Graduation Plan: Urbanism

The learning plan consists of at least the following data/segments:

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Studio	
Theme	Urbanism_Explore-Lab
Teachers	Diego Sepúlveda/Gerhard Bruyns/ Heidi Sohn
Argumentation of choice of the studio	Focus on the spatial characteristics and results of economic crisis in the context of a city in recession, and in particular Athens.
Theme	Urban Asymmetries
Teachers	Diego Sepúlveda/Gerhard Bruyns/ Heidi Sohn
Title	
Title of the graduation project	Splitting normalities: informality and common spaces as a way to address the reality of Athens

Product

Problem Statement

General conditions

Through a collective historical and urban analysis on the current situation on the city of Athens, I recognize the following general conditions and phenomena that will play an important role to the elaboration of my project. These are the following:

- The economical crisis is a starting point of changes, since its effects have start to show in the physical space of the city center of Athens.
- These changes can be summerized in the following: inaccessibility of public space, demonstrations, squatting, violence, rise of extremes.
- The social, political and economical context have influenced and still influencing the urban form causing **asymmetries and shifts** in the conditions of the city.

Problem statement

The problem statement of my graduation project is formalized around one basic question: Which is the shift in the conditions of Athens that require also a shift in the approach of a vision for the city?

- The economic crisis has lead to **economic distress** for the inhabitants of the city with high percentages of enemployment.
- The visions for Athens have always presented the city as a western capital causing a **split in its identity.**
- The changes in the social structure of the city have created a notion of **'fear of the otherness'** and on the same time have effected the **public and private relation.**
- The shifting of the social structure has created a notion of urban decay about the center of Athens which is nothing more that the **social and spatial reality of the city.**

These phenomena can be summerized in the dichotomy that is explained in the following diagram:

A dichotomy between the governmental projects for a multicentered city and the current interest for the development of the city center, as part of the vision of Athens as a western city and a global destination.

A dichotomy between the notion of urban decay about the center of Athens and its social and spatial reality, which have a relational dimension to the city space where individual and common values from different groups manifest creating between them the 'fear of the otherness'.

summerized into:

the planning framrwork driven by economic centered forces for the development of the center

dichotomy

social reality

Research questions

- How can a urban revitalization project form a carrier for the **integration of the planning framework with the social reality and socio-spatial activation of an area?**

i.What strategy **framework and planning instruments** are needed to allow top-down urban proposals to work with local initiatives in informal and public spaces in order to improve the spatial conditions and integration of these areas into the city?
ii. What **functional program and spatial configuration** meets the different demands of the stakeholders and actors on the level of the municipality and the local population?
iii. What urban project recognizes **local spatial qualities and potentials** and uses these to activate the upgrading and integration of an area?

- What are the **needs, potentials, interests and conflicts** at the local and the city level?

- How can the urban form and morphological characteristics of public space contribute to the **co-habitation of different groups and address the reality of the city?**

- What **planning instruments** can be applied that allow for local community initiatives to support a top-down urban proposal and the other way around?

Goal

Hypothesis

- How can an urban revitalization project tackles the phenomena mentioned before and take into account the real conditions of the city of Athens?

- Would the answer be in the redefinition of the already existing urban space, recognizing and creating quality spaces that respond to the current conditions of the city center of Athens?

The hypothesis is that by taking into account the dichotomy between the current planning framework and the social reality, we can create a new type of urban space that attempts to tackle with the needs of all the actors and **create space for co-existence and co-habitation** for these groups by **recognizing the capacities and the needs.**

why?

'A new type of urban space can be defined by the intersection between the individual or group and the rest of the city, a space where the city accumulates the multiple social and economic transactions.' (Margaret Crawford, 2005)
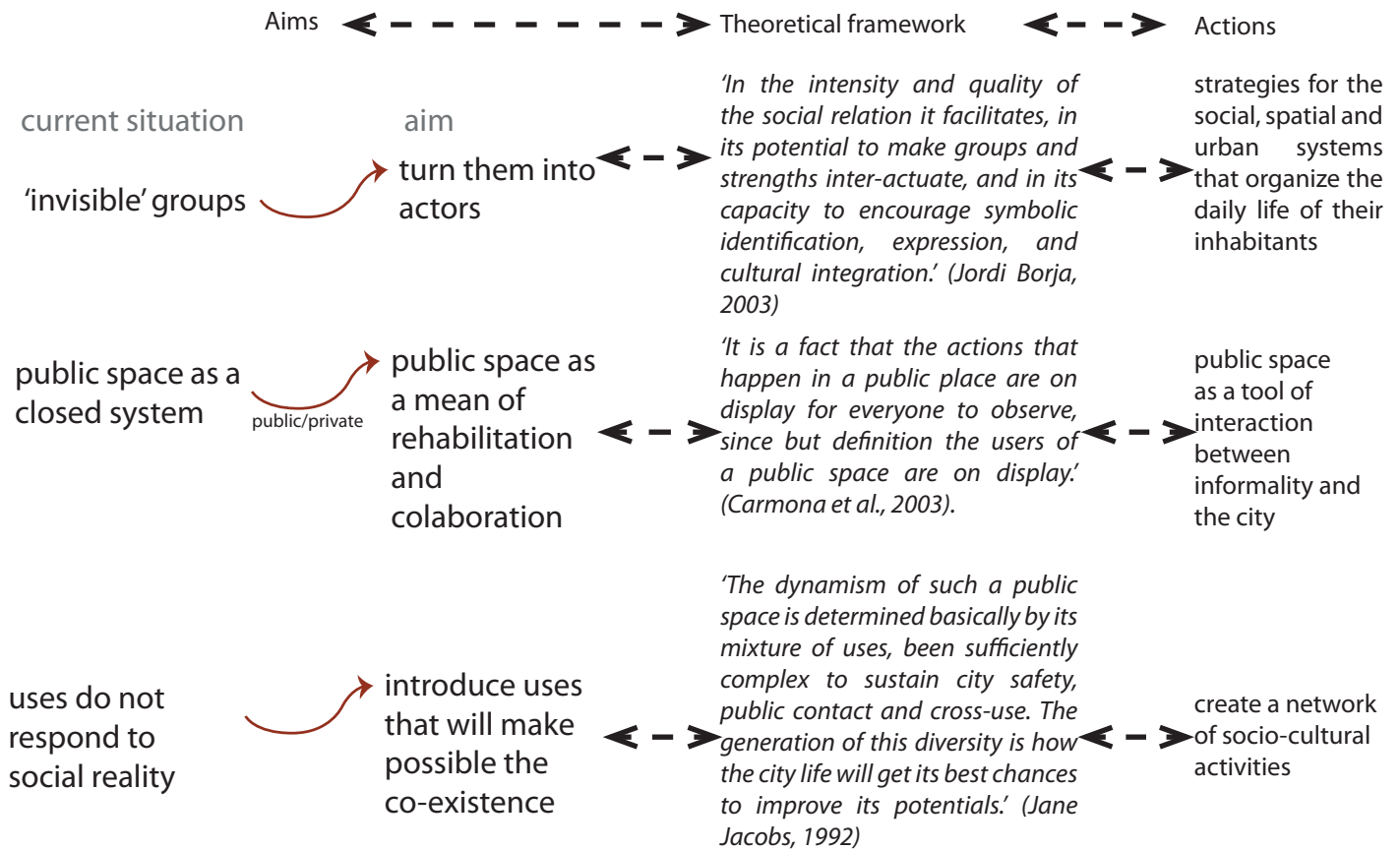
Vision/Approach

The question of what kind of city we want to have cannot be separated from that of what kind of relations to space, social links, lifestyles and aesthetic values we desire and the vision of my project follows this direction. It can be summerized with the following:

- Make **visible the feared and the undesirable** part of the city, from abandoned places to social groups
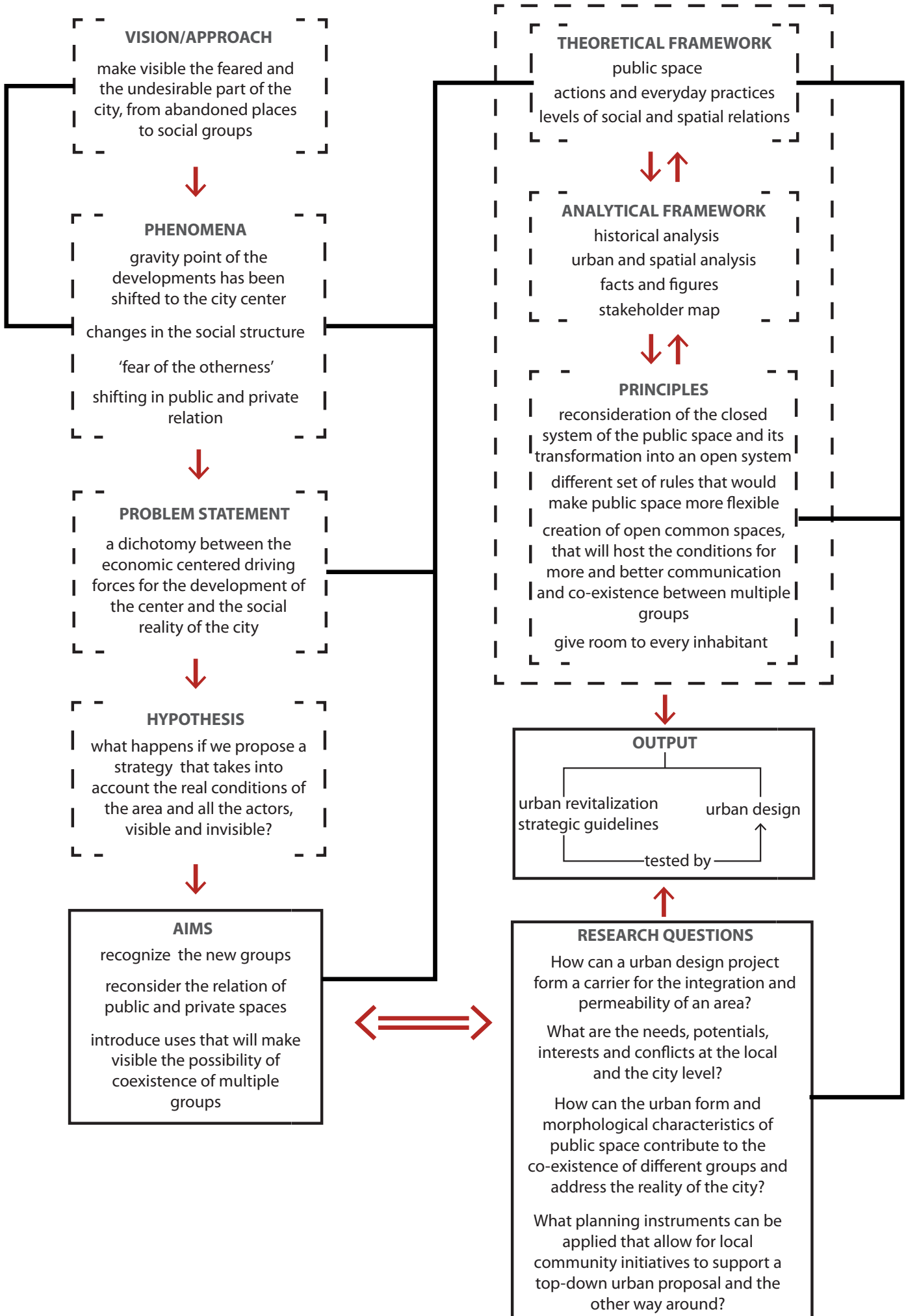
- Make the characteristic of living in the city of Athens,of living in a realm of smudged and invisible boundaries, of friction and sometimes disorder, part of the city life by giving space for **co-habitation.**

- Make the phenomena that consist the social reality of the city **visible** and open.

Aims

| Aims | ← – – – – – – → | Theoretical framework | ← – – → | Actions |

| current situation | aim | | | |

'invisible' groups → turn them into actors

← – → 'In the intensity and quality of the social relation it facilitates, in its potential to make groups and strengths inter-actuate, and in its capacity to encourage symbolic identification, expression, and cultural integration.' (Jordi Borja, 2003)

← – → strategies for the social, spatial and urban systems that organize the daily life of their inhabitants

public space as a closed system → public/private → public space as a mean of rehabilitation and colaboration

← – → 'It is a fact that the actions that happen in a public place are on display for everyone to observe, since but definition the users of a public space are on display.' (Carmona et al., 2003).

← – → public space as a tool of interaction between informality and the city

uses do not respond to social reality → introduce uses that will make possible the co-existence

← – → 'The dynamism of such a public space is determined basically by its mixture of uses, been sufficiently complex to sustain city safety, public contact and cross-use. The generation of this diversity is how the city life will get its best chances to improve its potentials.' (Jane Jacobs, 1992)

← – → create a network of socio-cultural activities

Process
Method description

The scheme on the following page shows the methodological approach of this project. In the introduction of this thesis plan the current and future trends of the shifts in social structure and the relation of public and private space as well as the 'fear of the otherness' responses to the phenomena as they are illustrated. These phenomena result in the problem statement of the project. After analysing a hypothesis for this research, the aim and research question are expressed. Following this, the methods are instigated. By investigating theoretical works and analytical methods a set of principles is developed. Al these lead to a final output for my project, which will be the strategy and the urban design fot my area of interest. In order to demonstrate how this proposed strategy together with the proposed system of principles can be used, a translation is made in the form of an urban design project. This output is then evaluated by reviewing the aim and research questions.

VISION/APPROACH

make visible the feared and the undesirable part of the city, from abandoned places to social groups

↓

PHENOMENA

gravity point of the developments has been shifted to the city center

changes in the social structure

'fear of the otherness'

shifting in public and private relation

↓

PROBLEM STATEMENT

a dichotomy between the economic centered driving forces for the development of the center and the social reality of the city

↓

HYPOTHESIS

what happens if we propose a strategy that takes into account the real conditions of the area and all the actors, visible and invisible?

↓

AIMS

recognize the new groups

reconsider the relation of public and private spaces

introduce uses that will make visible the possibility of coexistence of multiple groups

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

public space
actions and everyday practices
levels of social and spatial relations

↓↑

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

historical analysis
urban and spatial analysis
facts and figures
stakeholder map

↓↑

PRINCIPLES

reconsideration of the closed system of the public space and its transformation into an open system

different set of rules that would make public space more flexible

creation of open common spaces, that will host the conditions for more and better communication and co-existence between multiple groups

give room to every inhabitant

↓

OUTPUT

urban revitalization strategic guidelines   urban design

tested by

⟺

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can a urban design project form a carrier for the integration and permeability of an area?

What are the needs, potentials, interests and conflicts at the local and the city level?

How can the urban form and morphological characteristics of public space contribute to the co-existence of different groups and address the reality of the city?

What planning instruments can be applied that allow for local community initiatives to support a top-down urban proposal and the other way around?

Theoretical Framework:
1. Anlysis of public and urban space
2. Exploration of theories on everyday practices
3. Analysis of the social and spatial relations of public space

Analytical Framework:
1. Historical analysis of area of intervention
2. Urban analysis of area of intervention
3. Facts and figures on the actors involved with the project
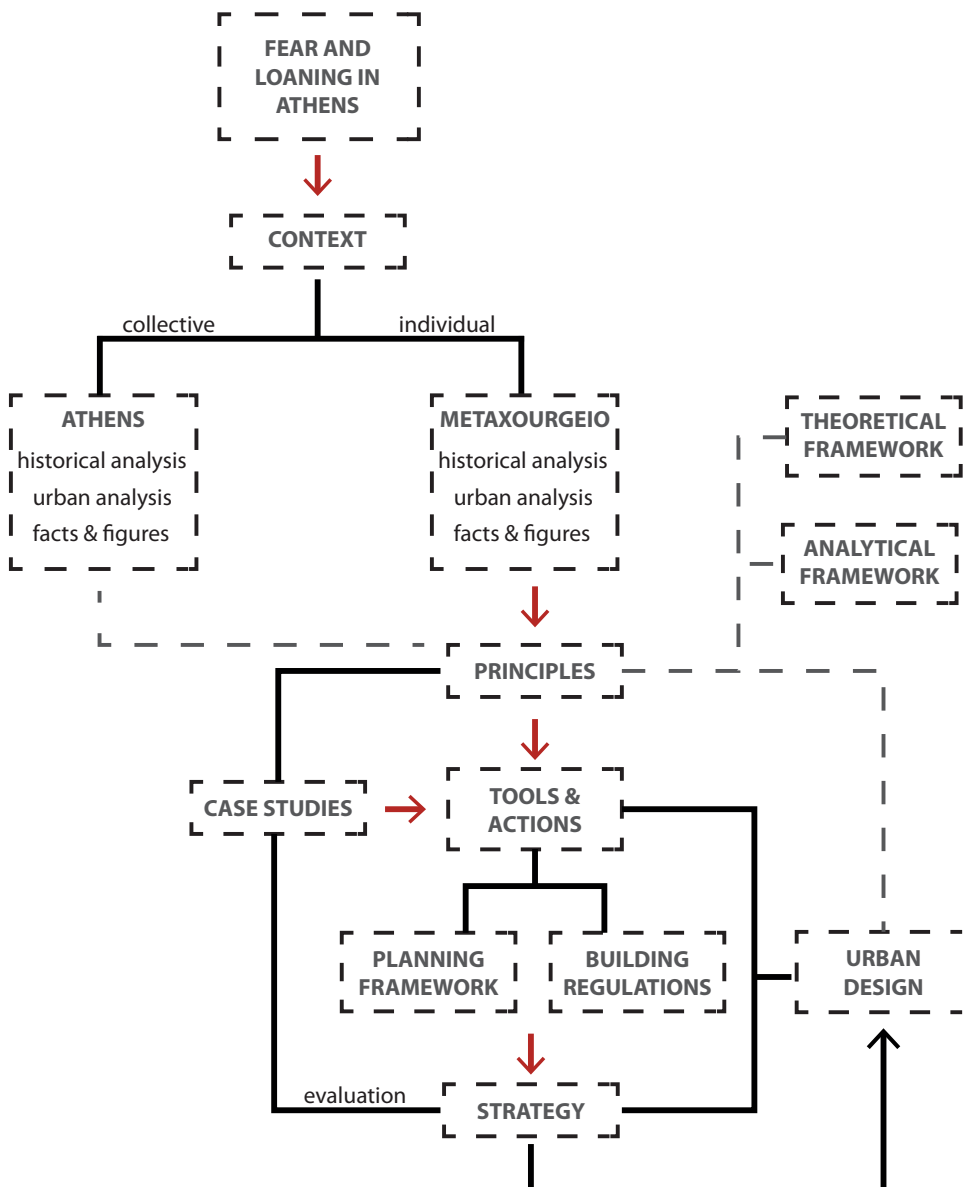
Reflection

Relevance

Public space in Athens is a territory and an object of social conflicts. It was never owned by a particular group, and the use of public space is a way for different goals and multiple prospects of inhabitance to be established by different users who usually have conflicting interests. But now public space is re-invented by its users and we notice it in Athens, also though the interest that is taken by architects in re-inventing the public space of the city. This projects adresses these social needs by attempting to re-define public space and its uses. The results of the research and the design proposal aims contribute to the ammount of the discourses that concern public space, as an identity and as a place of uses and conflicts.

Output

The output of my project will be an urban revitalization project, formed by a set of policies, actions and tools with the aim to tackle the phenomena that consist the dichotomy between the current planning framework and the social reality. In order to do so, the following steps will be made:
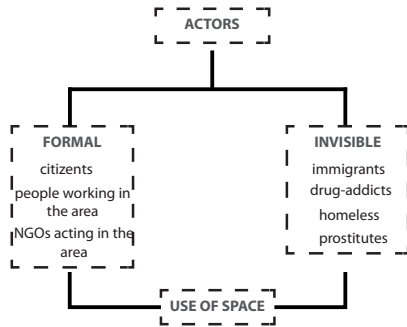
Structure of the project_Step 1

The diagram above shows the way that my individual project will be structured

Define the invisible groups and spaces_Step 2

One of the main aims of my project is to inverse the invisibility of the unwanted groups and turn them into actors. The followng diagram shows the actors, invisible and not.

```
                    ┌─────────┐
                    │ ACTORS  │
                    └─────────┘
         ┌──────────────┴──────────────┐
  ┌─────────────┐              ┌─────────────┐
  │   FORMAL    │              │  INVISIBLE  │
  │  citizens   │              │  immigrants │
  │people working in│          │ drug-addicts│
  │  the area   │              │   homeless  │
  │NGOs acting in the│         │  prostitutes│
  │    area     │              └─────────────┘
  └─────────────┘
         └──────┌──────────────┐──────┘
                │ USE OF SPACE │
                └──────────────┘
```

Besides the unwanted groups of individuals in the city, there are also the unwanted spaces in the urban form that I am interested in my revitalization project. These are:
•   abandoned buildings
•   abandoned and open plots
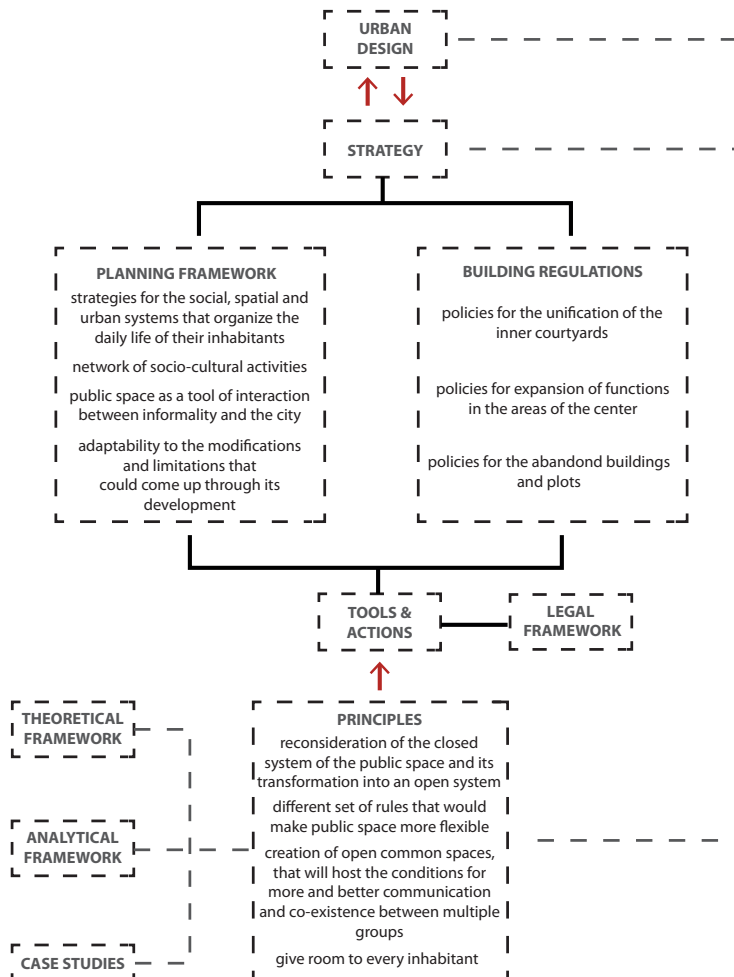•   inner courtyards

Site selection_Step 3

The area that my project will be realized is the area of Metaxourgeio. I choose that specific area for the following reasons:
•   According to the urban analysis that has been conducted, in this area there is a high concetration of the invisible and unwanted groups that have been mentioned before.
•   From the historical analysis of the are of Metaxourgeio, I have noticed that it is an area with a very clear industrial and low income character area that has remained the same throughout the years of its evolution.
•   It is an area where a gentrification process started in 2004 and it has stopped in 2008 due to the economic resession, leaving the area with an interested mixture in the urban form and its social structure.
•   There is a high ammount of unwanted and abandoned spaces.

Strategy_Step 4

This diagram shows the strategy I will follow

Time planning

P1
(19/10/2012)

Studio problematique
Historical Analysis
Creation of the timeline
Preliminary theoritical framework
Preliminary thesis plan

P2
(25/01/2013)

Collective research book
Urban Analysis
Strategy proposal
Theoritical & Analytical framework
Thesis plan

P3 **(-/-/2013)**

Research reports/Planning project
Strategy proposal
Master thesis

P4 **(-/-/2013)**

Research reports/Planning project
Strategy proposal
Urban Design
Master thesis

P5 **(-/-/2013)**

Final graduation project