Human Activity in Public Spaces Before and During the Pandemic

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Abstract

The scope of this thesis is set to examine the immediate relation of a city's public spaces to the daily life of its citizens and portray how this relationship evolves. The location under examination is the city center of Athens, Greece. Specifically, focus will be given on two major public squares, namely Syntagma square and Omonia square. Syntagma square functions as a front stage for the Athenian citizen. Its location being right in front of the Hellenic Parliament strongly influences the uses and activities that take place. In contrast, Omonia square stands as a backstage of public life in the city center. Importantly, these two squares are closely located and are linked together via the axis of Panepistimiou and Stadiou streets. Both comprise some of the busiest streets in the center of the capital and play an integral role in the function of the city. Therefore, the squares, being linked through such important arteries in the circulation network of the city, gain significant importance in the context of the public life.

The analysis will focus on the observations and recordings of human activities (movement/flow, behavior, and occupation) that are taking place in these public squares. Open observation will help to understand how the structured outdoor public sphere is being used and whether it controls its user. The question of ownership, a fundamental issue in regard to public spaces, directly affects and influences how the public space is used. Hence, I aim to understand who owns these public squares and how this influences their design and structure. Are private interests and goals favored over the interests of the public? If that's the case and local actors are not consulted prior to and during development, this may result in the construction of public spaces that only serve upper- and middle-class individuals and add to socioeconomic and ethnic exclusion and segregation.

To this purpose, I will analyze case-studies chronologicaly in relation to the changing context (pre- and mid- pandemic conditions) and will aim to identify all relevant changes occurring on these squares. I will focus on public activities in the years 2011 and 2022. For the observation of 2011, as a comparative period, I will rely on Dr. Fani Kostourou's research that analyzes human activities in the center of Athens at that time under non pandemic conditions. This work will serve as a basis for my analysis which focuses on the pandemic conditions of the year 2022.

Between 2011 and 2020 numerous events took place which resulted in profound changes in the public space. Furthermore, the pandemic drastically affected the public sphere and the overall human activity in it. The essay is going to identify how user's' behavior changed in relation to the squares' new layout and analyze the impact that an unprecedented pandemic environment has had on the public sphere of the city.

Research Question

Do only the physical qualities of a public space influence the way it's being used or the activities it hosts and do large-scale socioeconomic events of the past decade affect their function?

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1 Chapter

Introduction

Citizens tend to conceive a public space as having a set of fundamental and evident characteristics. They consider them as being publicly owned and as not having any direct relation to private ones. Ideally, a public space is open and accessible to everyone, free to any exclusion or segregation. As such, it represents an important aspect of democratic life, where people feel free to speak out and be heard. In a public space collective events are hosted, and citizens gather to celebrate, protest, and mourn.[1]

Occasionally, this is not the case, and this leads to a lesser understanding of what a public space constitutes. The reason why, lays on our constant focus regarding the physical characteristics and appearance of public spaces, concentrating our attention on the locations themselves and how the public space is going to look. This preoccupation is particularly prevalent in design history and criticism. By concentrating solely on the physical, we repeatedly overlook non-physical elements that are essential to a true public space such as legal, economic, and political.[2] We should not consider public space as physically static but rather as a live entity that incorporates ideas and events.[3] The ecology of public space is much more fluid and open to input and, consequently, change.

If public space is not, as the majority envisage it, what should be a subjective definition of public space? To address this, Kristine Miller argued:

> *"Public space, if it is going to play a role in democratic life, must be a hybrid of actual physical places and active public spheres. To tie public spaces to public spheres we must investigate the constantly changing intersections of physical places, the laws and regulations that govern them, the people who claim them through their use or demands, and the actions of government officials to answer these demands".*[4]

In essence, Miller is trying to address the role and responsibility of public space in public life. Designers attempting to create pleasant public spaces may unintentionally concretize limiting concepts of the public and public space in architectural form, aesthetic representations, and programmed systems. Design, just as much as legislation, policy, and rhetoric, influences what defines public life and who belongs to it.[5]

Attention should be paid on the possible influence of the private sector on public space making sure that the space does not cease to function as public. Activities considered as legal such as 'sleeping' or 'loitering' should not be prohibited by new rules. In redesigning a public square, we must make sure that the interventions involved do not hamper the public character and that people are able to move and speak freely. "Design is a way of representing ideas, imagining futures, and trans-

forming the built environment".[6] Hence, physical spaces are shaped by design strategies. This results in aesthetic experiences for those occupying them and are, potentially, immersed into the physical design. Designers are equipped with various tools, techniques and strategies that can form "boundaries within a space, connect it to or block it from adjacent spaces, lift it above or push it below the street, and create backdrops of vegetation, polished marble, or advertisements. A designer highlights aspects of a place's history while leaving other aspects hidden".[7] One should question how do any of the aforementioned actions relate to questions of public spaces?

It is the preoccupation in design history and criticism and misinformation about public spaces that prompted me into focusing my thesis on how public squares are being used. Studies of public space are mostly centered on the issue of design and few give consideration to the ties between public spaces and public spheres. "Constrained by incomplete definitions, the scope and findings of their research are limited".[8] Most of the literature on design emphasizes the importance of public space as a place to rest, recreate, and enjoy daily social interactions. Many of these studies aim to look at areas that 'succeed' in establishing environments for such activities and to provide guidelines "for practitioners and communities".[9] They refer on case studies trying to retrieve the physical and programmatic characteristics that have proved successful so as to replicate them elsewhere; rather than problematizing and questioning, they distill, extract, and apply. [10]

I intend to emphasize not only on the physical qualities such as design decisions, but also on the non-physical ones revolving around ownership and atmosphere. To do so I use as case studies two of the most frequented squares of Athens, Syntagma and Omonia squares. Both are located in the city center, and although the distance between them is less than 1 km, they play very different roles on the function of the city and on the activities they host. Regardless of their ownership, private or public, the criteria for analyzing the above squares were their significance and their relationship to the broader context of the city. [11]

Methodology

The thesis is divided into two sections. The first section is a review of the literature on the subject. After examining the key terms of research, I proceed to review the global concept of Public Spaces while paying particular emphasis on the environment of the city center of Athens. In this context, the reader is introduced to the pre- and mid-pandemic environment of the city referring specifically to the two cases under study, Syntagma and Omonia squares. The reasons for their selection were their location, their historical significance and particularly the prominent role these public squares have in the daily function of the city. The two squares raise important questions regarding what is right or wrong concerning public space: how it should be designed, used, controlled as well as disputed. [12]

The second section explores the set of themes selected for the comparative analysis between the different squares and chronologies. The case studies are mainly analyzed based on their spatial attributes, also accounting for accessibility, scale, typology, urban activity, urban atmosphere and ownership.[13] To collect my data, I decided on a full survey of the two squares. I was present at Omonia and Syntagma square from 11:00 am up until 19:00 pm monitoring and recording the movement and activities of the people present. This survey provided notes and static maps covering the traces of people sitting, standing or being active and resulted in recordings for each square. For Syntagma the recordings are as follows a) 11:00-11:20, b) 13:00-13:20, c) 16:00-16:20, d) 18:00-18:20 and for Omonia a) 11:30-11:50, b) 13:30-13:50, c) 16:30-16:50, d) 18:30-18:50. The methodology and specific timing were not at random; they were specifically chosen to match F.Kostourou's research paper so as to allow my findings to be directly compared to those of hers.

Limitations

In order to comprehend public spaces as the site and subject of democratic processes we must first recognize these principles on the already existing locations. Furthermore, public spaces are a multidisciplinary field that should be seen through different methodological lenses, for example:

i.   of an economist, whose concern would be the distribution of wealth within a public space;
ii.   of a lawyer who will refer to the necessity for regulations in public spaces since they may function as platforms for public speaking;
iii.   of a political scientist who will examine who has the authority to make changes on public spaces;
iv.   of "an environmental and behavioral psychologist, to trace the patterns and habits of sociability that certain spatial configurations might support, and
v.   of a public policy researcher, to compare the intentions of public programs with their multivariate effects".[14]

It is important to make clear that I don't have a background in these sciences. I approach these issues through the lens of Architecture, and I attempt to map and analyze the processes and activities that lead to the creation of public spaces and their function in the city. As designers of the built environment, architects bear the responsibility to understand how their work affects and is affected by the societies they serve.[15]

It is vital to state that the present thesis is a contextual study of two central squares in the center of Athens and shall be treated as such. It is not an overview of the public environment in Athens (public sphere, the public realm, public domain, and public space), nor does it conclude to generic comments that can be applied and linked to all public spaces of the city. Being limited to a specific length, the study tries to introduce the reader to the basic concepts of publicness, give a brief description of the pre- and mid- pandemic environment in Athens and also to analyze the daily routine and activities of the two. Another limitation in regard to the data collected during surveying and the data retrieved from the research paper of F.Kostourou from 2011, is that they represent different seasons. They are used as a source of representation of different chronologies and periods so that I can proceed to make this comparative study; they do not represent completely similar scenarios. F.Kostourou conducted her research during Spring in the month of May whereas I during Winter in January. The weather conditions in Spring are expected to be much warmer and sunny so more people would be keen to gather in public spaces.

Chapter 1 Endnotes

1.   Miller, Kristine F, *Designs on the Public : The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press,2007), ix.
2.   Ibid, xi.
3.   Ibid, xi.
4.   Ibid, xi.
5.   "Kristine Miller", College Of Design, 2022, https://design.umn.edu/directory/kristine-miller.
6.   Miller, Kristine F, *Designs on the Public : The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press,2007), xi.
7.   Ibid, xiii.
8.   Ibid, xiii.
9.   Ibid, xiii.
10.   Ibid, xiii.
11.   Zagora, Nermina, Šamić Dina, and Univerzitet u Sarajevu. Faculty of Architecture. *Urban Rooms of Sarajevo : Transforming Urban Public Places Using Interior Design Tools*, 2021, 9.
12.   Ibid, xvi-xvii.
13.   Zagora, Nermina, Šamić Dina, and Univerzitet u Sarajevu. Faculty of Architecture. *Urban Rooms of Sarajevo : Transforming Urban Public Places Using Interior Design Tools*, 2021, 10.
14.   Ibid, xii.
15.   Ibid, xii.

2 Chapter

Literature Review

The thesis raises a series of fundamental questions: What defines a public space and how it serves to manifest cultural, social, and political events? How is it designed and managed and how this impacts its character and purpose of public everyday life? How a Covid-19 – like pandemic can affect the character and functions of a public space in the future? To better consider the themes and scope of the thesis, however, we first need to fully understand the terminology and meaning of the key words.[1]

Understanding Public Space

The terms public or publics ring an association with the concepts of public sphere, public realm, public domain, and public space.[2] Although these concepts are used inter-changeably in the upcoming chapters there are distinctions both in concept and discipline. To begin with the most inclusive term, 'public sphere' is more frequently used by philosophers, political theorists, and legal scholars and it emphasizes on the extent and limit of public space as one of political discourse rather than a space having communicative aspects. Public realm stands in between public sphere and public space and is concerned more with genuine political actions that take place and "commonly associated with symbolic communication and spatial practices, and thus with the sociology of the publics".[3] Most importantly, it is a term frequently used to portray public space as a site of collectivization through uses and activities in an urban environment. Public space is considered to be an integral part of the public realm, but more specifically a physical expression of it. Finally, public domain is where legal and policy features of public locations and public meetings are argued and determined, such as the right to free expression, free assembly, and access to privately owned public spaces.[4]

The definition of public space as a hybrid between physical spaces and public spheres will serve to analyze and guide the case studies of the thesis.[5] It is based on the notion that physical space is crucial to democratic public life, and it stems from a large and expanding body of literature that strives to understand why. For example, people tend to envisage the 'Internet' as a 'new public realm'; however, such notions do not take into consideration the actual needs of human life as well as the fact that groups and individuals can be excluded from public space.[6] Furthermore, homelessness is an ever-present threat to numerous people worldwide, where minimum wage is unable to provide for the necessities of a modest living. However, without the presence of public space as the only guaranteed location for those without access to private space, individual life is in threat. Laws are only one of the criteria that determine who is and is not a member of the "public" in a public space.

Physical space is essential for human activities, yet this does not justify why it is so essential to democratic life. Even if we recognize that public space serves a purpose other than leisure and recreation, it is difficult to find the links with which public spaces relate to the intangible concepts of democracy. Art critic Rosalyn Deutsche has claimed that public space is where democracy is alive; questions however of how, why, and under what conditions democracy occurs have gotten less attention. Studying and analyzing the regulations governing protests in public spaces indicate the increasing relation between public spaces and larger public spheres:

"public space is a place within which political movements can stake out the territory that allows them to be seen (and heard) ... In public space – on street corners or in parks, in the streets during riots and demonstrations–political organizations can represent themselves to a larger population, and through this representation give their cries and their demands some force" [7]

The relationship between public spaces and democracy is more complicated than the latter's physical location. "Public spaces are not mere backdrops for democracy".[8] While these spaces can house rallies and protests, they must also involve publics who form opinions about these sites and demand action from the government. In this theory, public spaces do not need to be the stage for political acts and discourse in order to be associated with democracy. [9]

Furthermore, in the book "Public Space", the authors Stephen Carr, Mark Francis, Leanne G. Rivlin, and Andrew M. Stone discuss the responsibility that public spaces have in public life as they succeed in stressing the human need for interaction and democracy. Their perspectives are based upon three key values; public spaces should be 'responsive'[10], 'meaningful'[11], and 'democratic'. They refer to 'democratic spaces' as those that safeguard the rights and privileges of the people, open and accessible to all while protecting freedom of action.[12] They then proceed on stating that ultimately, public action can alter and change a public space since it is owned by all. The book argues that public participation in the preliminary design process is critical because it stresses public space as a component of democratic living. Public space design carries the obligation "to understand and serve the public good, which is only partly a matter of aesthetics".[13] The authors, however, are occupied on designing settings without considering such issues as how the design may influence the people occupying the space, how public spaces are related to public spheres and how the aesthetic characteristics of the physical place may influence the access to public spaces.[14] Later on, in the comparative chapter of the analysis of the two case studies I will attempt to address the above questions.

Since the public space is owned by all, its character and scope can be altered.

Privately Owned Public Spaces

Part of the analysis will address the subject of Privately Owned Public Space, also known as 'POPS'. As previously mentioned, this was part of the explanation of 'public domain'. This is a category of public spaces which is increasing in numbers and can alter the character of public space as we know it. As of today, public space should be open and accessible to all.[15] 'POPS' as a term was introduced in New York's City Zoning Resolution in 1961, whereby if the developer created a public space in or in front of the building, he had the right to increase the number of building floors. The program aimed to 'dress' New York with quality public spaces[16] without any cost to the city.[17]

However, according to Michael Sorkin, a theorist in this area, these 'POPS' are in effect 'pseudopublic' for it is debatable whether these spaces are really open and accessible to all. When owners and operators control access, usage, and behavior[18], their public value is diminished.[19] It remains to be clarified whether these spaces represent a real benefit to the public or whether they are, simply, legal-financial[20] deals where surveillance, control and consumption prevail.[21]

Pandemic

The term pandemic originates from the synthesis of the Greek words πᾰν meaning 'all and δῆμος meaning borough/municipality and refers to the worldwide spread of a disease.[22]   On December 31st, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was informed about an alarming case of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan City, China. On January 7th, 2020, a novel coronavirus, not previously isolated in humans, was identified as the cause and was given the name 'Covid-19'. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause symptoms ranging from the common cold to severe systemic disease. The WHO declared the outbreak as a pandemic on March 11th, 2020, as by that time 118.000 cases were reported in 114 countries.[23]

Lockdowns were deemed necessary, leading to silent public spaces, devoid of the vitality of human presence, being captured by photographers all over the world.[24] This was the effect of a pathogen that was threatening the health and safety of all mankind while creating a post-apocalyptic scenario. Citizens were only allowed to go out for essential reasons such as groceries, pharmacy, and doctor's appointments. Squares, parks, and playgrounds were closed to the public, curfew was imposed on both pedestrians and vehicular traffic. Global lockdowns prohibited all but the most essential personnel outdoors, restricting social gatherings, both in public and in private.[25]

Previous pandemics have shaped and increased our preparedness on a national and global level for better managing future outbreaks. Most importantly, they have taught us that individual actions and precautions are equally important to those imposed by governments. However, globalization has facilitated the spreading of a virus across countries and thus an epidemic can quickly turn to a pandemic.

Figure 2.1

Police in Wuhan, China close down the Huanan Seafood Market after it was declared the epicentre of the pandemic's start.

Athens Environment (pre-, mid- pandemic)

The key comparative differences emphasized on the thesis are the uses and activities in public spaces occurring during pre- and mid-pandemic environment. A decade ago, curfews, lockdowns and any social distancing regulations that would prohibit people from freely roaming around the city did not exist. However, following the global financial crisis in 2008, Greece became deeply in debt to the European Union, obliging it to implement tough austerity measures such as pension cuts and tax hikes. Greece's economy weakened, unemployment climbed, and poverty increased throughout this time.[26] In Syntagma square the most frequent circulation was from the metro station to Ermou and Stadiou street. During the economic crisis, the above sites resembled a post-apocalyptic urban desert where social life was minimal. Merchants and shopkeepers barely covering operation costs, now faced the threat of shutting down.[27] This dystopian scenario resurfaced during the pandemic, triggering the government to implement strong regulations and leading businesses to temporarily or even permanently shut down. In between these periods and prior to the COVID-19 outbreak Greece's economy experienced a period of significant recovery and the GDP rose sharply. However, in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic had a dramatic effect on the economy[28] and, along with the refugee crisis, led the country to recession.[29]

1832
Topographical master-plan drawn up in 1833 by Kleanthis & Schaubert, after Athens became the capital of the newly established Greek state.

1997
During 1997, the city had roughly around 2.5 sq.m. of green areas per inhabitant, which is 2.8 times less than the average of 7 sq.m. to other major European cities.

2007
During the financial crisis of 2007-2008 the Greek economy suffered one of the longest recessions of any advanced mixed economy to date.

2011
Dr. Fanis Kostourou research data collected regarding the activities and uses for 5 major squares in Athens.

2020
In 11th of March 2020 the WHO characterized the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic, by that time 118.000 cases were reported in 114 different countries

1800   1900   1950   2000   2005   2010   2015   Present

Figure 2.2

Time-line of significant events in the history of Athens that affected the use and atmosphere of public spaces.

Figure 2.3   April 12, 2020, Syntagma square, Athens' central square
              notorious for being filled with commuters and tourists,
              finds itself almost completely empty during the lockdown.

Figure 2.4

Syntagma Metro Station, Athens's main station, which on a typical day is bustling with commuters is now abandoned due to the pandemic.

Figure 2.6

The Hellenic Parliament with the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in front of it, one of the main attractions of the city is now suddenly empty.

Figure 2.5

The now deserted exit of Syntagma Metro Station which leads to the square.

A

B

C

A

B

C

Figure 2.7

Series of images before (on the left) and after (on the right) the burst out of the new deadly virus. A. Varavakios Central Market B. Ermou Street, C. Athens International Airport.

Figure 2.8

A. Deserted arrivals area in the capitals airport, B. Metro train with destination the Athens International Airport is seen completely empty , C. Check-in area of Athens's airport is now abandoned and silence dominates the space.

Figure 2.9

Filellinon street, with a starting point at the bustling Syntagma square, now completely empty.

Figure 2.11

Vasilissis Amalias Avenue, one of the main road arteries in the vehicular network of the Athens is captured in an unreal conditions.

Figure 2.10

Not a single vehicle can be spotted in Panepistimiou street, one of the most prone to vehicular traffic streets in the center of Athens.

Figure 2.13

The Greek singer captured singing outside the Evaggelismos Hospital in Athens, striving to encourage healthcare workers and infected patients.

Figure 2.12

April 25, 2020, Greek singer Alkistis Protopsalti, one of country's most well-known and identifiable voices, performs out on the streets of Athens to boost spirits amid the coronavirus lockdown.

Urban Movements in Athens

A long-lasting problem in the urban planning and development of Athens has been the negligence towards creating and maintaining public spaces and green areas. This can be attributed to a number of factors afflicting Athens's urban planning and growth which prevented the creation of a 'spacious' metropolis and resulted in an extremely negative urban environment in terms of quality of life as stated by Dr. Karolos-Iosif Kavoulakos[30]. During 1997, the city had roughly 2.5 sq.m. of green areas per inhabitant, which was 2.8 times less than the average of 7 sq.m. of other major European cities. In the past decades the vast majority of Athens' public places and undeveloped plots were at risk, since they were included in 'valorization' plans by public and private sector authorities. Indefatigable efforts of organizations and collectives over time have raised awareness on this critical problem.

'Right to the City', as a movement, represents citizen action which was crucial in defending public ownership, advocating improvements in the urban environment while successfully lobbying for the creation of community areas. These urban movements emphasized the significance of the quality of life far and above unsustainable growth and the importance of user value over trade value. Furthermore, through variable action, networking and requests followed by demands, the urban movement aimed to protect the existing public spaces as well as to reserve them for public use. The political environment significantly influenced the development of those actions. In the progression of urban movements for public spaces, we identify four distinct phases:

i.   "the early phase, lasting until the mid 90s
ii.   the phase of the formation of movements addressing the consequences of shrinking public spaces due to projects related to the 2004 Olympics
iii.   the phase of regeneration and enrichment of movements through the entry of new collectives and the expansion of their actions, and
iv.   the crisis phase, during which commercialization policies for public spaces intensified while the action of movements decreased."[31]

History of Urban Athens

In 1833, a year prior to Athens becoming the capital of the newly formed Greek State, architects Stamatis Kleanthis and Eduard Schaubert had already begun their radical new urban transformation plan[32] of the city. What is now known as Omonia Square beared the name of Otto square, named after the first King of Greece and was located at the intersection of Stadiou, Panepistimiou, Tritis Septemvriou, Agiou Konstantinou, Pireos, and Athinas Streets. The square "was abruptly found on the right angle of the triangle that geometrically formulated the city's urban development and formed the backbone of the first plan of the architects".[33] Omonia's square original location was planned to be where Syntagma square is presently located. The administrative center of the State, the Ministries, and the Kings palace were all positioned there.

 Their proposal was based upon the following characteristics:
i.   Omonia square with branches to Piraeus and Stadiou streets, the latter connecting to the start of Ermou street.
ii.   On the peak of the triangle the construction of the palace was foreseen. The fact that the peak of the triangle coincided with Palace, the seat of the Head of State was symbolic.
iii.   Piraeus and Stadiou Streets were interrupted in their middle symmetrically towards the Palace by the square squares of Mporsa (Koumoundourou) and Theatrou (Klaithmonos) and ended in two central squares-limits of the city, today's Kerameikos and Syntagma Squares.
iv.   The carving of four boulevards in the shape of a square around the Omonia.
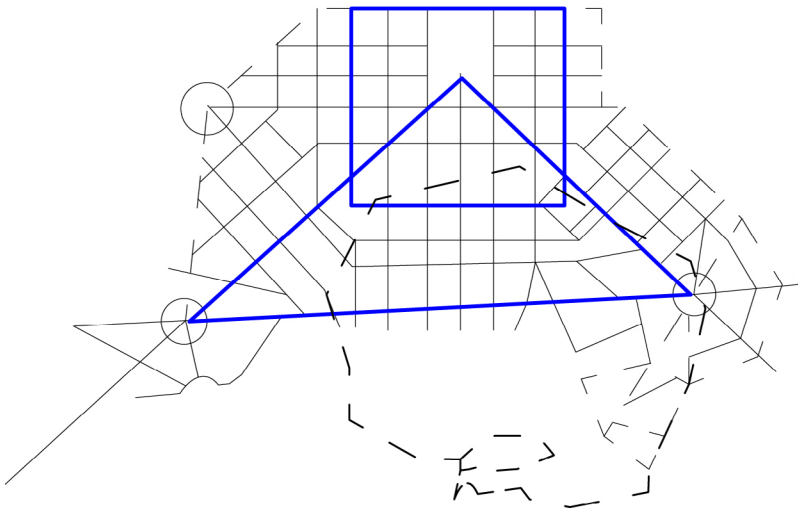
Figure 2.14

Simplified version of the master plan drawing of Kleanthis & Schaubert. Blue lines depict the main idea of the two geometric shapes.

v.   The creation of the National Garden located on the South of the Palace, which aimed to create a commercial market.[34]

However, in 1834 the application of the original masterplan by Kleanthis and Schaubert was suspended, following demonstrations by property owners. Subsequently, Leo von Klenze, a well-known architect, was called to provide a better solution. His proposal consisted of:

i.   Moving the Palace and the entire administrative centre of the city from Omonia Square to the area of Kerameikos
ii.   Carved two streets in a direction perpendicular to Athinas Street where today's Panepistimiou and Agiou Konstantinou are located.
iii.   Limited the width of the streets and the surface of the squares.
iv.   Abolished the framework of boulevards and instead of laying out a number of new streets, he limited himself with light widening and alignment of older streets.
v.   Reduced the total area of the city, enclosing it with a ring road on which four gates were located.

Following the dethronement of King Otto, the city planning radically changed. The relocation of the Palace, initially to the west and finally to the east 'freed' an extensive area for the future location of Omonia and Syntagma squares leaving behind a strong semantic landscape as their foundation. Interestingly, Emamanouil Kalergis in his architectural plan refers the former Otto square as 'Omonia Square – Place de la Concorde' and the square facing the 'Kipos ton Muson'[35] as 'Syntagma square'.[36] It is noteworthy, that the word Omonia[37] has been associated with this site since 1862 and is probably related to the decisive political events of the time which eventually led to the dethronement of Otto. The double note in the Kalergis map is a gesture that conceptually shifts two of Athens' Triangle points into something new, signaling a political movement in 'space'. The abolition of monarchy triggered the renaming of Otto square and Otto University, to Omonia square and Greek University and the square on Pireos Street, from Loudovikou (Louis) Sq. to Eleftherias (Liberty) Sq. Syntagma square was already holding that name since the early 1850s, so the turn of events did not affect it. "The new political situation and the new name of Otto square were publicly announced on 12 October, during the inaugural speech of the president of the interim government, Dimitrios Voulgaris and were celebrated with an open mass on Omonia square".[38]

In 1884, the first conceptual cycle of the planned, but mainly unbuilt, area of Omonia Square comes to an end and the second one begins. This urban core found identity in the footprints of its people frequenting it as it moved away from its original meaning, becoming more convoluted and multileveled, quiet or prominent, mounted in the modern reality
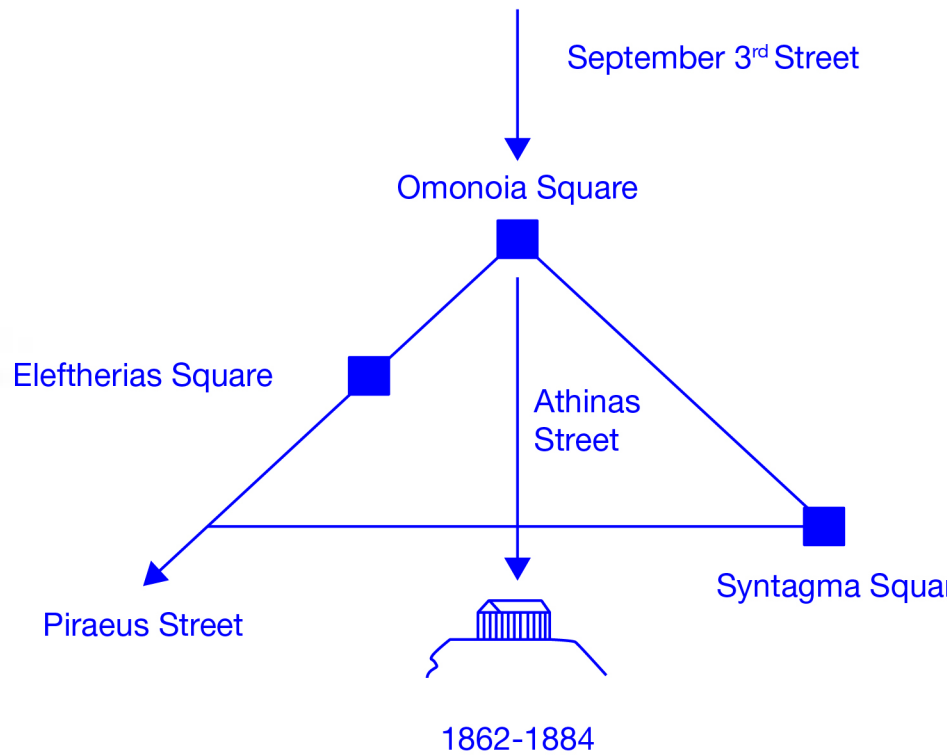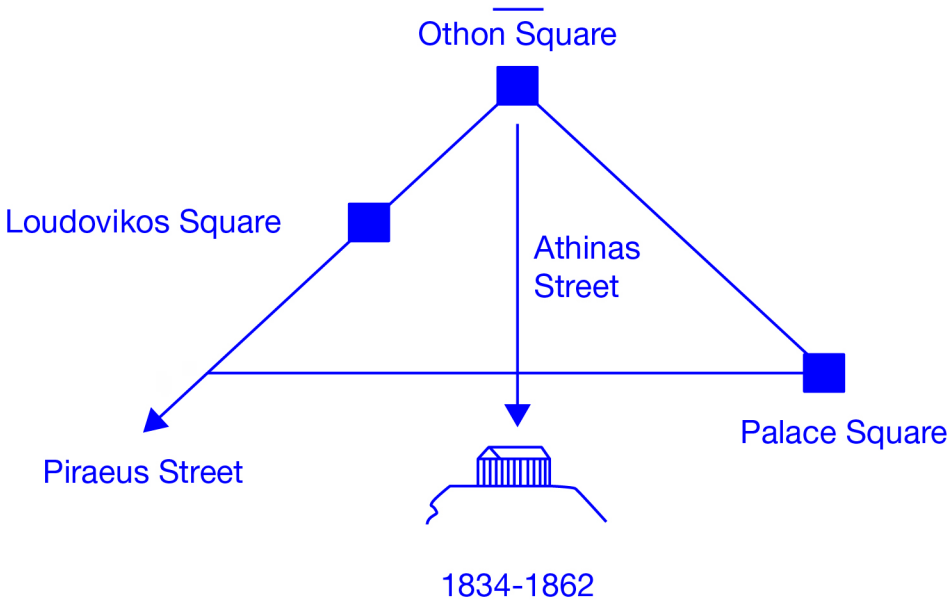
Figure 2.15

Name changes of the capitals layout during urban development.

of the structures and movements of the city surrounding it. Omonia square came to be an appropriate name. As it evolved into a broad access point to the center, the capital, and the country, it became known as the square of 'everybody'. The square initially had an open subterranean train station and then a covered one, being the city's railway network terminal connecting the city port, and hosted also intercity buses and trams. It evolved into a recreational area, with busy cafés and bars, as well as stores. It was the epicenter of the hospitality business for more than a century, with hotels and congested buildings around it, and a center of any form of gathering, social or political. To the Athenians Omonia square became synonymous to the centre of their city, where people and public space coexisted. At times the square remained silent and selectively inhospitable and was the site of demonstrations, conflicts, and celebrations.[39] Omonia square still thrives to maintain this character; however, as time passed it started sharing its role on the public sphere with Syntagma square. The shift of attention to Syntagma led to a neglection of Omonia square and it entered a very dark and struggling period which it still hasn't entirely recovered from.
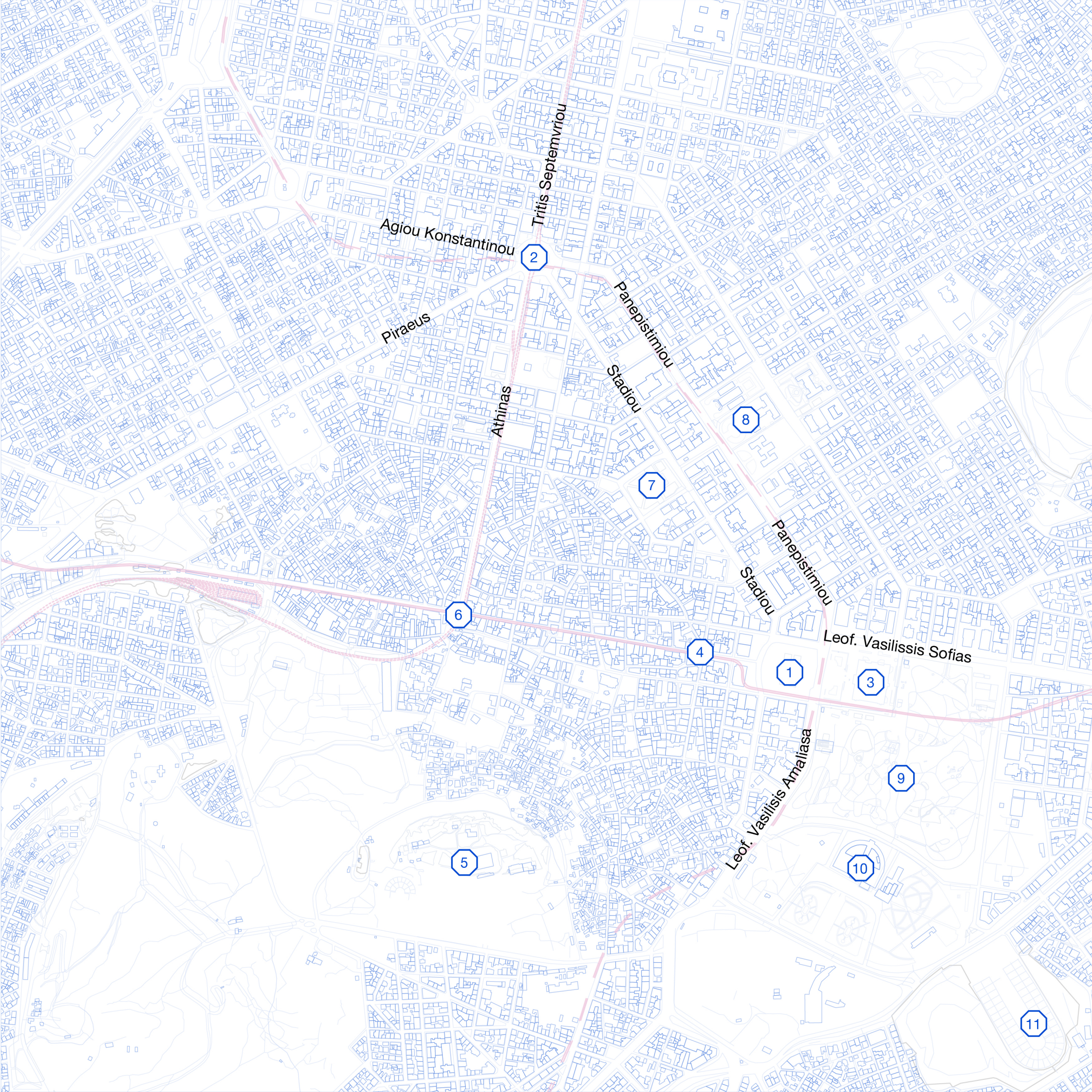
Figure 2.16

Omonia Square

Omonia square with its six radiating streets mirrors, during almost two centuries, the cultural diversity and social 'disorder' tapestry of the city. Omonia Square is a bustling location where passers-by, merchants, tourists, immigrants, young and old collide as they hurry by. In a way Omonia Square stands for the 'Megali Idea', - the Great Idea, representative of patriotic connotations which inevitably influenced every architect and town planner.[40] This 'plateia' (square), is dramatically associated with the history of Athens. This ill-fated area has seen over its history several radical transformations regarding its design and appearance, while always paying consideration to the particular activities and the social kaleidoscope that it hosts. The palms trees and statues of Muses of early 20th century gave way to fountains, greenery and the monumental sculpture of the 'Runner' by C.Varotsos. In the early 21st century Omonia didn't even resemble a square; it has transformed into an extension of its surrounding streets.

The square is spatially defined in reference to the Acropolis, the city's most prominent emblem, and is located at one end of Stadiou Street, which connects Syntagma and Omonia Square. Omonia earned a symbolic status in the collective consciousness as the capital's 'backstage': a hangout and a crossroad, a gathering point and a hideout. "Omonia Square has become a modern Tower of Babel and ultimately, a monument".[41] Primarily, however, it has mostly become an urban field where people of different socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and age mingle. This diversity is clearly manifested in the arteries emanating from the square.[42]

As the following streets branch out and distance themselves from Omonia the heterogeneity fades away. The Varvakios Agora (Athens' Central Meat, Fish and Groceries Market) is located on Athinas Street which connects the 'plateia' to Monastiraki and, by extension, to the Acropolis. Surrounding Athinas street was, until recently, home to a number of run-down, rent by the hour, hotels frequented by prostitutes. To the east, Stadiou Street connects Omonia Square with the two legendary squares, namely, Klafthmonos and Syntagma square; then Panepistimiou Street, the Athenian Trilogy's Street[43], which connects Omonia with the Old Palace. To the north the charmless Tritis Septemvriou Street, has no distinguishing characteristics with the exception of the elegant Victoria Square. Agiou Konstantinou Street connects Omonia to the national highway network and also houses the National Theatre. Finally, there's Piraeus Street, an industrial thoroughfare that leads to Athens's harbor.[44]

The uses and activities, both present and absent, are integral factors for the division of the spatial sections of Omonia square. The element that composes and prioritizes the central void is the round fountain

| 1930s design | 1960s design | 2004 design | 2020 design |
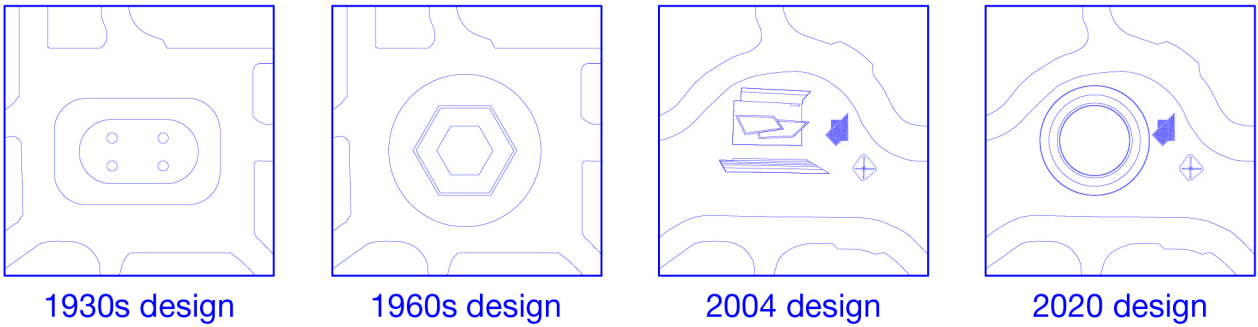
Figure 2.17

Omonia's square different physical appearances in time.

that faces the Acropolis. Omonia square can be divided into four main spatial zones.

i.   The peripheral parts of the square that are connected to the building fronts and are closely linked to Public Transport operate separately from the central square without having any visible relationship
ii.   The linear southern part of the central square which is essentially a traffic zone
iii.   The northern part of the square which is spatially isolated from the main square and its circulation
iv.   The intermediate zone from (ii) and (iii), the central fountain where we meet a dense coexistence of elements. The round design also splits the circulation to two.

So as to understand the contemporary state of the square regarding its activities and uses we must first look at its past. Up until the second World War, Omonia was a cosmopolitan meeting location[45] mostly of the Athenian middle class. "Omonia Square was the canvas for any modernisation project attempted on each new page of Greek history".[46] Significant changes started occurring in the course of the interwar period, when Omonias' underground electric railway line linking Athens to Piraeus was revamped. The square quickly transformed into a transport hub, were private automobiles and parking were given key priority. Above ground, high-rise structures were springing up, drastically altering the urban environment, while below on the underground, a pedestrian-friendly area with banks and stores was being constructed, essentially creating two separate squares. Above and underground were connected by escalators. 'Above' Omonia square identifies as a metropolitan space having its own particular cultural and social characteristics.[47]

To have a clear image of what Omonia square represents and projects today, we should consider it in a third dimension. The Greek novelist G.Theotokas in his influential novel "Argo" refers to Omonia square as a boundary dividing the 'above' and 'below' character of the city. Theotokas describes a city split into two parts expressing different and opposing social and cultural identities. 'Above' Omonia square is the historic center of Athens flooded with lights, ornaments and colors were "eudemonism dominates in a new Athenian Belle Epoque".[48] 'Above' projects the cultural and social characteristics of a true metropolis with buildings formed by the users' diverse events and consumption habits.[49] Connecting it to Syntagma Square, the commercial core of the city with its links to Ermou Street, a location featuring European cafés and restaurants, afternoon stopover hangouts where frequent clients unwind after work. "It is therefore not surprising that unsuspecting walkers suddenly find themselves in another capital, where the lifestyle
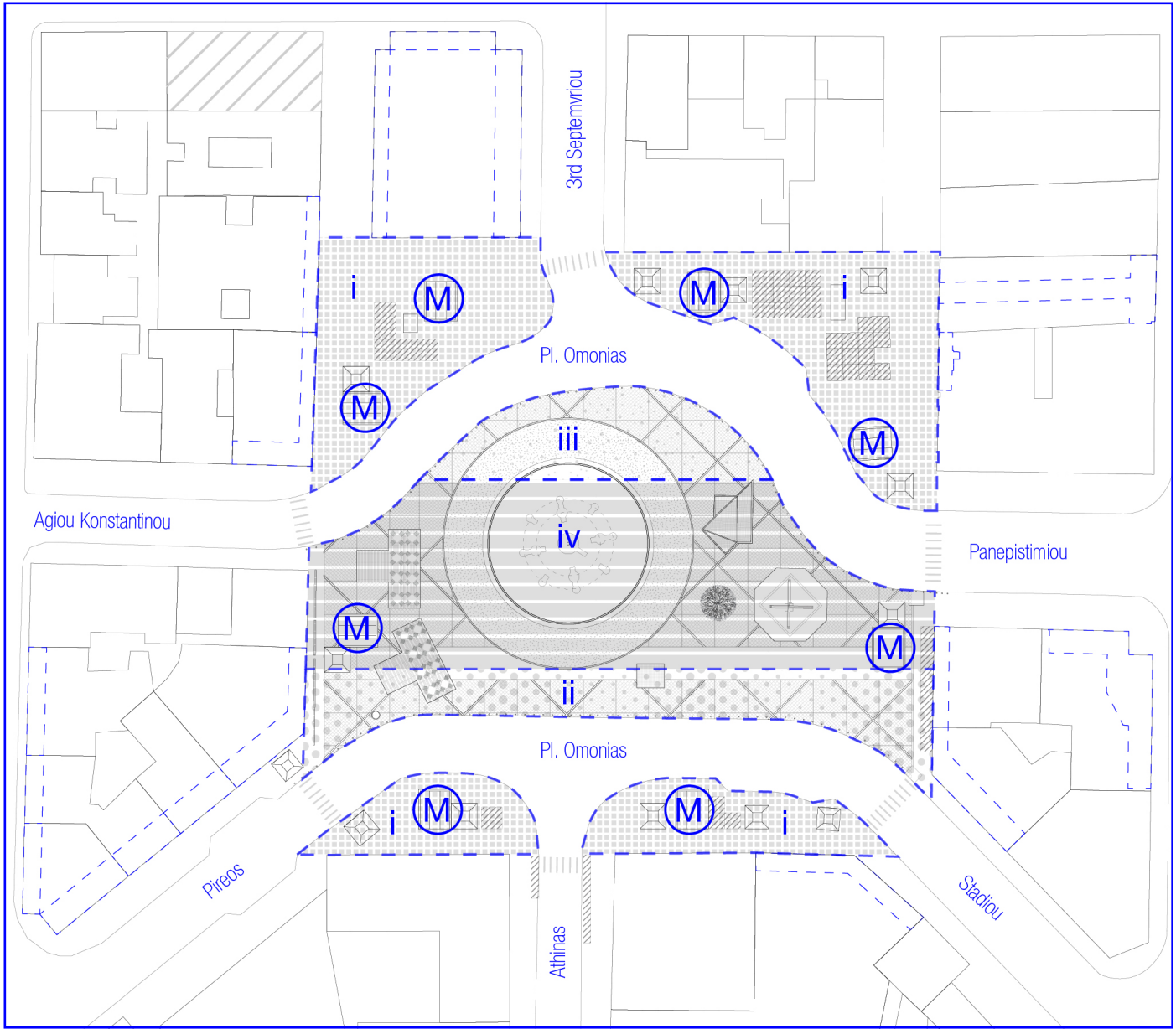
Figure 2.18   Spatial zones of Omonia square.

of the residents seems to ignore the life 'below' the square".[50]

In 'below' one encounters a different reality: there is poverty and misery and, according to Sociology Professor Walter Siebel, an expert in regional and urban matters, here thrives the 'dark side of the city'. Illegal or semi-illegal activities are carried out, unfamiliar roads with abandoned buildings are acting as a shelter for homeless people, and the loud by-streets of the morning turn dark and perilous in the evening, piquing the interest of intrepid night-wanderers. The near vicinity of Omonia acts as a hangout for adventurers, immigrants, and drug addicts.

Radiating from Omonia square, the sites of Kolonos, Kerameikos, Votanikos and Metaxourgeio constitute an extension of the 'below' character of the square. Here old decrepit neoclassical houses, garages and brothels dominate while entertainment venues styling themselves as 'alternative' try unsuccessfully to change the atmosphere of the area.[51] These locations are the starting points of the main traffic arteries of the city leading to the industrial area and the Western Suburbs. It would be a mistake to see Omonia square as a simple boundary between 'two worlds'. On the contrary "we should also understand Omonia Square as an omniscient narrator of the city. An author who writes in the morning whatever takes place at night. In its dark corners and silent galleries, in its morbid streets and sad buildings, among the shadows that inhabit it and the escalators that lead from one part of the city to the other, sometimes leaving their tracks on its thick concrete skin and sometimes erasing them, on the breathless tarmac and its "electrified" bowels".[52]

"Omonia Square is seen by the urban consciousness of society as a boundary not only as a junction of five streets, a meeting place, a thoroughfare, a non-place, a home for the homeless and the marginalised, a familiar cinematic, literary scene or a 'turbulent zone'" [53]
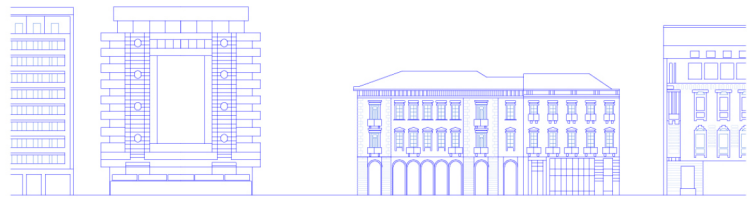
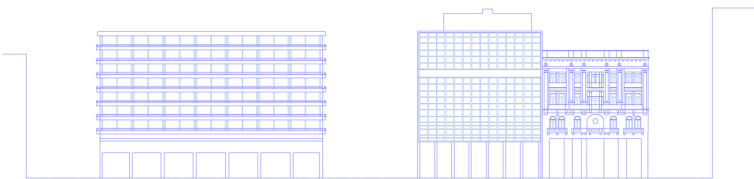

North Elevation
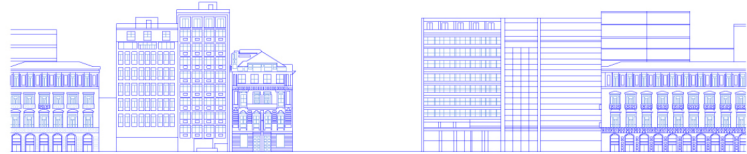
East Elevation

South Elevation
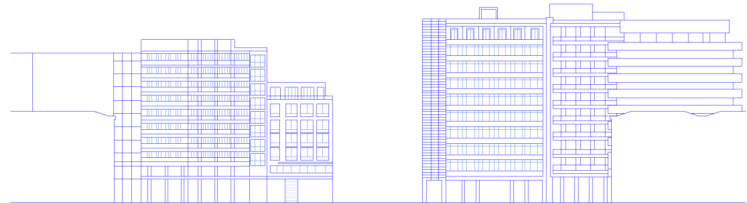
West Elevation

Figure 2.19

Building elevations surrounding Omonia square.
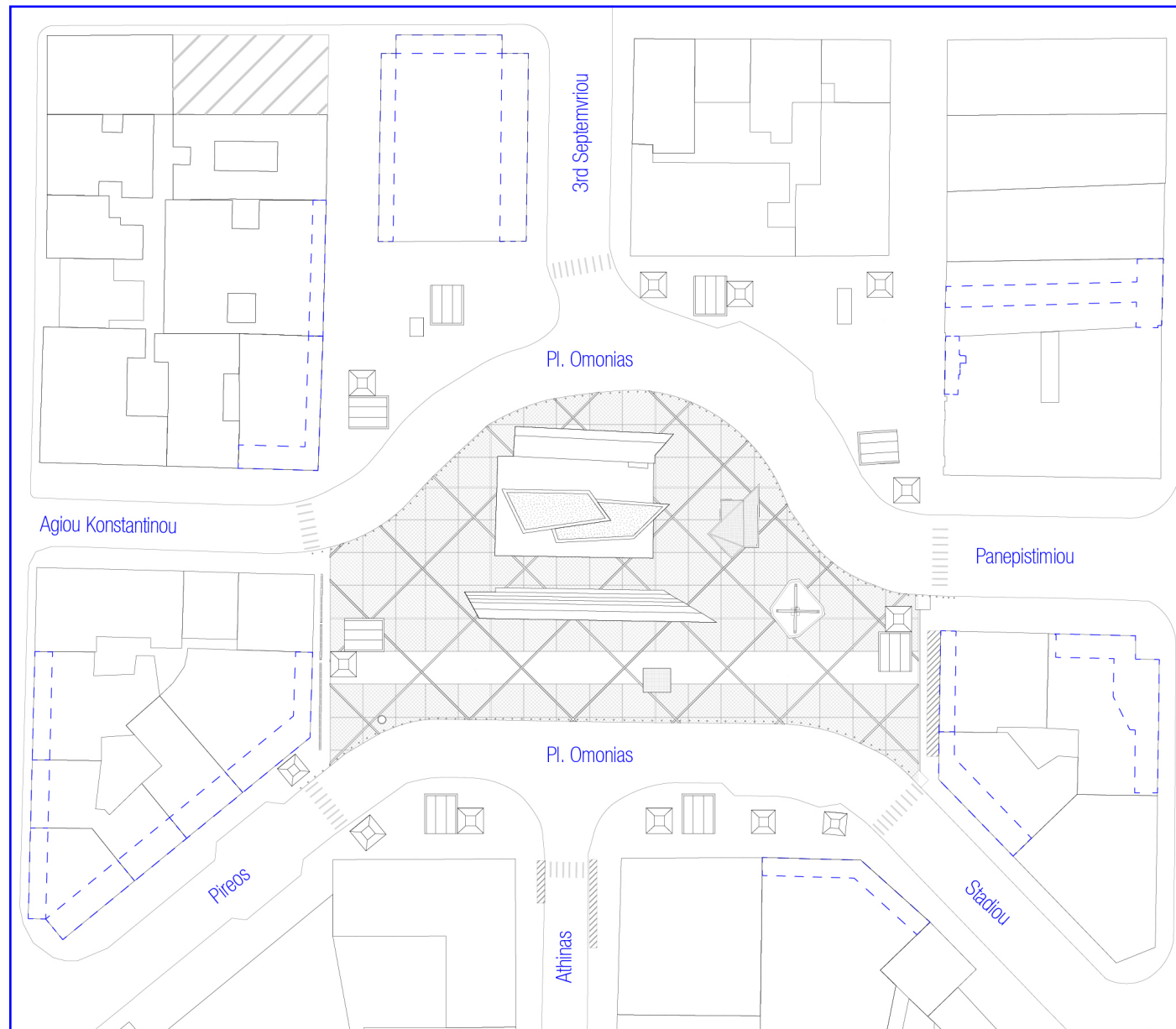
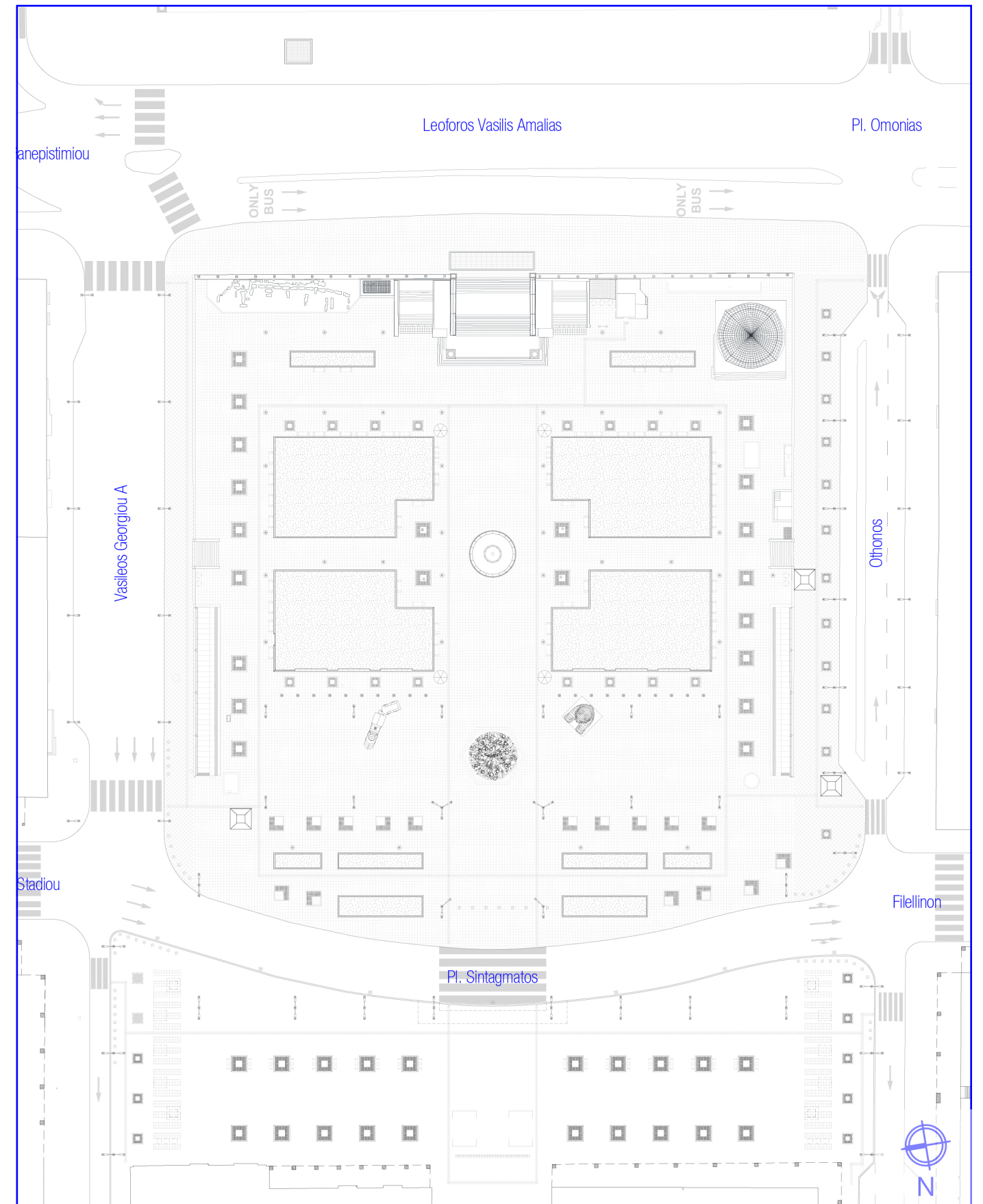Figure 2.20   Site plan of Omonia square's form in 2011.

N
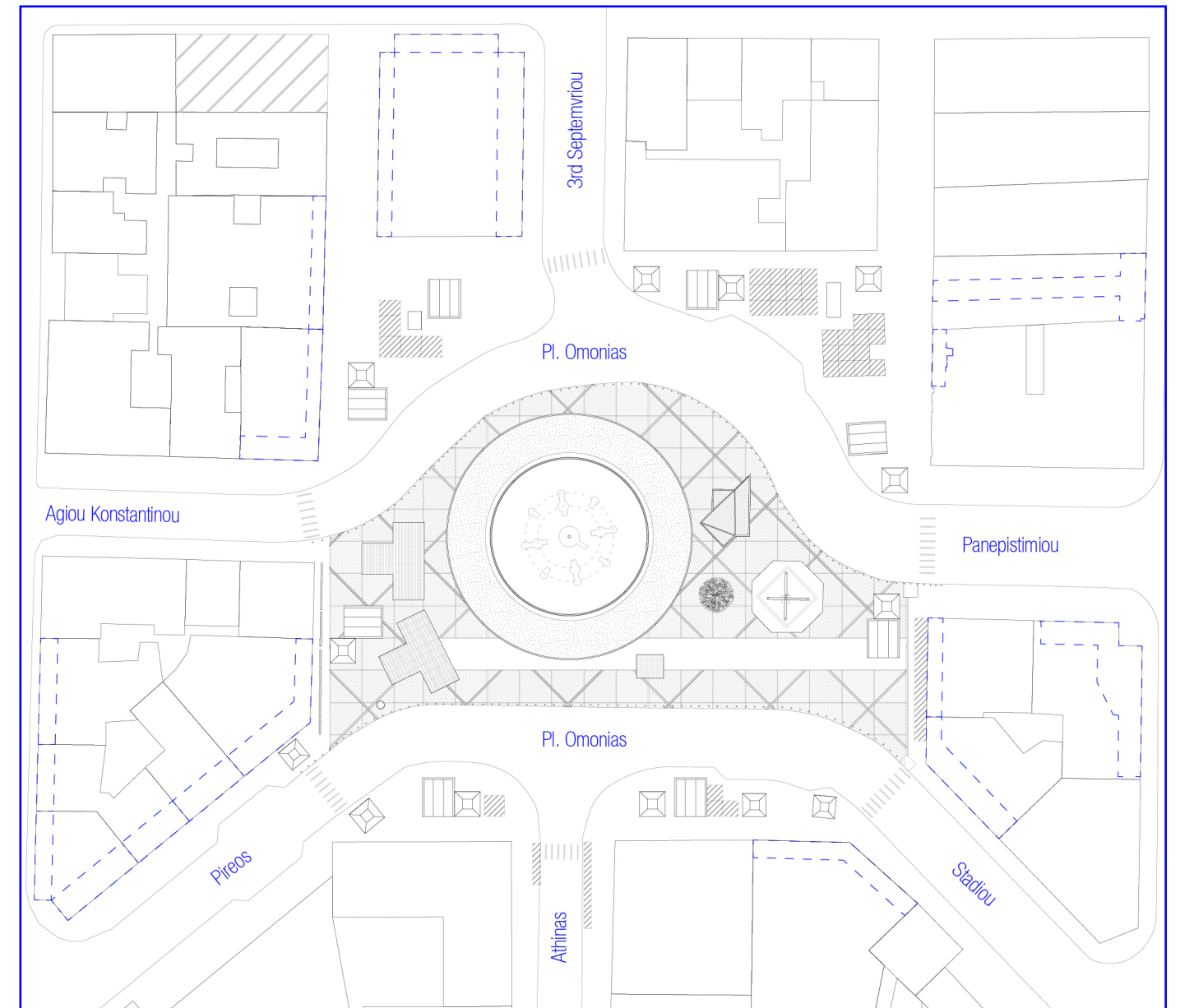
Figure 2.21   Site plan of Omonia square's form in 2022.

N

Syntagma Square

Syntagma is the Greek word for constitution. Syntagma square is considered the central and most prestigious square of the capital and is associated with the political and administrative affairs of the country as it coexists to the East with the impressive House of Parliament and the Ministries. At the same time Syntagma square is a meeting spot for natives and tourists. It has always been acutely political in character and the main site for hosting marches and strikes, where demonstrators try to voice their difference in opinion. We identify two faces of the square, one on the 'political angst'[54] when major political events and demonstrations take place and another on leisure with social and cultural ones.

"Syntagma has always been a political square, a charming character that needs to be retained. The square turns alive when there's a strike, but in any other day it looks neglected." [55]

To the West the square is connected via Ermou and Voulis streets to the exclusive commercial and cosmopolitan core of the city.[56] To the North it connects via Panepistimiou and Stadiou street to Omonia square; however, the social environment and lifestyle of Syntagma square bear no relation to the 'beneath' characteristics of Omonia.[57]

The large orthogonal square spans a distance of 240m by 150m and the central longitudinal axis symmetrically divides the square into two equal parts and four sub-sections.

i. The heart of the square, a round fountain placed in the center
ii. On the perimetry of section (i) with dense vegetation
iii. Two linear zones parallel to the road axes of Vasileos Georgiou and Othonos, which in the past included cafes
iv. Along Filellinon Street, a linear planting zone
v. Transition zone defined on both sides, parallel to section (iv)
vi. On either side of the main staircase where the entry/exit points of the metro station are located
vii. In front of the Hellenic Parliament the plinth with the monument of the 'Unknown Soldier'[58].
viii. The elevated west sidewalk of Panepistimiou avenue from which one can have visual contact with all the above sections
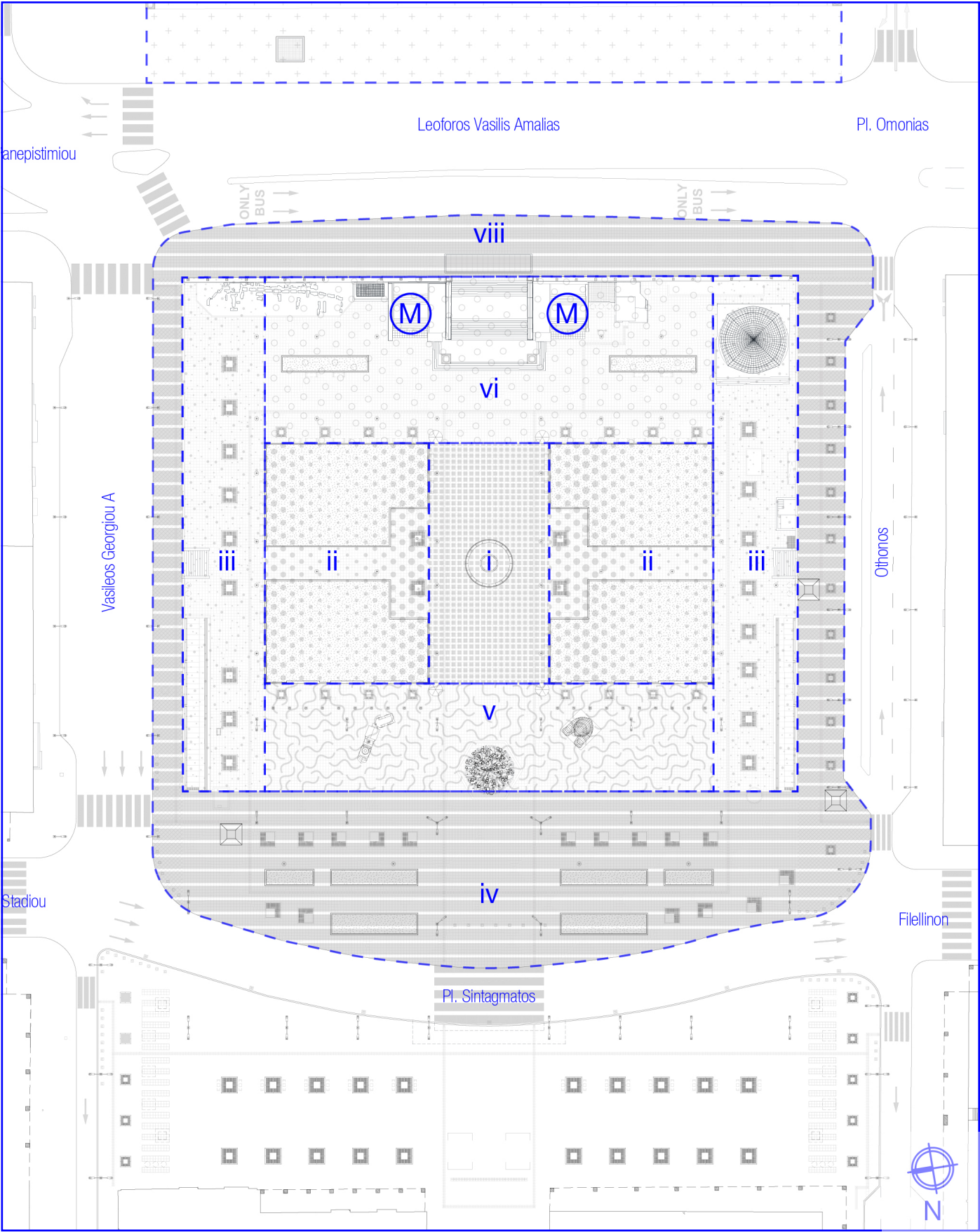
Figure 2.22   Spatial zones of Syntagma square.

Syntagma square, in contrast to Omonia, hasn't undergone a major re-design. As the capital's main square, Syntagma manifests the country's political authority. Through time it has undergone minimal transformations and its significance and vitality in spirit and character have been retained. The square was completely regenerated in 1896, renovated in 1990 and entirely remodeled three times between 1990-2004. By the turn of the century, Syntagma was marketed as the 'capital city's square-display' and was lauded by officials during Greece's 'Strong' period —late 1990s and early 2000s—, hosting the city's New Year celebrations.

Syntagma square was slowly transforming into a neoliberal public space with few people standing or sitting with the exception, of course, of these frequenting the square's cafes which no longer exist or the ones taking part in highly managed and supervised activities. Moreover, it is very important to mention that the square was gradually converted into an increasingly regulated site of control.[59] This was starting to become evident due to the complete reconfiguration of pedestrian traffic. Up until the late 1990s, the main routes to and from the square were on-road pedestrian crossings. However, ever since the construction of the Metro station in the square itself, the underground passages[60] have become the main paths leading to and from the square closely watched over by Closed Circuit Television, private security guards, and the police. Similarly, to Omonia Square this 'under-groun-dization' was purely intended to benefit car traffic in the city center and thus allowed uninterrupted car circulation in Amalias Avenue and King George Street. Furthermore, tramlines and tram stations were built around Syntagma, with a constant reconfiguration of the bus stops. The presence of Parliament and the Government Ministries necessitated increased continuous policing of the square, as did security measures for bank branches and luxury hotels located there. This is essentially how Syntagma Square became little more than a passageway for most people. A space of transit, where the majority of pedestrian movement is recorded to be from the metro station to the shops of Ermou and Stadiou Streets.[61]

North Elevation

East Elevation

South Elevation

West Elevation

Figure 2.23

Building elevations surrounding Syntagma square.

Leoforos Vasilis Amalias

Pl. Omonias

anepistimiou

ONLY BUS

ONLY BUS

Vasileos Georgiou A

Othonos

Stadiou

Filellinon

Pl. Sintagmatos

N
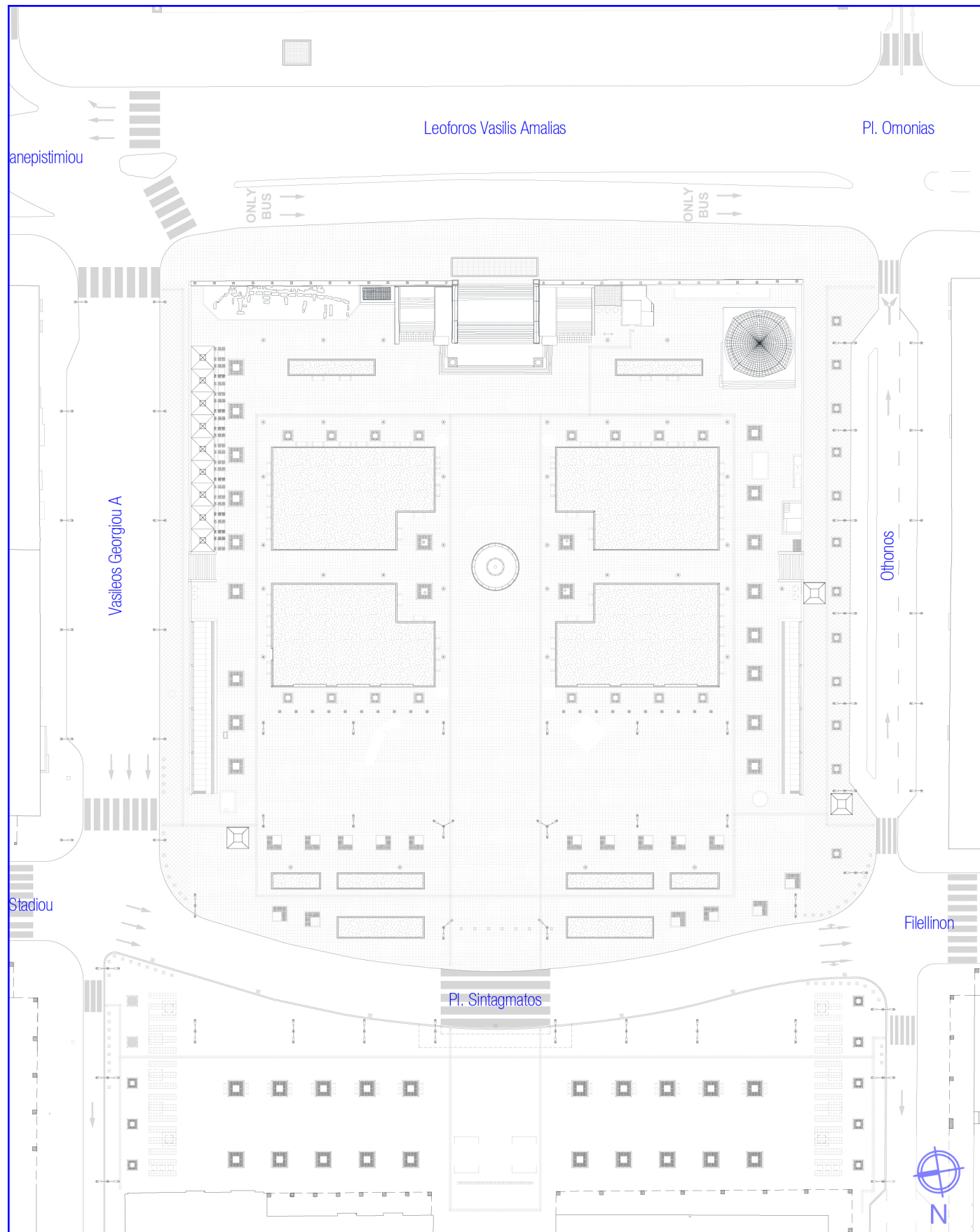
Figure 2.24

Site plan of Synatagma square's form in 2011.

Leoforos Vasilis Amalias

Pl. Omonias

anepistimiou

ONLY BUS

ONLY BUS

Vasileos Georgiou A

Othonos

Stadiou

Filellinon

Pl. Sintagmatos

N

Figure 2.25

Site plan of Synatagma square's form in 2022.

Chapter 2 Endnotes

1. Mitrašinović Miodrag, and Vikas Mehta, eds. *Public Space Reader*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021.
2. Ibid, 15.
3. Ibid, 15.
4. Ibid, 2021, 15.
5. Miller, Kristine F, *Designs on the Public : The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press,2007), xvi.
6. Ibid, xvi.
7. Ibid, xvi.
8. Ibid, xvi.
9. Ibid, xvi-xvii.
10. 'Responsive' spaces are designed and maintained to meet the demands of their users.
11. 'Meaningful' spaces allow people to form deep connections between the location, their own life, and the greater world.
12. Miller, Kristine F, *Designs on the Public : The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press,2007), xiiv-xv.
13. Carr, Stephen. *Public Space*. Cambridge Series in Environment and Behavior. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 19.
14. Miller, Kristine F, *Designs on the Public : The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press,2007), xiiv-xv.
15. Ibid, x.
16. Examples of this scheme are the Sony Plaza, the former IBM Atrium, and the Atrium at Trump Tower based on Miller, Kristine F, *Designs on the Public : The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press,2007), x-xi.
17. Miller, Kristine F, Designs on the Public : *The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press,2007), x-xi.
18. Referring to photography, demonstrations, sleeping, and drinking.
19. Claire Martin, "*Wrong Division: The Rise Of Privately-Owned Public Space*", Foreground, 2019, https://www.foreground.com.au/planning-policy/wrong-division-the-rise-of-privately-owned-public-space/.
20. Miller, Kristine F, Designs on the Public : *The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press,2007), x-xi.
21. Mitrašinović Miodrag, and Vikas Mehta, eds. *Public Space Reader*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021, 26.
22. "*What Is A Pandemic?*". 2022. Health Direct. https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/what-is-a-pandemic.
23. "*Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic*". 2022. World Health Organization. https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov.
24. Mitrašinović Miodrag, and Vikas Mehta, eds. *Public Space Reader*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021, 1.
25. Ibid, 1.
26. Tzanis, Zoe. 2021. "*The Impact Of COVID-19 On Poverty In Greece*". The Borgen Project. https://borgenproject.org/impact-of-covid-19-on-poverty-in-greece/.
27. Dalakoglou, Dimitris. 2013. "*The Movement And The "Movement" Of Syntagma Square*". Society For Cultural Anthropology. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-movement-and-the-movement-of-syntagma-square.
28. Business activity came to a halt, unemployment and poverty were again on the rise and schools were suddenly closed.
29. Tzanis, Zoe. 2021. "*The Impact Of COVID-19 On Poverty In Greece*". The Borgen Project. https://borgenproject.org/impact-of-covid-19-on-poverty-in-greece/.
30. Social movements, civil society, collective mobilization, urban policy, and urban sociology are among research interests and expertise.
31. Karolos - Iosif Kavoulakos, "*Public Space And Urban Movements: Scope, Content And Practices*", Athens Social Atlas, 2015, https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/urban-movements/.
32. The city plan gets approved in June 1833 based on Kostourou, Fani. (2015). *Οι ανθρώπινες δραστηριότητες στο δημόσιο χώρο: Αστικά κενά στον άξονα της Πανεπιστημίου*, 23.
33. Fanis Kafantaris, "Omonia Square: From Space To Words", Athens Social Atlas, 2015, https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/omonia-concorde/.
34. Kostourou, Fani. (2015). *Οι ανθρώπινες δραστηριότητες στο δημόσιο χώρο: Αστικά κενά στον άξονα της Πανεπιστημίου*, 23.
35. Garden of the Muses now known as National Garden.
36. Fanis Kafantaris, "Omonia Square: From Space To Words", Athens Social Atlas, 2015, https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/omonia-concorde/.
37. A common noun meaning concordance – omonia (in greek: **ομόνοια**) found in Fanis Kafantaris, "Omonia Square: From Space To Words", Athens Social Atlas, 2015, https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/omonia-concorde/.
38. Fanis Kafantaris, "*Omonia Square: From Space To Words*", Athens Social Atlas, 2015, https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/omonia-concorde/.
39. Ibid.
40. Themis Andriopoulos, "*Omonia Square As A Limit And A Narrator*", Athens Social Atlas, 2015, https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/omonia-square/.
41. Fanis Kafantaris, "*Omonia Square: From Space To Words*", Athens Social Atlas, 2015, https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/omonia-concorde/.
42. Ibid.

43. The Athenian trilogy consists of the three neoclassical buildings on Panepistimiou street; University of Athens, the Academy, and the National Library based on "Athenian Trilogy: The University Of Athens, The Academy, And The National Library", Athens By Locals, 2021, https://athensbylocals.com/athenian-trilogy/.

44. Themis Andriopoulos, "*Omonia Square As A Limit And A Narrator*", Athens Social Atlas, 2015, https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/omonia-square/.

45. Omonia became a municipal landmark: the Bakakos Apothecary functioned as a meeting spot for locals, visitors, and immigrants flooding into the capital.

46. Themis Andriopoulos, "*Omonia Square As A Limit And A Narrator*", Athens Social Atlas, 2015, https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/omonia-square/.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. "*Syntagma Square - AWRDDHN*", Cargocollective, accessed 6 April 2022, http://cargocollective.com/awrddhn/filter/Architecture/Syntagma-Square.

55. "Ibid.

56. Dalakoglou, Dimitris. 2013. "*The Movement And The "Movement" Of Syntagma Square*". Society For Cultural Anthropology. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-movement-and-the-movement-of-syntagma-square.

57. Kostourou, Fani. (2015). "*Οι ανθρώπινες δραστηριότητες στο δημόσιο χώρο: Αστικά κενά στον άξονα της Πανεπιστημίου*", 43-46.

58. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Athens' Syntagma Square is a war memorial. It is a war cenotaph dedicated to Greek troops who died in battle. The mausoleum was carved between 1930 and 1932, and it is guarded by the Presidential Guard's Evzones.

59. Dalakoglou, Dimitris. 2013. "*The Movement And The "Movement" Of Syntagma Square*". Society For Cultural Anthropology. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-movement-and-the-movement-of-syntagma-square.

60. Owned by ATTIKO METRO S.A. a state-owned corporation with a high level of scientific training that is responsible for the development of the Athens Metro network through dependable scheduling and methodical work.

61. Dalakoglou, Dimitris. 2013. "*The Movement And The "Movement" Of Syntagma Square*". Society For Cultural Anthropology. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-movement-and-the-movement-of-syntagma-square.

3 Chapter

Ownership

Action aiming to protect public spaces and to 'reserve' so far unbuilt plots for public use underwent many stages and was manifested in the form of composition, action, networking, requests, and practices of urban movements. In the beginning, various activities were undergoing in numerous parts of the city, the majority of them being reactions to the privatization of the city's public spaces and to significant large-scale investments or programs aimed at safeguarding specific areas.[1] However, things got altered as a result of the economic crisis and the associated changes in policies. Political elites and business firms utilized the crisis as an excuse for financial opportunities. The movements' discourse was delegitimized under the guise of an urgent need for corporate investments, and the privatization of public areas was put forward as a solution to the recession and unemployment. The activity of movements for open spaces was dramatically reduced. To some extent, this was because these organizations focused on addressing the crisis's effects by establishing and operating communal pharmacies, groceries, banks, social educational centers, collective kitchens and activities without intermediaries.[2]

Ownership of public spaces and squares in Greece tends to be an endless bureaucratic vicious cycle. Specifically, the two case studies, Omonia and Syntagma squares might phenomenically appear as completely publicly owned; however, this is not the case. Both squares are owned by a variety of different governmental Institutions and Departments[3] with various and completely different interests. The above appear to own different sections of the squares and, in some extreme cases, even a single bench or an electrical socket is contested for ownership. This creates numerous difficulties in terms of maintaining and preserving the square. When there are many and different parties involved it becomes unclear who is responsible and for what, leading to communication and managing problems. Furthermore, there is the influence imposed on these public squares by the private sector. Even though the private sector does not own the spaces it exerts a catalytic influence upon them.

Syntagma square is surrounded by many luxurious hotels, but most importantly by the Grand Bretagne Hotel[4] which, for a short period of time during 2014, was responsible for the maintenance and preservation of the square. During the time that it was managed by the private sector the square was at its best condition; it had never been so clean and well preserved. A.Laskaridis, a successful Greek entrepreneur and owner of the Grande Bretagne and King George Hotel, also located in Syntagma, donated[5] for the restoration of the square. The refurbishment included a deep cleaning or even replacement of the marble tiles, the repair and cleaning of the central fountain, a brand-new lighting configuration, and improved greenery.[6] The role of the private sector

in maintaining the square didn't last long since a public outcry was voiced regarding the alleged 'adoption' of the most central square of the capital by the private sector.[7] People were perceiving Laskaridis's 1.45 million euros not as a donation but as an investment aiming to further expand and boost his two hotels. Public spaces that are physically linked to key public buildings, such as the Parliament, are not automatically linked to the practice of democracy. Regulation and ownership of such squares can shut down public venues that appear to be perfect forums for political discourse.[8]

In Omonia square, although, it is completely different in terms of use and function, a similar paradigm with Syntagma is identified. Although the recent redesigning plans were under government supervision, public and private interest had a definite saying in the final physical appearance of the square.[9] In 2020, during the lockdown the square was closed for the reconstruction required as its prior aesthetic and urban alterations resulted in the deterioration of Athens's center and historical district. Surprisingly, however, during the refurbishment there was not a single indication of the square's intended outlook. Typically, in large public projects drawings and models are installed on site that portray to the public how the project would look like in the end. However, that wasn't the case. Furthermore, the legal protocol for large reconstructions of public spaces goes through several design phases so as to make sure that they fulfill the necessary criteria and receive building permit. Once again, the procedures weren't followed. Even though there have been numerous architectural studies and even a massive open public competition in 2012 called 'Re-think Athens' that also involved extensive research and planning for the square, in the end none was considered or even consulted. Nobody was really aware of what was happening in the square, nor of the changes that would occur. What's relevant and very interesting is that, again, the funding for the project was coming from both public and private sector. The private body which aided the funding of the project was, once again, A.Laskaridis, donating over half a million euros.

Movement on Squares

Omonia

There are three key movement motives in Omonia square, the underground, and the above-ground circular, which are the most powerful and last the permeable movement. The pattern movement of the above ground is heavily influenced by what's happening on the underground part of the square. The removal of the entrance to the station from the center of the square initiated the construction of the underground square where for the first-time the movement of pedestrians was organized. In 2011 the underground pedestrian traffic was greater than the above ground one. Every day, a great number of people use the short, curving subterranean subway and railway network, to cut short journey time. On the above ground central plateau two movement possibilities are offered: one along the axis of Panepistimiou – Agiou Konstantinou and one from Stadiou – Piraeus, the latter being stronger. Through both, the user perceives the overall image of the square, experiences the streets and associates with the building fronts that frame the gap. This movement, which is flat and smooth, is the most straight forward and easy option. However, due to the building environment and overall conditions of the square, it is not the one preferred by the user. From the data retrieved from the surveying in 2011 we identify that people prefer to circulate on the peripheral zones of the square rather that going through the central part.[10]

Following the reconstruction of the square and during the initial lockdowns of the pandemic, we observe a slight shift in people's movement. The big fountain placed in the center of the square with is combination of greenery and water elements create a much friendlier and pleasant environment for the temporary users. Even though the peripheral zones are still very much active due to their commercial land use, now similarly to a decade ago, more people throughout the day prefer to pass through the square and not around it. What has stayed the same, however, is intense activity on the exits of the underground. Omonia, since its founding, used be a transport hub for all social classes and this has never changed not because of its design but due to the squares' central location.
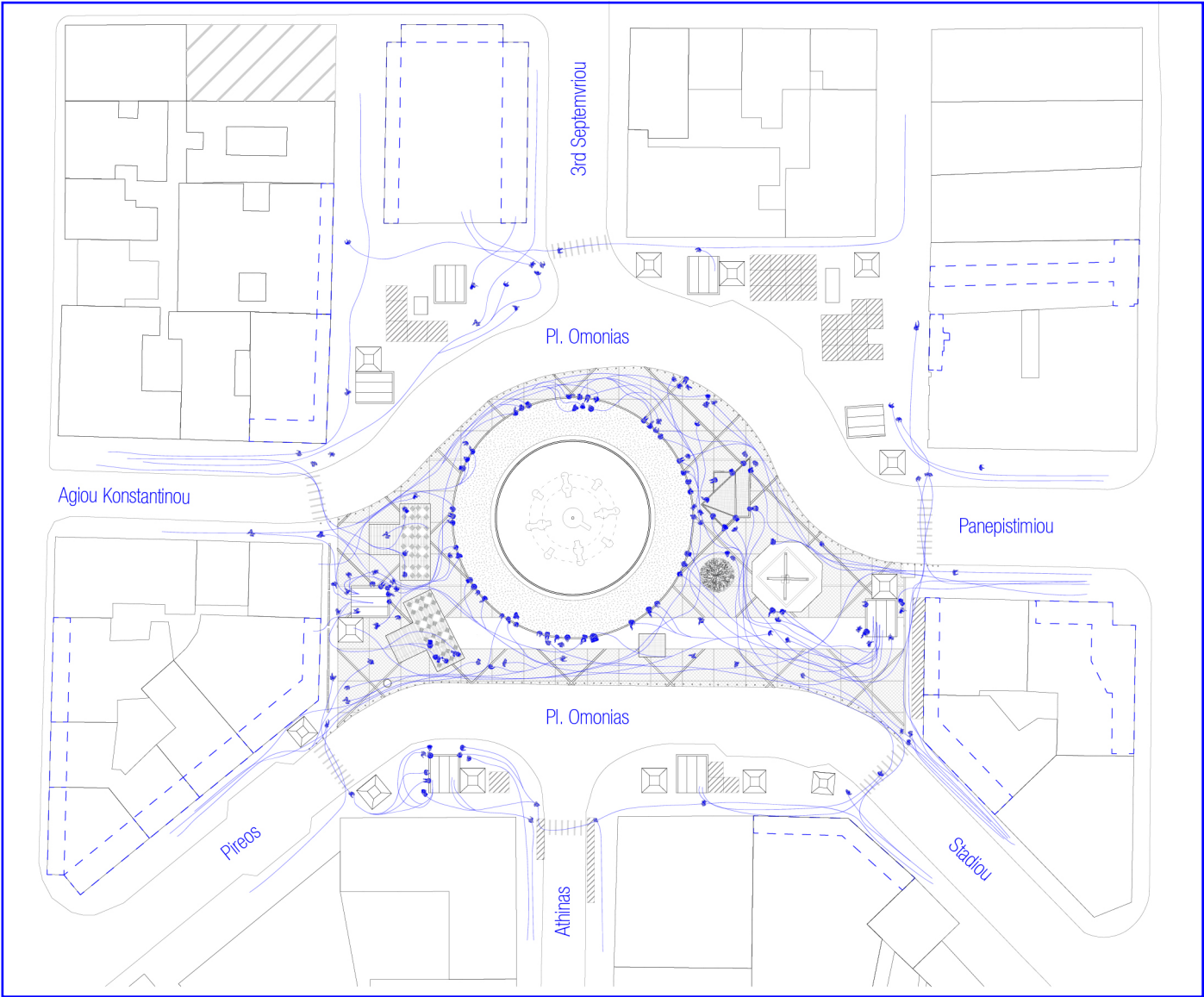
Figure 3.1

Citizens movement paths recorded during my surveying day in Omonia square. Main access to the square is from Stadiou and Panepistimiou street and also from the metro's multiple exits on the square.

Syntagma

The observations made in 2011 (data collection by F.Kostourou) are not very different from the current situation. The axis of symmetry of the square forms the main axis of pedestrian circulation, connecting the inflow of people from the underground exits with the commercial street of Ermou which is the predominant pedestrian street in the city. At the same time this movement also connects Ermou with the axis of Pane-pistimiou through the grand staircase located in the Eastern part of the square. As mentioned in previous chapters, the majority of users arrive at Syntagma Square via the underground station; it was observed, however, that there is a disproportionate use of the southern exit of the metro in relation to the northern one as depicted in Figure.27. The southern exit is being primarily used because of its proximity to the docks. Un-surprisingly, the goal of the user seems to be the shorter route to reach the square which allows total supervision of the public space.[11]

Crossings outside the four green areas are rarely chosen by pedestrians, especially when access to the square is via Stadiou and Filellinon streets. Finally, the traffic on the peripheral sidewalks of the square created by the convergence of the four streets, heavily depends to a large extent on the land use. Specifically, the dense line of areas of commerce located on Northwestern front, attract the majority of pedestrians.

Comparison of the Two Squares

As mentioned in previous chapters, the two vastly different squares suddenly find a common purpose. Their common central location in Athens immediately makes them a transport hub that hosts underground and railway lines that span all across the city. That leads to an amalgam of people, different in background and social class coming from all around the capital, meeting and interacting in these public squares. Because of this scheme, in both cases we identify a heavy circulation from the stations exits towards the square, from where the users either temporarily stay in the square or continue to move towards their destination.
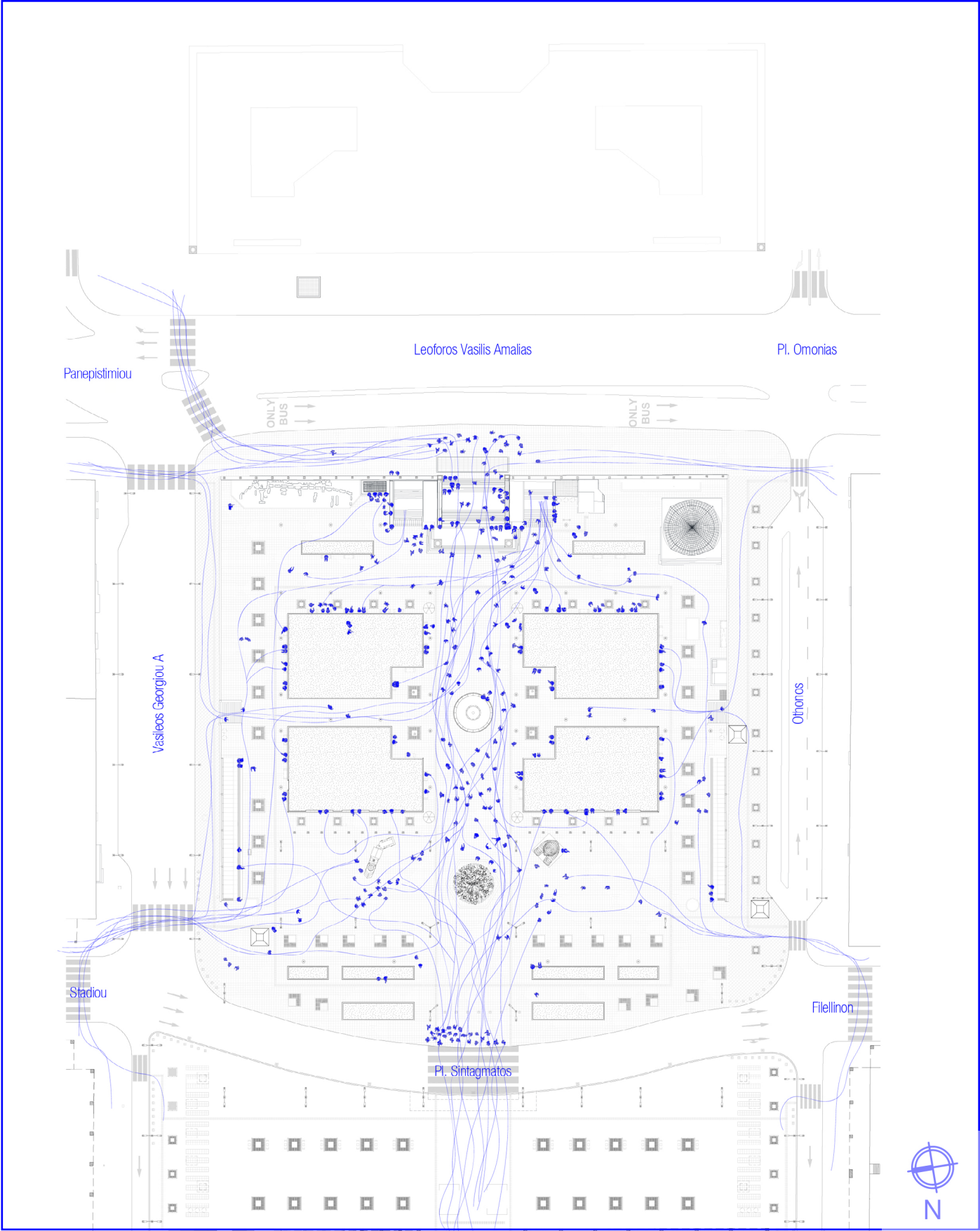
Figure 3.2

Citizens movement paths recorded during my surveying day in Syntagma square. Main access to the square is from the southern exit of the metro station.

Human Activities on Squares

Omonia

In 2011 the collection of data portrays a reduced human activity in the central part of Omonia square. In relation to the perimetric zones, stopping in the square's center is limited. The linear amphitheatric 'living room', which faces the Acropolis and divides the center plateau, is the only aspect of the square that supports static activity. Another factor that affects the usage of the square is the poorly vegetated environment which creates a very unfriendly and unwelcoming atmosphere. The absence of shade generates discouraging thermal conditions for pedestrians during the intense sunshine of the summer months. Thus, we can detect more life towards the 'outskirts' of the square since the proximity to public transport and the uses of the surrounding building blocks attract pedestrians and have a multiplier effect on movement and traffic. Therefore, instead of the inaccessible and inhospitable center of the square, pedestrians are seen near the entrances of the shops and the exits of the metro. From the physical environment of the square in 2011 it is clear that the space has been designed to accommodate certain functions, most commonly that of exiting the underground station. This observation is reinforced by the absence of seating infrastructure, with its replacement by stairs, metal bars and parapets. Transitional zones along the facades of the buildings most typically take the form of sheds and arcades. These are located around the square and are the most common secondary stopping spots of the users. Lack of seating triggered passers-by to stand or sit on technical obstacles like road barriers on the sidewalk perimeter, highlighting a secondary use for them and their importance in the space. They enabled users to observe not only the diverse movement of pedestrians and vehicles but at the same time the overall area of the square. This physical environment, however, excludes older and more sensitive ages from being part of the square. For this group the possibility of staying in the square is almost negligible since comfort is of vital importance to them.[12]

Ten years later, the square has undergone radical changes which appear to 'inspire' people to frequent the space around the large circular fountain. Surveying and collection data regarding the activities in the square show people being present there across different hours. The vegetation around the fountain in combination with the water element creates a relaxing environment for the people to inhabit and escape from the busy center. Different groups of temporary users appear there: passers-by who now decide to go through the square to arrive at their destination and users who take a break from their busy daily routine and eat their lunch. Others use the square as a meeting spot or even a place to have a cup of coffee in the sitting spaces provided by the cafes. However, it's interesting to see that, even though, there is no visible public sitting infrastructure, people are using the fountains boundar-
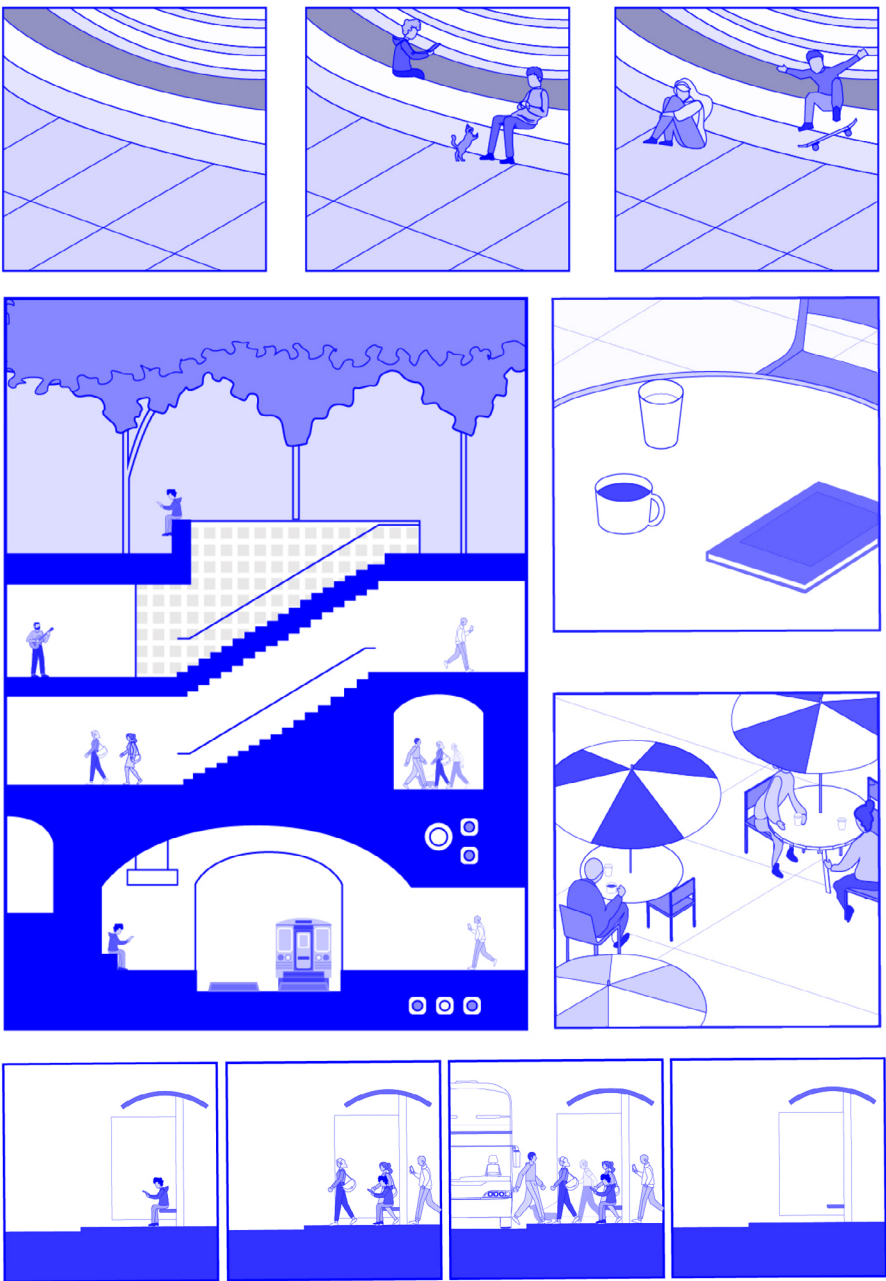
Figure 3.3

Diagrammatic depiction of the most common activities recorded in Omonia Square.

ies as one big bench. Equally interesting is to observe the fluctuation across age groups during the day. In the morning and noon more middle aged and elder people appeared to be present because of work or other duties, while during the afternoon - evening younger people started appearing in the square bringing life into it and soothing the noise pollution of the heavy vehicular traffic.

Omonia square's architectural variations had an impact on its vegetation as previously mentioned. During the middle of the 20th century, one could find dense vegetation with tall trees. Later the square acquired its treeless form which still exists up until today. "In August 2004, responding to the need for more vegetation in the city, the Municipality of Athens, ΥΠΕΧΩΔΕ and ΕΑΧΑ ΑΕ[13] considered it appropriate to make a green technical intervention in the existing Omonia Square. Up until today the vegetation present does not form a mass capable of shading the space during the warm months".[14] However, by 2021 the large, vegetated fountain area achieves a much better cooling effect in comparison to the square's past forms due to the urban heat island effect.[15]

Figure 3.4

Compared to Syntagma square, Omonia is much less decorated for the Christmas holidays.

Figure 3.5

Users finding ways to occupy the square but sitting on the fountains pedestal.

Figure 3.6

Daily busy vehicular traffic on the roads that surround Omonia square.

Figure 3.7

Private cafe offering sitting space on the square positioned right next to the fountain.

Figure 3.8

Limited sitting infrastructure in Omonia square, triggers users to find alternative options, such as to stand or sit on road columns and barriers on the perimeter of the streets. A secondary use for these objects is created by the flexibility of the users.

Figure 3.9   Omonias square's brand new fountain.
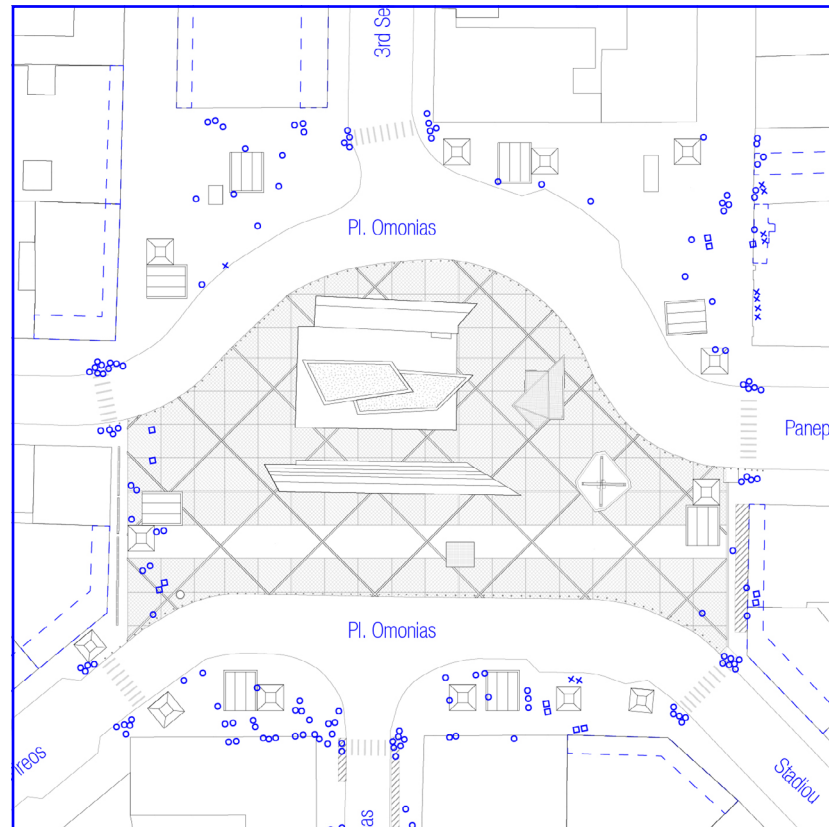
Figure 3.10
Static map of Omonia between 11:30 - 11:50 on 24/06/2011
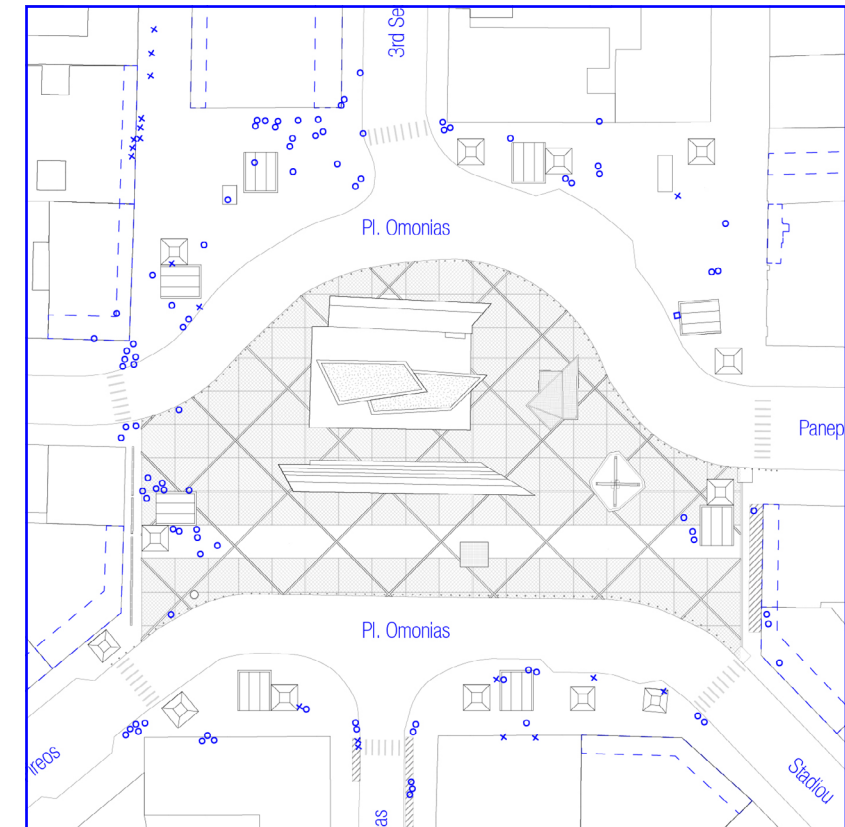
Figure 3.12
Static map of Omonia between 16:30 - 16:50 on 24/06/2011
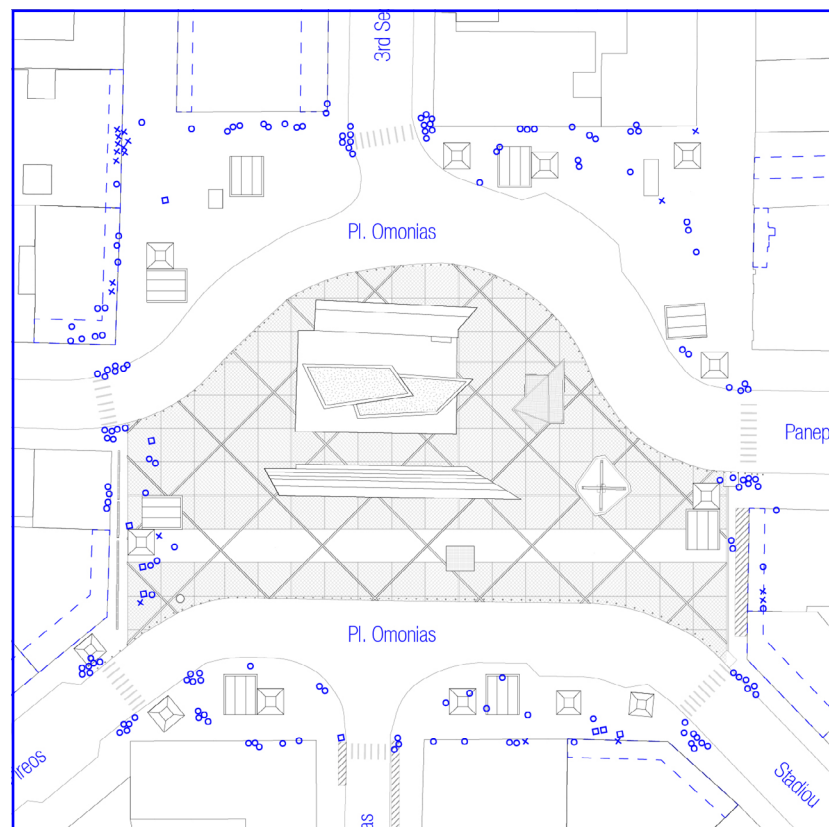
Figure 3.11
Static map of Omonia between 13:30 - 13:50 on 24/06/2011
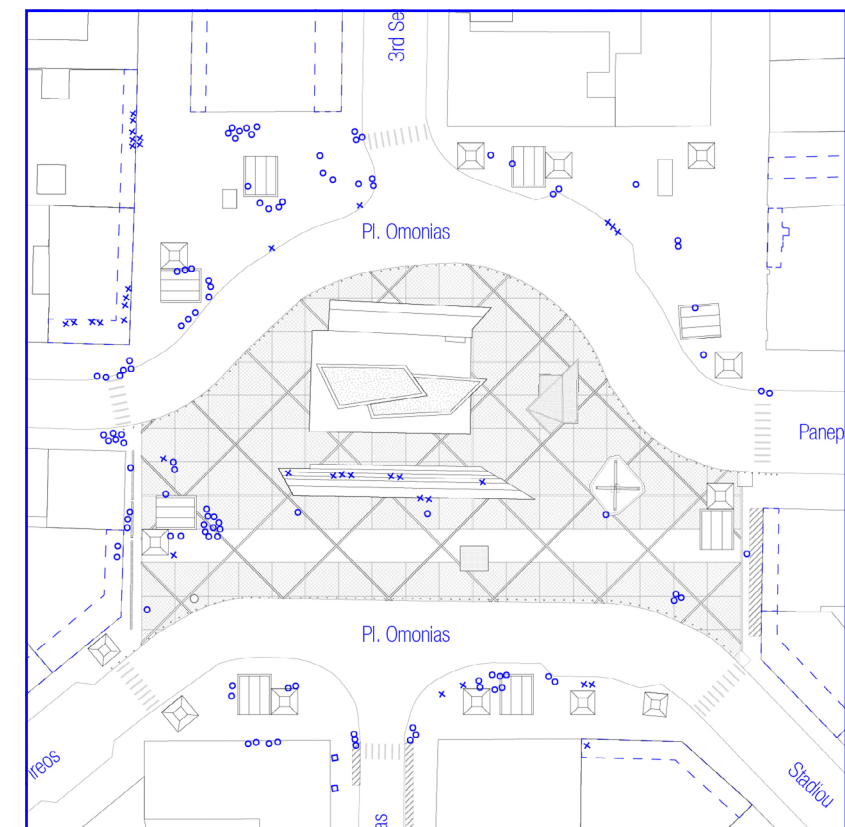
Figure 3.13
Static map of Omonia between 18:30 - 18:50 on 24/06/2011

Legend   ○ People standing   ✕ People sitting   ☐ People being active

Legend   ○ People standing   ✕ People sitting   ☐ People being active
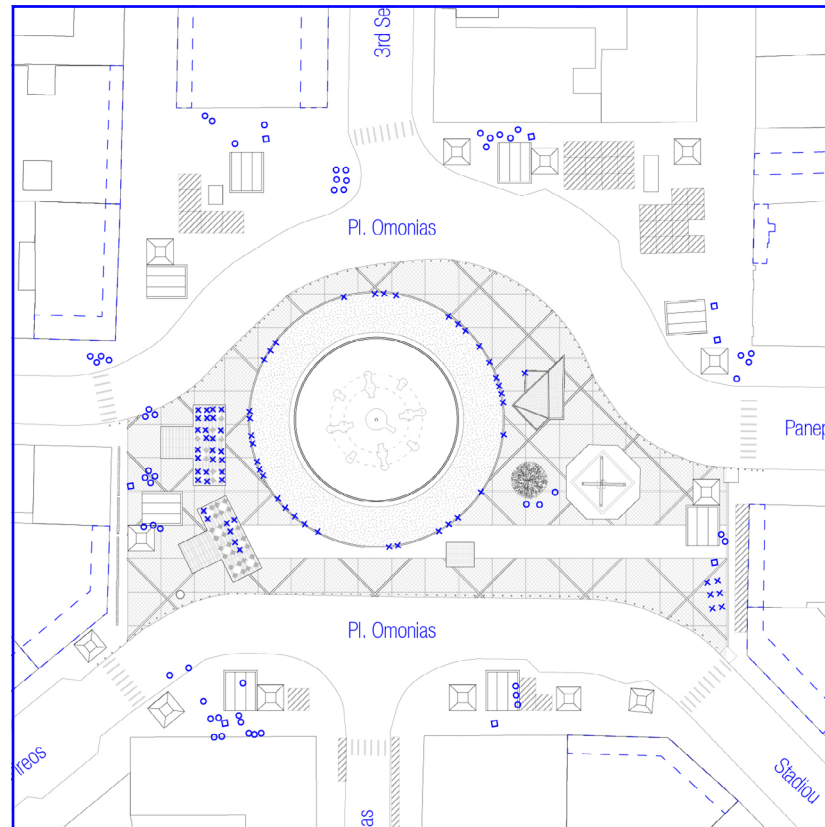
Figure 3.14

Static map of Omonia between 11:30 - 11:50 on 03/01/2022

Figure 3.15

Static map of Omonia between 13:30 - 13:50 on 03/01/2022

Figure 3.16

Static map of Omonia between 16:30 - 16:50 on 03/01/2022
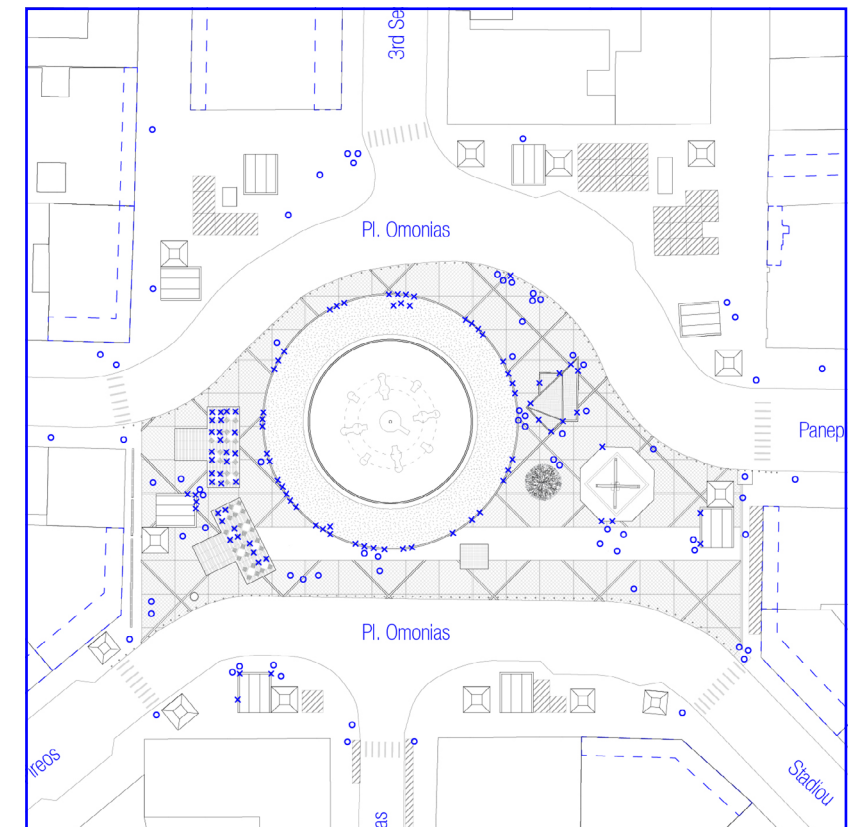
Figure 3.17

Static map of Omonia between 18:30 - 18:50 on 03/01/2022

Legend   ◯ People standing   ✕ People sitting   ☐ People being active

Syntagma

Syntagma Square carries great historical significance and is closely linked to the decision-making nucleus of the country. Syntagma is where people can freely express their diversity of opinion and argue and debate in social and political matters.[16] It is this environment that Dr.Kostourou came upon on the day she surveyed the square. The static mapping of Syntagma Square took place before and during the demonstrations of the 'Aganaktismenon'[17] movement. Choosing Syntagma Square as the site of the movement was not accidental, since the centre for taking national decisions is located opposite to the square. The protesters were divided into two groups. The first, projecting a more dynamic expression, acted from the top of the central staircase of the square and directly facing the Parliament. While the second one was camped in the lower part of the square occupying the four segments of greenery; the decision of residing in the green part of the square shows the good and peaceful intentions of the protesters. They intended to avoid disturbing the main part of the squares, where pedestrian traffic is heavy, since this would negatively affect the daily life and activities.[18]

Overall, the use and activities in Syntagma square haven't radically changed. A common observation in both surveys' static mapping is the large concentration of people and street vendors in front of the southern exit of the metro, from which, as mentioned, the majority of the pedestrians enter the square. People were seen standing taking advantage of the squares central location and using it as a meeting point, sitting on the square's benches reading a book, having a conversation or eating their lunch.

A large group interacts with the square's main elements, temporarily sitting on the central staircase and around the fountain; landmarks of the space that offer a visual connection to Ermou street and "supervision" over the space. In addition, small scale trading takes place with food retailers choosing to set up their stands in this strategic location to increase sales.

Figure 3.18
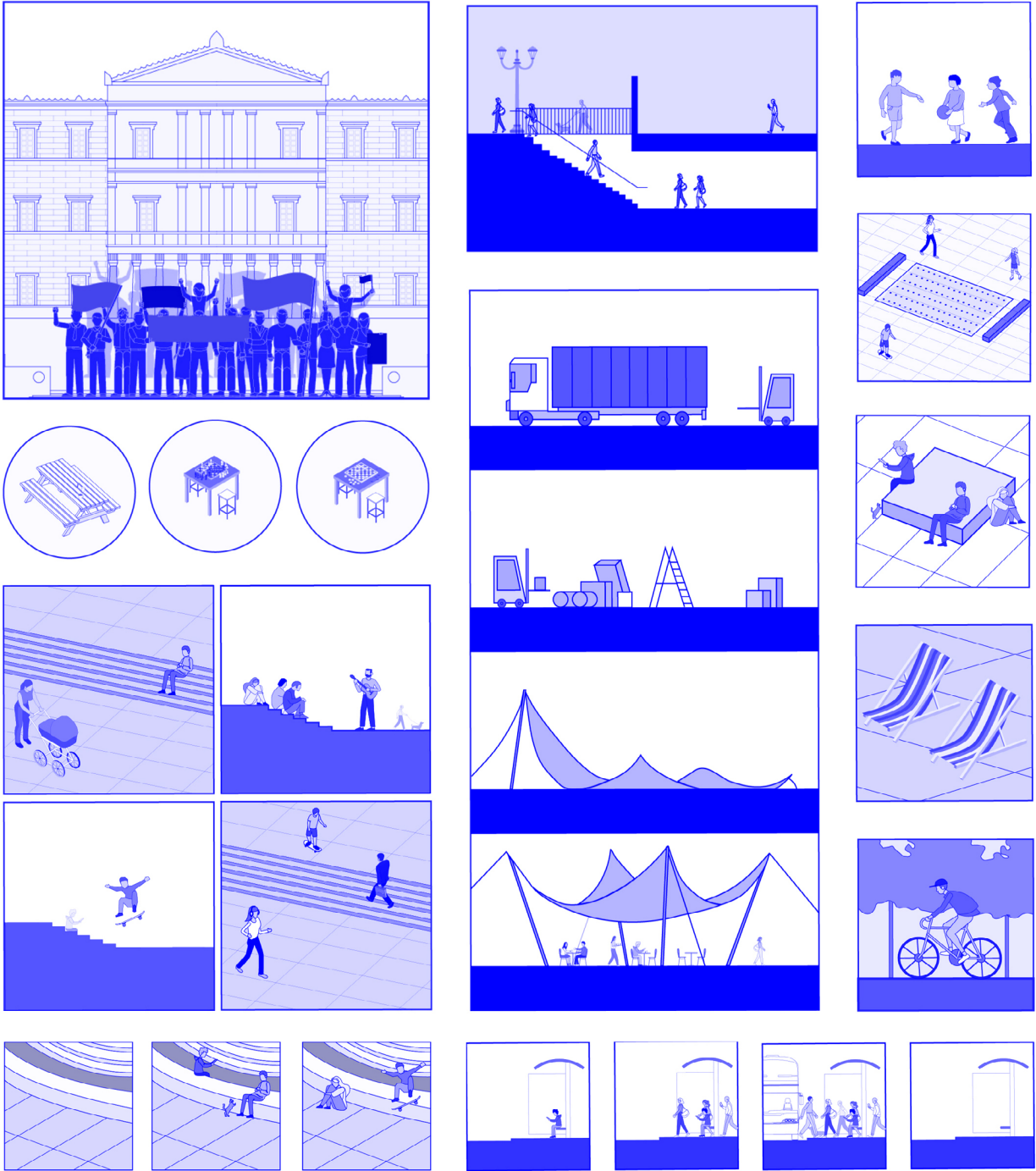
Diagrammatic depiction of the most common activities recorded in Syntagma Square.

The exact opposite happens to the zones located on the perimeter of the square. Due to the high and dense planting, these areas are visually isolated from the main axis of movement and activities. This results to very few people choosing these areas for activities and the movement is stagnant. The dimensions of these spatial units do not facilitate the gathering of people, since they are narrow zones between the side retaining walls of the square and the tall trees.[19] The main difference identified between the data mapping of the two chronologies is the increased number of people in the square during the protest and their occupation of the four central green zones, a phenomenon that is documented by the increased presence of people in the area as compared to normal conditions. Because the static maps were documented during the winter season (January 2022), we do not identify people occupying these green zones, as it is during the summer months when these zones play host to picnics and other activities.

Figure 3.19

At night people sit on the central staircase of the square. It's the perfect location to sit and observe the bustling activity and movement of the public space.

Figure 3.20

Crowded Syntagma square at night by a variety of age groups. The square is being used as a hanging out spot but also as a meeting one.

Figure 3.21

Pedestrian crossing from Syntagma square to the main pedestrian street of Ermou. These connection is one of the main paths user take, thus making the crossing extremely busy all day.

Figure 3.22

Many merchants are found in the square taking advantage the square's central location and heavy pedestrian activity,
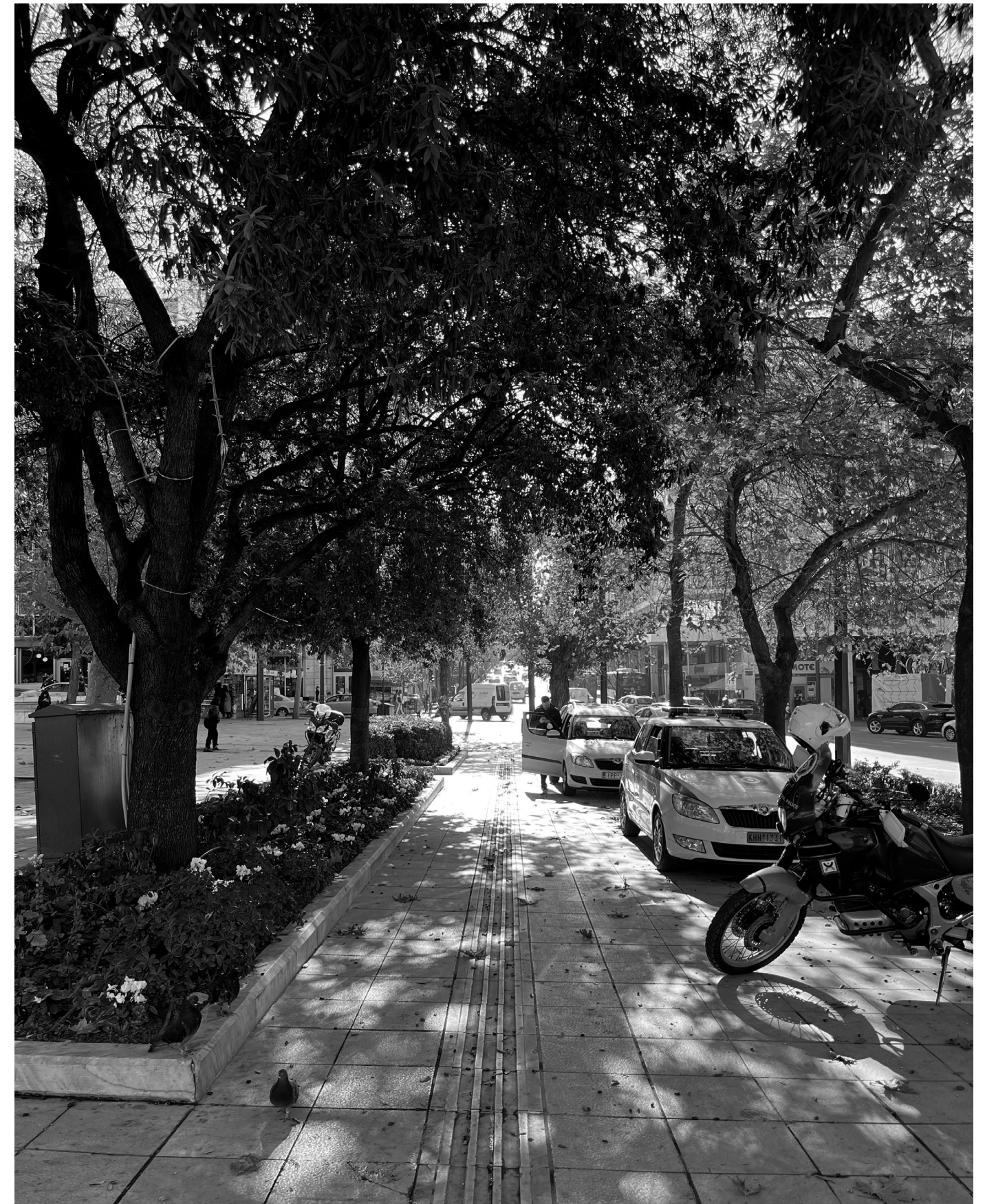
Figure 3.23

Municipal police and surveillance being present in Syntagma square throughout the day.

Figure 3.24 January 6, 2022, Syntagma square heavily populated by users. The square is still decorated with its Christmas ornaments making it a very lively and joyful destination for the Athenians.
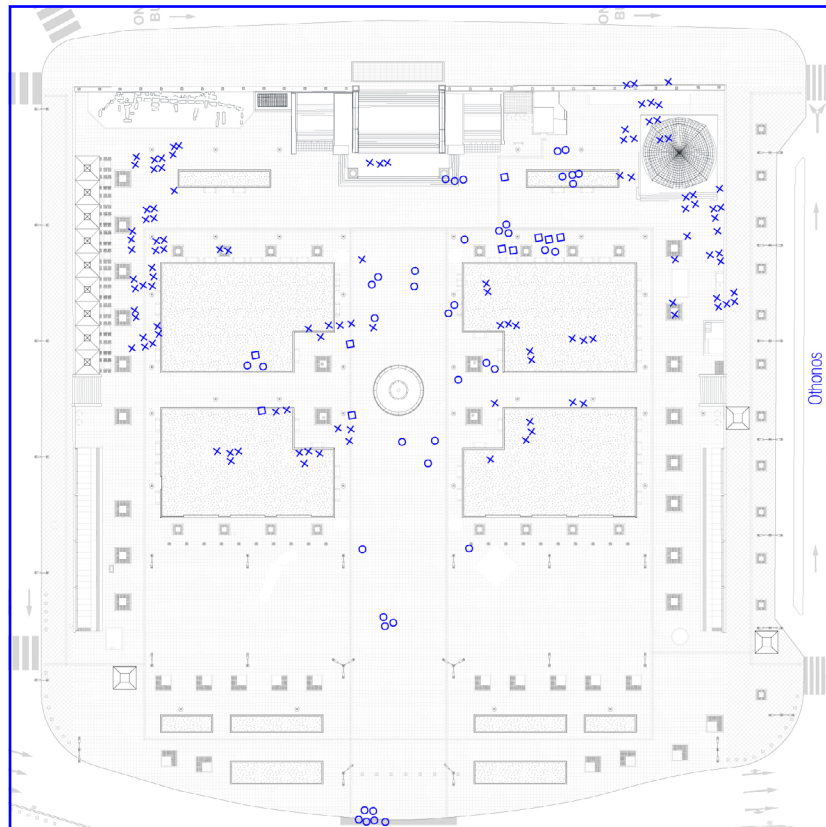
Figure 3.25

Static map of Syntagma between 11:00 - 11:20 on 24/06/2011

Figure 3.26

Static map of Syntagma between 13:00 - 13:20 on 24/06/2011

Figure 3.27

Static map of Syntagma between 16:00 - 16:20 on 24/06/2011

Figure 3.28

Static map of Syntagma between 18:00 - 18:20 on 24/06/2011

Legend ◯ People standing ✕ People sitting ☐ People being active
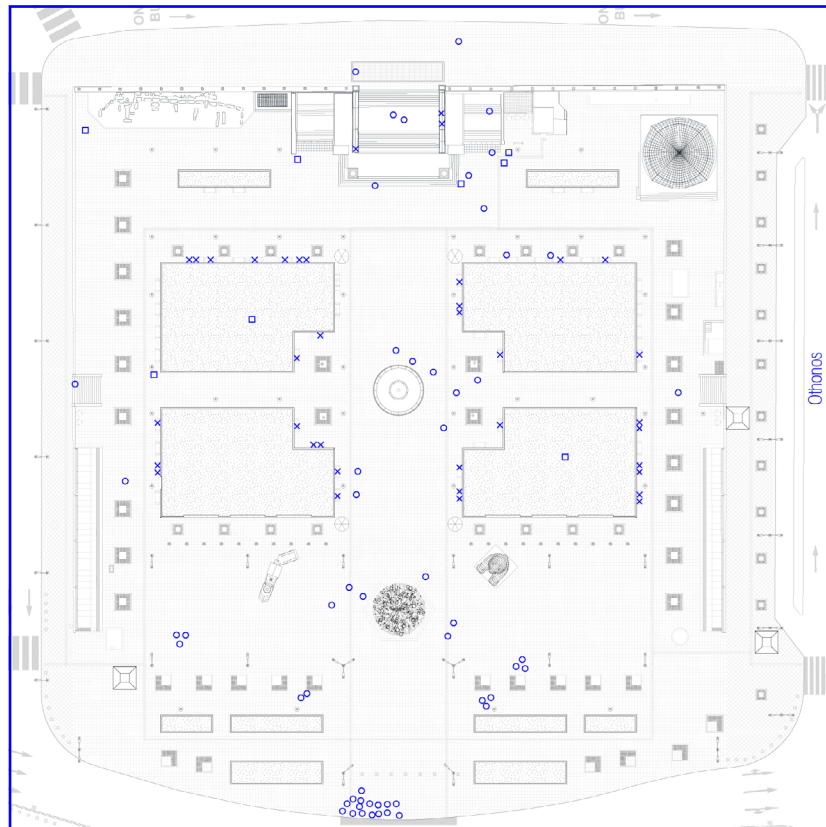
Figure 3.29
Static map of Syntagma between 11:00 - 11:20 on 03/01/2022
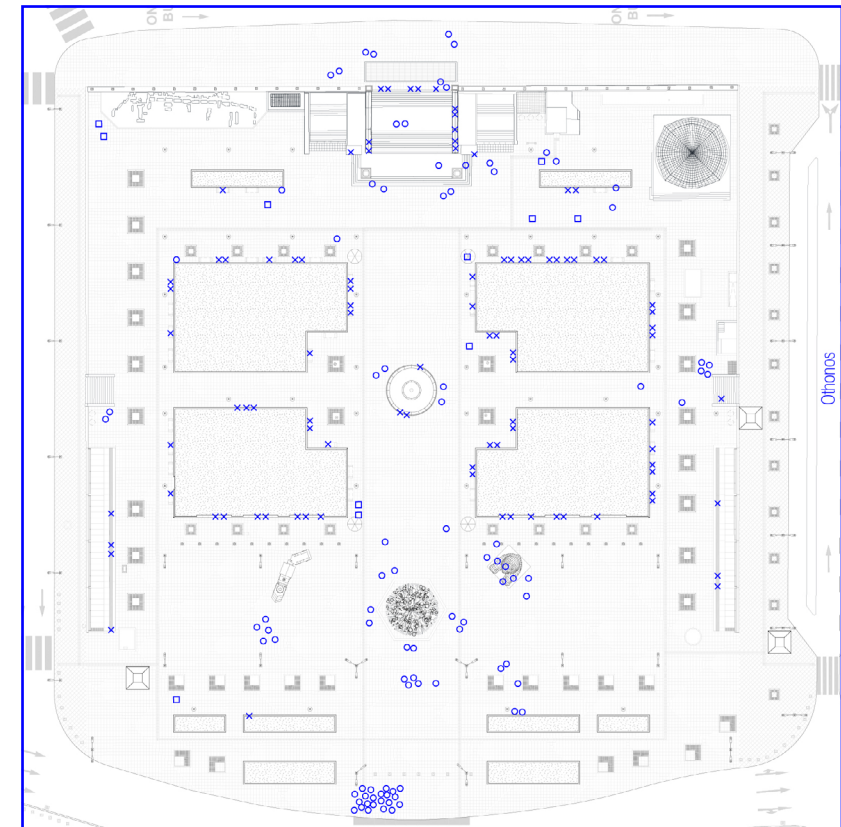
Figure 3.31
Static map of Syntagma between 16:00 - 16:20 on 03/01/2022
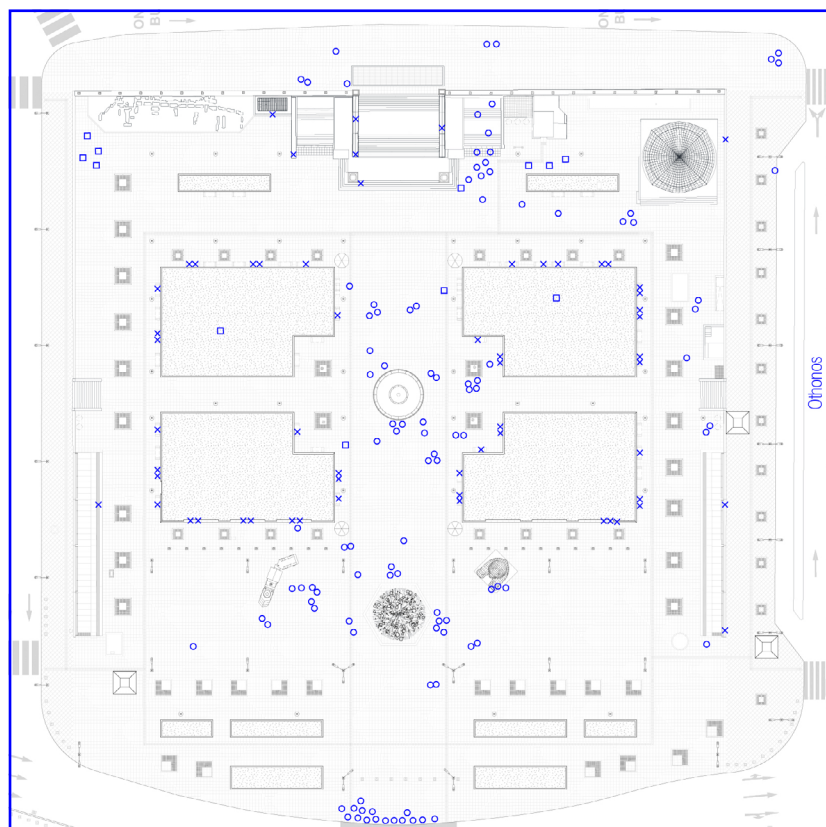
Figure 3.30
Static map of Syntagma between 13:00 - 13:20 on 03/01/2022
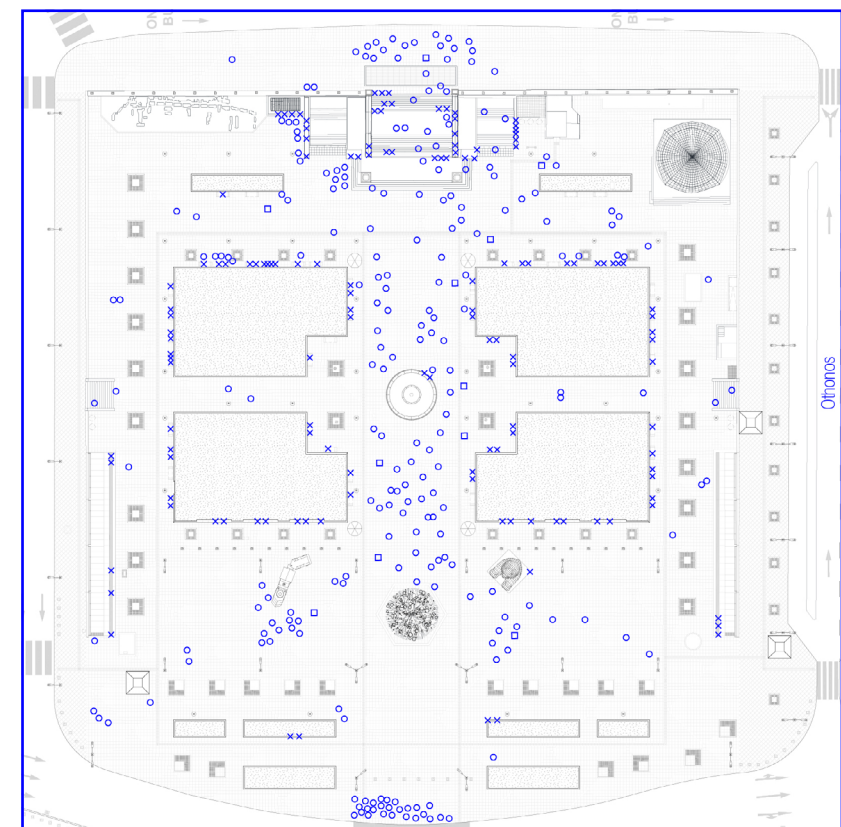
Figure 3.32
Static map of Syntagma between 18:00 - 18:20 on 03/01/2022

Legend ◯ People standing ✕ People sitting ☐ People being active

Legend ◯ People standing ✕ People sitting ☐ People being active

Comparison of the Two Squares

We can identify another type of space by looking outside the culturally established physical boundaries of home, workplace, and institution, just as Nancy Fraser explored beyond the formally defined as public to discover previously hidden counter publics. In the book Public Space Reader, Margaret Crawford, author of the chapter, referred to these spaces as 'everyday space'. 'Everyday space' is the pervasive fluid that holds our daily life together. "Everyday space is like everyday life, the 'screen on which society projects its light and its shadow, its hollows and, its planes, its power and its weakness'".[20] The two squares analyzed perfectly demonstrate the two sides of everyday life in the center of Athens, on the 'frontstage' Syntagma square acts as a gathering spot, a starting point for all events and explorations in the center of the capital, the nucleus of leisure experience. On the other hand, Omonia square in its prime acted as the 'frontstage' but now has transitioned into a 'backstage' hosting and portraying the struggles of the everyday man and woman. Playing these opposite roles in the function of the city, they host contrasting activities. For most Athenians, both squares are part of their daily life, with endlessly repeating commuting routes and trips to the supermarket, dry cleaner, or video store; these are the sites of intersection between the city and its citizens, where various economic and social transactions take place.[21]

Daily life is organized in respect to time and space, structured around itineraries influenced by work, and leisure, week obligations and weekend indolence and the repetitive gestures of commuting and consumption. In terms of social fabric, Athens may be seen not as a homogeneous city but rather as an aggregation of microcities each having its own peculiar characteristics that clearly defines them in terms of ethnicity, race, class, and religion. This fragmented social fabric of Athens creates a complex social environment in which cultures unite, diverge, and interact.[22]

Chapter 3 Endnotes

1. Karolos - Iosif Kavoulakos, "*Public Space And Urban Movements: Scope, Content And Practices*", Athens Social Atlas, 2015, https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/urban-movements/.
2. Ibid.
3. The Municipality of Athens, Attica Metro SA, ΥΠΕΧΩΔΕ (Ministry for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works of Greece)
4. The historic multi-awarded 5 star hotel, has been located in the center of the city since 1874 and is an important part of Athens' history.
5. The donation was 1.45 million euros
6. "*Αθανάσιος Λασκαρίδης: Τιμήθηκε Για Τη Μεταμόρφωση Της Πλατείας Συντάγματος*". 2018. Protothema. https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/819553/athanasios-laskaridis-timithike-gia-ti-metamorfo-si-tis-plateias-sudagmatos/.
7. "*Δημόσιοι Χώροι Προς Υιοθεσία- Θεός Φυλάξοι Από Τους Ευεργέτας....*". 2014. Ημερολόγιο Ομονοίας. https://omoniadiary.word-press.com/2014/03/12/1693/.
8. Miller, Kristine F, *Designs on the Public : The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press,2007), xi.
9. Ibid, xix.
10. Kostourou, Fani. (2015). *Οι ανθρώπινες δραστηριότητες στο δημόσιο χώρο: Αστικά κενά στον άξονα της Πανεπιστημίου*, 102.
11. Ibid, 48-49.
12. Ibid, 102-104.
13. Unification of Archaeological Sites and Reconstructions
14. Kostourou, Fani. (2015). *Οι ανθρώπινες δραστηριότητες στο δημόσιο χώρο: Αστικά κενά στον άξονα της Πανεπιστημίου*, 102-104.
15. Heat islands are urbanized areas with higher temperatures than their surrounding areas. Buildings, roads, and other infrastructure absorb and re-emit heat from the sun more effectively than natural landscapes like forests and water bodies.
16. Kostourou, Fani. (2015). *Οι ανθρώπινες δραστηριότητες στο δημόσιο χώρο: Αστικά κενά στον άξονα της Πανεπιστημίου*, 49-51.
17. The 'Aganaktismenon' movement is an initiative of citizens to peacefully protest about the political and economic situation of the country which lasted from May to June 2011. The word Aganakistismenoi can be translated as indignant. It is an action addressed to the political audience of the country, thus selecting Syntagma Square as a setting and claims the collectivity of society. According to the organizing body of the movement, the word Aganakistismenoi is not meant to incite or indicate the type of demonstration. On the contrary, they declared from the beginning that they wanted to meet peacefully and spontaneously. Their aim was to peaceful protest and express their concerns based on Kostourou, Fani. (2015). *Οι ανθρώπινες δραστηριότητες στο δημόσιο χώρο: Αστικά κενά στον άξονα της Πανεπιστημίου*, 49-51.
18. Kostourou, Fani. (2015). *Οι ανθρώπινες δραστηριότητες στο δημόσιο*

χώρο: Αστικά κενά στον άξονα της Πανεπιστημίου, 49-51.

19. Ibid, 49-51.
20. Mitrašinović Miodrag, and Vikas Mehta, eds. *Public Space Reader*.
     New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021, 28.
21. Ibid, 28.
22. Ibid, 28-29.

4 Chapter

Conclusion

A decade ago, when there were no pandemic and social distancing regulations, both public spaces and the city as whole should have been more vibrant, active, and flourishing. However, thorough research on the past and present context of Athens showed that conditions haven't changed all that much. The environment in 2011, that interested me, was similar to that of 2022. Even though there was no pandemic before, the impact of the 2008 – 2009 global economic crisis in Athens was evident. Shops closed temporarily and, in most cases, permanently, social activities came to a standstill, commerce declined, and unemployment climbed to 22% and by 2017 one-third of the population lived below poverty standards. Although the economic and pandemic crises differ, with the first applying to the economic and political section of life and the latter mainly to the health section, they end up having an almost identical impact on the public environment. It is, therefore, vital to realize and accept that public spaces are not just physical entities where architects employ design solutions to formulate a specific environment and a way of life for the citizens. In public spaces vastly different disciplines exert a variable degree of physical and non-physical influence. Omonia and Syntagma squares, no matter how much their physical identity changes, will not achieve their purpose and aims if the sociopolitical environment does not consider the daily uses and activities hosted and the basic needs of their users are not taken into account. Even though Omonia used to be the center of attention in the beginning, now we find Syntagma to be much more recognized and admired for a variety of reasons because of its political involvement. Both squares are equally important and carry responsibility to the public sphere. Omonia square may not be as refined as Syntagma square, even though recent refurbishments have tried to address this; what's certain, though, is Omonias role as a practical entity for the undisturbed function of the city, a fact that makes it equally vital to its neighboring Syntagma square.

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