METAXOURGIO OF ATHENS
TOWARDS A COUNTER HEGEMONIC USE OF SPACE

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EMU, European (Postgraduate)-Master in Urbanism
Spring Semester 2013, TU Delft
Delft, 28 June 2013

To my mother
I want to thank my mentors Dominic Stead, Paola Vigano and Birgit Hausleitner for their valuable guidance and comments throughout this work. Most of all, my warmest acknowledgements goes to Paola Vigano because of her contribution to shape an overall attitude in thinking and practicing in the field of urbanism. I am also at most grateful to Birgit Hausleitner for her constant, inspiring, sincere help and radical view throughout all the process of my work.

My gratitude goes to Thomas Maloutas (National Centre for Social Research), Eleni Portaliou (NTUA), Dina Vaiou (NTUA), Tasos Ilantis (Doctors of the world), Loukas Triantis (NTUA), Giorgos Stamatopoulos (Municipality of Athens) and Theodoros Mitrakos (Bank of Greece) who have helped me with useful information, data and suggestions. I am also thankful to my EMU colleagues and friends Lucile Ado, Carlos Salinas Gonzalez, Jesus Garate and Johanna Jacobs, Betty Tsacusi, Anastasia Kotzalis and Daphne Matziaraki and Giannnos Giannopoulos for the discussions and their help. Last but not least, special thanks to my parents Makis and Annita. Thank you so much for your support, encouragement and patience during these years.
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Source
National Statistical Service of Greece - NSSG, 2001
1. Problem field

In the past three decades, the neoliberal shift has transformed the global economy as well as the urban process. Before the recent global recession and more precisely during the 2004 Olympics, Athens was portrayed as an “international metropolis”, envisioning its role as the “capital of South-Eastern Europe”. The state adopted a laissez-faire land policy, withdrawing government regulations and restrictions, shrinking the public domain and in the same time denying access to the commons. Athens became a cultural and residential industry, an optimal location for high-value businesses, a touristic (destination) occupied by the demands of a ravaged property market. Moreover, the neoliberal ethics and the police suppression harmed collective values like those of citizenship and democracy. Since the beginning of the current crisis, inequalities have multiplied affirming and reproducing previous patterns of uneven geographical development. Extensive enclaves of poverty increase and social services collapse especially since the city has been abandoned by the protection of the local authority.

The Historical Center as the multifunctional condensation of the city of Athens, depicts the existence of the financial crisis, the dramatic decline in income, unemployment, new poverty and the abandonment of the weaker social groups. Simultaneously, speculation on land and the uncontrolled circulation of black money grow. Uses of leisure and culture, which dominated the last decades the central functions are affected by the recession, while the removal of social public services and small scale manufacturing sector increase the problem

The austerity measures, along with the uneven spatial policy occurred the last decades in Athens magnifies the old and creates new spatial inequalities in the form of displacement of social valuable groups, absence of integrated communal participation and a divisive social cohesion. The urban policy is designed with fragmented, yet occasional and unconditional terms abolishing the public interest and the planning structures.

2. Case study as research device

This study tries to make a historical identification for the past and present of Athens through its urban transformation as this occurred in a specific area called Metaxourgio which is used as research device, in order to provide an alternative spatial model for the future of the city of Athens.

Metaxourgio has been historically the field of different and opposed social dynamics and urban trends. The last decade, Metaxourgio attracted important private investment especially from the housing market that for a period seemed to alter its social context and increase gentrification tendencies. At the same time, still attracts the poor population that enhances its historical popular identity.

A. Introduction
3. Hypothesis

By engaging a greater diversity of actors and by prioritizing issues of spatial justice, a new model of production of space can be introduced as a counter hegemonic answer to the urban crisis of the city of Athens.

4. Research tasks and goals

On the research aims of this project is to investigate the urban effects on the scale of the neighborhood and the urban block as the shells of human activity and human relations in order to proceed in an urban model that would provide accessibility to all citizens and different voices, based on self-organization patterns, democratic control and participation processes. The challenge today, is to perform a counter-production of communal and non-speculative form of space that could potentially have a larger impact in the urban environment and will facilitate the needs of the inhabitants in the city of Athens into the current conjecture of crisis.

In this way of thinking, the project attempts to transmit knowledge from a model of production of space that will involve different modes of spaces and different programs by activating the embodied spatial capital of the area, developed by the local participation and the engagement of the relevant actors involved in the process of planning, either these are collective entities, institutions or individualities.

5. EU dimension

Since the outburst of the current crisis the countries of Southern Europe are facing rather unprecedented socio-political, economic and thus spatial transformations. The geographical divergences of the crisis can be explained in terms of locally as well as internationally based factors. The Southern European countries, despite their own particularities, have relatively similar historical, socio-political and cultural backgrounds, including welfare structures based on family support and informal networks, similar processes of urbanization and are relatively “new” modern democracies with significant institutional problems. However, the crisis itself can also be perceived as a common context. Although it broke out differently in each country, its causes, consequences and policies adopted in order to address it seem to follow similar patterns. Following a long period of neoliberal reforms that mostly led to today’s crisis, further aggressive adjustments are imposed, both from international and domestic actors and interests. Hence, cities once more become the main places to accommodate both the discontent and the struggles. As a response to the crisis, new survival strategies, solidarity practices and social networks are being created locally, regionally and nationally. In this context, a new model of spatial and social relations raises new challenging questions but also new potentialities that challenge the current conditions of exclusion and inequality and introduce new collective forms of organizing everyday life in the city within the field of the radical urban planning.
Objective
The Historical Center of Athens in Crisis

Title
Metacourgio of Athens: Towards a counter hegemonic use of space.

Theoretical Framework
Urban Transformations & Uneven Development
Gentrification and the Athenian Case

Method
Historical Analysis
Urban Analysis
Participatory Action Research
In Situ Observation
Interviews

Metaxourgio as research device
Mapping the city in the period of growth & current recession:
Social Geography
Physical Space
Policies, Actors & Urban transformations

Research Question
How can we produce a new model of production of space by using the embodied social and spatial capital of Metaxourgio of Athens.

Hypothesis
By engaging a greater diversity of actors and by prioritizing issues of spatial justice, a new model of production of space can be introduced as a counter hegemonic answer to the urban crisis of the city of Athens.

Problem Statement
Austerity measures, along with the uneven spatial policy magnifies the old and creates new inequalities

The urban policy is designed with fragmented yet occasional and unconditional terms in favor of any possible investment abolishing the public interest but also the planning structures.

Research by Design
Block as guideline
Available Tools & Spatial Opportunities
A diffused collectivity of Space:
Enacting Actors
Spaces-Time-Scales-Programs
6. Methodology

Fieldwork started in February 2006-2009 during my Undergraduate studies and is still under process. In order to map the urban dynamics of the city of Athens both Urban and Historical analyses has been made aiming in:

A critical review of the urban transformations, the urban Planning in Greece, the role of the state, the recent real estate strategies and land development projects in the city center of Athens during the period of growth and the current recession;

Drawing the profile of the neighborhood after the uneven development and gentrification process and identify which special norms encouraged this fragmented and acupunctural processes in order to explore in particular the conflicting trends deriving by different social dynamics and spatial functions using as analytical tools the land uses, the actors involved in the process of change, the policies under process and the land prices;

Mapping the social geography of the centre of Athens, the dominant and the dominated classes -whether these are persons or collective entities, by identifying the power relations among the stakeholders and perceive the possibilities for organization towards different ways of producing collective space.

I. Multi-disciplinary approach

The key for understanding the theoretical approach of uneven geography and gentrification, were the numerous bibliographical references and similar studies from Greece and abroad. At the same time, the research was based on a methodical field research, which mainly made use of personal observation and empirical conversation with people and practices of the area in the period between 2006-2007 and 2013, through which the connection was made between the theoretical knowledge, as well as with the texts that refer to the particular entities of study. In this context the narratives of the existing social groups that act in the area were collected and are presented by deploying qualitative methods through interviews with members of the policy arena, researchers, NGOs, residents and other key informants.

Since the official census of 2011 has not yet officially get published, data from other official sources, estimations by experts and relevant publications have been used and researched. At last, during the research process new knowledge about the contemporary critical geography has been delivered from the participation of the researcher in the workshop “Crisis regimes and emerging social movements in cities of Southern Europe” that took place in Athens, on February 2013. The workshop provided the opportunity to scholars such as David Harvey, Margit Mayer and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, urbanists and activists from European cities to exchange experiences concerning the current urban crisis and to explore alternatives about the impact of the crisis on the European cities and their inhabitants. Hence, new ideas and concrete practices about urban alternatives have been collected and used as reference in the research process.

The workshop “Crisis regimes and emerging social movements in cities of Southern Europe” will take place in Athens, Greece on 7-9 February 2013. The event is organized by Encounter Athens, INURA Athens, The Institute de Gouvern / Politiques Publiques and the The Department of Urban and Regional Planning of the National Technical University of Athens and is funded by a Regional Workshop Award by the Antipode Foundation.
1830  Establishment of the Greek State
1843  Revolution for the establishment of the 1st Greek Constitution
1859-1902  Construction of the “Athenian Trilogy”
1862  Gas Industry
1867-1890  Modernization of the Greek State.
1869  Railway of Athens- Piraeus
1873  Construction of the Polytechnic School of Athens
1881-1922  Agricultural reform, Nationalization and land distribution to small family plots.
1882  Tram Operation
1884  1st Railway, Peloponnesus Station
1889  Electricity Industry
1896  Olympic Games
1909  Coup d’état of Gudis
1910  Eleftherios Venizelos
1912-1913  Balkan Wars - Annexation of Thessaloniki and Thrace in the Greek Territory.
1922  End of Greek-Turkish War, Massive Migration from M. Asia to Athens, New Settlements. State Construction Apparatus and self-construction.
1951  Introduction of the Organization of Social Housing
1956  Neatlas’ Dictarship
1958  Hellinicon International Airport
1940  Italian and German Invasion, German Occupation
1944  Battle of Dekemvriana
1945-1949  Civil War
1950-1974  Political Persecutions and Exiles
1950-1990  Development in Infrastructure, Construction Markets’ Boom
1950  Introduction of “Antiparoh” System
1960  Stop of Tram Operation
1960-1964  “The Fifth Year Plan” for the Greek Economy in Industry and Agriculture. Increase of Unemployment, Mass external Immigration
1960-69  Construction of the National High-way Athens - Patras
1975  Greek Constitution of 1975, First Constitution after dictatorship, First legal provisions for the supra-urban spatial planning
1981  Number of European Union
1982  Progressive Reform in Administration, Education, Health and Agriculture, Increase of Public Sector
1985  Regulatory - Metropolitan Plan for Athens Metro line
2000  Emergence of City Movements
2004  “Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport - Attiki Road” Co-finance with E.U, Suburban Railway
2004  Reintroduction of Tram Line
2004  Olympic Games, Construction Boom
2009  New Acropolis Museum
2010  Kallikratis Reform in Local Administration and Municipalities, Shrinking of local Authorities’ Responsibilities and funds, IMF, Shrinking of Public Space, Memorandum
2011  “Movements of Squares”
1. Introduction

In order to trace the urban development in Athens we have to make a short review of the Greek housing market as this dominated the urban process in a more complex and idiosyncratic way than the housing market of the Western countries.

One could compare the social dimension of Athens to old medieval cities in which merchants and craftsmen, rich and poor, young and old necessarily had to live and work side by side. Such cities embodied the advantages and disadvantages of an integration-oriented city structure. The necessity to meet the housing requirements of large sections of the population in the city led, during the 20th century, to an increase in the density of urban areas, creating favorable conditions for the cohabitation and intermingling of different social groups. The relatively weak community segregation becomes obvious by the vertical social differentiation of Athens. (Maloutas and Karadimitriou 2001).

2. The housing market in Greece

Athens has experienced a very important urbanization wave after the 2nd world war and during and after the civil war (1946-49). From 1.1 million inhabitants in 1940, it climbed to 3 million in 1981 after 3 decades of intense population accumulation (Kotzamanis, 1997: 5). The city had already experienced, during the inter-war period an important incoming wave from Turkey after the flee of the Greek population, following the failed expedition of the Greek army in Minor Asia (1920-22).

The period between the end of the civil war to the mid 70’s was when self-promotion in housing thieved in Athens. During that period the population of Athens increased by some 1.5 million or 110%. (Maloutas, Karadimitriou, 2001: 710, Leontidou, 1990: 143).

The massive need for housing during these first post-war decades, has never been covered by a public housing production system as long as the dominant development policy in Greece was mostly directed to the development of a delayed industrial sector driving at the same time the private sector to the construction of a huge amount of houses. Most of the housing produced in the 50’s was individual, located at the western (working-class) part of the city. This part of the city has been the par excellence residential location for rural immigrants of low means arriving in Athens and being reconverted to urban manual laborers.

From 70’s onwards, popular self-promotion as the dominant process of housing production was progressively replaced by the system of “antiparochi” (Αντιπαροχή), co-exercised by small landowners and small construction firms in ad-hoc joint ventures to produce small condominiums. According to this system, a contractor (real estate agent) provides the building project with contracting exchange some horizontal properties giving in return to the landowner ready made properties like apartments, offices, shops, etc. The new dominant system lead to the replacement of the old-self constructed low rise houses by high-rise condominiums (Polykatoikia).
Self-construction ended in Athens during the 70’s and self-promotion gradually changed from a socially diffused practice in the early post-war period to a socially exclusive one in the late 80’s and the 90’s. Popular access to home ownership was first channeled to a more commodified form, where the products of innumerable joint ventures between small landowners and small construction firms inundated the housing market with rather affordable condominium apartments.

Immigration, and recent immigration in particular, is usually related to increasing segregation through the relegation of immigrants to the lower tier of the housing market, often leading to their spatial concentration in downgraded housing estates or other low-quality housing. It seems, therefore, paradoxical that in Athens the massive arrival of immigrants has contributed to decreasing segregation in the 1990s (Maloutas, 2003).

Increasing inequality has affected issues directly related to segregation, like housing. In Greece, like the rest of Southern Europe, the weak welfare state has rendered home ownership an important asset across all class lines, especially due to deficient provision of social rented housing (Allen et al., 2004). The 1990s, however, introduced increasing social differentiation into access to home ownership. Between 1991 and 2001, the percentage of those living in rented dwellings increased for the lower socio-economic categories while it decreased for the higher and intermediate ones (see Figure 2; see also Emmanuel, 2004).

Although access to housing has been increasingly socially differentiated, not only in terms of tenure, but also in terms of housing age, space per capita, floor, quality and comfort, especially for immigrants, polykatoikia proved the accidental accumulation of a diffused class mixture defining the city of Athens by completely covering the Attic landscape, from the centre to the periphery.
3. The urban development of Athens
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The Urban Planning in Greece, the role of the state, the recent real estate strategies and land development projects.

‘Athens is for certain the modern city par excellence, [...]’

[Frampton 2001, p.61]

Athens is an archetype of South European piecemeal urbanization. Its post-war growth was not driven by industrial development, which specialized in building materials and housing-related consumer goods (Economou, 1987; 1988) and followed rather than led the city’s growth. Industry never became the main employer in the city’s labor market and was mostly made up of traditional small-scale commodity production units, rather than of large modern industrial plants.

In Greece, the post-war capitalism relied on an urban development model whose essential features are the limited social housing policy, the substitution of an arbitrary structure and its subsequent legitimacy (usually during the pre-election periods, through mechanisms of political corruption). The whole system of self-construction and self-promotion in Athens has produced a method of distribution of surplus of the land that could be called “democratic”, to the extent that operated either as a housing solution for the working masses, either as an extra income for the former ex landowners. The dominant model of urban development, although relied on a “democratic” mechanism of distribution of the land surplus, contributed to the degradation of democracy and generated a political culture in which urban land and the city as a whole, is not perceived as a social product, with the possibility of intervention and social control by the citizens, but as a sum of individual properties with private non-negotiable interests. Moreover, in parallel to what is claimed about large public housing estates in Western Europe, especially the areas with self-constructed housing, developed within an unplanned and poorly equipped urban environment with lacking infrastructures and social services that today represent the areas of degradation.

During 80’s capital interests in the suburban areas of the new sprawled city left creatively untouched the still vibrant political administrative and economic inner body of Athens. At that time, the state did a significant effort to recognize the importance and multifunctional character of the historical center. The Master Plan of Athens in 1985 reflecting the progressive political mobilization of the era by introducing for the first time urban planning processes in the public agenda. The attempts to implement regulations and public interventions in favor of the public interest became at last a noble declaration leaving the transformation of the space to the dynamics of an upcoming neoliberalism.

source of maps:
NTUA 2004, Maloutas 2000, Laonidou 1989,
Attico Metro S.A.
From 90’s onwards, the neoliberal turn restored the economy as well as the urban process. New spatial adjustments that could respond to new and older high concentrated sectors of capital, new sets of «soft» spaces with similar spatial contexts had been created. Before the recent global recession and more precisely during the 2004 Olympics, Athens was portrayed as an “international metropolis”, envisioning its role as the “capital of South-Eastern Europe”. (Hatzimihalis 2001) The state adopted a laisser-faire land policy, withdrawing government regulations and restrictions, shrinking the public domain and in the same time denying access to the commons. Athens became a cultural and residential industry, an optimal location for high-value businesses, a touristic (destination) occupied by the demands of a ravaged property market. Along with the radical restructuring of the urban process, an incredible transformation of lifestyle occurred, surrounding the contemporary urban experience with the neoliberal ethics. Moreover, the increased police suppression of the period harmed collective values like those of citizenship and democracy.

This city’s strategic orientation to the attraction of local and globalized capital resulted in the development of new urban projects:

The construction of the Olympic Venues and urban infrastructures under the legal framework of “fast track” procedures ignoring social and environmental issues producing at the same time a boom in the construction sector of the period and massive urban sprawl especially to the east of Attica Region where the new airport was built. The key large-scale projects of this period, divided into categories according to their relevance to the directions set by the Metropolitan Plan. Most of these projects either contradict the Plan (i.e. Olympic infrastructure), or they were later integrated into it (i.e. new airport). Among the mobility projects of that period were the construction of the Metro, the Tram, the Suburban Railway and Attica highway.

Urban regeneration processes in the city center with most emblematic the program for the “Unification of the archaeological sites of Athens”. This intervention monitors the dynamic new urban development and highlights the comparative advantages of Athens to the new conditions of competition between cities that meant among others the promotion of its historic character by the preservation of its cultural heritage. The state envisioned Athens as a city where the new ethos of urban competitiveness is accepted as an imperative bet for its economical development. In this context, we observe the proliferation of activities related to leisure and consumption, over the old uses of production. At the same time, the renewal projects extricated a huge surplus value on land, directly absorbed by the construction market. By the non parallel provision for a range of social measures to protect residents in the neighborhoods and the creation of new social infrastructure to expand the multifunctional dynamics of the city, a new spatial inequality emerged making the basis for the new urban polarization and segregation we observe today under the context of crisis.
Athens is one of the cities for which ‘gentrification’ is something new. Though, the regeneration processes that occurred during the last decade in the historical center can be identified through the framework of gentrification and uneven development process.

The depreciation and devalorization of capital invested in residential inner-city neighborhoods is an objective process (“filtering”) that is preceded gentrification not depending on “the relentless passage of time” but to “human agency”. Therefore, the previous devalorization produces the objective economic conditions that make capital revaluation (gentrification) a rational market response.

An emphasis on consumer preference and the constraints within which these preferences are implemented. This assumption of consumer sovereignty is shared with the broader rubric of residential land use theory emanating from postwar neoclassical economics.

The restructuring of national and urban economies in advanced capitalist countries toward services, recreation and consumption; and the emergence of a global hierarchy of world, national and regional cities. These shifts have propelled gentrification from a comparatively marginal preoccupation in a certain niche of the real estate industry to the cutting edge of urban change.

Neoliberalism has created new systems of governance that integrate state and corporate interests, and through the application of money power, it has ensured that the disbursement of the surplus through the state apparatus favors corporate capital and the upper classes in shaping the urban process. Gentrification, captured precisely the class dimensions of the transformations that were under way in the social geography of many central and inner cities. “If Baudelaire, Engels and Berman (1982) all saw the Haussmannization of Paris as one defining moment of a capitalist modernity, can we see in gentrification a defining geography of postmodernity?” (Smith N.1996).

Other scholars like David Ley, have highlighted the fact that gentrification is better understood as an inner city process highly related to the transition of the cities’ economic base from the manufacturing industry to service based industry (Ley, 1996). In contemporary “post-industrial cities,” patterns of consumption come to dictate patterns of production; “the values of consumption rather than production guide central city land and use decisions” (Ley 1978:11; 1980).

These conventional hypotheses are by no means mutually exclusive. They are often invoked jointly and share in one vital respect a common perspective: an emphasis on consumer preference and the constraints within which these preferences are implemented.

This assumption of consumer sovereignty is shared with the broader rubric of residential land use theory emanating from postwar neoclassical economics (Alonso 1964; Muth 1969; Mills 1972). According to these theories, suburbanization reflects the preference for space and the increased ability to pay for it due to the reduction of transportational and other constraints. Gentrification, then, is explained as the result of an alteration of preferences and/or a change in the constraints determining which preferences will or can be implemented. Thus in the media and the research literature alike, and especially in the US, where suburbanization bore such a heavy cultural symbolization, gentrification came to be viewed as a “back to the city movement.”

The terrain of the inner city is suddenly valuable again. This new urbanism embodies a widespread and drastic revalorization of the city along political, economic, cultural and geographical lines since the 1970s, and is integral with larger global shifts. Systematic gentrification since the 1960s and 1970s is simultaneously a response and contributor to a series of wider global transformations: global economic expansion in the 1980s; the restructuring of national and urban economies in advanced capitalist countries toward services, recreation and consumption; and the emergence of a hierarchy of world, national and regional cities (Sassen 1991). These shifts have propelled gentrification from a comparatively marginal preoccupation in a certain niche of the real estate industry to the cutting edge of urban change.
Valorization and devalorization in the built environment. The uneven development in the Urban Scale

Gentrification is a structural product of the land and housing markets. Capital flows where the rate of return is highest, and the movement of capital to the suburbs, along with the continual devalorization of inner-city capital, eventually produces the rent gap. When this gap grows sufficiently large, rehabilitation (or, for that matter, redevelopment) can begin to challenge the rates of return available elsewhere, and capital flows back in.

The physical deterioration and economic devalorization of inner-city neighborhoods is a strictly logical, “rational” outcome of the operation of the land and housing markets. This is not to suggest it is at all natural, however, for the market itself is a social product. According to Lowry, the deprecation and devalorization of capital invested in residential inner-city neighborhoods is an objective process (“filtering”) that is preceded gentrification not depending on “the relentless passage of time” but to “human agency” (1960:370). Therefore, the previous devalorization produces the objective economic conditions that make capital revaluation (gentrification) a rational market response.

With the previous devalorization, the state is less involved or absent in this decrease of property values, developers are clearly able to absorb the costs of devaluing capital.

The state initiated much of the early gentrification in many cities as a continuation of urban renewal projects, and though it plays a lesser role today, state subsidies and sponsorship of gentrification remain important. The state as collective social actor in a region can enhance early gentrification trends playing the role of the programmer of new redevelopment plans, by changing the land uses, or constructing new mobility nodes, cultural spaces, etc. In the beginning the gentrification process one or more companies become active in an area. Hence, the investors act as the legitimate agents of gentrification. With the absence of the state as the regulator of land-prices, investors absorb the accumulated capital that has not yet fully devalorized. Thus, it seems that whatever social and political failures accompanied urban renewal the state has provided the broad conditions that would stimulate private market revitalization.
D. Metaxourgio
“Silk Industry”
The case study area, "Metaxourgio, is located to west inner city of Athens and belongs to the municipality of Athens. The area is located to the crossroads between Plato’ s Academy, the cemetery of ancient Kerameikos and Iera Odos (Road). It’s strategic location from ancient times until today defines the road network within and outside the city.

Metaxourgio was a rural area located between Dipylon (today in the archaeological site of Keramikos), Iera Odos and Pireos Street (the main street branch of Piraeus, which was ending to “the door of the Dragon” and to Sepolia.)

With the establishment of the Greek state in 1830 and the introduction of the first city plan of Athens Syntagma, Omonia and Kerameikos (the thee squares) form the historic triangle of the city of Athens, with three different poles: the administrative-political, economic and culture pole respectively. The third square (Kekropos) – although never materialized- was decided to be the center of the new Capital and the new Palace on the outskirts of Acropolis hill.

Since then, important buildings of that period were built along the big hub of Piraeus Street. The prescribed evolution of the area into a zone of central urban functions attracted the significant investment of Prince G. Katakouninos that built a commercial center. At the same time, other few wealthy new settlers built their mansions in the area. (Milarakis, 1885).

However, the final decision for the location of the palace to the diametrically opposite site of the city (Syntagma Square), in 1836, "froze" the developments in the area and the demand for urban land moved to the north and north suburban areas, which were the first to be urbanized.  

1. Maps of Ottoman Athens and the surrounding rural areas in K.Maris. The first drafts of Athens, Athens, 1933, p.5, and I.Traflos, The Urban development of Athens, Athens 1993, pl. XII. See also Lyra and Raymond Matton, Athens et ses monuments du XVIIIe a nos jours, Athens 1983, where images are 3.4 and 5 of this study.

2. Keramikos is one of the most important archaeological sites of Athens. The area named Keramikos after the settlement of ancient potter artisans called ”Keramis” on the banks of Eridanus river. In 478 BC, as delivered by Thucydides, Themistocles tries to prevent the decision of Spartans to stop the fortification of the Greek cities, after their destruction from the Persians, by building the fortified wall of Athens, part of which survives till today. From Thriasio Gates, located there, one could go (through Iera Odo) to Eleusis. Outside the walls, in the area where Metaxourgio is located today, was the “Dimosio Sima”, the official cemetery of the Athenians who died in wars. In “Dimosio Sima” Pericles delivered his famous “epitaph” speech. Mononer, the “Panathenaea Pomp” was starting from Keramikos, passing by the Ancient Agora ending up to Acropolis. (Historical map of Athens, published by the Ministry of Culture, Fund of Archaeological resources and expropriations, Athens 2004, I.Traflos, The Urban Development of Athens, 2005).

In 1852, "A. Wrampe & Co" company bought the property owned by G. Katakouzinos in order to establish a silk industry. During the same year the company sold the property to G. Douroutis and since then the Silk Industry started to work while the location around the silk factory in Millerou Street became the first pole of colonization in the area. (Agrantoni, 1995) At the same period, the area that was called "New Sphere" since 1834, changes its name into Metaxourgio (silk industry).

The impact that metaxourgio (silk industry) had to the area was greater than the production of silk itself, defined by long-term trends that had already determined the structure of the city: The integration of the area in the industrial zone of Athens forms until today the basic dichotomy of the city, between the "rich" urban residential areas to the east and the working popular neighborhoods to the west. Within a decade, 1875-1885, the entire area from Gazi to the south and the “Kyklovorou stream” to the west was urbanized and incorporated into the city. The already degraded identity and character of the new settlers, masses of immigrants from the province, contributed to form a popular area with the small and popular houses of workers and all sorts of professionals and craftsmen.

However, this massive invasion of residence didn’t stop the penetration of manufacturing functions in the district. On the contrary, the character of the new settlers enhanced the character of the neighborhood resulting from the synthesis of opposite tendencies that at times seemed to prevail temporarily (productive zone - residential area), though, fundamentally structuring the development of the city.

This character in its complete form, is depicted with clarity in a map of 1930. The map includes a total of about 1900 addresses of which approximately 680 uses belong to other but housing uses (trade, production, recreation, services) showing that 1/3 of the houses in the area were (or were including on the ground floor) workshops or shops. The most important feature of the district is the high degree of concentration of production units, in total 141, especially those that in an basic classification could be described as 'heavy' (metal workshops, wood, construction materials and printing shops). Moreover, a very important feature in the area has been the specialization in the car-repairing services with numerous of car-repairing stores, car-painting stores, stores for car-equipment etc.

"During the suburbanization period in 1960 – 1980, Metaxourgio experienced a significant deterioration as a result of the state’s indifference to the welfare of the residents: lack of design intervention, social and environmental decay and an obsolete infrastructure network abandoned since the 60’s. At that period, the urban policy has been oriented to the development of the suburban areas neglecting at the same time the central neighborhoods many those of western Athens. The wealthier residents began to migrate to the suburbs, while new groups of population came to settle in the area. However, none of them who moved to suburbs sold their properties; as they preferred to own the land until circumstances would allow construction with the “antiparoch” system. After the Civil War in 1950 and until 1970, at the period of vast internal migration, new residents especially workers settled in the area "absorbed" in the industrial zone of Piraeus Industrial hub."

Aggelos Madadakis, resident of Metaxourgio
Concentration of Immigrants in Athens Municipality,
Concentration in Metaxourgio

The abandonment of the area is confirmed by census data of the National Statistic Services, according to which during the period 1981-1991 there is a significant reduction in the percentage of households reaching more than 20% in Metaxourgio. According to demographic data published in the research project "Opportunities for a specialized housing policy in the context of the urban development and upgrade of the historical districts of inner Athens: the case of Metaxourgio", in 1995, the area was inhabited by two main groups of people: old residents established in the area since 80s and Albanian and Polish immigrants as well as Roma Muslims from Thrace. Among the residents was a small percentage of home ownership, belonging to working-class families whose members were employed in factories and other businesses in Metaxourgio but as salaried employees in the public and private sectors. The family income was below the average income of the wider Athens area and the main reason for families living there was the cheap housing. The survey showed that the tenants of the area in contrast to the landlords had limited financial means and could not cope with a future rental increase (Alexandri, 2005).

"During the 1970s the governing dictatorship decided to employ Muslims from Northern Greece to the Gas factory in Gazi. These were the first Muslims to reside in the area of Metaxourgio: they rented abandoned houses, whose landlords had left the area.

Additionally, during the 1980s the social-democratic party (PASOK) which was in power, in order to alter the composition of the population of Thrace, offered ethnic minorities the opportunity to work for the public sector. Hence, many Greek Muslims migrated to Athens, and rented abandoned buildings in Metaxourgio neighborhood."

Adonis Pallis, resident of Metaxourgio

Since the early '90s new settlers, economic migrants came to fill the human mosaic of the area. Coming mostly from the Middle East, China, Asia, Egypt and the former Eastern bloc, rent cheap apartments sheltered by dozens, while others live in old houses scattered on the area. The migrants are mostly workers, while others managed to open their own small businesses.
Metaxourgio has a visible historical dialectic interaction between buildings and their site and an unusual for the Athenian data lifecycle. The architecture of the area, rich in qualities, constitutes an individual mixture of industrial buildings, warehouses and residence, the first Athenian neoclassical mansions and Bauhaus adapted buildings, popular houses and housing blocks.

The development of the area into a zone of productive uses determined its subsequent form, and attracted mainly workers from the islands and the Peloponnese who lived in “humble houses, of the pseudo-neo classicism of the anonymous architecture” (Filipides, 1994). Thus, the area developed into a vibrant popular neighborhood with small houses or two-storey houses, sometimes combined with professional use. During the Middle-War period, Metaxourgio became the vanguard of the cultural and social life of Athens developed as one of the centers of the theatrical world of Athens. At that period buildings adopting the German neoclassicism and Beaux Arts movement started to be built as well as some modern buildings according to Bauhaus movement.

After the war and the suburbanization movement, the area experiences inner degradation and stabilize its popular character, creatively untouched by the construction market. During the period of 1950-1970, in which Athens has experienced an intensive building activity, the popular character of the neighborhood, the small plot sizes, the narrow widths of the roads, but also the possibility of archaeological findings discouraged the massive presence of “polykatoikia” and “antiparohi system”.

Source: field research
I. Urban regeneration processes in the historical center of Athens, the legal framework from 1985 - 2008 and the cultural penetration

The regeneration processes began in the 1980s, intensified in the 1990’s and had a significant peak in the period before the Olympics. In this context, the regeneration of the urban fabric, operated by a variety of local procedures involving different agencies, which resulted in different aspects. In Plaka, the whole process started in the 80’s. The state, by the parallel prohibition of the popular leisure uses which were dominating the area before redevelopment, proceeded in a large investment strategy especially on the renovation of the building stock of the area. As Maloutas states, since then, no other regeneration strategy in Athens had that “pure” “gentrification” characteristics leading at the same time to a significant expulsion of the former population of the area.

A similar approach involving state’s intervention, operated in other areas mostly located on the western ex-industrial part of the historical center, under which public operations and their resulting impact, are justified only if the regeneration is associated with actors and activities based on culture and leisure. The restoration of the old Gas factory in Gazi and its transformation into a center of cultural activities in 1999, together with site specific interventions along Piraeos Street, remained spatially limited and not connected with any other urban strategy or provision for the housing in the surrounding areas. Hence, the regeneration process provided a type of dynamic development associated with numerous small private initiatives, which contributed to a radical change of the land uses. This model of urban renewal, firstly established in Psirri, initially motivated by investors from the entertainment industry (bars, restaurants, and art galleries) in sparsely populated former productive areas and defined by the refurbishment and transformation of the ex-industrial building stock into bars, had a domino effect in other central areas (Gazi) resulting at the same time in a complete change of the character of local activities (Soulitri, 2005).

As aforementioned before since the late 1990’s, the area around Piraeus street has been a field of intensive transformation towards its change into a thematic-cultural and touristic park of the city. The reasons for the development of this trend can be summarized in its central location, history, significant building stock, recent industrialization and low land value. Through wide transportation projects (Metro stations Metaxourgio and Gazi), investments of public or nonprofit funds, directed to the creation of cultural uses, the state transformed the area into a new strategic location, within the broader context of new urban trends in the pre-Olympic Athens.

According to the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, “The aim is the regeneration of a deprived area of the city into an attractive hub of cultural activities, with the cultural axis formed by the Gas-Cultural Center (former Gas Factory), the Foundation of the Hellenic World, the Cultural Center Melina Mercouri”.

Almost ten years after, the area is included in the Action Plan SOS ATHENS 1994 and the Unification of Archaeological Sites Program. According to the aims of the program, “The Unification of archaeological sites monitors the new dynamic urban development that highlights the comparative advantages of Athens to the new conditions of competition of cities (cultural activities, tourism, etc.).”

Urban transformation in Metaxourgio
Although the significant work for the promotion and protection of the historical monuments, the absence of broader planning, social measures and functional arrangements enhanced speculative tendencies. Moreover, the beautification of the Historical Center contributed to its gradual transformation into an arena in which the uses of consumption, leisure and tourism were dominating.

The neo-liberal economic shift of this period in Athens was accompanied by political shifts as cities found themselves competing in the global market, shorn of much of the traditional protection of national state institutions and regulations (Sassen 1991), but was equally a presence in national and regional centers that were themselves experiencing an economic, political and geographical restructuring (M.P. Smith 1984; Castells 1985; Beauregard 1989).

With the program of the Unification of the Archaeological Sites Metaxourgio is included within the regeneration project of the wider area of the historic center and the so-called cultural park. Pedestrian areas are created in few streets and buildings are expropriated by the City of Athens and the Ministry of Culture for future cultural uses (like the building of the Provelegios residency next to the former silk factory) and the Greek Film Archive and Greek Film Museum held within the shell of the ex- the pornographic movie theatre "Lais in Pireos street, few restorations of buildings with municipal programs, the construction of Avdi square, and many announcements about future plans considering mainly cultural uses.

II. Gentrification processes and urban pioneers

The important building stock of the area and the proximity to the city center, the expulsion of production, the previous depreciation and devalorization of capital invested that now produces opportunities for reinvestment, the introduction of the new land uses and the new official regeneration projects, all contributed to the attraction of wealthy young Greek people, who buy buildings or land in very low prices. Since the end of 90’s the first modern houses began to be built and old buildings to be renovated (often combined with workshops of painting, sculpture, studio recordings, etc.) Most of them are in close proximity to houses where the “miserables” still lived. The first luxury residential enclaves were built in direct contact with the first alternative leisure and cultural spaces, gay and lesbian bars whose landlords were triggered by the ambience of the bohemian modernity of the area.

“Metaxourgio is determined to become the next cultural center. Those who invested here saw head.”

Anna Vagena, actress, owner of theater

Indeed, the story of the post-bohemian modernity was already visible. It could be seen as a trend in the urban history of Athens, with the change of a former invisible neighborhood to the new mixed-artistic area of the central Athens.
We built our studios, our homes, and in 2004 we inaugurated the gallery. We chose the space because it was big, in the city center and close to the Metro. Today here are many things that help to attract young people. Previously no one could imagine to come here. This does not mean that the risk is eliminated. But there is a world that defies and comes to see exhibitions, performances, to eat. This is the attitude we want to encourage.”

Sofia Vamiali, owner of gallery
III. The cultural sovereignty

In August 2006, the newspaper "Kathimerini" one of the most famous Greek newspapers hosts on its coverpage, an article entitled "Neo-bourgeois on the outskirts of Acropolis". The article continues with the title: "The big change," describing the "experiment" of a big construction company, the most organized effort of the Real Estate in Metaxourgio, opposite the old Metaxourgio factory, which followed the example of three other loft complexes in the near Gas neighborhood.

In the article, the reporter describes how during the process of finding a new home in Metaxourgio was surprised because of the proximity of his new house to the well know "alternative" music scene "Bios", "a recognized landmark in the fluid geography of the area": "In the heart of a neglected but quiet pedestrian street, a n apartment complex with a small yard and metal balconies, stood like a lighting boat in an open sea " and continues: "Today, on unknown streets and narrow, neglected neighborhoods, unfolds a new fantasy that seems to have the same dynamic as in the previous suburban fantasy which was identified with the Athenian exodus in suburbs and the city entrance in the world of consumption and prosperity." At last, the journalist leads to the conclusion that the colonization of the area needs young people and who will "give life during the day in to these deprived neighborhoods."

Mr. Stamatakis of the company "Alpha Land Developers" says: "We talk about apartments not exceeding the 70-80 sq. m with prices starting from the 2.500euro per sq. m addressed to a profile of people that are singles, aged 25 -45 years old-the most productive machine in the capital, committed to their careers that are suffering in the traditional Athens of '90s. Moreover, the new residential use of the neighborhoods of west Athens is the catalyst to redefine its character."

The newspaper "Eleftherotypia", describes the Athens Biennal that for the first time is taking place in Metaxourgio:

"It is known in the art cycles that recently several galleries that act in Psyrri or even in the center of Athens seeking - in the name of renewal and experimentation - to settle in the growing artistic neighborhood of Metaxourgio. Greek galleries such as AD, The Breeder, Gazon Rouze, Ileana Tounta, Rebecca Camhi, Helen Koroneou, Xippas, try their luck at art virgins spaces. I'm wandering if the experiment will succeed to attract young art lovers, the 20 something who seeks in an underground situation in deprived areas where economic illegal immigrants coexist with prostitutes in brothels; and even the 30-something, rising business executives who want to buy art pieces for their collection filling the walls of their new residence."

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IV. The geography of displacement

Atkinson (2000) claims that measuring gentrification is measuring the invisible. When gentrification process starts some people have already been displaced. Research in Metaxourgio has identified a direct form of displacement. (Alexandri, 2011). Older people, gypsies, immigrants, bohemian gentrifiers, generally people with no economic nor political power, get evicted as the landowners want to sell their properties to gentrifiers. In Metaxourgio specifically there was a restricted number of displacements.

It usually takes place when the landowner decides to raise the rent and rent the property to bar or restaurant owners who will then renovate the building and turn it into a bar or a restaurant. It is straightforward that the rent paid by a non-residential more profitable use such as bars, is much higher than the one afforded by immigrants or older people.

In the case of a gypsy family facing eviction, that refused to leave the building, they were threatened by cut of power and water supply.

"Do you know how many gypsies used to live in this street? Every day was like a Sunday bazaar: they were out in the streets making baskets and talk loud to each other. Now they are all gone… after 2005 they were forced to leave and the owners shut their houses"

Old resident, Alexandri 2011

"Many immigrants used to live in the derelict houses… now they are gone since the houses were sold to newcomers and were renovated. The area now is more beautiful”

Immigrant of the area, Alexandri 2011
V. Conclusions for the gentrification impact during the period of growth in Athens

“In research done according to the data of the previous census (2001), no gentrification processes were visible. Not with technical tools (changes in land use, infiltration of leisure etc), but in terms of change of the social context (moving of resident population), which is part of the process of gentrification. We certainly left the discussion open about the post-2001 period because of the public investment made during Olympics and the beautification of the city that contributed to the advent of new residents (gentrifiers) in inner Athens, but as isolated pioneers.”

Thomas Maloutas, Urban Geographer, Head of the National Center of Social Research

Some scholars insist that the city centre of Athens is ungentriifiable. The high rise buildings that via the antiparochi system concurred in inner cities, the high percentages of small ownership, mixed land uses, illegal uses, deviancy and generally the densely and not well maintained built environment cannot attract new residents. Additionally, their re-evaluation through regeneration initiatives seems complicated as the local state has run out of money and apart from that, the state hardly imposes schemes that would trigger landowner interests.

In Metaxourgio indicators of Gentrification is the process itself, justified by the theory of uneven development, the State’s involvement in regeneration plans, the increase in land prices, the consumer-cultural sovereignty and residential mobility patterns of very different nature, all highlight a specific mobility pattern associated with upper status individuals coming in the area and investors absorbing the accumulated capital.

Except from the mass eviction of the productive uses—led by the latest legal framework imposed with the new land uses— and the Gypsi community, no other mass eviction has occurred. Hence, eviction is not visible in Metaxourgio as the whole process is sporadic, eviction is selective.

As such, if we should look for processes with gentrification-like social impact in Athens, we must turn to the micro-scale (Maloutas and Alexandri, forthcoming). Gentrification may be taking place within a particular street, block or even within a building, where gentrifiers replace or displace former residents. Hence, the gentrification history in Metaxourgio reflects the specific socioeconomic and planning history of the city and as such it is acupunctural and sporadic.

A typical service sovereignty of consumption over production reduces the employment rate in crafts, while in the period between 1991-2001 fell by 30%, while the ratio of employment in bars and restaurants increased by 90%

Source
National Statistical Service of Greece - NSSG, 2001
I. Social geography and Current Urban Policy

“The biggest problem of Athens is poverty”

I. Moyzalas, member of the administrative council of the NGO “Doctors of World”

Athens, currently, is being tested by the public debt crisis and the latest IMF policies and Greek society experiences an unprecedented austerity. This new political, social and economic condition has serious impacts in all spatial scales; extensive enclaves of poverty increase and social services collapse especially since the city has been abandoned by the protection of the local authority. The Historical Center depicts the existence of a financial crisis, the dramatic decline in income, unemployment, new poverty and the abandonment of the weaker social groups. Simultaneously, speculation on land and the uncontrolled circulation of black money grow. (Balaoura O., 2012) Trade, leisure and culture, which dominated the last decades the central functions are affected by the recession, while the removal of social public services and small scale manufacturing sector increase the problem. (Balaoura O., 2012). Day by day the crisis also affects the everyday life in traditional middle class neighborhoods and could be defined as the major shift in the urban geography of Athens in terms of transition from a relatively coherent urban and social system to a fragmented, segregated and polarized one.

“We provide primary medical care to people in need that especially the last years have proliferated. While we were traditionally provide help to immigrants, now the problem is expanded to the local population. Today, under the IMF policy which means degradation or privatization of the Public Services, the National Health System does not cover the needs of the citizens or covers only those who have still to pay.”

Tasos Ifantis, Social Server in the NGO Doctors of the world

In the historical Center of Athens the poverty enclaves get expanded, while the city gets abandoned by the local authority. Thus, when the city is deteriorating economically, socially and spatially, the phenomena of social decay and degradation, resulting from the economic and environmental crisis get wider social and political dimensions.

Closed businesses and empty spaces, are the results of the financial crisis but also of the wider economic restructuring that has taken place during the past decades in commercial areas and areas almost exclusively covered by entertainment uses and tourism.

These restructuring programs have contributed in the weakening of a number of vital activities for the city center’s structure, pushed towards the periphery of the city, leaving significant buildings of the past standing vacant as a consequence of decentralization policies in regards to public services. The above image is completed by a consequent deprivation of public space and the urban environment with direct social implications; drug dealing and use, an increasing number of homeless people gathering in public squares and apartment building entrances, scavengers, beggars and petty thieves, an accumulation of illegal,
UNEMPLOYMENT  POVERTY  HOMELESS
-absolute-

Percentage of Total Unemployment
1999-2012
percentage over the labor force

Under these heated circumstances, the government developed a number of initiatives, aiming to tackle the situation. During spring 2010, the Parliament’s Special Permanent Committee for the Environment, published its conclusions on the issue. The two texts, focus on the presence of illegal immigrants in the public space, as well as on the sublets which these groups occupy in large groups, under inhumane circumstances. The texts also focus on the illegal trade activities, the drug problem, prostitution and homelessness. The way that these issues are portrayed basically limits the solutions to these problems as long as the problem doesn’t seem to be prostitution, the drug trafficking, the lack of shelter, but their exported image. In addition, the Committee’s conclusions do not refer to other significant sides of the problem such as xenophobia and police violence. The texts fail to raise the role of the media for the reproduction of this “Situation of panic” while the conclusions do not bring light to the existing ineffective legal framework pushing the unwanted groups out of sight, without committing into actually solving the problems in the multiple levels that the situation demands.

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Today under the context of the current recession there are still proposals for large scale urban projects in the historical and center of Athens with most emblematic and advertised one the pedestrianization of the historical Avenue of Panepistimiou, since the implementation of the international private competition held by Onassis Foundation. Along with the interventions in the built environment, the current urban policy is accompanied by a number of fragmented measures which form the “Action Plan” for the center of Athens. The plan prepared by the Ministries of Public Order, Economy, Environment, Public health in collaboration with the Municipal authorities under the supervision of the Prime Minister, although is presented as an “Integrated state intervention that aims to reassure the right to a safe, sustainable, attractive and lively city for its inhabitants and visitors” it’s basic axis are the “re-conquest” of the center by the “desirable” social groups; The revitalization of the central districts by facilitating real estate projects at central devaluated areas; while the majority of the new measures are about policing, control and surveillance.
Governance, Decision Makers

Troika
European Union, I.M.F.

MEMORANDUM

Public Sector

Private Sector

MEDIA

Greek State
Greek Government

Relevant Ministries / Planning
- Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change
- Ministry of Development, Competitiveness, Infrastructure, Transport and Networks
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry Public Order and Citizens Protection
- Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports

Decentralized Administration of Attika
- Department of Environment and Spatial Policy
- Department of Immigration

Athens Prefecture
- Directorate of Land Policy
- Environment Directorate
- Directorate of Industry, Energy & Natural Resources
- Directorate of Public Health and Civil Care
- Directorate of Transport and Communications
- Directorate of Development

Municipality of Athens
- Municipal Council

Sans Voix?

Unions, Political Organizations, NGO's

Movements Local Initiatives

Mayor G. Kaminis

7 District Councils

KKE (Communist Party)
SYRIZA, Radical Left ("Cita Apera")
("Insiding Athens")
ADARSYA ("Anti-corporatist Left Cooperation")
GOLDEN DAWN/FAISTS ("Greek Dawn for Athens")
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The areas in transition, such as Gerani and Metaxourgio, gather the majority of urban and economic proposals and initiatives. They are characterized as “Zones of special regeneration” and economic incentives are given for the renovation of houses to any possible investor.
The Spatialization of Crisis
II. Uses

The prevalence of a contradictory mix condition creates a situation with special characteristics: low-income population (Greeks and immigrants) new residents and the presence of the Chinese community in combination with the visitors attracted in the neighborhood for leisure uses.

Dominated by residential uses but also trade, administration, recreation, culture, and brothels while important is the number of vacant buildings, the area is characterized by mixed uses in terms of dynamics and of maintenance in time.

The Institutional Framework (Land Uses) has been implemented partially if not unevenly in the area. Although the land uses of 1998 lead to the gradual expulsion of the production and the working class population who worked in the sector, the public mechanism did not remove or minimize the operation of other uses that on the contrary got expanded like those of the brothels, the illegal big scale leisure uses and the expansion of retail uses (especially those of the Chinese retail network).

Furthermore all the aforementioned uses can pay higher rents than those of housing in the certain period. During the last decade, Metaxourgio has been the focal location for the Chinese Market in Athens. Especially, in three main roads, the Chinese commercial transactions occupy the 50% of the total land uses.

The so-called mansion of Millerou or China Town which occupies a block concentrates an important number of wholesalers. The building also hosts services referenced to the members of the Chinese community such as travel-agencies and law firms, associations and the offices of the newspaper “China-Greece-Times” etc. In addition, the public space surrounding the building, is converted to a daily meeting point of immigrants who work or live in the area.

Although in Metaxourgio the commercial activities have a local reference, the Chinese Market features characteristics of centrality for both the local community and for a range of visitors. The Chinese neighborhood has been developed economically and expanded geographically. Moreover, it contributed to the raise of land prices and filled the urban voids, in the ground floors, in apartments, in warehouses and in housing.(Polyzou, 2012)
III. Vacancies

“During the work we’ve done for the research program “Changing characters and policies in the city centers of Athens and Piraeus” in the National Technical University of Athens, delegated by the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change in 2009, we mapped the urban problems and we proposed specific measures in order to reset the symbolic and functional centrality of Athens. We then highlighted the urgency of specific projects which they would subvert a further downgrading of Athens and they would possibly restrain speculation tendencies in the future. The research study would be part of the Regulatory or Metropolitan Plan for Athens, which until now has not been authorized by the state. We then argued over the previous public policy that during the last decades was increasing the urban sprawl and was directed over mobility projects or big projects that were decentralizing the functions of the city. We mentioned the need for the reconceptualization of the city center not as a vacant space like it is now (80% of the building stock around Omonia Square is empty) or a space of touristic and cultural zoning but as a multifunctional center where the working population, the financial and administrative networks and the universities would return back.”


The Building of Social Health Services (IKA-ETAM) in Piraeus is one of the most important buildings in the area both in terms of symbolic and financial dimensions. After the earthquake of 1999, the building has been considered inadequate for security reasons and was evacuated in order to be renovated and operate again under the same use. Since then, the building remains vacant and under reconstruction until today. In 2011, the administration announced new plans for its development with the method of “sale and lease back” to a private investor.

“We would like this building to remain as a Social Health Service department as it was before. In this way we would both save the money of the rents we pay so far (as public sector), but also to encourage the administrative functions that exist in the area.”

Employee in IKA-ETAM

Although, the future of the building, because of its scale, its location and its symbolic capital, will have important impact in the area, seems that under the current uncertain financial conjuncture, the management, the development regime and the future of the building remain under negotiation.

In Metaxourgio there is an important number of vacant buildings (abandoned or ruins). Except from IKA building the vacancies are basically neo-classical or old popular houses under an uncertain property regime or a complicated protection regime. Vacant also remains the renovated public building on the corner of Avdi square (ex Proveleggios House), which was promoted for cultural uses.
IV. Institutional Framework and Actors involved

The Municipality of Athens

In the period of memorandum the municipality of Athens remains without resources due to the cuts of 60% of its budget. Thus, the economic tools needed for interventions are minimal. Along with the lack of political will, the municipal authority doesn’t have a coherent urban project for any social interventions to support the city and its residents and to address the problems of the Historical Centre. Since 2008, there was a decrease of government grants by 130 million investment program and technical program from 18.8 million in 2008 to 1.3 million in 2011. In addition, while the social problems multiply, there are important cuts in the social policy.

“The state or the Municipality must make permanent structures like night centers or public showers for homeless people in the city center where these populations concentrate. These provisions, which are not really creating conditions of degradation as some may say, offer instead assistance to people who live in these areas. What is really needed is supporting structures for the weak people in Athens. The homeless nowadays, are mostly Greeks over 50 years old, unemployed mostly from the private sector.”

Tasos Ifantis,
Social Server in the NGO Doctors of the world

“The profit from the trafficking and prostitution has exceeded the profit from drug trafficking in central Athens. In Iera Odos, the domination of the illegal leisure uses has evicted housing shrinking the permanent population of Metaxourgio and Gazi. The reason of the presence of these illegal activities is due to the political and economic power of their owners. This is evident also from the proposal of the former sub-mayor who supported the idea that these uses should not get any law restrictions in order to not damage their entrepreneurship. In other words, according to the official Municipality’s Policy the entrepreneur goes beyond the public interest.”

Eleni Portaliou, member of the Municipality’s of Athens Board

New Measures

Metaxourgio has been recently characterized as “Zone of special regeneration” and economic incentives are given for the renovation of houses to the possible investors without taking any other measurement for the protection and renovation of the already occupant building stock. In addition, the Municipality claims that cannot manage and regulate the speculation tendencies but at the same time gives incentives to young couples in order to move to the area not as a social but as a target group.

In May 2011 the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change (Y.PE.KA) announced tax incentive measures for the restoration and “modernization” of “Metaxourgio and Keramikos” area. These incentives including tax-free measures for the cost of reconstruction of the houses under the precondition that the renovated building will be dwelled only...
by the owner or his/her family members, either by tenants that their official stated income would be the triple of the rent price. Moreover, tax-free incentive measures are included also for the energy upgrade of the old houses.

At the same time, the Municipal Council of Athens with decision 870 taken on 1-11-2012 confirmed the development potential of Metaxourgio with the cooperation of the private and public sector and is committed to the following projects:

Street lighting, a nursery school and street pedestrianization- green route from funds deriving from the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) 2007 -2013 in the context of the «sustainable development of the natural and built environment, and social and economic welfare. In this context, the design and implementation of the intervention will focus on energy efficiency, improving the atmosphere, improve the functionality of the city and the quality of life in it. Additionally, it aims to revitalize rundown neighborhoods, particularly, the provision of social cohesion and the avoidance of social exclusion and in pockets of the urban center.»

According to G.Evmolpidis the consultant of the Mayor of Athens in Urban planning except from projects focused in the financial sustainability context which means “compensative” loans of reduced interest to developers from funds deriving from NSRF(European Union), the Municipality is not directed in any other policy of social or public interest.

«In crisis condition, I hardly see gentrification tendencies. Although, gentrification might appear in the future, at that moment the integration of a mixed housing program that would incorporate market trade properties and social housing is not at the will and plans of the Municipal Authority.

The only thought we had is for the abandoned buildings. We were thinking to implement a new law that would allow the municipality to make foreclosures of buildings that are not under maintenance for a long period. Not for housing but as a measurement to close all the occupant buildings of the city center”

G.Evmolpidis,
consultant of the Mayor of Athens in Urban planning

V. The developers

In 2006 GEK TERNA S.A. company active in the construction and energy sector provides an international open architectural competition for the construction of a luxury residential complex.

The construction is completed in a short period and directly alters the spatial geography of the area. The building is the first organized attempt of real estate with particular aesthetics, social, economic and cultural characteristics different to the character of the area. The typology of the building seems like a gated community-, the scale, the form and the class profile of the future homebuyers and tenants (upper middle class) but also the advertisement of the project during the time of competition have seemed to guarantee the future benefits of the company. The competition and advertisement
VI. Prices

During the last years the Greek real estate is characterized by exaggerated-offer and a substantial number of building stock for sale, very low demand and extremely limited number of transaction. The commercial property sector (office, retail, industrial buildings, warehouses, etc.) shows a dramatic decline in recent years, with significant pressure for the reduction of rents, especially in local commercial properties in warehouses and offices in less maintained buildings. Furthermore, the market is characterized by excessive offer, with an increase in vacant commercial shops and offices, a dramatic reduction in transactions and a declining trend in prices. (Annual Report of the Administrator of the Bank of Greece for the year 2012)

In Athens the indices of prices for properties shows a decline of around 23.3% since 2008 as general trend in Athens. In Metatourgio, from data collected from buying and sales of properties at the same period from the Economic Research Department of the Central Bank of Greece the indices shows a decline of 11% for buildings and 38% (approximately the half of the total decline in Athens).

become a feature in the production of space, which invest in the area with a kind of symbolic capital (Papatouka 2012). The company as well as the buyers do not build and buy a single building but a recognizable product under consumption. Today, half of the apartments haven’t been sold and what was sold recently was purchased at a lower price. Hence, even if the investment does not seem to return the maximum profit, the company managed to innovate in an environment high risk and obviously to advertise its products.

The property development company Oliaros has bought many buildings in the area (45-50 properties) vacant buildings or sites. While the company has not made any sales yet, it engages in several initiatives: it participates in the Exemplar Neighbourhood citizens’ network, it organizes the artistic event of Remap (in coordination with Athens biennale), where artists from all over the world exhibit in its buildings and people are provided with neighborhood maps so as to locate the exhibits, environmental actions. He has organized two architectural contests one for the construction of student residences in the area and the second one for the renovation of four of its buildings. The Company’s investment activities are directed in a financial strategic approach, which involves innovations, site-specific interventions and design and cultural initiatives.

The investor has a special treatment from the Mass Media as he is often hosted in newspapers and radio shows in order to express his vision for the city, to advertise his investment but also to complain about the delay of his work from the state while at the same time, as he claims he is in coordination with the Municipality and the Ministry. Indeed as the consultant of the Mayor of Athens in Urban planning confirms, we are in coordination with the developer who in order get the European Funding (NSRF) needs the confirmation of the Municipalities’ intervention in the area. Moreover, the developer claims that he will make a donation for the transformation of one of the basic roads (Keramikou) into a road of low traffic or shared space."

The member of the municipal council E.Portaliou states: «The Municipal Authority had brought up for discussion after request of the investor of the real estate company Oliaros a proposal for a small-scale redevelopment which would help the future value of the investor’s property. However, the City Council does not assign projects, although could certainly have an opinion with specific directions for an area of Athens, as has many times happened in the past. There were studies on many areas of Athens and even some suggestions specifically implemented. So if the City wanted for Metaxourgio a new project, then this should happen under the Municipality’s guidance to architects and urbanists and on this basis the plans should be delivered.

Furthermore, a regeneration does not only involve some pedestrianizations and renovations of buildings that an investor could make. The reconstruction presupposes a general planning with public interventions that could respond to social problems. The architectural projects are not enough. A regeneration through regulations over the land uses, through public intervention in the housing, or by upgrading a small production, can create conditions to prevent the expulsion of the existing residents. We cannot prepare the area for a population of high income who can afford to pay the land value the area will acquired within a new gentrified environment.»

In Athens the indices of prices for properties shows a decline of around 23.3% since 2008 as general trend in Athens. In Metatourgio, from data collected from buying and sales of properties at the same period from the Economic Research Department of the Central Bank of Greece the indices shows a decline of 11% for buildings and 38%, (approximately the half of the total decline in Athens).
5. Analysis Conclusions

A “liquid” claimed space

Today the identity of Metaxourgio is strongly controversial. The previous fantasy that fed the expectations for a gentrified city is now limited both in the public debate and the media.

In Athens, the austerity measures, along with the uneven spatial policies magnifies the old and creates new inequalities. The urban policy is designed with punctual yet occasional and unconditional terms in favor of any possible investment abolishing the public interest but also the planning structures.

In the city today one can observe two different realities: On the one hand, a future reality with a gentrified city center and its consequent scenography, and on the other hand the reality of those who defend themselves against such a prospect. Between these two different images what is today left in the city is what we could call as a “liquid” space. An uncertain future with it’s consequent impact raises the question which reality is going to prevail. So far, the phenomenon of gentrification has not taken big scale dimensions and does not yet seem to threaten the population of the city.

“Though, a new feature that comes into question nowadays is the housing issue in Greece. Prices have strongly decreased. Certainly, housing has never been a source of huge income because of the structure of real estate in Greece, as it has been in Manhattan or Paris, though, this mass decrease of land prices will probably lead to further speculation in the deprived areas and thus in an extreme gentrification process in the future.”

Thomas Maloutas, Urban Geographer, Head of the National Center of Social Research
Police

Source: Field Research

Police Presence
Police Operation "Ένιος Ζεύς" (Xenios Zeus) - Pogroms

Brothels

Source: www.bourdela.com
field research

Street Prostitution
FEANTSA - European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless

**EUROPEAN RESEARCH CONFERENCE: Homelessness, Migration and Demographic Change in Europe, Pisa, 16th September 2011**

types of homelessness*

- a. people in the streets/roofless
- b. people with no house (live in shelters)/houseless
- c. people who live under unsafe conditions of housing/insecure housing
- d. people who live under inadequate conditions/inadequate housing

Homeless people profile**

**“Traditional” Homeless**
- Unemployment, low income
- Mental health problems, mostly dual diagnosis (gambling, drug/alcohol addiction)
- Absence of supportive network
- Greeks, Russians, Bulgarians, Polish

**“Neo-homeless”**
- Unemployment, low income
- Middle / Higher Educational Background
- Former Satisfactory Living Standard
- Middle Social Level
- Occupied in economic branches particularly affected by the crisis

**“Hidden Homeless”**
- Immigrants Asylum Seekers in transitory stage:
- Roofless for a short time but in adequate housing shortly or extreme overcrowding for long
- Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Nigeria, Sudan, Mexico, Algeria

Needs

| ethnicity | 10.3% | immigrants |
| sex | 17.8% | women |
| age | 60% | 41 - 55 years old |
| | 26% | 26 - 40 years old |
| education | 40% | secondary level education |
| | 20% | higher education |
| occupation | 25% | technical jobs |
| | 22% | private sector employees |
| | 18% | freelancers |
| | 16% | employees in front |

* FEANTSA - European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless
**EUROPEAN RESEARCH CONFERENCE: Homelessness, Migration and Demographic Change in Europe, Pisa, 16th September 2011
E. Towards a counter hegemonic use of space
Introduction

Athens needs a substantive redefinition of the concept of the "public interest", to incorporate in a meaningful and collective manner the basic imperative of equality, "human rights", and the right to the city. Therefore, this design proposal investigates a series of applications through the transformation of space that could reflect the possible ways of acting inscribed in different schemas and serve to regulate as well as enable mobility through them. Spaces that could answer to the needs of the residents as hierarchized before but also produce a new model of a non-commodified urbanity that would enable the different voices and subjects to have access to the urban resources. And this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization.

"Spaces for the politics of our times"

Doreen Masey

Metaxourgio has a visible historical dialectic interaction between buildings and their site and an unusual for the Athenian data lifecycle. The urban block had always the capacity of being porous, to infiltrate functions and absorb social practices and transformations of different natures (Vigano, 1996). Therefore, the block is used as a device for the identification and organization of space in the micro-scale.

Respectively, the block and its inherent transformation is reproduced in a sample of 400x 400 m, in the scale of the neighborhood which is used as a testing field for the design proposal.

Elements of Intervention

Urban Tools and Spatial Opportunities

Reclaiming of the vacant public and vacant building stock, the vacant lots and underused spaces for a different set of programming according to the scale and the location of the space in cooperation with the Municipality:

Strengthening of social alliances and new economy patterns with the introduction of a multifunctional mechanism of housing, small commerce, crafts, solidarity and cooperative markets interconnected with communal and public spaces.

Reuse of the grid infrastructure and the typology of the block, when adequate, to produce enclaves of inner common gardens.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Policies</th>
<th>Financial Instruments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vacancies</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Regulatory and Participatory Framework</td>
<td>E.U Funds (Municipality)</td>
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<td>Public Property of</td>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>Social Services</td>
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<td>Private funds</td>
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<td>Social Security Funds</td>
<td>NGO's</td>
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<td>Self Reconstruction</td>
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<td>Municipal Vacant Property</td>
<td>Municipal Boards</td>
<td>Cooperatives' Market</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Space</td>
<td>Social Security Funds</td>
<td>Open Spaces</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Space</td>
<td>People</td>
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<tr>
<td>New &amp; Existing</td>
<td>Movements</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Classification

Typologies

Vacancies according to use

- Plots
- Public/Private

Ex- residential

- Warehouses
- Public buildings

Ex-Industrial-Ex Commercial Services

Context- Factors

crisis- tenantless
deindustrialization- decentralization of services
bad condition
new cycle of investment
for sale
Creation of a unitary urban framework with the local communities to take control of the development and sustainability of their own neighborhood. Introduction of a unitary urban framework within a vast array of stakeholders as agents in the making of the city and strategic device for a multidisciplinary design. Attention will be given to the needs of the valuable groups in terms of housing and welfare facilities.

While in the plans of the Municipality is the implementation of a new law that would allow the foreclosures of buildings that are not under maintenance for a long period, these buildings can be renovated with the minimum cost and be given to groups of population that need shelter as a concession for a period of time which can be defined between the different parties of the negotiation. The same can happen with private tenantless buildings that cannot be sold or rented because of their bad condition or the lack of demand from possible buyers and renters due to the crisis. The reconstruction of these properties will be made with the involvement of the people that will live there, the community, urbanists and architects involved in the process under the supervision of the local and public authority.

Embodied dynamics:
Examples of collective housing and solidarity action in Metaxourgio

Enacting Actors
The proposal introduced a diffused and adaptable program which involves a dialectic connection and organization with the collective action and the local engagement.

Classification of use according to space and its typology; The 1-2 storey buildings are used for housing and small manufacture whereas the vacant ground floor apartments in polykatoikia for housing or small stores and upper ground floors for housing.

The old warehouses are reused for manufacturing and exchange services for the neighborhood; The public buildings of the Municipality and the social security Funds for hosting the social services infrastructure. More precisely the vacant building of “IKA” is reused as Health Service and the recently renovated neo-classical building in Avdi square as social Center.

The new collective space that will emerge can take also different functions according to its scale and its location; The inner merged collective yards and the narrow pedestrian streets are transformed in a network of internal public-collective system which enables the housing function to be an organic element of the whole. Hence, housing because of its limited scale, in the form of the city, is interwoven with the public space so as to produce a dense interrelation between private and public.

The medium scale collective space, more exposed to the border of the blocks and usually isolated from the other communal enclaves can perform as an enclave itself for the inhabitants of the neighborhood and users of the area with bottom-up spatial practices of encroachment thriving on informality and alternative social organizational practices that can periodically change functions during the day (assemblies, cultural events, self-organized parks, mobile units of NGO’s).

The blocks with solid vacant public buildings of big scale are used as social services with reference to all the historical Center of Athens because of their importance to facilitate a great range of users of the city.

The Public Squares, Avdi Square with the old silk-factory(today the Municipal Gallery) and Eleftherias Square become spaces of an intense and productive social activity by the introduction of the new social center and the flea cooperatives market respectively fostering the local production and commerce and the interaction between locals and immigrants.
*for Sale*

- 3 Years Vacant
- 10+ Years Vacant
- 6 Years Vacant
- 10+ Years Vacant
- 10+ Years Vacant
Activating Space
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Vacant Spaces</th>
<th>Configuration</th>
<th>Adaptability/Program</th>
<th>Typology Distribution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Inner Enclave</td>
<td>Housing/Workshops</td>
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<td>Inner Public Space</td>
<td>Housing/Social Services</td>
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<td>Open Front</td>
<td>Collective Space/ Mobile Units</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Archaeological Site</td>
<td>Housing/Workshops</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Public Space</td>
<td>Unification of Public/ Collective Space</td>
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<td>Solid/ Public Building</td>
<td>Archaeological Park</td>
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<td>Social Center/ Public Activity/ Mobile Infrastructure</td>
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<td>Social Infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Time</td>
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<td>Informal Market</td>
<td>12:00 p.m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective Kitchen</td>
<td>5:00 p.m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cinema de Plein Air</td>
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<td>Concerts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assemblies</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Block
The Neighborhood

Solidarity Networks

Housing & Production

Social Services

New Economy

Municipal Gallery
Public Space
Social Center
Collective Space
Mobile Units
Collective Space
Housing
Health Center
Cooperatives Market
Small Scale
Medium Scale
Conclusions

This study initiated by researching the current urban effects after a long history of uneven development occurred in the city of Athens and examined the political, the social and ideological agenda that lead at the end to a semiotic and sporadic gentrification as new means of urban transformation and development in Athens.

By studying the different historical processes that determined its social context and urban form the study generated a critical understanding of the underlying structural economic, political and social processes that shape the contemporary city.

In addition, the methodical investigation of gentrification as partially occurred in Athens along with the policies and actors that encouraged the uneven development trajectory, helped to the identification of the power relations that have been developed within the case study for exploring in particular the conflicting trends deriving by different social dynamics and spatial functions and uses, the actors involved in the process of change, the current policies and land prices.

Therefore, by focusing to the conception of alternative forms of property and their larger impact in the urban environment, the study established a critical urban frame that could answer to the needs of the people living in the city center of Athens.

The project primarily engaged the micro scale of the neighborhood in search for new modes of social sustainability and accessibility. What is interesting in the small scale is the instrumentality of its operational socio-spatial and political procedures.

The objective was to construct an understanding of the city through the elaboration of a number of urban spatial transformations that could empower citizens to be engaged in local spatial politics and become active participants in the making of their own environment. Acknowledging the complexity of the urban dynamics and development potential of Metaxourgio through the voice and needs of citizens, the research seek to use the embodied spatial and social capital of the neighborhood in order to produce an alternative spatial model for the future of the city of Athens.

The counter economic and social organizational practices produced by alternative spatial prototypes and social infrastructure at the scale of the block within the neighborhood is creates alternative sites of negotiation and collaboration that could also restrain gentrification tendencies in the future.

Although the case of Athens can be seen as exceptional or even extreme example due to its lack of actual urban or integration policies, the problem of accessibility of the weakest social groups to the urban resources in the contemporary city is not unique and can been seen today in many historical segments of many European cities. Thus this model of a diffused collectivity and accessibility to housing and services can have also spatial implications in other European inner cities especially since the right to housing and the security of tenure are gaining far greater public attention by urbanists, scholars and greater significance in claims and actions of the urban social movements.

The evolution of these actions derived from a possible organization of the space and vice versa, becomes a productive model to deal with the complexity of our era.

Limitations

Even if such projects which deal with the emerging pivotal issues such as housing, welfare and accessibility, albeit from different perspectives, can be considered as crucial in the current condition of global crisis, though their implementation is essentially connected with political and progressive will which is not yet visible in the political agenda in Greece and in Europe. In other words, their feasibility which needs both the top down and bottom up collaboration restrain the terrain of their application in the city today.

But at the end as David Harvey insists “the right to the city is to claim some kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities are made and remade, and to do so in a fundamental and radical way. The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization.”


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