(RE-)DESIGNING THE PLANNING PROCESS:
THE CASE STUDY OF PANEPISTIMIOU STREET IN ATHENS
European Postgraduate Masters in Urbanism
strategies and design for cities and territories

(Re-)designing the planning process_
The case study of Panepistimiou Street in Athens
MASTER THESIS
June 2014

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Cover photo: Panepistimiou Street (Source: Marialena Kassimidi)
(RE-)DESIGNING THE PLANNING PROCESS: THE CASE STUDY OF PANEPISTIMIOU STREET IN ATHENS

To my brother
I want to thank my mentors Vincent Nadin, Daan Zandbelt and Bernardo Secchi for their valuable guidance and comments throughout this work. Their diverse—often contrasting—perspective widened my understanding and perception of the disciplines of urban planning and design.

My gratitude goes as well to Thanos Pagonis and Bouki Babalou (NTUA, Athens) for the inspiring discussions and reflections on my work. I would also like to thank Giannis Polyzos (Athens Organization), Panayotis Tournikiotis, and Fanis Kafantaris (Research program “Mutating characters and policies in the centers of the city of Athens and Piraeus”, NTUA, Athens) who have helped me with useful information, documentation and suggestions. Moreover, I especially thank Iosif Argyropoulos (ATTIKO METRO S.A.) for the valuable insight on the planning of the project “Rethink Athens”.

I am also greatly thankful to Marialena Kassimidi and Antonis Chazapis for their guiding comments and support, and my EMU colleagues and friends for enhancing this learning experience. I especially would like to thank Katherine Sundermann for the inspiring collaboration and discussions.

Finally, I would like to thank Sotiris Papanikolaou for his encouragement to pursue this study and to my family that always believe in me.
ABSTRACT

This diploma thesis explores the Greek planning tradition and practice and its capacity to address the real urgencies of the urban environment and deliver long-term benefits to society and the economy. An overview of recent regeneration proposals is presented in order to investigate the reasons why planning in Greece is said to have weak influence. The evidence presented is essentially reinforced by the extensive study of an on-going regeneration project that takes place in the city centre of Athens: the case study of Panepistimiou Street. The so-called “university” street—one of the major traffic axes of Athens—is currently planned to be transformed into a large pedestrian avenue with public transportation flows. The case study is evaluated in order to understand the “how” and the “what” of the urban proposal: What is the vision that is leading the project of urban transformation and what are the tools that are used to implement the project? Finally, what effect do these interventions have on the urban environment of the city centre?

Following this research, the thesis focuses on the construction of alternative ways to intervene in the city through the tool of strategic spatial planning. The aim is to explore the tool, its definition, origin and main principles, and introduce four values that guide the proposal for the area. These are the qualities of a visionary, relational, integrative and action-oriented plan. In such a framework, Panepistimiou becomes the test-bed for a coherent and coordinated process of urban regeneration. A new vision for the area is suggested but also a set of actors, processes and institutional provisions is employed. The thesis concludes with a reflection and evaluation of the proposed process. How is it different from the existing project approach and what broader transformation is suggested for the way 21st century urbanists plan and intervene to the city? In the context of the Greek planning system, what institutional provisions are needed to be added for strategic interventions to take place in the future?
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INTRODUCTION

Preface
Problem Field
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PREFACE
In the frame of the current economic crisis, the way we plan the European city is challenged. The lack of resources for huge investments is setting the current institutions under restructuring and examination. In such a context, the role of the urbanist is also transforming. From designing artifacts that follow functional and morphological rules, urbanism becomes the science of orchestrating processes and coordinating actions.

MOTIVATION
Through the framework of the European Master in Urbanism, we have been introduced to the north-western European tradition of urban planning as a strategic and collective tool that defines priorities for a city or territory and structures them in space and time. My personal motivation therefore, for this thesis, is to use this methodology for reflecting back to my city of origin, Athens, Greece’s capital city. I aim to investigate how planning can be instrumental for the processes that form the city and consequently how the role of the urbanist can become strategic not only for designing how the city should look like but also how the city should work.

1. According to United Nations’ definition of Urban Planning, the latter is viewed as “a self-conscious collective (societal) effort to imagine or re-imagine a town, city, urban region or wider territory and to translate the result into priorities for area investment, conservation measures, new and upgraded areas of settlement, strategic infrastructure investments and principles of land-use regulation. [...]”
Population of Athens: 3.5 millions
Population of Greece: 11 millions
(formally registered population)
ATHENS

Athens is the capital city of Greece and accommodates almost half of the country’s total population. The city has a very short contemporary history—dating only from 1833—when the Greek nation was reconstituted after 400 years under the Turkish Law. At that time, Athens was a degrading medieval village on which the modern structure of the new city was superimposed. Today, the urban fabric of contemporary Athens is characterized by the close coexistence of the ancient monuments of the past with the dense structure of the modern city.

CITY COMPETITIVENESS

Since the late 20th century, the city of Athens has been following a wider trend that took place across Europe and is related to an effort to increase the city’s attractiveness to international investment capital through urban development strategies that improve locational advantage and the image of the urban space (Pagonis, 2013). In the broader, metropolitan area of Athens this trend resulted into large scale urban projects such as the Olympic venues and a portfolio of new infrastructure for metropolitan mobility. However, in the dense structure of the city centre, this pursuit towards urban competitiveness and city promotion takes place through processes of “urban regeneration”.

PROBLEM FIELD
Regeneration Projects of the last 20 years for Athens city centre.

source: astynet.gr

“Rethink Athens”
pedestrianization of Panepistimiou street

“Fix”
Reuse of former brewery and transformation into modern history and art museum

“Pedion Areos”

Acropolis Museum and unification of archaeological sites

Kolonaki Square

Kotzia Square

Monastiraki Square

Psiri District

Metaxourgeio Regeneration

Omonia Square

Psiiri District

Benaki Museum

Gazi Cultural Centre-Kerameikos Metro Station

Regeneration projects of the last 20 years for Athens city centre.
Regeneration processes in the city centre

Regeneration projects first occurred in Athens in the 1980s, when the traditional neighbourhood of “Plaka” on the foot of Acropolis hill, underwent an extreme process of renewal and renovation of the building stock. The old district—initially intended to be demolished for extensive archaeological excavations to take place—was decided in 1976 to be preserved through an “embalming” process; the existing functions were removed, many of the plots were acquired by the State and new functions of leisure and culture were introduced (Traulos, 2005/ Papageorgiou-Venetas, 1999). This type of intervention was for the first time applied in the city centre of Athens, and it was widely criticized as a gentrification case where the local residents are being removed for an aesthetic improvement of the area and promotion of the real estate market. (Sarigiannis, 2000)

Plaka, in this frame, forms an example of a widely applied pattern in the central districts of Athens. The main principles of these projects have been the upgrading of the physical environment and the programming of the built space with pre-defined functions so that the city centre will receive “desirable characteristics” (Papageorgiou–Venetas, 1999). However, the capacity of these projects has been limited and does not result into an inclusive upgrading of the urban environment, since the existing characteristics of the space and the “place identity” were often neglected for a visual “make-over” to take place. Furthermore, the physical and programmatic interventions did not involve compensation mechanisms or social and economical policies that would take care of a broader distribution of the regeneration benefits.

In the later years, these processes of regeneration continued, reaching a significant peak in the period before the Olympic Games of 2004. They took place as city-image improvement strategies focusing on the zones of circulation of visitors usually with the absence of any other programmatic reference. (Pagonis, 2013)
Design Competitions for Athens city centre.
source: www.rethinkathens.org/, astynet.gr, NTUA
Among the most emblematic projects has been the “unification of archaeological sites of Athens”. It was an extensive urban intervention consisted of pedestrian routes, well designed public space and buildings' renovations that attempted to unify the most renowned monuments of the classical city. The project carried out a significant work of protection and promotion of the historical elements of the city; however, the absence of functional and institutional arrangements for supporting the main intervention, encouraged speculation from the market which in some cases altered importantly the character of the intervention.

Similar approaches, always involving the central state's initiative, operated in other areas of the city centre, and especially on the western ex-industrial part of it. Big scale infrastructure of culture and leisure were introduced in former industrial sites such as the restoration of the old Gas factory in “Gazi” district. Its transformation into a centre of cultural activities in 1999 remained spatially limited and not connected with any other urban strategy or complementary policies and planning tools. In 2007, the introduction of a new metro station in the area ultimately altered the character of the traditional neighbourhood with unplanned consequences for the local residents. The old Athenian houses were massively transformed into bars and loft residences without the provision of wider public good and amenities for a wider range of stakeholders. (Chazapis, 2012)

Finally, today, Athens becomes again the test-bed for a range of architectural competitions that take place in the city centre and are attempting to “rethink” of the city and develop its underused plots. Physical design and the improvement of the physical space in these projects is thought as the main carrier of urban change. This way urban regeneration becomes the primary field for architects, developers and political actors, but without the guidance of an overall vision or a coordinated set of actions to reach this vision.
Crisis in Athens
source:http://www.crisis-scape.net/
THE CONTEXT OF THE CRISIS

Furthermore, the current context of austerity measures, ad-hoc decisions and fast track processes, adds extra difficulties to the fragmented, project based planning of the city centre of Athens. The state is now introducing a wide range of new legal framework whose primary aim is to bypass existing constraints and inflexibilities of the regulatory system, for attracting large capital investment in land development. (Pagonis, 2013)

These policies are reflected in parts of the metropolitan area of Athens, such as the urban waterfront or the former airport of “Hellenikon”, which are changing destination in order to be exploited by the global market. Indeed, the urgency for new development and reactivation of the market leads to new transformation projects both in the large plots of the urban periphery but also in the historical structure of the city centre. In this frame of emergency, the current planning system and its policies are failing to ensure that new development or regeneration projects bring benefits to both society and the local economy as well as the major investors.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In such a context, the problem statement for the research is:

The economic crisis is heightening the danger derived by the fragmented planning system. Urban “regeneration” projects, outside the guiding mechanisms of a broader, cohesive planning process provide only short term benefits to the market, while they disqualify in the long term the spatial capital of the historic city.

Therefore, it seems that the process of “designing” or “re-designing” the city has to be examined.
Projects that rethink Athens city centre
source: remapkm.org, rethinkathens.org, astynet.com
In the above described framework, the aim of this study is on the one hand to structure a comprehensive reflection on the planning processes as these take place in the Athenian context, and on the other hand, to research and investigate how regeneration projects can become part of a cohesive, multisectorial process of city transformation.

RELEVANCE

The relevance of the issue can be traced both in the academic field, but also in the societal one. Academically, the research touches upon the theme of the European city and its dense and multilayered city centre. The complexity of the urban core, but also of the processes that are forming its spatial configuration are fields of continuous research and investigation. What is more, the planning culture that underlies this system reflects upon the southern European tradition of Urbanism, where the protection of heritage, promotion of identity and the presence of a weak and flexible planning framework are the dominant features. This way, the current crisis reveals also the societal relevance of the above issues. Greece, as most of the southern European countries is facing the extreme consequences of a longstanding malfunctioning system of local institutions and legal framework. Societal, environmental and economic deficiencies heighten the urgency of the matter.
How can regeneration projects become part of a coordinated and strategic process of city transformation that will promote livability and economic development in Athens historic centre?
Right: The axis of Panepistimiou Street as a “catalyst” for urban regeneration
Source: rethinkathens.org
This research is structured in two stages: first investigating the context and the performance of existing planning practices in Athens city centre, and secondly constructing a different way to intervene to the city through the understanding of its contemporary character and needs. Both the analytical and the proposal part are guided by a main principle; that is the feature of “strategic” as a fundamental principle in urban projects and spatial plans that aims towards the realization of a well-defined vision through an inclusive and coordinated process. A comprehensive interpretation of the theoretical framework regarding “strategic spatial plans” aims to provide a platform of evaluation for the existing proposals but also the main “ingredients” for a well-informed and coordinated process of urban regeneration.

For closer elaboration on the above-described issues the method of a case study is used. The purpose is to use the example of an existing regeneration project, describe its character and its relation to the context presented in the problem field, while, finally, introduce an alternative version of it through the “invention” of a different process.

**PANEPISTIMIOU STREET (THE UNIVERSITY STREET)**

The project under investigation is that of the transformation of one of the main traffic axes of Athens city centre into a large pedestrian avenue with public transport flows. The project is entitled “Rethink Athens” and the mentioned axis is Panepistimiou Street, one of the most historic and monumental streets of the 19th century plan of the city. The so-called “University Street” is distinctive for its re-occurring presence in successive regulatory and strategic designs for Athens city centre and its role in the metropolitan structure.

“Rethink Athens” project is of pivotal importance for the current discourse that takes place in Athens as being a “city in crisis”. Panepistimiou Street constitutes a field of conflict between academic researchers, professionals, and the public administration regarding the way we should intervene to the city centre, who should redesign the city and, most importantly, for whom it should be designed.
Therefore, the axis is assessed both as a spatial structure, but also as an evolving project, as a product of many plans, policies, major investments and individual interests. The aim is, firstly, to understand the approach of the existing planning practices regarding the character of the street and its role in Athens urban structure. Secondly, I aim to provide a critical response to the existing proposal. The focus is not drawn on the qualities of the architectural design plan, but most importantly, on its strategic character: that is the responsiveness to the urgencies of the city and its wider impact on the physical structure, economy and social life. In such a frame, I use the main principles of strategic spatial planning as they are described by contemporary theorists and practitioners in order to introduce alternative ways to intervene to the city and plan not only what the city should look like, but also how it should work.

If Panepistimiou Street is the opportunity to revitalise the city centre and contribute to tackling the spatial, economic and societal crisis, then what are the tools that should be employed towards this direction and how can they be “orchestrated” in a cohesive way?

Finally, the thesis aims to reflect on the outcome of the proposal—both spatial and institutional. How is it different from the existing project and what broader transformation is suggested for the way 21st century urbanists plan and intervene to the city? In the context of the Greek planning system, what institutional provisions are needed to be added for strategic interventions to take place in the future?
“STRATEGIC” SPATIAL PLANNING: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction of term “strategic” in spatial planning
Values for a strategic plan
There is no single, universally accepted definition for strategy and strategic spatial planning. Various authors and practitioners use the terms differently. In the following lines, I am presenting the main elements of the theory regarding strategic spatial planning; I am mainly focusing on the description by Albrechts (2006, 2010) of a normative view on strategic spatial planning, and referring also to understandings given by other authors. The aim is to explore the tool of strategic planning and define its difference from traditional practices in spatial planning that tend to be monosectorial, project-based or comprehensive (instead of selective and action oriented).

**ETYMOLOGY**

The word strategy originated within the military context. In the Webster’s dictionary, it is explained that it is derived from the Greek `strategia`, meaning generalship (Webster, 1970, page 867) and is defined as the “science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the maximum support to adopted policies in peace or war”.

**DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY-COORDINATING**

The practice of “strategic planning”, in its global context, seems to have been, through history, greatly related with the need to deal with uncertainty, changing norms or crisis situations. In the US, strategic planning originated in the 1950s in the private sector (Kaufman and Jacobs, 1987). Its roots are tied to the need for rapidly changing and growing corporations to plan effectively when the future seemed to be increasingly uncertain.

Strategic planning became a tool for the public sector when, in the early 1970s government leaders in the United States became interested in strategic planning as a result of the overwhelming changes which were occurring such as the oil crisis, demographic shifts, changing values, and the volatile economy (Bryson and Roering, 1988; Eadie, 1983). In the European context, the first traces of strategic spatial planning date back to the 1920s and 1930s in north-western Europe. (Mastop, 1998) Mastop links strategic spatial planning closely to the idea of the modern nation-state. Strategic spatial planning is used here to direct the activities of others (authorities, sectors, private actors). In this frame, strategic spatial planning is closely related with the idea of city management, stressing its coordi-native managerial role.

**DIFFERENCE FROM BLUEPRINT PLANS**

What is useful is looking at the distinction between ‘strategic plans’ and ‘project plans.’ A typical project plan is a blueprint type plan, and its success is evaluated on the extent to which outcomes conform to the plan (Faludi, 2000). On the other hand, a strategic plan is ‘not so much concerned with producing a final picture, as with gaining a better understanding of the problems with which we are faced now and in the future, in order that we can make better decisions now’ (Faludi, 2000, p.302).
From the perspective of strategies as framing mechanisms, Faludi (2000) has therefore argued that it is more appropriate to speak of their ‘application’ than their ‘implementation’. Implementation assumes a direct and measurable impact of the plan, whereas application refers to a reinterpretation of policy options in an interactive process. Similarly, in evaluating spatial planning we should talk of performance rather than conformance (Faludi 2000; Janin Rivolin 2008). The term “conformance” is looking at the direct implementation of physical or programmatic changes, such as land use regulations or introduction of new infrastructure; whereas, “performance” implies a long term influence of the plan towards a predefined common vision or goal, and it implies a diverse range of tools and methods.

In this way, “the plan is just one vehicle amongst others with the purpose of producing change. Strategic spatial planning is not about a single concept, procedure, or tool. In fact, it is a set of concepts, procedures, and tools that must be tailored carefully to whatever situation is at hand if desirable outcomes are to be achieved.” (Albrechts, 2006, p.1163)

Healey (2006) deepens the notion of strategy as ‘inclusive argumentation’ (p. 261); Strategies are “deliberate efforts in collaborative social mobilization, the objective of which is to transform policy discourse” (p. 267). Successful strategies are about changing the way participants see the world by establishing a new discourse. They innovate by re-framing issues and enabling new types of synergies to take place.

This way, strategies are not only involving the official governmental bodies and the central decision making structures; through their powerful visions they aim at engaging major private actors and supra-national institutional bodies towards a common goal. In such a frame, strategies become inclusive but also regulating mechanisms towards a fair distribution of public goods when prevailing interests are at stake.

TOWARDS A DEFINITION: THE WHAT AND HOW

Therefore, “strategic spatial planning is a transformative and integrative process through which a vision, coherent actions, and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame what a place is and what it might become” (Albrechts, 2006, p.1152).

Strategic planning is about developing content, images, and decision frameworks for influencing and managing spatial change; it is about the what and the how of urban transformation processes. It is about building new ideas and processes that can carry the ideas forward, generating ways of understanding, building agreements, ways of organizing and mobilizing for the purpose of exerting influence in different arenas (Albrechts, 2006).
EIFFORTS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING IN THE CITY CENTRE: REACTIVATE ATHENS / 101 IDEAS

Research and design initiative directed by the RA Lab, a joint collaboration between the Brillembourg & Klumpner Chair of Architecture and Urban Design at the ETH Zürich, Urban-Think Tank, and local experts and collaborators from various fields.

The initiative took place after the “Rethink Athens” competition as a way to integrate the new role of the street in a portfolio of actions in the city centre. However, it focused more on the communicational aspects of the project, than the construction of legitimate proposals for the city centre.

Source: http://www.reactivate-athens.
WHY DO WE NEED STRATEGIC PLANNING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS OF THE ATHENIAN PLANNING SYSTEM?

As stated before, the limited resources available and the shortage of public funds in the Greek state has given the private sector a bigger role in the urban transformations that take place in Athens the last years. This phenomenon makes urgent the need for a selective and action-based spatial planning that focuses on what is of prior matter to the citizens and the local economy, balancing out the interests of the global market and major investors. Without the steering and controlling mechanisms of a coordinated planning process, regeneration projects are driven by powerful (technical, political, economic, and cultural) actors that may have “free play” in decision making and an uncontrolled impact to the urban environment. Finally, where formal, public sector driven, planning processes are proved mono-sectorial, fragmented and disconnected from the actual transformation of the city, then an unplanned and market driven urban “makeover” is threatening the future development of the Greek capital city.

In such a frame, I have identified four key characteristics of a “strategic” approach to plan-making and I try to use them as the main criteria for assessing the existing plans and making better plans for the future. The four characteristics are based on the interpretation of the main “elements’ that constitute the hard core of “strategic” in the planning practice as these are stated by Louis Albrechts (2006): visioning, relational, integrative and action oriented.
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Schematic Diagram of Strategic Planning
Source: by the author
01. VISIONING (IMAGE OF THE FUTURE—CRITICAL VIEW OF THE ENVIRONMENT)

“In strategic spatial planning a dynamic vision is ‘constructed’ and time flows from a ‘created’ future, which challenges conventional wisdom, towards and into the experienced present and invents a world that would otherwise not be.” (Mintzberg et al, 1998; Ozbekhan, 1969).

The term ‘vision’ refers to images of possible futures with some implicit or explicit commentary on why civil society should try to construct these futures (Albrechts, 2010). The actors involved will only make sacrifices when they truly believe that a transformation is possible or feasible and that the potential benefits of change are attractive (Kotter, 1996, Albrechts, 2010). Constructing a vision involves creating solid, workable long-term perspectives while introducing a limited number of strategic key-issue areas. A strategic vision for a place contributes with a critical view of the environment; that is in the frame of determining strengths and weaknesses in the context of opportunities and threats, studying the external trends, forces and resources available.

02. RELATIONAL (INTERESTS/ ACTORS)

Strategic spatial planning aims at first identifying and subsequently incorporating the interests of different actors in the construction of the plan. Such an idea goes beyond the standardized conventional collaboration between government, major business organizations and trade unions. Strategic spatial planning involves relevant actors needed for their substantive contribution, their procedural competences, and the role they might play in acceptance, in getting basic support, and in providing legitimacy.

Relational and inclusive planning involves engaging major actors (public and private), a broad (multilevel governance) diverse (public, economic, civil society) involvement during the planning process taking into account the power structure of political, economic, gender, cultural uncertainties and competing values.

03. INTEGRATIVE (FRAMEWORK/ ARENAS)

Strategic planning provides the framework for decisions, actions, projects, results, and implementation. After the plan is made, it keeps working incorporating monitoring, feedback, adjustment, and revision. Planning provides arenas in the process of plan making for integration of ideas. It manages ‘discourse structuration’ and its subsequent ‘institutionalization’. Strategic planning is also about designing plan-making structures, providing survey-listening-discussion arenas, managerial and functional arenas. This way planning is about the content but also about the process, the mechanisms that lead to transformations where a wider range of actors is involved. (Albrechts, 2006)

04. ACTION ORIENTING (IMPLEMENTATION PORTFOLIO)

In strategic spatial planning, the plan is not the final product. Strategic spatial planning relates to action, to implementation. Planning should lead to a portfolio of actions— a pattern of purposes, policy statements, plans, programme, actions (short-term, medium-term, and long-term), decisions, and resource allocation. (Bryson and Crosby, 1992). This stresses the need to find effective connections between political authorities and implementation actors (officers, individual citizens, community organizations, private corporations, developers, and public departments). (Nadin & Stead, 2008)
SUMMARY

In conclusion, the element of “strategic” in planning the 21st century city is found in the combination of the above principles defining the what and the how of the urban proposal. Strategic plans should be structured upon a well-informed vision that is being strengthened with consistent institutional and process design.

In the next chapters the above described values are being juxtaposed with the Greek planning culture and the existing plans for the case study area. Finally, they provide the framework for an alternative proposal that suggests a coordinated process of city-planning to be designed and evaluated against the four main principles.

Strategic Planning through providing platforms of integration of diverse ideas for the city centre:
Public Discussions as part of the “Reactivate Athens” Initiatives

Source: http://www.reactivate-athens.
ATHENS: THINKING OF PLANNING IN A DIFFERENT CONTEXT

Urban development and planning culture
The Greek planning system: constitutional provisions
According to the EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies (1997) (CEC, 2000), Greece takes part of the so-called “urbanism” planning tradition, which “has a strong architectural flavour and is more concerned with urban design, townscape and building control”.

This tradition elucidates the main features of the Greek planning system: multiplicity of laws, predominance of a command-and-control type regulation, lack of efficient monitoring and control mechanisms and slow responses to changing circumstances. (ESPON, 2013)

**A “RE-INVENTED” CITY**

When Athens was chosen to be the capital city of the newly founded Greek State (in 1833, following the Greek war of independence against Ottoman rule), the main criterion that had prevailed was the city’s glory in ancient times. Indeed, at that time, Athens had a mere 6,000 inhabitants and the urban area mostly resembled a fragmented village than a contemporary capital city. (Travlos, 1981) The plan that was then produced for the new city reflected the principles of 19th century Romantic Neo-Classicism and it mainly focused on highlighting the history and culture of classical Athens through an overall restoration of the centre and with a series of excavations taking place around the Acropolis.

In such a frame, the medieval city that Athens was at the time had been “assigned” to become the symbol of the glory of the classic antiquity and of the ideas that brought up European renaissance, democracy and liberalism. This ambitious conquest for the capital of the Greek state, contrasted with its weak institutional structure and the strong underlying memory of the Turkish subjection, creates the context inside which the city of Athens tried to build its identity and its modern character.
Athens Urban Development:
(From top left) Olympic Infrastructure (ypeka.gr), Refugees’ Settlements (Travlos, 1981), “Polykatoikia” as the main form of settlement for the second half of the 20th century, Informal Built Environment (Chazapis, 2012)
A WEAK STATE

During the 20th century, Athens followed a substantially different path of urbanization than most European cities, related more with rural exodus than the promise of organized industrial employment (Maloutas, 2003). Two big population influxes formed the structure of the city as it is today. Self-housing development based on small scale land ownership and capital has been the essential mechanism of urban integration. As in most Mediterranean countries, state intervention during this process has been very much limited and was mostly attempting to redeem social consensus through looseness of laws and tolerance in their implementation. These “clientelistic structures” (Pagonis, 2013) of the weak Greek state are complemented with informal family-centric relations that are substituting formal welfare mechanisms.

The first regulatory plan was adopted in 1985 and constituted a significant governmental initiative to deal with the structural problems of the conurbation with an emphasis on environmental protection and control of peri-urban growth dynamics. However, its role was in the end limited to the incorporation of the areas of illegal city expansions in order to provide urban infrastructure and densification. Sprawl had been a structural characteristic of the way the city developed and the role of planning was then often confined to a posteriori regulation of already formed urban realities. (Leon-tidou, 1990)

VISIONARY PLANS, EFFORTS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

However, the 1985 regulatory plan also promoted an overall vision for the city, including policies and strategies for strengthening the historic identity of Athens, upgrading the city centre and protecting the natural environment. More recently, the Olympics games of 2004 was a great opportunity for strategic spatial planning in Athens; a broad range of infrastructure was introduced in the wider Athens’ urban area, while the city was for the first time conceived as a metropolitan region, a more inclusive unity, extended further beyond the city’s traditional limits (Pagonis, 2006). At that time a new institutional body was formed, that of the National Olympic Committee, directly appointed by the Prime Minister and responsible for the planning and design of the Olympic projects.

However, as it is going to be further explained in the next chapters, the Olympic Games’ plans were superimposed to the existing planning framework without an integration of the new “strategic” goals for the city to the previously defined visions and development plans. After the big event was over, the newly built conference halls, athletes’ residences and stadiums became abandoned or underused, since no long-term strategy for this project had been designed.
Plans of 1970 and 1980
Source: orsa.gr
Spatial Planning in Athens has been through the years a major top-down process. According to the Greek Constitution, spatial planning is placed under the regulatory authority and the control of the State. Indeed, urban and regional planning in Greece has been for a long time the sole responsibility of the central state. In this way, the main institution responsible for urban and regional planning is the Ministry for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works.

In Athens metropolitan area, a special constitution is founded since 1985 for monitoring the implementation and safeguarding the materialization of the Master Plan of Athens: the Organization of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens (OPEPA) is a single central government agency with full administrative and economic independence operating under the supervision of the Minister for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works. It is the body which is delegated the overall administrative management of physical planning, urban planning and environmental matters of Athens and its wider area.

**TYPES OF PLANS**

Greek planning law comprises a rigid hierarchical structure constituted at the highest level by the national and peripheral plans, the second of the intermediate plans (master plans, regulatory plans, local land use plans) and the third level of development control regulations. Overall, we would describe an hierarchical but fragmented structure, involving central state departments and institutions like the “peripheries” (centrally controlled regional institutions that manage major investment flows and the European Union Community Support Framework funds), the prefectures (democratically elected regional and sub-regional institutions), and the municipalities, at the local level. The array of institutions normally involved in planning and spatial development is indicative of the complex decision-making process that lies beneath them. (CEC, 2000)

**THE REGULATORY PLAN**

However, the main instrument that sets the objectives and guidelines of spatial development in Athens city area is the Regulatory Plan of the city. The regulatory plan sets the planning framework, the policy goals, the directions and measures for the sustainable development of the greater metropolitan region and establishes the Organization of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens as the competent agency to oversee and co-ordinate its implementation. However, its role in influencing the city’s future, even if it is often called a “strategic plan”, is constrained by its limited formal competences and inherent structural deficiencies of the planning system that are mainly related with the multiplicity of laws and the lack of monitoring mechanisms (Pagonis, et al., 2008).
‘ATHENS IS A CAPITAL THAT IS DIRECTLY GOVERNED BY THE STATE’. (Kokkosis et. al, 2003)
As it is going to be argued in the following chapters, the planning processes in Athens have been marked by the interplay between national and supranational trends in policy formulation. The recent history of Athens is often affected by dilemmas regarding how to adopt policies originated in other countries and fit them in the local context in order to address local problems. In such a frame, this phenomenon leads to an actual “gap” between the formal planning practice and the real character and evolution of the city.

Furthermore, this super-imposed model of planning is greatly related with the governance structure that is responsible for the Athens’ policy making. As noted by many critics, ‘Athens is a capital that is directly governed by the State’ (Kokkosis et. al, 2003), meaning that despite positive steps of governance decentralization that took place throughout the 1990’s, the main policy formulation for the city’s development is still under the authority of the state ministries. This leads to an inherent distance of the planning structures from the real problems of the local environment. Being centrally managed, the planning authorities are not engaging with tasks that only the prefectures and the municipalities are aware of.
CASE STUDY: PANEPISTIMIOU STREET

The role of the street in Athens and the city centre
The approach of existing planning practice: Four Plans for Panepistimiou
LOCATION

ATHENS METROPOLITAN AREA
THE STREET PROFILE

PUBLIC BUILDINGS/ MONUMENTALITY

Source: Antonis Chazapis
THE STREET PROFILE

OPEN SPACE/ PEDESTRIAN FLOWS

Source: Antonis Chazapis
THE STREET PROFILE

FACADES #2

Source: Antonis Chazapis
Source: Antonis Chazapis
THE STREET PROFILE

URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Source: Antonis Chazapis
**PANEPISTIMIOU: THE ROLE OF THE STREET IN THE CITY CENTRE OF ATHENS**

Panepistimiou Street has a nodal role in Athens’ city structure. It is the city’s significant axis, the street that concentrates along its spine the monuments of two hundred years of modern Greek history. Furthermore, it is the street of Big and Beautiful: the street of public and private institutes, of banks and of the city's first University. It is the street where the national military parade takes place once a year, but it is also the axis which is often occupied by big protests or celebrating events in the city.

However, Panepistimiou today is mostly conceived as a traffic avenue: a six lanes’ traffic axis with major private and public transportation flows. The street today accommodates enterprises of metropolitan character, such as banks, public administration offices and extensive department stores, concentrating in its environment the most vital economic part of the centre of Athens.

In the following pages, an overview of different maps of the city centre is presented signifying the position of the street in the different “worlds” of Athens (economic/leisure/education etc). The purpose is to understand not only the character of the street as an object, but how this relates to the multiple layers of different centralities of the city centre.
The statutory framework on land uses in Athens municipality
Source: rethinks Athens competition file
Looking at the “legislative uses” map of Athens municipality, we see that Panepistimiou is officially included in what is described as “metropolitan city centre”.

The map at the left illustrates the hierarchy of different centralities: Metropolitan – municipal – local. Panepistimiou street forms a reference of centrality both for the centre of Athens but also the metropolitan area.
Panepistimiou traffic axis
Source: Research program “Mutating characters and policies in the centers of the city of Athens and Piraeus”, NTUA School of Architecture
Panepistimiou Street is the widest axis of the historic centre of Athens. It has been designed as an urban boulevard already from the first plan for the contemporary structure of the city and till today it accommodates heavy traffic flows that cross the city centre connecting the North with the South, the East with the West of Athens.
PANEPISTIMIOU STREET AS A CROSS-SECTION OF REGIONAL FLOWS
Source: Attiko Metro
The street forms a node where three different nodes of public transport meet: The metro network, the buses and the trolleys. In the next decade, one more metro line is planned to be added that will intersect with the existing network on Panepistimiou Street.

However the intermodality of all these different means of transport and especially the presence of the buses at the half length of its length, are disrupting the street’s continuity and augmenting the complexity of the variety of flows that are being served along Panepistimiou.
PANEPISTIMIOU STREET
AS PART OF THE DIFFERENT “WORLDS”
OF ATHENS’ CITY CENTRE

“Economic” Map of Athens
Metropolitan Enterprises
Land Values Map

“Political” Map of Athens
State Buildings and open space
Power Map

“Touristic-City Identity” Map of Athens
Classical and Contemporary Monuments
Network

Urban Activities Map of Athens
Education and Culture Related activities
Leisure Activities
Commercial Activities
*ECONOMIC MAP OF ATHENS
LAND VALUES

EURO PER M²

- 1000–1450
- 1500–1800
- 1950–2850
- 2950–3300
- 4000–4750
- 5800–8500
*Political Map of Athens

State-Owned Buildings and Controlled Open Space

The University
Source: Author

Academy
Source: Marialena Kassimidi

"Coin" Museum
Source: Marialena Kassimidi
Source: Research program “Mutating characters and policies in the centers of the city of Athens and Piraeus”, NTUA School of Architecture
**POLITICAL MAP OF ATHENS**

**POWER REPRESENTATION**

- **Legislative Power**
- **Executive Power (Central–Metropolitan)**
- **Executive Power (local)**
- **Judicial power**
- **Political Parties**
- **Trade unions**
- **Embassies**
- **Police (central administration)**
- **Universities – Higher Level**
- **University services**
- **Public-Cultural Institutions**
- **Public Museums and Art Centres**
- **Church (Administration)**
- **Main (Central) churches**
- **Athens Stock Exchange**
- **Central Bank Offices**
- **Main squares of social and political action**

**Source:** Maria Elena Kassimidi

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**NATIONAL PARLIAMENT/ LEGISLATIVE POWER**

**Source:** Maria Elena Kassimidi

**PRESIDENTIAL GUARD/ MILITARY POWER**

**Source:** Maria Elena Kassimidi

**BANK OF GREECE/ ECONOMIC POWER**

**Source:** Maria Elena Kassimidi

**SAINT PAUL CHURCH/ REGION-RELATED POWER**

**Source:** Author
REPRESENTATION OF THE POWER OF SOCIAL GROUPS/UNIONS

Source: Author
REPRESENTATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY
UNIFICATION OF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES NETWORK

ACROPOLIS HILL
Source: Author

THE UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
Source: Travlos, 2005

MONASTIRAKI SQUARE
Source: Travlos, 2005

MONASTIRAKI SQUARE
Source: Author
Source: Research program “Mutating characters and policies in the centers of the city of Athens and Piraeus”, NTUA School of Architecture
Source: Research program “Mutating characters and policies in the centers of the city of Athens and Piraeus”, NTUA School of Architecture
URBAN ACTIVITIES MAP OF ATHENS

EDUCATION & CULTURE RELATED ACTIVITIES

ACADEMY
Source: Author

"PAPASOTIRIOU" ATHENS BOOKSTORE
Source: Author

THE UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
Source: Author

THE "GALLERY OF THE BOOKS" CULTURE HALL
Source: Author

BOOKSTORES
BIG CHAIN BOOKSTORES
UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS
UNIVERSITIES
CULTURAL CENTRES
*URBAN ACTIVITIES MAP OF ATHENS

COMMERCE AND RETAIL

COMMERCIAL STREET IN THE CENTRE OF ATHENS
Source: Author

MEAT MARKET/ "VARVAKEIOS AGORA"
Source: Travlos, 2005
SUMMARY

“Economic” Map of Athens

“Political” Map of Athens

“Touristic- City Identity” Map of Athens

Urban Activities Map of Athens

Panepistimiou Street has a distinctive character in the city centre; It is the street that concentrates the economic activity as well as the representation of political power.

It is an urban boulevard; such as Champs Elysees in Paris, 5th avenue in NY, or Pensylvania avenue in Washington D.C.

It is a “national” street; It does not belong only to the city centre of Athens, but it forms a reference for all citizens in the greater Athens area and beyond that.
In this frame, the street forms an integral part of Athens “economic” and “political” structure, while it is well connected with the “touristic” map of Athens, as an extension of the archeological sites’ network. However, Panepistimiou does not seem to relate integrally with the centralities of different activities in the city centre such as commerce, leisure or culture. They are found in the surrounding environment, but the street seems to form a barrier in their functioning as one system.

In the following chapter, the approach of the existing planning practices for the street is accessed. The purpose is to juxtapose the analysis and understanding of the different worlds of Panepistimiou with the character of the plans that imagined or re-imagined the street.

What was the capacity of the plans towards a strategic “design” of the street for Athens central structure? And what elements of its identity are failing to be reflected in the pedestrianization latest proposal?
In the second part of this analysis, I aim to investigate how existing planning practices in Athens have formed the discourse on Panepistimiou axis, what were the key concepts, what were the instruments that were employed, the institutional changes, and how those responded to the transforming urban environment.

Thus, the plans are evaluated in relation to their strategic character. Reflecting on the four main principles of a strategic plan, attention is first drawn on the leading vision of each plan. How much is it related to the real character of the street and the urgencies of the city centre? But also, in what extent have the plans been relational and inclusive of the diverse range of interests that compete each other in the dense structure of the city? Finally what has been the capacity of the institutional provisions in relation to the actual application of the plans? Did the plans conform to short-term, top-down measures or did they establish a long term transformation that performs until today in the evolution of the city?
Panepistimiou Street has been the reoccurring subject of four plans that are imagining the city centre in the contemporary history of Athens. Since the city’s first plan after the reconstitution of the Greek nation, till the recent “Rethink Athens” regeneration proposal, the imagination and the visions that led the proposals for the street have evolved according to changing political and academic ideas, societal and economical restructurings and institutional transformations.

This way, the plans for the city have always been led by leading concepts such as the “beautiful city”, the “sustainable city” or the “competitive city”. At the same time the role of planning in the discourse ahs also changed. From traditional, physical or blueprint planning the city has attempted to also adopt strategic or coordinating approaches following the global trends in this field. In the end, what appears to be guiding the plans for the street, the city centre and the metropolitan structure of Athens is the outcome of two interrelated discourses:

- what is the good city, and how can planning contribute to producing the good city?

In such a frame, the starting point of the analysis that follows embarks from the acknowledgement that there is a gap between the formal discourse on Athens and the city’s true character as this has been structured through the years and is being experienced by the local community. The four plans for Panepistimiou, as it is being further explained in this chapter, seem to primarily aim on the promotion of the place’s competitiveness and distinctive identity, neglecting the persisting social and institutional deficiencies lying underneath.
PLANNING THE NEW CITY AND EXPLORING THE OLD

Panepistimiou Street was first introduced in the 1833 neo-classical plan of Athens that was attached to the old medieval structure of the 19th century city. The Bavarian king Otto, who reigned Greece since the reconstitution of the Greek state, appointed the architects Stamatis Kleanthis and Eduard Schaubert, students of the German Karl Friedrich Schinkel, to carry out a systematic geographical survey of the city, and subsequently draft the first city plan. (Travlos, 1981)

The shape of the main axes of the plan was an isosceles triangle, with its peak at today’s Omonia Square. Its entire orientation was aimed at Piraeus (the Port), the old Stadium and, primarily, Acropolis, at whose feet it spread out in an open embrace. The orientation of the sides of the triangle was not accidental: As Kleanthis and Schaubert note in their memorandum, “they meet in such a manner that allows viewing simultaneously the Lycabettus hill, the Panathenaic Stadium, the rich-in-proud-memories Akropolis, and the military and commercial ships of Piraeus, from the balcony of the Royal Palace” (Biris, 1938, p. 16)

TOP DOWN “EXECUTION”–SOCIAL RESISTANCE

The plan started being executed at once, as did the laying out of the new streets and squares on the ground, as well as the appraisal of the houses and plots involved. That was when the inhabitants realized the consequences of the new plan and saw that with the demolition of their houses most of them would remain homeless or would lose their land. (Kallivretakis, 2000) The Bavarian architect Leo von Klenze studied the situation and proceeded with a revision of the plan that led to the one that formed the city centre as it is today.
It is common ground in the historiography of the Athens of recent times, the indication of its unimportance, before being chosen to become capital of the free Greek state. For instance, “When it was chosen as the Capital, Athens was a village of 4,000 inhabitants and Piraeus an unimportant fishing port”; “Athens was then [1834] a town of 10 or 12,000 inhabitants, a total ruin with a few dwellings at the foot of the Acropolis”. These are some the characteristic expressions, of this perception.
The new plan incorporated a big part of the existing structure, while it abolished the boulevards of the Kleanthis-Schaubert plan and it provided a new set of such boulevards that would circumscribe the entire city instead of crossing its centre. However, in practice, only the streets that today feature Panepistimiou and Amalias were laid down, one succeeding the other, to form a single avenue which begins from Omonia Sq. and reaches the pillars of the Olympian Zeus temple, southeast of Acropolis hill. “Panepistimiou Boulevard” hosted along its axis some of the most memorable structures of Athens that were built in the 19th and 20th century: the first University of Athens but also the National Library and the Academy building.

NATION, LAW, STATE AND GOVERNMENT

The 1833 Plan is a plan of political symbolism expressing the prevailing ideas of the era, as well as the distinctive historic momentum of a new-born European city with a great ambition. The design of the plan demonstrates the scholars’ ideas about the good city at the time: what is called the Burg, the New City, (Tsiomis, 1985) must, on the one hand, be a rationalistic City-Machine and, on the other hand, a city-centre, the capital of a state—that is, the centre of power, a material point for the input of information and the output of directives, as well as the symbolic centre, the hub of organization for the realm of the nation-state.

However, the 1833 Plan, focusing on the architectonic and morphological characteristics of the city, failed to address other objectives and respond to the fundamental need for social cohesion in the fragmented society of the newly founded Greek state. Furthermore, being imposed top-down, it did not involve mechanisms of compensation for the residents of Athens, who were losing their land, causing social resistance and finally the need for a revised plan, as stated before. Thus, although being ambitious, the plan was not visioning, since its vision was not based on a critical view of the environment. Moreover, even though it had the strong support of the central government, which was the palace and the Bavarian king, it lacked the integrational character of a strategic intervention with an inclusive framework for the diverse stakeholders involved.
Panepistimiou pedestrianization project, as it is introduced today, is built upon the ideas that were elaborated in the 1970s and 1980s during a transformative period in Athens planning structure. It is the period when a range of issues related to informal development, population influx, traffic congestion and pollution, had led to the degradation of the urban environment. The livability of Athens city centre was widely questioned and an idea of escaping from the city centre started to become the pervasive concept.

In this context, land management was seen as a major vehicle for tackling growing environmental problems and improving the living conditions of the newly formed urban population. (Pagonis, 2013) A new legal framework for urban planning was created which was intended to provide uniform rules and specifications for the preparation of urban plans as well as instruments for land policy. As part of the institution building process, the “Organization of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens” (OPEPA) was constructed, which formed the main institution for issuing the regulatory plans for the city.

Panepistimiou Street was then studied as part of the Athens Regulatory Master-Plan and Framework for Environmental Protection, the first regulatory plan of Athens that formed a Law, valid until today (1985/ Law 1515, Greek Government Gazette issue A 18 of 18/02/1985). Under the inspiring leadership of the minister of Public Works- and urban planner- Antonis Tritsis, Athens was imagined to grow into a polycentric city with a historic urban core. The city centre would be highly accessible by pedestrian and public transport flows and freed from “disturbing” administrative or productive functions that bring heavy traffic flows or pollute the urban environment. In such a frame, the historic centre would “find once again” its previous character and identity, a physiognomy that was in line with the European aspirations regarding the city. At that moment, a complete proposal for the pedestrianization of Panepistimiou Street and simultaneous installation of a tram line was conducted.

(at the left) : 1985 Plan, Doxiadis Plan, “Athens 2000” Plan
Source: Sarigiannis, 2000
A PROPER “EUROPEAN CAPITAL”

The 1985 Plan was structured at a historic moment regarding influences of supranational level in the local policy formation. 1981 is the year that Greece becomes part of the European Union and is being envisioned as a proper “European capital”. This coincides with local social and political change that is initiated by the first socialist government (PASOK) that comes to power the same year. The idealism of the period and the optimism in the will to change “the way that things are done” is also reflected in the character of the new plan. The regulatory plan is based for the first time on a well-defined vision that looks at the city in a different way and is contrasting the existing practice of ad hoc and additive logic of the time.

However, the road to implementation was not proved easy both with regard to coordinating sectorial government policies according to agreed objectives but also overcoming inherited structural problems of land management upon implementing regulating policy. Furthermore, the concept of the city centre being transformed into a historic–thematic park gradually led to the processes that are responsible for the current crisis of the central districts: a great percentage of administrative and economic activities were gradually drawn away and relocated to the periphery leading to a gradual transformation of the centre into a leisure and touristic hub. The pedestrianization project formed part of this plan and visualized the iconic axis of the new form of the city that was then proposed. In this new city image, the centre was an “open-air museum” where Acropolis featured the main exhibit.

1985 Plan has been often called “strategic” because of its clear vision and a strong institutional commitment towards this vision. However, the plan didn’t seem to take into consideration the weaknesses of the planning and decision making system to undertake such an ambitious transformation of the city. The big plans were not complemented with locally grounded policies while the European aspirations for the city created controversial expectations from the citizens and the political actors.
The third plan for Panepistimiou is part of the metro network plan—an extensive study for metropolitan transport planning that was executed in the pre-Olympics period in Athens. In the transportation plan, Panepistimiou street, hosts along its spine three of the main metro stations of the city centre, Syntagma (Parliament Square), Panepistimio (University), and Omonia, while the two anchor stations of Syntagma and Omonia constitute the main nodes that connect with the rest of the regional lines of the transportation network. Furthermore, the street is programmed in the future to be “plugged” in a fourth metro line, connecting mainly residential areas of central and northern Athens area.

**SPECIAL PURPOSE PLANNING**

The metro plan realization took place in an unprecedented speed and efficacy. Due to the urgent need for proceeding fast with the implementation of the Olympic Games 2004 preparations, and especially under the pressure of its commitments to the IOC (International Olympic Committee), the government opted to treat the planning and construction of Olympic infrastructure as an extraordinary venture. The Olympic projects were excluded from the control of the conventional planning framework despite the fact that the decisions taken involved major transformations of the urban area (Pagonis, 2006). A separate set of legislation was then created in order to enforce the Olympic Masterplan provisions, while a number of special purpose agencies carried out the implementation of the projects. This temporary planning apparatus operated directly under central government control through specially appointed committees and secretariats, thus, postponing the needed reform in the structures of metropolitan governance. (Pagonis, 2013)
PART OF THE AGENDA FOR “AN INTERNATIONAL CITY”

Thus, the third plan for the street, the metro network plan, formed part of a wider agenda that was applied in Athens in the years from the end of 1990s up to the end of 2000. The process of first bidding for hosting the Olympic Games, which started in the 1990s, and then, the intense preparation for the planning and construction of the event, made urgent the introduction of a metropolitan infrastructure in the city of Athens. The development of Athens Metro Study and the relocation of the new international airport in the Messogia Plain—out of the existing city limits, were two studies that had been already initiated in 1991. The broad planning operation that took place that period was one of a national level, directly related to an aspiration followed-up from the previous unsuccessful attempt to host the Golden Olympiad of 1996. (Pagonis, 2013) During this period, a key idea which emerges is the promotion of the so called ‘international role’ of Athens (Economou, et al., 2001) by investing in the city’s comparative advantages. The Olympic Games are seen as a vehicle for achieving this goal by acting as a catalyst for promoting major investments in the metropolitan area and by spreading a reinvented city image worldwide.

The metro plan, as part of the Olympic planning process, was considered a major opportunity for strategic planning in Athens. However, the Olympic infrastructure that was added to the city did not lead to a long term performance of a strategic vision. The mobility network that connected the centre with the periphery led to the augmentation of the sprawling tendencies of Athens urban form. The new airport attracted major commercial and leisure venues that are competing the distinctive dense environment of the city centre. This way, the benefits of the plan seemed to be only delivered to the major sector of an international market, rather than the wider range of public and private interests that fail to be strongly represented in the planning of the city. Thus the plan, eventhough being action-oriented and visionary for an “international” Athens, it failed being relational to the interests that take place or integrative of the existing planning framework of the city.
The fourth plan for the street is the major on-going project for the pedestrianization of Panepistimiou axis. The plan is mainly consisted by the organization of an international architectural competition that took place in 2012 and was complimented by extensive architectural and traffic engineering studies regarding the framework and the feasibility of the project. The organizational committee is often presenting the pedestrianization proposal as of “national importance”, while it is thought as the intervention that is going to reconstitute and reorganize the city centre.

THE COMPETITION: RETHINK ATHENS

“Rethink Athens” competition was undertaken by the appointed by the Greek state- Onassis Private Foundation for the transformation of Panepistimiou axis into a public space of pedestrian flows and mild transportation networks. As it is stated in the competition brief, the purpose was “the selection of the architect that will undertake the design of the architectural public space for the creation of a new city centre in Athens along the axis of Panepistimiou Street”. The program also incorporates a great portfolio of communication actions and public events of civic engagement towards the promotion of the idea of the pedestrianization.

“Rethink Athens” project is part of a programmatic vision that was set forward in 2009, entitled “Athens-Attica 2014”. The program is attempting to “reboot” an effort that never reached completion after the Olympics, and is related with the development opportunity that was driven by the Games. Part of a set of interventions proposed was also the pedestrianization of Panepistimiou Street and the introduction of a tram line that is extended beneath the axis of the street and connecting with the residential neighbourhoods of central and western Athens.
(Regulatory) Strategic plan 2021
Source: Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change /ypeka.gr
In this frame, the project was presented as an intervention that supported a wider strategy of “discharging” the city centre from the car traffic and reinforcing the role of public transport in it. As it was stated in the published booklet, the aim was to upgrade the “metropolitan assembly”, bring back the ecological function of the urban structure and improve the quality of life of its residents. Furthermore, the proposal was expected to improve Athens’ city competitiveness, reinforce its identity and promote Athens city centre as a touristic destination.

**REGULATORY PLAN 2021**

The guidelines of “Athens-Attica 2014” were incorporated in the “Regulatory Plan 2021” that was issued the next year. The document was an updated version of the 1985 plan for Athens; however, it never reached legal status as the precedent document. The pedestrianization of Panepistimiou Street was announced as one of the plan’s key interventions with a clear reference to the existing analogous proposal from the previous plan.

For the preparation of the pedestrianization plan, two research programs were appointed to the National Technical University of Athens. The first one, conducted by the department of Transportation and Traffic engineering, investigated “the possibility of exclusive use of Panepistimiou Street by public transportation, pedestrians and cyclists”, validating, in this frame, the feasibility of the pedestrianization project. The second one was assigned to the department of Architectural History and Theory of the Technical University and it was the one that formed the basis and defined the framework for the architectural competition of “Rethink Athens”. Both programs were funded by the Special Fund for the Implementation of Regulatory and Town Plans (ETERPS–Green Fund) mainly provided by the European Union.

“Rethink Athens” is a distinctive project that accurately represents the current “crisis” context of Athens planning processes. It forms part of a visionary process that started in 2010 and was reformed and adapted to the limited capacity of the contemporary public domain.

Indeed, the program “Athens-Attica 2014” that first “revived” the idea of the pedestrianization, was introduced in a transitional and quite pivotal political context: The socialist party was again taking over the national governance from the conservatives, while crisis was only then starting to shape the new economic and social framework for the city. Furthermore, part of the general restructure, that was then promising a new vision for Athens, was also the responsible ministry for territorial planning, which was now the newly created Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change; Tina Birbili, an Environmental Economics and Management professional, was now leading the Ministry, a fact which was illustrating a revived commitment to environmental issues. The perception of the environment at that moment though, aligned with European policy directives, has a policy connotation that is more related to the concept of ‘green development’ rather than that of social welfare.
However, even though “Athens-Attica 2014” was formed in a visionary time for the city, the pedestrianization project is running parallel to the evolution of the Greek economic crisis that has also affected the planning mechanisms in Athens. “Rethink Athens” forms a common example of the shrinking of the public domain that gives place to private initiatives; Onassis Foundation hosted the architectural competition but also the communication project to the city attributing a distinctive character to the project—referring to the greatly acknowledged “majesty” of the private foundation. Furthermore, the “urgent” character of the competition and the completion of the final studies is directly related to the ambition of the central state for the project to be incorporated into a European funding program.

Concluding, the fourth plan for Panepistimiou is predominantly an architectural design—more than a strategic plan. The pedestrianization proposal relates to past aspirations for the city centre that are being revived in a new context of the “ecologic function of the city”. However, neither the proposal for the Street but either the monosectorial tools of implementation—promoting a direct “construction” of an architectural design—are responding to the prevailing urgency of the current crisis that is especially affecting the city centre. Finally, as in the previous plans, the answer to local problems is being explored in global solutions such as the concept of the “livable city” and is being based in top down implementation with the support of external funds.
**Evaluation**

**Ambiguous Visions/ Super-imposed Ideas**
Panepistimiou project reflects the practice of traditional planning in the Athenian-Greek context; Standard planning practices are failing to provide the city centre of Athens with a clear role for the future. The echoing of old ideas, often imposed by supranational trends, and the limited responsiveness of the plans to the actual urgencies of the city lead to projects that are either never implemented, or they take place as flagship interventions that are not promoting a fair distribution of public goods. In such a frame, Panepistimiou becomes the test-bed for global policies and ambiguous visions for a “competitive” and iconic city centre.

**Monosectorial Projects**
The most recent architectural competition for the street’s pedestrianization discredits planning from its social, economic and transformative content towards a narrow- sighted architectural and aesthetic role. The design proposal is not combined with economic and social policies that steer broader processes of transformation and control externality effects and other unwanted impacts.

Therefore, it is becoming urgent that a different way of envisioning the city should take place. In the second part of the thesis, I am constructing an alternative plan for Panepistimiou Street. Taking into consideration the main values for a strategic plan I attempt to suggest a proposal that is based on a comprehensive interpretation of the character of the street and the main interest groups involved. Starting from the current political, economical and societal context I will “draw” a different process of intervention that is being structured on the capacities of the planning system and the potential of the identity of the place.
Towards a Strategic Plan for Panepistimiou

Vision
Two levels of intervention
Institutional Design
Process Design
View of Panepistimiou Street
Source: omoniadiary.gr
This thesis suggests a strategic proposal for Panepistimiou Street in relation to its role in the city centre of Athens. The proposal is based on “repositioning” the street in the different worlds of the city centre as these have been described in the previous chapters.

Panepistimiou currently forms an integral part of the traffic network map of Athens, but also the economic (businesses and high land values), and finally the “political”- power representational map. However, it relates only partially with the leisure, educational and commercial activities’ map of Athens, being, thus, quite disconnected from neighbouring vibrant environments.

Finally, if one looks at the recent proposal for the street pedestrianization, in that case, the street is being envisioned as an extension of the “archaeological promenade” in the city centre; that is the designed pedestrian route that connects all the ancient monuments and most important built heritage sites. This way, the street is being integrated in the “touristic” map of Athens, together with Acropolis, the main open recreational spaces of the centre and the traditional medieval districts.
WHAT IF, INSTEAD OF AUTHORITATIVELY DESIGNING AND CONTROLLING THE CENTRAL PUBLIC SPACE, WHICH IS THE STREET, WE REINFORCE THE SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT THE “MAIN EVENT” WHICH ARE FOUND IN THE SURROUNDING EMPTY SPACES AND THE MISSING CONNECTIONS WITH THE SMALLER AND MORE DISPERSED CENTRALITIES OF LEISURE, COMMERCE, EDUCATION AND OFFICES?

AND SECONDLY, WHAT IF WE GRADUALLY SHIFT THE FUNCTION OF THE STREET FROM THE TRAFFIC AVENUE THAT IS TODAY TO AN URBAN BOULEVARD THAT ACCOMMODATES BOTH TRAFFIC AND PEDESTRIAN FLOWS INTO A COHESIVE ENVIRONMENT?

In such a frame, a critical response is provided to the pedestrianization proposal for Panepistimiou street. The new proposal is “fading” the street’s position in some of the maps of Athens, such as the traffic network map, while it strengthens the role of the street in the different centralities of activities in the city centre. In the end, the goal is to “re-inhabit” the street and transform it from an “crossing” to a destination—primarily for the citizens of Athens and subsequently for the tourists. In the context of the economic but also social crisis of the city centre, Panepistimiou becomes a field for cohesion among citizens, entrepreneurs, visitors and political power.
TWO LEVELS OF INTERVENTION

01. ACTIVATE THE SURROUNDING URBAN ENVIRONMENT

- Galleries
- Corridors
- Anchors
- Vibrant structures
- Tram and main public space

02. REINFORCE THE URBAN CHARACTER OF THE STREET

- Make it a destination
- Make it pedestrian-friendly
- Make it an event
01. ACTIVATE THE SURROUNDING URBAN ENVIRONMENT

WARM CITY

“The Warm City exists at the intersection of observable physical and social aspects of city life.”

(Thaddeus Muller, 1999: “De Warme Stad”)

LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS

“If you change a street, talk with local entrepreneurs first. There is too much top-down thinking[...] Streets will be open for construction for months and after some time you can see the special entrepreneurs disappear. They will never return, and by doing so, the street has been effectively destroyed.

It is not only the local authority’s organisation, of course. A crucial role for the city centre is played by how the city’s elites and people’s voices involve themselves in the development of the city.”

THE POTENTIAL OF THE IN-BETWEEN SPACE

What lies in-between the main- “national” public space that is structured along Panepistimiou Street and the informal smaller centralities of leisure and commerce is an abeyant potential of the city centre. In the next pages an activation of this potential is suggested.
01. GALLERIES

The groundfloor passages that are found inside the bid institutions’ buildings along the sides of the street connect Panepistimiou with the parallel to it axis and offer an alternative environment to the busy avenue. They are occupied by small shops, bookstores, repair shops, watch and eyeglasses’ stores but also cafes for the people who work in the lawyer and public services’ offices located in the area.

Today these shops are becoming gradually abandoned due to the crisis that has especially affected this sector of economic activities in the city centre.

THE “WAITING” STRUCTURE

Empty shops in the galleries (2012)
Source: Ramia Theofanidou, Elli Ntrouka, Iro Sketzou, Dionysis Tzanetakos, Research Project, NTUA
many of the shop owners today are closing their businesses because of the high rent costs. Panepistimiou is an expensive street and that also applies to the small businesses in the groundfloor galleries. By offering incentives to the shop owners to maintain the enterprises, improve the facades and participate more actively in the “life” of the public space, by organizing bazaars and open days, we ensure that we have a vibrant environment and an active economic activity.

**Regulation**

*The example of UK*

“In England, landlords of empty property have to pay 100% of business rates once the property has been vacant for 3 months, a policy that was introduced in 2009. This is often very costly for them, especially when the vacancy rate in the UK currently stands at 14.5%”

**Stimulation**

*Reference project: Meanwhile Space, a social enterprise and community interest company (CIC)*

- negotiating deals with landlords
- assist in accessing available space

“I began to explore the potential for temporarily occupying vacant space with creative enterprise start-ups, but encountered so many bureaucratic barriers, including planning use classes, accessing landlord’s contact details and extortionate business rates, that everything felt stacked against me. It was obvious to us that not just anyone could tackle this challenge: a support mechanism was badly needed. An agency or organization that connects temporary occupancies to those who need them might solve this problem.” (Glaser, et al., 2012, p.143)
02. THE “CORRIDORS”

The perpendicular to Panepistimiou streets have a different character form the main axis. They often are vital urban neighbourhoods, with many small shops or caffes, but they lack qualitative pedestrian infrastructure. The sidewalks are often too narrow for people flows and often occupied by illegally parked cars.

The economic activity on these streets is also affected by the recent crisis. Today, many small enterprises are found shut down; this phenomenon causes the occupation of such streets by drug addicts during the night increasing the criminality in the area.

VIBRANT ENVIRONMENTS PERPENDICULAR TO THE MAIN STREET
Creating pedestrian-friendly environments

Improving the urban environment of the perpendicular streets is expected to enhance the visual and functional qualities of what is called the public realm. Gradual small scale transformations such as occupying parking lots with plantation or introducing semi-public zones in front of the shops with benches and chairs can facilitate many new dimensions of urban life.

Redesigning sidewalks

- offering specified parking lots
- reinforcing the presence of the pedestrian
- creating “hybrid”, semi-public zones

Public realm

“Cityscape matters, especially through small shops with an open character. One can see people shop, sit drink, eat, argue, try on clothes, show off, be together […] Because of plinths we have access to people and their presentation of self. It is not only the human comedy one can experience in these places. Seeing others is seeing oneself and thus becomes part of our ongoing identity-project (Giddens 1996).
01. GALLERIES

02. THE “CORRIDORS”

03. “ANCHORS”

IDENTIFYING AND INTEGRATING MAIN POINTS OF INTEREST

“ANCHORS”

Anchors are the major destinations or sources of people. It is about where people come from and where they are heading to when moving inside the city.

In the near environment of Panepistimiou Street, one can find major venues of education and culture related functions. Athens University of Law is located on Massalias street, perpendicular to Panepistimiou, while many other university departments can be found in the area. Furthermore, institutions such as Parnassos host in a regular basis cultural activities and scientific conferences, events that are often combined with leisure activities afterwards in the bars that are surrounding the area.

These environments can be reinforced as points of interest in the edges of the “corridors” perpendicular to Panepistimiou Street. By adding program to them, opening them in the evening for cultural events and —finally— by connecting them through pedestrian-friendly streets we qualify the orchestration of a more cohesive system of people’s flows and activities.
01. GALLERIES

02. THE “CORRIDORS”

03. “ANCHORS”

04. EXISTING VIBRANT STRUCTURES

CONNECTING WITH VIBRANT ENVIRONMENTS

“Shopping and cultural districts in the old city, leisure and educational environments towards Lycabettus hill.”

Through improving the quality of public space but also reinforcing the presence of places of interest, the segregated areas are eliminated and people start exploring a greater range of streets in the city centre without the need to use their car.

Aiolou Street
Source: Author

Agias Eirinis Square
Source: Author

Monastiraki Square
Source: Author
01. GALLERIES

02. THE “CORRIDORS”

03. “ANCHORS”

04. EXISTING VIBRANT STRUCTURES

05. TRAM AND MAIN SQUARES

ACTIVATING “FORMAL” PUBLIC SPACE

The last step of the strategy is leading to the main event: the street and the formal structure of important public spaces that are located along its spine.

The introduction of a tram line is considered instrumental in this context; in contradiction to the already existing metro network that is running parallel to it, the tram manages to keep the flows of people “visible” in the urban environment adding to the vitality of the space.

At the same time, it improves the urban experience: commuters have the chance to observe the monumental facades of the street in a different way than when they drive their cars and they can also be more aware of all its different environments.
In the end, what the first level of the strategy suggests is a structure of centrality. The city centre is composed by different worlds of commerce, leisure, culture and other diverse activities. By providing binding structures of public space, but also by promoting the sustainability of small scale–local environments, we attempt to orchestrate the different worlds of Athens in a system that uses Panepistimiou as a “cohesion” structure.
02. REINFORCE THE URBAN CHARACTER OF THE STREET

TRANSFORM THE STREET FROM AN INTERSECTION TO A DESTINATION

REINFORCE PEDESTRIAN FLOWS: THE STREET AS AN URBAN BOULEVARD

MAKE IT AN EVENT: INSTITUTIONALIZE THE OCCUPATION OF THE STREET BY THE CITIZENS
EXISTING SITUATION: THE STREET AS A NODE OF REGIONAL FLOWS
TRANSFORM THE STREET
FROM AN INTERSECTION TO A DESTINATION

REGIONAL SCALE

REINFORCE PERIPHERAL “RING”

DISCOURAGE THE CROSSING OF THE CITY CENTRE FROM REGIONAL FLOWS
Pedestrian streets are often part of a larger network of more or less pedestrianised streets and squares. Together they form a network of various experiences and possibilities for play in a calm and safe environment. The most successful of these types of streets are the ones with a multitude of activities extending into the evening.

Pedestrian priority streets prioritize walking. No kerbs have been installed and it is more a negotiation process, than a right of way. These types of streets hold strong restrictions on vehicular traffic in terms of turning options and driving directions. Thus the level of vehicular traffic is low and space is gained for other people activities.

High quality walking link with the occasional light rail or bus passing through. A low level of noise and a busy atmosphere of many people visiting and promenading are distinct trademarks. Cycling is a natural part of these streets.

**PEDESTRIAN STREET**

Pedestrian streets are distinct gathering points for a number of people, both locals and visitors. *Stræget, Copenhagen, Denmark*

**PEDESTRIAN PRIORITY STREET**

The one levelled pavement is divided into patterns defining the different zones for movement and for recreational purposes. *Strædet, Copenhagen, Denmark*

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT STREET**

A homogeneous paving unifies the street with the square and indicates a high level of shared space, where pedestrians are invited to cross at their convenience. *Strasbourg, France*
REINFORCE PEDESTRIAN FLOWS: THE STREET AS AN URBAN BOULEVARD

A “GRANT” TRAFFIC STREET WITH ATTRACTIVE PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

“Boulevards are grand city streets carrying heavy volumes of traffic, while still providing an attractive environment for walking and cycling.”

The re-characterization of the street into a public boulevard stands as one of the main arguments contradicting the pedestrianization proposal; the transformation of the street into an exclusive pedestrian environment with only public transportation flows would eliminate the dynamic of traffic flows that has formed through the years the character of the place and would turn the street into a static environment.

If we look at the different types of pedestrian friendly environments, these are ranging from the homogeneous pedestrian street to the more “inclusive”structure of the urban boulevard. In this respect, the facilitation of the street as a boulevard, suggests an “attractive” environment for pedestrian flows with a reduced number of traffic lanes and an enhanced presence of public transport networks.
Kypseli, Patisia Residential Districts

Pireaus, Port of Athens

Western Suburbs

OMONIA SQUARE

SYNTAGMA SQUARE

"TRILOGY"

Kifisia/Agia Paraskevi, North-Eastern Suburbs

Goudi, Ilisia, Eastern Suburbs

Falirio/ Glyfada Coastline

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Currently the street is functioning as an intersection, as a traffic node that brings together regional connections from northern to southern Athens and from East to West.
PROPOSAL FOR AN URBAN BOULEVARD

- reducing the private cars’ traffic lanes from five to two
- widening the sidewalks
- introduction of the tram line
- designing a high quality environment
- (participatory) new design of the street’s pavement pattern
Examples of events when Panepistimiou Street was occupied by the people
MAKE IT AN EVENT
INSTITUTIONALIZE THE OCCUPATION OF THE STREET BY THE CITIZENS

ADD PROGRAM
Isolate the street from car traffic every Sunday
Facilitate events
Communicate the events to the public

OPEN STREET DAY!

SUNDAY  MONDAY  TUESDAY  WEDNESDAY  THURSDAY  FRIDAY  SATURDAY
EXPANSION TO THE CITY

ACTIVATION OF THE GROUND FLOOR LEVEL

MOTIVATION STIMULATION

STREET REGENERATION

DESIGN EVENTS PARTICAPATION
INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

COORDINATING DIVERSE INTERESTS

Panepistimiou is one of the most “expensive” streets in Athens, but still quite controversial in terms of the stakeholders involved and the capacity that these have. A great number of the buildings on the street are owned by the state, public and private institutions. However, on the groundfloors— and especially inside the galleries of the buildings— there are many privately owned shops, repair stores, bookstores and cafes.

“FRIENDS OF PANEPISTIMIOU” CONSULTATION GROUP

As part of the strategic plan for the street, a new mechanism for integrating the diverse interests is proposed. The “Friends of Panepistimiou” consultation group constitutes a semi-public agency that is oriented towards the promotion of the greater strategy of the street regeneration, but also towards the accommodation of the interests of different groups in it.

Managed by a council that represents the municipality of Athens as well as local entrepreneurs and is also guided by professional planners, the agency is expected to assist in the first steps of the project, while monitor the evolution of the whole process during the years.

Furthermore, the “Friends of Panepistimiou” is the planning agent that is responsible for organizing the “Open Street Day” events, communicating the strategy to the people and investors and trace potential funding and support.
The design for a strategic process of intervention for Panepistimiou Street is based on acquiring the support first from the local society, and later on from important institutions and stakeholders that are in powerful positions. Investments are taking place starting from the “low hanging fruits”: municipality partially supports local interpreuners, but soon the strategy should become part of the action plan of the ministry of commerce, public works and tourism.
**EUROPEAN UNION**

**CENTRAL STATE/MINISTRY/INSTITUTIONS**

**MUNICIPALITY/COMMUNITIES**

(SHOP OWNERS, ENTERPRENEURS)

**SOCIETY**

"Friends of Panepistimiou"

**Constitution of Consultancy group**

Bring together stakeholders

Organize first Sunday Open Street Event

Announce Program to the public

Engage actors

"Gallery of the books"

Regeneration Demonstration Project

Involvement of Municipality, Entrepreneurs and Private Institution (Building Owner)

Communicating Results/ Acquiring State Participation in the Project

**Gallery “Nikoloudi”**

**Architectural Competition**

Gain Institutions’ financial support for a pavement “mosaic”

**Introduction of the Tram Line**

Funding from EU

**Expansion to the city:**

Perpendicular streets regeneration

**Monitoring the Project/ Updating the Strategy**

**Process Design**

**Communicating Results/ Acquiring State Participation in the Project**

**Gallery “Nikoloudi”**

**Architectural Competition**

Gain Institutions’ financial support for a pavement “mosaic”

**Introduction of the Tram Line**

Funding from EU

**Expansion to the city:**

Perpendicular streets regeneration

**Monitoring the Project/ Updating the Strategy**
CONCLUSION

Aim of the study/ evaluating the research outcome
Responding to the current political economical and social context
AIM OF THE STUDY/ EVALUATING THE RESEARCH OUTCOME

The aim of this thesis was structured in two levels; on the one hand, to undertake a comprehensive reflection on the planning processes as these take place in the Athenian context, and on the other hand, to research and investigate how regeneration projects can become part of a coordinated, multi-sectoral process of city transformation.

In this context, Panepistimiou case study performed as a multilayered research method. The four plans that have imagined of the street in different times of Athens’ contemporary history were proved illustrative of the main tendencies of the planning paradigm of contemporary Athens. The element of supranational influence through global trends and planning concepts has formed a common argument of why plans do not achieve to meet the local needs and distribute benefits to local society.

Furthermore, when accessing and redesigning the process of city regeneration, Panepistimiou is proved to be an axis that encompasses a wider range of “atmospheres” than what the big plans for the street have demonstrated. The social and economic potential of the axis is found in the smaller qualities that exist beyond the monumental structure- and that is the main contradicting argument towards the existing pedestrianization plan:

“What if, instead of authoritatively de-signing and controlling the central public space, which is the street, we reinforce the systems that support the “main event” which are the surrounding empty spaces and the missing connections with the smaller and more dispersed centralities of leisure, commerce, education, offices?”

Thus, a different, “strategic” plan for Panepistimiou Street was formed. Its strategic character can be traced in the four values for a strategic plan:

“Visionary”: in the respect of providing a new image for the place, that of an urban boulevard embraced by temporary events.

“Relational”: in the respect of looking at diverse interest groups such as the shop owners but also the municipality as well as the private and public institutions.

“Integrative”: since it introduces an orchestrating mechanism, the institution of “friends of Panepistimiou” which undertakes the integration of the diverse priorities towards the achievement of the bigger strategy.

Finally the plan is “action oriented”: since it suggests an action plan- a new process of city regeneration that starts with the engagement of the community and the investors, under the guidance of the consultancy group.
The proposal for Panepistimiou aims to respond to the current urgencies of the political, economic and more importantly social context. Greece is facing today—once again a supra-national influence on the making of local policies. (Pagonis, 2013) The international financial control to the Greek governance system is greatly affecting the local institutions and it threatens the legitimacy of national planning processes. This is why a different set of tools, originating from local governance structure have to be found. At this level, of the municipality extents— or those of the metropolitan city structure, one can trace fundamental urgencies but also underlying potentials of the spatial and social structure.

Finally, the proposal is also attempting to include a different aspect of the current context which is the social crisis—especially affecting the city centre of Athens. By providing a space where a “periodical” urban activity can take place, collectively managed and organized, a new structure for “social cohesion” is added to the diverse environment of the city centre. Cities need such places where major events of political and social life can be expressed together with demonstrations of social dissatisfaction and unrest.

“Cities are not peaceful places or smoothly functioning machines”. They are the fields where political debates take place and where different interests conflict each other.

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