Reflection

Urban space under negotiation
Reactivation of underused spaces as a tool for urban transformation

Evgenia Zioga
student number: 4188705
evgenia.zioga@gmail.com
The urban strategy that is being proposed by the present thesis aims to rethink the social and the spatial conditions in the area of Agios Pavlos in Athens, in order to provide opportunities to counteract the processes of decay, urban fragmentation and socio-spatial segregation. The starting point of this thesis was the fact that Greece and especially Athens, which are now facing the 5th year of economic recession, constitute an arena where the process of crisis is unfolding through several aspects of everyday life that are visible in the city centre of Athens.

The effects of the economic recession as well as other socio, political and cultural forces, that have a direct impact on the Athenian urban environment, were identified and reported at the collective research with the title ‘Fear and Loaning in Athens’ conducted by the members of the graduation studio. Moreover, the collective research focused on the identification of urban transformations that formed the current image of the city as well as the existing socio-spatial realities in the city centre of Athens. The research on regional and urban scale, along with the historical analysis, points a more specific area in the city centre where a more specific research was made focusing mainly on social issues – conditions.

The overall research concluded into statements that formed my individual problem statement with respect to the existing realities in the city centre of Athens which are the conditions of urban fragmentation and social segregation totally neglected by the official plans.

The main aim of the strategy is to propose a revitalization process that can encounter directly the existing conditions of decay and socio-spatial fragmentation and at the same time to create the base for the long-term revitalization of the area. In order to evaluate the outcome of the project, it is necessary to step back and rethink if the proposed strategy corresponds to these aims.

The starting point of the strategy concerns the re-programming of underused parking lots, in order to create a platform for new activities to happen in the area. The proposed activities have mainly a short term character and constitute the first step for the re-activation of the local scale. Some of the activities such as the flea market and the food tracks contribute to the empowerment of the existing social infrastructure since local people through their participation can generate profit. Moreover, these activities can attract external population in the area and consequently the flows of people will be gradually increased. In that way, it is possible to achieve the re-activation of the local scale even in a short-term basis and the gradual re-integration of the local scale in the city network.

According to the planning framework, the process that is necessary to be followed in order to start the implementation of the activities, is not very complex and it will take a few months to build up. What is needed is an agreement between the parking owners and the Municipality of Athens, as well as informing the inhabitants in
order to participate in the activities. In that way, the proposed system can encounter directly the local scale without the implementation of governmental resources. This parameter is considered as critical for this project since we need to keep in mind that Greece is now facing the 5th year of economic recession.

The second substantial aim of the strategy concerns the long term revitalization of the area. For this reason the strategy has been set as a gradual process shaped in time and divided in phases. The first phase that concerns the re-activation of parking spaces with temporal activities forms the basis for the next phases that deal with the empowerment of more permanent activities. The analysis that has been made explains and predicts how some of the proposed activities can be evolved through time, contributing to the re-activation of vacant commercial spaces and abandoned buildings. In that way, the proposed strategy aims to decrease the urban abandonment and finally, to establish the long term revitalization of the area.

However, it is necessary to recognize that there are some potential risks regarding the whole process. The first concerns the negotiation process with the property owners, since it is possible to deny cooperating. For that reason, the benefits for the property owners have been extensively analyzed in the planning framework. The second potential risk concerns the time-span of the proposed planning framework.

For instance, the period of three years that was defined as the starting point of the re-activation of vacant spaces, could be regarded as too ambitious since it depends on the complexity of the negotiation process. However, keeping in mind that in a time of crisis it is necessary to propose solutions that can have a direct impact, we consider that the proposed time plan can be realistic.

A third risk concerns the potential ‘failure’ of some of the proposed activities. However, as it has been already explained the whole process and more specifically the proposed activities have a flexible and revertible character which means that they can be alternated during time according to the corresponding conditions. This parameter is also critical since this project reinforces the idea that urban space is not the psychical construction of a designed object but it is continuously developed as social, cultural and political production.