Milestones in the urban history of Athens

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Athens is a very old and at the same time, a very new city. Some of its cen-
tral streets, some uses of urban space and, certainly, some monuments may be
traced back to the antiquity. But what we now call Athens originates in the
mid-19th century. What follows is not, of course, a «concise history of Athens»,
but a presentation of some important turning points in its modern history,
which have determined patterns of urban development and have contributed
to form the city and its metropolitan area as we experience them today. Three
such milestones are discussed, namely the time when Athens was designated
as capital of the new independent Greek state; the arrival of 1.5 million refugees
in the 1920s; the aftermath of the Civil War. The presentation ends with some
thoughts on current developments, awaiting the 2004 Olympics.

19th century: the origins

In the first half of the 19th century, the Great Powers of the time (Great
Britain, France, Germany, Russia), in their struggle for economic and politi-
cal penetration in the Balkans and the Middle East, favoured the dismantling
of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of very weak «independent states»
with imposed administrations. The modern Greek state, along with other such
states in the Balkans, is a partial outcome of such geopolitical moves and of a
war of independence from the Ottoman Empire (1821-27). On the part of

the newly formed state, consolidation of boundaries and state power and national identity were major issues in the long 19th century.

Before the war of independence, and over almost four centuries of Ottoman rule, a significant class of Greek merchants, bankers and ship-owners was formed in the Ottoman Empire, and a powerful group of Greeks, an educated élite, had gained power and prominence around the Ottoman administration in Istanbul. Along with these groups, rich communities of Greeks developed in Venice, Trieste, Vienna, Alexandria and other cities around the Mediterranean. When the new Greek state was constituted in 1828, this «diaspora» remained out of its frontiers and, until about the 1880s, did not invest in productive activities or base its economic transactions in the new state (SVORONOS 1972). They either «donated» money for various purposes, thus becoming «national benefactors», or they contracted loans to the state.

In this context, in the small state that came out of a seven-year war of independence there was a dire scarcity of capital for productive activities and a poor and devastated countryside, full of antiquities and ruins - which had exclusively attracted the interest of European travellers and Tour de Rome winners. The state offered loans to peasants to buy the land left by withdrawing Ottomans, in an aim to create a class of small landowners, faithful, and indebted, to the crown - to king Otto, a Bavarian king imposed by the Great Powers (with a Bavarian regency until he became of age). However, agriculture remained stagnant for quite a while, but a relative development of small commercial activities, construction and services is noted.

Population was dispersed to a large number of small independent communities, with local power structures, which could not easily accept central government. Torn between an oriental past and living tradition and an occidental state administration around the royal court and the Greeks of the diaspora, a deep identity crisis characterized society and polity. Break with the recent past of Ottoman rule and rejection of anything that could question the continuity with the much-acclaimed antiquity became (and perhaps remains until today) the cornerstones of the dominant ideology. It was promoted by the administration and the ruling classes and contributed to deepen the gap between them and popular groups.

This break with the oriental past found its expression in many aspects of cultural life, including painting and music (where central European romanticism replaced the Byzantine manner), theatre (where Italian melodrama replaced popular plays), clothing, and, most prominently, architecture and town planning - with famous architects and engineers invited to produce plans for old and new settlements, in a German neoclassical order which was thought to be reminiscent of the antiquity. Town planning became a key component of modernisation and plans for many towns were produced throughout the 19th century (KARADIMOU-YEROLYMPOU 1985), with rectangular blocks and street patterns, town squares to embellish towns and mark the importance of public buildings, formation of quays to facilitate commercial activity, clear

division of neighbourhoods and typologies of private houses and public buildings.

The capital of the new state moved to Athens in 1834, when, according to an Austrian traveller, Athens was «piles of dirty rubble, around some magnificent ruins». Ruined houses, no paved streets, narrow passages full of rubbish, inexistent lighting, puddles full of dirt everywhere were part of the description of this village of 6.000 inhabitants, while Piraeus was an uninhabited wild coast: nothing like the occidental capital with its ancient glamour, that the royal court and the bourgeoisie had in mind. The main argument advanced was an ideological one: Athens, as a symbol of democracy with a rich antique past, could contribute to the development of a national identity (BASTEA 2000). At the same time, its poor and heterogeneous population had not been as deeply involved in internal power struggles during and after the war of independence, as was the case with the former capital, Nafplion, nor had it contested the power of the king. Moreover, with the exception of the area around the Acropolis, which was privately owned, large parts of land belonged to the state and could be easily planned.

A plan for the new capital was already commissioned in 1831 to a famous Greek architect of the time, Kleanthis, and was submitted to the king in 1833. The plan followed the high standards of neoclassical city design and provided for very spacious public spaces. Its main feature was a broad axis (Athinas street) linking the Acropolis with the square where the royal palace was to be located. The plan for the new capital became the object of very heated debates, mainly around land development. The royal promise to give privately owned land for public use (streets, squares, public buildings) met the opposition of big landowners - which the administration could not afford to overlook. As a result, the original plan faced many «adaptations», both general, effected by the German architect von Klenze, and local, imprinted on an enormous number of legal decrees (2000 decrees in the second half of the 19th century alone): narrowing of streets and squares, relocation of the royal palace, redrawing of plot subdivisions etc (MANTOUVALOU 1988). In fact location of the palace and the seat of government was a major issue, determining the location of other activities, as well as land values.

Public space changed sight and function but remained forbidden to women, both those of the popular classes and those of the middle and upper classes - they did not even go to the market, which was men's privilege since Ottoman rule. The values, moral rules and ideas supporting women's position in the changing society were perhaps the only part of the «new reality» which remained so tightly attached to the past. It seems that those values played a stabilising role at a time of confusion and identity crisis, a kind of antidote to the blows suffered by foreign dependency and continuous de-valuation of popular behaviours and ways of living (VARIKA 1985). Women were completely subordinated to the will of men-heads of family, «free of opinions or thinking of their own», as an English traveler of the time admired.

Domestic work was time-consuming, hard, manual labour, since the houses did not have essential amenities: most houses did not have window panes; there was no lighting or running water and it was considered improper to have WCs in the house (BIRIS 1966); although the market for goods was growing, women had to sew clothes, preserve food etc, because prices were high and incomes very low. Women's labour was gradually differentiated from men's and devalued: it was unpaid in a world in which money was acquiring a growing importance; it was task-oriented and not defined by the clock; it was manual labour at a time when social ascent was associated with non-manual work in the city. Moreover, and as industrial activity grew until the 1880s, there was a lot of homeworking undertaken by women, drawing them to the labour market without drawing them out of home and adding to their manual labour. At the same time, women's non-work, or, for the poorer groups, the invisibility of their work, became a status symbol for men (they could maintain a woman) (VARIKA 1985).

Women's presence in public spaces increased around the end of the 19th century. Women of the upper classes participated in leisure and cultural activities, they frequented theatres and some cafes and patisseries - always escorted, by some man of the family or at least a servant. There was a growing interest in children and hence in women-as-mothers, with motherhood becoming a social mission and a new role for women. Ideas about scientific housekeeping and education for prospective mothers became part of the description of the «New Woman», emancipated yet attached to her family (PARREN 1889).

While the royal court and the bourgeoisie were debating the plan for Athens, the city was growing through a multitude of private transactions and locational decisions. Population was migrating fast to the new capital, in search for a livelihood, for shelter and for security from the continuing warfare in the «non liberated» areas. Illegal settlement, the process par excellence of urban growth, appeared already in the mid-19th century, when clusters by place of origin appeared around the planned area and sometimes within its boundary. Manufacturing activities started in the 1840s and extended along the road and rail link which connected Athens with the developing port of Piraeus (silk factory, gas works, textiles, printing, flour mills, iron). Piraeus became a major port and industrial centre, with two thirds of its population living off manufacturing activities in 1887, and assumed primacy over Hermoupolis, Patras and Nafplion (AGRIANTONI 1985, TSOKOPOULOS 1986).

Since then, and through all these planned and unplanned locational decisions, Athens was broadly divided, along a northeast-southwest axis, into an eastern and a western part: the eastern contained the royal palace and the residences of rich families, while the western developed into a working class area.

1 1834: compulsory primary education for both girls and boys; law not observed for girls
1837: 91% of men and probably all women were illiterate
1887: 69% of men and 93% of women did not know how to write their name
The only profession open to educated women was primary school teaching.

This social division of space is true until today at a much broader scale. The lower classes, according to foreign travellers' descriptions, lived a different reality than the rich, «practically in the streets»: sidewalks and cafés, squares, popular tavernas became gathering places where people circulated freely, made fun of the westernized bourgeoisie, «solved» national and international problems, and had fun in their own way.

1920s: the refugee settlement

The beginning of the 20th century is marked by instability and war in the Balkans, following which boundaries were reset, as various states, including Greece, incorporated territories of the dismantling Ottoman Empire. Struggles for control over the rich natural resources of the Near East, until then under Ottoman rule, brought the Balkans into the focus of confrontation among the Great Powers of the time (PSIROUKIS 1974, SVORONOS 1972). During World War I the Balkan countries aligned themselves with one or the other of the adversaries in Europe, the «Entente» (Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy) or the «Central Powers» (Germany). Greece joined the war on the side of the Entente in 1918, amidst great internal political conflict (between royalists and liberal democrats). During the post-war peace talks, the victorious Entente decided on an expedition of the Greek army to Asia Minor, to occupy the territories ceded to it by the Treaty of Sevres (1920). This expedition matched Greek nationalist ideals, nourished for decades by both conservative and liberal governments, to «liberate the unredeemed brothers» (i.e. Greeks living in the Ottoman Empire) and to extend the national territory «over two continents» (RIGOS 1989).

However, the Greek army was left on its own on this expedition, while its allies were trying at all costs to improve their relations with the New Turkish leadership under Mustafa Kemal (MORGENTAU 1929). Having signed a treaty with Lenin, Kemal rejected the armistice proposed by the Entente and set out to expel all foreigners from Turkey. The Greek army, by then in constant warfare for ten years (since the Balkan Wars of 1912-13), demoralised and deserted by its allies, was met by utter defeat, which is referred to in Greek history as the «Asia Minor Disaster». On September 9, 1922 the Turkish army entered Izmir, a city on the Aegean coast of Turkey with a flourishing Greek community, set fire to the whole city and fired against the British and American ships engaged in rescue work. All those who could get aboard any kind of vessel and cross the Aegean did so and sought refuge in Greece (PENTZOPOULOS 1962).

Peace talks started in Lausanne in November 1922 and a Treaty was signed almost a year later, in July 1923, which regulated the exchange of populations and frontiers between Balkan states. According to the Treaty of Lausanne, all Turkish nationals of Greek orthodox religion, except the Greeks living in Istanbul, and all Greek nationals of moslem religion, except those living in Thrace, were forcibly exchanged. The Treaty also regulated the terms of

exchange or not of various groups and is valid until today. Parallel exchange was effected between Turkey and the rest of the Balkan states: a broad-range «ethnic cleansing», by today's terminology. This unique exchange by force, which raised international protest, but was also greeted as a «brilliant achievement of Kemal» (EDDY 1931), brought to Greece 1.5 million refugees (an 18% net population increase after 1923 - population of the country in 1922: 4.5 million), mostly women, children and elderly people.

The refugees who came after the destruction of Izmir had «scarcely any wealth and no visible means of support» (MEARS 1929). But under the provisions of the Lausanne Treaty different groups of refugees also came to Greece with their movable property and capital: merchants, bankers, ship-owners and industrialists from the thriving Greek communities of many coastal cities of the Aegean and the Black Sea (EDDY 1931, PENTZOPOULOS 1962). The impact of each of those groups, albeit different, was nonetheless crucial. For many historians, the so-called Asia Minor Disaster is in fact a turning point, after which the Greek state started to develop into a modern bourgeois state (MOUZELIS 1978, PSIROUKIS 1974, RIGOS 1989, VERGOPOULOS 1978). National boundaries were definitively settled; economic activity of Greeks from different parts of the former Ottoman Empire relocated to Greece; the inflow of both labour and capital and the transfer of manual and entrepreneurial skills, along with the expansion of the internal market, contributed to the growth of manufacturing, and of economic activity in general, and to the development of urban areas, particularly Athens.

Although the policy of the Greek state was to locate the refugees in the north of Greece and in rural areas from which muslims left (as a means to ensure a clear ethnic population composition near the borders), a considerable number of the refugees were of urban origin and finally settled around Athens, Piraeus and Thessaloniki. The problem of settling the refugees was enormous, at a time when the country was impoverished by the war and faced with political instability (fight between royalists and republicans). The state appealed to the League of Nations, which set up, by the end of 1923, the Refugee Settlement Committee (RSC) to manage foreign aid to Greece (loan from the Bank of England). Following the protocol of its creation, «the RSC shall not be dependent upon any Greek executive or administrative authority but shall be completely autonomous in the exercise of its functions» (EDDY 1931:72). It could only allocate its resources to permanent productive purposes, mainly housing construction, and not to temporary relief, like food and clothing. As a result of its complete independence, the know-how of settling the refugees was never absorbed by the Greek administration.

Natives initially confronted refugees with hostility and this was used in official documents as an argument why refugee settlements were located at a distance of one to four km from the town plan boundary. But land prices were also much lower in those by then still rural areas. Until 1930 the RSC built 23000 housing units for 1 million refugees, housing poor refugees in small,

one-room houses (36sq.m.) and providing the better-off ones with a plot of land and a loan. Non-beneficiaries (eg. those who should have been settled in rural areas but decided to come to the city) were left to solve their own problem and they did so by building shacks around refugee settlements, which took the Greek state 50 years to clear and provide adequate housing (LEONTIDOU-EMMANUEL 1981, GUIZELI 1984).

Location policies of the RSC changed the pattern of urban growth for many decades, with refugee settlements determining the direction of urban expansion. But the volume and degree of urban sprawl was out of the control of the RSC or the government. Amidst the crisis created by the arrival of refugees, and as a result of it, processes that have since determined urban development in Athens were established and consolidated. At the same time, the tools and policies, which both permitted and attempted to regulate these processes, were first devised. These include planning and building legislation, loan policies, legislation related to the co-ownership of buildings and land («horizontal property»), construction of infrastructure. Among these, one is critical in order to understand mechanisms of urban growth: the introduction, in the 1923 planning law, of the «town plan boundary». Thus, areas within the town plan boundary were established, for which property boundaries, land use and building regulation were set. By the same token, areas outside the town plan boundary were also established, where land holdings were designated as «agricultural plots»; the latter were much cheaper, therefore affordable by the poorer internal migrants to the city.

The town plan boundary gave rise to vast land speculation, to which all governments have since given in: pressures to modify the boundary and incorporate areas in the town plan when they were already (illegally) built and populated, thereby de facto recognizing land use for other than agricultural purposes and assuming the obligation to provide infrastructure and services. In this change of status, from nominally agricultural to nominally urban, plots can be further developed, leading to higher prices on land and on housing that can be built on it. In this vicious cycle, low-income families are pushed further out to the urban periphery, where they can afford to purchase, and become legal owners of, agricultural land outside the town plan boundary, with the expectation of being incorporated and therefore able to profit from the eventual change of status of their property (VAIOU 1990). Legally owning land but illegally using it for housing purposes is called «semi-squatting».

Tolerance, if not promotion, of this type of housing acquisition became the focus of complex arguments among political parties and experts' groups already in the interwar period. The political function of owner-occupation and of making both refugees and natives «respectable owners» was explicitly stressed at that period. The state, industrialists, bankers and developers all agreed to this policy of social integration, which widely diffused both the costs and the profits of settlement. For the refugees in particular, the myth of temporary settlement was kept alive for many years: they lived in the hope that they would

soon return to their areas of origin - which removed the probability of social protest for their conditions locally. And conditions were indeed dire, although not very different from those of natives.

The 1920s and the arrival of refugees is a turning point for Athens, not only in terms of urban expansion, but also, and equally importantly, in terms of radical social and economic restructuring. The interwar period is the time when manufacturing activity boomed, profiting from the arrival of abundant labour and capital. Already in 1928, more than one third (34%) of the active population of Athens worked in manufacturing, the largest establishments in the country concentrated in the capital and employed 41% of the total manufacturing labour (AGRIANTONI 1989). From the reports of the RSC to the League of Nations, one can see that a large number of manufacturing establishments of various sizes and specialisations were located in or near the refugee settlements. Those establishments employed in 1926 «342 men and 4532 women», i.e. to the extent that there was an industrial proletariat, this was female: «women and girls who performed the work and were paid pitiful wages on a piece-work basis» (MORGENTAU 1929: 250).

Small industries and artisan shops increased in the 1920s and 1930s, as overwhelming numbers of people tried simultaneously to start a new life in any possible way. Flimsy wooden shops filled central Athens with people engaging in petty-commercial activities or selling their valuable crafts as coppersmiths, silversmiths, tanners etc. Local authorities built such shacks in an attempt to control the process. In addition, a large number of homeworkers, mostly women, is reported, producing linen and cotton goods, rugs and embroidery. Such items were sold individually or in shops established by charity organisations, in an attempt to assist refugee, and sometimes also native, women to make a living. The RSC also set up workshops in some of its bigger settlements (MEARS 1929).

Statistical data of the period is neither consistent nor sufficiently detailed. But one can see that: (a) there was a significant increase in manufacturing employment, both in absolute numbers and in percentages; (b) participation of women increased, particularly in large establishments which employ wage labour (83% in textiles, 72% in tobacco, 71% in clothing and footwear, around 30% in paper, printing, rubber and chemicals) (LEONTIDOU 1990); (c) economic activity was diffused into a large number of very small units, (d) after 1930 unemployment increased dramatically and reached around 28-30% in urban areas (RIGINOS 1985).

As a result of this last development, pressures started for women to be sacked from paid jobs, the argument being that they un-necessarily contributed to male unemployment while using their wages «for vain purposes». The state, supported or at least tolerated by trade unions and political parties, passed legislation, which facilitated women's exclusion from paid work. Such legislation was further amended and strictly enforced after 1936, when a dictatorial regime assumed power. Women on the whole remained unorganised throughout the

1920s, although there were very active feminist organisations, with strong international links, indeed a flourishing feminist movement which was fighting on two fronts: universal suffrage and the right to employment (AVDELA, PSARRA 1985). Only when their position in the labour market became very insecure, women started to organise massively. The first committees to protect working women's rights were formed in the early 1930s, with the guidance and assistance of feminist organizations, while trade unions continued to deny women membership and employers used every means to intimidate them.

The aftermath of the Civil War

In the years that followed World War II all Western European countries used the aid of the Marshall plan in the major effort of reconstruction of productive structures and cities, incorporating the technologies developed during the war. At the same time, welfare institutions were strengthened, so as to repel the «communist threat» (HOBSBAWM 1995). In Greece, because of the Civil War, these processes started later and followed different paths. The enormous sum of money of the Marshall plan (2 billion dollars, when the public debt of the country was 1 billion) was used by the government for the Civil War. Thus, at the end of the Civil War (1949), reconstruction had to start practically without capital.

The productive structures of the country were completely destroyed and masses of people were moved from the countryside to Athens, where they tried to survive doing whatever job they could and living in whatever shelter they could find. Housing problems in Athens, which were already acute since the 1920s (according to a Report of the Ministry of National Economy, 1922), assumed dramatic dimensions and the government was obliged to impose rent control in 1946. As employment opportunities were scarce, many people migrated, particularly after the signing of agreements, to Western European countries, mainly West Germany, to whose industrial development miracle thousands of Greeks have contributed (along with Turks, Yugoslavs, Italians, Spaniards and other «others»). Perhaps the only opportunity open for the government was the mobil-

2 Some examples of the legislation drawn to impede women's employment:
 • Marriage became a reason for prompt «lawful dismissal» of women from public services and banks. The 1931 employment regulations of the National Bank of Greece provided that «only single women are hired as typists and are automatically dismissed as soon as they get married».
 • Women could not be promoted to higher posts in public administration, education or private companies. The only two women-headmistresses in public schools were sacked in 1933.
 • «Positive discrimination» in education was banned. Previously, women had priority of employment in girls' schools. Instead, pregnant women were put in compulsory suspension and their return to work remained at the discretion of the Minister of Education.
 • Legislation for the protection of women and children (drafted in 1913) was drastically amended and restricted women's participation in paid work. By reducing the hours of work, prohibiting night shifts and banning women from various sectors and tasks, this legislation confined them to the lower paid jobs with the pretext of protecting them (AVDELA, PSARRA 1985).
 3 Women could vote for the first time in local elections in 1944, while they gained full political rights in 1952

isation of hidden deposits in gold, which were collected during the war, mainly through black market activities, and had not started to be invested, due to general insecurity, monetary instability and non-existence of relevant investment opportunities (VAIOU, MANTOUVALOU, MAVRIDOU 1999). Possibilities opened with the devaluation of the drachma in 1953, which favoured exactly those who had collected money in foreign currencies and in gold.

In this context, a debate about the direction of development efforts took place among economists, in which the development of heavy industry became a key issue (BATSIS 1947, VARVARESSOS 1952, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW vol. of 1952). However, and despite the cheap and abundant labour force, which was concentrating in cities, and in Athens in particular, few investments in manufacturing took place before 1960. The post-Civil War climate, drastic reduction of American aid after 1949, as well as an orientation of Greek capital towards tertiary activities were not favourable conditions for indigenous industrial development. In addition, local demand for manufacturing products was minimal, since the majority of urban residents did not have a proper home or adequate nutrition. The making of Greece into an industrial country did not happen therefore in this period of reconstruction - nor later, as we know, despite the recurrent policies of incentives to manufacturing. Manufacturing activity did exist, however, in small to very small firms, which gradually assumed importance, both in terms of production and in terms of employment creation. The majority of this multitude of micro-entrepreneurs, self-employed people and assisting family members were part of the defeated of the Civil War who had no access to other types of employment and were practically left to survive on their own (VAIOU, MANTOUVALOU, MAVRIDOU 1999).

Greek society was deeply divided by the hate accumulated during the Civil War and the period of cruel persecutions, which followed it. The victorious Right imposed a quasi-parliamentary regime based on an all-pervasive police state, overt oppression and systematic exclusion of the Left from every domain of social and political life. The state has been very selective in its support of social groups and promoted clientelistic relations which in practice annulled any welfare institutions (GETIMIS, GRAVARIS 1993). Thus, mechanisms of social integration worked more informally than through formal regulation and property development and housing construction assumed paramount importance. Contrary to the goals officially promoted about industrial development, relative stability after the devaluation of the drachma and the relevant legal measures opened the way for investments in property and construction. Whether this has been a conscious political choice is still an open question. But, since the early 1950s, the importance of construction in the economy in general is a recurrent theme in political debate, in Parliament as in society at large, while the sector remains strong and decisive.

Already by the end of WWII and along with debates about the economy, developments in Athens became a major issue in Greek politics, in the context of preparation of a Master Plan, which involved a number of prominent

figures of the post-war era, including K. Doxiadis who was appointed Minister of Reconstruction in 1945. While a Master Plan and smaller scale plans were being elaborated (BIRIS 1966), urban development in Athens was shaped by different forces, decisions and actions by individuals, groups and institutions, by planning and building legislation, by taxation and loan policies, by sectoral policies and decisions (concerning, for example, industrial location or tourist development), by construction or improvement of infrastructure, by geographically diverse provision of public services. All of these, often not in line with the goals put forward in the Master Plan, reduced it to a future land use picture in the target year 2000.

Severe housing deficits and lack of capital led to a desperate effort to start reconstruction with private funds and in the existing urban tissue, without adequate infrastructures or other type of planning provisions. The volume and degree of urban sprawl, which is referred to in all the debates since, can hardly be attributed to urban policy as such. It has rather to be seen in the context of (a) state tolerance of semi-squatting and (b) promotion of the «exchange in kind» mechanism (in Greek «antiparochi»). Housing needs of the masses which migrated to the city from rural areas were primarily met through semi-squatting land at each successive urban fringe, a process consolidated already in the 1920s, which became a substitute for a social housing policy. It is estimated that 560.000 people or 35% of population growth in Athens between 1945 and 1970 acquired housing in this way (MANTOUVALOU 1980). Houses were built by mutual aid, often at night, defying building and planning regulations, and stood as a basis for future improvement, extension and, eventually, intense development, once they were incorporated in the town plan.

Increasing plot exploitation became a major mechanism to amortise investments in urban projects, which led to mass reconstruction of central Athens at first and, later, of the entire city within the town plan boundary, through «exchange in kind». This is a process in which the owner of land passes it on to a developer in exchange for part of the final built volume. A relatively high coefficient of plot exploitation is thus necessary, so that both land owners and developers can draw profits. At the same time developers suppress the amount of initial capital necessary, since they do not have to invest in land and infrastructure. Tolerance and at times promotion of these processes by the state has led to further fragmentation and diffusion of urban property ownership, and amplified social divisions. At the same time it has contributed to consolidate the idea that every part of the city, and of the entire country for that matter, is a buildable plot. To the extent that such expectations were met, these processes ensured very broad social consent, even if the urban environment produced was problem-infested and raised complaints (VAIOU, MANTOUVALOU, MAVRIDOU 1999).

Such processes of land exploitation and urban development contributed to mobilise gold and monetary deposits, financed the construction of mass housing which covered the needs of urbanising population, diffused urban property also among poor groups who became rightful owners of, often more than

one, pieces of property, created jobs, gave momentum to the development of manufacturing. The multiplier effects of construction became a major push for the economy at large. Groups of urban residents from a broad range of social backgrounds profited, albeit in unequal ways, from the boom of construction and property development. This in turn contributed to a homogenisation of urban space and avoidance of «ghettoisation» of large areas (VAIOU, MANTOUVALOU, MAVRIDOU 1995). The debate about Athens concentrated, for almost 50 years, on its notorious problems (eg. traffic, lack of open spaces, pollution) - which undeniably exist and result from the patterns of urban development already discussed. There is a lack of attention, however, to the contribution of such patterns to the social integration of all those who suffered the violence of the Civil War and its aftermath. This type of urban development is probably the social cost for the abolition of the Civil War climate and the building of broad social consent in a country which was politically divided, without resources and with minimal technical infrastructure.

Awaiting the Olympics: developments and prospects

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the processes of urban development already described became consolidated, in a period of continuous and fast economic growth. As a result, an urban environment developed with a number of positive features that, at the same time, entail the problems for which Athens is notorious. Indeed, Athens was proclaimed a «national problem» already at the time of its fast growth and three goals were set towards its resolution: modernisation, decentralisation and regional development were expected to change the (crude) picture of an «over-concentrated» capital and a «ruined» countryside. The logic and rhetoric of these goals persisted during the dictatorial regime (1967-74) and throughout the 1980s, with PASOK in power, when Athens was hard hit by economic crisis, as some of the main features of post-war growth were contested (eg. reduction of foreign investment, shift of industrial specialisation towards traditional labour intensive branches which faced severe competition by low wage countries, investments based on ever smaller firms). In the new conjuncture, state policies oscillated between efforts to contain falling profits in the private sector and efforts to contain and socialise the effects of crisis.

Mass construction of housing slowed down and never reached the levels of previous decades, while fragmentation of land and property went hand in hand with fragmentation of economic activity into a very large number of very small/dwarf firms diffused in urban space. Without underestimating the importance of big firms in Athens, a considerable part of economic activity is diffused into a vast number of very small firms: 96% of firms employ less than 10 people and account for 55% of total employment. This vast sector contains quite different situations and patterns of operation: a large number of micro-firms are marginal and short-lived, a «refuge» for people who find a way to get

by; but there are also those which form part of subcontracting chains or net-
works of firms working for the local, national or international market; such
networks contribute to the dynamics of urban development and to the func-
tioning of the city as a place of production (VAIOU, HADJIMICHALIS 1997).

Some small firms are technologically advanced, flexible and dynamic, insert-
ed in particular market niches, while others use older technology and defensive
strategies to reduce production costs (VAIOU et al 1996). Some micro-firms are
completely «formal», others, however, operate informally, totally or in part, and
still others operate completely illegally. The informal part of their operation
includes undeclared activity and income; violation of labour law in terms of
payments and/or conditions of work, hiring and firing practices; avoiding social
security payments, totally or in part; non-observance of locational and envi-
ronmental regulations; and profiting from the gaps in the formal regulatory sys-
tem. Therefore informal arrangements are not a homogeneous whole either and
in any case enjoy widespread social acceptance (VAIOU, MANTOUVALOU, MAVRIDOU
1995). As a result, those who work informally, on a regular or ad hoc basis, are
not on the whole marginalised, although this not to underestimate inequalities
which exist and probably increase, also through the workings of the informal.

Diffusion of economic activity and lack of land use control, along with
hyper-exploitation of land/micro-landownership, have resulted in a patchwork
of land use which accounts for much of the liveliness and density of activity
throughout the urban area. The mix is not found only in land use, but also
among social groups, cultures and ages and it has contributed to blur the lines
of social division of urban space, thus preventing extreme cases of social seg-
regation and conflict. The north-east to south-west divide (in terms of quali-
ty of housing, availability of social and technical infrastructure, income, social
class), which appeared already in the 19th century, may be supported by a lot
of research and planning reports; but, beyond its extremes, it contains a com-
plex mix of incomes, types of housing, modes of everyday life and patterns of
consumption, which put into question arguments about segregation. With the
exception of very limited parts, the problem of revitalising dormitory housing
estates is unknown in Athens; the opposite may be the case, i.e. disentangling
a land use mix which has come to incorporate incompatible uses of urban
space, even within the same building (MALOUTAS, KARADIMITRIOU 1999). But
liveliness and density is the under-side of congestion and pollution to which
all reports and press articles refer.

Limited and in some cases controversial state involvement has led to gener-
alised individual solutions, elevating the family to a major institution which
facilitates access to housing, proliferation of informal practices and the avail-
ability of individuals for work. Its «protective net», however, entails a lot of
conditions for the help and services rendered: it perpetuates prescriptive behav-
iours and divisions of labour and power by gender and age. Expectations from
the state in all these domains have so far been limited (GETIMIS, GRAVARIS 1993)
- the underside of which is that state control over major areas of everyday life

has been weak, compared to places with a developed welfare state. Strong family involvement and weak state intervention have resulted in urban problems for which Athens is notorious, but they have left «gaps» where mechanisms of social integration could and have developed, mainly through informal arrangements of various forms and levels of significance.

These patterns of urban development are at a turning point as a result of changing conjunctures. Three developments are worth mentioning in this respect: (a) the euro zone framework; (b) the mass inflow of migrants from the Balkans and elsewhere; and (c) the preparation of the 2004 Olympics. Inclusion of the Greece to the euro zone came after a long period of austerity policies with painful effects on incomes and employment. The new context, apart from other important changes, leaves the multitude of small firms, which characterize the productive structure of the country and of Athens in particular, open to conditions of competition they probably cannot cope with - and one has witnessed many closures, particularly among the more traditional ones which relied mainly on cheap labour for their survival.

The upcoming Olympics on the other hand have contributed to the re-concentration of public investment in Athens, after a period of decentralisation, at least in public rhetoric. Preparation of the event opened room for a change in the scale and composition of urban projects, the effects of which in the city are gradually being felt and yet to be fully appreciated, both in terms of its land use patterns and property values and in terms of its social composition. An indication of such changes is the operation of large real estate firms (also inserted in the stock market) - a new actor in land development in Athens —competing among themselves for every piece of property which has escaped previous rounds of land exploitation in the metropolitan area.

The practical opening of borders with the Balkan countries, or the relative ease of crossing them after 1989, precipitated a process of in-migration, which had started already in the mid-1980s. In addition it has initiated a process of flow of Greek productive investment in the Balkans, in search for higher profits in the restructuring former socialist economies. The number of in-coming migrants is estimated between 800.000 and 1 million (7.5 to 10% of population of the country), mostly including people of working age, half of who come from Albania and 44% have settled in Athens. As a result of the processes already discussed, central neighbourhoods in Athens have never been massively abandoned by natives, even though a move to the suburbs was noted in the 1980s, by families with young children. Owners remained in top floor flats of the 6 or 7 floor apartment buildings. Middle floors have gradually been taken up by lower income families, students, private offices and other uses. In the same apartment buildings immigrants rent lower floor and basement flats, which, in many cases, had ceased to be used as residence, were sometimes used as workshops or storage areas or had remained unused.

The geography of immigrant settlement organises in and around the city centre but the scale of ethnic concentration is such that one cannot speak of

immigrant ghettos (PETRONOTI 1998, ORFANOU 2001, PSIMMENOS 1995). Immigrants' trajectories in the city and final/current installation are closely linked to the search for paid work and to the conditions of their insertion in the urban labour market, although one cannot generalise and experiences vary among ethnic groups and individual people, according to the reasons and conditions of migration. Discrimination and inequality, in the range of activities and the conditions of work and pay, are important determinants of the immigrants' condition and should not be underestimated, but informal and irregular jobs are not exclusive to them or socially unacceptable (for a similar case in southern Italy, QUASSOLI 1999). Thus an exclusive emphasis on (definitely existing) over-exploitation underestimates the fact that immigrants are not passive agents, they develop strategies of survival and actively seek to determine the terms of their settlement in the new environment (PETRONOTI 1998). Through paid work they do not only secure income, they also establish relationships with locals, come to contact with local conditions of everyday life and become acquainted with the city.

As immigrants settle and their conditions improve, they become more visible in the city. They develop patterns of everyday life and strategies of appropriating urban space which contribute to revitalise central neighbourhoods of Athens in many respects, including re-use (and in many cases repair) of old housing stock; re-population of schools; new life in local shops; recycling of second hand furniture and home equipment; intensive use of public spaces. Particularly neighbourhood squares seem to have a new life as meeting points and as places for recreation for adults and children, sometimes also for spending the night. These new uses of urban spaces and urban services - which need to be identified and studied in detail - are an important part of understanding the changing features of urban development in Athens.

The conditions in which immigrants experienced more favourable conditions and chances for insertion in the urban environment are becoming very fragile though, since the decade of mass migration coincides with attempts of the state to introduce controls, to close the «gaps and with urban projects of a new scale and size, awaiting the Olympics. Some of the attempted regulation/formalisation affects local poorer social groups as well, as historically established mechanisms tend to be disrupted. Athens is going through a period in which patterns developed in the «longue durée» are changing. The productive structure based on small firms and informal activities and employment patterns is restructuring and in part disintegrating, informal channels of social integration are disappearing, without any formal mechanisms replacing them, real estate capital is fast replacing family ventures. And the city now faces the challenges of a multiplicity of ethnic groups and cultures and the tensions of their social insertion. Whether the city will be able to maintain its «gaps», where control cannot reach and tolerance abounds, is an open question and a challenge for the future.

Greece and greater Athens population revolution

years	Area of the country (thousand km².) (thousands)	Population Greece (thousands)	Population Greater Athens	Greater Athens As % Of Greece
1853	47.5	1036	36	3.5
1870	50.2	1458	55	3.8
1889	63.6	2187	144	6.6
1907	63.2	2632	242	9.2
1928	129.2	6205	731	11.8
1940	129.2	7345	1124	15.3
1951	132.0	7633(=100)	1378(=100)	18
1961	132.0	8388(=110)	1853(=134)	22
1971	132.0	8768(=115)	2540(=184)	29
1981	132.0	9740(=128)	3027(=220)	31
1991	132.0	10264(=134)	3097(=224)	30
2001	132.0	10939(=143)	3192(=231)	29

source: NSS, census data

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