



**BRITISH COUNCIL
CITY DEBATES
13/3/2006**

**URBAN REGENERATION
IN ATHENS
AND THE BROADER
PERIPHERY OF ATTICA**

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**ΒΡΕΤΑΝΙΚΟ ΣΥΜΒΟΥΛΙΟ
ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΕΙΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΠΟΛΗ
13/3/2006**

**ΑΣΤΙΚΟΣ ΑΝΑΣΧΕΔΙΑΣΜΟΣ
ΣΤΗΝ ΑΘΗΝΑ
ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΕΥΡΥΤΕΡΗ ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑ
ΤΗΣ ΑΤΤΙΚΗΣ**

ΕΛΕΝΗ ΠΟΡΤΑΛΙΟΥ
αναπληρώτρια καθηγήτρια
Αρχιτεκτονική Σχολή
Εθνικό Μετσόβιο Πολυτεχνείο

• Cities • mouvements • Ciudades
movimientos • مدينة • mouvements
Cittá • ГРАДОВЕ • ΚΙΝΗΜΑΤΑ •
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URBAN REGENERATION

from the point of view of the public interest, the social needs and the demands of the Urban Social Movements

ΑΣΤΙΚΟΣ ΑΝΑΣΧΕΔΙΑΣΜΟΣ

από τη σκοπιά του δημοσίου συμφέροντος, των κοινωνικών αναγκών και των Αστικών Κοινωνικών Κινήματων

URBAN REGENERATION IN ATHENS AND THE BROADER PERIPHERY OF ATTICA

Athens and its broader periphery have developed through continuous extensions and have sprawled throughout the Attica basin. Spatial Planning (at regional and urban level), as a proper tool for the control of development safeguarding the city's public spaces, the natural landscape, farmland and forests, was substituted until the 1980s with limited and fragmentary regulations.

Athens' Strategic Plan (1985) and Land Use and Local Plans attempted a general regeneration of urban space – but only for new extensions of town plans – based on social infrastructure, control of land use and moderating the continuous extension of the city into the countryside. On the contrary, no policies of rehabilitation and regeneration had been enacted in existing urban districts in spite of a new law that was passed in 1997.

In the middle of the 1990s, plans for the Olympic Games intensified Attica's centralization. Sporting and other Olympic venues encouraged the expansion policy and the euphemistically-named rehabilitation (on a limited scale), namely the siting of the Olympic Poles in unbuilt areas. Nevertheless, all these areas were valuable reserves for the reconstitution of the fragmentary city or parts of natural landscape, that should have remained in their natural condition (for example the Saronic coast)

The Olympics broke with any tradition of planning on the basis of the Athens' Strategic Plan and the planning experience and thought of the 1980s, circumvented existing laws and introduced a contemporary spatial *laissez faire* by wasting public land of inestimable value and billions of euros of public money.

The Olympic Games concentrated and accelerated the enactment of contemporary neo-liberal policies with regard to space, that in the case of Athens can be summarized in the following choices: the reinforcement of the major construction capital through new large scale investment opportunities in the context of improving Athens' international role and prestige as a metropolis, as an international tourist destination and as a business interest. Our position is that the kind of regeneration that took place through the Olympic Games and which is still going on today – very recent examples are the proposed reconstruction work at the Hippodrome, Votanicos and Drapetsona – do not renew the city, do not answer its accumulated needs. On the contrary it serves property speculation, producing new socio-spatial problems and divisions.

We must emphasize that in any case, renovation and spatial regenerations are not socially neutral planning interventions. Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen in their book *Globalizing Cities: a new spatial order*, examine contemporary changes that emerge from respective regenerations, referring mainly to American and Third World cities. Finally, Marcuse and van Kempen have discovered three types of spatial changes in cities: the enforcement of spatial divisions with increasing inequality between the different parts and the walling in of each part, particular new spatial formations inside the basic divisions and a number of “soft ” places where changes have taken place (seafront, central production areas, brown fields that were previously industrial districts, central areas with offices, housing and places for recreation and tourism, extensive areas of social housing, historical buildings, public spaces and so on).

Mike Davis, as well as Neil Smith and Edward Soja pose related issues, while David Harvey, in 1978, reminded us of an old reality : *Under capitalism there is a perpetual struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of crises, at a subsequent point in time. The temporal and geographical ebb and flow of investment in the built environment can be understood only in terms of such a process.*

Of course, the Athens of the Olympic Games as well the contemporary city appears much more homogenous as to its socio-spatial fragmentation in comparison to cities that are deeply polarized according to class, race and national divisions. But at the same time it doesn't have the long tradition of many European cities with regard to public spaces, social infrastructure and collective facilities, as well as the protection of its historical heritage and natural landscape. Although Athens has a very high percentage of housing ownership (about 80%) that covers broader popular strata, it lacks public infrastructure.

Athens and the broader periphery of Attica had, long before the Olympic Games, assumed the high density or incoherent peripheries of first and second homes (a kind of conurbation), that in most cases had developed as an accumulation of private buildings without collective facilities or public spaces, in contrast to the natural geomorphology, on the ruins of its historical heritage and after extensive destruction of coasts, forests and farmland that had been preserved for centuries.

So, an effective regeneration of the broader city of Athens ought to put an end to endless extensions and to reconstitute housing areas, using all the important remaining architectural and environmental elements . Namely, regeneration ought to serve the reconstitution of a public space, the implanting of social uses, preserving and supporting green and open areas, aesthetically improving and reviving historical memory. In other words, regeneration ought to express the contemporary public and collective identity of the city.

Instead of all the above, quite different policies have been enacted. After the planning of the new international airport at Spata and the construction of the Attiki Odos, there was an extensive outward urbanization that destroyed the farmland of the Mesogheia plain, and which now extends in the opposite direction towards the Megara plain.

The amount of open green space has dramatically declined, major transportation axes have resulted in new fragmentation and divisions of the urban tissue, the use of private cars has increased and, finally, all the problems created in the past have multiplied. According to the planner Maro Evagelidou, contemporary spatial neo-liberalism has been superimposed on a preexisting traditional political populism. So, property speculation has developed at the expense of the necessary public regeneration that produces social surplus value and serves collective needs, not strong financial interests.

Athens' problems didn't cease with the end of the Olympic Games. According to law 3342/2005 the Olympic public property, namely the 16 Olympic Poles that were entirely financed with public money and built on public land, were given to Olympic Properties, a company out of public control that has already started to lease the Olympic venues to private business interests at a very low price, offering them along with the existing installations the use of the adjacent public land and the right to construct new buildings in the area.

So the difficult regeneration of the Olympic venues to be used for the city's collective functions appears to have no meaning because the venues are being given to the businessman who plan according to their own profit needs.

I'll present two different examples of the Olympic installations' regeneration.

Although all the examples are negative, I'll start with a positive exception. It is the weightlifting venue in Nikaia that is going to be converted for the use of the University of Piraeus, following protests by the citizens' of the municipality and the university community. Popular demand highlighted the importance of the university for the district and asked that the regeneration plans to fulfill four points: to maintain the continuity of the urban tissue, to safeguard the openness of the university to the community, to add open green spaces and to solve transportation problems via extending the metro to the municipality of Nikaia.

I'll now present the problematic area of the Saronic coast that should be a protected area, preserved as a natural seaside environment, and freely accessible to all the inhabitants of Attica for swimming, sport and recreation.

In spite of some positive results that resulted from protests that have gone on for years and succeeded in reducing intensive exploitation and commercialization of the area, today the Saronic coast has very few areas accessible to the public for swimming. Much of the old airport of Hellenicon, where there are several Olympic buildings, is going to be built on. Major sporting venues occupy space, spoiling its natural character, while major transportation works detract from natural environment.

In spite of all these problems and while the previous installations should have been removed and the permanent ones better linked to the surrounding municipalities, law 3342/2005 added new sporting, commercial and cultural buildings, theme parks, etc, even a zoo. Some months later the Niarchos Foundation applied to construct a home for the Greek National Opera, which could be housed in the adjacent Tae Qwon Do building), the National Library and many other cultural and commercial buildings.

The example of the Saronic coast is not the only one. In other words, the current regenerations, everywhere in Attica, are motivated by strong private interests, as opposed to public ones, through by-passing the law and intensive development.

However, I have already introduced in the approach of the regeneration in Athens, a very important factor which is not usually referred in scientific debates. I mean, the citizens' movements which are appearing every day as a decisive critical factor in regeneration from the point of view of safeguarding public space and the collective identity of the city.

Urban Social Movements have a long history that was presented by Manuel Castells in his monumental work *The City and the Grassroots*, as well as by other researchers of space and society as areas of conflict in which social dynamics are played out

The Open Spaces Watch in Athens some months ago published the Map of Urban Social Movements in the Municipality of Athens, recording a large number of everyday struggles that express vital needs, highlighting living spaces of daily life and demonstrating a collective dream for the city.

I'll take out of this Map an example of a proposed rehabilitation, that of the area around the historic Columbia recording studio which was designated as a listed building, although only a small part of the whole site.

The Columbia issue was publicised by the Citizens' Committee for the Salvation of the Factory as an historic site and for its incorporation in a broader plan of rehabilitation, which covers the Apollo football stadium, the Prompona wood and a part of the Podoniftis gully.

In the Architectural Composition course in the 9th semester of the Athens School of Architecture, we are working this year on the Rehabilitation of the Broader Columbia Area in close cooperation with the citizens' committee. Through the use of historic memory and the natural elements of the district, we aim to create an extensive public space at the meeting point of three municipalities : Athens , New Ionia, New Philadelphia.

I have already introduced the idea of Participatory Planning that, in my opinion, should be an important constant of regeneration. As is already clear, I choose the dream and the needs of the many in contrast to the profitable interests of the few, as a basic criterion for appreciating regeneration.

I' m going to finish with an example of a small intervention, a case of reusing an inactive building with an outstanding presence in the urban tissue. It is the municipal market building in Kypseli that was designated as a listed building thanks to the struggles of local residents and the Athens School of Architecture. The majority of the municipal council had no interest in opening up the building for the inhabitants, so many thousands of them met and decided to open and administer the space themselves. So this was an excellent example of regeneration, a model for self-activation and creativity, a collective answer to the isolation and alienation of urban space, a “hive” for everyday meetings for thousands of people through a variety of common activities.

Planning didn't succeed to stop the continuous extensions of the city into the countryside
Ο σχεδιασμός απέτυχε να ελέγξει τις συνεχείς επεκτάσεις της πόλης στην ύπαιθρο



Map of the Attica basin Χάρτης του Λεκανοπεδίου Αττικής



Olympic Athletic Centre of Athens
Ολυμπιακό Αθλητικό Κέντρο Αθήνας (ΟΑΚΑ)



International Broadcasting Centre in Marousi
Διεθνές Ραδιοτηλεοπτικό Κέντρο στο Μαρούσι



Ολυμπιακός Πόλος Φαληρικού Όρμου
Olympic Pole in the Phaleron Bay



**Citizens' mobilizations for the salvation
of the Phaleron coast**
**Κινητοποιήσεις πολιτών για τη σωτηρία
της παραλίας του Φαλήρου**



**Olympic Centre
of Rowing
in the historic site
of Marathon**

**Ολυμπιακό Κέντρο
Κωπηλασίας
στον Μαραθώνα**



**Social Protest against the placing
of the rowing centre in Marathon**



**Κοινωνική διαμαρτυρία κατά της χωροθέτησης
του κωπηλατοδρομίου στον Μαραθώνα**

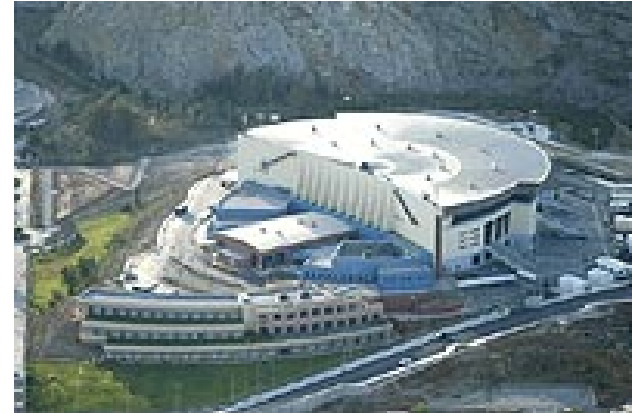




**Major transportation axes divide urban space
and detract from natural environment**

**Οι μεγάλοι οδικοί άξονες διχτομοούν τον
αστικό χώρο και τραυματίζουν το φυσικό
περιβάλλον**





Weightlifting Venue in Nikaia

Το Σπίτι της Άρσης Βαρών στη Νίκαια



Citizens demand free access to the coasts for swimming

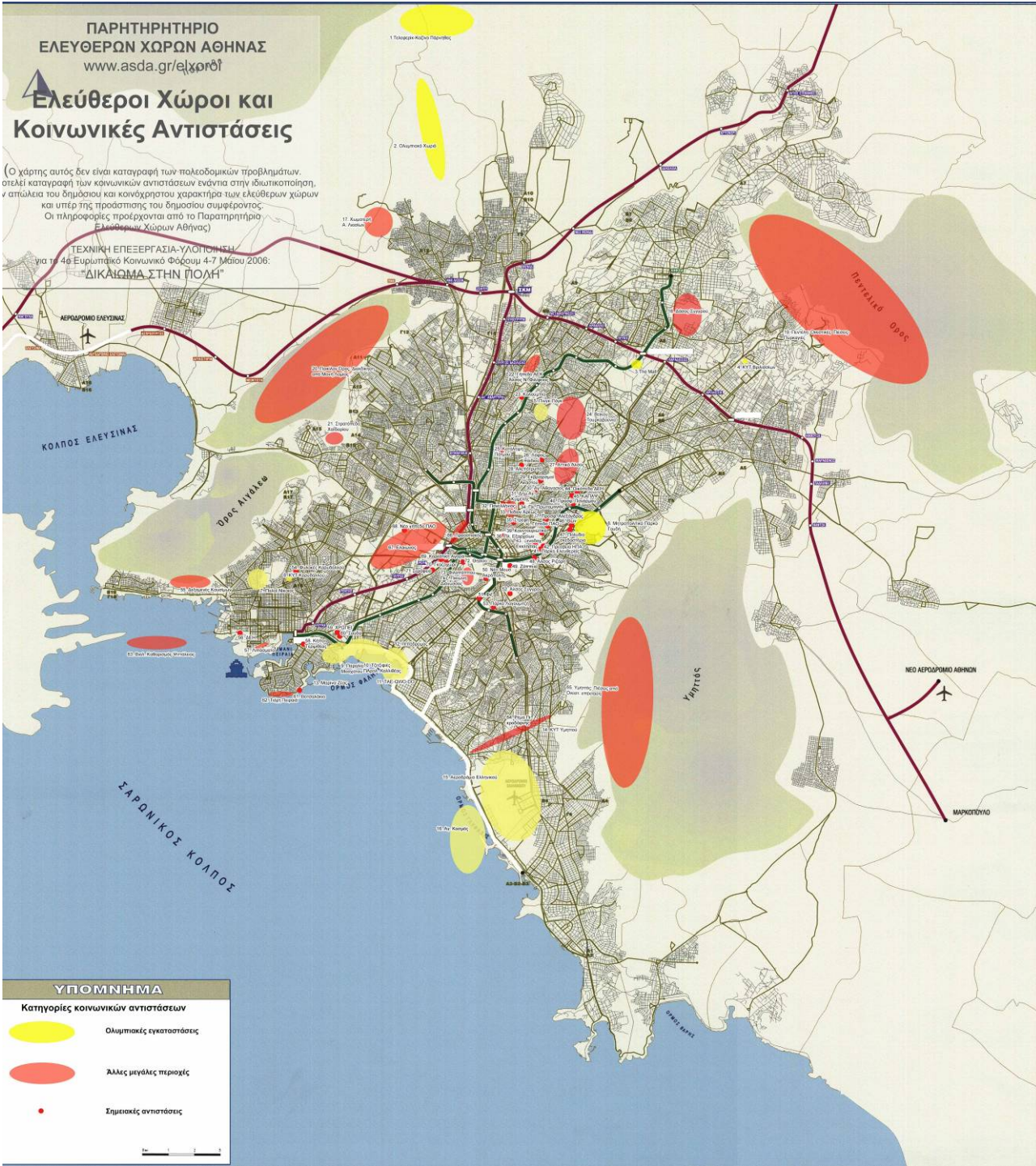


Πολίτες διεκδικούν ελεύθερη πρόσβαση στις ακτές για κολύμβηση



**Views of the
Saronic Coast**

**Όψεις της ακτής
του Σαρωνικού**



The Map of Urban Social Movements in Attica

Ο Χάρτης των Αστικών Κοινωνικών Κινήματων στην Αττική



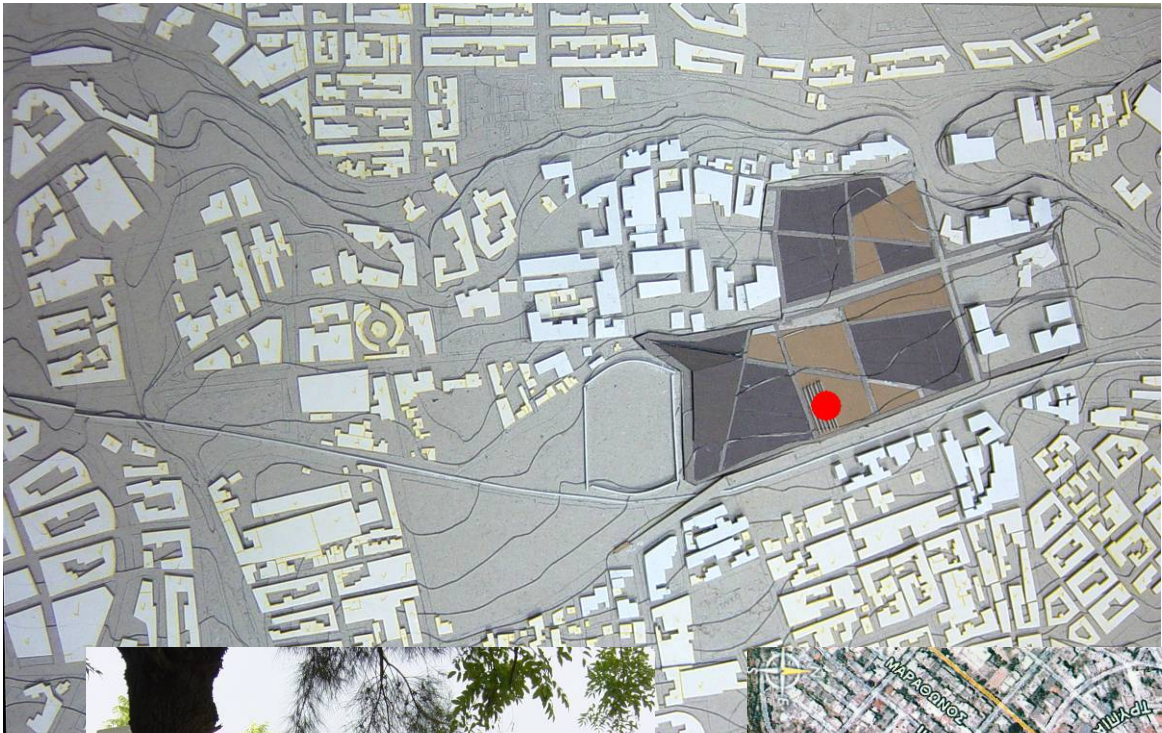
**The music factory
of Columbia...**

**Το μουσικό εργοστάσιο
παραγωγής δίσκων
της Columbia...**



**...was partially demolished
... κατεδαφίστηκε εν μέρει**





**Athens School of Architecture
Students' project on the Rehabilitation
of the Broader Columbia Area**

**Σχολή Αρχιτεκτόνων Αθήνας
Σπουδαστικό θέμα : Ανάπλαση της
ευρύτερης περιοχής της Columbia**





The Municipal Market Building in Kypseli

Η Δημοτική Αγορά της Κυψέλης



The Municipal Market Building in Kypseli is now open



Η Δημοτική Αγορά της Κυψέλης είναι τώρα ανοιχτή





**The Municipal Market Building
in Kypseli : a model for self
activation and creativity**

**Η Δημοτική Αγορά της Κυψέλης :
ένα πρότυπο αυτενέργειας
και δημιουργίας**

