

Αθήνα



ATHENS 2016

RUPS TRIP REPORT

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

The Report “Αθήνα” is a collection of impressions from the city of Athens. These impressions were constructed during the annual field trip between the 1st and 5th of April by students of MSc in Regional & Urban Planning Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The MSc Regional & Urban Planning Studies is a strongly focused and internationally based planning programme that has a long tradition in training both people seeking careers in urban and regional planning policy and mid-career professionals. Founded in 1966 by the departments of Economics, Geography and Government, the programme (now housed solely in the Department of Geography & Environment) continues a strong interdisciplinary focus challenging students to understand cities and regions from an economic, social and environmental perspective.

We thank the National Technical University of Athens, Assoc. Professors Thanos Pagonis and Penny Koutrolidou, the Municipality of Athens, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre and all those who participated in the lectures and provided us with their insight into the Greek capital.

Special thanks to the LSE Students’ Union Planning Society and its members.



THE LONDON SCHOOL
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ALYSSA CAMBELL



TSUYOSHI AIKI



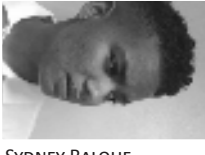
THOMAS CORBIN



PATRICK ANDINSON



JANNE CHARBONNEAU



SYDNEY BALOUE



ADELE FRASLIN



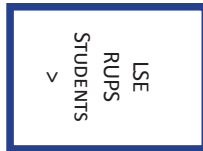
ARIADNE BASKIN



LUC GIRAUD



ALICE BEST



GABRIELLE GUIDETTI



PAULINE BOGEY



GABRIELLA AGUINAGA



FANNY BLANC



MARIA SUASNAVAS



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GEORGIOS KAPRARAS



MARTIN HABASQUE



ALESSANDRA MOSSA



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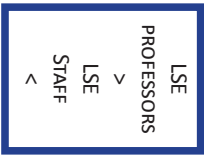
APICHAYA O-IN



ADRIEN LAFON



FARRAH HUSSAIN



SIYING WANG



KIANA OTSUKA



KUNG YIN (IAN) LO



JAVIER INIGO



DR. NANCY HOLMAN



KATHERINE WYNDHAM



DANIELLE RICCHIUTI



EMILY MARCUS



AMEER JABAREEN



DR. ALAN MACE



ZHONG XUEAN



MUSTAFA SHEHU



MFUNDO MLILO



GUILLAUME JANIN



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Introduction **Kiana Otsuka** - MSc RUPS 2

Organising Athens Trip for RUPS **Georgios Kapraras** - MSc RUPS 4

SCHEDULE OF THE TRIP

1st Day Morning **Maria Stratigaki, Eleni Mirivili** - Municipality of Athens..... 6

1st Day Evening **Penny Koutrolikou** - NTUA 8

2nd Day **Thanos Pagonis** - NTUA / **Maria Kalantzopoulou** - Cadastre and Mapping Agency 10

3rd Day **SNFCC** 12

RUPS STUDENTS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The Olympic Legacy of Athens 2004 **Gabrielle Guidetti**..... 18

The National Technical University of Athens as a Refugee Shelter **Martin Habasque**..... 20

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre **Farrah Hussain** 22

Athens - A City of Ancient Monuments and Modern Streets **Kung Yin (Ian) Lo** 24

Pedestrianization of Panepistimiou Street **Emily Marcus** 28

Past Policies in Today's Time: Home Ownership in Greece **Pauline Niesseron** 30

The Impact of the Refugee Crisis within Greek Cities: Glimpses of Housing Responses in Athens and Thessaloniki **G. Aguinaga, A. Fraslin, A. Baskin, H. Halimi, T. Kergosien, J. Charbonneau** 32

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INTRODUCTION >

**“ATHENS: BETWEEN THE ECONOMIC AND THE
REFUGEE CRISIS”
RUPS FIELD TRIP 2016**

INTRODUCTION

Kiana Otsuka

MSc Regional and Urban Planning Studies

Through the lens of its rich history and current events, Athens made for a truly interesting and engaging space to study urban planning. Reflecting on what we learned about planning in the UK and other developed countries over the course of the year, what was most surprising to myself and many of my classmates was the lack of masterplanning in Athens, or rather the ineffectiveness of the master plans produced. Perhaps, the best example of this is the way in which most of the current housing stock was built, following World War II. The small scale housing blocks were built individually by small landowners and builders to address the need for affordable housing, rather than on a grand scale. This will be further discussed in an essay included in this report. Though this type of planning is often deemed as “informal” and “unplanned”, the cityscape reflects the purposeful reactions to crisis after the Second World War, influenced cumulatively by social and familial structures, politics, and the forms and organisation of labour, whereby construction drove the revival of the economy at the time.

Athens’ Olympic regeneration, financial constraints, and influx of refugees further made it a compelling choice of location for the MSc Regional and Urban Studies, annual study trip. The ‘15-’16 cohort spent 4 days in Athens learning more about socio-spatial issues, the municipal’s

social policy program, urban resilience and sustainability, segregation and marginality of immigrant populations, land grabbing, privatization, gentrification, energy poverty, vulnerable households, homelessness and responses to housing issues, and metropolitan planning and governance.

This report is comprised of the thoughts and impressions from what was learned and experienced by students in this year’s cohort. Students delved into topics that include housing issues, Olympic regeneration, the National Technical University of Athens as a space for political expression and contestation, the pedestrianisation of Panepistimiou Street, and the mixture of ancient and modern streetscapes.

This trip would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of Planning Society President, George Kapraras. George worked tirelessly with University of Athens academic, Thanos Pagonis to plan a wonderful, educational and eye-opening trip to his home country. In addition, the Regional and Urban Planning Studies cohort would like to thank Penny Koutrolikou (NTUA), Maria Stratigaki (Vice Mayor of the Municipality of Athens and), Eleni Myrivili (Council Member of the Municipality of Athens), Sofia Avgerinou (Head of Planning Department at the University of NTUA), Maria Kalatzopoulou (National Cadastre & Mapping Agency and LSE Regional and Urban Planning Studies alumna), and all the rest of the lecturers for graciously giving their time to educate us about urban issues in Athens.

Photo by Apichaya O-In



ORGANISING THE LSE RUPS TRIP TO ATHENS

Georgios Kapraras

MSc Regional and Urban Planning Studies

Since 2010 Greece has been associated with the stigma of a failed economy. The “country in debt” was attempted to be kept alive with loans that demanded serious cuts in public spending, social benefits, pensions and wages, and the notorious “memoranda” (in Greek μνημόνιο mnimonio). This period hurt the positive image of Greece constructed during the Olympic Games of 2004, that promoted Athens as a world city, ready to receive investments, tourists, and as a world capital that joined the list of world class cities.

The crisis deeply affected Athens and Greece as the country lost more than one-third of its GDP. Housing issues, planning systems and laws changed dramatically during this period. It was hard not to isolate the students, not only because of the devastating effects of the crisis, but also because it was difficult to understand how the crisis expanded beyond the Greek capital.

However, because of the Syrian Civil war, Athens at the time was part of the Refugee Crisis. While the point of entrance into the country are the Greek Islands closest to Turkey, Athens’ port Piraeus received a large influx of refugees. In that sense, a new narrative was clear for the trip: how an urban system in economic and fiscal crisis, can respond to a refugee crisis of people in need of immediate help.

In close collaboration with the National Technical University of Athens, and especially assistant professors Penny Koutrolikou and

Thanos Pagonis, I think we managed to organise a trip that tried to expand on these issues. It was definitely not a trip to provide answers, rather to raise questions and issues of housing, planning and social policy in a different context than the typical cities of Western Europe.

I would like to thank all the RUPS students for being really interested in Athens, Penny and Thanos who managed to create a fascinating schedule of lectures with officials and researchers dealing with these issues in Athens, and of course Nancy and Alan for accompanying us on this trip and providing us with their insight.

Photo by Apichaya O-In

LAWS
EXIST
TO BE
BROKEN

DAY ONE MORNING >

DAY ONE

Maria Stratigaki

Vice Mayor of Athens for Social Solidarity, Welfare and Equality, Municipality of Athens

Maria Stratigaki is Vice Mayor of Athens for Social Solidarity, Welfare & Equality, since

September 2014. She is an Associate Professor at the Department of Social Policy of Panteion University, teaching gender, social policy and gender equality policies. She served as General Secretary in the Ministry of Interior, and in the European Commission.

In her lecture, she presented us the social agenda of the Municipality of Athens, policies trying to battle poverty, housing challenges, unemployment, and the gender pay gap. She presented us the policy instruments used in the local administration during the crisis.

Eleni Mirivili,

Urban Sustainability Portfolio, Municipality of Athens

Eleni Myrivili comes to the position of Chief Resilient Officer as an elected Councilmember in the City of Athens, currently holding the urban-sustainability portfolio. In addition, she has held elected leadership positions for several years in the Greek Green Party's Executive Leadership Committee.

She got her PhD from Columbia University (N.Y., N.Y.) in socio-cultural anthropology. She is an

Assistant Professor in the Department of Cultural Technology and Communications at the University of the Aegean, in Greece. Interested in the knowledge-society relationship, she has always been active in projects that go beyond the walls of the academy: designing multimedia museum exhibitions/applications, curating events/festivals, participating in civil society organizations.

She presented us the work that the Municipality of Athens has been doing using the platform of the 100 Resilient Cities program. Risks of social cohesion, but also climate change and earthquake vulnerability are issues that the municipality are trying to address. Facing a challenging economic policy environment, Athens wants to increase employment, manage climate change risks, and execute an urban regeneration plan.

Photo by Adele Frasin



DAY ONE EVENING >

GENTRIFICATION PATTERNS FOR THE CITY CENTRE OF ATHENS

Penny Koutrolikou

Assistant Professor, National Technical University of Athens

Considering stigmatization as a process ingrained into power relations, difference and contexts, this walk around the city centre focused on how socio-spatial stigmatization is deployed by specific social actors within a broader context of multiple stigmatization of social groups in the city of Athens.

We discussed under the the supervision of Penny Koutrolikou imposed stigmatization, whereby stigma is attributed to a group and/or a place by external (to the group) actors and further explored what can be termed as 'incorporated' stigmatization whereby socio-spatial stigma becomes the central feature around which a group is formed and/or mobilized.

We discovered the consequences of stigmatization, while raising further questions about (de)legitimization, focusing on the gentrifications patterns that were appearing in the city centre and especially the area of Metaxourgeio that were somehow brought to a halt by the crisis in the recent years.



Photo by Apichaya O-in

DAY TWO MORNING >

EVOLUTION OF ATHENS

Thanos Pagonis

Assistant Professor, National Technical University of Athens

The day was dedicated on discussing the history of the city of Athens from the first urban plan by Kleanthis and Schaubert to the Athens 2004 Olympic Games impact on the city.

Athens fascinating history as an urban settlement since the founding of the Greek state and the designation of the city as a capital was presented by Thanos Pagonis who distilled the most important parts of the city's evolution through the planning systems, historical events, the lack of housing provision by the state and the antiparohi system that dominated the Greek Planning System in the second half of the 20th century. Informal planning and small scale private development was the norm while the state acted more like a legalizer than a planner, not being able to follow the growth of the Greek economy and the increasing demands on housing.

The suburbanisation of the city in the 1980s was the result of the densification that happened in the previous years with Athens expanding further to the north and to the east. The no policy over planning era of the 90s was followed by the big infrastructure projects that made possible the "Golden Olympic Years", that were marked by increased public spending over sports venues, transportation and public realm.

The Olympic Games era was followed by the crisis which hit hard the Greek Capital and its results are large scale privatisations and taxation on property ownership.

Photo by Apichaya O-In



Photo by Adele Frasin

DAY 3 MORNING >

STAVROS NIARCHOS CULTURAL CENTRE

The final day of our field trip was dedicated on visiting the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre (SNFCC). It is a complex under construction to house various activities and organisations like the Greek National Library and the Greek National Opera.

It is a big intervention of €600 million, the first of its kind to be built in Athens and particularly in the Faliriko bay that has for long been neglected by the Athenians. A masterplan for Faliriko had been prepared but was eventually denied funding from the EU Cohesion funds. The SNFCC however was a donation of the Niarchos family to the Greek state. The SNFCC today is composed of a park and a big complex bearing the name of the shipping family.

Athens always was home of buildings erected by donors and gifted to the Greek state. The new cultural centre is no different story. However in this time of crisis its usefulness is contested and its survival as a diamond of the Greek coast is doubted. Some believe the state will not be able to maintain a state of the art building coming with a lot of spending for it's maintenance. Others think it will be the opportunity for the redevelopment of the coast of Athens to the east along with the Ellinikon Project.

Photo by Adele Fraslin



Photo by Apichaya O-in



(Photo by ...)



Photo by Adele Frasin



RUPS STUDENTS' CONTRIBUTIONS >

Photo by Adele Fras...



THE OLYMPIC LEGACY OF ATHENS 2004

Gabrielle Guidetti - MSc RUPS

Within the urban planning conversation in Athens there is a before and an after the 2004

Olympic Games; the same way that in Greece there is a before and an after the crisis for just about every other topic of discussion. As is the case for many other mega event host cities, the Olympic Games have not only structured Athens' urban environment, but have also structured the conversation on urban planning in Greece. For many, this is precisely the purpose of hosting such a huge event: the pressure of both the deadline and the global media attention brought by the Olympic Games allows the streamlining of major infrastructure projects. For others, it is a threat and disrupting factor to the integrity of the planning system, as the projects discretely rid themselves of the burden of public participation in the name of the Games.

Whatever our opinion on the benefits of hosting mega events such as the Olympic Games, the impact on the built environment is undeniable. However, the long-term legacy of such events is much more prone to debate and controversy, an uncertainty which was exacerbated in Athens by the onset of the economic crisis and its devastating effects on the country's economic and social structure.

As one of our lecturers explained to us, the Greek planning system is unable to implement large-scale projects, but has developed an expertise in managing small ad hoc and flexible projects. With this statement as a starting point, the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens were regarded, both within the country and abroad, as very successful. What is undeniable in the

case of Athens is the unanimous agreement that the Olympic Games successfully spurred much needed urban infrastructure improvements, especially in terms of transportation. Not only did the mega event promote Greece as a developed country that can successfully carry out difficult undertakings, it also would provide the stimulus to engage in wider urban transformation at the metropolitan scale.

However, the success of the games themselves did not automatically translate into significant positive economic impact in the long-run. The extent to which the games produced a long-term legacy in terms of its economic impact is prone to debate, but is generally argued that the impact is smaller than it could have been. Two factors can explain the weaker economic impact. First, a significant part of the sports installations were abandoned and dilapidated following the end of the games. Second, while the games helped improve the image of the country abroad, that boost faded after the start of the economic crisis and the associated negative publicity Greece received. . Though there was an immediate positive impact on tourism after the games, this did not last beyond the crisis.

We cannot say that the Athens Olympics met success on the level of the Barcelona 1992 summer Olympics, the archetypical symbol of a successful mega event led urban transformation, but they did achieve one great success: they proved that large-scale infrastructural projects were possible in Athens and that the administration has the capacity to undertake such projects. However, in terms of urban planning, their effect on the stated objective to limit urban sprawl and focus on the city centre might have been counterproductive.

Photo by Apichaya O-In



ARTS

THE NATIONAL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS AS A REFUGEE SHELTER

Martin Habasque - MSc RUPS

Most presentations took place in the School of Architecture of the National Technical

University of Athens (NTUA). The campus has long constituted a space for political expression and contestation. Most walls are covered with activist graffiti and paintings. Walking around NTUA's halls and courtyards is an intense intellectual experience. Wandering makes you think. You are constantly facing provocative questions and calls for actions against social injustice and political domination. It seems difficult to attend classes and study at the library without engaging in real world affairs. We are far away from our usual impersonal top-university environment. Politics are deeply engrained in the school's culture and the daily life of its members. It goes way beyond mural expressions.

The 1973 student protest against the military junta was a major event in NTUA's history. During the so-called 'Polytechnion Uprising', demonstrators barricaded themselves in the buildings and received wide popular support against the Regime of the Colonels. Authorities responded with guns and army tanks. The toll was tragic. Several protestors were killed, many were injured, and others were arrested. Following the fall of the junta, the newly elected government reacted by issuing a decree banning the police from entering the NTUA campus.

The rule still holds today. We experienced it. A few weeks before we arrived, a militant group working with migrants settled an unofficial

camp in a NTUA building that was not being used at that time. Roughly two hundred people were living within the campus, mostly Syrian families. Living conditions are tough. There are no bathrooms or kitchens in the academic facilities. But at least the police cannot intervene, as it is within the campus. Though we were not allowed to visit the inside of the building, we got a chance to be in touch with its temporary inhabitants. Some of us played football with the young people in the main courtyard of the School. I had a fairly long talk with Armin, a 23-year-old Afghan. His personal journey left me speechless. He has a BA in economics from Kabul University. He worked for two years for a small bank granting micro-credits to support local economic development. He had planned to pursue further studies in this field. However, a few months before we met, the Taliban harassed him about getting loans to fund their weaponry. As the bank refused, he received death threats. His family sold their house and moved to another area of Kabul. With part of the money they made from the selling their home, Armin left with his younger sister to reach Europe. They saw no future in such an unsafe environment. His goal is to reach Germany and apply for postgraduate programs. Since he quit his job, the Taliban has murdered one of his colleagues and badly injured his former boss.

Armin and I are the same age. We have similar dreams for our lives. We were talking together in the same courtyard, laughing at the same jokes. But the distance between us is huge. About the size of a EU passport.

Photo by Adele Frasin



THE S. NIARCHOS FOUNDATION CULTURAL CENTRE

Farrah Hussain - MSc RUPS

“What I really do in life is sailing,” says the 78-year-old Genoese architect, standing on the roof of his latest project, a cultural complex that cost almost €600m. The complex combines Greece’s new national library and opera house in one gargantuan artificial hillside, topped with the thinnest concrete roof the world has ever seen. “The ingredients are the same in architecture: light and air and breeze.”

A care free structure? I don’t personally sail but I imagine it is like being able to take your sorrows away with you! This is not the case with this civic building, as the challenges it now faces are rather more weighty. As Greece’s culture ministry budget was slashed by half since 2010, it is a fraught time to be unveiling one of the biggest cultural projects of the century – especially one that will require state led upkeep and maintenance.

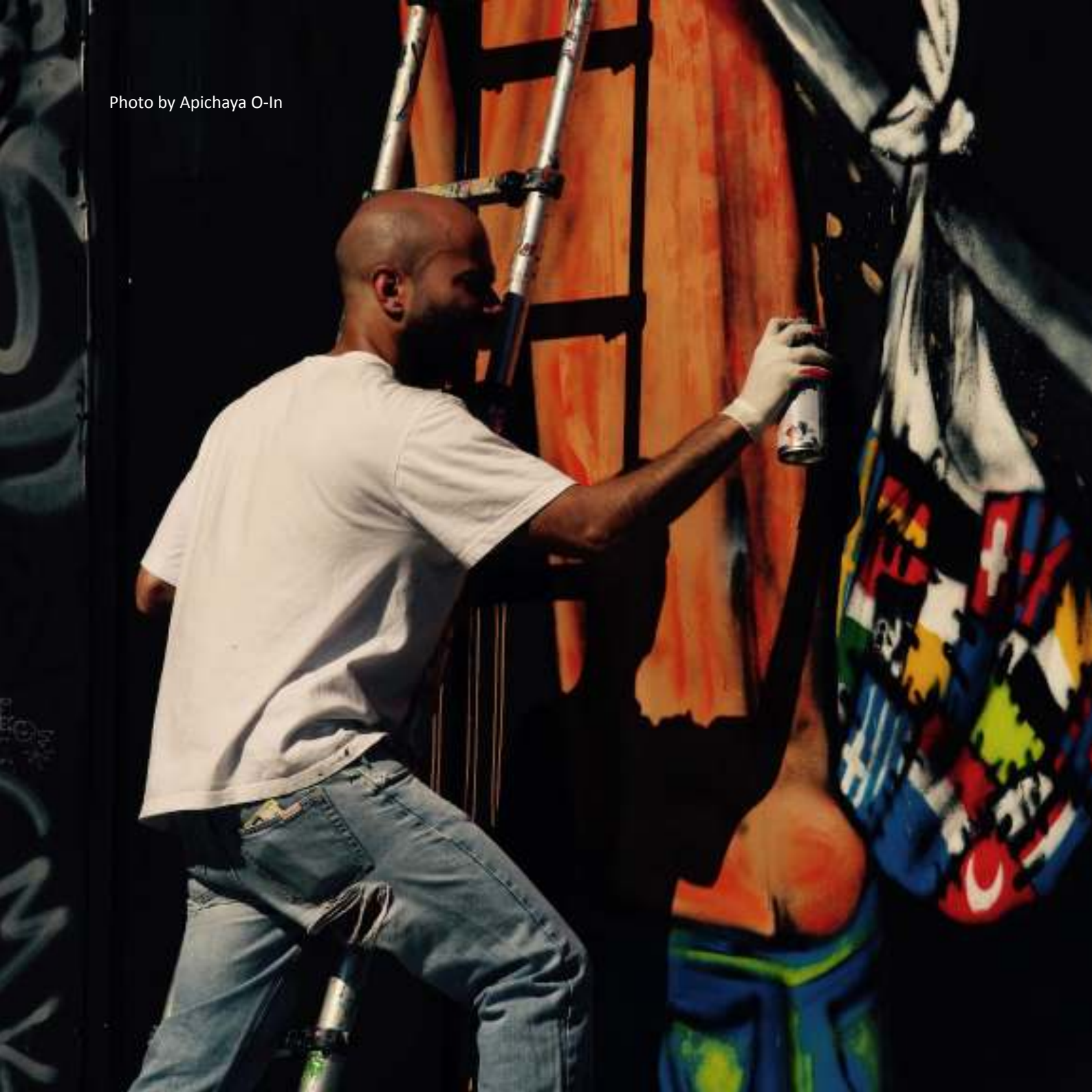
“Making a good building is an important civic gesture. It makes you believe in a better world” – says Renzo Piano. First planned in 2007, the complex is now being gifted to the state at a time when many other museums and cultural institutions are closing their doors.

“We might have had the agora, but we lost our tradition of public space in Greece long ago,” says one visitor. “This will be a fantastic new place for the city, if we can afford to maintain it.” The question remains can a struggling public maintain this new Athens civic quarter?

This is the first time the power of design and architecture did not live up to its merits; across the highway, reached by a land bridge, lie the poignant relics of a time when the regenerative power and promise; the ruins of the 2004 Olympic Games.

Perhaps I being a pessimist (or a realist) – Dracopoulos (spokesperson for the Stavros Niarchos Foundation) is adamant this will not be the legacy of his foundation’s gift. “Look at the buildings built during the Great Depression in the US,” he says, referring to the Empire State building and the Chrysler building among others. “We have built the cultural centre, but now it is the obligation of the state to run it. If a country can’t run a national library and an opera – the basic pillars of a nation’s culture – then we might as well lock everything up and jump into the Mediterranean.”

Photo by Apichaya O-In



ATHENS – A CITY OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS AND MODERN STREETS

Kung Yin (Ian) Lo - MSc RUPS

Without needing any introduction, Athens is often known to be one of the most important cities in ancient times, with almost 3½ millennia of continued inhabitation. However, during my visit to Athens, I realised how modern many parts of the city actually are. Needless to say, Athens is home to numerous ancient monuments such as the Acropolis, Agora, Theatre of Herodes Atticus, Arch of Hadrian and Panathenaic Stadium. However, these monuments which were once important buildings in ancient Greek society have now been relegated to tourist attractions, and many of the functional buildings and infrastructure in today's Athens were built within the past two or three centuries.



Figure 1: Map of Athens' urban triangle (Source: Google Maps)

Athens' streets are generally well-organised and regular, and consists largely of grids and diagonal boulevards planned in the early 19th century, which is evidently a result of relatively modern urban planning instead of organic, uncontrolled urban growth. While parts of central Athens such as Psiri are made up of irregular street patterns (the centre of Figure 1), most other parts of central Athens are defined by an "urban triangle" and a "monumental axis" (Figure 1) (Roubien, 2013: 225) that resulted from an urban plan designed by the Greek architect

Stamatios Kleanthis and the Prussian architect Eduard Schaubert in 1832 (McGregor, 2014) – a relatively modern intervention in Athens' cityscape considering that Athens' has existed for 3,400 years. The urban triangle is north of the Acropolis, and is formed by the boulevards Stadiou in the east, and P. Tsaldari in the west (Figure 1), which eventually runs in a southwest direction to the adjacent port city of Piraeus.



Figure 2: Athens' monumental axis at the end of the 19th century, shown as a black line. (Roubien, 2013)

The monumental axis (Figure 2) runs east of the Acropolis, and connects most of Athens' ancient monuments (shown as numbers in Figure 2). Roubien (2013: 227) argued that the creation of these boulevards and axes is rooted in the desire to transform Athens from a "provincial Ottoman town" to a "modern European capital" during the accession of the King Otto of Bavaria to the Greek throne in 1832 while taking advantage of the presence of its numerous ancient monuments to create a unique, new city.

The redrawing of Athens' street patterns over an existing Ottoman village is reminiscent of Baron Haussmann's large-scale realignment of Paris' chaotic streets in the late 19th century. Both were essentially projects that aimed to modernise the respective cities by eradicating their undesirable elements, and to lay regular, long and straight streets and boulevards over the existing urban fabric to link up and accentuate the many important monuments. In Paris, overcrowded and unhealthy

Photo by Apichaya O-In



medieval neighbourhoods were razed, while in Athens, the need to construct a new Greek state, physically and metaphorically, necessitated the symbolic and actual destruction of the omnipresent Ottoman other, and therefore was the basis of the removal of many Ottoman-era houses to make place for wide boulevards (Roubien, 2013) and imposing neo-Classical buildings like the Old Royal Palace which houses the Greek Parliament.

These wide boulevards and large squares have been the sites of many protests, such as the 2010 anti-austerity protests along Stadiou Boulevard and in Syntagma Square outside the Greek Parliament. During our stint in Athens, along the same boulevard we witnessed at least one political protest – perhaps in their quest for modernity in the early 19th century the architects foresaw how the wide boulevards could facilitate protests. As we walked along the wide boulevards and grid-patterned back streets of central Athens, it was apparent that apart from the ancient monuments, many of the normal, everyday buildings in the city were built in the 19th or 20th century, giving the impression that Athens is essentially a modern urban project with a monumental axis dotted with numerous ancient monuments (i.e. tourist attractions) which are now, perhaps more than before, an increasingly important source of income during Greece's ongoing economic crisis.

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Photo by Adele Frasin



PEDESTRIANIZATION OF PANEPISTIMIOU STREET

Emily Marcus - MSc RUPS

Progressive cities all around the world are focusing on alternative transportation methods. Governments are recognizing the multiple benefits that increased pedestrian and cyclist activity, in lieu of motorized transport, can bring to their cities. Reduced traffic congestion, reduced air pollution, improved traffic safety and increased health benefits from physical activity are amongst the most commonly cited. Increased pedestrian activity can generate economic benefits as well- pedestrians are more likely than drivers to pop into local shops that catch their eye because there is no hassle of finding a parking spot. Thus, there is definitely significant value that can be captured through investment in pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. Some cities have taken it a step further by fully pedestrianizing certain streets or portions of streets. With that being said, however, the full consequences of altering the local transportation system must be understood before any changes are made.

On our trip to Athens, we were introduced to an interesting conflict regarding the proposed pedestrianization of a central thoroughfare. Re-Think Athens, an organization sponsored by the Onassis Foundation, has been working for a number of years to remove automobile traffic from Panepistimiou Street in order to create a pedestrian and cyclist haven. This is a central part of its larger effort to revitalize the city center and increase both its future economic and environmental sustainability. Panepistimiou Street is a busy six-lane road running through the heart of the capital. Home to a number of iconic buildings including the Bank of Greece, the University of Athens, the Academy of Athens, the National Library, the Numismatic Museum and the Catholic Cathedral of Athens among others, Panepistimiou Street holds special importance in Athens. The Re-Think Athens

plan seeks to divert private vehicular traffic to the parallel streets and in its place initiate an “operational and environmental rebirth” of Panepistimiou through a complete re-streetscape. The goal is to maximize pedestrian activity and create a lively neighborhood throughout both the daytime and evening hours, reigniting interest in residential development and strengthening “commercial, entrepreneurial and tourist activity in the wider area”. Additionally, a new tramline would run down Panepistimiou, connecting the street to key locations throughout Athens.

The project looks promising from the surface. Upon further examination it has actually been quite controversial. First there are concerns regarding the project’s impact on city-wide traffic. Panepistimiou is an arterial road; pedestrianizing it would increase traffic on all surrounding roads and thus increase city-wide congestion. Additionally, there are concerns over equity. Since Athenian society is very car-centric and most residents get around by automobile, many have questioned ‘who’ this large scale redevelopment is actually intended for. Lastly, projections estimate a public cost of nearly 200 million euros. Unfortunately, this project has been criticized as outrageously unaffordable- the Greek government is experiencing a serious multi-year budget crisis. Supporters justify the steep pricetag by highlighting the expected benefits of reduced air pollution, improved connectivity, increased retail activity, and overall increased quality of life. However, the High Courts seem to agree with the critics. In 2014 the European Commission officially declined to provide funding for the Panepistimiou Street project, and in 2015 the highest administrative court in Greece rejected the project as well. The Panepistimiou Street project is interesting because it demonstrates the complexity of large-scale planning decisions. In this case, most would agree that increased pedestrian activity will foster certain benefits. However, there is significant disagreement over the extent of the costs to the project. Thus, even when an issue is seemingly noncontroversial, there will always be strong opposition.

Photo by Apichaya O-In



PAST POLICIES IN TODAY'S TIME: HOME OWNERSHIP IN GREECE.

Pauline Niesserou
MSc RUPS

Athens has a rather singular experience with informal housing, self-constructed houses and home ownership. After World War II and the Greek Civil War, thousands of people left the countryside and moved into Athens. The post-war urbanisation wave was part of a wider process of shifting from a prevailing agrarian economy towards an urban-industrial economy. The intense urbanisation was accompanied by acute housing needs in Athens and other cities. The Greek state did not, as was done in many European countries, construct large estates to deal with their housing needs because of financial constraints and the lack of state housing policy. On the contrary, housing in Athens became a private initiative and a bottom-up practice of self-building, nonetheless facilitated by the state.

One of the ways that the housing shortage was dealt with was through selling land property in exchange for flats. Indeed, small landowners could sell their property rights to developers in exchange for a negotiated number of flats in a future building that will be built on the land exchanged (referred to as antiparochi system). Athenians then, were the owners, producers, and consumers of space. The system fostered a vertical social differentiation with lower income people living at the bottom of the building and the wealthy people at the top of the building, (this means higher level and sunnier apartments).

Simultaneously, in order to further assist urbanization, parcelling of peri-urban land was tacitly authorised by the government which resulted in high levels of self-constructed housing on small, parcelled plots, often not within the city limits and in non-planned areas. These self-build houses were

usually constructed without legal authorisation by the owner of the land. Yet, in the 1980s, land-use plans were created in informally built peri-urban settlements to limit urban expansion. Informally developed settlements were consequently formalised by the state, through incorporation into planned Settlement Control Zones.

Post-war policies then focused greatly on micro-ownership (perhaps because of the influence of communism, as it was considered to attach a dweller to its land) and the legalisation of informal settlements. The logic behind this was to give a minimum security to people when the state wasn't giving much. As such, the state met increasing housing needs without developing an important welfare programme. The result of these policies is still observed today, as home ownership is very high in Greece, with a rate of 74% in 2014 (Eurostat), one of the highest in Europe. Thus, these policies fostered a high home ownership rate among Athenians and allowed rural migrants to become urban citizens.

Interestingly, during the crisis high home ownership in Greece has acted as a safety net for families, with many young people having to move back to their parents' houses. Yet, a new property tax was imposed in 2011 on built properties, which clearly raises redistributive concerns as in many cases, home ownership is not synonymous with wealth or upper-middle class status. In addition, the 2008 crisis has also made private ownership unsafe, as the value of properties have decreased. Property was once considered to be a safe investment for Greek families aiming to secure an apartment for the family's future generations. However, it is highly questionable if in this post-crisis landscape, property will continue to be dealt with as a sacred institution in Greek society, or if loan agreements will align the housing conditions with current western European norms.

Figure 1: Idomeni Rail Station
Photo by Ariadne Baskin



THE IMPACT OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS WITHIN GREEK CITIES: GLIMPSES OF HOUSING RESPONSES IN ATHENS AND THESSALONIKI

Gabriela Aguinaga, Adele Frasin, Ariadne Baskin, Hugo Halimi, Tifenn Kergosien, Jeanne Charbonneau

MSc RUPS

Within the current EU “refugee crisis” there is a growing acknowledgment of the crucial role that cities play as main points of arrival, transit hubs, and ultimate destinations. In this context, Greek cities have been a crucial point of arrival for refugees fleeing current conflicts from countries in the Middle East such as Syria or Afghanistan. In fact, 85% of the refugees fleeing into Europe since the start of the refugee crisis have arrived in Athens or Thessaloniki (by way of Lesbos and other Greek islands) on their way to central Europe through the Balkans route (The Guardian, 2016).

From a city planning perspective, the refugee crisis poses serious challenges especially regarding the housing and shelter response. There is a growing consensus concerning the idea that large temporary camps can have extremely detrimental effects by turning into permanent and segregated entities (Earle, 2016). Therefore, refugee housing responses should propose models that not only foster the integration of refugees but facilitate cultural interaction and a peaceful coexistence with existing communities (Eurocities, 2016).

However, this proves no easy task considering the emergency situation that requires a fast response for a large amount of people and entails the difficulty of finding enough vacant and affordable space within the city structure.

This has moreover put tremendous pressure on Greek cities that are already experiencing difficulties to deliver infrastructure and social services due to the financial crisis and municipal budget cuts and have to respond to a large increase on the demand for housing, education and labour.

One of the results of a lack of municipal capacity has been the emergence of informal refugee camps across Greece. One example is the refugee camp that emerged in the port of Piraeus in Athens where up to 5000 people (The Guardian, 2016) were staying in informal tents. This was partly due to a lack of space within the official camps in Greece but also resultant of a fear of getting stuck in Greece as well as being deported to Turkey. A similar dynamic happened in Idomeni, another informal camp on the border to Macedonia, one hour away from Thessaloniki. This settlement constituted the largest informal refugee camp within the EU and agglomerated up to 12000 refugees (UNHCR, 2016).

However, the official settlement response also shows the difficulty of delivering an adequate shelter response. Most of official temporary shelters constitute camps, warehouses or military barracks, with reportedly poor living conditions that are normally located in remote areas outside city centres. For instance, Diavata camp, a military managed settlement that hosts up until 2300 refugees, constitutes a settlement of tents with poor living conditions that is located approximately 1 hour away from Thessaloniki and is completely fenced.

This approach does not follow the recommendations from practitioners including a recent report from EuroCities, which states as a crucial aspect of city’s refugee responses to



Figure 2: Boxes with Donations
Photo by Adele Frasin

avoid segregation by providing individual and decentralised housing units across the city in order to ultimately foster long-term integration (Eurocities, 2016). In this regard, an interesting project has been put in place in the city of Athens. The project which is supported by UNHCR, plans to accommodate 20.000 refugees within existing private apartments using the large amount of vacant space within the city and creating socially mixed communities (Developathens, 2016).

Nevertheless, these policies can also incur into increasing social tension if it leads to a provision of services over the host community that may be suffering from existing lack of affordable and social housing. In this regard, as Urbact states “cities with good housing policies in place might find easier to adapt” (Urbact, 2016). This relates to a city’s resiliency and is connected to other structural problems such as the lack of municipal funding and the lack of decision power by cities (The Guardian, 2016). Concurrently as the report of Eurocity suggests cities in Europe should be able to access EU emergency financial schemes directly (The Guardian, 2016) in order to facilitate a more decentralised, flexible and innovative shelter response.

This article is based on the experience of six RUPS students (Adele Fraslin, Hugo Halimi, Jeanne de Charbonneau, Ari Baskin, Tifenn Kergosien and Gabriela Aguinaga) who spent 10 days in Thessaloniki volunteering for the organization Oikopolis which supported the supply of basic needs and services in different camps around the northern port city. Oikoplis is a Greek organization working on a completely volunteering basis.

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