

The Seaport of Athens: Planning and Urban Space

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The focus point of this paper is the examination of the role that the planning procedure - including all the relevant parameters- on the culture of the modern seaport of Athens -Piraeus- as it reflects on the urban space mainly during its great development in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with emphasis on the relation between the port and the city.

Modern Piraeus first plan -elaborated in 1834 by the architects Kleanthis and Schaubert, both Schinkel's students- is based on the neoclassical principles and the hippodamian street layout model in the sense of a maritime-commercial urban shell. The land policy failure and the unstable finance situation were the main reasons of many revisions during the first plan implementation, with significant transformations of the land uses lay-out, the building plot sizes and the building heights/street widths proportions.

The city became a remarkable regional centre until 1900; its functions were determined by the explosion of the secondary sector and the maritime/transport infrastructure; its space aesthetic was moulded by a multifaceted architectural identity, in association with the parameter of the geomorphology; the organised open spaces and the archaeological finds completed the overall picture.

After 1920, the socio-economic changes, the historical junctures and the lack of planning policy were among the decisive factors with an important impact on the uncontrolled expansion of the urban tissue, the built environment/public space shape and the relation between the seafront and the city centre.

Nowadays, although the disaster of the historic signs was continuous -especially after 1970-, a great part of the cultural heritage is preserved.

In the perspective of the 2004 Olympic Games, Piraeus is in the dynamic of a new transformation procedure: the construction of high speed ring roads and the tram and suburb railway lines, the upgrade of the harbour infrastructure -including the new Olympic Hospitality facilities-, and the enhancement of the local identity to some extent are in progress.

Will the traditional urban tissue absorb the surcharges? Will the projection of the urban culture possible?

We will be able to give documented answers "the day after".

Apart from that, the same questions draw some interesting parallels between the past and the present, concerning the questionable degree of the city culture dependence on the planning model or on the urban planning management and the preservation policy.

The focus point of this paper is the examination of the role that the planning procedure - including all the relevant parameters- on the culture of the modern seaport of Athens -Piraeus- as it reflects on the urban space mainly during its great development in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with emphasis on the relation between the port and the city. The ulterior interesting side for discuss could be the possible drawing of a parallel between the past and the present, when Piraeus -and especially the harbour- is in the progress of large scale interventions due to the 2004 Olympics.

The prosperity of Piraeus in the Classical era¹ was followed by a long period of decline and disasters, the most decisive of which was its burning by Sylla in 87BC. After a small scale regeneration during the rest of the Roman occupation, every sign of life disappeared after the Goths attack in 395. Arabs, Franks, Venetians and Turks were the subsequent conquerors. By the end of the 12th century, the destroyed city's three harbours lost all importance. Early 19th century travellers used Piraeus as a stopping place on their way to Akropolis-Athens and describe it as almost deserted.

The order to establish the new city of Piraeus -in 1833- was linked with the decision to transfer the capital of the Hellenic State² to Athens. The revival of this maritime nodal point was rendered imperative by the lack of a road network on the mainland and by its key geographical position and leeward harbours –an advantage which has made the classical city so affluent.

Furthermore, the planning of the harbour was part of the more general efforts of the central government -both Hellenic and Bavarian- to rebuild Greece³, including the creation of new settlements, which is connected with the endeavour to reinforce the concentration of urban population and activities in the areas designated for development⁴ (Kafkoulas-Papamihos-Hastaoglou, 1990). In the case of Piraeus, the state focused its efforts on creating the favourable conditions and legislating for incentives to attract settlers, from Chios island initially, and from Hydra island later on⁵.

Modern Piraeus first plan -elaborated in 1834 by the architects Kleantes and Schaubert, both Schinkel's students- is based on the hippodamian street layout model⁶. The plan, which is developed at the eastern and western sides of the Athens-Piraeus road -existing from the Antiquity- in a symmetric way around the main port, has an obvious orientation towards the sea and it is strictly geometric⁷.

The two architects designed a regional town based on the neoclassical principles⁸, with significant open spaces and broad tree-lined avenues, enough space for large ground-plots, public buildings in the axes, enlarged main crossings through the cutting-off of the building plot angles, and they essentially permitted its expansion only toward the capital city and northwestwards (Malikouti, 2000: 139). It is worth devoting detailed investigation to the fact that their design is identical -with some small deviation (Eickstedt, 1991)- to the most likely conjectural plan for the Classical city, although the informations on the ancient topography were not available during the plan elaboration (Papageorgiou-Venetas, 1999).

The functional structure of the city was proposed in the sense of a maritime-commercial urban shell with the prospect of the organisation of self-reliant quarters for the settlers from Chios and Hydra, as well as for the immigrants from various places inside or outside the boundaries of the Hellenic State. The "right side" was devoted to the Chios community and included virtually all the central functions of the city. The Hydriots' quarter was planned as an expansion of the Chiot's one in the southeast.

At the same time the existing antiquities were preserved. The first elements of the city heritage were already present: the Hellenistic Theatre at Zea, the Tomb of Themistocles, the quarries in Piraiiki, parts of the Long Walls and the fortress of Kastella.

The land policy failure⁹ and the unstable finance situation were the main reasons of many revisions during the plan implementation in the first decades (Malikouti, 1996). Among them:

- The efforts to create self-reliant quarters came to naught.
- The building plots were divided by two in 1836, with visible results in the building heights/street widths proportions.
- The enlargement of the crossings in the east side of the city was cancelled.
- The place of several land uses changed¹⁰.

After property ownership had been derestricted, groups of people from various places came and settled in the area. A great percentage of the diverse population was temporary during the first decades. The influx of refugees from areas still under foreign rule, the annexation of new territories and the return of Greeks from abroad, as well as the economic development of the city -due to the special attention paid to export products, the favourable international situation of the greek merchant navy, the investment of the commercial capitals in the secondary production and the expansion of both the domestic and the foreign markets after the Athens-Piraeus railway line operating in 1869- produced a population explosion after the mid-1860s.

Railway links with the Peloponnese and northern Greece, as also the construction of the Corinth Canal, put Piraeus in first place between the Greek harbours from the end of the 19th century onwards¹¹. After 1890, the fast pace of urbanisation, together with the specific conditions created by the industrial development of the port -with the concomitant massing of workers-, were the main factors in the constant, rapid increase of permanent residents, even at times when other Hellenic urban centres were declining or remaining stable¹².

The effects of the spectacular development¹³ became apparent in the organisation and the form of the urban space:

- The city plan expanded to all possible directions, legally or not, following the geometric lay-out of rectangular building plots irrelevant to the geomorphology¹⁴. By the beginning of the 20th century, the entire urban area and the suburbs -Freattyda, Kastella and Neo Phaliro- had been planned and the industrial zone¹⁵ had been developed. The urban land became an object favourable for speculation then; "its market value expressed its only value" (Mumford, 1991: 482)¹⁶.

- The land uses layout was related with the intensive infrastructure works directly. As the places of the infrastructure installations and equipment were not the proceeds of a planning project, they "produced new limits" for the city. The railway stations and lines divided the urban centre from the industrial zone and the workers neighbourhoods. On the other hand, the raise of the tertiary sector was excessive around the harbour zone.

- The building activity had been changed in the tempo and focus¹⁷.

By the beginning of the 20th century, although it was undeniably equal to the demands of its original role as the commercial "satellite" of the capital, the seaport of Athens evolved at the same time into a self-reliant and remarkable regional centre aligned with the European principles, thanks not only to its economic development, but also to its enterprising local authorities and the strong and creative "local" consciousness developed by its mixed population. The city had a complete transport infrastructure, considerably improved harbour facilities, a generally adequate water supply, a clearly delineated sector of economic activity, a large industrial zone, extensive residential areas, picturesque suburbs, a lot of urban facilities

and public amenities, and a lively social and cultural life. Its urban culture was moulded then.

The morphology of the urban shell was early defined by the regularity of the rectangular street layout, the "constant" point reference of the Athens-Piraeus road and the coastal lines. The city physiognomy was determined by a multifaceted architectural identity and a distinctive urban aesthetic, which consisted mainly in the co-existence of the various building categories¹⁸ and their position in the urban tissue related with axes and perspectives, in association with the parameter of the geomorphology. Especially, a number of public buildings were the strong signs of Piraeus: the Municipal Theatre and the High School in the administrative city centre; the Municipal Market, the Custom House, the Stock Exchange -used as Town Hall-, three railway stations and three churches in the harbour zone.

In addition, among the building potential we must include the maritime and transport installations which played an important role in the urban landscape; the organised and equipped in details open spaces and the archaeological finds completed the overall picture.

The urban culture could be examined as an entity then, although the expansions of the city plan, always aligned with the gridiron model, were not the result of a special design but they were dictated by accomplished needs or by the urban sprawl; although they reflect of the highly stratified society was clear on the private building quality and size. The "spirit" of the Neoclassicism and the bourgeoisie manners and customs were the catalysts, together with an obvious tendency towards the imitation and the exceeding of the Athenian principles and examples¹⁹. The visitors could recognize the city from the maritime front, which was an organic part of the whole.

After 1920, the socio-economic changes²⁰, the unstable political situation, the various historical junctures and the lack of planning policy were among the decisive factors with an important impact on the intense urbanisation²¹, the suburbs uncontrolled expansion²², the transformation of the social structure and the definite separation of the city centre from the port functions and the periphery, including the industrial zone. Besides, the planning and the construction of the new maritime infrastructure regardless of the town development led to the first deterioration signs of the seafront features in late 1930s.

The harbour zone -and consecutively the wider area- had been transformed from an attractive residence, entertainment and working place to a pole of population evacuation. In addition, if the interesting variety of a dynamic city was reflected in the urban environment before 1922, on the eve of the 2nd World War the irreversible contrasts in the social, economic, political and cultural level were simply certified through the space shape, and new limits and gaps were finalized relevant to the city culture in transformation.

A great part of the building potential was destroyed during the 2nd World War, when the harbour installations were bombed. For all that, the local identity -considered as the composition of the relations and the analogies of the traditional space features and enriched with remarkable examples of the Mid-war architecture- was readable and perceptible until the 1970s²³. Since then and continuously for 20 years, the space identity suffered a heavy blow due to the building craze. The skyline harmony breaking off on the one hand, and on the other the destroy of many significant buildings -private and public- and other local features had a negative impact on both, the city "legibility" and the relation between the urban area and the maritime zone. It was hardly possible to identify the city scale from the waterfront, since a few and isolated historic and cultural signs had been left.

The development of the port in the last decades resulted in the flourishing of new business activities, which mark the transformation of Piraeus into an independent financial centre, as well as the needs of the Greek Shipping Industry. Nowadays, Piraeus is one of the largest passenger ports²⁴, with 19.000.000 passengers annually²⁵, that rank the harbour as the third busiest worldwide. The city population is 175.697 inhabitants²⁶. Besides, many groups of economic immigrants from various places -mainly from Asia and the Balkans- are installed in the wider harbour area at a large extent temporary.

The seafront "culture" reflects exactly the process of the globalization practice and the way that it is inscribed in Piraeus, with the out of scale office and trade building blocks. In the rest of the city, where a few regeneration interventions are completed during the 1990s, there is still a representative number of historic signs : the traditional urban tissue and the public space nexus that are preserved, the heritage from the Classical and Roman period, and over 500 historic buildings representative of the architecture of the late 19th-early 20th centuries and the Mid-war that are listed²⁷.

In the perspective of the 2004 Olympic Games, the harbour zone is in the way of an operational and aesthetic upgrading. Apart from the environmental interventions²⁸ and the security measures, we can notice a lot of actions aiming at the enhancement of the coastal zone and the functional change of extended stretches of the built environment, as well as at the development of cultural and recreational initiatives and the promotion of the port history; also, and this is the most important and questionable, some new developments, which the Olympic Hospitality dictates, are in progress or in the project level.

Among the mentioned above:

- The construction of the new passenger terminals and the rehabilitation of the existing ones.
- The construction of the new port facilities for the cruise-ships, which will serve the Olympic Hospitality.
- The development of the PPA S.A.²⁹ real estate at the Hetionian Quay, which consists in the conversion of the multi-store warehouses into a maritime commercial complex and the re-use of the Silo complex as a National Museum of Maritime History parallel to the insertion of recreation activities in the wider area.
- The rehabilitation of an old stoney Warehouse into a passenger terminal and the transformation of the old industrial cargo loading installations into a restaurant.
- The construction of additional passenger facilities (a network of info kiosks, an underground parking station in the Exhibition Centre, etc.).
- The implementation of an integrated rehabilitation programme for the open spaces and the cruize zone of the harbour.
- The project for a rail fixed guideway transport system, which will be constructed for the ring connection of the central port³⁰.
- The project for a five stars hotel in the south side, a low income residence district with small two-storeyed houses and narrow building blocks.

Besides, Piraeus is in the dynamic of a serious transformation procedure: the construction of a high speed ring road -for the connection of the Attica coastal zone with the northwest suburbs and the highway to Peloponnese, and the blunt of the harbour zone traffic jam- and the tram and suburb railway lines³¹, which pass through the historic centre; the "deconstruction" of the traditional urban tissue and the complete isolation of the relevant city

part are among the probable negative effects.

But, what about the city itself in the "Olympic Era"?

In despite of the starting projects, according to which various actions for the enhancement of the historic centre and the local identity would balance the impact of the infrastructure works, the recent works in progress represent only a small percentage (Malikouti, 2001).

The more ambitious between them is the project for the unification of the archaeological sites, aiming the creation of a cultural promenade in the area of the two city Gates in the ancient entrance from Athens; according to which, the expropriation and incorporation of several plots and parts of existing streets in the archaeological park are foreseen³². In the most of the other cases, the projects are minimized, either to the refurbishment to some facades or to the restoration of the main streets pavements.

Regardless of the projects completion, several questions raise. Will the traditional urban tissue enough flexible to absorb the surcharges? Which will be the relation between the seafront and the city centre after the Games? Will the projection of the urban culture possible? Or will it be a temporary and fragmentary promotion?

It's impossible to give documented answers, which must be the result of a detailed research in all levels "the day after". Apart from that, the same questions lead to the drawing of some interesting parallels between the past and the present; the same questions proove the questionable way, according to which every planning decision is implemented in that place. And, besides, they highlight the ascertainment that the constitution of the city culture depends on the planning model to a low extent; because, although the gridiron Piraeus plan offered the opportunities for the speculative land development, the moulding of the urban space was ought, on the one hand to the geomorphology and, on the other, to the planning management, as well as to the land and preservation policy.

e "bad fortune" of the city legacy and cultural status.

¹ As Steinhauer says, the special features of Piraeus was determined by two strictly organised functions, on the one hand as the Athens dockyard and military base of the Athenian Empire, and on the other as commercial centre of the Eastern Mediterranean (Steinhauer, 2000: 59).

² The Hellenic State was reestablished in 1830, after 400 years under the Turkish occupation. The first capital was Nafplion in Peloponnese.

³ The development of the modern Greek State in the 19th century went hand in hand with intensive activity in the sphere of town planning. From 1828 onwards, dozens of town plans were produced at a rapidly increasing rate. Those towns with a large population and considerable economic importance were planned first. By 1845, all the country's important centres had been redesigned. The state also turned its attention to coastal towns at an early stage, owing to the importance of maritime transport. Both large and small ports, irrespective of population or economic range, acquired a town plan (Kafkoula-Papamihos-Hastaoglou, 1990: 232).

^{iv} In some cases this endeavour was also connected with a broader trend towards developing national consciousness and led to the foundation of new towns on the famous sites of antiquity. Sparta, Eretria and, naturally, Athens are the typical examples. There are also isolated proposals and attempts by foreigners to establish colonies which however, did not materialize (Kafkoula-Papamihos-Hastaoglou, 1990: 234).

⁵ Chios was completely destroyed by the Turks in 1822. Part of its population was temporarily settled in Hermoupolis (the rich capital of Syros island) and the rest emigrated in all Europe and Russia, especially in trade centres. In 1833, many of both parts demand to be settled in the new city of Piraeus.

The Hydriots were very poor sailors. They began to be settled in Piraeus in 1838.

⁶ Hippodamus designed the classical city immediately after the departure of the Persians; the plan followed the regular pattern characteristic of all cities built from the beginning, whether Greek or Roman, or large American cities. In contrast to old cities that grew up naturally, such as Athens, Corinth or Sparta, with their labyrinthine street that follow the concurrences of the terrain and property ownership, the irregular squares and the scattered sacred and public buildings, the colonies of Miletus, homeland of Hippodamus, and the new cities of Magna Grecia are distinguishable by their straight roads, regular building blocks and the central position of the square with the public buildings and the temple. The equal distribution of the colonists' lots lends the new settlements an image of democratic uniformity. Hippodamus, who continued this tradition in Piraeus, expressed a comprehensive philosophical viewpoint of the rational organisation of city life (Steinhauer, 2000: 92).

⁷ The geometry was inserted to the urban tissue of the modern Greek cities as a tool with a double role, technical and theoretical; the space arrangement and the ideological marking of the break with the Ottoman past (Tsakopoulos, 1997: 35).

⁸ The town-planning policy, which the Governor Kapodistrias (1828-1832) and the Regency and King Otto's reign (until 1862) intended to apply follows the functionalist approach of European Neoclassicism. The morphological models of the Greek cities during the first decades of the new State were inspired by the neoclassical aspect of the European romantic movement, and were brought to Greece by the foreign technicians and architects who worked in the country, chiefly up until 1843. This town-planning concept serves as a vehicle for the links with the West, for the renewal and rationalisation of urban structure, and for the preservation of the nation's historical continuity by reconnecting the ancient world and the modern kingdom (Tsakopoulos, 1997: 41 / Kafkoula-Papamihos-Hastaoglou, 1990: 235-236).

⁹ To implement the first plan and to ensure the independence of the Chiots' quarter, a

number of measures were initiated to settle the ownership status, especially the reallocation of property in the “right side”, where specific conditions were enacted regarding the granting of space. Previous owners, from the Turkish period, had to exchange their holdings with national lands in the “left side” of the city plan. By means of successive legal settlements, from 1834 to 1842, land policy gradually adapted to the existing conditions, as they were being shaped by the owners reactions, the low degree of response on the part of Chiot immigrants, and by the economy status of the newly constituted Hellenic State, according to which the compensations could not be paid (Malikouti, 2000: 140).

¹⁰ The decisions for the Cemetery, the Hospital, the Barracks, the Bank changed. The places for the Theatre, the Bourse, the Library, the Hotel, the Post and two Markets, as well as for some green spaces in the maritime zone were cancelled (Malikouti, 1999).

¹¹ By the beginning of the 1st World War, Piraeus harbour was the fourth in the Mediterranean, after Marseille, Napoli and Genoa.

¹² The population of Piraeus between 1834 and 1920 (Leontidou, 1989: 48):

YEAR	CITIZENS
1834	150
1836	1.011
1840	2.033
1850	5.286
1870	10.963
1879	21.618
1890	36.000
1896	50.200
1907	73.759
1920	133.482

¹³ Between 1870 and 1875, the number of factories quintupled. In 1883, 34,5% of the Greek “mechanical facilities, representing 56,4% of the country’s total power, were operating in Piraeus, and 51% of the Greek work force was employed in the factories. Despite the recession in the years that followed, the city continued to wield the sceptre in terms of the distribution of the industry even after 1900, though the major proportion of the capital was already being invested in real estate.

As regards trade, the indexes shot up by leaps and bounds until the mid-1880s. A decisive part was played in this by the opening of the branch office of the National Bank in 1862. In 1870-72, the port was the centre of trade, and later on, in 1887, it was described as “the mouth of Greece”. In the last decade of the 19th century, when trade in the traditional centres of Greece -Patras, Hermoupolis, Corfu- was suffering a significant decline, the indexes of the related activities in Piraeus rose steeply. Up to a point, they suffered the effects of the Greek economy collapse of 1893, but recovered after 1910.

As for shipping, Piraeus held first place in Greece’s import trade in 1869. For exports, the port became a serious rival to Hermoupolis in 1880. In 1883, it had the greatest number of steamships.

¹⁴ After 1856 the institutional framework is regularized in Greece and important public works are constructed. The new town-planning with its simple othogonal composition is characterised by the systematic provision of public amenities, especially for the coastal towns and their harbours. It can be more closely related to the proposals for the cities of the new nation states of the Balkans than with those of Europe, since there the industrial city has

already posed different problems to be solved (Tsakopoulos, 1997 – Yerolympos, 1996).

¹⁵ The “factory quarter”, northwestwards, which had begun to come into being in 1864 (simultaneously with the first layout of the Athens-Piraeus railway station) and the plan of which was ratified in 1892, was governed by special circumstances relating to organisation and dynamics (Malikouti, 1999).

¹⁶ The Chapter “The Speculative Ground Plan”, in which L. Mumford refers to the gridiron plans of the commercial cities in the late 17th-early 18th centuries (Mumford, 1961 (1991): 480-486) is representative of the Piraeus case. We must not forget, that the relevant social and economic phenomena are noticed in Greece later than in Europe, due to the Turkish long-lasting occupation.

¹⁷ The vacant spaces of 1840, the “sketch of a city” described by the French traveller Buchon in 1843, and the sparsely built strip around the main harbour in 1850 were a thing of the past. Piraeus had 2.500 private buildings in 1875 and 4.500 in 1898. During the 1890s, the number of taxed residences increased by an average of 130 a year (Malikouti, 1999).

^{xviii} The architectural development of Piraeus is extremely interesting; all the categories of private buildings (ordinary dwellings, mansions and villas, shops, industrial units, factories, office blocks, and hotels) and the public edifices too present an exceptional form variety. As far as the early decades are concerned, we may only make a few observations about the architectural profile, which was essentially made up from isolated examples. After 1860, it is possible to draw better documented conclusions (Malikouti, 1999b).

¹⁹ Especially in some public buildings, the open spaces and the villas in the suburbs (Malikouti, 1999).

²⁰ The refugees from Asia Minor in 1928 (Leontidou, 1989: 159):

	Population (total)	Refugees	Refugees from Asia Minor	Percentage %
Athens	459.211	129.380	119.420	28,17
Piraeus	251.659	101.185	94.683	40,21
Greece	6.204.684	1.221.849	1.069.957	19,68

²¹ In the period 1914-1940, the urban phenomenon is going through a phase of exceptional importance in Greece; the “centre-periphery” relation becomes hierarchical, with Athens as the commercial, administrative, political and cultural “summit”. The exodus of the agrarian population to the cities and the formation of the urban working class, both connected with the overseas emigration and the refugees from Asia Minor, present specific particularities; the evolution of the cities, and mainly of the capital and Piraeus, reflects this peculiar development model. At the same time, the technical progress had a decisive effect on the modern towns (Gizeli, 1997: 49).

²² Several quarters, mainly in the northwest periphery of Piraeus, had being inserted to the official city plan after 1925, as to cover the illegal installation of the refugees. In the suburbs of Kastella and Piraiki, we have the “refugee sectors” of Mikrolimano and Kallipolis.

²³ The problem of the relation between the harbour and the city was the axis of a large discuss in 1946. The Master Plan of Piraeus, elaborated a year later, was not implemented. It is just in 1988, that the next plan for Piraeus (the General Urban Plan) was legislated, that comprises some directions for the land use control and rules for the heritage preservation. This plan, revised in 1994, is in force now.

²⁴ The commercial terminal moved to Keratsini, northwestwards.

²⁵ According to the data from Piraeus Port Authorities S.A. (PPA S.A.) in 2002 (www.olp.gr).

²⁶ According to the 2001 population census.

²⁷ Part of the city of Piraeus has been declared as “historic centre” in 1982 (Govt.Gazette 410/27 August 1982). The great part of the historic buildings have been listed in 1987 (Govt. Gazette 420/17 July 1987).

²⁸ Piraeus Port Authorities S.A. is currently involved in the process of formulating a structured environmental policy with specific plans of action: the implementation of an integrated system of handling every liquid and solid ship related wastes, the management of the hazardous cargoes in a safe way, the undertaking of innovative initiatives in collaboration with the local authorities for the protection of the wider area environment, the creation of a waste collection system in collaboration with the Olympic Games Accomodation Programme.

²⁹ Piraeus Port Authorities S.A.

³⁰ The beginning of the works is estimated in September 2004 and the completion in December 2006.

³¹ Ship passengers will have access to the port by means of the Athens Metro extension, the Athens Light Railway and the Suburb Railway.

³² All the actions stopped since late 2002 because of many administrative and organisation difficulties. The Ministry of Environment, Planning and Public Works is responsible for the project, in cooperation with the Department of the Classical and Byzantine Monuments of the Archaeological Service.

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