

Issues on urban design of public space: social and spatial identifications in the case of 4 central squares in Athens

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outline of the presentation

- the context: comments on public space urban design
- main goals of the research and methodological approach
- basic features of the public space urban design projects under study
- main findings and discussion
- conclusive remarks



the context¹: public space urban design

- vast, diversified and multidisciplinary literature on the morphological and social issues related to the production and management of public space as well as its use, observation and perception, which grew somewhat in parallel with the one on urban design
- significant number of projects enhancing public spaces in many European cities, a tendency intensified by the mid-1990s under the influence of sustainable urban policies focusing both on the regaining of public space and the promotion of soft urban mobility modes / several city marketing and regeneration strategies, in the context of intense urban competition, focusing on the design of high quality public spaces to attract private investors
- public space making and use became gradually the key issue for almost every small, medium or large scale urban design intervention
- “yet, public space remains a kind of ideal and it is always threatened by two forms of segregation: social exclusion that produces ghettos and deals unequally with public spaces in line with the neighbourhood status and the functional or technical exclusion as more and more public spaces are divided and specialised” (Devillers, 1994)
- “While arguably the aim should be the provision of an accessible, safe and secure, equitable public realm for all, economic and social trends in many parts of the world are making this increasable difficult to deliver” (Carmona et al., 2003)

the context²: public space urban design in Greece

- one of the most important problems in Greek cities is the lack of public spaces and their aesthetic poverty
- inherent and historically rooted weaknesses and shortcomings of the urban and land policy and the relevant institutional framework prevented the development and implementation of a coherent policy regarding public space production and management throughout the 20th century
- the policies adopted from the 1980s have clearly led to the improvement in the design and production of public spaces
 - enhancement of land acquisition tools for ensuring public spaces
 - proliferation of architectural competitions on public spaces redevelopment
 - implementation of mostly *ad hoc* and fragmented projects for enhancing existing public spaces (pedestrian streets in central commercial zones, redevelopment of squares etc.)
 - special events (Cultural Capital of Europe, Olympic Games of 2004), in the framework of which a restricted number of such projects were integrated in wider urban strategies (Archaeological Walkings in Thessaloniki, Unification of the Archaeological Sites of Athens)
- although the number of public spaces redevelopment projects has been growing, especially from the mid-1990s, they have been commented as actually unable to induce a general improvement in the quantity and quality of public spaces in Greek cities



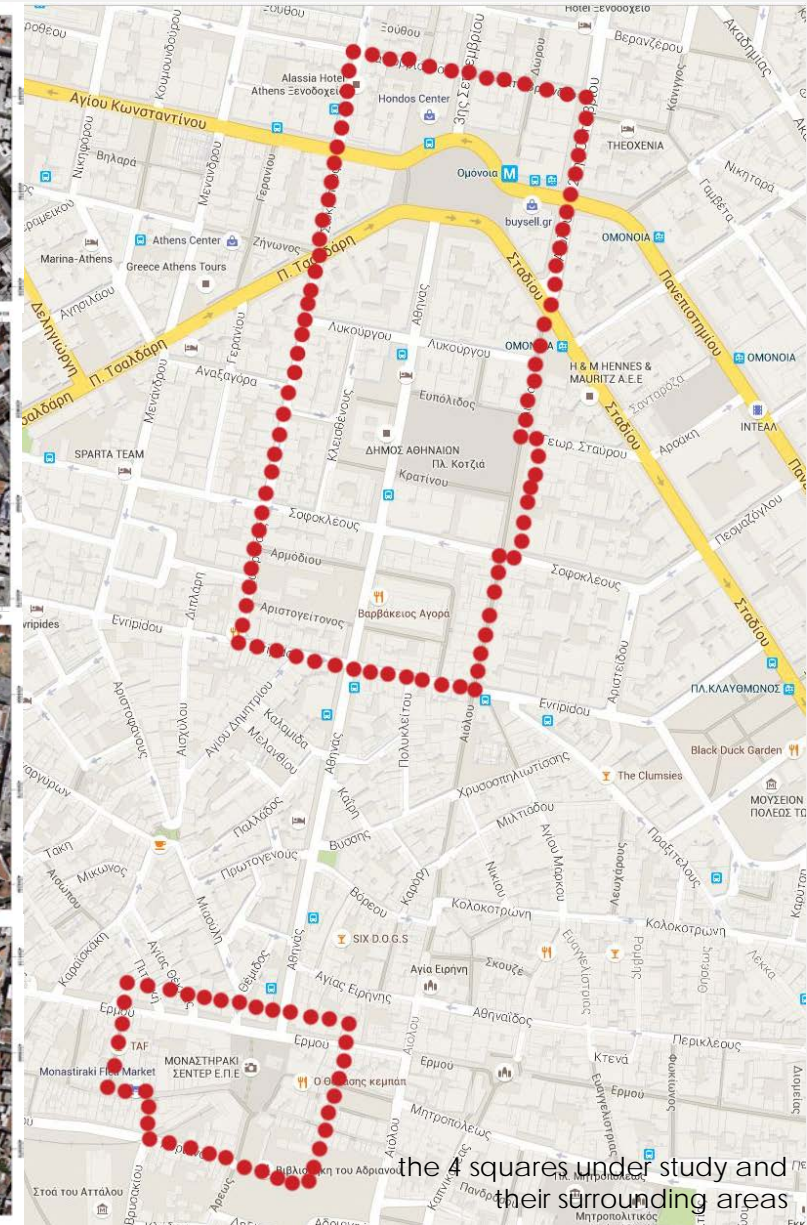
main goals and methodological approach

- part of a wider research project, conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (EKKE), regarding the social impact of urban design on the sustainable development of cities and especially the city of Athens
- focus on the study of 4 central squares - Omonoia, Kotzia, Varvakeios and Monastiraki - redesigned in the period 1990s-2000s, interrelating different design and implementation procedures / one case study among the five ones examined within the research project
- present, assess and discuss the social and spatial effects of these redevelopment projects on urban sustainability
- methodological tools:
 - _ i) socio-demographic identification of the surrounding areas so as to assess the integration of the urban design interventions in the local social tissue
 - _ ii) analysis of the land use changes before and after the implementation of the redevelopment projects
 - _ iii) analysis of the economic activities adaptations to study the commerciality of the redesigned public spaces
 - _ iv) analysis of the political and scientific discourse with regard to the redevelopment projects to evaluate the necessity, objectives and social acceptance of the projects




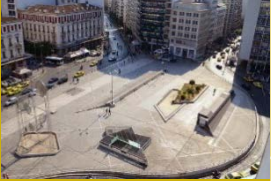

basic features of the public space urban design projects under study¹

- important physical and functional complex of lively public spaces with a dominant commercial character located in the heart of Athens
- diversified urban environment characterised by strong bonds with the old town, the 19th century city and the urban fabric of the 1960s, presenting great environmental and social challenges strengthened after the burst of the economic crisis in 2008
- redevelopment projects reflecting diverse views for the urban renewal of each square and its surrounding area in reference to particular spatial and social re-considerations
- indicative examples of the two characteristic aspects of the urban projects in Greece:
 - (a) small scale interventions with the application of both formal/institutionalised and informal/non institutionalised procedures
 - (b) large scale interventions, either being flagship projects or connected to a broader urban strategy



the 4 squares under study and their surrounding areas

basic features of the public space urban design projects under study²

SQUARE	PROJECT	CONCEPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION
	Main components Reach of the project	Procedures Period Contracting authority/ies
	Construction of underground parking Redevelopment of the square in two levels (ground floor shops + square-park on the roof) 2nd redevelopment of the square/introduction of cultural and recreational activities (before the Olympic Games)	Architectural competition (not concluded) Assignment of the project to external consultants Contracting the realisation to a construction company Assignment of the 2 nd redevelopment project to external consultants Implementation of the refurbishing project by MA (technical service)
	Supralocal / metropolitan	1981-2002 MA
	Construction of underground parking Redevelopment of the square Pedestrianisation of the streets in the north and south of the square and the ones ending up in the middle of its north and south side (Kratinou, Efpolidos, Apellou, Streit) Integration of the archaeological findings and the entrances-exits in the parking garage	Parking construction (not concluded because of the archaeological findings) Contracting the realisation of the parking to a construction company+ architectural competition for the square redevelopment (not concluded) Assignment of the redevelopment project to external consultants Contracting the realisation of the square redevelopment to a construction company
	Supralocal / metropolitan	1984-2000 YPEHODE MA
	Redevelopment of the square Upgrading of the surrounding building facades Integration of the metro airways	Traffic study (ATTIKO METRO SA) Architectural competition for the square redevelopment Implementation of the 1 st prize with major modifications Fragmentary ad hoc additions decided by YPEHODE, MA and EAHA SA
	Supralocal / metropolitan	1998-2004 EAHA SA
	Redevelopment of the square Upgrading of the surrounding building facades Integration of the archaeological findings and the metro airways	Architectural competition for the square redevelopment Implementation of the 1 st prize with significant modifications
	Supralocal / metropolitan	1998-2008 EAHA SA

main findings and discussion¹

socio-demographic identification of the 4 squares surrounding areas¹

- critical factors for the integration of a renewed urban space in the surrounding area, alongside its general functional and symbolic entity within the city, are:
 - _ the identity of the spatial unity to which the renewed space belongs
 - _ the identity of its social, urban and natural environment
- these identities attribute the importance of the renewed space within the urban fabric as a significant place in the city
- the object of this specific work was the exploration on basis of census data (panorama.statistics.gr) and the elaboration of a methodology based on an algorithmic application and descriptive statistics, so as to find and analyse the socio-demographic characteristics of the surrounding areas, *as a whole*, of a set of public open spaces in the wider area of Athens selected as the five case studies of the project
- the surrounding areas of all case studies have been structured into a partition of spatial units with similar internal socio-demographic characteristics and dissimilar characteristics to each other
- these spatial units are considered of second-order as they group the first-order spatial units (A and B) and have arisen from the clustering by the K-means algorithm / so, the surrounding area of the four squares, structured within the second-order spatial units (groups 1, 5, 8, and 9) have specific socio-demographic characteristics

main findings and discussion²

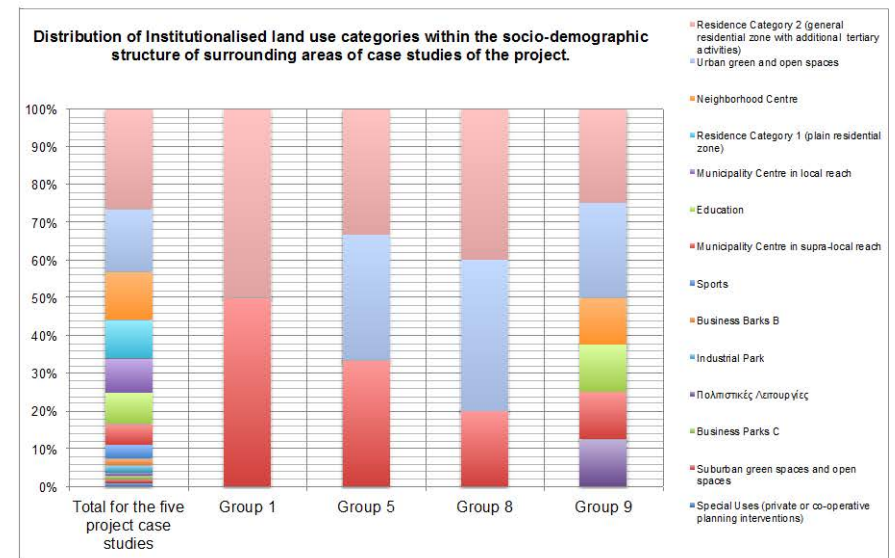
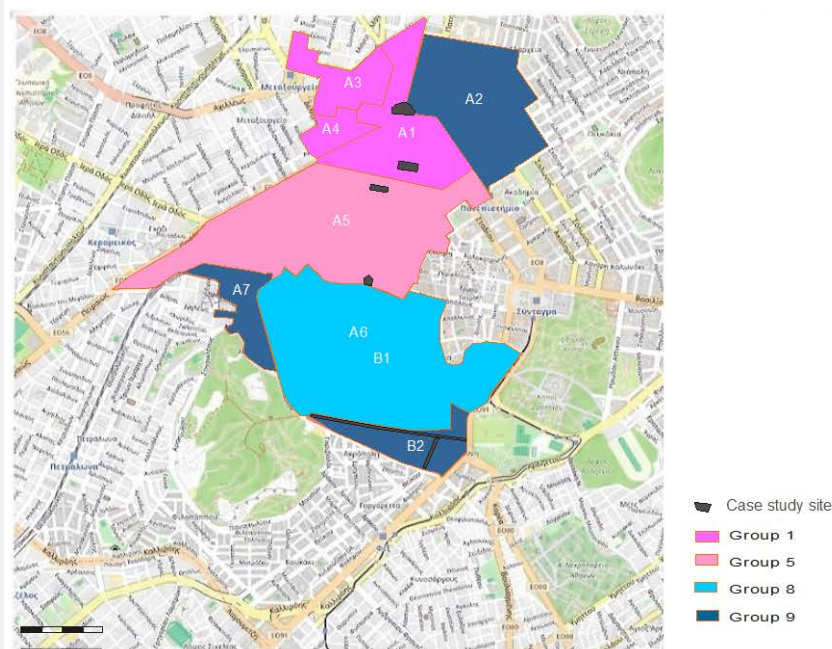
socio-demographic identification of the 4 squares surrounding areas²

Group 1 characteristics (A1, A3, A4 / includes Omonoia and Kotzia)

- supra-local city centre land uses
- gendered (male) and globalised synthesis
- people of the lowest level of education
- unmarried people
- economically active
- blue collar professions
- reside in apartment blocks of the period 1961-1980
- households with numerous members

Group 5 characteristics (A5 / includes Varvakeios and Monastiraki)

- main land uses: residence, urban green and open public spaces zone, supra-local/metropolitan centre
- gendered (male) synthesis (to a lesser extent than group1)
- mixed in terms of educational level, with a strong presence of both educated and non-educated individuals
- unmarried people
- economically active
- non-Greek citizens of low professional skills
- high rates of adults aged between 25 and 54
- reside in apartment blocks of the period 1961-1980



map of the surrounding area of the case study A (comprising the four open spaces Omonoia-Kotzia-Varvakeios-Monastiraki, and labelled with A) (left) / distribution of main institutionalised land use categories within socio-demographic structuring of this surrounding area compared to the whole of surrounding areas of all case studies of the project (right)

main findings and discussion³

land use changes before and after the redevelopment projects¹

- comparison of land uses during the period 1995-2016
 - 1995: data extracted from the on-site research made by ATTIKO METRO S.A.
 - 2016: data derived from our on-field survey focused on a thorough recording of land uses in a) the ground floor of the buildings and b) the set of the other floors of buildings
- concerning the Omonoia-Kotzia-Varvakeios squares area, there is a reduction of central (city-level) services and subsequent increase in special uses, mainly abandoned (and very rarely under construction) buildings and no-use plots / similar trends in Monastiraki square area

	OMONIOIA		KOTZIA		VARVAKIOS		MONASTIRAKI	
Land uses	1995	2016	1995	2016	1995*	2016	1995	2016
Residence	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	-	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Local level services	0.0%	0.0%	11.4%	2.2%	-	34.0%	1.3%	2.6%
Central (city-level) services	94.4%	50.0%	81.8%	56.5%	-	22.6%	94.7%	72.4%
Social Infrastructure / Institutions	1.9%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	-	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Culture	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	0.0%	-	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%
Freight	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	8.7%	-	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%
Small industry	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	-	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Transport	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	-	0.0%	1.3%	1.3%
Special uses	0.0%	48.1%	2.3%	32.6%	-	37.7%	1.3%	22.4%

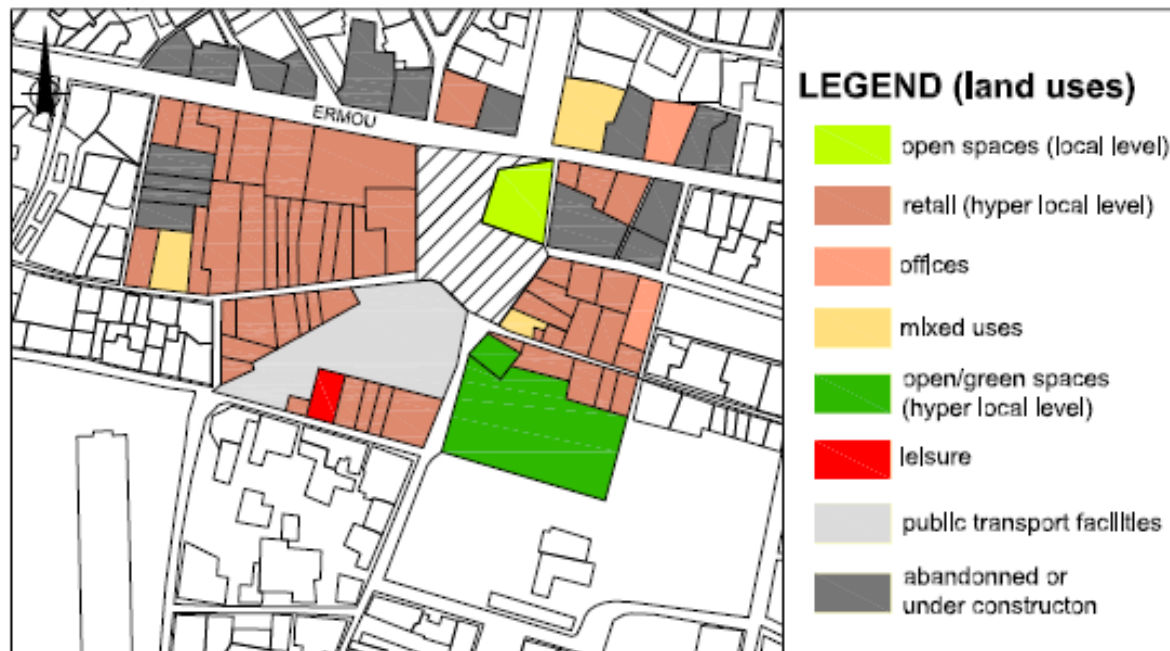
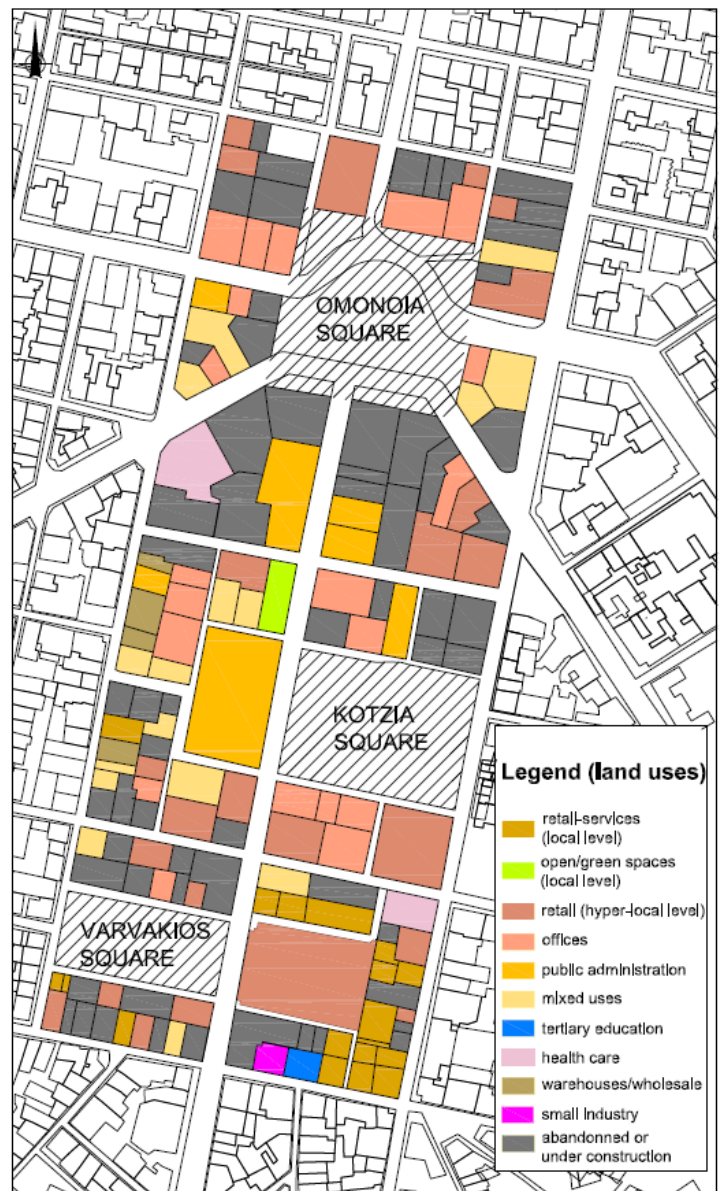
general land uses (%) in the surrounding areas of Omonoia, Kotzia, Varvakeios, Monastiraki squares, 1995, 2016

main findings and discussion⁴

land use changes before and after the redevelopment projects²

- in the surrounding area of Omonoia-Kotzia-Varvakeios squares, the de-investment trends are generic since there are scattered abandoned buildings
- in the case of Monastiraki square, the distribution of special land uses is unequal, since abandoned buildings are located in the north of the central commercial Ermou road and focal areas in the periphery of the study area

spatial organisation of specific land uses in the surrounding area of Omonoia-Kotzia-Varvakeios squares (left) and Monastiraki square (right)



main findings and discussion⁵

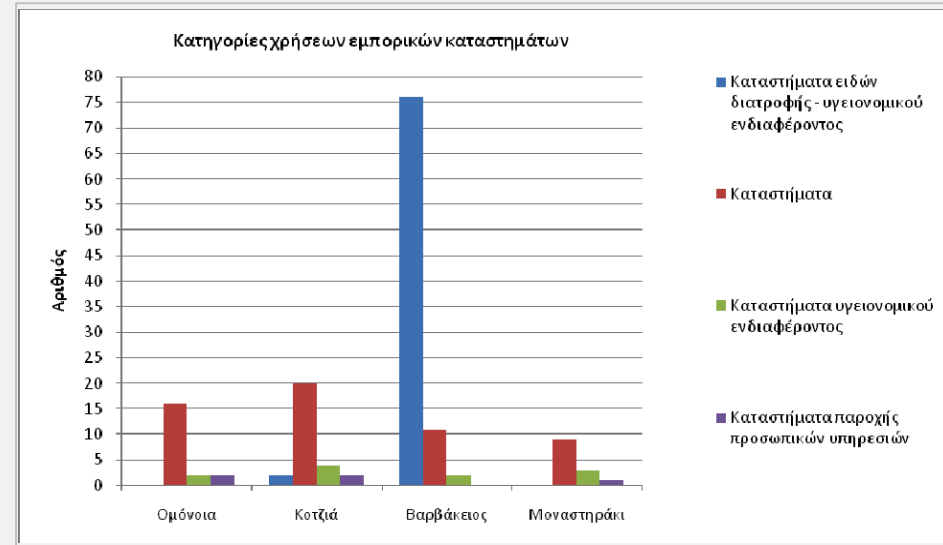
land use changes before and after the redevelopment projects³

- concerning the surrounding area of Omonoia-Kotzia-Varvakeios squares, on the level of ground floor of the buildings, the dominant land uses are retail (58.72%), abandoned buildings (19.57%) and restoration (9.54%), still maintaining its strong commercial character, although characterised by strong de-investment trends / on the level of the set of the other floors of buildings, almost half of the buildings' surface (48.0%) is abandoned, highlighting the social and economic degradation of the area
- with regard to the surrounding area of Monastiraki square, retail (69,3%) and restoration (15,3%) are the prevailing uses on the level of the ground floor of buildings, whereas underused spaces are significantly limited (8,7%) in relation to Omonoia-Kotzia-Varvakeios squares area / even though the abandoned spaces in the other floors of buildings have a high percentage (47,8%), the Monastiraki square area does not show the general degrading image that the other central squares present
- taking into account the empirical investigation, we could propose that there are two crucial factors determining the impact of urban design project in land uses and, consequently, the urban regeneration of an area:
 - first, the existence of residence can multiply the benefits from urban regeneration and enhance urban sustainability in the direction of mixed land uses / on the other hand, the absence of housing (<1%) interacts with the existing urban crises (environmental, economic, social), intensifying the urban degradation tendencies of the area
 - second, the existence of a clear vision to give a specific identity to the redeveloped area and not simply integrate the specific project into a wider strategy

main findings and discussion⁶

business adaptations: the commercial character of the 4 squares after the redevelopment projects¹

- precise recording of all ground floor spaces (according to their specific land use category) of the buildings located in the perimeter of the four squares under study with the aim to assess the degree and type of commerciality of the 4 central squares after the redevelopment projects
- the specific land use category “stores” with 150 records, out of a total of 289 in the four squares, constitutes the most popular one (51.90%), the second being the use “restaurants” (5.79%)



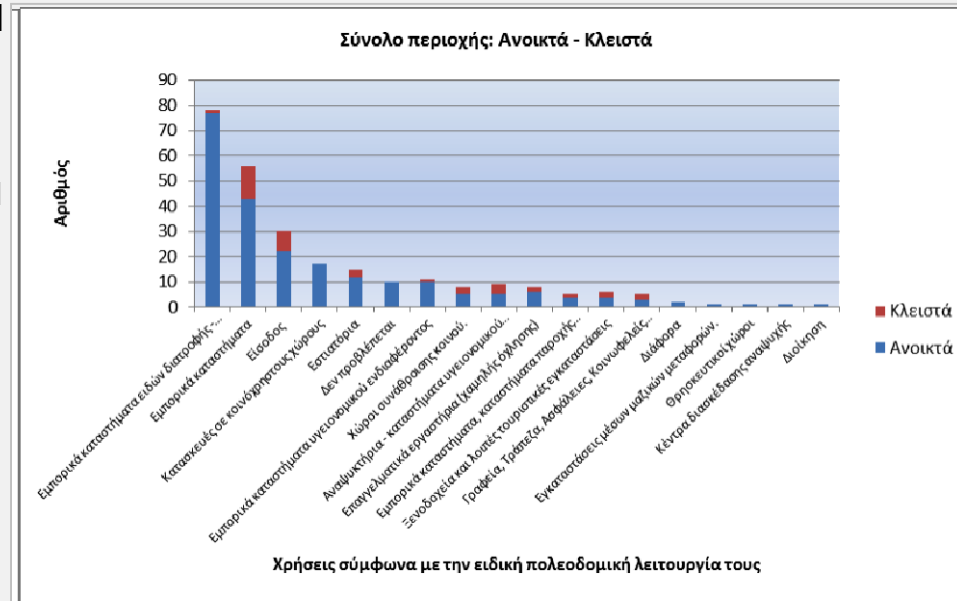
sub-categories of the specific land use category “stores” by square

- the category “stores” includes the sub-categories: “grocery stores” (52%), simple “shops” (37.33%), “food and drink stores” (7.33 %) and “personal services” (3.33%) / Omonoia and Kotzia squares present a similar type of commerciality, since in these squares a greater pluralism in the various kinds of stores is recorded / in Varvakeios square the category “stores” is almost exclusively limited to the kind “grocery stores” / in Monastiraki Square the “stores” seem oriented to serving visitors of the commercial city centre mainly for recreation or tourism
- the ground floor uses seem to be largely matched with the specific character and profile of each square, having contributed decisively in their co-shaping, along with other factors

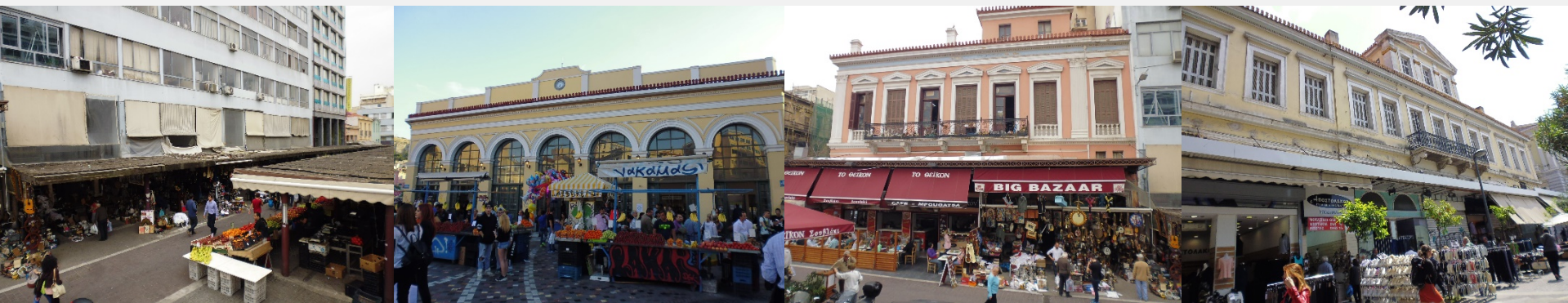
main findings and discussion⁷

business adaptations: the commercial character of the 4 squares after the redevelopment projects²

- land use changes were also investigated based on data obtained from a questionnaire survey addressed to professionals established in the four squares areas:
 - no significant shift from one specific category of land use to another, except in the case of Monastiraki Square
 - in Omonoia and Kotzia squares there are isolated cases of land use change mostly of the same category
 - in Varvakeios square in all cases the previous and current use is of the same category (grocery stores)
 - in Monastiraki square, there is a change from the use “stores” mainly towards the use “cafes and restaurants”, which could be interpreted as an adaptation of urban land uses in the current situation as defined by the everyday life of the square



open and closed ground floor spaces by land use category
in all 4 squares



main findings and discussion⁸

political and scientific discourse: necessity, objectives and social acceptance of the redevelopment projects¹

- the analysis was based: (a) on secondary and primary sources (articles, published interviews, archival material etc.) and (b) on semi-structured interviews addressed to people that have a responsible position in the relevant public agents of the squares redevelopment projects design and implementation
- the objectives, the character and the expected results of the redevelopment projects are differentiated and evolve in correspondence with the nature of the problems, as well as the evolution of the approaches on urban interventions

main objectives of Kotzia and Varvakeios squares redevelopment projects

- resolving the practical issue of the lack of parking in the city centre
- creation of public spaces that could contribute to the social life of the neighbourhood and the city
- improvement of the quality of life
- enhancement of the archaeological findings or/and the listed surrounding buildings
- provision of green spaces
- limiting the uncontrolled use of the space and the delinquent activities taking place by marginal groups

main objectives of Omonoia and Monastiraki squares redevelopment projects

- regain and enhancement of the historic city (historical and cultural value)
- enforcement of the place identity
- functional improvement of the public space with emphasis on facilitating pedestrian movement and sitting
- aesthetic upgrading of the public space and integration of the metro works
- aesthetic upgrading of the surrounding building stock and monuments

- in the rhetoric of the redevelopment projects, their necessity and its social dimension as well as their objectives in the social level are not explicitly stated / the resolution of issues related to social inequality and exclusion is only marginally and vaguely raised

main findings and discussion⁹

political and scientific discourse: necessity, objectives and social acceptance of the redevelopment projects²

- the integration into a wider urban strategy for the successful outcome of an urban intervention and the multiplication of its positive effects emerged as a commonly accepted need and goal of urban projects, regardless of their type or scale
- regarding the public open and green spaces, their networking and unification at neighbourhood, district and city level so as to maximise their accessibility and the environmental benefits aroused as an important tool for the overall upgrading of the urban space, especially in the context of the discourse on urban green infrastructure
- regarding the social acceptance of urban design interventions, which has a significant impact on the use of the redeveloped spaces, it is directly linked to:
 - _ the way urban transformations evolve over time and their positive spatial, socio-economic and environmental effects
 - _ the degree of their co-formulation, involving local and civil society in their design and implementation process
- in Greece, however, both these two dimensions have been systematically and diachronically underestimated and/or ignored by formal spatial planning / the interviews confirmed:
 - _ the lack of studies exploring the impact of the urban projects under study before and after their design and implementation (the identification of the effects, especially the social ones, was simply based on the experience and personal judgment of the interviewees)
 - _ the lack of know-how and effective framework of consultation and participation process
- it is therefore vital to establish a framework to evaluate, with qualitative and quantitative methods, the social impact and acceptance of urban interventions, *ex ante* and *ex post*, as well as to institutionalise co-formulating procedures for urban interventions, with the aim of maximising social consensus and acceptance

conclusive remarks¹


- the case of the four squares is indicative of the diversity that exists between the various public spaces / nevertheless, they form a set of significant places within a wider area which includes their surrounding areas, the profile of which presents particularities and diversities that contribute to the social impact of this area as a whole
- the study of the four squares revealed a number of key elements for a more likely to be successful public space redevelopment with wider impact on urban sustainability:
 - the methodological approach and study of the socio-demographic profile of the surrounding area as well as of the character of the public space, so as the integration in the local social tissue to be taken into consideration in terms of the involvement of the everyday life of the local inhabitants with the space under redevelopment
 - the recording and analysis of spatial and precise land use changes in relation to the social as well as the cultural and economic effects before, during and after the project implementation
 - the consideration at the designing level of the continuity and accessibility of the public space and its relation and connectivity to other public spaces within the urban fabric
 - the integration of the redevelopment project into a broader urban strategy as well as the configuration of a clear vision about the new character of the redesigned public space
 - the co-formulation of the urban interventions by the local and civil society involvement



conclusive remarks²

- in this context, the important factors that prevented the regeneration of the wider area of the four squares redevelopment projects, could be summarised as follows:
 - the partial implementation of certain projects and land use regulations included in the broader urban strategy promoted by the Unification of the Archaeological Sites of Athens program
 - the modifications of the urban design projects during their implementation phase which resulted to a confusion about the new character of the squares
 - the failure of adequate maintenance as well the subsequent additions and alterations
 - the lack of an established framework to study the social and spatial impact of the urban projects before, during and after their implementation
- besides, the current economic and fiscal crisis further undermined the goals and expected outcomes of the urban design projects and, in general, the urban sustainability of the area





thank you for your attention...