

BRICOLAGE URBANISM FOR URBAN SOCIAL COHESION

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1. Introduction. The need for urban social cohesion at a ‘local’ level.

It is expected that 83% of the European population will be living in urban areas by 2050. This prospect brings enormous pressure on European cities that are already facing serious challenges due to financial crisis, globalization, demographic change, increasing flows of migration, disparities among and within cities, inner city decay, urban sprawl, climate change etc. These challenges have a cumulative effect on deepening social exclusion, social polarization and increasing urban violence and spatial segmentation (Urban-Net, 2011; Dhéret, 2015).

For the aforementioned reasons, social cohesion resurfaced in the public sphere and became a foremost need for the contemporary European society, centring on the rights of the individual. Europe has to deal with rapid and radical changes, which upset the mechanisms that have traditionally ensured the maintenance of social bonds. European cities are delegated to play a leading role and tackle the challenge of inclusive growth. They agglomerate all the complexities of social life on a concentrated territory, and they import/export factors of cohesion and fragmentation of their own system on a daily basis. Furthermore, the views of how social fragmentation and cohesion should be addressed vary significantly among groups and people, but also among different types of actors within cities (Urban-Net, 2011). The emergent call for socially cohesive cities is proved by the recent provision that approximately half of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the period 2014–2020 will be spent in cities, enabling them to design and implement cohesion policies and test new ideas in urban development (European Union, 2014).

In the quest for urban social cohesion macro-structural and local reinforcing processes must interact and “people based” policies need to be complemented by “people and place” ones (Meegan and Mitchell, 2001). For socially cohesive urban futures Urban-Net report (2011) recommends re-orienting current modes (academic and practice) of urban design and planning towards “socio-spatial cohesion” and “environmental sustainability” at multiple scale levels. Developing a common European methodology through an urban social cohesion based approach, the report argues for a shift from the global-metropolitan to the “local” dimension with particular attention to participation and empowerment of inhabitants of neighbourhoods.

The development of urban social cohesion is traditionally perceived as a topic for social-cultural, economical and political experts rather than a consideration requiring multi-scalar spatial design and planning handled by architects, urban designers and planners. As Madanipour (1998) argued, space has a major role in integration or segregation of urban society. It is a manifestation of social relationships and can affect and shape their geometries. Relevant literature already indicates the significance of urban morphology, such as accessible public and private services, availability and quality of infrastructure, physical or ecological barriers, properties condition and environmental quality, etc. (Meegan & Mitchell, 2001; Kleinhaus, 2004; Loukaitou-Sideris 2006; U.N., 2014). Thus, social inclusion or exclusion is a socio-spatial phenomenon.

In this context, we argue that urban morphological aspects related to social cohesion need to be further explored by focusing on the ‘local’ dimension. Our research explores how urban morphology at the smaller scale, the neighbourhood, contributes to social cohesion policy. With due caution against physical deterministic arguments that social problems can be eliminated by redesigning space, we aim at investigating ways for the promotion of social cohesion within the built environment, on the basis of urban design and planning premises.

Athens’ inner city neighbourhood Omonia has been chosen as a case study. Over the past decades the population of the area witnessed large-scale changes and violence due to socio-economic exclusion related mostly to immigration and economic depression. However, its urban fabric cannot adapt in a critical, creative and cohesive manner to these changes due to constraints from preservation, legislation, ownership, FAR reduction/stagnation etc. Through the technique of bricolage, based on relational micro-scale urban interventions, we aim at developing a desirable and sustainable level of urban social cohesion, that would exclude extreme situations such as defensive bonds and fragmenting terror. Subsequently, we propose design actions related to social cohesion criteria, on both public and private space in order for the area to regenerate as a socially cohesive neighbourhood. These actions are intended to be flexible and to enable participation, among others of stakeholders, communities and citizens so that they develop towards a state that is suitable and sustainable.

2. Towards socially cohesive inner-city neighbourhoods through urban bricolage.

2.1. Bricolage Urbanism: A social cohesion approach based on micro-scale urban interventions

In the pursuit of socially cohesive cities we adopt the concept of Bricolage Urbanism (Rodi, 2015). The notion of bricolage as a way of looking at and producing things was first introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1962. It offered an alternative vision of creativity to that of Modernism. Rather than a homage to science, bricolage is described as a creation of meaningful structures out of events. For Rowe and Koetter (1978), the most eloquent expression of bricolage could be found in the city. They rejected "total design," and proposed instead the notion of "collage city" within which a functioning network of pocket utopias can be accommodated.

The unprecedented urbanism of small, spontaneous and collective acts that we nowadays notice in cities, seems to outfox technical expertise and top-down procedures. Public posting of citizens’ individual needs and desires on social media becomes a form of public discourse. Current austerity urbanism and social cohesion issues in our cities seem to have contributed towards this phenomenon. Whilst such small-scale interventions are central to the life of cities, yet they remain peripheral in design discourse.

This paper introduces *Bricolage Urbanism* as a process towards socially cohesive urban environments, not just as urban acupuncture. Based on the shared responsibility of all players, *Bricolage Urbanism* focuses on how small-scale neuralgic interventions can have a direct impact on urban morphology and life through a relational, situational and, predominantly, cultural approach. In analogy to Lévi-Strauss’s *La Pensée Sauvage*, it intends to propel a discussion about the disciplines of architecture, urban design and urbanism, that will not be sought in citizens’ design but in citizens’ desires. An objective is to calibrate the nature of small urban acts and to critically appraise the potential trajectories the practice of urban design and urbanism could take in the future. Bricolage urbanism is a planning method and does not replace masterplanning, local planning and other strategic planning tools. But it can enrich, expand, inspire and motivate planning procedures, helping to create a better urban life.

Specific aspects relevant to *Bricolage Urbanism* are (Rodi, 2015):

- Micro vs. Macro interventions. Is the design of urban environment predominately small-scale activity or a bold, large-scale transformative activity? Can small-scale urban changes work in synergy and have a direct impact on urban life? Can they re-adjust easier? Are they less or more vulnerable? How can success of a small intervention be measured?
- Design authorship. Who should design urban interventions? Should they be designed at all? Does urban morphology matter as citizens' participation and empowerment?
- Aesthetics and economics. Do small-scale interventions produce better space than big projects do? In the context of crisis and uncertainty, are small-scale projects more effective and more feasible? Are they more manageable and likely to get done?
- Social cohesion. Can small interventions make a meaningful contribution towards social cohesion? Can small interventions, though ephemeral and low impact, scale up to a broader social return?
- Design Practices. How can design be engaged so as to propose current physical transformations of the built environment? Do small-scale interventions pay less attention to the rulebook and more to the real principles of how we actually do things? Is triggering the design process more important than predetermining its outcome?
- Resilience. How small-scale urban interventions contribute to climate change and other resilience? Are they 'resilient' themselves, that is, easier to fix or undo when they go wrong?

2.2. Focusing on the 'local' level: neighbourhood social cohesion.

The research perceives social cohesion as a bottom-up process that focuses on neighbourhood scale. Neighbourhoods provide a useful scale for studying social relations, ties and conflicts in everyday life. One of the reasons why neighbourhoods remain an object of policy interest is the revival of notions, such as 'local community' as means to tackle social exclusion (Forrest & Kearns, 2001). Furthermore, the increasing interest in bottom-up approaches and transition processes as the 'third way' between incrementalism and strict planning, are part of the sustainable development (Grosskurth, 2009).

The quality of social integration at the neighbourhood level is the basis for social cohesion at larger scale, especially in an era when many social relations take place outside neighbourhood communities and virtual social networks seem to be "further eroding the residual bonds of spatial proximity and kinship" (Forrest & Kearns, 2001). According to Moulaert (2010), dynamics of change at the local level, is an integral and vital part of wider urban dynamics and is the pivotal scale through which urban change ought to be understood, although in a multi-scalar way. The local scale can be more "tangible", or a "better" or more "just" and "democratic" level at which to analyse, organize, and imagine change, whilst macro-level solutions are significantly more difficult to find (Moulaert, 2010, Meegan & Mitchell, 2001). The local is a privileged and empirical entry point for understanding the modalities of social cohesion through social innovation, social learning processes, spatial change, new policy initiatives, or collective action (Atkinson, 2007, Rodriguez, 2009, Urban-Net, 2011).

A neighbourhood should not by definition be seen as a "spatially integrated Gemeinschaft", but as a key living space through which people get access to material and social resources. It helps them pass to reach other opportunities and symbolises aspects of the identity of those living there (Meegan & Mitchell, 2001). Thus, four different perspectives on neighbourhoods are identified: neighbourhood as community, as context, as commodity, or as a consumption niche (Forrest & Kearns, 2001).

Socially cohesive but increasingly divided neighbourhoods may coexist in a city. Excessively strong ties within communities or groups in neighbourhoods may cause urban violence related to social, racial or religious conflicts. If there is conflict within or between strongly cohesive neighbourhoods this might impact the macro-cohesion of the city. Thus, social cohesion at the neighbourhood scale is

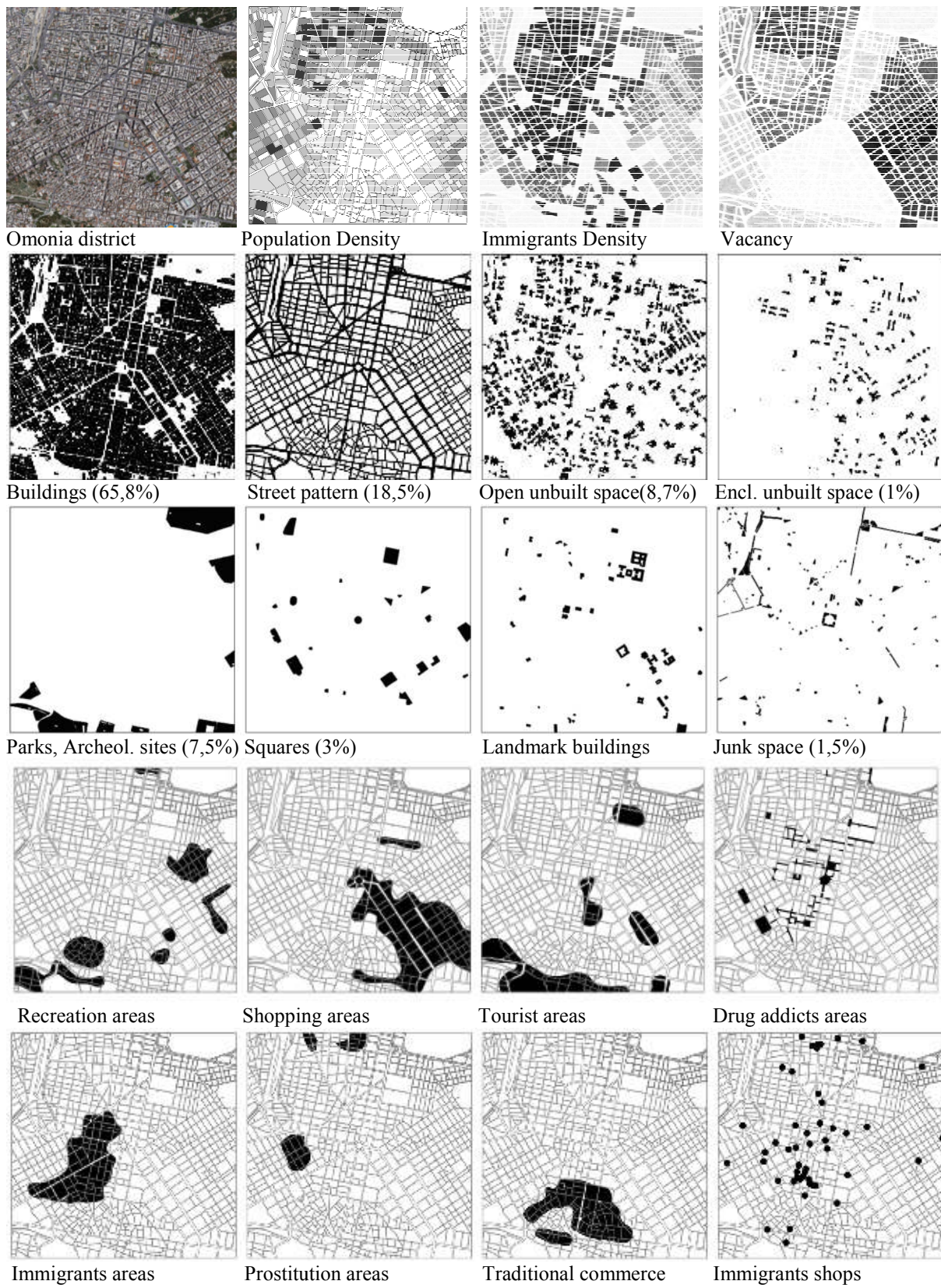


Figure 1. Land uses and activities in Omonia

not unconditionally a good thing and we should aim for a simultaneous, multilevel perspective on it. Forrest and Kearns (2001) state that the less robust and less deep-rooted neighbourhood networks are, the more stable and conflict-free the social order in which they sit may be.

2.3 Expanding to new grounds and stakeholders of social cohesion.

Collective and personal responsibility. The European model of social cohesion acknowledges the welfare state as the prime guarantor of rights and the public interest. However, urban regeneration and other services formerly provided by public domain have been outsourced. Citizen actions help find solutions and open new horizons in cases where public action is missing. The establishment of new public forums to strengthen those already in place and incorporate concerns for the general interest and for defending the well-being of all, particularly the most disadvantaged, in private action, is essential for asserting the values of social cohesion (Council of Europe, 2005).

Following the aforementioned arguments, the research expands the concept of ‘responsibility’ for social cohesion from stakeholders as the state and citizen organizations to individual citizens and owners. Doing that new, not publicly owned, spaces in urban fabric, are emerged as a potential social cohesion generators that belong to private and common ownership.

Public and private space. Importance of public space as befitting tool for social cohesion has already been established. Our study further expands this quest to the privately owned territory of city blocks. It explores the imperative to further elaborate on the privately owned space of high density urban centres that lack public space in order to achieve social cohesion. We do not withdraw from public realm. We look for opportunities that exist with the private and common ownership instead. Design interventions into the public, semi-public, semi-private and private realm are explored. Emphasis is given on both the fragmented common areas where responsibility is fuzzy letting space underused, as well as built up space, the existing apartment buildings.

2.4 Social cohesion related criteria

As Bollens (2006) argues, urban designers and planners should be able to work with areas such as public spaces, neighbourhoods, historic areas, housing, and other urban public facilities to promote good ‘inter-group’ life. He proposes (a) an urban form that is flexible and porous enough to allow for integration in urban processes (b) city planning that engage marginal groups by encouraging and facilitating participation during the planning process (c) cities that allocate sufficient opportunity for neighbourhoods to present their cultural and historical identity within urban neighbourhood and (d) a sense of ‘public-ness’ in public space, necessary to respond to all social and ethnic groups.

In the pursuit of socially cohesive urban environments, a high degree of **connectivity** is considered an important cross-cutting strategy. Madanipour (WUF7, 2014) suggests connection ‘across’ and ‘within’ space by loosening spatial barriers. Cooper, Fone and Chiaradia (2014) conclude in their research on which factors in the built environment facilitate, or impede, the development of social bonds, that physical connectivity or severance has a significant effect on social cohesion. Street patterns, alternative routes, numbers of intersections and dead-end streets, entrances to the area and route options are some of the urban features that impact connectivity.

A high degree of **accessibility** is also required. Neighbourhood street patterns, networks and open spaces should be designed so as to provide access using various modes of mobility. Accessibility may also refer to a neighbourhood’s proximity to services and infrastructures.

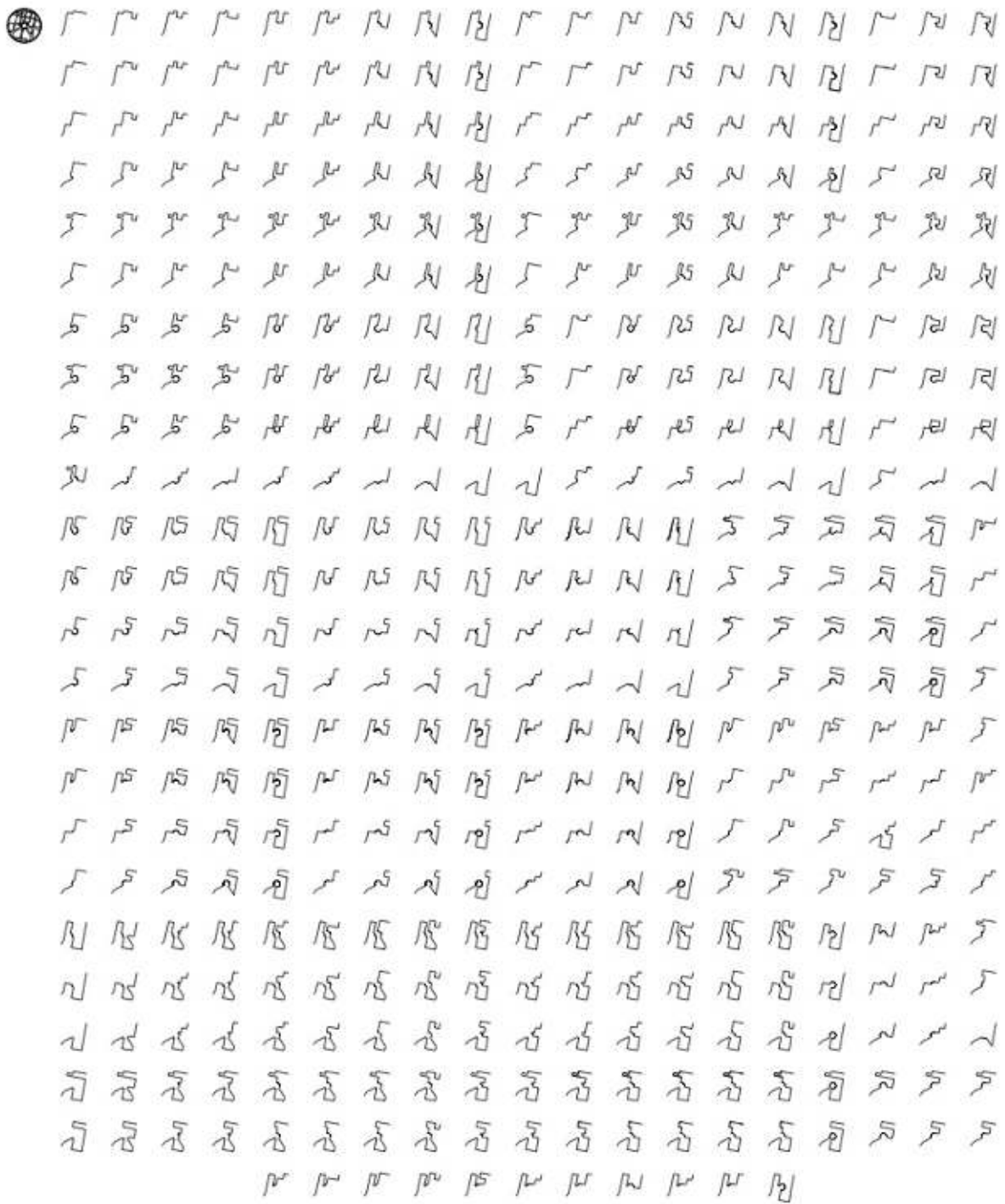


Figure 2. Alternative routes within a conceptual circle of a 200m.-radius connecting two points at a straight distance of 400m

Increasing **walkability** in a neighborhood may promote social cohesion as well. The ability to walk in a neighbourhood indicates not only a type of mobility, but also a type of sociability between neighbours. Architectural and environmental quality, land uses, street patterns, wayfinding ability, human comfort and safety are some of the features that contribute to an individual's decision to walk.

Flexibility should characterize master plans. Planners should allow communities and residents to develop a distinctive character of place and shape it in ways meeting local needs and changes in populations, work patterns and social life. Flexibility should include creative use of buildings and open space. Research identifies the importance of flexible and adaptable housing to provide space for families to grow without having to move away from a community where they have become established. (Woodcraft, Hackett and Caistor-Arendar, 2011)

Social interaction can contribute to social cohesion. Social relations provide an important source of information and social support that help us get by and cope with everyday problems (expressive social resources), while others are more useful to 'get ahead' in life (instrumental social resources) (Lin, 2001; Wellman, 1992). In order to achieve intimate social interactions the setting and aspects of the built environment should provide individuals with opportunities of contact and interaction within reasonable distance.

Spatial proximity is not a sufficient condition for social interaction (Kleinhans, 2004; Blokland, 2008). Social mixing does not necessarily result in the formation of strong relationships between different groups. However, interaction is more likely to occur between groups when different tenures are placed in close proximity to each other (Lawton, 2013). Therefore, a variety of people and **diversity** of households is considered important for creating an inclusive urban environment. **Integration** in an urban area can be achieved through a mix of housing types in order to accommodate a variety of households, ages and income groups. The role of diversity can vary, and can include the diversity of land uses, an array of architectural styles or the promotion of social and cultural diversity (Fainstein, 2005; Blokland and van Eijk, 2010).

Other authors warn that a high degree of heterogeneity may have unwanted consequences, such as coolness between neighbours (Gans, 1961; Goodchild and Cole, 2001). Even tensions may arise when diverse social and ethnic groups are mixed in close proximity. As Lees (2008) argues "socially mixed neighbourhoods are just as likely to engender social conflict as social harmony, due to the clash of different cultures, classes and socioeconomic groups". Research conducted at the building and block level shows the desire for separation of communal social space within socially-mixed apartment blocks (Uitermark, 2003). Therefore **privacy** should also be provided.

The perceived **safety** of a neighbourhood is a fundamental part of social cohesion. Safety and fear of crime are related to activities that take place in public environments (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2006). Intentional physical risk, such as violence and terrorism, or accidental, such as fall and collisions, can force people to stay indoors, therefore limiting social interaction and cohesion. Some of the claimed associations between safety and the built environment include the benefits of natural surveillance, i.e. windows directly overlooking streets, which is said to increase perceived comfort and safety. Poor condition and maintenance of the built environment are also claimed to have detrimental psychological effects on people's sense of safety.

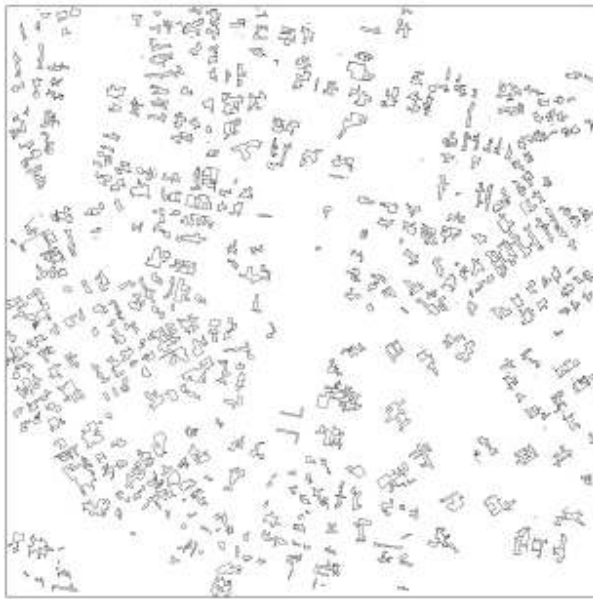


Figure 3. Location of unbuilt space in the city blocks (left) and typologies (right).

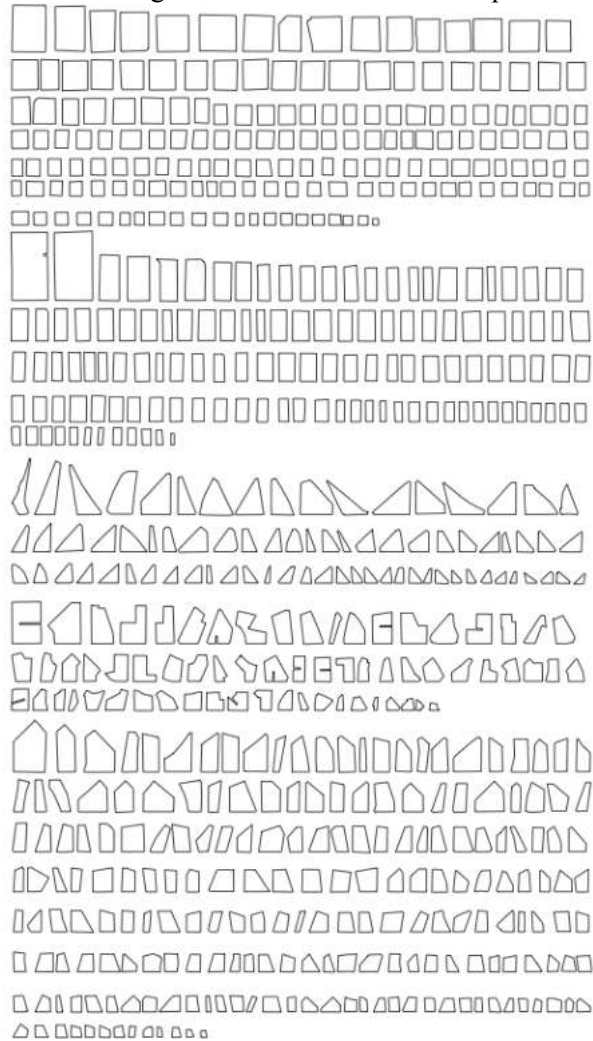


Figure 4. Typologies of building blocks (left) and buildings (right)

3. The case study of Omonia, Athens

3.1 Issues of social cohesion in the examined neighbourhood

As case study a central Athenian neighborhood, Omonia, has been chosen. The selected site has an area of 4.000.000 m² (2mx2km). Its estimated population is 40.000. A concentration of multiple land uses is observed (retail, housing, offices, recreation, hotels etc.) (Fig. 1). Around 600 building blocks are to be found within the site. Residential have been recorded in 80% of the city blocks (median average number of residents per building block is 85). Green space is only found at the periphery of the site, while public space is lacking.

Omonia was the principal square of the 1834 neo-classical city plan of Athens by Ed. Schaubert and S. Kleanthis and the intended location of the royal palace, the pole of a patte d' oie pattern opening towards the Acropolis (Tzonis and Rodi, 2013). The relocation of the palace led to a continuous transformation of the square and the neighbourhood. High population densities, building heights and FAR without supporting infrastructure led to the neighbourhood's development and subsequent dramatic downgrading. A middle class area during the 1950s and 1960s, it was abandoned by its residents. Several failed regeneration efforts were made so as to reaffirm its identity as the city's heart. The area is currently inhabited by immigrants, prostitutes, drug addicts and dealers living in very confined spaces in dilapidated buildings. The population has become diverse with no single group representing a clear majority. Omonia has become a no-man's land, with a negative and impersonal identity. The square itself is an empty square occasionally hosting waves of immigrants.

Since the early 1990s and due to its geographical position and the broader geo-political change, Athens has received large numbers of economic immigrants who have largely affected the city's socio-economic and socio-spatial structures. Following the 2009 economic crisis, increasing difficulties started when the available niches in the labour market were reduced and the average immigrant's profile changed towards that of a less educated/skilled male. (Maloutas, Souliotis, Alexandri et al, 2013). Nowadays, half of the immigrants in Greece live in broader Athens. Out of this population, 44% of lives in its central sector where inexpensive housing can be found. They count for the 19% of municipality's total population. Immigrant of diverse ethnic background live within proximity of each other and mix with Greeks who remained in the center after the 1980s and 1990s suburbanization and sprawl. This unintended social mix and spatial proximity did not eliminate social difference. Separation in terms of everyday life, consumption patterns and the use of services, along with a mix of cooperative and conflicting coexistence have marked these two and a half last decades of substantially increased ethnic diversity in Athens. Studies dating even back to the 1990s, identified areas excluding immigrants in inner Athens. However, comparative research among European metropolises, showed that there is no area in Athens that could be classified as ghetto (Maloutas, Souliotis, Alexandri et al, 2013; Arapoglou and Maloutas, 2011).

The threat of conflict or disrupted social ties also results from symbolic divisions, as well as ideological and political mediations. Lower-middle class groups feel trapped in a common destiny with immigrant populations in contrast to the upper-middle class who prospers in the fashionable and emerging suburbs. The potential threat for social cohesion is reflected in terms of deprivation and material inequality since the ethnic mix of populations living densely in Omonia, in aging rented accommodation and with deficits in public infrastructure. Too often an apartment building may host households belonging to more than three ethnic groups. The size and level of apartments signify economic and social discrimination even among the residents of a single building (Arapoglou and Maloutas, 2011).

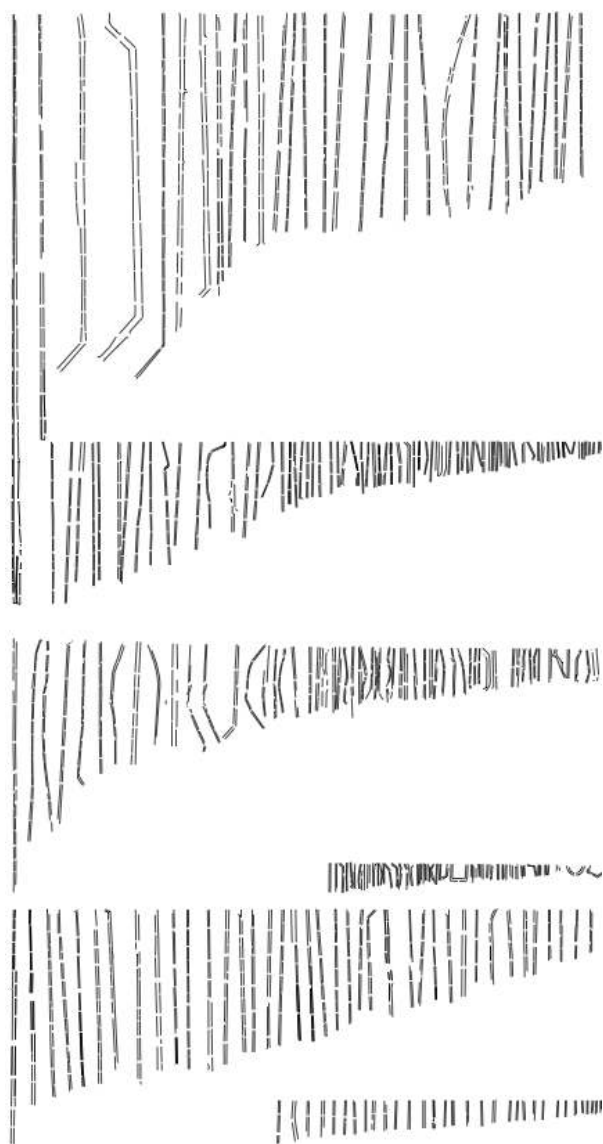


Figure 5. Typologies of streets



Figure 6. Typologies of encl. un-built space, squares, important buildings, junk spaces and green areas

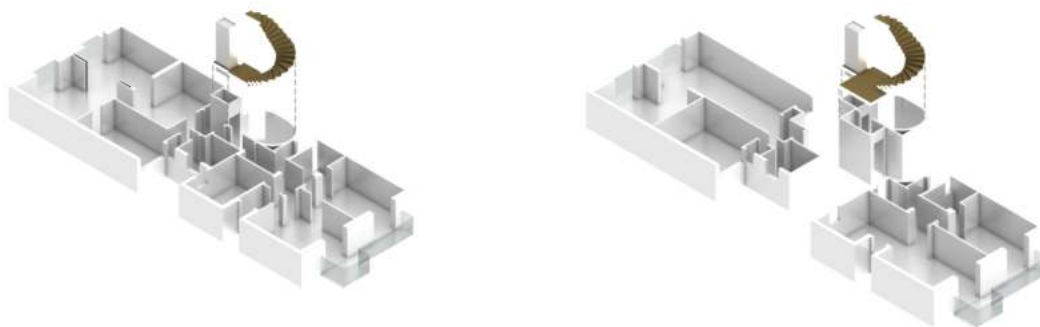


Figure 7. Division of an apartment building into two

3.2 Dissatisfaction with the city and people.

In a survey conducted on how citizens perceive quality of life in 79 European cities and 4 surrounding areas, Athens ranked last in most fields (European Commission, 2013). It was the only city where a majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the life they lead (45%) and the place they live in. (56%).

Although safety was not an issue of importance in the majority of the cities surveyed, in Athens was seen as the most important of all. It is the only capital where the majority of respondents do not feel safe in their neighbourhood (63%) and city (81%) with an increase of 32% since 2009. As regards to immigrants, respondents in 7 out of 10 cities agreed that the presence of foreigners is good for the city. In Athens a significant majority disagree with this statement. On the question of whether foreigners are well integrated, 82% of respondents in Athens disagree. This is the highest percentage among all cities in the survey. Athens surroundings follow in rank. Respondents were asked whether they agree that most people in their city can be trusted. In 64 out of 83 cities included in this survey more than 50% of respondents agreed that people in their city can be trusted with Athens ranking last with only 18% of respondents trusting their fellow citizens.

In European cities, level of satisfaction with regards to green spaces is generally high. People in Athens show again the highest level of dissatisfaction (77%). Athens respondents also show the highest dissatisfaction among Europeans with regards to public spaces such as markets, squares and pedestrian areas. Finally, Athens ranks second before last concerning on satisfaction with the state neighbourhood streets and buildings (27%).

3.3 A spectrum of interventions: Design action to promote social cohesion

As already mentioned, a critical goal of *Bricolage Urbanism* is to develop new interpretations of public and private space through micro-scale interventions, and also generate new forms of urbanity addressing the integration of the individual with the collective, and the urban with the environmental. The aim is to provide maximum outcome through minimal means, and to establish a network of community partnerships to act as programme generators. *Bricolage Urbanism* moves across scales and develops a series of architectural and urban design elements that are able to satisfy inhabitants's needs.

In Omonia, we explore new and divergent ideas to invert urban decay. We identify a set of design actions for the transformation of the area into a socially cohesive urban neighbourhood. Design actions in the neighbourhood can take place in public space (squares, streets, parks etc.), but can also take place within private or common areas (internal courtyards in city blocks, entrances, roofs, apartments, etc.). Omonia lacks usable open and green spaces. Instead of demolishing parts of the urban tissue to provide new common areas, the strategy activates junk spaces in the public realm and the unused interior of city blocks that can be connected to the street. This "new common ground" functions as a framework for social and physical development, creating a porous urban fabric for the community with environmental benefits. Junk space turned to usable public space will contribute an increase in public space equal to 50 % of the current total area of city squares in the neighbourhood. Access and development of the interior open space of city blocks can contribute further increase, equal to 250% !. These new common areas could provide opportunities for social interaction between residents of different incomes and backgrounds. In this way, they may accumulate extra social capital, which is expected to have a positive impact on social inclusion and cohesion (Fig. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

Design actions of *Bricolage Urbanism* operate on private space and transform both city blocks and apartment buildings (Fig. 7, 8). These actions may include insertion of small-scale housing units into

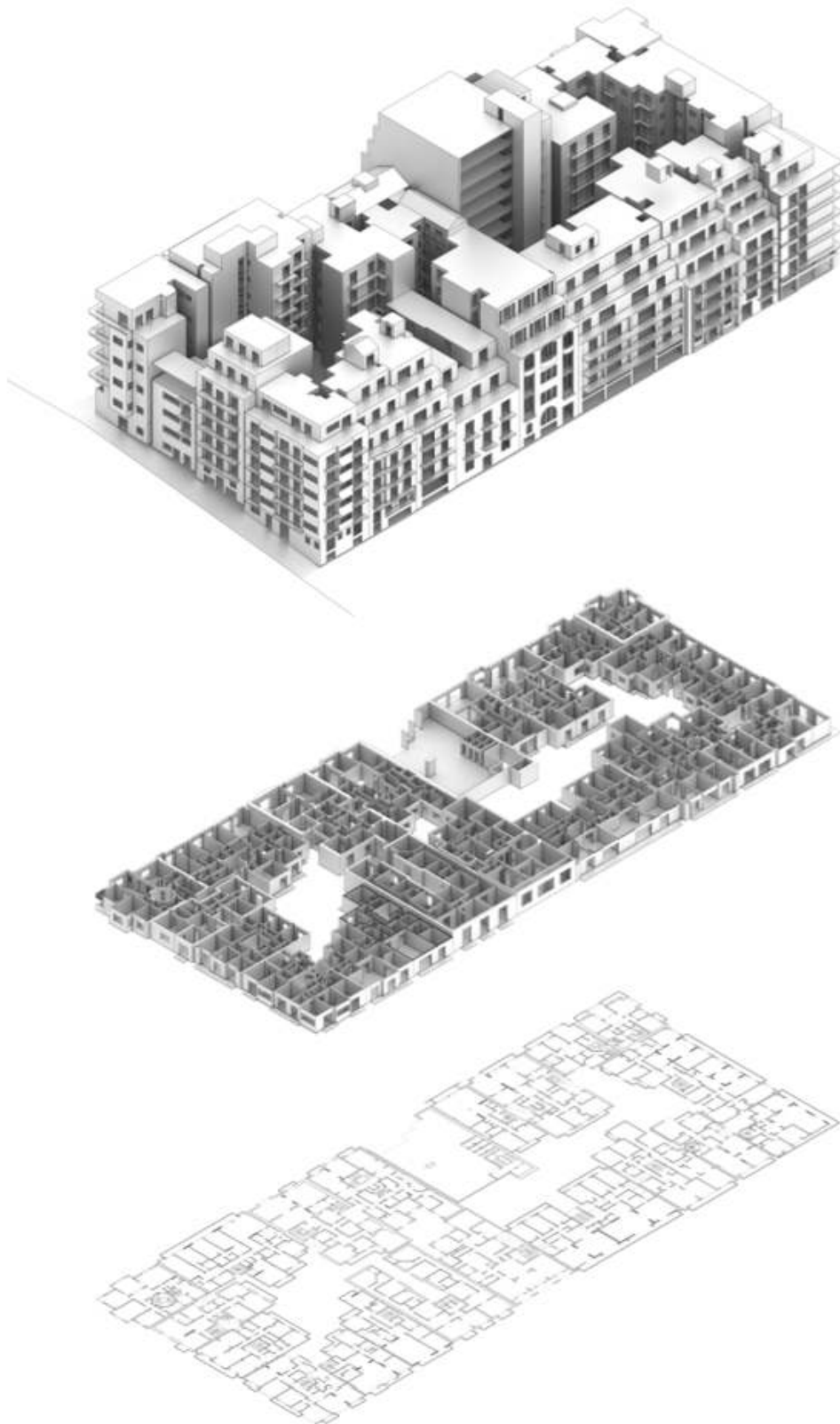


Figure 8. Typical Building Block. Exploded axonometric showing building volume, un-built space, lightwells, typical floor, staircases

residual spaces of existing blocks, creation of green roofs, integration of planted courtyards and social spaces with cultural, recreational, educational and communal programmes in the interior of city blocks, and invigoration of vacant lots through their linking with adjacent streets and leftover spaces. New pedestrian paths consisting of open air and enclosed accesses and passageways will form networks connecting these new social spaces. As for apartment buildings, we propose transformations towards flexible and varied unit types for households in contrast to the homogeneity and repetitiveness of existing apartments. These changes will offer new facilities and infrastructure addressing a wide range of programmes and catering to a strongly diversified population.

4. Conclusions

Promoting and strengthening social cohesion is a principle shared by European societies. In the pursuit of socially cohesive urban neighbourhoods, people-based and place-based policies have to work together. Urban space is perceived as the arena for social cohesion. The densely populated centre of Athens, Omonia, experiences the dramatic impact of immigration and conflict. Public space is lacking and, also, underused. New strategies and patterns of use have to be introduced. Thus, in order to achieve social cohesion, the study expands its scope beyond public urban areas (streets, squares, parks etc) to the private realm (city blocks, apartment buildings, apartments, inner courtyards and roofs). The research established social cohesion related criteria and their correlation to urban form through typo-morphological features. It can inform the thought and work of planners, designers, and decision and policy makers and contribute to the critical analysis and design so as to regenerate high density neighbourhoods. However, we would like to warn against the pitfall of physical determinism that relates morphological features and social cohesion as for example, in the perception that exclusion rates are due to the existence of junk or underused space in the city blocks.

Through Bricolage Urbanism our research aims to contribute to the:

- Development of an appropriate physical setting for a heterogeneous urbanity through small-scale relational and situational urban interventions.
- Urban design process that emphasizes the importance of intervention on both public and private space to meet essential needs of local and migrant communities.
- Perception of the city as a shared space enriched with opportunities for social and cultural activities
- Intensification, reactivation and reinvention of urban space for and with the participation of local people and immigrants through the process of design and implementation of urban interventions.

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