FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT THE INSTITUTIONAL TOOL OF REGENERATION. THE CASE OF VOLOS.

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ABSTRACT

In Greece, there are numerous legislative instruments which, despite being significant spatial planning tools, are not practically used at all. Regarding urban planning, the most important and already implemented law is the law 2508/1997 ‹‹Sustainable Residential Development in Urban and Country Settlements and Other Provisions››. Several provisions of this law address major urban planning, socio-economic and environmental problems of the country's cities and smaller settlements. A typical example of this is the regeneration tool, aimed primarily at improving the residents' living conditions and built environment, protecting and showcasing the area's cultural, historical, morphological and aesthetic features. This paper examines whether this tool has been implemented in the case of a medium-sized Greek city, Volos. The analysis showed that since 1997, when the law was adopted, and up until today, no region has been declared a regeneration area. So, this paper also examines the reasons why a useful tool with so many urban planning and developmental benefits was never used. Is it due to the stiffness of the state apparatus, the lack of interest on behalf of the competent authorities or the inadequacy of available resources? Therefore, the main question that arises in this case-study is why are point interventions being recorded since they are not part of a broader and integrated project.

1. Introduction

The term 'urban regeneration' has acquired quite a few meanings both over the years and, to a certain extent, over different countries. According to a general descriptive definition, regenerations are urban planning interventions in parts of the existing urban fabric which include, though not entirely consumed by, their physical (re)structuring. In this context, the specific objectives, thematic range and emphases on regeneration are determined by the urban planning problems (if any) and some general parameters, such as the cities' changing roles or socio-economic data (Oikonomou, 2004).

Defining the term's notion and content is particularly significant, because urban regeneration is very often confused with urban renaissance. The first case concerns interventions in the morphological characteristics of the residential area (mainly in the public, but also in the private sector), while the second one relates to interventions in its structural characteristics. So, even though, for instance, regenerations may lead to an overall improvement of the city's image, urban renaissance aims at changing the city itself, that is to say, not only its morphological or even economic, social and cultural characteristics. Urban renaissance is a wider process that contains urban regenerations, without which it would prove quite difficult to bear fruits. The interventions made in the existing urban area, which focus on physical planning, are obviously not the only components of the urban renaissance spectrum. They practically have a central role in it as they are essentially connected to some of its principal

determinants (Oikonomou, 2004). There is, consequently, a two-way and clearly hierarchical relation between the two. What is more, it should be mentioned that urban renaissance, as a predominantly development process, requires the existence of a coherent framework and a combination of several sectoral policies.

2. Urban regeneration in the Greek reality

The basic element identified within the Greek reality, both in theory and in practice, is that the boundaries between urban regeneration and urban renaissance are not very distinct especially in institutional texts where the term of urban renaissance is never used in contrast to that of urban regeneration. The tool of urban regenerations which is established by the provisions of the law 2508/1997 (Article 8) is a classic example of this. Now, while the areas in question should be referred to as urban renaissance areas – based on their characteristics as well as their objectives – the institutional framework refers to them as urban regeneration areas (this specific tool will be extensively discussed later on). This is why there is still a growing confusion regarding the terminology used.

Even if we accept this institutional term on condition, the problem remains, as it has been informally established that any kind of urban intervention, whatever the intensity, is characterized as urban regeneration. As a consequence, the term is used today to describe fragmented or point interventions that have absolutely nothing to do with the philosophy and definitions derived from the institutional text, thus reflecting the lack of cohesion and planning in design (Vlachvei, 2012). Various problems arise, in this way, such as difficulty in implementing the urban planning policy and in evaluating the results of the underlying projects and the predominance of fragmented interventions over integrated planning.

3. Institutional tool characteristics of the regeneration of law 2508/1997

By law 2508/1997 ‹‹Sustainable Residential Development in Urban and Country Settlements and Other Provisions›› (GG 124 A'/13.6.1997), except for any other strategic type tools such as Development Plans, Open City Spatial and Residential Plans and Master Plans, the first institutional tool for problem or developing areas which are within the city plan – either by instalments or in entire urban units – has been introduced. (Chapter B' in articles 8-17). The law's objective lies in the environmental and urban planning recuperation of the city area as opposed to previous residential policies confined only to urban extension. (law 2508/1997)

Regenerations based on institutional provisions have yet to be realized, while even the ones whose designing had begun (Old City of Irakleio, N. Liosia, Zygos area – municipality of Filippon Kavalas) were never completed, due to the lack of issuing regulatory acts as provided by law. (Scientific Committee Report, 2006)

According to law 2508/97 regeneration is defined as: "…the set of guidelines, measures, interventions and procedures of an urban, social, economic, residential and specific architectural nature, which result from a relevant study and aim mainly towards improving the citizens' living conditions and built environment, protecting and showcasing the area's cultural, historical, morphological and aesthetic features". Regeneration areas are defined as:"…those areas of approved city plans or demarcated settlements where problems of degradation or deterioration of the residential environment are noted. These problems cannot be confronted only through the usual urban planning procedures of town plan revision and building terms and restrictions. A regeneration area may include one or more urban units or parts of urban units." "In order for an area to be classified as a regeneration area, there should be at least some of the problem categories below: High building densities or great lack of communal spaces

and spaces for recreational facilities. Conflicts on land uses or needs of radically restructuring land uses, depending on the area's potential and prospects. Lack of protection and promotion of the area's historical, archaeological and cultural features and activities. Increasing aesthetic degradation and generally that of the area's built environment quality and natural assets. Pressing housing stock problems."

The regeneration process consists of three stages: the preliminary proposal which includes the preliminary proposal and the financial information, the programme where the timetable, guidelines, measures and any processes needed for the project's completion including its budget are systematized and the regeneration design which includes the urban study and other relevant specific studies.

The Ministry is responsible for the approval of the regenerations which have to be part of an overall design while having emerged from the area's certified DP, OCSRP, MP guidelines. Furthermore, in case of any public interest reasons not having been considered during the designing phase, their approval is rendered impossible. (Scientific Committee Report, 2006)

Regeneration is perceived as a business plan, part of the current DP/ OCSRP /MP programming according to which the regeneration area is determined. The preliminary proposal constitutes the planning document that sets the goals, guidelines and implementation measures and the regeneration design is essentially the business plan. (Arvanitaki, 2005). Respectively, the regeneration study comprises the physical planning of a project within a given space, as reflected upon the planning and the business level.

Competent regeneration bodies, according to the law, are par excellence public institutions and namely the public administration at a NUTS 2 or even a LAU 1 level. Respectively, the responsibility for opening a procedure lies with the private sector either at ministry level or at the level of local authorities.

Regeneration is a fairly new term in Greece in contrast to the aforementioned foreign bibliography, though it shares common features with the term of urban regeneration due to its developmental character, which is based on the institutional framework (law 2508/97).

4. Reasons for not implementing the institutional tool and its necessity

Several critical points of the law 2508/97 on regenerations are expressed below:

- Legislative complexity as to the procedures to be followed.
- Stiffness as to the competent bodies. Public-private partnership is not given the opportunity to grow.
- The public sector, which has a major reserve problem especially during the current Greek economic crisis, is the only funding source.
- There is no legal differentiation as regards to the process of regeneration depending on its intensity degree (mild or highly invasive form of regeneration), and what is more, there is no regeneration possibility for the white land area included in the institutional framework. (Arvanitaki, 2005)
- Failure to inform the public so that they can participate in the process of regeneration in order to avoid negative reactions and for the project to be embraced by the local community. (Tsoukala, 2005)
- Lack of institutional measures about building renovations and reconstructions within the regeneration areas, in case the owners are indifferent to their restoration. (Tsoukala, 2005)

These problems were recorded in examples of cities where regeneration studies based on the law were approved but never actually completed (the example of Palaio Irakleio).
Undeniably, there is a need for a more flexible legislation on the regeneration issue, among others, which would offer the possibility for a public-private partnership, not only to avoid conflicts of interest, but also to seek funding, as the public sector does not possess the required capital especially during the economic crisis. Simultaneously, the participation and involvement of the local residents is an integral part of the project's success because quality urban planning for the society's benefit is a top priority. The stiffness of the institutional frameworks in the Greek reality complicates, of course, the projects' completion, while, at the same time, the DPs, ΣΧΟΟΑΠ, or MPs are revised after a quite long period of time and their updating according to economic, social and urban planning needs is seriously delayed.
In order for the property ownership to be defined, the Land Register completion is a necessary condition for exploiting the existing economic incentives offered by the law and for achieving efficient planning.

Nevertheless, the fragmentation which characterizes today's "regenerations" (better: point interventions) has eliminated the area's coherence and consistency both in physical planning and in the realization of its vision and design. This will result in urban planning as well as environmental benefits and will contribute to the area's economic growth through attracting suitable investments.

5. Case – Study of Volos

In the previous section of this publication, reference was made to the institution of regeneration and to what is happening in the Greek reality. In particular, emphasis is placed on the institutional tool of regenerations and on the fact that it remains inactive since the year the law was established, even though it could have made a major contribution to the way Greek cities are structured. Apart from the theoretical approach to the matter, exploring the tool's implementation is equally essential so that its practical importance can be understood as well. For this reason, a medium – sized city, Volos, is selected, where point interventions and the absence of integrated planning predominate, just as it happens in the rest of the country.

5.1 Analysis of the city

Volos is situated at the central part of the country at a close distance from both the metropolitan regions of Athens and Thessaloniki. It is the sixth biggest Greek city with a population of 141.675 citizens and a size of 385.614 sq km. The area specialises in the tertiary sector, while the primary and secondary sectors follow at lower rates.The Municipality, according to the Kallikratis criteria, includes 9 urban planning units quite different from each other as regards to their population, economic, social and urban planning features. As to the municipal units relating to the present proposal, it should be noted that there are many land uses, with residency, trade and recreation among them. The building densities within these uses are high, which is based on the absence of communal spaces, mainly green spaces and city squares, within the urban fabric. Moreover, the interventions made within the urban space are point interventions without resulting from an integrated plan with questionable results. It is estimated that the determination of an area as a regeneration one would effectively address its various urban planning and economic problems.

A broad band that includes a section of the Palaion area (Municipality of Volos) and a section of the Municipality of Nea Ionia is defined as the regeneration area. This band constitutes an integrated section that covers some of the considerably large area of the two Municipalities (chart 1).

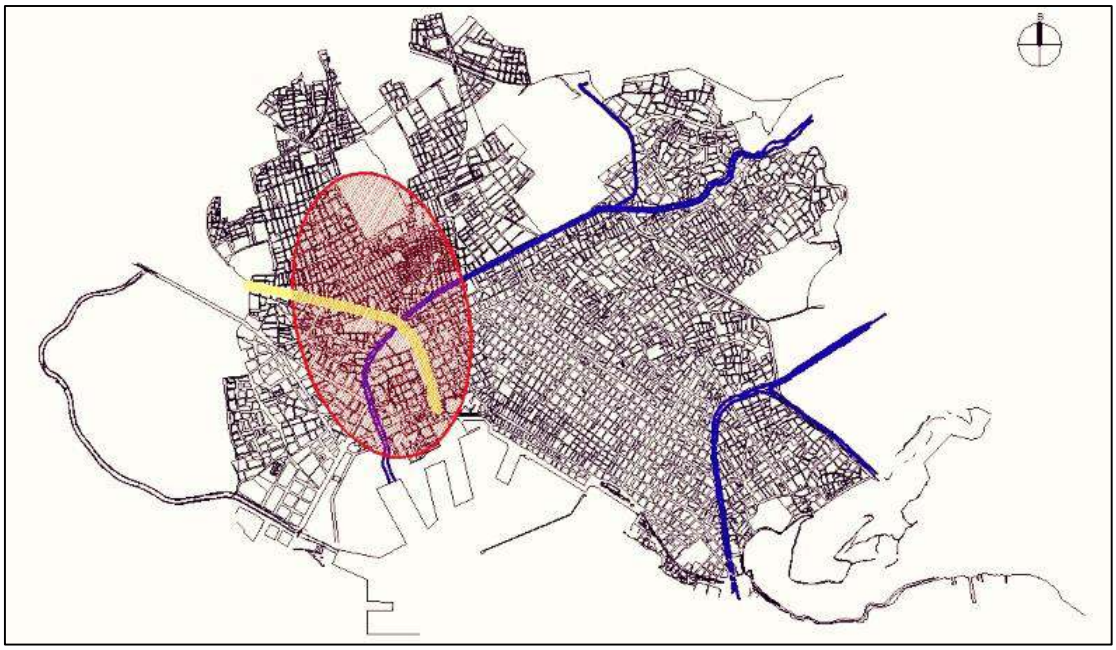

Chart 1. Regeneration area

This band's specific characteristics are those that make up the necessary and sufficient condition for this part of the city to be characterised as a regeneration area in accordance with the Greek institutional framework. The elements considered in order to explore whether the area meets the requirements and can therefore be characterised as a regeneration area are the following: urban planning – environmental, socioeconomic and cultural.

In more detail, as regards to its urban planning features, the main land uses that are being recorded within that band are those of residency, trade and recreation. In the absence of arrangements envisaged by the urban planning, it is quite reasonable for conflicts regarding land uses to arise. These are mostly between residency and recreation, as already observed in the Palaion area. The conflicts within the band section of the Municipality of N. Ionia are significantly fewer and spatially identified, even though the determination of measures/arrangements for their immediate restoration is necessary. In addition, another basic element of the area that contributes to the degradation of the urban environment are the high building densities. The absence of communal spaces reflected on the low sqm/resident rates (common feature of Greek cities), in combination not only with the absence of networking, but also with the bad quality, render interventions of an integrated nature absolutely necessary.

The analysis revealed two main facts regarding the proposed area's socioeconomic features: first, that the majority of citizens comes from lower and middle classes and second, that social discrimination phenomena against the area's different minorities (immigrants, Roma etc.) are often recorded. Moreover, due to the economic crisis the country is facing, there are numerous stores that are no longer in business, which has multiple effects on the local economy (e.g. unemployment, reduction of land values, etc.). As a result, features of a shrunken city can already be detected in the area.

The cultural features are equally important since the area as a whole has a unique historical nature which is strongly reflected upon the urban landscape. The archaeological sites, monuments and mainly the housing stock are typical of this. While, however, the existing cultural and housing stock is especially rich, it remains unreliable and in bad condition.

It can easily be deduced, now, that the proposed area has common features even though it is formed by sections of different urban planning units. Further differentiations, though not really significant, can be detected as well. There are, of course, some features, which may contribute to a better relationship between the two sections in the future through implementing an integrated urban planning project, although today these same features accentuate their differences. The first one is the railway premises (chart 1) which while connects the city of Volos to the district's headquarters, does not serve the connection between different parts within the city. On the contrary, it presents a further barrier that interrupts the spatial continuity. The second feature is the river Krafsidonas which up until today has yet to be exploited, leading to the environment's aesthetic degradation.

It is established, therefore, that the proposed band meets all five of the criteria – problem categories of the law 2508/97, in order for the area to be classified as a regeneration area. The Municipality of Volos is appointed the body responsible for the area's regeneration, so the benefits resulting from this process can be fully exploited by it and especially at an economic level, without the existence of lost profit.

5.2 The purpose of this proposal

The purpose of this proposal is twofold. On the one hand, the very useful institutional tool that has remained inactive up until today has to be implemented, and on the other hand, it has to become the stimulus for comprehending the importance of a complete and clearly stated urban planning policy. In other words, urban planning should not be identified with point interventions, as it usually happens today in the country. The need for a comprehensive approach to problems and the link between urban planning and development design should be understood. Particularly in a country like Greece, where problems besetting the city centres are not only of an urban planning but especially of a socio-economic nature, their holistic treatment is necessary. This indicates that the means and tools to be used are going to have both an urban planning and a development dimension since, by their own nature, society, economy and urban planning are inextricably linked.

The proposals discussed in this article are limited to guidelines and do not specialise in particular arrangements – measures. This is because regeneration areas are determined, according to the law, by the Development Plans (DP) which are of a strategic and not of a regulatory nature. Detailed arrangements will, therefore, have to be provided for by other types of planning such as urban planning studies and implementation acts.

More precisely, the proposed guidelines address the following axes:

A) Increase in the percentage of communal spaces per citizen and creation of networks such as green spaces, foot and cycle paths.

Finding available space for the creation of communal spaces in the case of Greek cities is undeniably a cumbersome and time-consuming process mainly because of the dominance of fragmentation of private property (Getimis, 2000) and smaller property. Furthermore, unregulated building projects that resulted in reshaping the peri-urban space illegally and in advance and where the subsequent urban development plan of '87 was based, are the urban planning policy's status quo. This causes a plethora of problems within the urban space among which is the difficulty in locating communal spaces. Nevertheless, both the national legislation and the European programmes, in which the country participates, allow the possibility of locating spaces suitable for this specific purpose. Using tools such as reimbursement, the preferential right and the building rate transfer, the national urban planning legislation and the exploitation of European programmes of type Jessica ensure the regeneration body that there are the resources necessary for the projects to be completed. They also provide the landowners with the incentives so that they can participate in it. What is more, the exploitation of

unstructured spaces and empty shells is the alternative to ensuring the existence of the communal spaces required for the regeneration area. Finally, the public – private partnership should be a top priority. Both sides can benefit from this partnership. For the public body, the benefits are directly related to the location of the required land and to the maintenance of any communal spaces that will arise. For the private sector, the benefits are related to investment incentives that will be provided within the band.

B) Addressing the nuisances occurred by different land uses.

Within the study area, no land use conflicts serious enough to require modification of the designated uses by the Development Plan are detected. However, individual nuisances between recreational spaces and residences cannot be overlooked. To address this problem, it is proposed by way of illustration, to reduce the authorised noise levels and to impose stricter fines in case they are exceeded.

C) Protection and promotion of the historical and cultural features.

The area in discussion, as mentioned above, possesses a rich historical and cultural stock which is, unfortunately, neither protected nor exploited. Thus, its negative impact is the degradation of the historical monuments and archaeological sites themselves and, by extension, the loss of the area's historical identity and the creation of lost profit instead of it being exploited (e.g. used as a resource for tourism). In order to address these issues, the creation of a network of archaeological sites and historical monuments is suggested. At the same time, an indicative way to protect and promote them is to provide the urban equipment and specific lighting needed for them to be accessible to the public for longer periods of time.

D) Upgrade in the quality of the structured and physical environment.

The communal spaces, the foot and cycle paths as well as the paths connecting archaeological sites will contribute significantly to the reformation of the urban environment. Additionally, emphasis is placed on providing the right incentives, such as funding or municipal tax reduction in case of building renovations that will contribute to great improvement of the housing stock.

Simultaneously, using the existing infrastructures, the promotion of the railway station and establishments, the exploitation of the river as an important resource of the area and their smooth integration into the urban fabric, will remove the barriers that previously existed. After having achieved these objectives, further benefits are expected at an urban planning and economic level. The urban planning and environmental benefits are obvious. The economic ones, though, arise indirectly from increasing land values, attracting capital and granting aid to local small and medium-sized businesses about which further incentives are proposed.

E) Providing urban planning – economic incentives

The regeneration tool of the law 2508/97, as stated in the previous section, has a strong development dimension, which cannot be disregarded in this proposal. So, then, besides public – private partnership and benefits to the local economy, which were analysed earlier, it is appropriate for urban planning and economic incentives to be provided as well within this band. Some instances of these incentives are funding new businesses, tax reduction for small and medium – sized businesses and favourable building conditions.

It is estimated that the above mentioned guidelines will effectively contribute to the improvement both of the morphological and structural features of the area in the short and in the long term. That being

said, they will enhance the quality of the urban environment and at the same time create prospects for the local economy to recover and for the social cohesion to be strengthened.

6. Conclusions

Having understood the need to connect spatial and development planning, the use of multidimensional tools is absolutely necessary. The forefront of the law 2508/1997 lies in incorporating the development dimension into urban planning. Since it includes tools that are capable of yielding substantial effects at numerous levels, it thereby highlights the socio – economic terminations of urban planning. However, several provisions of the law, including those on regeneration, have not yet been implemented in Greece. On the contrary, the ‹‹regenerations›› take place only at a point intervention level. The reasons why such a practical tool is not in use are many, varying from bureaucracy (e.g. delays in completing and approving projects) and lack of available resources to stiffness of the country's intricate legislative system. The main issue that arises, though, is the absence of a clear and integrated policy and the existence of multiple legal instruments, which are sometimes confusing, since they operate in opposition to each other. It is, then, particularly important to lay some foundations so as to perceive that urban planning has to have a strong development dimension and not be restricted to planned and point interventions

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