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Public spaces and neoliberal policies: The Greek case

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The process of neoliberalizing public spaces involves implementing policies aimed at increasing capital flow to offset reductions in local budgets. In Greece, although public spaces are decisive elements of the urban tissue, the tools, strategies, and mechanisms for their development are mainly based on public funding and the role of the private sector is still weak. The current paper analyzes the policies for public spaces since 1950 until today and the role of public and private sectors in their development. It focuses on specific periods as the Olympic Games, the economic crisis and today, to investigate the policies followed for public spaces development. The research area is the capital of Greece, and the examined case studies include both small- and large-scale areas to cover different types of public spaces. Research focuses on the changes in the legislative framework to promote the role of private sector and evaluates its role and collaboration with the public sector. The analysis of the case studies shows that constrained expertise, centralized decision-making procedures, and inadequate coordination of synergies among management entities, have resulted in notable deficiencies in the partnerships between the public and private sectors in supporting projects for the regeneration of public areas.

Keywords: neoliberalism, urban regeneration, economic crisis, 2004 Olympic Games, Athens

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Introduction

The term “neoliberalism,” refers to a political resurgence that emphasizes the importance of the private sector in the economy and society. It is associated with economic liberalization, including privatization, deregulation, globalization, free trade, monetarism, austerity, and reductions in government funding. Neoliberalism is an ideology committed to the implementation of rolling out of market mechanisms and competitiveness and the rolling back of governmental intervention (Peck & Tickell, 2002).

Neoliberalism emerged in the late 1970s as a new means of restructuring international capitalism and restoring conditions for capital accumulation (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism is based on the economies of Western societies, primarily industrial and manufacturing activities, where the private sector has a central role, and the public sector is limited. The political conditions of liberal democracy have influenced the principles of neoliberal governance, including citizens’ rights to a better life, the development of competitive services and a limited role for targeted government interventions (Theodore & Peck, 2011).

Capital accumulation and urbanization are linked by real estate assets and the land revenue they generate. As cities are constantly evolving systems that adjust to the social, cultural, and environmental norms of each civilization, they are key components in fostering global competitiveness as well as hubs for social, political, and economic transformation. Neoliberal policies restrict urban planning in the context of urban development, which has serious spatial ramifications (Sager, 2011). For this reason, the myth that neoliberalism is the greatest way to address issues with global development is called into question (Carmody & Owusu, 2016).

In this framework, urban planning policies not only create the environment in which practices, manifestations, and sites of resistance occur, but also reflect the effects of neoliberalism (Allmendinger & Graham, 2012). More specifically the Southern European cities depend greatly upon their own socio-cultural networks and dynamics, as they have been developed as trading hubs, with rich hinterlands and large and varied population (Seixas & Albet i Mas, 2010). The 2008 economic crisis that impacted Southern European countries was attributed to a combination of weak economic performance and institutional or political mismatches (Tulumello, Cotella & Othengrafen, 2020).

But how are public spaces in cities affected by neoliberal policies? The process of neoliberalizing public spaces involves implementing policies aimed at increasing capital flow to offset reductions in local budgets. Central to these policies is the pursuit of strategies to draw in more tourists and businesses, marking a significant shift towards market-oriented urban development. This trend has led to the normalization of market-driven logic in public space management. Considering increasing pressure to adhere to entrepreneurial norms, cities are compelled to enhance competitiveness and explore fresh avenues for investment. One prevalent tactic is the adoption of public-private partnerships to deliver services to residents, reflecting the evolving landscape of urban governance (Dassé, 2019). The current and ongoing economic crisis is the first phenomenon of its kind and scale in the post-Second World War period in Greece (Serraos et al., 2016).

This paper examines the role of neoliberal policies in the development of Greek public spaces during the country’s recent history. Its aim is to analyze the framework of spatial planning and its role in involving both public and private sectors in the development of public spaces in specific periods, utilizing case studies. It focuses on Athens, the capital of Greece, where most

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regeneration projects are occurring. The study scrutinizes both small- and large-scale urban regeneration projects to discern similarities and differences in procedural approaches and the extent of private sector involvement in regeneration procedures. The research is based on examining the framework for regenerating public spaces during critical periods of the country's recent history, including the period of the Olympic Games, when large-scale regeneration projects supported by new legislative frameworks were developed for the city; the period of the Greek economic crisis, characterized by limited funding capabilities of the Greek public sector; and the period up to the present, during which the private sector is increasingly encouraged to play a more active role in public spaces regeneration.

Public space – Definition and characteristics

For the definition of urban public space, it is important to analyze its elements. Krier (1991) underlines that those public spaces are like the corridors and central rooms of each house. Jacobs (1961) argues that public space is registered in society's public sphere, as a place of meeting, interaction, confrontation, and dialogue. According to Habermas (2004), the public space covers the human need to coexist with others and to develop relationships through interaction.

Siebel and Wehrheim (2003) attempt to identify public space through its differences in relation to the private sphere. They argue that the public spaces are governed by public law, whereas the private sphere is governed by provisions protecting private property. Furthermore, in public spaces, functions related to public life, as entertainment, political activities, culture, and commerce are developed, while in private space, processes as production and reproduction are taking place. Finally, they argue that public space is a space for displaying arrogant behavior, unlike private space which is a space of intimacy.

Arendt (2018) asserts that public space is linked to public freedom and constitutes above all a political space, to the extent that common actions take place. Public space is a dynamic space developed in many different forms (streets, parks, squares) and in which many different activities meet human needs and protect the fundamental rights and the transmission of cultural meaning (Carr et al., 1992). According to the "Charter for Public Spaces," public spaces are divided into two types: those with distinct functional characteristics and those in which many different activities develop (Biennale Spazio Pubbico, 2013).

A public space is defined as any space in the city, to which all citizens have free access, and which is in common use (shared use). More specifically, parks, groves, beaches, forests, green spaces, squares, sidewalks, roads, and archaeological sites are defined as such spaces. Public space can be characterized as the area surrounding properties in a city, the space between buildings (Gehl, 1987). Public space is the space where everyone has the right to access, without income or social restrictions. It is the streets, the squares (Figure 1), the parks, the beaches but also the access to quality knowledge, entertainment, culture.

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Figure 1. Piazza della Signoria, Florence. Photo by [Samuli Lintula](#) / CC-BY-2.5

Public space is the product of competing ideas, a space of power and strength and therefore claimable, a political space, a space of increased recognition, of meeting strangers, a place of sociability but also a space of community and daily life development. The urban space and its form are the mirror of the social constitution of the city and the relations between its inhabitants. Public spaces are a window into the soul of the city (Zukin, 1995). Accordingly, private space is related to private individuals. The relationship between public and private space in a society often reveals its degree of prosperity or decline. Historically, it has been proven that in flourishing societies there is a developed collectivity and the dominance of the public over the private is reflected, while in societies in crisis the development of private interests overshadows the public interests, and the public space is a subject of pressure. During the 1980s, consumption activities began to replace traditional production functions, resulting in the emergence of new urban areas focused on cultural and consumer activities. Despite attempts of regeneration projects to redefine the identity of central places, these efforts were most of the times fragmental (Roberts & Eldridge, 2009).

According to Gehl (1987), a public space is functioning successfully according to the activities it facilitates. Gehl categorizes these activities into three groups: necessary activities, optional activities, and social activities. Necessary activities refer to the everyday tasks performed by individuals to meet their needs. Optional activities occur under favorable conditions, while social activities arise because of the first two categories, enhancing their effectiveness.

Today, cities that are constantly growing, need public urban spaces in every form, size and shape, as they are urban elements that define their citizens' physical, psychological, and

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emotional well-being. The revitalization of public spaces should be based on the promotion of intercultural communities and reflect the urban citizens' life and interaction. It should be based on principles of integrated management and promote social cohesion, economic development, environmental protection and urban conservation. During the last decades, the global economic transformations and the technology's development have led to city's transformation as "spatial" proximity that historically was a necessary condition for the development of the city is no longer necessary.

Public spaces in Greek cities

Public space had a special importance in the daily life of citizens in Greek cities since antiquity, from the Ancient Agora of Athens to the present day. Public spaces are the areas where many different functions are gathered and the center of social, commercial, cultural, and political life. They express the cultural and urban identity of a city, where people can satisfy the need for public expression and contact with other people. Since the development of the Greek State, at the beginning of the 19th century, the public spaces functioned as symbols of a new status, similar with the public spaces of other European cities of that period. Many plans were designed with huge public squares and boulevards that tried to show the entrance of Greece in a new era (Figure 2). Many of these plans were never implemented because the Greek State could not afford to expropriate all these large-scale urban areas, leading to a gradual shrinking of public spaces.

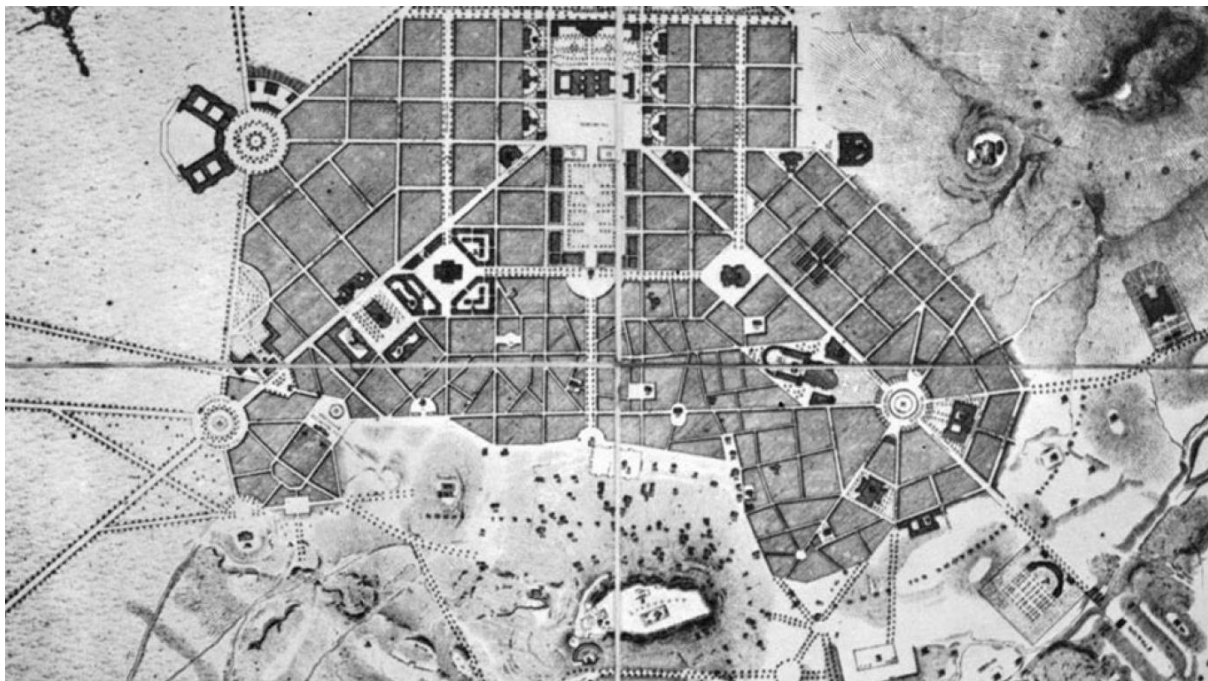


Figure 2. *The Kleanthis Schaubert plan for Athens in 1834. Source: Biris (1966)*

In the next decades, the increased demand for housing reconstruction, combined with increased car usage, resulted in plans that prioritized the intensification of construction and the development of new car infrastructures, often at the expense of green and open public areas.

In 1985, the Regulatory Plan for Athens set the base for big scale regeneration programs like the Unification of the Archaeological Sites of Athens, which was an innovative project in terms

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of scale, interventions, institutional arrangements, and know-how. It also focused on the capital's environmental planning and promoted pedestrian networks, green and open spaces in all neighborhoods. A few years later, in 1994, the Attica SOS Action Plan also promoted the increase of green spaces, through 30 interventions throughout the capital's basin, to develop new green and open spaces providing 4,000 acres of new public spaces. Despite the difficulties in its limited implementation, the project was the most important in the modern history of Athens, as it was one of the few plans to promote public spaces. The neoliberal restructuring of the country, which was implemented after 1996, did not include wealth redistribution. The urban development of the period was combined with policies that promoted competitiveness and entrepreneurship (Dimelli, 2018).

As it emerges from the investigation of the Greek experience, the public spaces regeneration programs of this period, that were expected to be exclusively funded by the public sector, according to the existing framework, were characterized by limited scale interventions. These interventions lacked to incorporate socio-economic parameters and were mostly fragmental, driven by political agendas aimed at city "beautification" rather than "regeneration" of public spaces (Andrikopoulou, 2008).

The first urban planning tool for public spaces regeneration

The basic law for public areas regeneration, enacted in 1997 (Law 2508/1997), defined the set of directions, measures, interventions, and processes of urban planning. Its primary aim was to improve the living conditions of the city's inhabitants by improving the built environment safeguarding and promoting the cultural, historical morphological and aesthetic elements and characteristics of Greek urban areas.

It defined that the regeneration of public spaces should be applied in areas with the following characteristics (Law 2508/1997):

- a. High building densities or lack of common spaces and spaces for public facilities.
- b. Conflicts of land uses.
- c. Lack of protection and promotion of the historical, archaeological, and cultural elements and activities.
- d. Increasing deterioration of the aesthetics and in general the quality of the built environment of the area and its natural elements.
- e. Degraded housing stock.

Two years later, Law 2742/1999 established Integrated Urban Regeneration Plans, which promoted integrated urban planning strategies in downgraded urban areas and promoted not only environmental but also social cohesion and economic development strategies (L.2742/1999). But although this framework was important for public spaces regeneration, the specifications for its preparation and implementation were legislated 13 years later, in 2012. Despite the framework for public spaces urban regeneration setting rules for public and private sector partnerships, the few projects during the period of 1997–2003 were funded exclusively by the public sector. However, the 2004 Olympic Games changed drastically the existing plans as areas originally designated for becoming public open and green spaces were repurposed for Olympic infrastructures and construction areas (Delladetsimas, 2003).

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The 2004 Olympic Games

The 2004 Olympic Games were a very important mega-event that brought Greece in the center of international attention. The program was based on the following pillars (Committee for the Athens 2000 Candidacy, 1996):

- Infrastructure
- Recovery and upgrading of the coastal zone
- Consolidation of archaeological sites
- Improvement of the Athenians historic center
- Regeneration of downgraded urban areas
- Redevelopment of areas around the Olympic facilities and access axes
- Actions to improve the image of the city and its public spaces (Figure 3).

Attica region hosted most infrastructure investments that completely restructured the accessibility relations and the geography of many areas. These investments were: the Spata Airport, the extension of the Metro lines, the Suburban Railway, the Tramway, the Attiki Road, the Ymittos Regional Road, the improvement of the Piraeus Port infrastructure. These new institutional interventions were beyond the legislated processes of planning practice that had been developed until then, in the name of public interest. The primary intention in this case was to entrench the process at a central level, to achieve a single and comprehensive system of licensing, to enforce safety standards and ensure the coordination of all necessary actions by all administrative levels within the limited available time. To facilitate the infrastructures construction, new provisions regarding the expropriation code, the temporary use of real estate and facilities, the transfer of stocks, and the use of coastal land were legislated. The adopted policies were mainly based on a technical-business approach, which was not combined with the socio-economic priorities of the city and with the post-Olympic urban development perspective.



Figure 3. The entrance of the Olympic stadium. Photo by [Georgios Liakopoulos](#) / [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

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Planning of the 2004 Olympic Games was based on two main committees which operated autonomously with respect to the existing state institutions at all levels of administrations: the National Committee of the Olympic Games and the Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games. In 1999, an emergency law on Olympic Projects defined new urban planning regulations which set the procedures for expropriation and acquisition of private and public real estate (Law 2730/1999).

The main tools for the implementation of the projects and the promotion of development initiatives were the “Special Plans” and the “Cooperation Agreements” between “Athens 2004” and the institutional bodies. A series of program contracts, memoranda of cooperation and business contracts were signed with ministries, local administrations, and agencies involved in the process. These collaborations gradually expanded to include professional associations and chambers. Financial difficulties, time constraints and organizational pressures did not allow the implementation of many of these contracts, while the agreements related to the post-Olympic period remained inactive.

The Olympic projects were a purely technical-construction action that was neither integrated into an urban strategy nor linked to planned proposals for private economic exploitation. After the 2004 Olympic Games, there was no established framework for the post-Olympic use of Olympic buildings, facilities, and infrastructures. The spatial policy and development of the Olympic projects was neither combined with the general socio-economic conditions of the city nor with local dynamics and needs. As a result, the whole project led to a post-Olympic inertia, with lots of ad hoc decisions that transferred facilities-buildings to public federations or granted them to private exploitation with long-term contracts.

Greek public spaces during the 2009–2017 economic crisis

The economic crisis in the Southern European countries that started by the end of 2009 led to neoliberal governance (Blyth, 2013) and other neoliberal principles (Seymour, 2014). They were enforced at a larger scale in the countries that were bailed out by the “Troika” (the EU, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund) and share similar historical and socio-political characteristics, e.g., Greece, Portugal, and Spain. They all present institutional issues, their urbanization processes are comparable, their welfare systems are mostly built on informal networks, and they are linked to agendas that are more elite-driven and less democratic (Dimelli, 2018). In Greece, an important role has been played by economic models based on sectors with low productivity and high employment – and hence low wages, large proportion of unskilled workers and stagnant productivity. This caused that wages in the public sector had been increased on the basis of political decisions to stimulate the (local) domestic demand and economic growth (Tulumello, Saija & Inch, 2020). During this period, the Greek cities which were formed under a mix of informal activities, arbitrary housing, and lack of planning, were downgraded as the existing legislation dictated that all regeneration projects should be funded by the public sector. New enacted planning laws share common features, including the simplification of procedures for land-use changes and spatial interventions, as well as the acceleration of procedures for public works. Amidst the morbid symptoms of the crisis and the profound political uncertainties it is generating, it is important to create critical debate about the nature of crises, austerity politics and their complex relationships to planning and urban development.

In the following years, regeneration of public spaces was mostly directed to mega-projects developed according to a different new legislative framework. The new decrees, Law 3894/2010 for private properties and Law 3986/2011 for public properties established that,

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due to the economic crisis conditions, a project could be approved even if it was not proposed by the existing urban and regional plans (Law 3894/2010, Law 3986/2011).

This framework allowed ad hoc new interventions by the private sector with long-term contracts, which were not in accordance with the existing spatial planning guidelines and restrictions. Although this new framework aimed at facilitating the role of the private sector within the existing complicated legislative environment, it faced strong criticism, as in many cases, the guise of development could lead to environmental degradation. During the last years of crisis, many restrictions of regular planning procedures were ignored for the facilitation of large-scale projects implementation, which were shaped by the pressures of social and economic priorities (Dimelli, 2023).

Mega-projects were developing under the principles of neoliberalism, while the following procedures for their completion were hardly based on advocacy planning as the main drivers of decision making were the public authorities (Dimelli, 2018).

The case of the former Hellinikon airport

By 2010, Greece presented two distinct phenomena. On the one hand, the built environment and public infrastructure deteriorated, the number of homeless people increased, and on the other hand various policies were enacted to benefit private funds. These new conditions boosted the participation of the private sector using the new legislative framework that was related to political decisions.

Hellinikon functioned as an airport until 2001. In the following years it became a big scale urban void that had to develop a new use (Figure 4). Research programs proposed the development of a park in the area, which would balance the lack of green and open public spaces in Attica's basin. Still, issues like the development, the management, and the maintenance of the area, did not lead to the implementation of these proposals as the public sector did not have available funds to finance these projects.

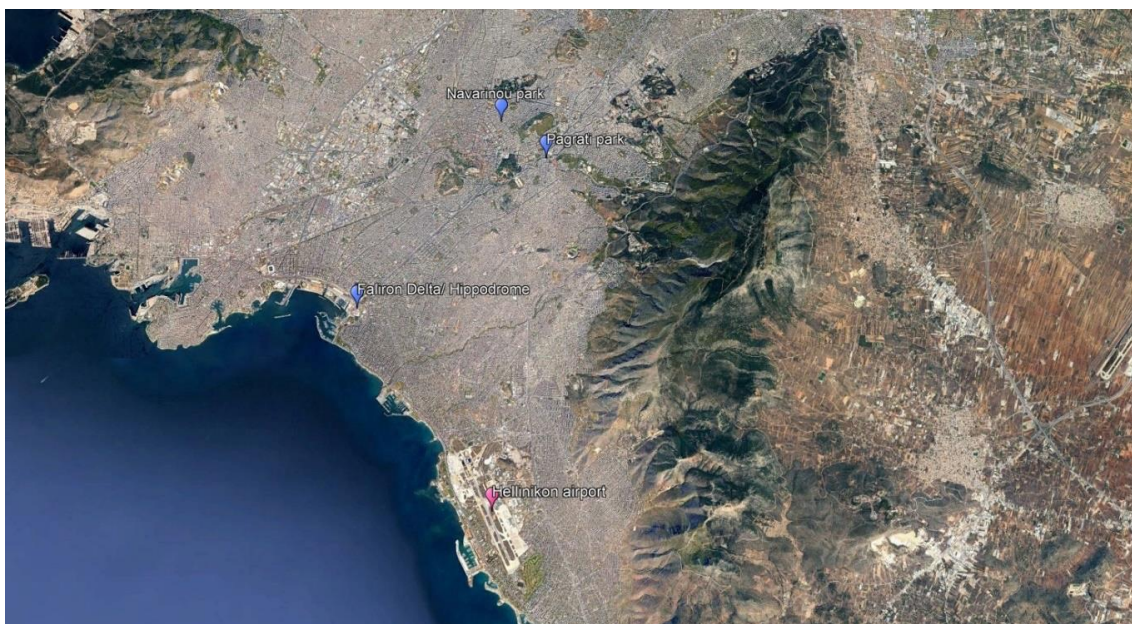


Figure 4. The Hellinikon airport area location in the Athenian basin. Source: [Google Earth](#)

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In the following years, as the conservative political forces were in charge, new proposals were introduced initially by Spiro Polalis and some years later by Norman Foster (Figure 5). These proposals envisioned the development of a park which would be combined with commercial and residential areas, hotels, casinos, malls, marinas and other infrastructures to attract new residents and visitors. These proposals appeared to be the only viable solutions in a country where private funds were the only available sources for urban regeneration projects due to the lack of public funds. The key factor for the proposal was funding resources, as the shared capital of the Hellinikon area and the implementation of the Business and Regeneration Plan was given to private investors, with the primary motivation being the investors' economic profit (Dimelli, 2023).



Figure 5. View of some of the proposed public zones. Source: [Foster + Partners](#)

The area's privatization has been intensively criticized. Although the Greek government promoted the project as a tremendous opportunity for job creation and economic development, many citizen communities and environmental organizations were against it, because it reduced the area's potential green spaces (Dimelli, 2018).

Little progress has been made until today, despite the public debate on regeneration between various political forces, mainly because of the Greek urban planning system's bureaucracy. Local society is divided to two main groups. The first group supports that the area would gradually lose its public identity and turn into a private place for consumption, while the second group believes that the development of commercial and other uses will lead to increased land values and employment and will become a new profitable pole for everyone.

The case of Navarinou Park

The inactive urban regeneration framework, combined with the lack of funding by the public sector, intensified the problem of the lack of open and green public area in Greek cities. Although mega-projects were promoted, still the lack of public spaces in the densely constructed neighborhoods of cities as Athens was a major problem. As the state was not able to provide the necessary public infrastructures, and the need for public spaces was intense, the residents of the Exarchia neighborhood decided to proceed to actions (Figure 6).

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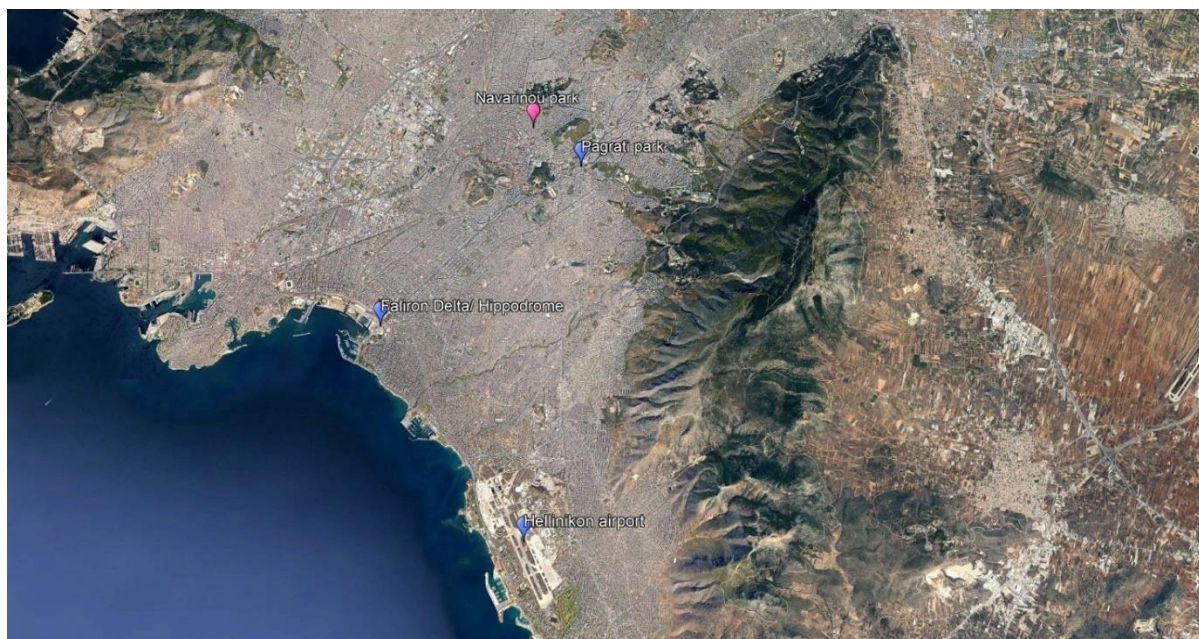


Figure 6. The Navarinou park location in the Athenian basin. Source: [Google Earth](#)

A paradigmatic case is the Navarinou park, a parking area owned by the Technical Chamber of Greece, which intended to construct an office building on the site. As the implementation of this project was delayed, in 2008 a group of the neighborhood’s residents occupied the lot, gradually transforming it into a recreational park (Figure 7). Through participatory processes, the groups of residents proceeded to conduct the area’s masterplan, to plant trees and create the necessary urban furniture to make the area accessible to everyone (Arvanitidis & Papagiannitsis, 2020). The case of Navarinou park is the result of the residents’ initiative, and its management is the subject of the park’s open general assembly. It is one of the few examples, where the residents decide to act and create their own public spaces, ignoring the ownership framework and other restrictions, and were driven by the fact that the public sector was inactive and did not provide the necessary public spaces in a downgraded zone of Athens.

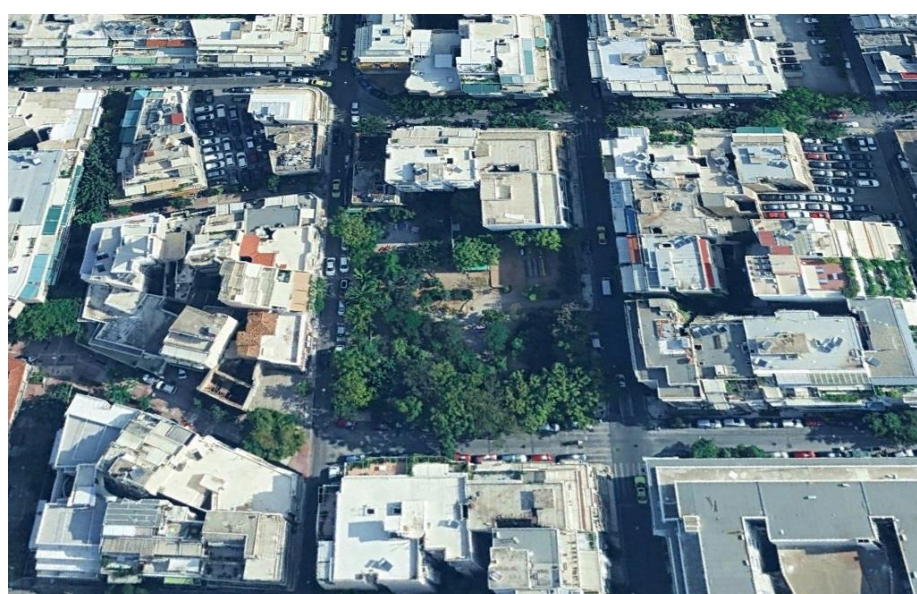


Figure 7. Navarinou park in Exarchia. Source: [Google Earth](#)

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The partnership of public and private sectors in public spaces development since 2017

In the Regulatory Plan for Athens (Law 4277/2014), there is an emphasis on the necessity to address the lack and deficiencies of green spaces and open public spaces. The plan prioritizes the equal distribution of public spaces in terms of both physical presence and function, as well as ensuring quality. In this context, several attempts have been made, some of which have been successful, while some others, especially in cases of large green areas, faced several obstacles related to a multitude of factors.

Spatial planning of this period emphasized the strengthening and upgrading of the role of public spaces as livable and accessible areas for social interaction. Public spaces regeneration projects were mainly carried out by the public sector with the private sector remaining inactive, as the partnership between the private and public sectors was yet not developed (Yiannakou & Vlahvei, 2014).

The Integrated Urban Intervention Plan for the center of Athens (G.D.1397/2015) promoted the necessity of regenerating degraded areas, yet it failed to provide the tools for urban regeneration. During this period, most of the public spaces' regeneration projects were fragmented and constrained in scope. Another significant weakness of the urban regeneration system is the complex and time-consuming procedures required for implementation, which also contributed to the limited application of projects. Even though participation and consultation procedures are proposed by the existing institutional urban regeneration framework, these are also evaluated as fragmentary (Tasopoulou & Lainas, 2017). Additionally, while efforts have been made for the integration of new technologies to strengthen citizen participation in planning procedures, a significant portion of citizens are skeptical about their actual inclusion in decision making procedures.

Spatial planning in the years following the economic crisis, emphasized the strengthening and upgrading of the role of public spaces as places of social interaction. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, public spaces need to develop a new role in terms of resilience, allowing them to accommodate short-term or long-term changes and adapt to the constantly changing conditions of modern societies.

The prevailing conditions show several problems related to the maintenance of urban infrastructures, the promotion of multiculturalism, the preservation of historical identity, planning, safety, and interaction issues. In this context, it is important to develop partnerships between city agencies, to develop actions as the evaluation and improvement of the public spaces' environmental conditions.

The Plan for Resilient Athens 2017 proposes the actions to shape green spaces in a way which optimizes their benefits (Municipality of Athens, 2017). Emphasis is placed on the maintenance of the existing green spaces, implementing new plantings and the upgrading of existing spaces. Green corridors are proposed both within the Municipality of Athens and on a metropolitan scale, to improve air circulation but also to increase soft mobility. Simultaneously, new public green spaces of all sizes and shapes, urban agriculture and urban gardens within educational units are promoted. Special mention is made to the development of water networks in the municipality through the promotion of blue routes.

A part of the Olympic Games infrastructures remains abandoned, facing increased maintenance costs. Only the Faliron Delta/Hippodrome is developed by Stavros Niarchos Foundation sponsorship and for different uses than those that were formulated in the initial plans. More specifically, in the Faliron Delta/Hippodrome area, a park with sport activities, a

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watersports area and a marina, and a zone with recreational facilities and infrastructures are developed while the National Library and the Greek National Opera are constructed by Renzo Piano plans (Figures 8 and 9).



Figure 8. The Faliron Delta/Hippodrome location in the Athenian basin. Source: [Google Earth](#)

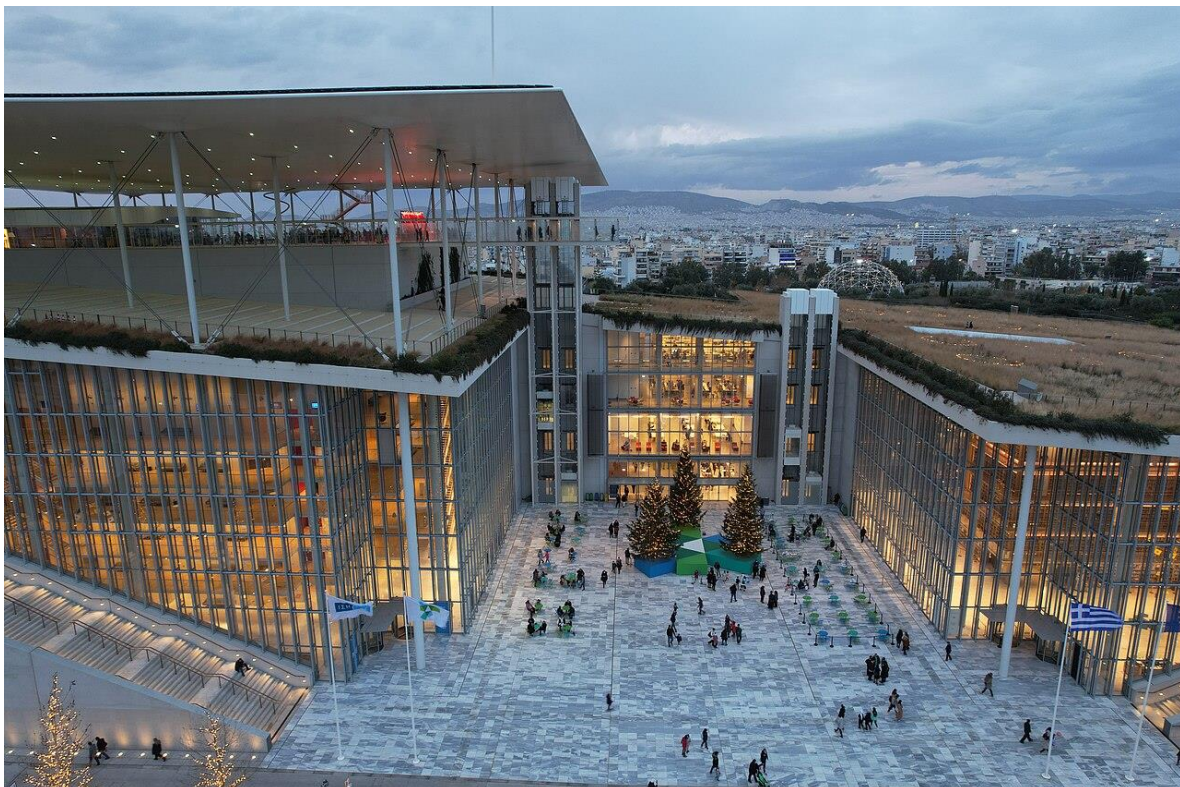


Figure 9. The Greek National Opera building. Photo by [Strange Traveler](#) / [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

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Most of the rest Olympic infrastructures are leased to private companies and converted into shopping centers, conference centers or theaters. During the last four years, the Municipality of Athens launched the “Adopt Your City” program as part of strengthening resilience, which aims to create small-scale green spaces through the municipality's collaboration with private entities. The aim of the program is to create pocket parks in areas beyond the borders of the historic city center to improve the environmental conditions in degraded areas and strengthen the social cohesion of these areas' residents. To date, several interventions have been carried out in many areas of the Municipality of Athens, in existing degraded green spaces, but also in inactive empty plots of the municipality, which are based on bioclimatic planning and in some cases are co-planned with groups of residents. A typical example is the Japanese garden of 3,500 m² in Pagrati which was remodeled, and through its new design, acquired a new identity with emphasis on bioclimatic architecture and multiculturalism (Figure 10). These interventions are a result of public-private partnerships, as a private company can adopt an urban void and transform it to a pocket park. Until today many new green points are developed in the Municipality of Athens and have contributed to a better environment and the creation of new poles of social interaction.



Figure 10. Pagrati pocket park. Source: [Google Earth](#)

Discussion and conclusions

During Greece's recent history, public spaces are facing a continuous degradation. The commercialization and privatization of public spaces and the lack of maintenance are the basic reasons for their degradation. Neoliberal policies impose constraints on urban planning within the framework of urban development, leading to significant spatial consequences. The neoliberalization of public spaces entails the adoption of public-private partnerships to provide services to residents, reflecting the changing dynamics of urban governance. How have partnerships evolved in the field of urban regeneration projects in Greece over the last 70 years?

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Funding urban public spaces regeneration projects is an expensive process, however modern urban policies and experience have shown that the economic benefit from the reuse and management of existing urban space is clearly greater than the procedures and costs of residential expansion policies (Tasopoulou & Lainas, 2017). Greece's persistently adverse economic situation and its incomplete and outdated institutional urban regeneration framework that leads to bureaucratic limitations, issuance, and time-consuming procedures, are barriers that do not contribute to the promotion of urban regeneration projects. Most of the urban regeneration projects are limited to small-scale pedestrian networks and green and public spaces, which have low cost and can be developed in faster rates compared with bigger scale regeneration projects.

In Greece, funding public spaces urban regeneration is a complicated procedure financed mainly by public funds, while the private sector remains limited to some big scale projects, as until today, the existing institutional framework that defines the terms of partnerships between the public and private sector in such complex procedures is complicated and time-consuming. The private sector requires fast and flexible procedures and negotiation capabilities and requires the assistance of the public sector to be activated (Triantafyllopoulos, 2016). The private sector's contribution is weak in urban regeneration procedures, and although the existing framework has set rules for its involvement, it is complicated and time-consuming. Today there is a deficit around funding projects for public spaces urban regeneration. The utilization of financial instruments presents significant lags, so most funding resources are public while the donations and sponsorships from large foundations are limited. The traditional forms of financing regeneration projects are public funding which is considered an unsustainable practice.

The case studies that are examined in the current paper, cover public spaces of different scales and sizes, regenerated with different spatial planning frameworks. In the case of the Olympic infrastructures, the public post-Olympic inertia led to numerous ad hoc decisions that involved transferring facilities and buildings to public federations or leasing them to private entities through long-term contracts. In this case the role of the Greek State was weak as it did not manage to reclaim its property and promote new public uses and spaces. So, it was the private sector that proceeded to some of these infrastructures management creating private areas as malls and theaters. In the same direction, the lack of available funds resulted in the concession contract for the former Hellinikon airport being awarded to private investors. This concession resulted in the development of both private and public spaces in the area, a fact that is viewed negatively. The initial plan, which could not be implemented due to the lack of public funds, proposed the creation of a public park, that address the environmental issues of Greece's capital. In the following years, the initiatives of residents, the promotion of sponsorships and partnerships between the public and the private sectors became new models for urban regeneration projects in public spaces. These were promoted by the changing spatial framework that allowed the involvement of the private investors in public spaces regeneration projects. Still there are barriers such as the limited know-how, the centralized and standardized decision-making processes, and the incomplete coordination of synergies between management bodies, that have led to significant gaps in support of public areas regeneration projects.

Although the development of the spatial framework promotes neoliberalism, this cannot be activated yet. This phenomenon presents two different aspects. The fact that the public sector remains the primary actor is positive, as in many cases, privately guided rehabilitation and regeneration programs can lead to social marginalization and displacement. This can lead to social exclusion, and to the promotion of private spaces that increase consumption.

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Simultaneously the fact that the public funds are limited, and the private sector's participation is weak leads to barriers in regeneration projects and to the city's downgraded environments.

Although the promotion of partnerships between the public and the private sector appears to be the most appropriate tool for the successful implementation of integrated urban regeneration programs in the European practice, which by their nature, require specialized knowledge, in Greece, up to today there are few examples of partnerships between the private sector and the public sector for the implementation of integrated urban regeneration programs. It is important to develop a multidimensional and multifunctional framework for urban regeneration, that will be flexible and promote partnerships between different public and private stakeholders to serve economic, social and environmental issues, and create more sustainable urban areas, and favor the city's public character by the development of places for all.

Although private-public partnerships offer numerous benefits, such as leveraging private sector efficiency and innovation, they also present several potential downsides. One significant concern is the risk of creating exclusionary quasi-public spaces as private partners are driven by profit, which can conflict with the public interest. Public spaces, that are publicly accessible but privately owned or managed, can become exclusionary as private entities may impose rules and restrictions that limit access for certain groups, such as the homeless, loiterers, or protesters, undermining the inclusive nature of genuinely public spaces. The commercial interests of private partners can lead to the commercialization of public spaces, where the focus shifts from public use and enjoyment to revenue generation through retail, advertising, and other commercial activities. To mitigate these downsides, it is crucial to establish clear, enforceable agreements that prioritize public interests, ensure transparency, and maintain robust oversight mechanisms. Effective regulatory frameworks and active public engagement are essential to balance the benefits of public and private partnerships with the need to protect public interests and maintain inclusive, equitable access to public spaces.

The establishment and the creation of partnerships between the private and the public sector is a process that presupposes a set of favorable conditions for the attraction of the private sector, and the existence of an appropriate institutional framework. It is important to develop a framework which will promote the participation of the private sector through a transparent process and define the terms and conditions that will lead to a legal and controllable profit. Towards this direction, it is important to develop partnerships between the private and the public sector which will have increased responsibilities that will work quickly and efficiently in terms of transparency. These schemes can fund the maintenance, restoration, development, reuse, planning and exploitation of public spaces, while the resulting profit, will be channeled into the local community. It is necessary to create the conditions that will contribute to the attraction of the private sector, who should know in advance at least a competitive institutional framework based on which they will negotiate. This framework should ensure low business risk and sustainably defend the interests of the local economy, society, and environment, and defend the public interest.

Today, after the COVID-19 pandemics, as the need to have more and better public spaces in urban areas is increasing, it is essential to develop an institutional framework that will promote mixed schemes (public-private sector) which will support urban regeneration, legislate ways and mechanisms for financial capital from the private sector, and defend the public interest and cover the financing gap of certain forms of urban interventions.

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