HELLINIKON
And the Question of the Large Urban Void
by
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Diploma of Architect – Engineer
National Technical University of Athens, 2010

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Architecture Studies
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AND THE QUESTION
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MIT SMArchS Thesis | Architecture & Urbanism
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ABSTRACT
The intention behind this thesis is to examine how the latest socio-economic crisis, in Greece, Europe and the World affects our cities. This thesis is an attempt to invent strategies for the declining city of Athens and trace the opportunities offered by the Athenian landscape and the recently ceased airport of Hellinikon. Twelve years after the cease of its operation, Hellinikon remains the largest abandoned urban void in the fabric of Athens. The public demand for a Metropolitan Park and all privatization attempts have not yet been fruitful. In a critical time of economic recession and social segregation, the question of the large urban void emerges and traditional urban redevelopment practices are questioned. This thesis argues that the answer to the question of the large urban void lies next to grassroots initiatives currently active within Hellinikon that creatively exploit the public land. With this as a starting point, Hellinikon could become a territory entirely occupied by social forces that denounce economic growth per se, and are willing to build an autonomous community relying on its own resources and regulations. Through the shift from spontaneous and individual activities to a more holistic self-instituted narrative for the Hellinikon area, a new urban vision emerges: ‘the Collective Superstructure’. This thesis states that the use of prime urban land as an investment to generate profit and fairly redistribute it to the people has failed us and can no longer constitute our primary objective. The post-crisis era should signify a holistic turn on how we perceive urban space and spatial justice.

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Most persons think that a state in order to be happy ought to be large; but even if they are right, they have no idea of what is large and what small state... To the size of states there is a limit, as there is to other things, plants, animals, implements; for none of these retain their natural power when they are too large or too small, but they either wholly lose their nature, or are spoiled.

Aristotle, 322 B.C.
HELLINIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void

1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction
The intention behind this thesis is to examine how the latest socio-economic crisis, in Greece, Europe and the World affects our cities. This thesis is an attempt to invent strategies for the declining city of Athens and trace the opportunities offered by the Athenian landscape and the recently ceased airport of Hellinikon. Twelve years after the cease of its operation, Hellinikon remains the largest abandoned urban void in the fabric of Athens. Up to today, the public demand for a Metropolitan Park and all privatization attempts have not yet been fruitful. In a critical time of economic recession and social segregation, the question of the large urban void emerges and traditional redevelopment practices are questioned. This thesis argues that the answer to the question of the large urban void lies next to grassroots initiatives currently active within Hellinikon that creatively exploit the public land. Through the shift from spontaneous and individual activities to a more holistic self-instituted narrative for the Hellinikon area, a new urban vision emerges; ‘the Collective Superstructure’.

What is the problem?
The world as we know it will soon change radically. Cities will grow. And they might grow denser or they might as well grow looser. And they will become smarter. And we know that because we are working on it. No matter what, one is for sure; most cities will grow. But why do our cities grow, and how far can this take us?
The reason responsible behind the gigantism of our cities is not the growing population but the increasing demand for economic growth. The driving agent for building cities today is private urban development and its interest is not to generate great cities, but profit. In order to do so, private development needs to address the market, therefore the people that can afford these new cities, turning the entire operation of urbanization into a process of excluding social groups from the urban space.
Interestingly, both blooming and defaulting of capitalistic markets have always had the same winners and losers. In the realm of urban space, that translates into marginalization of vulnerable social groups and dominance of wealthy social classes. Waterfront projects and brownfield
urban re-developments are typical examples where local communities are re-located to give away space for high-end communities and retail venues. And those investments are particularly popular during times of economic crisis, camouflaged behind the ‘high purpose’ of economic growth.

So yes, our cities will become even greater than they are today; More efficient, smarter, faster, more beautiful even; but how about fair and just? Our growth is tightly linked to our economies. And our economies occasionally suffer crises, as the one we are experiencing now. And while it may be true that those crises are periodical, one should reflect what the losses on the way are and whether they are worth it.

What can urban design do?
The problem set is not up to architecture or urban design to resolve. The urban and spatial justice is a deep social and political issue whose resolution can only occur through the emergence of new dynamics and correlations within the political and social sphere. So, what can Architecture and Urban Design do?

Looking at how our society builds cities, we can track a number of axioms that are blindly followed and go unquestioned. By critiquing those axioms we can evaluate them and reform them at least within the academic realm. However, the most important contribution of urban design is the powerful tool of vision. Even though an urban design project does not have alone the power of implementation, its manifestation can inspire communities and policy makers today and in the future.

Why Athens?

Athens undergoes a severe urban crisis that becomes apparent in four levels; social, demographic, economical, and environmental. The urban condition set by those parameters questions the role of a typical urban development, like the one that is currently underway in Hellinikon, and opens-up the opportunity for alternative scenarios. Using Greece and Athens as the field of operation for this thesis was a great challenge. Since Greece led the way into the Eurozone crisis, it seems topical to use Athens as starting point for an alternative exit strategy.
Why Hellinikon?

The selection of the site is utterly significant. The site has been described as one of the most valuable properties in Europe, therefore loaded with high investment expectations. As it usually happens to these cases Hellinikon fate is being decided by external forces. This is why it is important and highly symbolic to examine the extreme opposite. This thesis investigates an urban scenario where the decision making progress originates from within the site itself. It is almost provocative to conduct such an experiment as Hellinikon is not an average public property. On the one hand it has extreme commercial value, if seen through the lenses of traditional real-estate, but on the other hand, its location and importance for the metropolitan area of Athens make Hellinikon too valuable for being sacrificed to the altar of economic growth.

Greece was the first country in the Eurozone to enter the financial crisis, and the first to suffer its side-effects. What happens in Greece today is usually an omen for the future of the rest of the countries that join the zone of national debt crisis. The privatization of the former airport of Hellinikon is a conditional term for the financial aid Greece currently receives; therefore, its exploitation model will demarcate the future of similar properties across the defaulted countries of the Eurozone. It is exactly because of that why Hellinikon should stand tall and embrace an alternative scheme so as to show the way for other similar undergoing projects in Europe and the world.

Why now?

Twelve years have already passed from the decommissioning of the airport and there are only a few months left before the end of the international competition launched by the Greek government for the future exploitation of Hellinikon. This thesis is the last chance to stimulate a debate over the importance of Hellinikon as public urban space and the respective roles of the state, the citizens and the private stakeholders.

How?

The research I conducted before proposing the urban scenario of the Collective Superstructure, has lead me to existing theories and movements related to self-managed communities, alternative economic models and bottom-up social constructs. The four pillars of my theoretical framework come from the spheres of urban sociology, economics, philosophy, and urban design and are manifested through the ideas of Cornelius Castoriadis, David Harvey, Serge Latouche, and Oswald Mathias Ungers. The overlap of their respective theories, “Autonomy”, the “Right of the City”, “De-Growth”, and the “Green Archipelago”, have striking similarities that generate a powerful urban dynamic. The extracts from the study of their work, lead me to formulate an urban scenario according to which Hellinikon could be entirely occupied by social forces that are willing to build a distinct urban entity, self-reliant on natural resources that denounces economic growth and encourages good citizenship.
A contextual solution

The current practice of planning and private urban development confronts all places as accounted commercial assets with stereotypical features that lead to the production of mediocre and/or generic urban spaces. Conducting this thesis was a way to prove that places should not be defined by financial characteristics but their physical and social identity, the only factors able to generate unique results. Contrary to most ideal cities, the Collective Superstructure adopts an urban form that is relevant to the specifications and the capacity of the given site.

Even before its closure Hellinikon has been the epicenter of multiple studies and an International Architectural Competition. Why do we need another plan? Why not any of the already proposed plans? The answer comes from the fact that, twelve years after the cease of the former's airport operations Hellinikon still remains an abandoned urban void. There is a need for a strong political and social statement about how spatial organization should respond to the challenges of our times. There should not be a proposal of simply a new city or a new park, or a combination of the two, but a whole new proposal for a new way of living. This thesis undertakes the challenge to provide an alternative vision for Hellinikon, based on a bottom-up process and articulated through an urban design scenario.
A PIECE OF LAND NAMED HELLINIKON

‘The airport runway is the most important mainstreet in any town.’

Norm Crabtree
2. A PIECE OF LAND NAMED HELLINIKON

Hellinikon within the Regional Map of Greater Athens

Hellinikon is a unique public property, located 10 km south of Athens downtown and is covering a total area of 626 Ha. The site is situated right on the seaside, spanning along 3.5 km of waterfront facing the Aegean Sea. This location puts the site within close distance to desirable touristic destinations both within the city of Athens as well as adjacent to it such as the islands of Saronikos Bay (Figure 2.1: Location of Hellinikon Airport within the Greater Athens Area.).
The Athens Waterfront

Athens is a city built adjacent and along the Saronikos Bay. The coast of Athens spans from Piraeus to Sounion, including 15 municipalities, and the former airport of Hellinikon. However, there has never existed a rigid and thorough planning that engages the coastal nature of Athens. Even though numerous municipalities face the sea, the development that has so far occurred is mostly unplanned and opportunistic. Significant sectors of the seafront have been developed individually often serving short-term needs, like the Olympic Games of 2004. As a result, the majority of the coast of Athens is fragmented while, the often illegal uses render it inaccessible for the public (Figure 2.2: Accessibility along Athens’ Waterfront). Today, the coast of Athens still undergoes major transformations, such as the much-anticipated "Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center", by Italian architect Renzo Piano. Hellinikon offers a unique opportunity and the last chance for Athens to open up to the sea.

Figure 2.2: Accessibility along Athens’ Waterfront. Source: Organisation For Planning And Environmental Protection Of Athens (Graphic reproduced by author)
Topography
The site is situated 1km west of the foothills of Ymittos Mountain (Figure 2.5). For the most part, the site has a slight inclination, no more than 1%, as a result of the ground works that took place in the area during the construction of the airport. However, the topography changes dramatically over Vouliagmenis avenue that separates Hellinikon from the rest of the fabric along the east side of the site. (Figure 2.3, Figure 2.4)
A Piece of Land Named Hellinikon

Hydrology

Based on the surrounding topography and maps that preceded the construction of the Hellinikon airport, the original hydrology of the area can be reproduced (Figure 2.6). Three natural streams used to cross through the area, running from the foothills of Ymittos Mountain all the way down to the waterfront. All three of them are covered today by the concrete surfaces of the runway, and runoff is mainly managed through the drainage system of the former airport. However, the dense urban fabric that divides the airport from the mountain and the soil pollution that resulted overtime, allow the water to drain contaminated into the aquifer and the waterfront.
Existing Facilities and Infrastructure

Hellinikon embodies a significant amount of existing infrastructure. Serving both as the Athens International Airport and a major Olympic Venue for the Games of 2004, Hellinikon has inherited an important infrastructural stock (Figure 2.8). The site already includes a number of existing buildings like airport terminals (including one designed by Saarinen), hangars and the remnants of the Olympic Games sporting facilities. Additionally, Hellinikon has access to important transportation axes that used to connect the area to the rest of the city, as well as the two metro stations that were recently completed on the north side of the site. The long period of inertia, has attracted numerous public and private stakeholders within the area of Hellinikon (Figure 2.7). Today, 51 different tenants occupy the site of the former airport including transportation facilities, the Athens FIR, and sporting facilities among others (Figure 3: Administrative Sectors in the site of the former Airport of Hellinikon. Source: Hellinikon SA).
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Size & Comparison Studies

Hellinikon covers a total area of 626 Ha and is as large as Masdar and twice the size of Central Park (Figure 2.9, Figure 2.10). If we pasted Barcelona’s fabric onto the site, Hellinikon would be the home to 80,000 people (Figure 2.11). If Hellinikon was in New York, it would cover 10 avenues and 50 streets (Figure 2.12). Its area spans from MIT Building 7 all the way to South End and from Beacon Hill to Brookline (Figure 2.13). The former airport of Berlin, Tempelhof would occupy just 70% of the entire Hellinikon area Figure 2.14).

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HELLINIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void

Climate

Hellinikon likewise the rest of the Athens metropolitan area enjoys a warm climate throughout the year with high temperatures that exceed 15°C for more than half of the year (Figure 2.16). The climate of the area is typically dry with a low annual precipitation (Figure 2.15). The site itself receives some 4,750 gallons of rainwater per month.

Figure 2.15: Average rain precipitation in Hellinikon per month. Source: Hellenic National Meteorological Service

Figure 2.16: Average temperatures in Hellinikon per month. Source: Hellenic National Meteorological Service

Climate

Hellinikon likewise the rest of the Athens metropolitan area enjoys a warm climate throughout the year with high temperatures that exceed 15°C for more than half of the year (Figure 2.16). The climate of the area is typically dry with a low annual precipitation (Figure 2.15). The site itself receives some 4,750 gallons of rainwater per month.
Soil Quality

The areas within the former airport and adjacent to the coastal front are mainly covered by hard surfaces. The width of the concrete surfaces along the runway is approximately 0.6 meters and only scarce vegetation appears through cracks and along the runway intermediates. Besides the concrete surfaces most of the area is covered with dirt while vegetation becomes denser around a small part on the north of the site and within the former military base. Due to the airplane fumes and other side-operations from the airport activity, the soil has been long exposed to pollution. The extensive impervious surfaces and the quality of soil, allow polluted water to drain directly into the aquifer and the waterfront leaving hazardous pollutants in the soil. Preliminary studies however have shown that the contamination is not extensive and at similar levels with the area surrounding the airport (Figure 2.17). Researchers claim that planting is still possible, encouraging though use of tall trees whose produce remains within safe distance from the ground.\(^2\)

\(^2\) Belavilas Nikos et al., *Basic Planning & Design Principles for the Creation of the Metropolitan Green Park at the Former Hellinikon International Airport of Athens - Summary of Research Findings and Key Proposal Points.*

\(^3\) "Πρωτοβουλία Για Λυτοδιαχειριζόμενο Άρο Στο Ελληνικό: ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΟ ΤΗΣ ΠΡΩΤΟΒΟΥΛΙΑΣ."
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Some say that Hellinikon delineates the nature of the Greek society itself. Today, more than ever, it seems that it also holds the nature of its future.
Introduction

In March 28 2001, Captain Timoleon Kalogerakis in a deeply emotional state and with a cracking voice announces the departure of Olympic Airways from Athens to Thessaloniki and the last departure from the International Airport of Athens in Hellinikon. Located 11 km South of Athens Downtown, Hellinikon had served as the only airport of Athens, Greece for the previous 63 years. The new International Airport was relocated in Spata, a small town 19 km East of Hellinikon. The relocation of the International Airport had already been decided since 1976 and the preliminary works broke ground at the end of the 70's. In 1981 the works halted when the newly elected Greek Government decided that all major public works in the Greek capital should be suspended, in order to favor the growth in the periphery. However, Hellinikon was tightly surrounded by the urban fabric and unable to expand its operations. By 1990, it became clear that Hellinikon could no further handle the increased passenger traffic and the construction in Spata, was decided to be set back in motion. In 1995, and through an international competition for a Public-Private Partnership, German company Hochtief was commissioned to complete the construction of the new Athens International Airport (Figure 3.2).

Six years later, Greek PM Kostas Simitis would announce the start of operations of Athens International Airport Eleftherios Venizelos, during the inauguration ceremony at the main terminal of the newly constructed airport. In the same speech, Kostas Simitis also emphasized that the area of the former airport of Hellinikon would become the
largest metropolitan park of Europe: “It will become a metropolitan green area, a large park. I believe it will be the largest park of Europe”. Although this statement was inaccurate (there were already larger parks in Europe) that was not the first time the Greek people had heard of such a plan. The idea of a Metropolitan Park in the area of the former airport of Hellinikon was officially expressed for the first time in 1995. Then, the Minister of Environment and Public Works Kostas Laliotis had announced in the Greek Parliament after the pass of law 2338/1995: “«After the start of operations of the new Airport in Spata, the Hellinikon Airport will close down permanently. Thus, an area of 5000 stremmas (1235 acres) will be released and together with the 1800 stremmas (445 acres) of the former American military base, they will constitute a unified site. We are committed that the area will be transformed into a Metropolitan Green Zone that will upgrade the life of the residents, both in densely populated areas of neighboring municipalities and across the Athens Basin”.

Subsequent ministers and prime ministers also pledged for the creation of a metropolitan green park in Hellinikon. However, the idea of a partial development of the site starts to be implemented. In December 8 2003, Minister of Environment and Public Works Vaso Papandreou makes the following statement after meeting PM Kostas Simitis: “Mr. Simitis has stated twice that Hellinikon will be a Metropolitan Park, and part of it, approximately 250 acres will be given for development”. In February 17 2004 the new PM Costas Karamanlis confirms these very intentions: “We are committed that the greatest part of the released space will be
used for the exclusive creation of a model park”. Finally, In September 2010, the Greek PM Giorgos Papandreou will repeat the words of his predecessors: “As I have stated in the past, Hellinikon will become the largest Metropolitan Park in Europe”.

However, 17 years after the first official announcement, Hellinikon remains an unexploited piece of land creating the largest urban void in the otherwise dense urban fabric of Athens.

The First Years

The airport initiated its operations in 1938 (Figure 3.3). The first year of its operation, the airport was equipped with a single terminal building and a runway of 1,800 meters long. This year a total of 8,500 passengers and 1 ton of cargo were processed. Before its closure in 2001 Hellinikon was serving 12,000,000 passengers and moving around 120,000 tons of goods annually. Within those 63 years of operations, numerous additions and expansions occurred across the facilities and runways of the airport. The most significant was without doubt the construction of the new East
The Story So Far

terminal building by the Finish-American architect Eero Saarinen in 1969 (Figure 3.4, Figure 3.6).

**Relocation of the Airport to East Attica (2001)**

By that time the passenger traffic had reached 3,300,000 passengers annually following an annual growth rate of 13% and it was clear that there would be an immediate need for expansion. However, that was impossible because of the intense urban and touristic growth occurred around the boundaries of the airport. Alternative scenarios supporting the idea of a new runway inside the sea (Figure 3.7) and the upgrade of an adjacent military airfield were expressed, however, the Government decided to relocate the airport on an entirely different site in 1990.

The construction of the new airport was already underway since 1976, and in March 2001, the new airport in Spata, 10 km east of Athens downtown was inaugurated (Figure 3.5).

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**Figure 3.6:** Aerial view of the new East Terminal building, 1968. Source: www.in.gr

**Figure 3.7:** Concept drawing for the extension of Hellinikon International Airport into the sea. Source: kavvathas.com
HELLINIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void

Figure 3.8: Location Map of the Olympic Venues During the Athens Olympic Games in 2004. Source: Athens 2004

Hellinikon as an Olympic Venue (2004)

Ever since, the Hellinikon had ceased its operations and all consequent governments during these 17 years have been promising the transformation of the site into Athens’s new Metropolitan Park. However, only sporadically did the former airport open its doors to the public for events like concerts and of course during the Olympic Games of 2004. The Greek Government and the Olympic Games Organization Committee decided to use the area of Hellinikon, for the hosting of numerous sporting venues, including canoe-kayak, baseball, field hockey, basketball and fencing among others (Figure 3.9). Hellinikon was the largest Olympic Venue during the Games of 2004 (Figure : Location Map of the Olympic Venues3.8). To the day, these facilities still remain within the site of the former airport and according to many, any attempt for expropriation of the occupied land will be neither easy nor inexpensive.
The Future of Hellinikon

The question of the future use of the former airport of Hellinikon had been raised even long before its closure in 2001. In 1995, the law 2338/95 had already committed the space as zone for the future construction of a Metropolitan Park and ever since, every single government repeats this commitment. The same year, a preliminary study for the future exploitation of the site was commissioned to the National Technical University of Athens but it was never completed (Wassenhoven, 1995). The fate of Hellinikon seems to be rather linked to the meeting of the financial debt that the State periodically faces. Thus, in 1997, IMF and EU official and the financial advisor to the PM, Yannis Spraos, suggested through his report the selling of Hellinikon in order to cover the voids of the Greek economy. In 2003 Hellinikon was suggested to be sold to private investors after the end of the Olympic Games of 2004 in order to cover part of the debt that was created through the organization of the Games. However, the most orchestrated act through the Greek Government for the exploitation of the former airport began only after the strike of the financial crisis in 2009. The Memorandum signed between the Greek Government, the IMF, the EU and the European Central Bank, clearly stated that the Greek State needed to proceed to the evaluation and privatization of public assets and properties. Even though at this point the Memorandum did not cover specific projects, the first investment approaches for Hellinikon already began in early 2009
Hellinikon as Metropolitan Park
Green Open Space in Athens

Athens had never had significant open spaces or large urban parks. It is because of that, why the Organization for Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens, had designated since 1980 that Hellinikon, together with the realized Antonis Tritsis Park and a remaining large open space in Goudi are to become the three Metropolitan Parks of Athens, in order to achieve an acceptable level of 8m² /per capita. Up to now, Antonis Tritsis Park is realized (though underperforming) while Goudi ended up in hosting uses that are no longer compatible with a Metropolitan Park. As a result, today Athens offers 2.5 m² of open green space per capita and it is ranked among the lowest within the European Union and other large metropolis around the world (Figure : Comparative Analysis of Green Space Available per capita in 15 Major Cities (m²/capita).3.10). Only during the Olympics of 2004, 1.23m²/per capita were lost due to the expropriation of land in order to accommodate the urgently needed Olympic Venues. Hellinikon constituted the largest Olympic venue site. Nevertheless, with half of its area occupied by Olympic facilities, the former airport still remains the last large open space within Athens' urban grid (Figure 3.11). According to latest studies by the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), Hellinikon is just 1/10 of the area Athens needs to turn into park in order to meet the established National and European standards. The disappointment from all the opportunities wasted in the past to make Athens a greener city, have raised the expectations for Hellinikon and the desire for a Metropolitan Park on the site of the former airport is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Greek society.
Figure 3.11: Map of Athens representing established green open spaces and spaces under claim by local communities. Drawing courtesy of Komninos, Krekoukiotis, and Mavros
State Commitments and Precedent Studies

The International Architectural Competition (2003-2004)

In December 2003 an International Architectural Competition was launched by the Ministry of Environment and Organization for the Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens in collaboration with UIA (Unite International d’ Architecture) under the title: “Hellinikon Metropolitan Park International Competition”. The competition required the planning and design of three distinct sections: (a) The Metropolitan Park, (b) the Urban Development Plan, and (c) Other Facilities and Infrastructure. More specifically, the competition required the following:

A. Metropolitan Park
1. Green Spaces, and Public Open Spaces: suitable for individual and group activities, social and communal gatherings and events. Pedestrian areas, bike trails, sport facilities, open-air markets, gathering spaces etc.
2. Recreation and leisure: infokiosks, small cafes and restaurants, thematic and amusement parks.
3. Cultural facilities: museums, theatres, media, arts/education/research spaces.

B. Urban Development Plan
Mixed-use development, covering a maximum area of 100 Ha and a total of 1,000,000 m². The proposed uses can include any of the following:
1. Low and medium income housing
2. Retail and office spaces
3. Hotels
4. Business Centers, in relation to Conventio-Exhibition Center
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Figure 3.13: Hellinikon Metropolitan Competition - First Prize: Rendered Aerial View. Source: Serero Architects

7. Recreation
8. Social infrastructure and
9. Parking Facilities
C. Other Facilities and Infrastructure
1. Existing structures and infrastructure to be taken into consideration, however not to exceed 325,000 m$^2$

10. The building of the East Terminal to be preserved and transformed into a Convention-Exhibition Center, covering a defined area of 17 Ha, and occupy a built area of 51,000 m$^2$. Additionally, a new 5* Hotel is proposed for the needs of the Center covering an area of no more than 2,000m$^2$

The overall construction area was not to exceed 1,325,000 m$^2$. The maximum construction budget was not to exceed €400,000,000, while the revenues from the development should exceed the construction cost for a minimum of €300,000,000.

One hundred and fifty nine entries were submitted. The first prize of the competition was awarded to DZO Architecture (Figure 3.12: Hellinikon Metropolitan Competition - First Prize: Rendered Aerial View. Source: Serero Architects). A team of architects from Paris and New York consisted by Elena Fernandez, David Serero, Antoine Regnault, Philip Coignet (Landscape Architect). The proposal stood out for its unique conception of reinstating the natural streams that used to run across the area before the construction of the airport runways. Those streams (softscapes) were used for the spatial organization of both the green areas and the new urban development (Figure 3.13: Hellinikon Metropolitan Competition - First Prize: Ground Floor Plan and Model's Aspect of the Softscapes and Hardscapes. Source: Serero Architects).
The YPEXWDE Study (November 2007)

Two years later (2006), the Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Planning and Public Works, (YPEXWDE) commissioned the award-winning team to deliver an updated and further specialized study, of the winning proposal. In the beginning of the next year (January 2007) the architectural team submitted the proposal together with additional reports on transportation and water management planning. On November of 2007, the Ministry presented the final study. The Minister presented the plan as the most important urban development of the 21st century in Greece and a unique opportunity for the regeneration of the local, metropolitan and national realm (Figure 3.14: Updating and Specialization of the General Layout and Development Plan for Hellinikon: Aerial View. Source: Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Planning and Public Works, Figure 3.15: Updating and Specialization of the General Layout and Development Plan for Hellinikon: Master plan. Source: Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Planning and Public Works).

The development according to the new specialized study provisions for 75 acres of mild new urban development along with another 75 acres occupied by existing uses. According to the study, the development of this part of the site aimed at the self-funding of the Metropolitan Park and the ease of construction and maintenance. Moreover, the study aspired to achieve the acquaintance of additional funds destined to the creation of green areas in other less favored neighborhoods of Athens. This concept is also known as the “Green Fund”.

The urban development plan included residential areas (188,000 m²), a
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Business Center (78,000 m²), a Cultural Center (29,000 m²) and tourism facilities (5,000 m²)
As far as the existing facilities, it was proposed the preservation of 41 out of 480 buildings and their retrofit or maintenance of their current use as following:
- Exhibition Center in the area of the East Terminal Building
- Sporting Facilities (Basketball, Field Hockey, Softball, Canoe - Kayak) while new uses are permitted within the area including retail, events, exhibitions etc.
- The existing facilities of the National Meteorological Agency, two existing churches, the Health Center and the Center for AMEA
- The West Terminal building as Museum of the Hellinikon Airport, and the Technical Hangars of the East Terminal as Aviation Museum
- Art Gallery at the old Water Tanks
- Mediterranean Research Center in the old buildings of the Civil Aviation Agency
- The newly constructed Metro Stations, the existing Firestation, Athens FIR, and a waste management station.
Additionally, the study indicated the plantation of 40,000-60,000 trees, covering 50% of the entire site, preservation of the greater part of the runways, and extension of the East-West runway all the way to the waterfront, suggesting the partial submerge of the coastal motorway.
The budget announced by YPEXWDE for the construction of the park was as high as €700 million.

Despite the high architectural quality of the Serero-Fernandez proposal upon which the Ministry of Environment and Public Works based its
own study, the results were widely questioned and criticized. Two studies, published by the Hellenic Public Real Estate Corporation (KED) and the National Technical University of Athens in 2008 and 2010 respectively, evaluated and commented on this particular study. The first study was undertaken by Harvard Professor Spiro Pollalis, while the second was realized by the Urban Environment Laboratory and was commissioned by the Local Union of Municipalities and Communities of Attica (TEDKNA).

On the one hand, the Pollalis Study emphasizes that the great deviation of the final proposal of YPEXWE from the original design of Serero-Fernandez is the great increase in the built area.

On the other hand, the NTUA study indicates among others, the overpriced cost for the construction of the park presented by the Ministry. According to calculations, the proposal is doomed to an over excessive budget due to its initial specialized and costly requirements, such as the dismantling of the existing hard surfaces, the demolition of existing buildings, the heavy infrastructure works (submerge of coastal motorway

Figure 3.15: Updating and Specialization of the General Layout and Development Plan for Hellinikon: Masterplan. Source: Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Planning and Public Works
etc.). On top of that, NTUA study highlights the great differences in the park construction budget in relation to precedent case studies, in Greece, Europe, and the US. It is characteristic that the YPEXWDE study of 2007 estimates the construction cost for the park 9 times higher than the average cost of 8.3 EUR/m², that the Greek Secretary of Public Works provisions.
The Pollalis Study (June 2008)

In June 6 and June 20 2008, Professor Spiro Pollalis under commission of KED, submitted an evaluation report on the proposal submitted by the Ministry of Public Works (YPEWDE) as well as a counter proposal that engaged guidelines on the master plan and development plan to be submitted by candidate bidders for the upcoming request for proposals that the Greek State intended to announce.

The Pollalis study is divided into two chapters. The first evaluates the proposal submitted by the Ministry of Public Works in November 2007 while the second part consists a revised urban plan proposal for the future exploitation of the site. According to the first chapter, the proposal presented by the Ministry of Public Works, encompasses great risks due to the absence of a coherent development plan. Because of that there is great uncertainty for the expected revenues, as well as great risk of the private development being realized without the simultaneous implementation of the proposed public-benefit projects. According to the study, and for the case of Hellinikon, a Public-Private Partnership is considered of great importance for the maximization of profits for the Greek State and the feasibility of the construction and maintenance of the park.

Finally Pollalis highlights the importance for the creation of a management committee that will deliver further studies, present the development plan and its feasibility study, with the participation of architects. Moreover, the committee will be assigned to examine the
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The potential of PPP for the optimization of the revenues towards the State, the privatization of the construction and maintenance of the park, or/and the funding of the project through State or European Union funds.

It is important to note that the study was released two years before the Greek State opened up the call for proposals for Private Developers to express their interest on the development of the Hellinikon.

Firstly, the study evaluated the proposal for a metropolitan park that will cover the entirety of the site is as unfounded, due to increased maintenance costs, accessibility difficulties, and significant lack of park areas in other areas of the city. Moreover, the study suggests that for safety reasons, low vegetation like bushes should be avoided, and there should be a limited number of trees. Instead the study suggests that the Hellinikon area should be connected to the near-by mountain of Ymittos in order to address the surrounding neighborhoods’ need for open space and parks.

The Pollalis study, accuses the YPEXWDE proposal for lacking of vision and a central concept that will hold together the entire project. More specifically, the study characterizes the proposed uses as cross competitive and proposes a wide range of uses that could successfully
be developed in the area and create the new identity of the place. Those uses namely are:
- Ecological Park
- Administrative center
- Pedagogy center
- Educational/research/technological center
- Wellness facilities
- Cultural center
- Urban airpark and
- High-end housing. Even though the housing use is less desirable for multiple reasons, its implementation will guarantee high revenues, and will offer activities to the area around the clock.

After indicating the poor accessibility to the site from the rest of the city, the study outlines the need for new metro and light rail connections to be implemented. Additionally, there needs to be a thorough study on the parking demands of the new park in a 1.5 km radius around the park. For the design of the park itself, Pollalis recommends the “thickening” of the edge of the park, with program and activities, in order to render it attractive for the surrounding areas. Additionally, the study partially adopts the idea of the award winning design of Serero-Fernandez, and more specifically, the concept of softscapes, as landscape devices that create corridors leading all the way to the sea. In contrast to the proposal by the Ministry, this study suggests that all development should happen vertically and adjacent to the softscapes rather than along the waterfront axis, while maintaining a non-coherent urban fabric so as to avoid it’s disperse into the existing city grain (Figure 3.16, Figure 3.17).

Finally, Pollalis calls for a closer approach of the issue of the waterfront...
and the Agios Kosmas area, and suggests that the runways should be carefully re-designed and highlighted. Interestingly, the logo that Pollalis proposes as a visual identity of the site is an illustration of the preserved runways.

The proposal adopts the idea of the Green Fund, included both in the architectural competition and the proposal by YPEXWDE, as a way to distribute the benefits from the metropolitan park throughout the city. More specifically, the Green Fund will ensure the acquisition of funds through the development of the metropolitan park in order to expropriate city blocks in more dense and less favored parts of the city and create their neighborhood-scale pocket parks.

The study suggests that the development should happen at the same time with the construction of the Park and should be implemented in 3 consequent phases: the first undertaken by the State, while the next two should be delivered through the PPP model (Figure 3.18).
The Timeline Towards privatization

May 2012  Four shortlisted. U.K.-based London & Regional Properties, Qatari Diar Real Estate Investment Co., Israel’s Elbit Systems Ltd. (ESLT) and Greece’s Lamda Development SA (LAMDA)

April 2012  End of the first phase of the expression of interest. Nine expressions of interest were submitted

March 2012  L. 4062/2012 for the development of the Hellinikon Area passed

February 2012  New Regulatory Plan of Greater Athens under published for public consultation, did not pass as a state law

December 2011  Invitation to submit an expression of interest for the acquisition of a majority of the share capital of HELLINIKON S.A.
Eviction notices to public bodies and companies located in Hellinikon

July 2011  Hellinikon in the list of the state-owned assets of the privatization program (L. 3986/2011)
Establishment of Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (L. 3986/2011)

June 2011  Presentation of Acebillo draft strategic urban model

2011 May  Establishment of Hellinikon S.A.

2010 September  Memorandum of Understanding between the government of the Hellenic Republic and the government of the State of Qatar

Figure 3.19: Basic Steps of the process towards the privatization of Hellinikon Area. Source: Polina Prentou, “More Athenian sociospatial injustice in the works? Creating a metropolitan park at the former Hellinikon International Airport of Athens,” fig. 1.
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The Path towards Privatization

By that time, Greek economy had already entered a phase of deep economic recession. After the elections of 2009, the disclosure of the actual deficit of Greece (12% of GDP, instead of the previously stated 6.5%), triggered a chain of events that undermined the solvency of the Greek State and lead the Greek Government to ask for the financial support of the European Union (EU). In May 2010 EU, together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Central European Bank (ECB) established the European Financial Stabilization Mechanism (EFSM). The Purpose of EFSM was to provide financial-aid to member countries of the EU that were facing excessive deficits, after implementing an Economic Adjustment Program conducted and monitored by the EU, the IMF, and the ECB.

On May 10th 2010, the Greek Government signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the EU and the IMF agreeing to a three-year financial aid program totaling €110 billion. Among others, the Memorandum required the immediate listing, evaluation and privatization of public assets and properties, ideally through fast-track processes:

Privatization of state assets: The government has prepared a draft privatization plan for the divestment of state assets and enterprises. The plan, which will be adopted by end-year, identifies a number of state assets targeted for partial and full privatization, including real estate, with a view to raise at least €7 billion over the next three years with at least €1 billion in 2011. A full inventory of state property will be completed by mid-2011 to assess the potential for higher medium-term targets. The Special Secretariat for Privatization within the Ministry of Finance will

In light of these latest developments, the Greek Government decided under the law 3894/2010, the immediate listing of all public properties and the establishment of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) with sole purpose the exploitation of the former airport of Hellinikon.

As a result, in March 2011, Hellinikon SA was established and Harvard Professor Spiro Pollalis was assigned CEO of the newly founded company.
Greece - Qatar Agreement and the Acebillo Proposal

Alongside the official governmental plans towards the exploitation of Hellinikon, an independent initiative was ongoing. Prime Minister George Papandreou, had invited in 2009 the renowned Catalan Architect and Urban Designer Josep Acebillo to submit a proposal for the future development of Hellinikon. Josep Acebillo leads an Urban Development firm called Barcelona Strategic Urban System (BcnSus) and he had been assigned much of the successful urban redevelopment of Barcelona before and after the Olympic Games of 1992. In September 2010 (4 months after signing the EMSF Memorandum), the Greek Government and the Government of the State of Qatar (through her state investment vehicle, Qatar Investment Agency - QIA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding that even though did not identify specific public assets, it granted QIA maximum investing benefits and eligibility for fast-track licensing approvals.¹

Acebillo was involved in the negotiations with Qatar in 2010 and presented an outline of a strategic plan in 2011. (Figure 3.20: Hellinikon, Greece: Strategic Urban Model - Aerial View from the Sea. Source: BcnSus) According to Acebillo² this is a first proposal, not a complete

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² Acebillo, J. 2011. Hellinikon, GrAcebillo, Hellinikon, Greece: Strategic Urban Model. Phase I - Conceptualization.eece: Strategic urban model [Con-
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master plan, for the creation of a mixed-use area in Hellinikon. His proposal includes the construction of new building stock totaling 2,000,000-3,000,000 m² and the demolition of most of the existing buildings. It proposes the creation of 6,200-6,500 m² of housing units and 980,000 m² of residential areas on the coastal zone characterized as “Mediterranean villages” and several “neo-tertiary” uses such as a financial and governmental district, a university and R&D district, live-work artists’ dwellings, and one or more malls. (Figure 3.21: Hellinikon, Greece: Strategic Urban Model - Master Plan. Source: BcnSus)

Despite the confidentiality of information, stated in the Memorandum between Greece and QIA, the agreement had leaked to the press, where it also became known that QIA had offered 4 bil EUR to the Greek State for the acquisition of the former airport of Hellinikon (Figure 3.22).

A memorandum of understanding signed in New York on Thursday by George Papandreou, the prime minister, and Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, emir of Qatar, “shows that Greece is a place that can attract credible investors” An Athens official said.
"We don’t want to raise expectations, there’s still a lot of work to be done... But this agreement boosts our confidence," the official said.

While the memorandum does not cover specific projects, Qatari investors are looking at a Euro4bn project to develop the 1,500-acre site of the former Athens international airport at Hellinikon on the coast south of the capital.4

Great political and social outcry followed the disclosure of the agreement, and only months later, the negotiation had ceased after QIA withdrew its proposal without any further official justification from the Greek Government. Further, according to the European competition regulations, the Greek government had to make an open call for investments, and not to grant a single potential investor privileged status.5

A month later Hellinikon was included among the first in the law 3986/2011 as asset oriented towards privatization. Moreover, and according to the derivatives of the EFSM, the Greek Government established in July 2011 the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF), a special independent Agency, responsible for the acceleration of privatization processes and the attraction of potential investors.

The official Request for Proposals for the development of the former airport of Hellinikon (December 2011)

In December 2011, HRADF launched the invitation for submissions of expression of interest for the acquisition of the majority of the share capital of Hellinikon SA. The same month all current tenants of the area received eviction notes by Hellinikon SA, and were ordered to evacuate within one to 5 months. Until today none of the 50 public and private companies have done so. Despite the multiple stakeholders, currently operating within the site the RFP announced by the HRADF, describes Hellinikon S.A. as the societe anonyme, currently in process of acquiring the entirety of the 626 Ha property located in the former Airport of Hellinikon, as this is described in the law 3949/2011 (Government Gazette 66A/31.3.2011)

The RFQ was divided into two phases. The first is a preliminary submission of Expression of interest while the second phase had been described as a formal Request for Proposals to be submitted by the preselected investor of the first phase.

First Phase

As for the First Phase of the invitation, the chairman of Hellinikon SA

4 Hope, "Athens Seeks $7bn Investment from Qatar."

HELLINIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void

Figure 3.22: First and Last Page of the MOU signed between the Greek Government and Qatar Investment Agency (QIA). Source: Eleftherotypia
Prof. Spiro Pollalis had stated that the SOI announced by the HRADF did not intend to impose obligations to the candidate bidders, rather than give certain guidelines of what is expected for the HRADF to receive from the future submissions. More specifically the Fund mentions the following parameters to be taken into consideration:

- Redevelopment of the site into a mixed-use landmark location of national and international importance
- Generation of a strong touristic, business and leisure destination
- Integration of the site within the existing urban infrastructure
- Stimulation of economic growth
- Implementation of best international practices for the project's design, construction, finance, and operation
- Achievement of balanced and environmentally sustainable economic development.
- Promotion of eco-friendly materials, application of energy and water saving techniques and exploitation of renewable energy sources.
- Facilitation of pedestrian circulation and promotion of the use of public and alternative (e.g. bicycle) transportation means.

The Eligibility criteria, for the candidate bidders required among others that the investors have:

- Strong expertise in the development of projects with similar size and characteristics to the one contemplated by the Fund in the Strategic Objectives
- Adequate financial capabilities supporting the payment of the consideration associated with the Transaction and the funding of the Business Plan

The average consolidated net assets, calculated as total consolidated assets minus total consolidated liabilities, for the last three (3) fiscal years, must be greater than €350,000,000)\(^6\)

Despite the thorough analysis of the prerequisites and eligibility terms, the invitation of HRADF, did not avoid certain statements that created confusion among the candidate investors, especially after the latest Memorandum between Greece and the EFSM was signed in March 2012. It is the Fund's intention to retain a minority participation in the share capital of Hellinikon S.A., post completion of the Transaction. The rationale behind this intention is:

i. to maintain a share of the value creation that is expected to be realized by Hellinikon S.A. through the implementation of the Business Plan; and
ii. To safeguard the Hellenic Republic’s participation in the development of a site which is of strategic importance to Greece and to the Athens greater area.\(^7\)

The Fund shall maintain customary minority shareholder rights, indicatively including, but not limited to, exit mechanisms and

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\(^7\) Ibid., 4 (Par. 2.4).
participation transfer rights (potentially including, without limitation, put option rights), and have a veto right with respect to material deviations from the Business Plan.8

To better understand the confusion that those statements might have raised, it is interesting to that point to cite two paragraphs from the third and last (until today) Memorandum between the Greek government and the EFSM, signed on March 2012, and only a month before the submission deadline:
The Government will neither propose nor implement measures, which may infringe the rules on the free movement of capital. Neither the State nor other public bodies will conclude shareholder agreements with the intention or effect of hindering the free movement of capital or influence the management or control of companies. The Government will neither initiate nor introduce any voting or acquisition caps, and it will not establish any disproportionate and non-justifiable veto rights or any other form of special rights in privatized companies. No further special rights will be introduced in the course of future privatization projects.9

Consequently, and as it appears in the Q&A document, published by Hellinikon S.A., the candidate investors mainly addressed the following issues:

- Ownership of the site
- What consists a material deviation from the business plan
- Potential uses on the site.
- Obligation to comply with existing regulations and local authorities
- Legislation framework (current or special legislation)

As promised in the initial announcement of the SOI, In March 2012 the law 4062/2012 included a special legislation for the site of the former Hellinikon airport. The legislation offers large flexibility to the future developer prescribing a mixed-use development, including but not limited to:

- Housing units,
- R&D educational center,
- Leisure and cultural activities,
- Business and administrative center,
- Recycling facilities and
- A cemetery

For the construction of the park, that is to be not less than 200 Ha, the following uses were provisioned:

- Green and open spaces
- Leisure, sport, and cultural activities
- Streets
- Open spaces of private developments, and
- Urban infrastructure

That is to say that by “park”, the legislation outlines all uses that are not

8 Ibid., 4–5 (Par 2.5).
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built area, including the urban infrastructure and the open spaces of public properties (porch, gardens and patios).

The first phase ended in April 17 2012 with the submission of nine proposals.
Nine (9) expressions of Interest were submitted, indicating strong competition for this unique asset. The participation of 9 strong groups in this complex and long-term development project is particularly encouraging. Arguably this is currently the largest urban development project in Europe and it is strategically significant for Athens and Greece.10

Second Phase

For the second Phase of the RFP, the Fund expected from all candidates the following deliverables:

- A comprehensive executive summary
- A detailed forward-looking set of financial projections for Hellinikon S.A., including income statement, balance sheet and cash flow statements prepared in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standards.
- A detailed investment plan of Hellinikon S.A., including a detailed development plan and phasing of the corresponding construction.
- A detailed physical master plan, including technical characteristics, drawings, supporting analysis and a physical model.
- A detailed funding plan for Hellinikon S.A.
- A strategic plan for Hellinikon S.A.
- A detailed proposed organizational structure of Hellinikon S.A.

The proposed uses could include (but were not limited to):

- Residential properties;
- Business parks (including offices, research and development centers);
- Tourism (including hotels, integrated residential resorts);
- Retail;
- Leisure;
- Healthcare/medical;
- Academic/educational; and
- Cultural

* The only use that was clearly excluded was the industrial.

As far as the Park area is concerned, the RFP mentions that investors will be allowed (but are not required) to propose a main park, landscape solutions within private properties, administrative uses within the proposed building development, and public infrastructure.
Additionally the Fund outlined the special legislation (that was not available at the time) for the site to be enacted in the near future, and presumed a building coefficient of at least 0.4 to be applied, as well as a maximum coverage of 50%.
Four proposals out of nine passed to the second phase:

“U.K.-based London & Regional Properties, Qatari Diar Real Estate Investment Co., Israel’s Elbit Systems Ltd. (ESLT) and Greece’s Lamda Development SA (LAMDA) are the four groups that will compete to buy Hellinikon” (kathimerini, as cited in Tugwell, 2012).

As of today, HRADF has not yet announced the winner of the competition.
Reactions and Responses to the Government’s Privatization Plans

The processes described above indicate that a highly selective and step-by-step process of deregulation and re-regulation has been adopted for the future exploitation of the former airport of Hellinikon. However, the path towards the privatization of Hellinikon, has not gone without resistance from the society. Long before the launch of Hellinikon SA, the HRADF and even the Olympic Games of 2004, the local community had persistently claimed the right to the property and intensively promoted the demand for a truly public Metropolitan Park in the area of the former airport of Hellinikon.

There is a long history of struggles of the residents for the protection of the public character of the area, starting with the closure of the airport in 2001 and the associated law. These struggles have culminated in a stable and growing regional coalition that has organized a series of initiatives, especially since 2007, when a rather milder privatization and development plan by the state had to be withdrawn. These initiatives, had led to the organization of numerous events for raising awareness against the privatization driven by the Greek government, an autonomous urban farm.

Figure 22: David Harvey on the beach of Hellinikon. Image courtesy of Hellinikon-Argyroupoli Municipality and a health care unit among others. Geography professor David Harvey, had himself visited the site of Hellinikon on June 2012, and expressed his support to the struggles and demands of the local community. The most significant act of resistance, though, and the strongest negotiation document of the local communities, was the commission of a feasibility study for the Metropolitan Park of Hellinikon ordered by the Local Union of Municipalities & Communities of Attica (TEDKNA) and the Cities of Alimos, Argyroupoli, Glyfada and Hellinikon, that was undertaken by the Urban Environment Lab of the National Technical University of Athens. The study was realized in 2009-2010, in the midst of speculative scenarios about the privatized future of the area, and its goal was to prove, based on economic data, as well as socio-spatial research the feasibility of the alternative scenario of a Metropolitan Park with maximum green areas and minimum to zero urban development.

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11 Ibid., 7. publicly-owned, urban, coastal area in Attica (626 Ha
12 Ibid., 8. publicly-owned, urban, coastal area in Attica (626 Ha
The NTUA - TEDKNA Study (December 2010)

1.

In 2009, TEDKNA commissioned the Urban Environment Laboratory of the National Technical University of Athens, to deliver a feasibility study and an alternative development master plan that will examine the construction of an open and Green Metropolitan Park. The study was submitted in 2010, and was divided into two parts. The first part included a thorough review and evaluation of all precedent studies realized for the former Airport of Hellinikon, as well as extensive documentation of all the legislative and developmental history of the site.

The study then argues why Hellinikon is indispensable as public asset for the citizens of Athens:

- Athens suffers from lack of urban public open and green space. 2.5 m²/resident
- That dictates the preservation of all open green spaces and the reclamation of all available land to be converted into park spaces
- The Greek Planning standards as defined by law in the 1980s prescribe that an area ten times bigger than Hellinikon is required to cover the needs for open green space for the Greater Athens Area.
- The entirety of Hellinikon area would add 1.98 m² of green space per resident to the Greater Athens Area resulting in an overall total of just 4.5 m² per resident.
- Moreover, the recent deforestation process that is witnessed to the east of the Attica region and follows the urban sprawl also triggered by the new airport at Spata renders the danger of an even greater
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decrease of the level of available green space within the Attica basin.

- Hellinikon is the only available piece of land that can provide Athens Greater Area, 3.5 km of access to the waterfront.

The study goes on, emphasizing the feasibility of the construction of the Metropolitan Park, without the need of the attraction of private investors.

According to NTUA, past studies coming out from governmental and planning authorities have misleadingly evaluated the Metropolitan Park as an expensive project that cannot be afforded by the State and should not be realized using taxpayers’ money. Instead, the alternative of a high-end urban development plan has been raised as the most appropriate approach involving an over-excessive budget and a Public-Private Partnership.

Therefore, the study concludes, the excessive estimated cost of the Hellinikon Metropolitan Park, as it has been presented over recent years, constitutes a choice rather than a documented necessity.13

More specifically, the study outlines the fact that there has not been any justification yet for the need to construct a new small other than promoting private interests against the beneficiary identity of the site, as this has been assigned through consecutive laws and governmental directions.

13 Ibid., 13. publicly-owned, urban, coastal area in Attica (626 Ha

Figure 3.24: Comparative Analysis of Park Construction Costs (EUR/m²). Sources: NTUA - Urban Environment Laboratory, Serero Architects, and Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Planning and Public Works
Moreover, the research claims that past studies (YPEXWDE) have deliberately presented an overestimation of the construction and operation costs for the park. As mentioned further in the study, a conventional construction of a park, according to the official invoices of the General Secretary of Public Works of Greece are 33,200 EUR/acre. The equivalent costs for the recently inaugurated Tempelhof Airport in Berlin are 64,000 EUR/acre. Finally, the much milder interventions in the award winning Maurice Rose Airfield in Frankfurt were as low as 18,000 EUR/acre. In the contrary the Hellinikon Metropolitan Park, as it was planned in 2007 by the YPEXWDE study, was estimated at 304,000 EUR/acre only for the construction of the park (without any buildings or infrastructure). 

On the contrary and according to the study of the NTUA, if the construction cost followed the construction standards of the European precedent cases, the entire project would cost 100 mil EUR, and would be realized in a 20-year horizon. Moreover, the study continues, based on the figures of the already expensive royal parks of London, Hellinikon in its complete form would require a budget of 10 to 12 mil EUR per year for its operation and maintenance (Figure: Comparative Analysis of Park Construction Costs (EUR/m2). Sources: NTUA - Urban Environment Laboratory, Serero Architects, and Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Planning and Public Works3.23, Figure: Basic Planning & Design Principles for the Creation of the Metropolitan Green Park at the Former Hellinikon International Airport of Athens - Master Plan and Land Use Map. Source: NTUA - Urban Environment Laboratory3.24)

The study further argues that the revenues from the existing uses located within the site of the former airport are sufficient to sustain both the construction and maintenance of the Metropolitan Park. These revenues are specified as the rent incomes from the leased spaces of the former Olympic Venues facilities as well as the area around the former East Terminal, currently being used as an Exhibition Center. Finally the study emphatically stresses that during the previous six years the Greek Government had failed to collect more than 40 mil EUR of the anticipated revenues (50%). The first phase of the study concludes that even with this loss, the existing funds are enough to launch and complete the first phase of the proposed plan.

The second phase of the study presents and analyzes an alternative agenda for the development of the Metropolitan Park. Therefore the study calls for six immediate actions:

1. Cancelation of all real estate development plans
2. Removal of all fences (56 km of fences - 40 km after the Olympics)
3. Clearance of the waterfront from illegal activities due to selective exceptions in permission giving
4. Immediate opening of approximately 56 percent of the area to the

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Belavilas Nikos et al., Basic Planning & Design Principles for the Creation of the Metropolitan Green Park at the Former Hellinikon International Airport of Athens - Summary of Research Findings and Key Proposal Points, 97.
The Story So Far

public with the removal of fences (the rest 44 percent will be given gradually to the public after the necessary arrangements with the various stakeholders (Ministry of National Defense, Aviation)

14. Avoid the relocation of the transportation facilities from the site

15. Restoration of the existing building stock (75% of the existing buildings can be re-used)

Finally, the proposal presents a five-axis strategy that implements the new uses of the Metropolitan Park:
- Open Metropolitan Sports & Recreation pole
- Demolition of illegal constructions on the waterfront and regeneration of the natural coastline
- Center for Culture, Education and Research in the area of the former West Terminal
- Local Center with Social Uses in the former USA military base
- Metropolitan node with compatible metropolitan uses (exhibition, conferences, scientific and artistic events) in the area of the former East Terminal building.

Endnote

The history of Hellinikon is a story of national growth, hope for the future, and ambitious dreams. It is also a story of opportunism, speculation, and false promises. Some say that Hellinikon delineates the nature of the Greek society itself. Today, more than ever, it seems that it also holds the nature of its future. Well, only time will tell.
Figure 3.26: Timeline of the History of Hellinikon
The Story So Far

1981
GOVERNMENT SUSPENDS ALL WORKS AT SPATA

1995
GERMAN COMPANY HOCHTIEF IS SELECTED FOR THE CONSTRUCTION AND CO-OWNERSHIP OF THE NEW ATHENS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AT SPATA

1996
WASSENHOVEN-NTUA STUDY: DEVELOPMENT OF THE FORMER AIRPORT OF HELLINIKON.

2001
LAST DEPARTURE FROM HELLINIKON TO THESSALONIKI. HELLINIKON AIRPORT SHUTS DOWN PERMANENTLY

INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF THE NEW ATHENS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT ELEFTHERIOS VENIZELOS

2004
OLYMPIC GAMES ATHENS 2004: HELLINIKON IS TRANSFORMED INTO THE LARGEST OLYMPIC VENUE

2005
DZO ARCHITECTS SERERO-FERNANDEZ WIN THE INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITION FOR THE METROPOLITAN PARK OF HELLINIKON

2007
YPAGXWDE STUDY: UPDATING AND SPECIALIZATION OF THE SERERO-FERNANDEZ PROPOSAL

2008
POLLAIS STUDY: DEVELOPMENT OF THE METROPOLITAN PARK OF HELLINIKON. COMMISSIONED BY KED

2009
GREEK PM G. PAPANDREOU INVITES JOSEP ACEBILLO TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL FOR HELLINIKON

2010
NTUA -TEDKNA STUDY:
BASIC PLANNING & DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR THE CREATION OF A METROPOLITAN PARK AT HELLINIKON

GREECE SIGNS A MOU WITH QATAR IN NEW YORK

GREECE ENTERS THE EFSM AND SIGNS THE FIRST MEMORANDUM

2011
ESTABLISHMENT OF HELLINIKON SA

JOSEP ACEBILLO PRESENTS A STRATEGIC URBAN MODEL FOR HELLINIKON

2012
FOUR INVESTORS SHORTLISTED: LONDON & REGIONAL PROPERTIES, QATARI DIAR REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT CO., ELBIT SYSTEMS LTD. AND LAMDA DEVELOPMENT SA

END OF THE FIRST PHASE OF THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST. NINE EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST WERE SUBMITTED

LAW 4062/2012: SPECIAL LEGISLATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HELLINIKON IS PUBLISHED BY THE GREEK GOVERNMENT

HRAFD ANNOUNCES AN INVITATION TO SOI FOR THE ACQUISITION OF HELLINIKON S.A.

HRAFD PUBLISHES EVICTION NOTICES TO PUBLIC BODIES AND COMPANIES LOCATED IN HELLINIKON
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Figure 3.25: Basic Planning & Design Principles for the Creation of the Metropolitan Green Park at the Former Hellinikon International Airport of Athens - Master Plan and Land Use Map. Source: NTUA - Urban Environment Laboratory

Figure 3.26: Timeline of the History of Hellinikon
The redevelopment of the abandoned Hellinikon Airport comes at a moment when Athens suffers from a deep urban crisis that had been incubating in Greek society for the last 70 years.
The redevelopment of the abandoned Hellinikon Airport comes at an awkward moment for Athens, mostly because of the recent economic crisis. The financial crisis simply scratched the surface of a seemingly prosper nation and revealed a deep urban crisis that had been incubating in Greek society for the last 70 years. To summarize some aspects of this urban crisis, I will only mention the demographic drop in Athens (more than 2% annually), the diminishing natural reserves (every year, the Greater Attica Area loses an average of 3,285 Ha of forested land\(^1\)) and of course the deep economic recession, partially caused by the 379 billion euros national debt\(^2\) that results in nothing less than 30% unemployment\(^3\), increasing poverty levels and more and more homeless people. The worsening financial and social indices triggered despair and diminishing faith towards the formal state, which seems inadequate to meet the challenges of the times (Figure 4.1, Figure 4.2, Figure 4.3, Figure 4.4, Figure 4.5, Figure 4.6).

An Urban Crisis
David Harvey describes the urban crisis as the production of urban space that does not originate from those who actually produce this space, rather than from a process of capital accumulation that aims to enhance ‘invisible’ notions such as the GDP and the economic growth. The investments that so loudly the Greek government advertises and desperately seeks to attract do not necessarily address the current social and urban disparities in Athens, but are rather tailored to fight the national debt and achieve a seeming increase of the GDP. Today, four years after the appeal to the European Financial Support Mechanism (EFSM), Greece, and Athens in particular, undergoes a significant social and urban decline. This crisis is reflected in environmental, demographic and financial indicators that are presented in this chapter.

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1. “Πυροσβέστιο.”
2. “Greece National Debt Clock.”
3. “GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL SERVICE OF GREECE.”
Food handout in Athens - picture of the day

A photographic highlight selected by the picture desk. Louisa Gouliamaki's image draws our attention to the plight of the Greek people.

Ranjit Dhallwal

guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 5 February 2013 07.42 EST

Athenians reach out for a bag of oranges during a free distribution of fruit and vegetables by farmers outside the Agriculture Ministry. The farmers are staging the event to protest against high production costs, including rising fuel prices.

Photograph: Louisa Gouliamaki/AFP/Getty Images

Figure 4.1: Food handout in Athens - picture of the day | World news | guardian.co.uk
Athens: A City in Crisis

Figure 4.2: Greece: When anger goes beyond despair - CNN.com

Figure 4.3: Greece unemployment hits a record 25% in July | BBC News | Business

Figure 4.4: Greek unemployment hits record as poverty spreads | World news | The Guardian

Figure 4.5: BBC News - Struggling Greeks losing belief in the state

Figure 4.6: BBC News - Greeks go back to basics as recession bites
Financial Crisis

Greece was one of the first countries to enter the debt crisis within the European Union and triggered a chain of events that have led to the destabilization of the Eurozone and the Union as a whole. As a matter of fact Athens was the fastest shrinking city in 2012 worldwide (Figure 4.7). Starting as a destabilization of the banking sector, the crisis soon leapfrogged to the entire social structure causing a chain of events that have led the country to its current situation. In 2008, Greece, seek activated the European Financial Support Mechanism, which ties the applicant country to specific commitments towards its lenders. As it regularly happens to these cases, the deficit was shifted from the banking sector to the taxpayers, through the state support of questionable capital investments, the imposition of cuts in salaries and pensions, and increase in taxes.

Alongside, and in order to lower the national debt and deficit, the state, largely instigated by the EFSM launched a wide privatization operation, focusing on public assets and organizations. To support this operation, the Greek state regularly forced deregulation policies and repeatedly threatened or negated social and labor rights. Moreover, the Greek Government formed a special purpose vehicle, the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF), with sole purpose the privatization of more than 400 public properties. Hellinikon is without question the pinnacle of the privatization agenda. And while the privatization of Hellinikon may seem; like a great opportunity to generate profit, in fact, and mostly because of the huge national debt (369,000,000,000 EUR), the current value of the property is evaluated at approximately 250 mil euros which does not consist a viable solution even in traditional developmental criteria (Figure 4.8).

That brings us to the first question of the analysis: *Q: Is Hellinikon to be sacrificed for covering just a minor part the national debt, or is there an alternative urban vision able to stimulate the civic coherence of Athens?*
Athens: A City in Crisis

Demographic Projections and Sprawl

Contrary to the projections that want China, the BRIC countries and the developing world to anticipate an explosive increase in population, Europe and to some extent Greece seem to follow a declining trajectory in demographic projections (Figure 4.10, Figure 4.11). Europe is heading towards a steady state with clear indications of shrinkage. Athens in particular exhibits a drop in population the last 12 years⁴, a phenomenon that had not been witnessed since after the war. Notably, since 2001 there seems to be an increasing tendency of population retreat towards the province and periphery, while the abandonment of the Athens downtown is increasingly observed over the last couple of years. Those two observations are largely attributed to the decreasing job opportunities within the historical center of Athens, as well as the pursuit of a less expensive lifestyle elsewhere.

This scope raises the first question: Q2: How, can the redevelopment of Hellinikon bring balance between the dying downtown and the outspread of the city?

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⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Kalogirou, Papadakis, and Tsimpos, Population Projections of the Kapodistrian Municipalities in the Attica Prefecture According to Age and Sex: 2001-2021.
Environmental Crisis

This tendency for fleeing away from the downtown led to the suburbanization of Athens and the fast depletion of the limited natural resources of the Metropolitan area of Athens. Even though, and according to the Strategic Plan for Athens 2021, Athens is not expected to grow or expand in the next 20 years, the relocation of the International Airport to the East of Attica basin triggered an expansion of the city that quickly covered formerly forested areas and agriculture land (Figure 4.9). Athens is not only loosing population. It is also loosing significant parts of its natural resources (Figure 4.14). Every summer, the entire country suffers from forest fires while some of the most severe incidents of the last 50 years occurred within the Attica Region Figure 4.12). The reason behind that are mostly arsons that aim to turn forested land into new development Figure 4.13). The relocation of the airport to the east encouraged even further the outspread of the city, and as a consequence the deforestation process had been accelerated. At the same time, the fact that Athens happens to have one of the lowest ratios of green space per capita in Europe raises a question of a balance between the need for urban parks and the urge for natural reserve preservation. The reflection on the environmental dimension generates the following question: Q3: Is Hellinikon to bring nature back into the city, or protect the exurban reserves with its urbanization?
Unemployed, Homeless and the Unresponsive Real Estate Market
Of course, the most striking impacts of the financial crisis are evident at the unemployment rates and the ever increasing homeless within the metropolitan area of Athens. Only in early 2013 the unemployment rate reached the historical high of 30% while for the ages between 15-24 there was a shocking estimation of 60% (Figure 4.15). In raw numbers that is translated into 1.5 million unemployed in Greece and approximately 900,000 in Athens only. Meanwhile, the homeless in Greece are believed to be around 11,000 according to the NGO “Klimaka”. Finally, and according to Eurostat, there are approximately 325,000 people under the age of 35 that still live with their parents. Those facts reveal that while the demographic drop might be partially responsible for this emerging urban crisis in Athens, the abandoned downtown and the declining social fabric of Athens is mainly due to the shortcoming of the productive classes to engage the urban realm.

Conclusions
It is true that the Greek Government needs funds to cover the national debt. It is also true that Athens features one of the lowest ratios of open space per capita. Therefore, a privately developed Metropolitan Park would sound like a rational solution under the present circumstances. Unfortunately, and as I explained in the second chapter, the current competition does not ensure either a satisfying profit for the Greek state or a true Metropolitan Park for the people of Athens. My thesis argues that what Athens needs more than a large privately managed urban redevelopment is a new model of urban life that is more responsible towards its citizens and the environment. And as I am stating in the next chapter, this is not possible within the capitalistic city. Therefore I claim that Hellinikon could become a territory occupied by social forces that denounce economic growth per se, and are willing to build an autonomous community relying to its own resources and its self-institution.

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6 “GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL SERVICE OF GREECE.”
8 CHOROSZEWICZ and WOLFF, 51 Million Young EU Adults Lived with Their Parent(s) in 2008.
9 Harvey, “The Urban Roots of Financial Crises,” 2.
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Figure 4.10: World Population In Different Continents 1950 - 2100.


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“Development is a voyage with more castaways than survivors”
Eduardo Gallano
5. FRAMEWORK

The problem of growth

Dense urban environments have arguably been the most viable and affordable living environments for the last ten thousand years. Why wouldn't that be enough anymore? The current process of urbanization can only ensure further accumulation, larger production, and more consumption. In other words, cities today can only further guarantee economic growth. So, what is wrong with economic growth? The main issue is the non-stop expansion. There is no limit to our growth. And while this happens at a metropolitan and regional scale, it becomes obvious that the continuation of this phenomenon on a global scale will have some severe impacts. If a certain amount of land is not enough for one city, how is the planet big enough to sustain the collective growth of all metropolitan agglomerations at the same time?

Strangely, the private development and real-estate world seems to have being conceived and built from scratch. Impatient market forces have driven and generated a new kind of city development that pre-conceives pre-designs and build entire cities from the ground up as one complete commercial product. And as finished products, those cities are finite. On the other hand, the totality of such urban life is seclusive. Traditional cities have organically grown accommodating their increasing population. Maybe, we are now at this stage of stagnation. That is to say that our cities might have reached that maximum capacity that enables our society to migrate and colonize other physical and economical territories. When that colonization occurs, in a need not to repeat the mistakes of the past, we create controllable environments.1

However, this is a plasmatic answer, because those finite and controllable environments, often camouflaged behind the decoy of sustainability, only aim to achieve even greater economic growth. The problem is not only that cities tend to grow but that they do because the gigantism of economy drives them to. The fundamental purpose of private urban development is to generate profit and not to make successful cities. This is a reality only because we consider it as a necessity. Even those new confined cities are built to be exclusive, and even if they are more sustainable or beautiful, they are not for everyone. If we change our

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1 Mumford, “The Natural History of Urbanization.”
model of economy, how would the urban environment react? Or the other way around, if we change the way we run cities, is it possible to change our economic model, towards a more fair and just system?

It is true that the Greek Government is desperately seeking funds to cover the national debt. It is also true that Athens features one of the lowest ratios of open space per capita. Therefore, a privately developed Metropolitan Park would sound like a rational solution for the current circumstances. Unfortunately, the legal framework under which the competition is being realized does not ensure either a satisfying profit for the Greek state or a true Metropolitan Park for the people of Athens. The only vision behind the government’s privatization plan is the pursuit of economic growth as the only option out of the crisis. This thesis claims that Hellinikon needs to be much more than that. The prime location of the site and its valuable natural assets can symbolize a fundamental turn in urban thinking where highly valued land is not exclusively handed over to specific economic and social groups.

**Why capitalism has failed us and what should we do about it**

Our society mistakenly perceives the low-income class, and unemployed as an inevitable part of our economies, and nurtures the illusion that those classes are in a transitional state and will eventually disappear in the near or distant future. What we fail to realize is that these classes are structural parts of our economies and our societies depend on their existence. This is why capitalism has failed. It is an economic model that was never designed and will never intend to become an inclusive social model.

‘Capitalist civilization is moving inexorably towards catastrophic collapse. There is no longer any need for a revolutionary class to overthrow capitalism; it is digging its own grave and that of industrial civilization in general.’

And even though capitalism has failed, our societies still continue to implement its values to control and direct economic growth and social prosperity. What is more interesting is that we try to heal the mistakes of

> ‘Most cities in Asia today are clearly developmental. That is, a city used purely as a developmental tool, with economic growth as its primary concern, often creating extreme inequalities. A city as we know (it) is more than that, it is a common space for the common good as Aristotle once wrote. “For this reason alone, our cities fall short of what it could be”.

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HELLINIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void

a capitalistic crisis with even harsher capitalistic policies. So, what would be the alternative model to build and run our cities?

In the introduction of his book "Depoliticization: the political imaginary of global capitalism" Ingerid S Straume stresses out that the lack of alternatives to capitalism is a shortcoming not of the economic sphere but the political:

"Why are there no serious alternatives to the capitalist economic system today? Since capitalism as an economic system produces many undesirable 'externalities' that should – rationally speaking – undermine its claim to dominance, its 'sheer success' is hardly a sufficient explanation. The lack of alternatives to capitalism seems to be a problem belonging not to the economic, but to the political sphere."³

I argue that urban design and architecture at large also need to take a stand on the need for an alternative scenario to the capitalistic city. Of course architecture alone does not have the power to bring about the necessary change. Change will come through the social and political realm. However, Architecture and Urban Design have the privilege of possessing the powerful tool of vision. And sometimes the vision of a cause can outshine its plausibility.

If this time of capitalistic crisis signalizes the beginning of the end of our current socio-economic construct, the search of a new model opens-up the opportunity for alternative social and urban theories. And if this is the time our cities need to respond, urban design needs to come up with answers.

Our economies consider financial growth not as a vehicle for prosperity but as a purpose by itself. Economic growth and abstract notions such as the GDP have become the essence of good governance. Urban space and urbanization are only seen as levers to achieve the higher goal of 'national economy'. This imaginative value leads governments and policy makers to sacrifice what is essentially real and palpable; the urban space. This thesis challenges the established practices used to produce the public space and aspires to explore an alternative if not diametrically opposed narrative; an urban scenario where the development of urban space originates from its final users, the local community. To achieve this, the new social structure needs to maintain a level of autonomy and self-institution. The idea of an autonomous society that shapes the urban space through a bottom-up process is not new and has been manifested in the past through theorems and actual interventions in the urban space. In this chapter, I will attempt to identify selective theories and practical examples, trace the overlaps that enhance the argument of self-institution and explore the ways that those can be applied on the case of Hellinikon.

I extracted the framework of this thesis from four theories that share common ground and could result in a new urban dynamic. Those are Cornelius Castoriadis's idea of 'Autonomy', David Harvey's 'Right to the

City, Serge Latouche’s writings on De-Growth, and Mathias Unger’s Green Archipelago. This thesis is a speculative scenario of how a community built upon those principles can be established, structured and spatially evolved.

**Autonomy (Cornelius Castoriadis)**

Cornelius Castoriadis was an important Greek-French philosopher, social critic, economist, and psychoanalyst, and author of “The Imaginary Institution of Society” (Figure 5.1). The ideas of the “social imaginary” and the bipolar of “autonomy”/“heteronomy” were the cornerstones of his work. According to Castoriadis, the imaginary is the collective perception of a society about the world and the role of man in it. Traditional societies have developed elaborated imaginaries, enhanced with myths, traditions and social narratives. The major transformation of these imaginaries came about with the dominance of capitalism that altered them into the so called ‘rational mastery’. Rational mastery is the continuous pursuit of pure reason and efficiency in means of production. For Castoriadis that was a critical turn in history and a dead-end for contemporary societies.

His answer to the phenomenon of rational mastery is the idea of autonomy. Autonomy originates from the Greek «οντος» (=self) and «νομος» (=law), and it means the one that establishes his own laws. And while most societies institute their own laws, autonomous societies are those whose members constantly realize this self-institution. Autonomy is about a society that establishes its own rules and above all has constant consciousness of their origin of implementation. The way of living is not deriving by the ‘invisible hand of god’ or abstract notions like the ‘national economy’ (heteronomy) but from the everyday activity of the citizens' collective actions.

Our cities today are designed according to the rational mastery. They are designed for infinite growth. What would a city with a finite life-cycle look like? If we subtract the goal of rational mastery from our society, what are we left with? What is a city that does not aim to growth that does not scope to accumulation of capital? Is it a city without purpose? If we shift the concept of autonomy into spatial terms we would end up with schemata that will dictate their self-limitation and manifest their self-governance. In nature, nothing expands. It just evolves in order to survive against other competitors and natural elements. And it evolves to the point that this very survival can be achieved. And there is always the possibility of that never to happen altogether.

Starting from Castoriadis’ argument on death, in the meaning of life-cycle would hold a paramount role in the spatial organization of the autonomous society. Its members, not only will they know that the social institution is constantly subject to question and re-determination, but they will be assigned to revitalize and rebuild it through finite cycles of time or chapters. The stretch of such a concept as a spatial configuration would resemble to a self-generative mechanism that at the same time is aware of its coming to an end, as well as its self-eliminating nature.
The Right to the City (David Harvey)

The ‘Right to the City’ was first proposed by French urban sociologist Henri Lefebvre in his 1968 book “Le Droit à la ville,” who describes it as the “demand... [for] a transformed and renewed access to urban life.” Later on, American geographer David Harvey largely adopted ‘The Right to the City’ in his own work and interpreted it as following:

“The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.”

Very close to the ideas of Castoriadis about the social imaginary and the ‘Rational Mastery’, David Harvey also speaks about the ‘national economy’ as a fictional structure that overrules contemporary societies. ‘Conventional economics routinely treats investment in the built environment along with urbanization as some sidebar to the more important affairs that go on in some fictional entity called ‘the national economy’.”

In his introductory memo for the AESOP Conference in Istanbul in 2012, Harvey identifies the fetishization of growth as one of the most critical problems of the capitalist era. He goes on saying that the blind pursuit of growth will inevitably lead to a dead-end and he stresses the need for a new urban scenario that will reconfigure the relation between production and consumption and will have a more responsible stand towards the available resources and the environment at large.

“A zero growth economy, which is socially just and environmentally beneficial, and that should in fact be the long-term aim, and again there is no way we can approach that without inspired ideas about new ways of urban living, and new ways of coordinating both production and consumption in metropolitan areas, new ways of living without again putting stress on resources and the like.”

Through the work of David Harvey, it becomes clear that current model that produces the city, has entirely detached its actual protagonists, those who build it, from the way it is produced, and it has also removed them from the epicenter of the urban life. Social groups that are regularly marginalized are in fact those who bring the ‘real city’ into life. On the contrary Harvey suggests that citizens should seize their right

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4 Lefebvre, Le Droit a La Ville.
5 Lefebvre, Writings on cities, 158.
6 “New Left Review - David Harvey: The Right to the City,” 23-40.
7 Harvey, “The Urban Roots of Financial Crises,” 1.
8 “AESOP 2012.”
9 Ibid.
to the city through bottom-up activism and local community initiatives. In the interview he gave to The Guardian in June 2012, Harvey stated that ‘The Occupy movement is saying we have to create an alternative city’10 Drawing a parallel between the Occupy movement and the 19th century Paris Commune Harvey suggests that both share a common manifestation; that citizens should reclaim and reshape their own cities. Interestingly, in his article “The Urban Roots of Financial Crisis”, Harvey calls this urban scenario a ‘zero growth economy’, much like the idea of the ‘de-growth’ economy developed by Serge Latouche.

De-Growth Movement (Serge Latouche)

Serge Latouche is a French professor of economy and one of the thinkers and most renowned partisans of the degrowth theory (Figure 5.3). The De-Growth movement advocates for a society that its primal goal is its citizens well-being and not the pursuit of economic growth. It suggests a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society that relies on reduced economic activity, an increase in free time and encouragement of good citizenship. In one of his most influential books ‘Farewell to Growth’11, Serge Latouche outlines the reasons why we should move away from the current way of living and constructs the framework of a de-growth society. Latouche notes that growth has become the “unquestionable cornerstone” of all modern regimes and believes that the mere chase of economic growth has distracted societies from caressing about the well-being of their members. Instead, and for the sake of financial growth, modern economies excessively harness natural resources and exploit human and labor rights. 12 Latouche, in a similar fashion with Harvey calls for a major political shift, driven by a profound cultural revolution. Attesting the ideas initially brought forward by Castoriadis, Latouche speaks about an autonomous de-growth society that achieves its self-institution and denounces the “invisible hand” of the market, the dictatorship of financial markets and the diktats technosience issue to (super-) modern society13. Again following the footprints of Castoriadi’s theory, Latouche suggests that such a society cannot be boundless. On the contrary, and according to the words of Robert Dahl14, Latouche suggests that citizens can have essential control over a political entity only if this remains restricted in size. Finally, Latouche proposes eight basic principles that this society should be built upon; Re-evaluate, Reconceptualize, Restructure, Redistribute, Relocalize, Reduce, and Recycle15.

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10 “David Harvey: ‘The Occupy Movement Is Saying We Have to Create an Alternative City’ - Video | Comment Is Free | Guardian.co.uk.”
11 Latouche, Farewell to Growth.
12 Ibid., 31.
13 Ibid., 42.
14 Dahl, Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy, 45.
15 Latouche, Farewell to Growth, 33.
The Green Archipelago (Mathias Ungers)

In his book “The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture”16 Pier Vittorio Aureli fleshes out the main principles behind Oswald Mathias Ungers’s concept of ‘Green Archipelago’ for the post-war city of Berlin (Figure 5.4). According to Aureli, Ungers project is one of the few planning attempts to address urban shrinking as opposed to urban growth. More specifically Ungers perceives the depopulated city of Berlin as an Archipelago impossible to plan and accumulates all the available urban density in confined ‘urban islands’. However, this should not be seen as an attempt to ‘dizurbanize’ Berlin but rather as a project of fostering urbanity through clearly articulated urban artifacts.

It is also topical for this thesis to cite the comparison that Aureli draws between the Green Archipelago and Koolha’s and Zenghelis’s ‘Exodus’ project:

‘...we can see the fundamental development of Ungers’s city-within-the-city concept as the germ of Koolhaas and Zenghelis’s Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture (1972). As the subtitle suggests, the subject of this project is the inmate. Koolhaas and Zenghelis intended the “voluntary prisoner” to serve as a metaphor for the inhabitant of the metapolis in its most extreme condition, an exacerbated version of communitarian citizenship based on self-imposed closure’17

The present study attempts a projection of the ‘Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture’ onto a social platform of communal organization of space that objects traditional urban development and adopts the ideals of self-sufficiency and self-institution.

Much like Latouche’s observations about the optimal size of a true democratic society, and the self-limitation proposed by Castoriadis, Ungers suggests that:

‘Radical communality was possible inly within the limited settlements, where an increase in population did not result in the growth of individual settlements but in their multiplication. The limits of each settlement were self-imposed by the community itself according to the self-management; thus their form was independent from any external urban order’.18

Finally, Aureli outlines the importance of Ungers work as one that boldly entangles the condition of depopulation and urban decline at large, something that has previously been anathematized by the discipline of urban studies as the embodiment of urban crisis. What Ungers proved through his thesis was that urbanism is able, and in fact is the appropriate discipline, to address not only urban growth but also urban decline.

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16 Aureli, The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture.
17 Ibid., 213.
18 Ibid., 216.
Grassroots Initiatives within Hellinikon

Shifting back to Athens and as a result of the economic crisis people is becoming desperate while increasingly losing faith towards the formal state. Violent protests and initiatives like food distribution without intermediates, refusal to pay taxes and fines, and self-organized collectives are showing up throughout Athens and Greece at large. Grassroots movements are also present within Hellinikon. Aiming both to face the disparities of the urban crisis as well as to object to the government plans for privatization, local communities have activated the old airport showing the way of how public land can serve the people in a direct and fair way. From spontaneous voluntary tree-planting initiatives, to highly organized clinics, local collectives have demonstrated a spirit of solidarity and coalition. This spirit of collectiveness is clearly triggered under the threat of the state to deprive the land from the community, and it is safe to assume that collective actions will climax as the privatization process unfolds.
Self-Managed Urban Farm

The ‘Initiative for a self-managed farm in Hellinikon’ is a citizen’s collective that was formed in 2011 advocating for new productive uses within the urban space and aiming at the organization of an urban eco-farm. In March 20th 2011, the first seeds of native species were planted. The collective initiated the project as a reaction to the privatization plans of the government. Today, the farm is spanning across 5400 sq. ft. of land and hosts a wide range of fruits and vegetables (Figure 5.5).

Metropolitan Community Clinic at Hellinikon

The Metropolitan Community Clinic at Hellinikon provides free medical assistance to the unemployed and poor civilians with no social security or with very little income. 19 The clinic was founded in December 2011 as an initiative of the ‘Intermunicipal Solidarity Network’ and the support of the Hellinikon-Argyroupolis Municipality. 20 The clinic is established in one of the abandoned buildings of the former military base at the North sector of Hellinikon (Figure 5.6).

Civil Aviation Museum

In 2011 the Cultural Association of the former national Greek air-carrier (POLKEOA) and after a process of fifteen years, founded the first and only Civil Aviation Museum in Greece. The Museum is located within the former airport of Hellinikon and more specifically in the former terminal building of the West sector of Hellinikon. The museum covers part of the ground floor of the overseas terminal and includes rare exhibits from the operation days of the former airport and Olympic Airways, the national air-carrier. Alongside, POLKEOA managed to obtain four old aircrafts, currently decommissioned at the North East side of the former airport. 21 (Figure 5.7)

Voluntary Tree-Planting

In March 2012, citizens from across Athens gathered in Hellinikon and planted over 1,000 olive trees. One year later, dozens of volunteers revisited the space to revitalize the newly-planted olive grove, manifest their objection to the privatization plans, and celebrate their collective action (Figure 5.8).

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19 “Metropolitan Community Clinic at Helliniko.”
20 “Μητροπολιτικό Κοινωνικό Ιεράρχειο Ελληνικού - ΜΚΙΕ.”
21 “Μουσείο Π. Αεροπορίας | ΠΟΛ.Κ.Ε.Ο.Α.”
Figure 5.5: Self-Managed Urban Farm. Source: agroselliniko.blogspot.com

Figure 5.6: Metropolitan Community Clinic. Source: mki-ellinikou.blogspot.com

Figure 5.7: Civil-Aviation Museum. Source: www.polkeoa.gr

Figure 5.8: Voluntary Tree-Planting. Source: agroselliniko.blogspot.com
HELLENIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void

Framework Summary & Thesis Statement

Population and economic growth are two sides of the same coin. Both have been used as criteria of good and bad governance. What was once population growth today is economic growth. As we saw earlier, all three theorists, Latouche, Castoriadis, and Harvey outline the futile value that contemporary societies have assigned to the abstract notion of economic growth in the past, namely ‘rational mastery’, ‘national economy’, or ‘GDP’, as the cornerstone of prosperity.

Through the analysis of the work of Castoriadis, Harvey, Latouche, and Ungers, one identifies some striking similarities between the Green Archipelago, an urban design manifesto, the ‘Right to the City’, an urban sociology approach, the idea of Autonomy, a philosophical construct, and the economic/ecologic theory of De-Growth. The overlapping of those ideas resulted in a new urban dynamic that largely shaped the principles behind the present urban design project.

I believe that for the same reasons why Ungers developed the idea of the Green Archipelago, that is to answer the challenges raised by the post-war urban crisis in Berlin, it is today topical to speak about an autonomous city as an answer to the deregulating practices of capitalistic governance. This project aspires to manifest an alternative to the current status quo of growth and development.

The project is a response to David Harvey’s call for new ‘ways of urban living’. The study embraces the philosophy of Castoriadis ‘Autonomy’ and Latouche’s idea of ‘De-Growth’, as cornerstones of a newly proposed
society. It is not coincidental that both Harvey and Latouche have actually visited Hellinikon to discuss with the active citizens of the local communities and express their support to their cause (Figure 5.9, Figure 5.10). This fact alone reinforces the intention of this thesis to utilize their ideas as the theoretical structure from which an urban alternative can be generated. I claim that Hellinikon could become a territory occupied by social forces that denounce economic growth per se, and are willing to build an autonomous community relying to own-resources and self-institution. Collective activities can shift from the spontaneous and individual to the holistic level for the entire Hellinikon area, as a bottom-up reaction to the top-down de-regulative speculations. This is an urban design project that will set the design ground rules for the evolution of such a society and will speculate on its possible form.
HELLINIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void
Design Principles set by the Theoretical Framework

Through the theoretical framework presented, a series of design and planning principles were generated:

- The new community abolishes growth, as its structural element and will be rather dependent on local resources (water, agriculture production and fishing stock). The capacity of these resources will also define the size of the community. More specifically, the potential agriculture production and fishing activities within Hellinikon can sustain a city of approximately seven thousand people.
- The new community will be built as a city within a city. It will feature a distinct urban shape, clearly separated by the rest of the fabric and will be organized around the buildings and facilities that currently exist on site. That is to achieve a formal coherence that spatially reflects its political and social manifestation.
- The new community will eliminate property ownership and land values, as practices of economic growth and amplification of social inequalities.

The new community will denounce hard infrastructure, as primary device of economic growth. Therefore it does not plug-in to the existing hard infrastructure (highways). However, connections are made to the secondary urban fabric, while the community makes use of existing public transportation networks such as the bus, the metro and the tram lines, as platforms of collective action.

The autonomous community will evolve as an incrementally growing city.
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Figure 5.10: Members of the local community are giving Serge Latouche a tour in the self-managed urban farm in Hellinikon. Source: agroselliniko.blogspot.com. IMG_1060.jpg (JPEG Image, 1600 x 1200 Pixels) - Scaled (0%). Accessed May 22, 2013. http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-y_LgJhWfjU/TclnhyjVFzl/AAAAAAAACw/gJqa_gkzXlc/s1600/IMG_1060.jpg.
‘There is no way we can approach that (a zero growth economy) without inspired ideas about new ways of urban living, and new ways of coordinating both production and consumption in metropolitan areas, new ways of living without again putting stress on resources and the like.’

David Harvey
HELLINIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void
Rise of the Collective Superstructure: An urban scenario

This thesis argues that what Athens needs more than a privately managed Urban Development is a new model of urban life that is more responsible towards its citizens and the environment. And this is not possible within the capitalistic city. Therefore I claim that an upscale of the existing bottom-up practices could transform Hellinikon into an autonomous community that denounces economic growth and relies on its own resources and self-institution. I call this the Collective Superstructure. This thesis is a speculative scenario of how this community could be established, structured and spatially evolved.

This urban scenario cannot happen randomly or entirely unplanned; otherwise the goal of self-sufficiency and self-regulation will fail. There needs to be a plan that can predict and dictate the urban capacity of the given land. The new city will start by building on the existing citizens initiatives of urban agriculture, community medical center and aviation museum. Those will be considered the seeds for future potentials of grassroots development in the city.

The new society will not reject technology and progress. On the contrary it will take advantage of all the achievements that have been done up to now, and those to come in the future to “do more and do better with less”, as George Latouche mentions. The new society will not lower the living standards; it will change them. The new autonomous city will attempt to reconnect the people to the earth. Everyday life will be a lesson learned. It will be a lesson of who we are, where we live, and how we live. Infrastructure will be minimum and visible. The idea is that society needs to be aware of the urban metabolism phenomena, by constantly realizing the externalities, impacts, and effects.

On the other hand, the entire operation will face several threats and risks. The formal state and private interests will certainly not welcome the idea of an autonomous self-acclaimed society in the middle of one of the best coastal properties in Europe. Most likely, Hellinikon will become a territory of continuous conflicts and clashes with law enforcement and private interest groups. Therefore, the community will need to develop defensive mechanisms along with the occupancy of the space that will

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1 Latouche, Farewell to Growth.
secure the survival and continuity of the autonomous structure. The present urban scenario assumes that while the first settlers will occupy the existing buildings on the north sector of Hellinikon, they will soon realize that the existing urban model is too vulnerable to external pressures and inadequate to achieve self-sufficiency. Therefore, the second phase of urbanization would migrate into the interior of the site and will be organized in dense urban entities formalized and equipped so as to control growth, make productive use of the land and confront possible threats; the urban patches. The size and shape of the urban patches is formally defined by collectively built entities that host civic services and amenities able to serve incoming occupants. The growth of the patches will need to be controlled and decided upon the current agricultural production capacity of the community.

The evolution and organization of the new autonomous community is based on four strategies:

- **URBAN**: Urban patches
- **LANDSCAPE**: re-connect mountain to waterfront
- **RE-USE**: re-use existing facilities and infrastructure and
- **PHASING**: incremental urban growth
Urban Strategy: Self-managed Urban Patches

The urban patch is the typology of urbanization of the Collective Superstructure (Figure 6.1). The patches are city sectors defined in size and shape in order to control growth, achieve the overall self-sufficiency of the community, and manage water resources. The patches offer a series of advantages and flexibility to the community. The fact that patches are distinct city sectors, offer them the possibility to individually succeed or fail without impacting neighboring clusters. Moreover, the confined growth of the urban patches spatially manifests the finiteness of the community, as defined by the capacity of the land and offers the citizens a constant realization of scale. Finally, the compact form of the urban patch acts as a defensive mechanism against possible invasions or other threats.
Community Centers or Urban Brackets

Critical components of the urban patches are the Community Centers or Brackets. The community centers are linear structures, perpendicular to the direction of growth that are built collectively by the community (Figure 6.2, Figure 6.3). Their role is to provide incoming settlers with basic amenities and define future axes and general urban form. The Community Centers operate as control growth devices by outlining the successive borders of the community and defining the amount of growth through a water management system. The foundations of the community Centers are used as underground cisterns that capture and store surface water runoff, while the rooftops of the built fabric operate as an interconnected aqueduct system that also drives water towards the
linear structures. Water is then pumped into water towers that maintain pressurized water for distribution across the community (Figure 6.4). The Community Centers also hold the necessary civic amenities, like markets, schools, administration offices and manufacturing lanes (Figure 6.5). Finally, this community at least in the beginning will receive immense pressure from the real estate market that in Greece translates into regular raids by the police. The structure of the Community Centers together with a maze-like street network system, provide a line of defense for the squadrons. Interconnected rooftops offer a secondary pedestrian network while water towers are used as observatories (Figure 6.6, Figure 6.7).
Figure 6.3: Critical components of the urban patches are the Community Centers. The community centers are linear structures, perpendicular to the direction of growth that are built collectively by the community. Their role is to provide incoming settlers with basic amenities and define future axes and general urban form.
The Community Centers are built as the urban patch grows. Their role is to provide all the necessary provisions for the community to evolve around them. At the same time they hold the means to define the amount and extent of growth (Figure 6.9).

A critical device for doing so is the water tank. The water tank is the administrative and morphological pinnacle of each community. The amount of water defines the size of the community that can be sustained, which is successively decided by the appropriation of the available land for cultivation.

Each community center embodies three principal functions for the community; the water tower, the market and the community theatre which host the local council and administrative venues. The community centers are diverse in size and form according to the spatial condition of the phased development that is underway. Two community centers are usually connected with the manufacturing and service lane. Along this entity, manufacturing and light industrial uses are allocated, providing jobs for the citizens and streaming goods into the community center markets.
Rise of the Collective Superstructure

Water towers are not accessible from the street level. Overstreet connections provide a safe secondary circulation. Citizens find shelter on rooftops during a police raid.

Figure 6.5: Programmatic analysis of the Community Center

Figure 6.6: Defensive mechanism analysis of the Community Center
HELLINIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void
Figure 6.7: The defensive operation of the Community Center during a police raid
An urban development sized and shaped according to the agriculture production capacity

In the US 1/3 of food gets trashed even before reaching consumers. That rings the bell for a society that is totally disconnected with the entire food production process is only focusing on consumption. Food production should return back into the cities. Producing food in cities raises awareness of what our food is and how it is produced. According to Latouche, if food production took a turn towards organic cultivation, not only our food quality would be better, but also the quantity and labor equilibrium will reach an ideal balance. Therefore there is a greater value for an autonomous community to be self-sufficient on agricultural production. Besides its practical importance, self-reliance in food becomes a critical political and symbolic operation for the community. The urban patches are responsible for the overall self-sufficiency of the community by establishing a balance between the urbanized land and the agricultural production. The three patches that are shown in the figure are sized and programmed according to this agricultural belt that resides along the old runway. The specific configuration allows for a community of 7,000 people to be entirely self-sufficient on fruits and vegetables (Figure 6.8).
Figure 6.8: Urban patches achieve the overall sufficiency of the community.
Phase 1: The Community Center is collectively built and attached to the existing fabric to provide incoming settlers with basic amenities and services.

Phase 2: As the community grows, the second Center appears while more water towers appear to cover the increasing demand.

Figure 6.9: Overview of the phased evolution of the urban patch.
Phase 3: The patch reaches its maximum density and capacity as the last Community Center re-connects the two previously separated parts of the city.

Landscape Overview: After the density reaches maximum capacity, all agriculture production relocates beyond the boundaries of the patch in order to allow the community to grow and also achieve more productive use of the land.
Landscape Strategy: Re-connect Mountain to Waterfront

Green Strategy

The main landscape gesture of the proposal is the re-connection of the mountain to the waterfront (Figure 6.10). The scheme has references to the winning proposal of the 2004 competition entry by Serrero-Fernandez and their concept of the softscapes. However, the landscape strategy has a dual goal; firstly, to provide the community with the natural resources for its self-sufficiency, and secondly, to give back to the city, a metropolitan-scale park and waterfront, open to the public.

The overall scheme results from the incremental deployment of agriculture fields and the continuation of the ongoing voluntary tree-planting from citizens across the Attica basin (Figure 6.11). The landscape is divided in five sectors fluctuating from a naturalistic mountainous area, to landscape corridors running through the urban fabric, a large scale metropolitan park, the agricultural belt, the buffer zone and the waterfront (Figure 6.12). It is also organized along three main corridors that overlap with the trails of the three re-stored streams crossing through the site.

Figure 6.10: The main landscape gesture of the proposal is the re-connection of the mountain to the waterfront
Rise of the Collective Superstructure

Figure 6.12: Landscape strategy sectors

Figure 6.11: The overall scheme will result from the incremental deployment of agriculture fields and the voluntary tree-planting from citizens across the Attica basin.

Figure 6.12: Landscape strategy sectors
1. Urban streams on the north collect and redistribute water.

2. Collectors along the avenues, linear water reservoirs and irrigation channels capture and distribute water for agricultural use.

3. Water reservoirs located along the streams are used for storage and recreation zones.

4. Wetlands along the shore filter water before it ends up in the sea.

5. Coastal ponds establish a protected zone against the pollution of open waters.

Blue Infrastructure

Due to the dry climate and the excessive impervious surfaces of the runways, there needs to be a network of channels and water traps, in order to sustain the surface water, filter it and use it for irrigation. Urban streams on the north collect and redistribute water. Collectors along the avenues, linear water reservoirs and irrigation channels capture and distribute water for agricultural use. Water reservoirs located along the streams are used for storage and recreation zones. Wetlands along the shore filter water before it ends up in the sea, and finally, the coastal ponds along the waterfront establish a protected zone against the pollution of open waters (Figure 6.13).
Rise of the Collective Superstructure
Figure 6.14: Overview of the landscape and water strategies
HELLINIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void
Re-use existing resources and airport facilities
Due to limited resources, the community will need to take advantage of the existing facilities and infrastructure.

Use of removed material to expand waterfront
Hellinikon is in close proximity to the port of Piraeus and the itineraries of all the commercial ferries turning the coast along Hellinikon into a zone vulnerable to water pollution (Figure 6.16). The hard surfaces of the former airport that are gradually being removed as the community grows are relocated to the waterfront to form a system of protected ponds, transforming the coast into a safe place for swimming, fishing and recreation (Figure 6.17).
Figure 6.16: Proximity of Hellinikon to Piraeus and itineraries of commercial ferries, Source: Google Earth

Figure 6.17: Coastal Expansion. The hardsurfaces of the former airport are gradually being removed and relocated to the waterfront to form a system of protected ponds transforming the beach into a safe place for swimming, fishing, and recreation.
Rise of the Collective Superstructure
Re-use of Olympic venues and airport facilities

The rich building stock that Hellinikon inherited from its operation as the Athens International Airport and an important Olympic Venue, is re-appropriated into civic buildings to serve the needs of the new community and the metropolitan Athens area (Figure 6.18).

General Assembly. The former Baseball Court of the Olympic Games of 2004, is retrofitted to house the General Assembly, core institution of the Autonomous State of Hellinikon.

High Court. The judicial system of Hellinikon is based upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guarantees compliance to the decisions of the General Assembly, which are also subject to judgment. The Court is open to public and is based in the former softball facilities.

Exhibition Center. The former East Terminal of the Athens International Airport, designed by Finish-American architect Eero Saarinen re-opens to the public, as 'Metropolitan Cultural and Exhibition Center'.

The Hangar. The old Technical Hangar of Olympic Airways is completely transformed and given to the public as the largest
The Tower is the Administration Centre of the Community. It is established in the old Air-Traffic Control Building. The control tower is being used as a Safety Control Center to intercept possible dangers or threats to the community.

Museum of Hellinikon. Since 2008, the Olympic Airways Employees Cultural Association have founded and operated the first Civic Aviation Museum in Greece. The initiative is upgraded into the Museum of Hellinikon and occupied the building of the West Terminal of the former International Airport.
Tram line expansion to cover the domestic transportation needs

Hellinikon is currently surrounded by important transport axes and infrastructure. Two metro stations are located at the north sector of the site and along Vouliagmenis Avenue. Along the coastal road to the south part of the site, Hellinikon has access to the tram network, while the terminal station of the tram is situated within the area of the former airport. An extension of the tram line connects with the tram network with the metro stations and a central spine running along the old runway, establish a domestic transportation network that serves all three urban patches (Figure 6.19).
Hangar Sheds to be used as formwork for landscape overpasses

Landscape crossings are built over the coastal road using old aircraft hangar roofs as the formwork and removed soil as the infill material (Figure 6.20).
Incremental-phased development
The evolution of the community is a result of incremental growth and is based both on a collective and individual level. Every person that settles in Hellinikon is given an individual allotment and is held responsible for building and cultivating the land according to basic rules and restrictions. Citizens can build individually or collectively by joining parcels (Figure 6.22). And while in the first phase of the development agriculture is managed individually, when density reaches maximum capacity agriculture is formalized and moved outside the urban fabric (Figure 6.21).
Figure 6.22: Incremental evolution of single and joint parcels
HELLINIKON and the Question of the Large Urban Void

**2013**

Current state on the site with red indicating the active buildings and areas, including the urban farm, the social clinic, the aviation museum, the air-traffic control tower, some sporting facilities, the tram's terminal station and some scarce administrative buildings.

**2025**

When the existing building stock depletes and after the squadrons infill the existing fabric, they settle to the interior of the site establishing the first community centers of the urban patches. Meanwhile, the tram line extends to the metro stations, the waterfront is being formulated and the landscape fingers are extending towards the new development.

**2045**

When urban patches reach a critical density urban agriculture shifts over their boundaries and form the agricultural belt along the traces of the old runway. The tramline connects the patches with one another and the landscape reaches the coastal road.
Rise of the Collective Superstructure

2020
In the next phase squadrons occupy inactive buildings on the north sector of the site and establish the first community, creating scarce agricultural plots and forming the landscape corridors to capture water coming down the mountain.

2035
The urban patches expand, building up successive rows of new community centers. Squadrons occupy existing olympic venues and airport facilities and transform them into the civic buildings of the community. The tram line reaches the third patch, and the waterfront continues to evolve.

2050
The community reaches its maximum capacity, the waterfront park is completed, and the Collective Superstructure enters its final steady-state phase.

Figure 6.23: Phased development of the Collective Superstructure
Figure 6.24: Masterplan
Rise of the Collective Superstructure

Figure 6.25: Birds Eye View
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Rise of the Collective Superstructure

Figure 6.17: Coastal Expansion. The hardsurfaces of the former airport are gradually being removed and relocated to the waterfront to form a system of protected ponds transforming the beach into a safe place for swimming, fishing, and recreation.

Figure 6.18: Programmatic Map of re-used Olympic and Airport facilities

Figure 6.19: Domestic Transportation Network

Figure 6.20: Landscape Crossings

Figure 6.21: Incremental evolution of agriculture production

Figure 6.22: Incremental evolution of single and joint parcels

Figure 6.23: Phased development of the Collective Superstructure

Figure 6.24: Masterplan

Figure 6.25: Birds Eye View
“Revolution does not mean torrents of blood, the taking of the Winter Palace, and so on. Revolution means a radical transformation of society’s institutions. In this sense, I certainly am a revolutionary.”

Cornelius Castoriadis
7. CONCLUSIONS

My thesis is that economic growth has no place in a city where social injustice prevails; I believe that the fundamental purpose of a city is to offer all its residents equal opportunities of spatial experience. I believe that there should be no such thing as poor and wealthy districts. Cities can no more marginalize un-favored citizens in order to give away extraordinary urban land solely for economic growth and profit. This recipe has been tried before and resulted only in even greater social and spatial injustice.

The capitalistic model of urbanization, after dominating the western world, is now in the process of overtaking the countries of East Asia and Latin America while the conquest of Africa seems irreversible. However, developed countries that are now undergoing an economic deficit, have the opportunity to reflect on the pressures that capitalism exercise on the urban space and attempt an about-face. The shrinking and ageing (and maybe more mature and wise) continent of Europe should be the first to abolish the concept of capital growth. Hellinikon, like the rest of the oppressed Eurozone, is a place whose fate is being decided by external forces. This phenomenon is strongly reflected on the urban space, mainly through the increasing exclusion of vulnerable social groups from wealthy and exclusive city districts. This is why it is highly important to embrace decision making processes that originates not from some invisible authority but from within the urban territory itself. Following the example of “occupy movement” and “indignados”, citizens across the euro-crisis zone need to reclaim the urban space and transform it to their own benefit.

This thesis attempted to show that collective actions can generate a revolutionary urban space. My hypothesis is that the reason the previous attempts to exploit Hellinikon have failed to be implemented is that they failed to address critical issues of social justice in a political and financial context of decline and despair. The local communities in Hellinikon have already proven that grassroots initiatives can activate a long-abandoned public territory and inculcate new urban life, against all political or financial odds. The current demand for a Metropolitan Park
Conclusions

should remain the principal cause against the fight for privatization and collective activities should remain the weapons.
The fact that, twelve years after the cease of the former’s airport operations Hellinikon still remains an abandoned urban void reveals a need for a strong political and social statement about how spatial organization should respond to the challenges of our times. There should not be a proposal of simply a new city or a new park, or a combination of the two, but a whole new proposal for a new way of living. This thesis provided an alternative vision for Hellinikon, based on a bottom-up process and articulated through an urban design scenario.
I believe that Hellinikon has all the potentials of becoming a strong urban manifestation for the post-crisis era. The prime location of the site and its valuable natural assets can symbolize a fundamental turn in urban thinking where highly valued land is not exclusively handed over to specific economic and social groups. This thesis proved that places should not be defined by accounted commercial assets and features but from unique characteristics (physical and social) that can generate unique results. This is because there is no such thing as average person or place, or social body.
The stakes for Hellinikon are high, and I think they should be. My goal through this project was to render the importance of Hellinikon for the city of Athens, and the reasons that led me to undertake the challenge of submitting a new proposal that addresses the present and future prospects of Athens. The Hellinikon case should remain deeply rooted in our memories, for its future will largely stigmatize the fate of other countries undergoing crisis and recession, since capital flow is the utterly responsible for the spatial organization of our cities. Hellinikon is much more than a large urban void. Hellinikon is the spatial manifestation of what is to follow the decaying dominance of capitalism over Greece, Europe and the world. The future of Hellinikon can demarcate the era when capitalism stopped defining the fate of our cities.
In 2016, the former Baseball Court of the Olympic Games of 2004, was retrofitted to house the General Assembly, core institution of the Autonomous State of Hellinikon.

Hellinikon is a community open to everyone. Homeless and unemployed are given priority. Every person that settles in Hellinikon is given an individual abitment and is held responsible for building and cultivating the land according to some basic rules and restrictions.

As an autonomous territory, Hellinikon relies on its very own resources. To do that, the citizens of Hellinikon have developed systems to harvest rainwater and runoff. The fruits and vegetables consumed in the community are all produced domestically, while energy must be produced by the citizens individually.

The judicial system is based upon the principles of Human Rights and guarantees compliance to the decisions of the General Assembly, which are also open to public and is based in the Autonomous State of Hellinikon.

In 2015, the old Technical Hangar of Olympic Airways was completely transformed and given to the public as the largest indoor Arts & Sports Venue in Athens. All events and concerts held in the 'Hangar' are open to the public while entrance fee is prohibited.

Commuting to Hellinikon is fast and possible through means of public transportation. Two stations at the north of the site provide access to the Athens Metro network. Hellinikon is also accessible by tram with multiple stations within the site and along the coast. Personal vehicles are prohibited while walking and biking are widely popular.

Hellinikon is a community based on the principles of de-growth. Practically, that means that profit is not the driving force of the city. While farming, fishing, and building are the main activities in the community, Hellinikon offers research opportunities in manufacturing and energy technologies.
MUSEUM OF HELLINIKON

Since 2008, the Olympic Airways Employees Cultural Association have founded and operated the first Civic Aviation Museum in Greece. Today, they manage the Museum of Hellinikon in the building of the West Terminal of the former International Airport.

EXHIBITION CENTER

The former East Terminal of the Athens International Airport, designed by Finish-American architect Eero Saarinen re-opened to the public in 2014, as 'Metropolitan Cultural and Exhibition Center' to celebrate the first anniversary of the occupancy of Hellinikon.
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