

A City That Is Constantly Changing but Remains the Same

The Case of Athens and Its New Regeneration Program

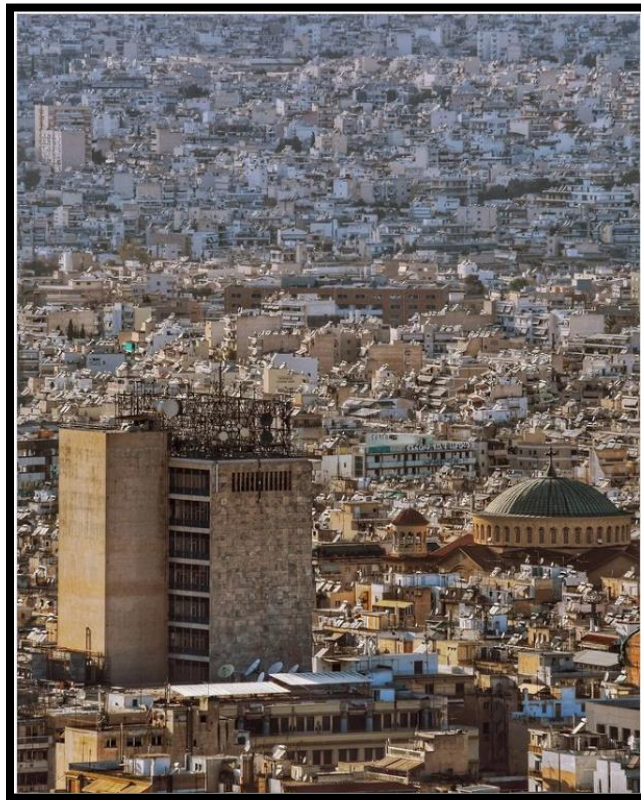


Figure 1: Athens, photographer: Analytis Cobalus source:
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CdftxcKTOv/>

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1.Introduction

Athens is a European city that faces many challenges. More than 4 million people inhabit the capital, and more than 650,000 people are squeezed in the city's center, covering a surface area of 12 square kilometers [Population Stat, 2021]. After WWII, the lack of both social and physical planning policies during the rapid period of the city's urbanization led to a high density and mixed-use city center characterized by urban sprawl,

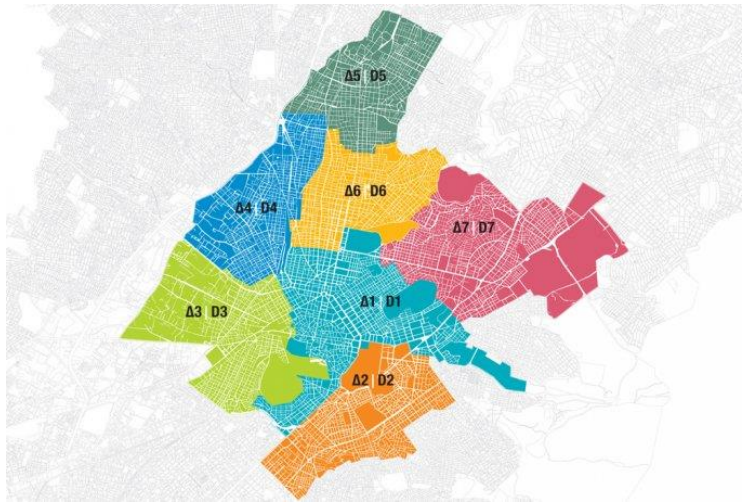


Figure 2: Municipality of Athens and its Municipal Districts, source: <https://megatronica.com.ar/photographershibou/>

social diversity, lack of green spaces, traffic congestion, and different forms of pollution (Alexandri,2014). Many attempts have been made to solve the city's problems but with little success. The current Municipality of Athens, in collaboration with the Athens Partnership (AP), an independent non-profit organization that works for the Municipality, has launched a new initiative called "Adopt your city." They aim to implement urban upgrade programs to improve city life and make Athens.

"A cleaner, more accessible and sustainable city",

[\[https://adoptathens.gr/\]](https://adoptathens.gr/).

More specifically, the project encourages private companies to "Adopt" a public space within the city (a street, a park, a playground, etc.) to upgrade them and make them look more "luminous, greener and friendlier" for both visitors and citizens. According to the official website, the initiative now operates in seven thematic areas; city interventions, cleaning and recycling, social solidarity, schools, parks, anti-graffiti, sports facilities, and playgrounds. The section "parks" is undoubtedly the more operational, as well as talked of, and involves the creation of pocket parks in the place of urban voids or the redevelopment of existing, yet neglected, green spaces. Green spaces have traditionally been associated with cleanliness, safety, and order (Koch, 2015). On the contrary, urban voids or deteriorated parks have

been associated with anomie and chaos and are features that “make the reality of deprivation visible” (Kohn,2004).

1.2 Research Question

Main Research Question: How Does the Public Private Partnership Adopt Your City Fit into the History of Urban Development of Athens and What Impact Does It Have on Public Life in the City?

What I am interested in investigating is how the initiative of ‘Adopt your City’ fits into the broader political/historical context of urban development in Athens and what are the potential effects a regeneration plan in the form of a public-private partnership (PPP) can have on city life. I will attempt to do that initially through a theoretical analysis of the socio-political influences that affected the city's urban development over the past 70 years. Then I will introduce my empirical work around the Adopt your city initiative based on ten expert interviews, participant observations, and document analysis.

1.2 Adopt your City in a Nutshell

In 2019 Costas Bakogiannis with his program “Athens high up” won the municipal elections. A couple of months later, after his electoral win, the new Mayor announced the new “innovative” program, aiming to encourage the citizens of Athens to get involved in the change of their city. The program was named “Adopt your city”.

Adopt your city is a regeneration project that invites Athenians, including small and large companies to “adopt” a street, a park, a neighborhood, “even a tree or a bench” [Adopt Athens, 2021] and take responsibility for its care and maintenance. Given the fact that Athens is a modern European city that faces many challenges, Adopt your city was created to address those problems and find “quick and practical solutions”. Based on the way the Municipality presented the program, the ultimate goal of the project is to transform Athens into a “clean, accessible, and sustainable” city. According to the official website, the program aims at bringing positive outcomes in areas that involve “cleanliness lighting, greenery, sustainable development, homelessness, culture, social solidarity, sports education, and new technologies” by promoting cooperation among its citizens, businesses, the public and the private sector [Adopt Athens, 2021]. The mayor commented on it in one of his public speeches around that time,

“This is a new model of public policy, where the public interacts with business, with civil society, with universities, with Non-governmental Organizations”

[Public speech of the Mayor at the Hellenic-British Chamber]

The program consists of 7 different areas of interest (see fig.3) and invites those interested to fill in the online registration form to express their interest in participating. The project is run by the Municipality, principally by the appointed project coordinator, in collaboration with the Athens Partnership, an independent non-profit organization that facilitates public-private partnerships and manages donations in favor of the Municipality of Athens. Consequently, we could argue that the main stakeholders of the project according to the information provided are the following:

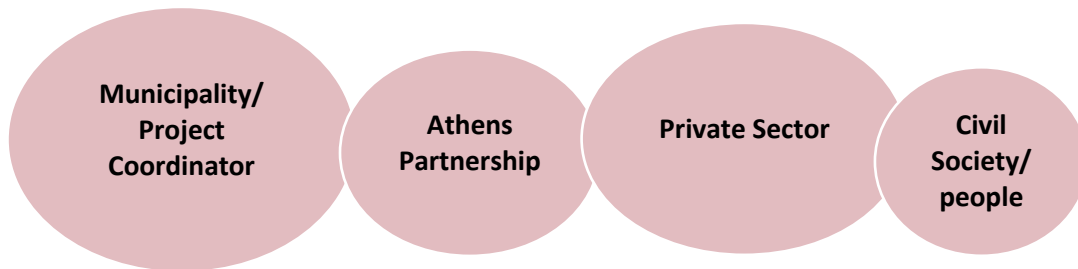


Figure 3: Stakeholders of AYC

The online page of the project is not only providing general information about the initiative, but it is also used as an online platform where people can fill in the form and express their interest to take part. In addition, the page is updated with all the projects completed so far, along with multiple pictures. The axis counting the most completed projects so far is the “Green-Public Parks”. This field of the project aims at enhancing the green areas of the city by either creating small outer green spaces, so-called pocket parks, or regenerating existing green spaces that are were in decline (parks and hills).

What criteria are used to select the projects that are implemented? ↑

The projects implemented through the program are determined based on the needs of the Municipality of Athens.

Who is the program addressed to? ↑

The program is based on the belief that public space belongs to everyone and its upgrade and sustainable development should be a priority of every healthy and productive group of the city. Thus, the program is addressed to residents of Athens, small and large companies, institutions and organizations but also to any party interested in "adopting" a street, a sidewalk, a park, a square, a playground, a stadium, a neighborhood and make them brighter, greener, more friendly to residents and visitors.

CITY INTERVENTIONS	PARK
CLEANING & RECYCLING	ANTI-GRAFFITI
SOCIAL SOLIDARITY	SPORTS FACILITIES AND PLAYGROUNDS
ADOPT A SCHOOL	ADOPT-A-TREE

What is the "Adopt your city" program? ↑

The "Adopt your city" program is the platform that brings together the City of Athens and the private sector. The program includes city interventions of all scales throughout Athens. Interested parties are invited to contribute to the work of the Municipality of Athens with ideas, infrastructure, and funds. The project aims to bring significant results in areas such as cleaning, lighting, greenery, sustainable development, homeless shelters, culture, social solidarity, public space upgrading, sports, education, and new technologies. Partnerships between the Municipality and the private sector can create significant added value for all the citizens of the largest city in the country.

The "Adopt your city" program by the City of Athens is addressed to anyone who is interested to "adopt" a street, a tree, a park, a square, a playground, a sport facility, a neighborhood, to make them more luminous, greener and friendlier for citizens and visitors.

Figure 4: Information provided at the program's official website

2.Theoretical Framework

2.1 Neoliberal Urbanism and the Effects of Urban Entrepreneurialism

Since the seventies, the dominant political ideology in most Western countries has been the so-called “neoliberal thinking.” Neoliberalism supports and promotes the acquisition of private property and the privatization of social resources while praising the free market as the key driving force of the worlds’ economy [Miro, 2011]. The spread of Neoliberalism has been associated with the “financialization of the capitalist economy” [Miró, 2011:2], where capitalist policies aim to find profitable targets to absorb the surplus capital. According to Harvey (1978), urbanization is very much connected with the constant pursuit of the expansion of capital. The built environment serves as a relatively secure and steady rate of return “resource system”. Thus, investments in the built environment were primarily initiated financially and incidentally for use-value reasons (117-118).

Under those circumstances, the mentality of building cities gave rise to “Neoliberal Urbanism” [Miró, 2011:2]. Neoliberal Urbanism is an urban strategy directed by capital, as well as the competitiveness. Cities at the top of the urban network concentrate the most significant amount of capital. The higher a city ranks in the world urban “arena,” the more powerful and influential it is. Building cities according to the laws of capital accumulation has triggered the creation of new spatial, power, and social relations” [Hackworth, 2007: 33]. The transformation of the dynamic of those relationships was (also) expressed by the emergence of what Harvey (1989) called “urban entrepreneurialism.” Urban entrepreneurialism is a form of governance that stimulates economic growth by prioritizing the private sector’s prosperity. This was actualized by letting the local ruling elites have a determinant role in how the urban environment was formed by allowing them to manipulate the trajectory of the cities’ future.

2.2 Urban Governance

One way that urban entrepreneurialism was, and still is, actualized was by letting more actors get involved in the ordering and management of the city. Due to the increasing needs that neoliberal urbanism as well as urbanization brought to the cities, specialized expertise was crucial to respond to the increased (mainly) infrastructural, demands. Consequently, this trend affected the role of the local governments. Local authorities from project leaders, slightly converted into project facilitators, increasingly relying on private initiatives as well as investments. This situation provided the breeding ground for a new form of governance to rise. Eventually the private sector was provided with the space to acquire a more active role in the decision-making, that marked the transition “from government to governance” [Miró, 2011]. This

“decentralization” process let the state to distribute some of its responsibilities and powers beyond the “government structures” [Carmona et al, 2008:66]. Governance does not mean that the state is giving up all the freedom to the private sector to act as it pleases. What happens is that it gives up the monopoly of policymaking by bringing different stakeholders together (local with public/private partners, lobbyists, public interest groups, public itself) to take part “in the production of space” [Leclercq, 2018:69].

Although the state remains one of the key stakeholders of this more collective way of exerting power, there is no consensus to whom this new world order has proved to be beneficial. On the one hand, many academics (Arendt 1958; Habermas 1989; Sennett 1977) have argued that a more “corporate” direction has been introduced to the administration of public services. This direction was named after Hodd (1991), “New Public Management”, and aligns more with the “cost-effective” way that the private sector is motivated by overlooking the importance of societal and cultural values. On the other hand, this more collaborative way of governing, allowed for more supportive development policies and community-based programs. Especially after the 1980s and 1990s to diminish the effects of austerity, municipalities attempted to integrate into their pioneering “revitalization programs” demands and requests of various social movements. This practice changed the dynamic between the state and the civil society; from more antagonistic, their relations became more collaborative. Since Civil Society groups became more influential, various NGOS started launching campaigns against the detrimental, both for people and the environment, practices of multi-national corporations. Such move gradually forced the corporate bodies to become more socially responsible in proportion with their economic, social, and political power” [Lantos, 2021:599]. As a result, they started incorporating in their activity, initiatives beneficial to the common welfare. Nowadays, this idea has been developed in one of the most characteristic business models (CSR) that necessitates companies to be socially accountable not only to its employees and stakeholders but also to the public. In that way they regulate the kind of impact they have in all aspect of society (economic, social and environmental). One way to put this model into practice is by sponsoring or donating to the public sector [Fernando, 2022].

Local governments do not exist in a vacuum and city administrations are always affected by other authorities, political ideas and interests. The concept of openly involving different stakeholders including civil society, in the decision-making process could also be seen as a more democratic way of governing. Barber (2013) argues that there is way that urban governance and mayoral leadership can collaborate against corrupt systems and “turn cities into genuine arenas of possibility” for all (332). To conclude, Pierre

(2014) argues that we should not make apriori assumptions about the different stakeholders but focus on their relationships and interactions if we want to draw more reliable conclusions.

2.3 Public-Private Partnerships

The shift from government to governance was expressed in multiple ways with more prominent the formation of coalitions between the public and the private sector. This is another effect of urban entrepreneurialism that goes hand in hand with urban governance and it was firstly identified by Harvey as “the notion of public-private partnership” [Harvey, 1989: p. 7]. As already mentioned, the ever-increasing challenges that cities are facing the last couple of decades, led to the formation of various types of “privatizations”. Leclerq (2018) distinguishes the following,

- A. when ownership and/or control of state-owned enterprises are transferred to the ends of the private sector
- B. when tasks and responsibilities are outsourced by public authorities to external actors temporarily, but the state still defines the nature of what, how and by whom things are going to take place
- C. when private actors form semi-autonomous organizational coalitions to collaborate with the public sector to participate in the discussion, planning, and implementation of public policy at the regional and local levels

[Leclerq, 2018:71-72]

Despite the variations, the idea of PPP is for all the partners to bring their expertise as well as resources for the realization of a specific project. Within this “alliance” not only profits but also risks, responsibility and costs are shared, to a smaller or larger extent. Unlike the early appearance of urban entrepreneurialism, the private component of partnerships nowadays is not always established between a corporate entity. It can also be established between a public actor and an NGO or a member of the civil society. According to McAllister and Taylor (2015) partnerships are based on three different organizational ways of partnering; coordination, cooperation and collaboration. Raynaers (2014) on the other hand, identifies 5 public values in her research; accountability, transparency, responsiveness, responsibility and quality, which can appear useful to evaluate PPPs . Opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of PPP vary. This is mainly because values like Raynaer’s are open to interpretation and not all PPPs are defined by the same qualities. According to Klijn and Koppenjan (2015) for instance, PPP are assumed to be more efficient at numerous domains such as financing, maintenance, and operation especially when they are involved in infrastructural

construction. In addition, they tend to be more flexible and less-time consuming when it comes to decision making and management compared to the legislative bodies. On the other hand, Estache (2003) argues that privatization fails in terms of transparency because of a lack of regulatory supervision, non-reliable ways of collecting data, and not adequate quantitative strategy models to allow governments to measure the efficiency of the private actor's performance. Similarly, Hood and McGarvey (2002) suggest that even if there is regulatory supervision, politicians or state employees are underqualified to assess the issues that are at stake.

2.4 Urban Regeneration or Gentrification?

Another vital characteristic of urban entrepreneurialism, intertwined with urban governance and privatization, is urban regeneration. Urban regeneration strategies usually aim to bring positive economic and social outcomes to improve cities' competitiveness by focusing on the "spatial division of consumption" (Harvey,1989:9). According to Harvey, after the 1950s despite the years of austerity and unemployment that followed, more attention was given to the power of consumerism. Cities banked on people that retained the advantage of being able to consume. Consequently, much attention started being given to improving the quality of city life but mainly to those with already an adequate living standard. Under the 'umbrella' of urban regeneration, there are also strategies aiming to improve the lower classes' living conditions (i.e., housing policies). Many of such policies have admittedly proven effective throughout the years.

Nevertheless, in most cases, the ultimate goal is not social interest. More attention is given to improving the city's image by making it look safer, cleaner, and appealing to consumers and tourists [Alexandri, 2018]. Hence, "cultural innovation, physical upgrading, consumer attractions, and entertainment" [Harvey,1989:8] became prominent components of urban regeneration. These strategies can either be state-led or funded by private actors and are usually initiatives undertaken through urban governance.

In the last two decades, urban interventions have been characterized by urban regeneration programs, physical renewal of urban areas, and/or strategic planning initiatives [Salone,2018]. Unsurprisingly, much debate has been going on about what urban regeneration initiatives have achieved. The redevelopment and rebranding of cities, as well as the revitalization of declining post-industrial areas, have raised various concerns associated with socio-cultural exclusion, gentrification, and the consequences of purification and touristification of urban space [Young et al.,2006]

The concept of gentrification is a massive part of this discussion and a controversial topic. The term was first introduced by Ruth Glass in 1964, aiming to describe the transformation process of the Islington neighborhood in London. Since its first appearance, thousands of urban researchers have touched upon the topic by gradually expanding and deepening the concept with new aspects and parameters due to the socio-economic changes that cities were undergoing. Nevertheless, from the "back-to-the-city movement" [Pattison, 1977] to Bourdieu's influence on the "aesthetic disposition" and the "generalized urban policy" [Hackworth and Smith, 2001], the consequences of gentrification remain more or less the same. Gentrified neighborhoods experience rapid urban uplifting through the causal nexus of the influx of more affluent people moving to deprived neighborhoods to live, work, or/and consume and the gradual increase of the real-estate value of the area. Such a phenomenon gradually led to the displacement of the local community that inhabited the area since they could no longer afford the cost of living. The reinforcement of cultural activities in those neighborhoods is also likely to encourage exclusion since it is often used as a strategy to transform a "decaying" area into something attractive or even exotic. Neighborhood revitalization does not always lead to gentrification. The difference between the two lies mainly in the motifs behind implementing such policies.

Since the undeniable global expansion of gentrification, many academics nowadays argue that the concept of gentrification, per se, is not enough to describe the peculiar and unique dynamics that generate it and consequently causes it. For that reason, subdivisions and concepts have emerged that focus on particular aspects of it or serve as clarifications of what gentrification is not [Gourzis, 2021].

2.5 Privatization of Public Space under Neoliberalism

As expected, urban governance not only led to a more collaborative way of decision-making but also resulted in new practices in the design, management, and maintenance of urban space. The global economic changes and the spread of neoliberal thinking appointed urban public spaces a very beneficial commercial commodity. Either global or local businesses in partnership with the local governments have re-designed the conventional functions of public spaces transforming them into open spaces that usually involve a form of an economic transaction [Carmona, 2010]. Local governments, which have allowed the access of the private sector to the public sphere, have often been accused of selling out public interests on the altar of profit. The most direct way this shift can be detected in the urban space is through the trade-

off of public property. Over the last three decades selling public assets to the private sector has become a very common strategy in the Western world. There are also cases where privatization is taking place by just physically expanding the ability to perform commercial activities in public spaces [Leclerq, 2018].

The effects that (forms of) privatization have upon public spaces, have been at the heart of discussion among geographers. More specifically, the extent to which a space is public, depends on various factors. For understanding a space and its socio-economic and material dynamics, we should not only focus on the space itself but on the production of the space (Leary, 2009:195). According to Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triangle theory, space consists of three interconnected processes: spatial practice, representation of space and spaces of representation. The first one consists of the materialistic aspect of space, the physical built environment. The second one refers to the way the space is represented and has to do with the more legislative aspect of the space. Representation of space has been associated with the "technocratic space of scale drawings [Leary, 2009:195] and all the technical and legal matters tied to it. Lastly the space of representation refers to the symbolic meaning of the space for the people using it and interacting with it. The extent of publicness of a space according to Mandipour (2010), lies on the most important quality of public space, its accessibility. "The more open and unconditional the access, the more public it becomes" (127). However, the concept of accessibility can be studied through different perspectives according to the triad suggested by Lefebvre. A park, for instance, can be considered accessible in terms of its physical aspect (spatial practice) if no physical barrier is preventing people from entering it. On the other hand, given that ownership, control, and funding is assigned to a private actor and not the state (representation of space), accessibility in more legislative terms can have different connotations. Lastly, the way that the park is lived and perceived by the users can also lead us to different conclusions regarding its accessibility and the effects it has upon public life.

2.6 The Struggle of Public Space

In the world of academia, the involvement of the private sector in the production of public spaces led many authors to engage with the topic and assess the situation [Arendt 1958; Sennett 1977, Habermas 1989]. Those more interested in the user's perspective or were more critical of the consequences of urban neoliberalism in general raised severe concerns around intolerance, surveillance, excess regulation, and exclusion [Collins and Shantz, 2009:517]. These views are linked with the idea that giving access to the private sector to determine the future of public spaces automatically threatens their openness and

inclusiveness. Eventually, they will transform into spaces of consumption accessible only to people who can afford to consume, excluding a large segment of the population from their public/social life. Among the same lines, concerns about the homogenization of cities with either “generic” spaces or “overly themed” public spaces were also expressed, proclaiming that under those circumstances, we march towards “the end” of public spaces [Sennett 1977; Harvey 1989; Sorkin 1992; Mitchell 1995; Davis 1992; Minton 2009, etc.].

On the other hand, several academics oppose that view by characterizing them as rather “pessimistic.” For them, not only has the privatization not negatively affected the use of public spaces, but they remark on their “revival.” The only difference, according to them, is that now an emphasis is given to sociability and entertainment instead of democracy and civicness [Leclercq, 2018:60]. According to Pojani (2008), people can vote if they like a place “with their feet,” which means that if a place attracts people, that reflects positive feedback, making it significant to people’s lives.

Somewhere in between those two poles, a third approach exists. According to that position, the vagueness and the different meanings the concept of “public space” possesses renders the debate rather simplistic. As Carmona (2008) argues, for instance, the pessimistic views are often based on an “idealized notion of public realm” that was never truly existent (43). The notion of “public space” and, on a broader concept, “public sphere” are products of a historical context, influenced by economic as well as social and cultural changes. Thus, we cannot expect them to remain intact in time. Similarly, Mitchell (2016) argues that public space is and always has been a “struggle”, “a tendency towards the end of it and the opposition to that tendency. Only by studying it as such, can we understand the processes of its transition (508). Thus, the transformation of a place from public to private should be seen as neither simple nor one-way process. On the contrary, all the different arrangements that take place have contributed to the blurring of the boundaries between public and private, a phenomenon that has been characterized by Kohn (2004) as “hybridization”. Mitchell phrases it differently by arguing that reaching the point of talking about the “end of public spaces” is always the result of “a tendency” produced by the nature of capitalism. We tend to feel public spaces are occasionally threatened because, under capitalism, public spaces are always abstract and so hard to define.

3. Methodology

3.1 Setting and Location

Having spent my whole life in Athens, I decided that it would be interesting for me to conduct my research on a topic that concerns my city. As already mentioned, Athens is a unique case of a European city, and I was very intrigued by the idea of exploring it from a different point of view for the first time. I found it particularly interesting the process of using all the knowledge of an Athenian citizen while being able to disassociate myself from it when needed. The focus of my research was located mainly in the area of the Municipality of Athens that encompasses the city center. It is one of the most significant, most important, and influential municipalities, and for that reason, it faces the most significant challenges. As I will explain later, my research was divided into two approaches: theoretical and empirical. Although both approaches were related to the same setting, I decided to visit the city physically for the empirical part. So, during the Easter vacation of 2022, I spent three weeks in the city to conduct the fieldwork needed.

3.2 Research Methods

The methodological approach I chose for my research purposes was qualitative analysis. Qualitative approaches aim at developing a deeper understanding of the research topic from a social dimension within its natural setting. Its attention is directed to answering questions of “why” instead of “what” and aims to illuminate the research participants’ point of view by presenting the social context as experienced by them [Fossey et al., 2002]. I decided to use this particular method because I was more interested in analyzing the effects of PPPs and urban redevelopment projects from a social point of view based on qualitative data that I was about to collect. More specifically, I wanted to investigate the project from an inside point of view and not just from the perspective of a simple citizen. I was interested in understanding how the project was legitimized based on the city’s history of urban development, how it started, what were the motifs behind its initiation, who were the stakeholders and what were their perspective regarding the project. For these purposes, I decided the best qualitative research methods I could use were; integrative literature review, open-ended interviews, electronic document analysis and participant observations.

- Integrative Literature

Integrative literature is one way to use literature review as a research method. Literature review as a methodology is when a researcher collects and synthesizes information from previous research to draw a conclusion on a specific research topic. Integrative literature aims explicitly at assessing, reviewing, and synthesizing the literature on a specific research topic in a way through which new theoretical frameworks and conclusions can be produced [Snyder, 2019]. I decided to use this research method mainly for the first part of my research question. This is due to the fact that it had to do more with the socio-political past of the development of Athens and how these created the breeding ground for the formation of a project like Adopt your city. Accessing literature related to the city's past was an insightful way to try and make sense of the present. The only challenge I encountered by using this method was the excessive amount of available information that I had to manage and use appropriately for the purpose of my topic.

3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview(s) is the research method that allows researchers to gather information directly from their target group and explore as well as better understand the research subject's point of view [Platt, 1985]. I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews because it would allow me to keep conversations under control and ensure I got the answers to the questions I was more interested in. At the same time, semi-structured interviews would enable my participants to elaborate and express their ideas freely, without limiting them to answering only the questions I had prepared (Bernard and Gravlee, 2014). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewees to feel more comfortable and not as if they are under interrogation. This is extremely helpful, especially when the research focus is on an intimate/personal or controversial topic. I felt that my case fell under the second category mentioned above since PPPs have often been criticized. Knowing that I would talk with people involved with the project to make them feel comfortable expressing their views and opinion on the matter was crucial for me.

A very critical part of the interviews is the selection of interviewees and the planning of the questions. In my case, I decided that I was more interested in investigating the point of view of people that represented the different stakeholders of the project under scrutiny. Therefore, I decided to interview people representing the public sector (Municipality), the private sector (private companies), civil society groups, and other institutions participating in the realization of the project (Athens Partnership). Eventually, I was given the opportunity to conduct ten semi-structured interviews that were divided as follows:

Public sector representatives (2)	Project Coordinator of Adopt your city	Head of the Independent Department of International Cooperation & Public Relations		
Member working for Athens Partnership (1)	Member of the board of directors of AP			
Representatives of NGOs (3)	Member of Save your Hood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottom-up initiative that organizes cleaning ups within the city • Have collaborated with Adopt your city 	CEO of Greenpeace office in Greece <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • international non - governmental organization with the aim of protecting the natural environment. • Have not collaborated with Aopt your city (yet) 	Member of WE4ALL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non -Profit Environmental Organization based in Athens • <i>Have collaborated with Adopt your city</i> 	
Private Sector Representatives (4)	NOVA- Greek digital satellite pay TV platform <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has funded two pocket parks so far 	Olympic Brewery: Commercial Brewery Company <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has funded FIX PARK so far 	Procter & Gamble: American multinational consumer goods company <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has funded 3 pocket parks 	Deloitte: A multinational professional services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has funded one pocket park

Regarding the questionnaires, since I was about to interview different stakeholders, it made more sense to develop different questionnaires. Consequently, the questions asked differed for each interviewee depending on their position and involvement in the project. Nevertheless, when applicable, there were questions asked in all the interviews to be able to compare the different points of view on particular topics. The challenges encountered in the realization of the interviews in my case were multiple and were either practical or related to the topic I was investigating. The first practical challenge I encountered was getting in touch with all the potential interviewees. Although being able to interview different stakeholders allowed

me to have a more representative idea of how the project is operating, at the same time, relying on specific individuals for the development of my analysis felt risky. There were multiple cases in which I was either unable to find the contact details of the person I was interested in interviewing or that the person was not replying to my e-mails or calls. Another practical difficulty had to do with the way the interviews were realized. More specifically, none of the interviews was conducted in person since most interviewees were very busy scheduling physical meetings. For that reason, all the interviews took place via either phone calls or zoom meetings. This did not allow me to make the most out of the interviews as a research method because my ability to observe non-verbal communication was restricted. Lastly, since most of the people I interviewed were working either for the Municipality or the private sector, they were not (always) in the position to share with me confidential information that could harm the reputation or the image of the partnership.

1.4 Electronic Document Analysis

Electronic document analysis was also a very critical method for my research. The process generally involves evaluating and interpreting physical or/and electronic documents to better comprehend the topic under scrutiny. There are different kinds of records a researcher can use for the purposes of this method, such as public records, personal documents, and physical evidence. For my investigation, I mostly used electronic public records that included; the official website of the project Adopt your city, videos from public speeches, and interviews given by the Mayor and the project coordinator of Adopt your City. I also used the action program of the current municipal authority as presented during his electoral campaign, as well as the online page of the Municipality of Athens. Electronic document analysis appeared extremely valuable because it allowed me to understand the context better and introduced me to topics valuable to explore during the interviews. In addition, it allowed me to gain insight into how the project is presented and communicated to the public. Inconsistencies between the information gathered from the interviewees and the ones available on the electronic documents was also crucial for my findings.

3.5 Participant Observation

I also decided to use participant observations, the most important (with interviews) anthropological research method, because it allows you to get a personal insight into the topic you are researching through your own personal experience (Bernard and Gravlee, 2014). I used this method specifically because I

wanted to visit the renovated places, the pocket parks, and the parks that Adopt your city had intervened by then. Having the chance to visit these places and spend some time there allowed me to get a clearer idea of how these places look physically, how people interact with them, and the overall feeling you get when you visit them. I was able to visit six of the ten pocket parks completed by that time and two of the parks (one of which was and still is under construction).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

As far as the ethical considerations are concerned, I followed all the guidelines for qualitative research methods carefully. More specifically, before conducting an interview, I was always informing the interviewees about their rights as participants. To begin with, I took their consent to record our discussion. In addition, I informed them about their right to stop the interview at any point of our discussion or deny answering questions that made them feel uncomfortable or were confidential. I also notified them that although I would not use their full names in my analysis, their identity, in most cases would be identifiable because of their public positions. Furthermore, I let them know that I was planning to use uncut parts/quotes of the interviews, so in case they were not comfortable with something being said, to feel free to notify me not to include it. In cases where I was given access to confidential information, I reassured them that these documents would remain classified. Lastly, I provided my interlocutors with any detail needed to contact me in case they had any inquiries or would like to be provided with a copy of the final piece of my work.

4. Empirical Analysis Based on Literature Review: How Does the Adopt Your City Initiative Fit the Wider Political Historical Context

The present socio-spatial dynamics in Athens, specifically in the city center, are very much related to how the city was formed after WWII [Leontidou,1990]. For that reason, in the following chapter, we will go through the most significant socio-political and economic influences that affected the city's urban development and contributed to the state that is found today. Such an analysis will help us understand the reason why the new Mayor decided to initiate such a regeneration program today, what is its symbolic meaning for the city, and why specific groups of people have expressed their frustration about it.

4.1 Economic Development of Mediterranean Cities and the spread of Neoliberalism



Figure 5: Southern Europe, source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Europe#/media/File:Mediterranean_Sea_16.61811E_38.99124N.jpg

To begin with, I would like to start by presenting some basic urban features that Athens shares with other Southern European cities that occupy more or less the same geographical position within Europe. More specifically, within the group of "advanced capitalist democracies," there are differences between Europe's North and the South. Despite their different historical backgrounds, Southern European countries share some geo-political and socio-economic characteristics that lead us to consider them comparable [Leontidou,1990:3]. One of those differences is that Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece) has experienced socio-economic and political underdevelopment. Some of the foremost common characteristics that played a crucial role in how these countries were developed were; recent experience of authoritarian rule, late industrialization, everlasting institutional weakness, "paternalistic political networks, and informal-vertical political linkages" (Tsatsanis,2009:208). It is critical not to overlook the relatively recent European debt crisis that mainly affected the Mediterranean countries. Therefore, differences in the functioning of those states have resulted in remarkable differences in how urban

problems and politics have been managed in the North and the South. In Northern and Central Europe, we encounter a tradition in line with the "well-developed and highly rationalized welfare State." While the South was always entrenched in the tradition of the "weak welfare states and clientelism" [Arampatzi and Nicholls, 2012:2595].

Furthermore, although there was a good prospect for expanding neoliberalist approaches, with a high number of self-employment and advanced agricultural sectors, the four countries always remained relatively immature according to the neoliberal standards. This is due to the fact that, although the self-employment coefficient was high, the area was mainly composed of small, family, or labor-intensive businesses and farmers whose income was almost entirely dependent on subsidies. The soil was not fertile for these countries to make big openings in national and international markets. On the contrary, it made more sense for them to present a more defensive as well as hesitant approach toward 'neoliberal globalization (Tsatsanis,2009:208). All these characteristics mark Southern Europe's particularities that, to a considerable extent, affected how their cities were developed

Consequently, when Southern European countries started slowly embracing neoliberal urban development around the 1990s, the pathogeneses of those states hailed the rapid shift to privatization and large-scale urban redevelopment projects. At the same time, a combination of lack of organizational, supervision, and management skills, as well as a tradition of clientelism, resulted in an unregulated sprawl and poorly planned big development projects, which eventually triggered severe complications within the southern cities.

Economou et al (2007) are also using the geographical location of Greece as a starting line to further explore the economic and sociopolitical peculiarities that affect the capital's urban structure. To begin with, the fact that the country is located in the southeastern end of the European area causes both constraints and limitations due to its peripheral position which limits its accessibility to key economic markets [193]. Secondly, is surrounded by a distinctive border situation since it has no common border with an EU member rendering economic relations with its neighbors a challenge. Such "missing neighbor effect" has surely affected its economic growth and orientation, affecting to a large extent its "spatial regularities" [Economou et al, 2007:193].

Therefore, although Neoliberalism in general and urban neoliberalism, in particular, have drastically affected the urban development of the European cities, at the same time, its expansion unfolds differently in each place according to the structure, strengths, and mentalities of national and local states [Arampatzi and Nicholls, 2012:2595]. In Athens, even though traces of urban neoliberalism started appearing during the early 2000s with a few big infrastructural design projects (relatively late already compared to other

central European countries), it was after 2010 that the whole of the urban planning and development process of Athens was taken over by neo-liberalization. All these factors left the city behind and at a low level in the world's urban "arena" (see chapter 1), which explains why Athens is trying to accelerate its development process nowadays, as will be argued later in the chapter.

Therefore, geographical position play an important role in the political and economic development of a place. In our case the current situation of Athens has a lot to do with the country's position within the European map. Greece has been historically weak economically and a noncompetitive member of the European and global market. This situation in collaboration with other factors that will be explored later, has created very distinctive dynamics in relation to the response of urban neoliberalism that has affected the urban development of the city and its situation now.

4.2 The Case of Athens



Figure 6: Athens today by Analytis Cobalus, source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CfB_TLAKPd/

Although geographical location is a very important point of reference, it does not let us go deeper into the analysis of the socio-political and economic factors that have brought the city to the state that is today. For that reason, we are going to go through the main stages of Athenian expansion that correspond to its modern history of development; Mid-War, Post-War (1950s-1980), 1980s- early 2000s, mid 2000s-today.

4.2 a. Post-war Reconstruction Period and the Urban Policies of the Time

Unlike many other European cities, Athens' buildings remained almost unaffected by the German occupation forces. The most damage to the city took place during the years of the Greek civil war (1946-1949). To restore the damage, during the 1950s-1960s, a restoration and restructuring period started that had a massive impact on the way the city was formed and determined the main structural problems that the city is facing up until today [Katsibokis, 2013:138].

From 1922, a huge migration flow occurred after the Smyrna destruction and the population exchange between Greece and Turkey. During the post-war years, more people started moving to the big cities looking for a better future and more opportunities to work, given that many rural areas were left in ruins. Consequently, during the 1950s-1960s, when the country was both politically and financially unstable, it had to deal with the housing shortage created due to the influx of people in the capital. Even though the country was still under the supervision and guidance of the European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan)¹, it proved incompetent in dealing with the emerging severe housing problem. Since no political interest was given in granting a fair amount of public expenditure for public housing and infrastructural development, private construction was encouraged.

This meant that private market mechanisms provided housing for the urbanizing population, a situation that not only appointed construction processes one of the most prosperous activities of the time [Leontidou, 1990] but also allowed a very peculiar "symbiotic relationship" to emerge between those in possession of the property and the contractors [Leo van den Berg: 197]. This system was called "antiparohi" and was exercised by the common agreement of landlords to hand in plots they had in their possession to contractors to build big apartment blocks. In exchange, the landowners were getting one or more apartments, and the contractors could sell the rest of the apartments for their profit. Three were the main consequences of the practically unsupervised and fragmented private housing market; The demolition of many old neoclassical and eclectic buildings, the uncontrollable construction of "cheap multi-story blocks of flats"² [Katsibokis,2013:138] but also the social exclusion and apathy towards the ones that were not able to afford to become part of this system.

¹ A system of new welfare capitalism that aimed to provide aid to Western and Southern European countries following the devastation of World War II but gained control over, ("Marshall Plan | Summary & Significance", 2020)

² So called "Polykatokoia"

Another interesting characteristic of the Greek urban policy of that time was the provision of a license to build. According to the constitution, only land within the “city plan” could be approved and recognized as residential by the Ministry of Public Works. In any other case, the area was counted “agricultural,” and thus, the building was illegal. The absurdity of this law lies in the fact that it was not illegal to occupy the land but only the act of constructing a house. Although the law aimed at supposedly preventing uncontrollable expansion by imposing heavy penalties both on builders and inhabitants, during the pick of its significance, a legal window was self-defeating its purpose. This legal window allowed people to “legalize” those illegal constructions out of the city plan as a “special contribution to the public” [Leontidou,1992:148].



Figure 7: Apartment Blocks, “Polykatkoia(s)”, by Analytis Cobalus, source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CegcObmqmaG/>

It is striking how indifferent as well as hypocritical the state was standing toward the whole reconstruction process of the city by adopting either behavior of apathy towards the housing problem or behavior of a devious accomplice in favor of corruption. Therefore, by the mid-1960s, the image of Athens had changed drastically while its transformation continued roughly until the end of the military dictatorship (1967-1974). Most “polykatkoies” were built carelessly without any architectural input, and as a result, many had to be restored, replaced, or even rebuilt a couple of decades later. Over the whole post-war period, this has been a common baseline in terms of the dominant urban policy model in Greece that defined how the city is functioning up until today. In reality, even before the war, this model was already brewing in Athens, while slowly diffusing over the rest of the Greek urban environments. The main features of this policy, according to Van den Berg (1982), can be summed up as follows:

1. *consistent support for small land property;*
2. *high plot coefficients and the small minimum size of plots allowed to be built*
3. *role of illegal construction as the basic mechanism of urban development;*
4. *negligible public expenditure for urban infrastructure.*
5. *subordination of urban policy to the priorities of other policies;*
6. *Weakness of urban planning.*

[Berg et al. 1982:197]

Even after the new Ministry of Regional Planning establishment in 1978, when more attention was given to the realization of the “Athens Master Plan” aiming to manage urban structure, the results were to the least ineffectual, with neither planning nor decentralization being achieved. Once again, the role of the official governmental agency in charge of the Organization of planning and environmental protection of Athens was repeatedly dismissed. Instead of improving the situation, most plans were not supervised by the actual planners, so they were manipulated in favor of the landowners. The weak regulations of the urban housing market created the circumstances under which “ad hoc” and “individualized urbanization” took place, especially in the lower middle and working classes cultivating the feeling of competitiveness among the inhabitants. The political structure of the time promoted individualized over collective consumption, which was reflected in the urban space by undermining the “collective, social, and political meaning of the city” [Arampatzi and Nicholls, 2012:2597]. In fact, the authorities have not only tolerated illegal building and anomy but took advantage of the situation either to take no responsibility over social conflicts or to promote “political patronage” (clientelism) with constructors and settlers [Leontidou, 1992:56].

Nowadays, the social structuring of the city remains more or less the same, with vertical segregation being widely spread in most of the city center’s neighborhoods. The concept of “antiparohi” is still legal, as well as the concept of legalizing illegal constructions. The city has kept the same urban structure of that time with weak social housing policies, intense traffic jams, lack of greenery within the city, air pollution, etc. It is not surprising that Adopt your city thematic areas aim at tackling the same problems that Athens was facing during that time since these became structural problems the city has been failing to tackle all these years.

4.2c Middle-class Suburbanization and the Migration Flows of Late 1980s- Mid-1990s



Figure 8: Athens of 1987 by unknown photographer, source: <https://www.lifo.gr/blogs/retronaut/ena-taxidi-stin-athina-tis-dekaetias-toy-1980>

During the late 1980s and 1990s, things started slowly changing. The trigger for the departure from the postwar urban political structuring was Greece's entry into the European Union. Neoliberal urban governance made its first appearance with policies introducing global capital investments. Enthusiastic to become a modern, respectable European country, the government embraced policies to stimulate urban entrepreneurialism and liberalize land markets. Overall, this period was marked by a broader feeling of prosperity and advancement that, among other things, led a big part of the upper middle classes to move from the city center to the suburbs, where they could enjoy life with spacious houses, more greenery, and fresh air. The city's urban advancement intensified existing environmental problems such as traffic jams and air pollution to such an extent that in 1996 the city lost its opportunity to host the Olympic games because of its environmental and infrastructural problems. Around the same time (1990s), migration inflows from Eastern European countries started arriving in the city. Most of these people found rescue at the affordable housing opportunities provided by the private sector and the system of "antiparohi" within the urban core. With state policies still absent regarding both physical and social planning, migrants were now occupying the lower floors of the Polykatokoia(s) either for residential reasons (vertical social segregation) or commercial ones. The cohabitation of the remaining locals with immigrant groups favored cultural diversity since both vertical differentiation, and social mixing was amplified. Although social mixing was promoted, simultaneously the intense inflow of migrants within the city core sparked a lot of friction

and a hysterical 'fear of the masses' [Alexandri, 2014:34]. This situation intensified middle-class suburbanization that slowly but steadily led to the neglect and deterioration of the city center the years that followed.

4.2c Urban Redevelopment of Late 1990s and Mid 2000s – The Bubble

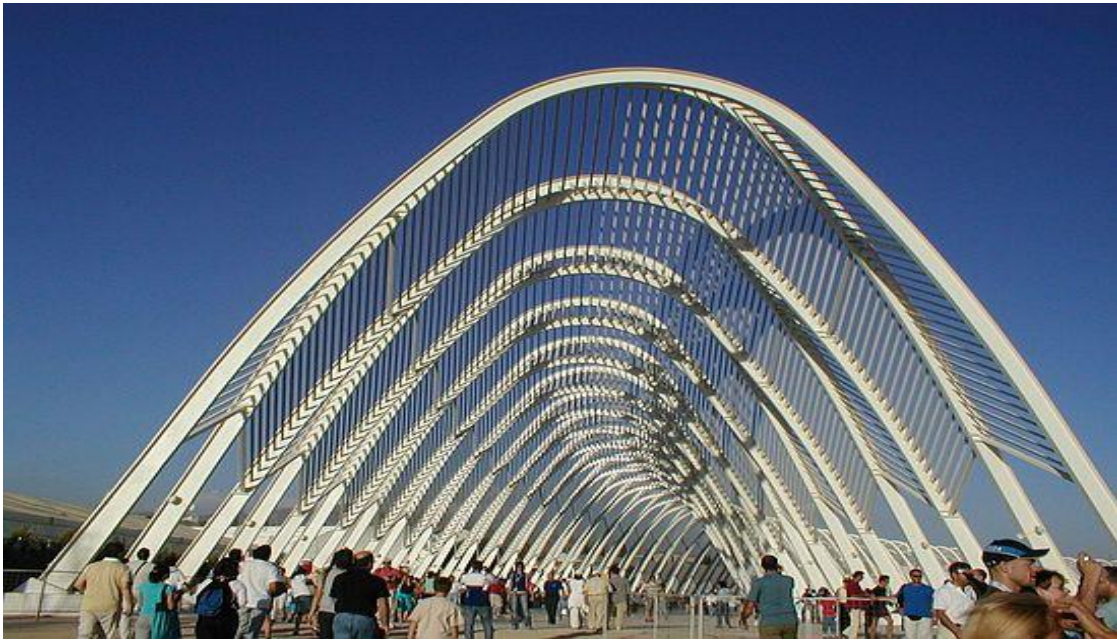


Figure 9: Central Olympic Stadium, by Stephen Carroll, source: <https://www.stay-tuned-to-sw.de/homearcorde/folon2/athens2004.html>

As neoliberalism was slowly gaining more space, the urban redevelopment strategies after the 2000s were carried out mainly through the formation of public-private partnerships. The collaboration between the public and private sector for the purposes of urban development consisted of three main components; Mega-events like the Olympic Games (2004) to promote a modern and cosmopolitan character of the city, the construction of office buildings, as well as the urban expansion of gentrified neighborhoods and the big infrastructural transportation projects (airport, metro, highway system). Even though these projects brought some positive effects to the city according to the neoliberal standards, such as large infusion of public revenue, the shift from government to governance, including the restriction of political clientelism, and the rebranding of the city to make it look more attractive, there was also the other side of the same coin. These projects intensified environmental deterioration, social inequalities, especially concerning the housing sector, and allowed gentrification to thrive. In addition, lack of planning and proper supervision of the ppps, in many cases, led to low-quality outcomes that, among others, were very disruptive to the environment [Arampatzi and Nicholls, 2012]. Interestingly the shift from government to governance,

although restricted political clientelism, on another level gave rise to another form of immorality, “economic clientelism.” Economic clientelism was another form of corrupted relationship cultivated by the state authorities. However, instead of maintaining unofficial relationships with citizens, it was now happening with the private sector. This led to excessive privatization of public resources and services and non-transparent ppps management. In addition, people favoured from clientelism lost their prioritization which disturb their dynamic relationship.

Therefore, Athens experienced an accelerating spread of urban neoliberalism that was so overwhelming for a country so politically immature that long-termly brought detrimental outcomes both to the city and to its citizens. The city was trapped in an absurd situation. On the one hand urban neoliberalism sparked a number of big developments within the city and a rapid change in the urban environment to generate economic growth. On the other hand, there was inability to regulate this massive wave of neoliberal domino effects, no substantial civic-minded policies, combined with a corrupted political system that was letting the private sector gaining excessive control over the state management.

Taking into consideration the intrinsic resistance that Greece presented towards Neoliberalism as we mentioned earlier because of its social and economic stratification until then (see 4.1), combined with the way urban neoliberalism was introduced in the city, triggered a wave of criticism. The wave was mostly consisted by left-wing organizations and environmental groups that pointed out the negative consequences that the new order was bringing to the city socially and environmentally. These movement culminated during the years of the economic crisis and austerity, but was formed quite early on [Portaliou, 2008].

4.2.d Athens During the Years of Austerity Until Today



Figure 10: Greek Parliament 2015, unknown photographer, source: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/greece/11682338/Desperation-forces-Greeks-back-out-on-to-the-streets-in-Athens-anti-austerity-protests.html>

The upgrade of the city through infrastructural developments, gentrification performed by free-market housing policies, and tighter control over the public space was already the new reality [Alexandri, 2018]. The economic crisis hit the country just a few years after urban neoliberalism reached momentum in Athens. From 2010-2017 neoliberalism revealed a different, rougher face to the city by denoting to the country the direction of austerity to avoid economic collapse through; “facilitation of large-scale investment in regional and urban development and ‘fast-track’ exploitation of precious public land by international corporate capital” [Alexandri, 2018:8]. Without going into further details about the economic policies implemented for the so-called “Memorandum Regime,” the effects that it had upon the Greek people and the city were tremendous. A deep recession, deflationary dynamics, housing crisis, the highest unemployment rate in Europe, a very big percentage of the people on the verge of poverty or social exclusion. In addition, unlike the early years of urban neoliberalism, there was an obvious decay of public spaces, absence of regeneration projects and the reformation of urban planning under the austerity paradigm [Balampanidis et al, 2019].

At the same time, the urban movements that had already started raising their voice in 2008 culminated. The public response to austerity was desperation, frustration, and rage that was directly reflected in the city through ongoing riots, vandalism, police hostility, and an overall decline of the city, especially the city center. A powerful anti-neoliberal sentiment emerged, and a massive mistrust of the Greek people towards politicians developed. The evident weakness of the Greek state, created a power vacuum that triggered the emergence of bottom-up initiatives, including local associations, neighborhood communities, and squatters to act. Urban redevelopment projects and restoration of public spaces were some of the actions undertaken by them, noting a strong wave toward the concept of the “Right to the city.”

Since 2013 despite the “austerity urbanism”, a booming of “urban tourism” hit the city. Multiple neighborhoods within the city center were receiving inflows of visitors which directed their economic base to become “touristified”. Short-term rentals, such as Airbnb platforms, expanded rapidly marginalizing residential uses. This situation triggered a rapid increase in land prices and set a fertile ground for gentrification to expand [Gourzis et al, 2021:3]. Gradually poorer neighborhoods, with low-income households were choosing to rent space in their homes for an additional source of income. Greece started gradually becoming overly dependent upon tourism as a way out of the crisis.

After 2017 the country started slowly presenting traces of improvement, which bring us to the situation that the city is found today. Athens, is still facing the knock-on effect of the economic debt and housing crises, connected with issues of urban deprivation. The current Mayor was elected in 2019 with his electoral program “Athens high up”. Adopt your City appears to be part of a step towards a second attempt of

“raising Athens high”. The first one was terminated rather ingloriously, while the second one seems to be more directed in the rebranding of the city as a tourist destination in continuation of the dynamics emerged from the years of economic austerity.



Figure 11: Extract from the Mayor's electoral program

The Mayor is presented with same structural problems the city is suffering the past 70 years in combination with all the additional problems that the economic crisis brought to the city. Therefore, still under the neoliberal reality, it does make sense to seek financial assistance from the private sector to deal with all the emerging problems that the city is facing. What the program and the Mayor does not seem to be dedicated to is what all the local authorities have turned the blind eye to all these years, the social and environmental inequalities and disparities that lack of housing policies are generating. For that reason, most of the thematic areas of the project concern how the city looks and not how the city functions. City lightning, upgrading of squares, increase of greenery, anti-graffiti initiatives are some of the main areas the Municipality seeks funding from the private sector. Such interventions are not part of radical changes, but they are beautifying interventions to cover up the structural problems that nobody has yet appeared to be willing to deal with.

Interestingly, citizen participation and sustainable goals, at least in theory, is part of the Mayor's rhetoric as a reassurance that both citizens and the environment are not going to be overlooked again. The way I interpret such commitments traces back to the history of the city. For the last couple of years the city was completely neglected by the local authorities something that changed the dynamic between the citizens and their city. People started developing ownership since nobody in power was showing any interest in the city. The negative criticism that Adopt your city has received is also a product of this change of dynamics the past 10 years. The strong anti-neoliberalist urban movements for example, are part of the city's social structure. From their point of view letting the private sector intervene in the city once again is not just an

initiative that threatens the spaces involved in the program or the expansion of gentrification to new areas, but it is part of a bigger threat. A warning that threatens to change the dynamic in regard to the ownership of public spaces. As Mitchel (2016) argues the talks around the “end of public spaces” is just a tendency produced by the abstract nature of public spaces that keeps on turning the tables on.

5. Empirical Analysis Based on Empirical Research: What Impact Does AYC has on Public Life in the City

Decision-makers nowadays are currently looking for public-private partnerships (PPPs) as a strategy for resolving the state's financial problems and enhancing its performance in public administration. Additionally, it is seen as an opportunity to improve the quality of infrastructural projects to satisfy new, rising societal needs and improve the image of the cities. Nevertheless, they are expected to be able to deal with advanced accounting and management which renders them a rather complicated procedure [Codecasa and Ponzini, 2017]. The more attention PPPs are receiving, the more international literature has questioned whether they are effective enough since they are often accused of a lack of strategy-making and organization. These problems align with the most recent advances in the field of urban regeneration and are extremely important to guarantee the quality of the outcomes. As already mentioned, one of the main concerns of geographers regarding PPPs in the context of a city (re)development is whether they pose a threat to the use of public spaces. In the following section, I will attempt to present my research findings by dividing the themes into five topics concerning the effects of PPPs and the use of public spaces: accessibility, openness, local participation and ownership, transparency and planning, and environmental sustainability.

5. 1 Accessibility and Openness

According to my empirical research, the case of Adopt your city does not pose a “threat” to the use of public spaces based on the accessibility criteria described by Mandipour (2010). To begin with, as demonstrated by the pictures below, 8/10 of the pocket parks were either non-existent or completely neglected. The spaces that have now been transformed into pocket parks are used to be untapped urban voids with no specific purpose. In addition, none of the pocket parks present any form of restriction or constraint to access them at any point of the day. On the contrary, according to my participant observation, they are all equipped with wooden or concrete benches, encouraging people to use them. In addition, transforming those empty, neglected spaces into little parks, contributes to the overall improvement of the city’s image since it makes it look safer and more approachable to all kind of visitors.

Before



Figure 13: Urban Void at Pangrati, photo extracted from Google Earth



Figure 12: Neglected Green space at Kypseli Neighborhood, photo extracted from Google Earth



Figure 16: Urban Void at Patisia Neighborhood, source: photo archive of AYC

After



Figure 14: Urban Void transformed into a pocket park, photo taken by me



Figure 15: Neglected Green space transformed into a pocket park, photo taken by me



Figure 17: Urban Void transformed into a pocket park; photo taken by me

FIX PARK- Before and After

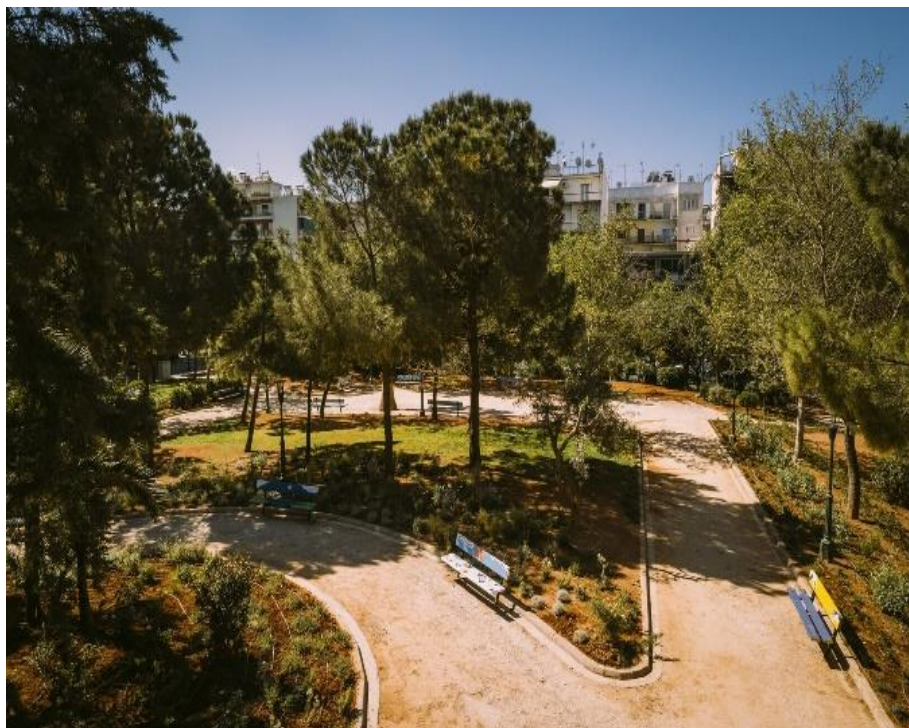


Figure 18 and 19 : FIX Park, source: <https://www.lifo.gr/now/greece/parko-fix-apektise-4500-mesogeika-fyta-kipoi-me-polyhroma-loyloydia-kai-thamnoys-se-ena>

The case is similar to the revitalization of the FIX park (fig.18,19), the only completed project that involves upgrading a standard-sized park so far. The park was entirely redesigned, and as the director of Communications of Olympic Brewery told me, 4,500 new plants were planned based on the “modern techniques of landscaping and environmental design.” The project was assigned to a professional landscape architect who received it in terrible condition, “degraded with neglected large trees, uncultivated land and damaged urban equipment” [Koukakis, 2021]. After its regeneration, the park is now cleaner, greener, and more attractive to the users.

Lastly, the physical location of the parks is another characteristic in favor of accessibility. More specifically, when the project manager was asked to describe the process of creating the parks from scratch, she emphasized three main features that the chosen spaces require to present; a. to belong to the Municipality of Athens, b. to be spaces of no use, neglected or abandoned, c. to be located within the neighborhoods.

“... We want the parks to be located in residential areas because there are most needed”

[Extract from an interview of the project coordinator of AYC]

In fact, all the pocket parks so far are located in very densely built and populated neighborhoods with no source of greenery around. This shows that parks are approachable and are made to improve the living conditions of those that inhabit in those suffocating areas by providing them with more open spaces. At the same time, though most of the neighborhoods that the pocket parks are located are either under the process of gentrification such as Kypseli, Keramikos, Koukaki or low-income areas such as Kolonos, Patisia, Sepolia suffering from the structural problems that we have explained on the previous chapter. From that point of view, such interventions seem to go in line with the beautification narrative that wants to facilitate gentrification in areas that are already under its influence and turn those still unaffected to the “right” direction.

Consequently, assessing the effects and consequences of PPP in public life according to “the end of public spaces” narrative, the case of Adopt your city seems to be in the middle. On the one hand it improves the condition of existing open and accessible parks but also significantly contributes to creating new public spaces specifically designed for the residents of densely built neighborhoods. Therefore, we can argue that we come across an example that shows how PPP promotes and contributes significantly to the “revival of public spaces”. As Feinstein (2005) has argued, urban parks are important parts of community development, facilitating social cohesion and interaction among people [Feinstein, 2005]. Thus, since these newly shaped public spaces present no limitation to freedom, we can argue that they contributing to the

“very essence of the democratic public sphere” [Leclercq and Pojani, 2021:16]. On the hand though, taking into consideration the fact that the only initiatives undertaken in those neighbourhoods are the creation of beautiful little parks, could also be seen as an act contributing to the superficial upgrading of the area and the overall beautification and touristification of the city.

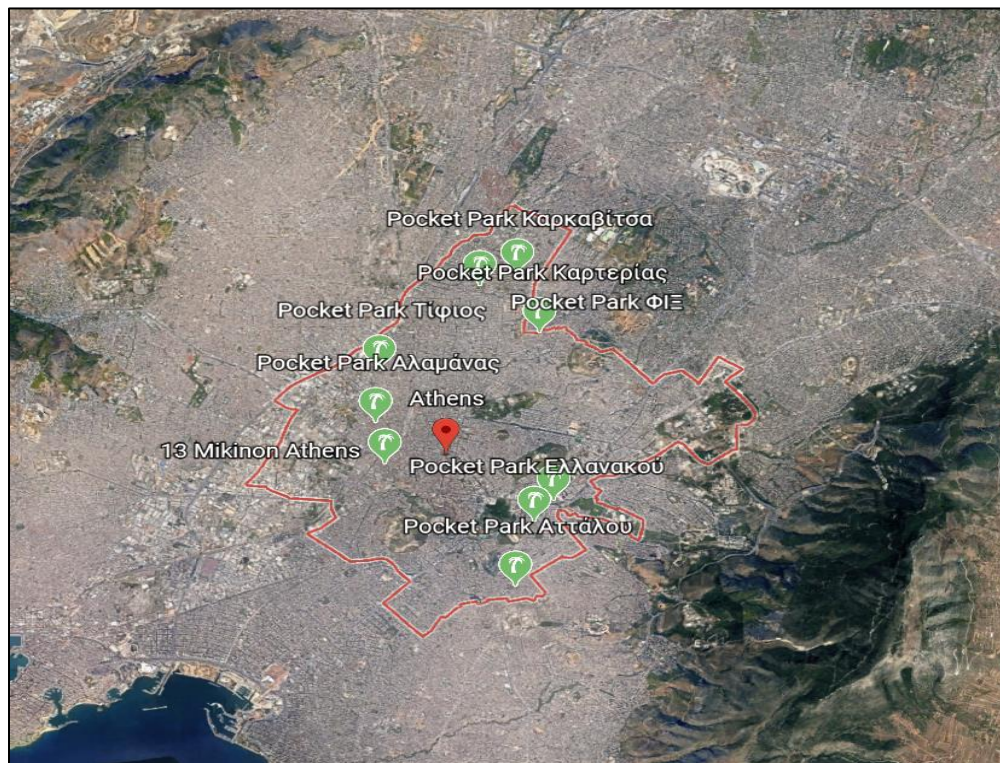


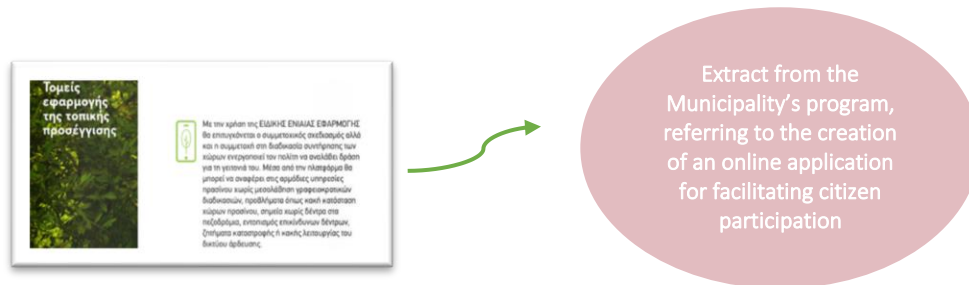
Figure 20: Map of all the pocket parks created so far



Figure 21: Screenshots from Google Earth, locations of three pocket parks

5.2 Citizen Participation

An intriguing contradiction I came across, concerns citizen participation in the project. The project has been promoted as an initiative encouraging both residents of Athens and companies and institutions to contribute to improving their city by “adopting” a public structure. In fact part of the electoral campaign of the current Municipality, was the aim to create an “online application” in which the formation as well as the maintenance of the green spaces would be accessible to the inhabitants of its neighborhood.



Nevertheless, according to my research not only the application does not exist but also local participation is neglected and in some cases incredibly superficially considered. Based on Forester's (1999) or Innes's (1999) opinions, lack of citizen participation undermines the democratic decision-making process when it comes to the regeneration of urban public spaces. Following the theory of the “Right to the city”, in such cases citizens are only recognized as users instead of urban dwellers (citidins) that are actively and collectively shape their city (Lefebvre, 1995). However, there are cases where the call for citizen participation has been criticized as a rather idealistic approach since it is neither always achievable nor fruitful for the whole community (Feinsten,2011). “Open processes” do not always produce just outcomes because urban citizen participation sometimes leads to unrealistic demands that are not always equitable. (Feinsten,2011:34). What I will attempt to do in the following section is to present why according to my research, lack of citizen participation seems to be apparent.

To begin with, with a careful look at the official website, it is evident that the project is not planned in a way that individual contributions could fit in any of the axes. So far, all the projects are accomplished by donations and funding by private companies, and no evidence of citizens' participation or contribution is apparent. On the contrary, the only field that was a direct call for the citizens to get involved in person is not available anymore. Regardless of whether this field was propitious, it was undeniably the only one dedicated to citizen participation. Furthermore, during the interviews absence of citizen participation was

one of the main sources of criticism for those more critical of the project. More specifically, the director of Greenpeace, when asked to express his opinion on the project, he replied,

“It’s interesting, it’s smart... in split seconds they are solving the problem of funding. What they don’t sort out is the participation of the society, which is what will guarantee the maintenance of these parks, the only way to keep them alive...”

The member of Save your Hood although acknowledged that the Municipality has made improvements regarding how open to recommendations and guidance is from other civil society organizations, he emphasized that excluding citizens from the process of Adopt your city is an oversight that affects both the citizens but also the project itself.

“Look the fact that such initiatives are taking place is positive...I am not gonna lie.... but where is the neighborhood in all this and by neighborhood, I mean the residents. Isn't this the role of a pocket park supposedly? To serve the needs of the local community? If you don’t take into account what they want, and what they have to say it’s like building a tennis court for people that don’t play tennis. They will never make good use of itand the court will deteriorate....”

On the other hand, the topic of citizen participation was either disregarded (private sector’s representatives) or superficially considered (local authority’s representatives) for those that were less critical. The project manager of Adopt your city for instance, although at the beginning of our discussion, made clear that all people are welcome to communicate their ideas through the platform, when asked to comment on the people that have reacted against the upcoming regeneration project of the hill of Strefi, in a defensive tone, she replied,

“What do you want me to say...everybody is free to have his/her opinion...the hill needs to be redeveloped....its something that the area needs....What do you want me to say, negative responses and reactions is not something that affect or concern us.”

Hence, regardless of what the project intends to represent in theory, in practice, citizen participation or contribution is neglected. The project has been assembled without any substantial effort to encourage people to take part in it regardless of what the first impression leads the public to think. Besides, in the cases where the local contribution is acknowledged, the program expects people to come up with their ideas and take initiatives by themselves without providing them a “good foothold to do so. An example that

affirms this reflection is the absence of any group of volunteers or participants, as is clearly stated in the FAQ section on the program's official website.

Do you organize voluntary activities in which I can participate?



Unfortunately, the program does not have a regular group of volunteers. In any case, if you wish you can fill in the expression of interest form by noting your details, so that we can contact you if a project arises that will require voluntary participation.

Thus, assessing PPP in terms of its outcome seems to have positive effects on the use of public spaces, as concluded in the previous chapter. On the other hand, if we focus more on the process and less on the product itself, Adopt your city fails to meet the requirements.

The question that arises is whether in the case of pocket parks and regeneration of parks, community engagement is critical or not. One way to answer this question is to examine the situation by evaluating what would be the potential negative effect of not involving the citizens in the process. According to the interviews, lack of citizen participation was indeed a characteristic that can potentially affect the long-term effects of the project negatively. Still, from the first two answers provided above, there is a shared reference to the importance of citizen participation in preservation/maintenance and ownership.

“The problem that exists is that they have not found the way yet -and this is not an accusation but an allusion to the weakness of how the project has been structured- the next day, someone to declare ownership, to take care of it in order to be maintained, to remain alive and functional.”

The member of the Athens Partnership was also very insistent about it, arguing that if you do not cultivate the feeling that parks are not just made for the citizens but belong to them, then it is very likely that the residents will not feel any form of obligation to protect them and take care of them.

“Adopt your city...yes...adoption... but only when it comes to funding but what happens in practice? nothing. You need to cultivate the feeling of belonging, of caring. Let's say the pocket parks are created, great! What is your plan for the users to adopt their city...? Because then if the parks are left neglected, again, and are transformed into places where anti-social behaviors take place then the residents will start complaining! You know the drill...”

During my participant observations, where I had the chance to visit 7 of the green spaces powered by Adopt your city, elements of lack of ownership were evident indeed. This was reflected in two different ways; all the pocket parks I visited were empty from people and three out of six were already painted with graffiti

tags. Only the pocket park located in Pagrati seemed to be taken care by the locals since traces of ownership by the locals were apparent (cats, cat bowls, shovel, and extra rubbish bags).

According to Piero (1967) for pocket parks to be truly successful they need to be designed as well as realized with the active involvement of the residents including the community leaders. This means that initiation of a dialogue with the neighborhood is needed, so that both planners/designers and the local authorities take into consideration the requests and ideas of the community. Providing the opportunity for the locals to participate is also key. In addition, Bates et al (2017) support that, one very important aspect of well-designed urban spaces is to be able to cultivate the feeling of “communal ownership”. Ownership should not only be central to the original design of a public space (i.e. use of benches and dining tables) but also to its “ongoing life” (99). In that case PPPs intending to enhance public urban spaces but without any form of citizen participation will eventually weaken the possibility of bringing positive long-term change in the public life. Having a sense of communal ownership over public space is essential for a neighborhood as it is also well as for the efficient, stable functioning of the city (Jacobs,1961).

To conclude it seems that in the case of Adopt your city and the enhancement of green spaces within the city center, community engagement is important and not only just for the sake of it. It can have observable effects on the way the spaces are functioning and preserved. Otherwise lack of ownership could seriously undermine the quality of the outcome.



Figure 22: Lack of ownership in three different pocket parks, photo taken by me



Figure 23: Pocket Park in Pangrati traces of ownership, photos taken by me

5.3 Transparency

Transparency is one of the main topics for which PPPs have been widely debated by scholars since it is used as an indicator for assessing an organization's credibility and legitimacy. Reynaers (2015) argues that in order to achieve external transparency in PPPs, "the extent to which organizations are visible to the outside world", internal transparency is required (69). Internal transparency is attained when the public party is clear about its expectations from the private party, and the private party provides detailed insights on its activity to the public [Reynaers, 2015]. In the case of Adopt your city, there was partial and at times misleading internal as well as external transparency. However, since more than just two stakeholders are involved, perceptions of transparency varied. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that research in the field of transparency in PPPs presents practical restraints that have to do with the access to critical information and data that would allow us to have clearer picture on the matter [Codecasa and Ponzini, 648]. Nevertheless, it was a topic that was coming up a lot during the interviews. For that reason, in the following chapter I will attempt to present why according to my research findings there was a lack of transparency among the stakeholders and how can this characteristic be attributed to the absence of coherent planning.

To begin with for most private sector representatives, transparency was a fundamental prerequisite for building trust with the project and the Municipality. From the point of view of the companies, transparency meant having a clear picture of the legal procedures required to be followed for both sides so that everything was explicit and legitimate. Being able to accelerate the process without having to deal with the exhausting bureaucracy but at the same time get the legal approval for all the steps, was one of the most critical arguments in favor of the project. As one of them said,

"I have to say the project is A-M-A-I-Z-I-N-G! The collaboration was perfect! Things were dashing, without problems, and everything was nice and clear. Usually, there is much difficulty between the private and the public sector (meaning the partnerships) because there is a huge bureaucracy you need to deal with...."

[Private sector's representative]

Along the same lines, for the Municipality transparency was directly linked with the legal procedures they had to follow. In this case it was more in relation to the other public services involved (i.e., Department of Greenery and Urban Fauna, City Planning Commission) and less with the private companies. This was evident from the way the project manager replied, when asked to describe the process of the formation of

either the pocket parks or the regeneration of the parks. She made it very clear that Adopt your city is not operating autonomously but needs the support and permission of other public entities for the realization of each 'intervention'.

"Everything is done according to the guidelines of the law. We must take the green light from many different institutions to intervene in any public space."

The concept of external transparency was coming up less often during the interviews especially with the private sector's representatives. Since the project was under the Municipality's supervision, it was its responsibility to make sure that external transparency is well-preserved [Forer et al, 2010]. Nonetheless, it appeared that not much effort has been put to secure that. To begin with, information about the partnerships and the city interventions are only provided through the website but only after their completion. In addition, although the website is frequently updated, neither information about the cost of the project is provided nor about the private sector's way of contribution. Overall, the information provided appear to be generic without further explanations on what are the terms of the collaborations. Furthermore, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, the project presents a rather misleading impression that is an open call for all the citizens to participate and contribute to the regeneration of their city, while in fact this is not the case.

On the other hand, transparency had different connotations for the interviewees that presented a more critical view of the program. In their case, transparency had to do more with the democratic processes of decision making. For instance, as we already explained, one of the main stakeholders of Adopt your city is Athens Partnership. AP is a non-profit organization that manages the funding of the private sector for the Municipality of Athens, including the project Adopt your city. Nevertheless, according to one of the members of AP, the role of the institution is recurrently overlooked since the council is never meeting to discuss.

"... They just send us announcements to inform us when a project is completed. You usually bring the topic to the Municipal council then to public deliberation, and then we meet all together to decide...for example, we had no idea of what was going on with the hill of Strefi. We were not informed about the collaboration with PRODEA and how the regeneration of the hill was already planned. One day they just announced it to us."

Likewise, the member of Save your hood accused the Municipality of opacity because although they were working together for the cleaning up of the same area, the municipality omitted to inform them about their plans to collaborate with that company and regenerate the hill,

“...it was one of our biggest actions, and the Municipality also took part that day... And so, the next day, literally the next day, they published about the regeneration and the partnership with that company...they had countless opportunities to inform us about it, but they decided not to because they knew we would step back and deny to help them to clean the area for that purpose....”

[Member of Save your Hood]

Consequently, we can conclude that transparency is relatively weak in our case. Nevertheless, although Raynaers’s (2015) distinction between internal and external transparency is evident, at the same time in the case it is not straightforward where internal transparency end and where external starts. The reason is that more than two stakeholders are involved in the partnership, and two (AP and the civil society groups) can fit both the internal and the external aspects of transparency.

Considering the limited access to the internal arrangements between the private and the public partner, one reason that justifies the lack of clarity regarding the processes that take place for the realization of the project is the lack of strategic planning from the side of the Municipality. According to the literature, one way to guarantee transparency (both internal and external) is for the public partner to have clear and well-specified expectations from the private partner. In addition, it has been widely argued that for PPPs to be successful in urban redevelopment, local governments are acquired to “frame projects” not only in the short term but also through a longer-term perspective. Public organizations usually appear responsible for the weaknesses and failures of PPP outcomes [Codesca and Ponzini, 2011:652].

Lack of planning does not allow for transparency since all the negotiations are taking place off the record and depending on what the private partner is willing to offer the partnership is shaped accordingly. In addition, it creates uneasiness with matters that concern accountability since the Municipality does not have the upper hand to direct the negotiations and the needs and wants of the company come before those of the Municipality. Such a conclusion indicates that the Municipality is not the partner that directs the collaboration, but it is the private partner that chooses what kind of collaboration they want to develop.

This shows that for the sake of both efficiency and budget, the Municipality negotiates from a place of vulnerability that affects the credibility and transparency of the program.

5.4 Sustainable Urban Development and the Concept of Social Responsibility

As already explained, Athens is extremely densely built, especially the city center. This means that there is a scarcity of green spaces mainly caused by various historical and political factors that prioritize built construction and overlooked the importance of greenery within the city center [Belavilas and Vatavali 2009]. Nevertheless, in the past six years, there has been an increasing interest in relation to the effects of climate change since a gradual increase in high temperatures started being observed. The density and bad quality of the built construction enormously contributed (and still is) to the extreme high temperatures that hit the city center especially during summertime. One of the main reasons why Adopt your city has attracted positive feedback is because of its commitment to environmentally sustainable goals targeted to the reduction of the Co2 emissions and minimization of extreme high temperatures [Kotsoni, 2021]. As it has been argued, green public space revitalizations improve the quality of open spaces through an ecologically sustainable way for the benefit of the public life in the city [Littke, 2015].

"it's about creating green spaces, lowering the temperatures, giving quality of life and creating new reference points inside the city"

[Extract from the Mayor's interview at Reuters, 2021]

At the same time, green public space revitalization programs have been also criticized for capitalizing the concept of "sustainability" to legitimize urban infrastructures that in fact are far from being environmentally harmless [De Vries et al., 2015]. In the following section, I will discuss why, according to my research findings, Adopt your City appears to serve as an instrument for both the Municipality and the Private sector to enhance their reputation by utilizing the goals of sustainability with little interest about the long-term effects to the environment. At the same time, I will attempt to explain why focusing on the "image" and less on the product itself can actually harm the quality of the public spaces and the public life in general.

Unlike a fair amount of literature related to the risks of PPPs and of public spaces, in the case of Adopt your city, the companies were not interested in capitalizing any of the green spaces they have funded so far. Based on the interviews with the private sector's representatives, it became clear that the reason why they

were keen on participating in the project lied on the concept of CSR fundraising. All of them, expressed very strong feelings about how important it is for companies to present a socially responsible public profile. Even though the significance of contribution for the benefit of the city was always mentioned at the same time all of them ended up admitting that engaging with social and environmental matters is the best communication strategy nowadays.

"Look, there are two different aspects of it. One is for contributing to a good cause. The other, of course, has to do with the communication aspect of it. Whether we like it or not, nowadays, CSR is the best communication strategy for a company. Customers are over the advertisements we had in the past in which companies were exalting themselves. People are more selective, and they prefer socially sensible companies."

[Private Company's representative- fundraiser of two pocket parks]

"It's true that customers are looking for brands and companies that have a purpose, that are sustainable. Sustainability has become very powerful marketing strategy and that's a fact."

[Private Company's representative- fundraiser of one park]

In addition, all the representatives of the companies with which I had the chance to talk with, told me that it was them that approached the Municipality and offered to participate in the project and not the other way around. In two out of the three companies, it was the communication department of the company that oversaw the collaboration. Even though the project had various axes, they specifically decided to get involved in the one that concerned the enhancement of greenery in the city. This was the case because the intervention was more visible to the citizens and had a direct link with the environment. As one of them told me,

"We heard about Adopt your City and we thought it was a good opportunity. We specifically chose the pocket parks because of their direct link with the environment and also because it directly affects the life of the citizens"

[Private Company's representative- fundraiser of one pocket park]

Evidence throughout my research demonstrated that companies were more likely to get involved with the formation and maintenance of the space if the company had any sort of connection either with the neighbourhood or the space itself. For instance, the Fix Park was directly connected with the company that undertook its regeneration because the old brand factory used to be located in that area. For that reason, the company appears to maintain strong ties with the park even after the completion of its regeneration. For them, the park serves as a storefront of the brand. As the relevant interviewee told me,

For us it was a very important project because this area is a landmark for the history of our company! For that reason, we wanted to create something bigger than just an ordinary park. That's why we put a lot of effort into it.

(...) Normally, it is the Municipality that takes care of the parks. But for us the park is an important Hub! So, we decided that we wanted to put an extra focus on it. We have our own people taking care of it, including the Municipality to make sure that the park is well maintained...

[Private Company's representative- fundraiser of Fix Park]

Therefore, the involvement of the private partner depends on how much the company has invested in CSR as a communication strategy. In cases where the private partners were only interested in contributing financially, based on the information collected, expenses for maintenance for instance was covered through the initial donations. Therefore, in those cases no further ownership is granted to the private partner after the completion of the collaboration. The public space for the private partner appears to be just the vehicle to communicate to the public eye that they have a "social purpose". Therefore, going back to the literature regarding the struggle of public space, unlike what many academics tend to believe, in our case the public space is not what is at stake.

This does not mean that potential threats do not exist. They just affect public life indirectly instead of directly. One of those threats could be the perpetuation of greenwashing as a result of abusing the concept of CSR³ (when applicable) because of the negative consequences it can bring to the future of our lives in general [De Vries et al., 2015]. In addition, another indirect risk is that relying on the communication strategy of the private sector does not seem to be a reliable means to bring long-term and environmentally conscious changes to the city's functioning. This was an observation made by the CEO of Greenpeace who

³ "Greenwashing is a practice followed by organizations in which unsubstantiated or misleading claims are made of the environmental and social attributes of a product, service or the company as a brand" [Aggarwal and Kadyan, 2011:61]

argued that his opposition is not towards the ppp. The problem is when the Municipality relies on the private sector to take responsibility for matters that the Municipality should be in charge of.

This brings us to the side of the public partner. In general, the enhancement of greenery, the creation of pocket parks and the pedestrianization of central streets of cities are all initiatives undertaken to contribute to the improvement of a city's image (beautification). This is because environmentally sustainable and green cities have been lately associated with the concept of modernity, and development [Ahman and Simis, 2017]. Indeed, one of the main goals of the Mayor was to "Create the Model Neighborhood" that is among others "smart", "safe", "accessible" and "sustainable" [Extract from the Mayor's electoral campaign]. However, based on my research the enhancement of green spaces is only contributing to the improvement of the city's image as well as the Mayor's reputation and no real dedication to sustainable goals exist. The enhancement of green spaces through the formation of pocket parks and the regeneration of existing green spaces is indeed in line with the concept of sustainability. Nevertheless, from the interviews as well as the document analysis of the program, the actions undertaken appear weak to bring an overall change to the city's ecological footprint. As one of the members of we4all, mentioned during the interview that Adopt your city is not only a good communication strategy for the private sector, but for the Mayor's office as well.

"We know that flashy and on-trend initiatives... is the easiest way to brag you are effective..."

[Member of WE4ALL]

The idea of creating pocket parks as part of a broader effort to direct the city into more sustainable pathways is fine. However, we need to see this bigger plan to affect the microclimate of a city, especially in Athens (...). Of course, we need more green spaces, but if you are dedicated to becoming environmentally sensible, build the pocket parks with the right heat-resistant materials, prioritize using bicycles as a main means of transportation, pocket parks are not the solution. And do you know what is the most important of all? Involve the citizens... This is true sustainability.... motivate people to become sustainable...

[CEO of Greenpeace]

...They don't care about the long-term effects. That is for sure. They say they want to reduce pollution and be more environmentally conscious.... well have you heard anything about measuring the atmospheric pollution after the pocket parks? Did the pocket parks help to reduce the temperature after all?

[Member of AP]

According to my research, make use of environmental sustainability with no real determination to bring sustainable results, is also used as communication strategy from the Municipality itself. In June 2020 for instance, the Municipality initiated a pilot infrastructural development project (the “Grant Promenade”) to pedestrianize a very big part of the city center to create cycle lanes, new public spaces, and pedestrian zones [Tzamourani et al, 2021]. During that time, media coverage including the Mayor himself was glorifying the initiative for its commitment to the reduction of co2 emissions and promote a more environmentally conscious way of transportation. A couple of months after the completion of the project, the city was suffering from worse traffic jams since lack of planning created extreme transportation problems. Bikers were not able to bike easily since the cycle lanes were always intersecting with main highways forcing them again to ride in the main streets. Part of the same project included the addition of palm trees in big metallic plant pots in one of the most historical streets in the city center. This decision was also praised by the media.

(...) the impressive trees, placed as part of the pilot temporary interventions of the Grand Promenade, from the height of Syntagma Square to the height between America and Bucharest streets, beautify the center of the capital and make it more attractive for residents and visitors.”

[Extract from an article published in the newspaper,
source: <https://www.skai.gr/news/environment>]

Nevertheless, neither the selection of palm trees was successful nor the metallic plant pots. The palm trees died after a couple of months as they were not suitable for the microclimate of the city. The material that the flower boxes were made from was also adding up to the high temperatures. Today the “Grant Promenade” is reformed, and the most central streets are currently under construction.

“The Grant Promenade was partially pulled-off...this is my honest answer...”

[Extract from a Mayor’s interview in National Television, 2021]

According to Alexandri (2014), the formation of pocket parks was also used as a beautification strategy among gentrifiers of Metaxourgeio, one of the first gentrified neighborhoods in Athens. Since the Municipality does not seem to be interested in the long-term environmental effects of the parks but at the same time is engaging with initiatives that aim at improving the city’s image, enhancement of greenery

could be also seen as an example of green gentrification. Green gentrification expresses the intersection of urban redevelopment, ecologically conscious initiatives, and environmental activism under capitalism [Cheker, 2011]. More specifically, green gentrification is formed when environmental justice initiatives create the circumstances under which local communities' displacement occurs. This phenomenon emerged since urban greenery has traditionally been associated with the idea of cleanliness, safety, and order of urban space [Koch, 2015: 682]. Consequently, urban ecologically conscious initiatives can be used as a strategy to improve the image of a neighborhood, as it will eventually activate the mechanism of gentrification.

Adopt your city is a very recent program to measure how much its initiatives regarding greenery has contributed to the acceleration of gentrification. However, since it is clear that the program is more about the image and less about long-term change, green gentrification goes in line with the general direction of the program. Unfortunately, this superficial engagement from both the private and the public sector with sustainability, will only disorient the city from adopting effective positive environmental practices, perpetuating the problem of air pollution and high temperatures in the city.

6. Conclusion

Adopt your City serves as a very interesting melting pot of all the socio-political and economic influences and peculiarities the city concentrates on after WWII. The chaotic urban structuring of the city, the absence of housing policies, and all the challenges the city went through since the appearance of urban neoliberalism not only determined the way the city looks and functions today but also created those dynamics that led to the formation of this new regeneration program. More specifically, during a period the city is trying to get back on its feet after a very long period of urban austerity, the formation of a PPP for the regeneration of the city is a condition rather expected. The current Municipality appears to try and facilitate the neoliberalisation of the city but with using up-to-date rhetoric that includes both the narrative of sustainability and citizen participation. Unfortunately, according to my empirical research, there is a discrepancy regarding how the project has been promoted and how it operates in practice, that was evident through the lack of citizen participation, transparency, planning and honest dedication to sustainability goals.

As the city's history also indicates, unlike a fair amount of literature regarding urban privatization, the biggest threat to city life is not the private sector but the inability of the local authorities to make good use of the partnerships. Lack of planning and denial to take matters into hand keeps the city from improving. Thus, PPPs for the regeneration of a city with characteristics similar to Athens's, allows the local authorities to escape taking responsibility for the city's disparities by relying on the private sector's contribution. Consequently, although the short-term effects on public life appear relatively positive, looking more into the future the problems are just tacked away.

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Appendix

Research Proposal

Submitted: 23/2/2022

Introduction

Athens is a European city that faces many challenges. More than 4 million people inhabit the capital and more than 650,000 people are squeezed in the center of the city which covers a surface area of 12 square kilometers (Population Stat, 2021). Lack of both social and physical planning policies during the rapid period of the city's urbanization after the Second World War led; to a high density and mixed-use city center characterized by social diversity (immigrants and local people co-habit), lack of green spaces, traffic congestion and different forms of pollution (Alexandri,2014). Many attempts have been made to solve the city's problems but with little success. The current Municipality of Athens has launched a new initiative called "Adopt your City" aiming to implement urban upgrade programs to improve city life (and make Athens "a cleaner, a more accessible and sustainable city" [<https://adoptathens.gr/>]). The initiative caught my attention because, after a bit of research, I realized there is a big contradiction with this plan. The initiative is called "Adopt your city" and at first glance is promoted as an initiative aiming at encouraging citizens to actively participate in the regeneration of their city. Nevertheless, with a closer look, it is obvious that the main target group of the initiative is private companies, not the local community.

What I am interested in investigating is to what extent such an initiative aims at enlarging and facilitating public discourse. Is it inspired by ideas of a "Just City" that stresses the importance of inclusivity, participation, and equity? Or is it inspired by more neoliberal views that aim to upgrade cities with the ultimate goal to make them look more attractive and accessible for investors and consumers? The initiative has 8 different areas of interest as presented on the official website. So far, I have been more interested in focusing on the formation of pocket parks or/and the anti-graffiti campaign. Green spaces have traditionally been associated with the idea of cleanliness, safety, and order (Koch, 2015). On the contrary, urban voids (that are about to be transformed into small parks) as well as graffiti, have been associated with anarchism, chaos and are features that "make the reality of deprivation visible" (Kohn,2004). Consequently, I think these two specific areas will give me the opportunity to explore; to what extent the aim of the project is to form a livable and better functioning city for its citizens or whether it is part of a beautification processes attempting to satisfy the neoliberal standards of a modern city.

What criteria are used to select the projects that are implemented?

The projects implemented through the program are determined based on the needs of the Municipality of Athens.

 CITY INTERVENTIONS	 PARKS
 CLEANING & RECYCLING	 ANTI-GRAFFITI
 SOCIAL SOLIDARITY	 SPORTS FACILITIES AND PLAYGROUNDS
 ADOPT A SCHOOL	 ADOPT-A-TREE

The “Adopt your city” program by the City of Athens is addressed to anyone who is interested to “adopt” a street, a tree, a park, a square, a playground, a sport facility, a neighborhood, to make them more luminous, greener and friendlier for citizens and visitors.

Who is the program addressed to?

The program is based on the belief that public space belongs to everyone and its upgrade and sustainable development should be a priority of every healthy and productive group of the city. Thus, the program is addressed to residents of Athens, small and large companies, institutions and organizations but also to any party interested in “adopting” a street, a sidewalk, a park, a square, a playground, a stadium, a neighborhood and make them brighter, greener, more friendly to residents and visitors.

What is the “Adopt your city” program?

The “Adopt your city” program is the platform that brings together the City of Athens and the private sector. The program includes city interventions of all scales throughout Athens. Interested parties are invited to contribute to the work of the Municipality of Athens with ideas, infrastructure, and funds. The project aims to bring significant results in areas such as cleaning, lighting, greenery, sustainable development, homeless shelters, culture, social solidarity, public space upgrading, sports, education, and new technologies. Partnerships between the Municipality and the private sector can create significant added value for all the citizens of the largest city in the country.

Source: <https://adoptathens.gr/en/>

Research questions

The knowledge gap that I could attempt to shed light on, I believe is linked with the internal division I also feel about this project; Authorizing private companies to renovate public spaces, opens up a big discussion around the privatization of public spaces and the harmful effects it has upon the city life (segregation, exclusion, limitation of freedom of speech, etc.). Critiques of privatization usually express a “nostalgic vision of an earlier, more authentic, organic community” (Kohn, 2004) with which I mostly agree. They talk about maintaining the unique character of each neighborhood, the importance of local representation and inclusivity in the decision making and the potential threat of commercializing cities. On the other hand, theories such as the “Right to the City”, although offer less profit-oriented and more citizen-friendly alternatives to the capitalistic model, at the same time they usually lack clear guidelines on how they could work effectively in practice; What happens when a mayor aims at improving city life, but the economic means are not enough as in the case of Athens? Would it be enough to rely solely on the citizens' participation and contribution? What if the democratic functions of public spaces have declined to such an extent that people have become entirely unconcerned about the ownership of urban spaces use? (Leclercq, and Pojani, 2021).

Questions:

To what extent does “Adopt your City” aims at improving the (public) life of the inhabitants of each neighborhood involved?

- What are the potential consequences of relying on private companies for the improvement of the city center? Does it undermine local representation when it comes to decision making?
- How does the concept of cleanliness and beautification of cities have influenced the new regeneration project initiated by the Municipality of Athens?
- What are the criteria based on which “Adopt your city” select where and how the next project will take place?

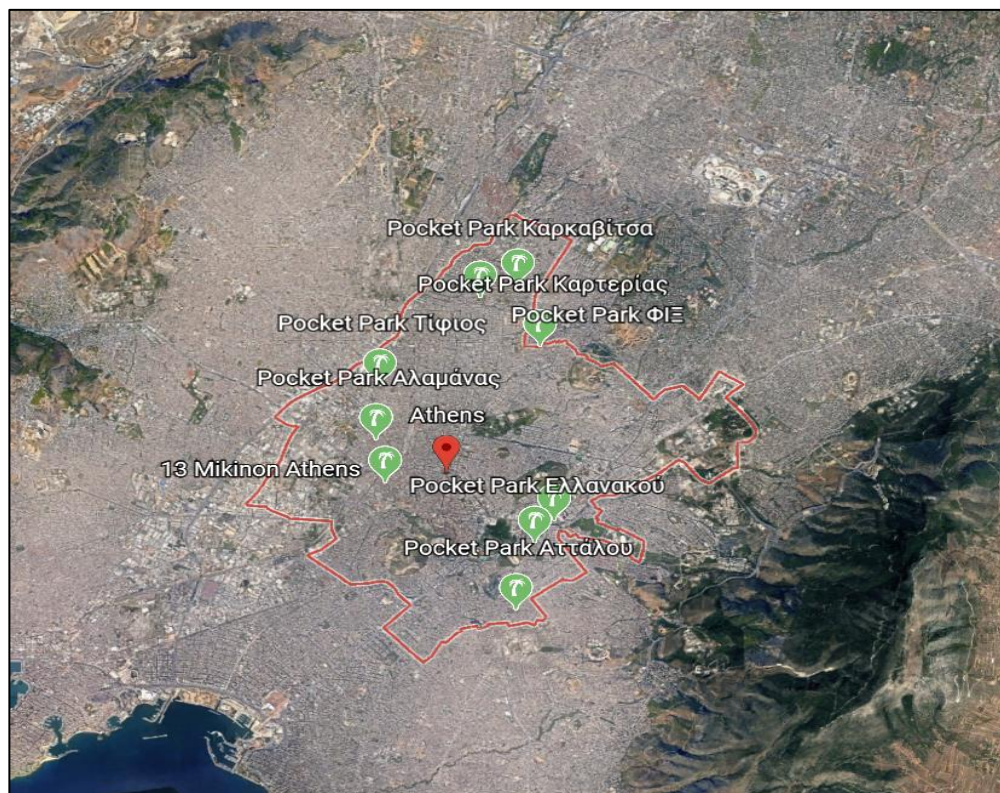
Is “Adopt your City” part of a generalized gentrification trend that has affected the city the last decade?

Elaboration of the research questions into a work plan

- What sort of information is needed?

Literature Review: Academic literature would be a great source of information for explaining theoretical concepts as well as debates regarding urban planning theories (privatization of public space, right to the city, urban neoliberalism, etc)

- **Interviews** with people involved in the program to provide their insight such as members of the Municipality, representatives of the private companies that have already or are planning to take part and also local people. It would be also interesting to talk with academics that could provide me with their insight upon my topic of interest.
- **Participant observations** (visit places that have already been upgraded but also places that are about to be transformed) and collect useful audiovisual material
- I am also interested in investigating the way the initiative has been covered by the medias (social media, newspapers, tv)
- Representation with **maps** and **images** of the physical aspect of the places:



Example: This is a map with all the pocket parks that have been formed with the initiation of the project

Time schedule

February (phase 1)	Research Proposal and research on the existing literature
March (phase 2)	Literature Review (essay planning and writing)
April (phase 2)	Literaire review, participant observation and interviews
May (phase 3)	Data analysis and last-minute interviews
June (phase 3/4)	Data analysis and wirtting
July (phase 4)	Wrting and hand in of the final draft

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Chapter 1 – Analysis of results and topics that arise	?
Chapter 2 – Analysis of results and topics that arise	?
Chapter 3 – Analysis of results and topics that arise	?
Conclusion	1
Discussion	1
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