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Kalliakoudas, Triantafyllos

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Data Analysis and Factors Correlation That Influences the Configuration of Urban Fabric in a Greek Middle Size City. The Case Study of Larissa

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“DATA ANALYSIS AND FACTORS CORRELATION THAT INFLUENCE THE FORMING OF URBAN FABRIC IN A GREEK MEDIUM SIZED CITY. THE CASE STUDY OF LARISSA.”

Space planning is not as much a science as it is an "intellectual preparation for action". It is also a field of research, spatial and non spatial , that equips us better in order to take decisions on our common future (Rose, 1974).

A thorny question naturally turns up: what will be the ¨subject¨ of this planning? Who moves it and who activates it? Who promotes its application? For whom ? All these are political questions and space planning is definitely a political process. It is a form of social and political action that determines the way and the place we will live. (L. Vasenhoven, 2002)

The result that arises from space planning is also certain. We refer to the city’s form, the urban fabric, that is worked out in the plans and in practice is putting into shape the modern city.

The cities change. They are live organisms that grow, evolve, developed or declined under the effect endogenous and exogenic factors. Even if the change is usually identified with the progress, enough elements from the modern picture of Greek cities constitute regression concerning the past and they often cause disappointment and intense discussions on lost occasions. (G. Petrakos , 2006).

However, which factors give shape to the city? Which data influence the forming of the urban fabric?

In our proposal we will try to record the data and explain the factors, as well as their role to the forming of the urban fabric of a Greek medium sized city.

That is to say , the cities with a population between 100 and 500 thousands of residents.

Any grouping and generalisation should not disguise the fact that every city , small or big , is a unique case. The developmental ways and the prospects of a city might be understood only within the bounds of the particular conditions that surround every city.

Taking as an example the city of Larissa, we bring out the growth conditions of a typical Greek medium sized city, through the particularities that characterize the space (city) but also the time (decade ' 70 - ' 80).

The data are as follows :

- Population - Immigration: the refugee's "wave" of 1922 that "hit" most of the Greek cities, created a big social problem. At the same time, the newly established (then) Greek state showed an intense dynamism in taking initiatives to confront these problems. The new urban legislation of 1923, the city plans that had been worked out, the new settlements and the built-up programs constituted perhaps the most important, urban interventions of the 20th century to the most Greek medium sized cities.

  After World War II the situation had changed. The creation of hostile blocs in an international level, created a new reality that limited the cities and isolated them from Athens and Salonica. It caused a climate of unemployment, internal immigration, social discontinuity and financial indigence. Also in this case , however, all the "urban education" that had to follow the settlement of population, only tried "to heal" the wounded picture of the Greek city.

  For this reason, every effort of was destroyed and at the same time the insufficient policies that had been exercised during the postwar period were revealed.

  The recent phenomenon of the installation of immigrants from the neighbouring countries (for example Albania), proves the rule.

  The immigrants settle in the neglected neighbourhoods of the cities' centre or in big regional complexes. Their cultural and national differences tend to speed up the social segregation in the cities, resulting to the loss of the urban fabric's cohesion and many problems such as racism and the uncontrolled violence expand all over the city.

  Therefore, the continuous increase of population therefore, and the concentration of activities in the city were reflected in space not only through the transformations that were made which "created" the form

of the urban fabric, but also through the continuous spread of the urban complex to the region. This results to the occupation of a big part of the suburban area and also of the city's wider area by applications and activities directely or indirectly related to the urban operations.

Thus, the local population and the immigrants are those who "have moulded" the form of the city. Their preferences for the place of installation have shaped the form of the urban fabric.

- Geographical position - topological peculiarities: in many cases the direction of the extension of a city depends on the particularities that characterize the region. The existence of a harbour (i.e. in the case of Volos) is a conclusive factor that influences the form of the urban fabric and determines its development, since it offers all the elements and contributes to the development of the region. The neighbourhood of the space with a street of big circulation, gives advantages to the area since it can create a lot of uses of the land (unmixed residence, general residence, urban centres, wholesale trade etc), while the neighbourhood with an airport complicates several uses and makes the coexistence with the residence impossible. The existence of a hill or an elevation "atttracts" the residence (of the high income class in particular), giving the opportunity for the growth of housing estates that could combine relaxation and sports activities. Finally, during the last decade a lot of studies have proved that the small cities with the promptest rate of growth were, mostly, satellite towns of the two big urban centres of Athens and Salonica and, without fail, in the administrative limits of the Prefectures of Attica and Salonica. (G. Petrakos, Pr. Mardakis, 1999). The satellite towns keep offerring more residence and social life, and their development depends to a large extent on the rate and type of the decentralisation of metropolitan operations. (G. Petrakos, D. Oikonomou, 1999)
- Technical infrastructures: the road network, the municipal and Community buildings, the public places (city squares, green spaces, recreation areas etc), the education buildings, health buildings, the water mains and the collecting system and the means of public

transport, influence (and/or guide) the demand for residence, hence the form of the city. One of the basic factors for the original shaping of municipal built-up before planning is the constructure of technical works. In this way an increase in the invested capital in the land is realised mostly in the form of reconstruction realised by the private sector and less in the form of public investments in the infrastructure (i.e. streets). Of course, the more the capital is invested in land, the most inflexible the original shaping of municipal built-up is, and binds in a way the later planning. (P. Getimis, 1994). The growth of a city is drawn and promoted by the existence or the prospect of big installations of infrastructure in the region (harbours, new airports, transport links). At the same time, it causes the need of creating new infrastructures for its service.

- Mentality: the average Greek has close ties with the land. The procedures of land partition and transaction that took place to a great extent in the postwar greek society are due to the fact that many of the interior immigrants had turned to the purchase of privately-owned land and residence in the regions around the urban centres. The process of exploiting the land in the individual property, in regions that are not incorporated into an approved plan, begin with the changes in the property status, via the purchase of building grounds at the prospect of built-up development. These transactions usually happen without the existence of elementary technical infrastructure and urban planning. Thus, the continuous expansions of the urban centres in Greece, that follow the already formed partitionws and are adjusted to the property status of small ownership, prove the importance and the extent of this phenomenon. (P. Getimis, 1994)

The **factors** that influence are:

- Financial: during the present decade, the perspectives of the Greek medium-sized cities are not particularly favourable. Many of them suffer (obviously) an intense deindustrialization and are accessed into the programs for the declining industrial regions, while their tertiary sector either remains traditional (retail trade and local scale

services), or depends to a large extent on the tourism. Of course, the dialogue on the subject of spatial distribution of population and productive activities, in our country, is far from being completed. (G. Petrakos, Pr. Mardakis, 1999). Nevertheless ,the runs in the shaping of the urban fabric seem to be outlined from the pressures that are exercised on it by the productive classes, as well as their financial spreading. There are many examples where a city is expanded towards a factory or any place of production, where tens or even hundreds of workers are employed. Beginning with residence, the needs that are created are too many, mostly the ones that are sufficient for the daily service. One of the direct results of the appeal of population also the shaping of urban fabric. Besides, most of the public services are lodged in the centre of the cities. As a consequence, the demand of residences rises. In all these cases the construction of residences for the accommodation of employees is required.

- Social: the unemployment (that either exists or not) is one of the factors that play important role in the shaping of urban fabric, since it drives back or forth the citizens of the city and the productive activities respectively. Social exclusion, marginalization, racism, crime all these are social factors that govern the city's shaping. Certainly, these constitute future scenarios for the Greek reality that sooner or later will come true. All the above, give rise to rallies and focus on claims for social residence and upgrade of state services (or even municipal) in social benefits. (P. Getimis, 1999). Feminist and homosexual movements, and other special groups in the Greek cities may not be as developed as they are in other european cities but the moment is not long when they will make their appearance and govern the urban fabric as well. The movements the protection and development of urban environment (such as the greens) will also not be late to appear and take action (them too) in the shaping of our cities. It is also inevitable that the opposed and warring movements will lead to polarisations and to lack of dialogue and

communication, something that will directly effect the shaped urban fabric.

- Cultural: the planning of cultural and entertainment services is, at last, the responsibility of the local authorities. It is absolutely realised that the entertainment of citizens and tourists constitutes an important operation of the cities which are the centre of cultural productivity. The efforts of distributing cultural services in the space, particularly those with national or regional range, differs from country to country and from city to city with quite explicit motives during the last years. These motives are not only related to the tourist industry, in which the most important cultural industries play very important role, but they generally form a feature of the city's marketing, in which the cultural services play an important role to the shaping of the urban fabric. (A. Defner, 1999). A few examples of tourist resources that influence the development of a city are: museums, conferences, theme entertainment parks of recreation (first of all), as well as hotels, the markets and food/drink services (playing a secondary part). Beyond the direct effects of the use of land that could be used in agriculture, it could also be used in the expansion of structured region to the specific direction, in the overloading of urban infrastructure with streets, railway lines, parking lots etc, in the changes in the use of the land due to the growth of hotels /guesthouses etc, and at the same time in the reuse of abandoned buildings and the re-establishment and maintenance of historical sites and buildings. (A. Defner, 1999) .
- Policies: one of the most important factors that shape the urban fabric are the legal possibilities of residence construction, which are allowed before the 50's by the status of building outside the city plan. These potentials are given on certain conditions, such as the limit of ground's high standard that has less deviations than the given high standards and the definition of "attractive" building factors, that allow the largest possible exploitation of the ground. Furthermore, the signature by the responsible ministers of too many circulars aims at the same direction, that is the overcoming of

difficulties for the building of many small grounds. At the same time, special provisions with more flexible conditions are being set in order to that allow the building of grounds along the national or provincial roads (service roads), the railway lines etc. The most important factor , however , that determined the configuration of urban fabric, is arbitrary structuring. Given that small-holding dominates mostly the suburban regions, only certain grounds meet the legal requirements for building. Thus , the biggest part of the small-holders of ground turn to the illegal building (without authorisation), especially when there are sharp housing needs. The phenomenon of arbitrary construction took enormous dimensions in postwar Greece. According to the official records of ESYE (National Statistical Office of Greece), it is estimated that during the years 1955 - 1966 the percentage of arbitrary ranges between 17% and 27% in the private building activity as a whole (number of buildings). Arbitrary building was growing worse in periods of political crisis or even in pre-election periods when the political authority had showes tolerance. The isolated demolitions of very few arbitrary buildings took place only in order to set an example, since a strict implementation of suppression measures would have meant social tensions and new housing problems for a wide range of population. The tacit "consensus" to arbitrariness, along with the possibilities from time to time of legalisation arbitrary and the partial incorporations of regions in the city plan are those that shape, in the end, the city's look. (P. Getimis, 1994).

The example of Larissa

Larissa is a typical medium-sized Greek city that is on the increase. The population at the sensus of 1991, was 113.090 residents while in 2001 they was nearly 125.000 residents.

It is situated in central Greece, in the middle of the Thessalian plain and it next to the national road of Athens - Salonica. The Municipality of Larissa is not by the sea but the river Peneus flows through the city. Next to the city there is a military airport which is (at least up to now) in political use.

The river Peneus and the fertile agricultural ground act as a brake on the built-up growth of the city to the north. Very close to the neighbourhood of Hippocrates (in the N.W. of the city) is the village of Giannouli , which now joins the urban region of Larissa with the new tenement houses.

The city cannot expand to the East due to the fertile agricultural ground and also the growth of industrial - handicraft units to the link of the old national road of Larissa - Volos. The military airport (N.E. of the city), the railway line and the new national road of Athens – Salonica also contribute to the obstruction of the city's expand towards that direction. In the future, the region between the roads of Larissa - Ioannina and Athens - Salonica (S.W. of the city), will form the basic receiver for the city's growth and expand.

The city's weakness of covering the needs for a certain type of residences in the city's centre (in the high income classes), pushed some of the citizens into settle in the above mentioned regions (like in the village Terpsithea and the Municipality of Nikaia). Moreover, the University Hospital of Larissa, the new sports centre and the Municipal Art Gallery are located in the wider area. (C. Maloutas, Hr. Swmaras, 1999)

During the last fifteen years, on the one and only hill, that is situated in the city centre, works are being carried out in order to bring to light the city's ancient theatre. At the same time, the biggest part of the centre's road network has been pedestrianized. The abrupt exploitation of the area in combination with the modification of the ground usage resulted in the removal from most of the residences and the operation of stores as restaurants, bars and recreation centres.

In a relative study (Th. Maloutas, Hr. Samaras, 1999) it is reported that in the neighbourhoods where the working class is gathered – particularly in the districts Pyrovolika, Epirotika, Anthoupoli (in South), Neapoli (S.W.), Ippokratis (N.W.), in the south part of Ag. Georgios (in East) and in Ampelokipoi (in South) – the majority of the residents are repatriated from East Romylia (who were alloted land), Vlachs (Vlahoi), Karagounides and Sarakatsanoi and lately people from Agia, Tyrnavos and Volos.

The district of Ampelokipi (Tampakika) forms the old historical centre of Larissa that is encircled by the river Peneus. The district's area is completely restricted by the river and the fortress hill. The cathedral of Agios Achilios

dominates on the centre of the hill. For this reason the multiple generations of descendants who had inherited the parental properties were forced at first to split their building grounds and later on were led to exchange their land due to a particularly attractive building factor.

In the district of Railway Station (S.E.) the majority of residents comes from the Asia Minor and East Macedonia, while the rest of the regions have a mixed population. The existence of a railway line led the district to a linear growth.

The farmers are gathereed in the suburban regions and particularly in the districts Toumpa (S.E.), Agios Georgios (at the east side), Filipoupoli (N.W.) and Livadaki (at the west). These regions are next to arable lands and the access is easy. Many immigrants from North Epirus have been recently installed in the last two districts, since they can find employment in rural occupations there.

Finally, the main area of Nea Smırni is populated by the descendents of the refugees of Minor Asia. Another big part of the area is populated by groups of gypsies who have chosen this particular area because it gives them access to the old national road of Athens – Salonica for their commercial activities..

In conclusion, the the city's fabric still bears the traces of population's place of origin, infrastructures but also of the mentality of residents. Furthermore, the financial, social, and cultural factors are being (daily) involved in the process of shaping the urban fabric, guided by the existed policies.

The result shows that the spread of urban fabric towards the region, happenned without a general direction and organisation, and resulted to the shrinkage of free space, green and agricultural ground, the natural environment's distortion, and also the disorientation of organisation of growth. As a consequence, there is a waste in infrastructures and a low level in rendered services.

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