

Mataroa 2013 Summer Seminar: Against Crisis, for the Commons

Day 5 - July 18, 2013, Nas Village, 11 am-1 pm: Input rounds – Roundtable
Mediterranean meditations: On the possibility of a regional radical think-network

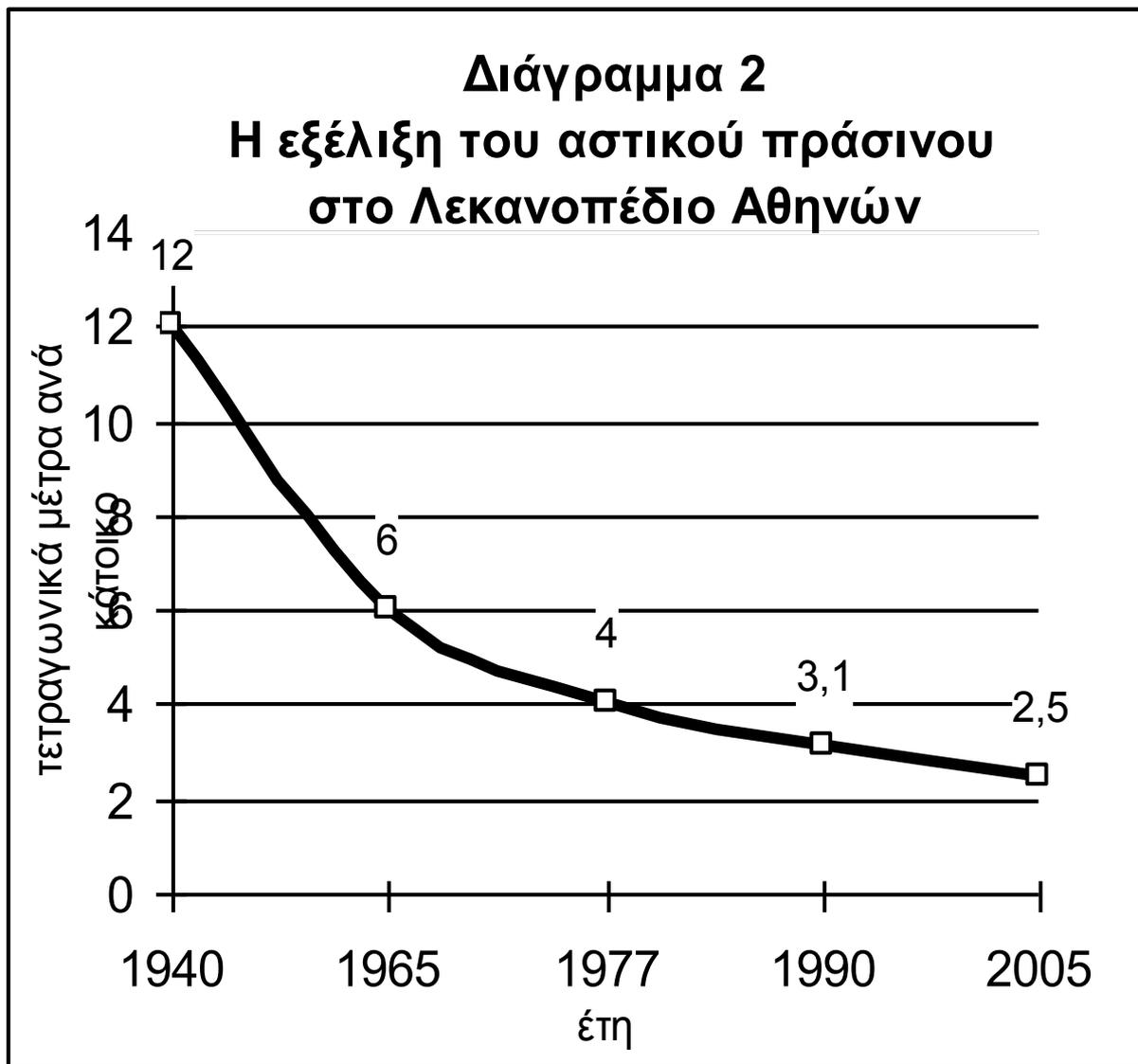
**Rethinking the local and horizontal characteristics of the green and open space city movements in Athens.
Facts and perspectives for a regional radical think network.**

Elias Gianniris [igiann@tee.gr]

ex prof of the Technical University of Crete, Dept of Architecture
Head of the “Athens’ Observatory of Open Spaces” (1999-today)

www.asda.gr/elxoroj

Urban green in the Metropolitan Athens (square meters per inhabitant)



European
average:
7 sq. meters/
inhabitant

- The proportion of built/unbuilt urban space is not monitored.
- There is **constant worsening of all urban indicators** which refer to the quality of life.
- There are **no policies for the increase of urban green**. Various existing urban and economic tools are not used to this purpose.
- There is **no official inventory** for the open spaces of the Metr of Athens.
- The legal and managerial framework for the protection of the open/commonly used spaces is **inadequate**.
- There is a **continuous building of small lots of downtown** and other densely populated areas.
- There is **no unified management of urban green** of the Capital.
- The urban green is scattered and **there is no effort for creating green corridors and green network** in the city and its surroundings.
- Recently, the newly founded **Green Fund** was disposed by 95% for the public deficit.
- **Contemporary forms of urban management** (governance, territorial governance, territorial cohesion, participatory democracy, participatory budget) **are systematically neglected**. The classic managerial forms of government prevail.

During the last decade, legislation, funding and various conditional adjustments were oriented to serve the post-modern phase of Greece; the private sector, particularly the construction and real estate sectors, were aided through long term programming (3d CSF 2007-2013, Olympic Games of 2004).

Local city interventions obtained priority in the place of comprehensive planning. In order to carry out the 3d Community Structural Fund, public land was used as part of the funding.

The Open Space and the Green were the victims of this political orientation.

The need for coordination became apparent in the mid 90's, during the preparations of the government proposal for the Olympic Games of 1996.

The Athens' Coordinating Committee for Open Spaces (1996-2011) successfully managed to coordinate various local movements aiming in protecting various neighborhood public/commonly used open spaces.

The longevity of the Committee is due to its organizational principles and functioning.

In the Committee there was no room for party or private interests.

All local movements as well as the pedestrian movements, the bike movement, the mobile anti-antenna movement etc, felt that they had a precious ally and soon the Committee became the center of information for city movements, journalists, active citizens, students and young groups

The Committee of Open Space in Athens had an important social influence in city movements and has even influenced the city politics for Open Spaces. This influence was apparent in the local elections of 2006 and 2010.

Pursuing a creative and active citizen had its price. The political parties were indifferent to these city movements since they could not infiltrate and control the Athens' Coordinating Committee for Open Spaces. In addition, very frequently the object of the Committee (the Open Space), confronted to big private intertwining interests often directly connected with the major Greek media (press, radio, TV). Despite the journalistic interest very few were published in the mainstream media.

In addition there was an Olympic Games embargo to information concerning the impact of the Games

Privatization-commercialization of Open Space was helped by incremental planning prevailed in the place of comprehensive planning. This was associated with the effort of creating a new type of citizen, a "false citizen" or "appropriate citizen", who conforms with the emerging entrepreneurial city

The issue of what is "public interest" and how it is served, was raised.

After December 2008 and the assassination of Alex Grigoropoulos by the police, new attitudes appeared in social movements

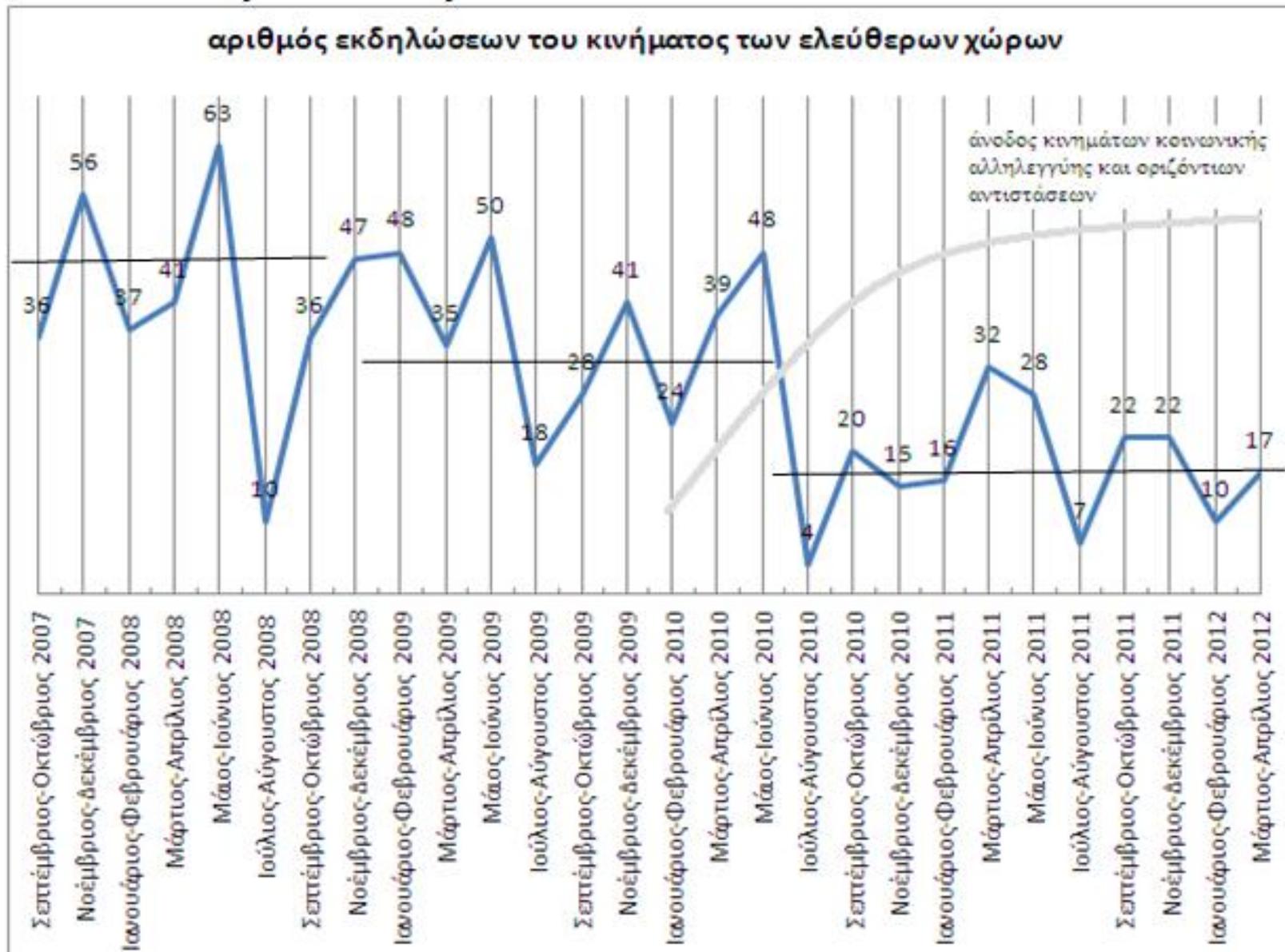
there seems to have been a kind of osmosis between this uprising and existing and new urban movements

After 2010, new politics (troika memorandums) had as result new urban movements, of thematic and horizontal character

After 2011, the Athens Coordinating Committee for Open Spaces is practically inactive

Evolution in the number of activities and events of Open Space movements (Sept 2007- April 2012)

Level 1
Level 2
Level 3



Facts and perspectives 1

- A discussion must open among city movements about the strategy needed in this new environment. The intellectuals involved in urban movements should play a crucial role.
- So far, the adaptation of urban movements to the evolving reality seems to be spontaneous and insufficient.
- New social initiatives emerge.
- Recent changes in the physiognomy of urban movements seem to threaten a precious heritage obtained by earlier urban movements.
- Political instability, social disintegration, the impact of a prolonged crisis, all these obviously lead to a fall of the viability of the city.
- It is raised the issue of what is “public interest” and how it is served.
- Local urban movements use networking. They apply the principles of Governance and frequently adopt direct democracy. Participatory democracy depends on the political orientation of the local, regional and national government, and to the adoption of governance by the representative bodies.

Facts and perspectives 2

- Labor Unions, professional associations and political parties use representative democracy and by their nature are selective in other entities which operate in a different way. Many radical, networked, direct democracy movements are outside their scope. The urban movements should not exclude in their actions the demand of help and/or cooperation to Labor Unions, professional associations and political parties.
- The quality of democracy becomes a main issue. Crisis is used as a neoliberal tool of consciousness assimilation and social automatism
- The voluntary depart of many youngsters from the city environment to the countryside or abroad is not assessed. First estimations refer to an urban exit of several hundreds of thousands of urban population. New social dynamic conditions emerge in the countryside.
- New bridges are created between generations, between social strata, between the city and the periphery.
- New networks are needed (a) between urban movements of various cities in a country, and (b) between countries.