

## The “public” (a modern-Greek particularity) and public space in modern Greece

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### Abstract

A generic approach of the public space perceives it as a *time-space continuum*. When public space is perceived as an interpersonal (face-to-face) interaction within a specific physical space, one can then understand the public space as *locally* defined. When the time space continuum is achieved at dispersed geographic relations through the digital and networking technology, then the public space is *electronic*. Public space can also be *extended* by embracing the Media (television, radio, the Press), the Internet and other means. The *democratic* public space is clearly defined when it's open to all, unrestricted as to conduct, and unconditional as to participation. The democratic public space is rather *practically* defined when it encourages the public access, when the status of state authority is muted, when barriers between governed and governors are abolished, when staging is arranged for people equally with officials as well, and when conditions contributing to deliberation and consent are equally fostered. In our paper we will only discuss the material public space and its peculiar perceptions by the modern Greeks. An unusual process took place during the territorial integration of the modern- Greek state. This gradually merged, and crystallized a mentality that nursed an idiosyncratic disrespect of all users towards the public space. The perpetual territorial re-demarcation of the modern-Greek state (1830-1947) consolidated a kind of haziness on the conceptualization of the public space. In other words the perpetual transformation of the country's borderline also deconstructed the respect for the public space on behalf of the citizens and also impinged -negatively- on the institutional enhancement and consciousness of the citizenship. The fact is a catalyst for the political system that never abolished its patron-client pattern. The Greek particularity about the perceptions of the public space conception identifies with a tampering or fusion of private property and physical public space or immaterial public sphere. Within the framework of the uses of 'public' and 'private' land we also refer to encroaches upon various areas and fields, stream and torrent polders, extensions of the sea-shore properties upon the beaches etc. due to lack of cadastre, forest tariff and so on. These contribute to disrespect and contempt of the public space, expanding to the public sphere and the legislation or any institutional framework for our compatriots. The paper draws from various fields: political philosophy on democratic theory, urban design, symbolism of public edifices architectural analysis and, virtually, from information technology. The synthesis of such a bibliography allows for a *holistic conceptualization* of the public space as time-space continuum.\* \*

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\* \* Within this concept of *continuum*, discourse, political communication and news are equally included; to this continuum the connection is prerequisite and interaction is allowed for this communicative experience. The specific *discourse* after the connection is established perceives that all connected partners may listen /see one another in a direct way. The continuum is continuously interactive, since participants may listen and with no delay may respond /react to the “dialogues” developed. This concept embraces the traditional form of a *time-space continuum*, that transforms the public space, and coincides with the material dimensions of an open city square, a meeting hall, and of-course is place-bound. All participants are in materially “sensed” relations, in a range allowing for direct visible or tangible encounter. Such an approach is the most efficient for a true connection and interaction. The perception of the public space as a time space continuum encompasses the discourse developed within the information technologies: internet and web chat-rooms, teleconference systems, comprehensive list-servs, open blog and chat software (msn, skype etc.) allow for an interactive communication within this global time space continuum to people in faraway places remote from one another and geographically sparse.

The space-time continuum may be conceptualized as a *landscape* in a wider meaning; this landscape is a natural scene *mediated* by culture. It's a space represented and presented, semiotically, a significant and a signifier in the same time, a frame and the content of the frame, a real space and its simulacrum, i.e. a wrap and the content of the wrapping.<sup>1</sup> A relevant conceptualization of the immaterial or material public space defines it as a space mediated by culture, an implement of local, social or collective identity formation. The public space within the Hellenic territory suffers from indeterminacy, producing haziness, and finally disrespect on behalf of the user, citizen, businessman or politician.

Citizenship and representation of the public space are directly related to visibility and the material presence in spaces of public access. Therefore, the space may not be really public, if its operation excludes specific constituents as users, such as children or juveniles (Valentine, 1996: 217).

According to Jürgen Habermas free access to the public space is one of the fundamental characteristics of the liberal civic societies.<sup>2</sup> However, others like Lynn Lofland (2000) and Richard Sennett (1977) have shown that the public space invoked by Habermas, isn't always universally accessible and that the public character of urban streets is full of contradictions.<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, civic public space was widened during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. In many areas of protestant communities, grand religious edifices opened their gates to the public, while many new roads had been constructed for public usage.<sup>4</sup> Public parks for recreation there had been created, being in contrast to the fences of the private gardens. Local authorities undertook mainly the maintenance of the public civic space.

The process of the territorial integration of the modern-Greek nation and state is rather unusual; this gradually contributed to a culture and a mentality in favour of the disrespect of all aspects of public sphere and space, a gradual disobedience towards all legal and institutional frameworks. The spatial redefinition of the modern state was a longstanding process of more than a century (1828-1947) and didn't but obscured the boundaries of the public land. Concerning the uses of public and private land we also refer to encroaches upon various areas and fields, stream and torrent polders, extensions of the sea-shore properties upon the beaches etc. due to lack of cadastre, forest tariff and so on. These contribute to disrespect -rather contempt- of the public space and enhance a wider antisocial and non-

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<sup>1</sup> (Mitchell 2002, 5)

<sup>2</sup> (Habermas 1962/1989)

<sup>3</sup> (Lofland 1973, Sennett 1977)

<sup>4</sup> (Olsen 1986)

citizen mentality. The fact is a catalyst for the political system that never abolished its patron-client pattern.

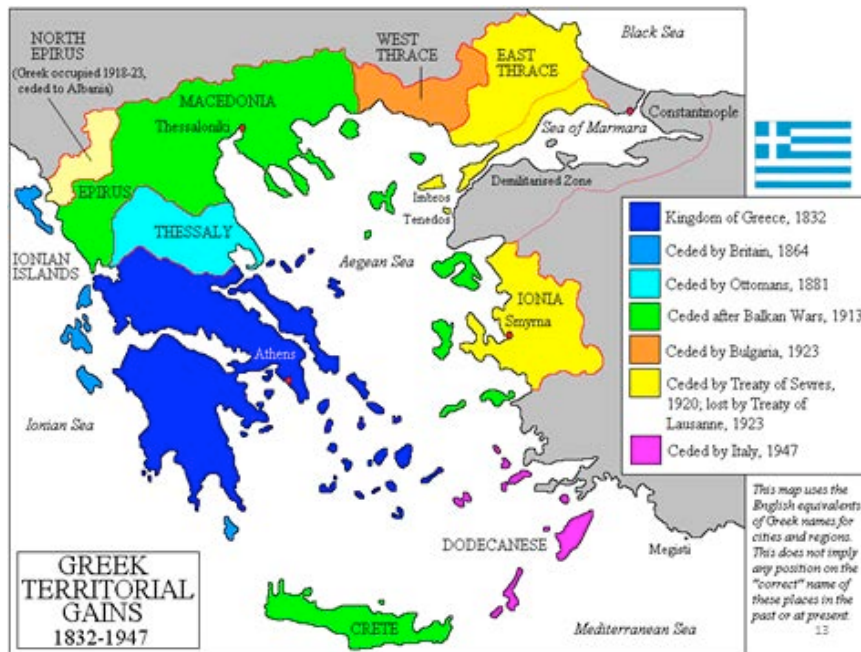


Fig. 1. The territorial unification of Greece 1830-1947

The post-civil-war urbanization and the post-war baby boom (1947-1965) attracted a large part of the population to the urban centers and especially Athens. This resulted to an augmentation of the residential development and growth together with an intensified economy of construction in order to meet the family need for shelter and jobs. The unspoken, lawless and clandestine agreement between users and local authorities on encroaching upon public land, the shucking of streams and shallow gorges around the urban areas, the arsons of forests and the immediate land development in plots for construction and housing consolidated the mentality of trespassing and stealing the public land and cultivated it as a common practice concerning the public space. The arbitrary construction of a house was easily legalized by the local administration and the relevant legislation forwarded by the parliament deputies. This process also consolidated the prosperity both of the users of the arbitrary constructions and of the political power administrators. This led to the profound rooting of a political, social, economic, and of-course cultural particularity of the modern Greek state regimes; the disobedience of the Greek people that enhanced the inescapable and complex political corruption due to an exchanging and patron-client interdependence for doing business in Greece.

Consequently, in modern-Greek society had never been cultivated a *social consciousness*, a *prerequisite for the formation of citizenship*; therefore, there has never been a *dominant ideology forwarding an institutional framework and the adequate legal toolkit for*

*the lawfulness, the egalitarianism, and the consequent obedience to the law and the respect of the public space.* The grassroots of the dominant ideology cultivate the self-interest and the wealth of a political bunch and administrators of the public space and the rest of the state's common wealth and goods.

And thus, *there's a failure of the oppressive intensification of the struggling reformers of modern-Greece to turn the quasi traditional population into a modern western-European society.* This may be considered as a positive development for the corrupted Greeks, but this intervenes to the cultural core of the Hellenic identity and unfortunately left no adequate time for adaptation to the new goals and the new standards of being modern-Greek.



Pic. 1, Somewhere in Northern Greece, Edessa

The endless, interminable attempt of the Greek state to define institutionally the spaces of public access and use maybe will be eventually defined within a broader normative framework of the European Conventions and rules, certainly as long as European Union survives from its continuous shocking challenges and pitches. The European culture, accompanied by its legal and institutional history, virtually functions as a collective identity formation mechanism and contributes actively to the cultivation of citizenship. The consequent political impact on the users of the public space will also induce cultural identity alterations. The cultural impact in a way renounces the subjective and relativist perceptions of the modern-Greek user (either governed or governing) about the public/private and regulates his behavior and mentality to criteria and values; thus, allows for a clarification of the haziness concerning public space. The modern-Greek public, that is the conglomeration of

private and public, is due to a consolidated collective perception in absence of obeying the law and the lack of social consciousness.

The institutional toolkit refers to the lack of a national cadaster of lands, forests and coastline. After funding by three Community Frameworks and spending tens of billions of euros Greece has not yet completed this cadaster, an appropriate implement for development. Any superficial reformation or modernization in the modern-Greek history never touched the issue of social consciousness of the users, and their citizenship qualities. Without these two national and supranational identity features it is impossible to enter any constitutional discussion about the public space. Modern societies are part of a clear continuum of the modern institutional transitions and cultural developments; it's a reflexive process of modernization, since modernity tends to be self-referential, while until now it was the opposite of tradition.<sup>5</sup> Modern Greece is in a state of fluid modernity<sup>6</sup> where tradition and modernity are still interwoven not allowing for a transition to clearly post-modern institutional landscapes. Within such a perception of a global fluidity the Greeks see themselves appropriate and conform to their 'priblic' behaviour.



Pic. 2, The Roma reservation in the urban space of Athens, Attica (2014).

The public sphere in the landscape and in the capitalist conditions of the liberal state has been a crucial space between the civil society and the state.<sup>7</sup> Our approach to the public space extends the social theory references on democracy, and enters the urban design and other sociological and political science issues, such as citizenship. Our perspective includes the

<sup>5</sup> (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991, Lash 1990)

<sup>6</sup> (Baumann 2007/9, 21-54)

<sup>7</sup> (Habermas 1989)

open spaces within the cities, functioning as sites of public use and interaction between the inhabitants. Streets, sidewalks, parks, squares, malls, beaches, under-deck parking (pilotis) etc., are equally conceived as crucial parameters of the collective identity and the life quality on the city.<sup>8</sup> The square in the urban space is not merely of recreation value, or contributing to the comfort of the inhabitants and the formation of a collective identity for the users, but is of an equal political value; the living public spaces within the urban spaces essentially promote participative democracy processes and mentalities.<sup>9</sup>



Pic. 3, Homeless immigrants in modern Athens (2013)

The public space mustn't be considered as having lost its social and political impact. The revolution of the information technology resulted to the outstripping of the industrial city and the functional foundation of the material space by the *informational* city, constituted by the e-flow and exchange between networks and hubs.<sup>10</sup> But this is another significant issue not to be discussed in this specific approach.

The public space is the field of research of the political analysis focused on the public architecture products. This analysis mainly focuses on the way that designing and symbolizing the material space enhance political authority. The monumentality of important public edifices (e.g., the Ministry of National Defense, the General Police Directorship of Athens, courts of justice etc.) release a sense of order, cleanliness, timelessness and,

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<sup>8</sup> (Goodsell 2009, 363-4)

<sup>9</sup> (Low 2000, 240)

<sup>10</sup> (Castells <sup>2</sup>2000, 2009)

predictability in reference to the state authority, while the emotional importance of architecture rests on a subjective level.<sup>11</sup>

In the same line of thought the study of the courts of justice, the monasteries or the concert halls lead us to understand that the design of these structures vests power to the judges, to the abbots or the orchestra conductors with their higher level podiums. However, this structure offers a tangible symbol of the common bond of the members of the organization or the institution hosted in these premises. The buildings, the edifices, encompass within their construction the entire organization and in a way they incorporate all its members in a universal way regardless of their individual prestige.<sup>12</sup> The authoritative (usually) leaders are those who tend to detach themselves architecturally-wise from the state corpus by opting for a remote and fortified residency.<sup>13</sup> They usually prefer not to allow for large openings (large doors or windows) in these buildings.<sup>14</sup>

Cities also open a window to the constitution processes of the modern world, allowing thus for a deeper understanding of their features. Modernists in the area of literature and the figurative arts offered to cities a face and a voice. Italian futurists enjoyed the frenzy rhythm of our big cities producing paintings according to the principles of Kinetic Art, just like the one titled *The city awakens*<sup>15</sup> by Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916), glorifying the urban reality in works like *The song of Mannheim*<sup>16</sup> by Italian poet Paolo Buzzi (1874-1956). As painter and art theoretician Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) claims the genuinely modern artist perceives metropolis as an Abstract life brought to form and shape. He feels the city closer than nature and is more possible that the city stimulates him with the feeling of beauty.<sup>17</sup> During the 1920s Walter Mehring (1896-1981) verses imitated the sound of a musical *staccato*, representing thus the mechanical feature of modern urban life— in brief called *Urban Machinery*.<sup>18</sup> Modernist urban designers and architects have influences the cities development and profile.

The urban spaces, the cities, have always been the focal point of modernizing visions of all kind. There were cities mustering the best and most avant-garde technologies in order to

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<sup>11</sup> (Edelman, 1995)

<sup>12</sup> (Markus, 1993)

<sup>13</sup> Palatul Parlamentului is the Romanian name of the biggest civil administration building in the world. It's in Bucharest on top of a hill, built in 1883-4 by Nicolae Ceaușescu; also known as the Parliament Palace or merely mentioned as his house.

<sup>14</sup> On these material openings there has been a discussion about architectural space in relation to the accessible public space (according to Jurgen Habermas's concept) with the architectural design by Zaha Hadid. More details in: Grossman, 2000 and Lasswell, 1979.

<sup>15</sup> (*La città che sale*, 1910)

<sup>16</sup> (*Il canto della città di Mannheim*)

<sup>17</sup> (Banham 1960, 152)

<sup>18</sup> (Hard- Misha 2008)

acquire the fame of modern. Paris, for instance, an already well equipped in circulation infrastructures with tramways and suburban railways, undertook the creation of a major subterranean *Métropolitain* as a construction to be presented in the World Exhibition, a World Fair, of 1900. Known as the Métro, this public work was originally modern and typically French: fast and clean, rational and technically developed, with entrances designed by leading figures of the *art nouveau* movement. Just like the buildings of the period designed by Austrian architect Josef Hoffmann (1870-1956), *métro* as a concept represented the idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This example was seconded by other European capitals, notably Moscow.<sup>19</sup>

During these decades, end of 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, roads in entire Europe were transformed. Their older multifunctional character, the empty space and the disarrangement gradually offered their place to adequately organized and to clearly bounded function zones where artifacts, systems and people hold their own concrete place. Today's roads are multileveled spaces: there are pavements and sidewalks for the pedestrian, median strips for a safe street-crossing, special traffic bus-lanes and tramways, bikes maybe, metro entrances and exits, parking spaces of-course and various stores, and open-air coffee shops. There are labels, signs and traffic lights, horizontal systems of signals, ruling on the street surface, but also cameras to control not only the traffic but the users themselves. The use of means to help inclusion or impose exclusion, have alter the character of the street as a public space. In brief roads and streets have been redefined by various technical means.

My interest focuses on the relations -and virtual interaction- of the different functions of the contemporary streets; empty surface, transportation, water works, separate and combined sewers, energy grids, aesthetics, sociality, politics and local administration. By the 1900 the electric tram appeared in European cities; in 1930 the first steps were taken to adjusting to the usage of car in the cities until its gradual domination of the car after the end of World War II; this proves that the identity of the modern streets results from a synergy between technical and social parameters. The spaces of public access are significant indicators of any active, sustainable urban environment. The best versions of such public spaces are appropriate for discussions, and non-scheduled, impulsive encounters and meetings between citizens who maintain different opinions about the world.<sup>20</sup> These spaces are fields of social and political interaction and active citizenship, within which personal identities are being constructed through non-mediated human encounter; they also educate the inhabitant of the

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<sup>19</sup> It's very interesting to notice that in the Webster's dictionary (1994) the word *métro* is defined as a European subway.

<sup>20</sup> (Blomley 2001; Young 1990, 2000)



city to otherness and the real need for good social manners.<sup>21</sup> In brief, these public spaces are material spaces where social interactions and all public activities of the members of the community take place.<sup>22</sup>

The public space either as a material space or as a time-space continuum carries material and immaterial facets. In order to clarify this modern-Greek particularity one should take into account the cultivation of social consciousness and citizenship; *the obviation of the patron-client relations in the core of the political system and, the materialization of all necessary mappings and cadasters and their normative implementation on all users, either mere citizens, businessmen, officials, governors etc.* Our approach encompasses various angles on public space from political philosophy and theory to social theory of democracy, urban design and the political interpretation of architecture. In short, the public space is defined as a social sphere of interaction and influence, focusing on political discourse, communicative action and other issues like alienation and state guardianship. The urban design perceives public space as an urban landscape, focusing on urban life and issues like redevelopment and restoration of the built environment. This approach perceived public space as a public edifice, with a social meaning and focuses on issues of coercion or identity.

Our holistic approach perceives public space as a time-space continuum. When this concept of public space is interpersonal within a specific material space, the public space is locally bounded; when the public space, regardless of its conceptualization, is open to all, without behaviour conformation restrictions or conditions for the access, then the public space is an entirely democratic public space. A practical definition of the democratic public space favours and encourages public access, the mitigation of state authority, the fading of the dividing lines between governed and governors, the egalitarian presence of both people and officials and, certainly, conditions enhancing the egalitarian debate.

By this approach the public space is a physical, material field of research for architects and urban designers, is an institutional landscape or mechanism for identity formation, as a cultural tool, as a communication network, as a modern-Greek public. The coined word 'public' derives from *private* + *public* (like *glocal* > *global* + *local*); in Greek the coined term is *ιδιώδημον* (from *ιδιωτικό* + *δημόσιο*). There is certainly a need for research in many aspects of the notions and concepts included in this approach, either being examined or merely implied. Such a research area is the social control in public access spaces: do the public access spaces being under private security protection acquire higher levels of safety or control? Which parameters of propriety and administration status improve control or hosting

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<sup>21</sup> (Rogers 1998, Lofland 2000)

<sup>22</sup> (Mitchell 2003, 131)

of their users? Do users' personal particularities create different perceptions on control and the private or public administration of the public access spaces?

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