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Opening Omonoia square to the public space of Athens

ABSTRACT

Opening Omonoia square to the public space of Athens is the venture for the revelation of the multidimensional centre of the city. With the study of the chronology, the detection of the potential spatial powers and the problems of the core of the city is clear that the original identification of the centre is vital. Hence, the specific thesis recognises this need and activates the square of Athens with its connection with the existing city structure, which consists of the buildings, the roads, the regions and the points of view. With the creation of a central pedestrian zone and a suggestion of an alternative mode of circulation of the vehicles, the centre communicates with the city with the exploitation of the unused places of ground floor which open to the public space. More specifically for the Omonoia square, after having contact and meetings with Attico metro, the current restrictions of the design of this space were taken into consideration and smoothly introduced to the synthesis which is based on the city lines. With the literal opening the hidden levels appear and communicate. Thus, the square is friendly to the citizens and invites us to walk to the place with the colourful plants, to rest and watch the public events and to visit the small market- spaces of the square with synthetically common design. Summing up, the Omonoia square faces the reality and is opened to the public with the revelation of the heart of Athens.

Keywords : public space, multidimensional city centre, identity of the centre, pedestrian zone, public functions of the square

INTRODUCTION

In every centre the public spaces are of great importance not only for the complete design of the city but also for the society and the rhythm of daily life. The central square is the core of a vivid city, full of movements, combining means of transport and connecting diverse regions. Omonoia square is the heart of Athens, having a long history in urban planning and social meaning. After having been transformed several times, it is nowadays a place with hidden strengths and potentials and the public character is partially lost. So, the aim of this research is to take advantage of the existing virtues and perspectives of Omonoia square, developing of reconnecting this central public space to the urban city web and the daily routine of Athens.

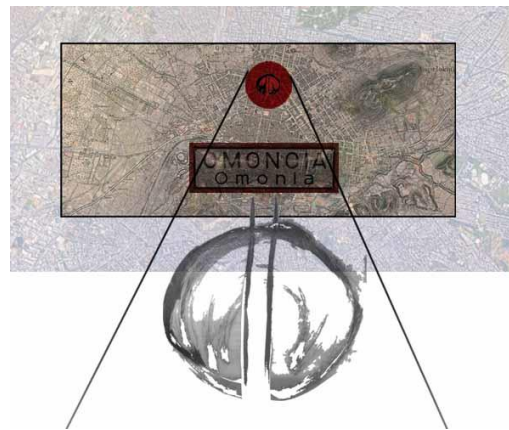


Image 1

DATA AND ANALYSIS

The study of the periods and the shapes of the square is important so as to understand the previous stages of the central public space and its consequences to the citizens. There has been a long history of the diverse designs and functions of the square and thus the relation to the city changed from time to time. The first design of the square in the map of Athens occurred in 1833 by Kleanthis and Schaubert¹. This public space obtained different shape, rectangular (1846) or circular (1954)² and there were always means of transport and connections with other regions. Until the last configuration, Omonoia square was full of life, a vivid part of the city web and of the daily routine of the citizens and visitors. Nowadays, the current square is a *colourless void*, as its character is complicated. It is not a reference point and people prefer mostly the underground movements, either for crossing the roads or for using the metro lines. Because of this lack of character of the central square of Athens, this research was motivated so as to study, to discover and to develop a way of connecting the centre of Athens, which is Omonoia square, with the city and its life.



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4

The central square of Athens has a great history as it was from its early stages a space full of experiences. It is a point of reference and the space of memories, feelings, sounds, perfumes, meetings and conversations. It is was an intense core for the citizens, full of advertisements, lights and life. There were special roles of the people giving character to the city centre, as for example the newspaper seller. This place is a conjunction of means of transport with dynamic movement of the people, as there were buses, trolley buses, the train and the tramway. As for the entertainment, Omonoia combines many choices for an interesting break from the daily routine. There were many theatres and cinemas, cafes where people had conversations and other activities, patisseries, breweries and pharmacies where educated people had their meetings³ (compared to the cafes, where there were all social proveniences). Also, as a city centre there were hotels around the square so as to accommodate any kind of tourist. It was easy to find a shelter in the centre so as to visit the city and to take care of any kind of pending activities and bureaucracies.

The aim of the design of Omonoia centre was to satisfy the needs of the citizens with the market (Near Monastiraki), the hotels, the cafes and the pharmacies, the theatres and the cinemas, the offices and the services. It seems that Omonoia square was a unique and inseparable piece of the whole city web, very well connected to the urban life and daily routine, as the centre was always full of life and energy of the people.



Image 5

It is important to understand the qualities and the potentials of this central place. In this way its pure meaning and social and public strength will be revealed. Firstly, there is connection via means of transport and basic road axles with the two basic points of arrivals and departures, the port of Piraeus and the airport of Eleftherios Venizelos. Also, Omonoia has many significant places and landmarks around her, with historic, social, environmental, cultural or educational value.

Another important factor is the relation of how pedestrians and vehicles move in the city and most importantly around the centre of Athens. For this reason, a research was carried out and in the study is presented the notation of the pavements, the sidewalks, the streets for pedestrians, the galleries and the loggias as well as the basic road axles for bus, trolley bus, cars and other vehicles. The connection of diverse regions is shown in the maps with this information. In addition to the pedestrian movement and the road axles, the means of transport and the relation between them and the centre of Athens are indicated. There are metro line 1 and metro line 2, as well as many buses and trolley buses which connect various regions. Omonoia square is an important core of transportation which sends and receives movements and flows.

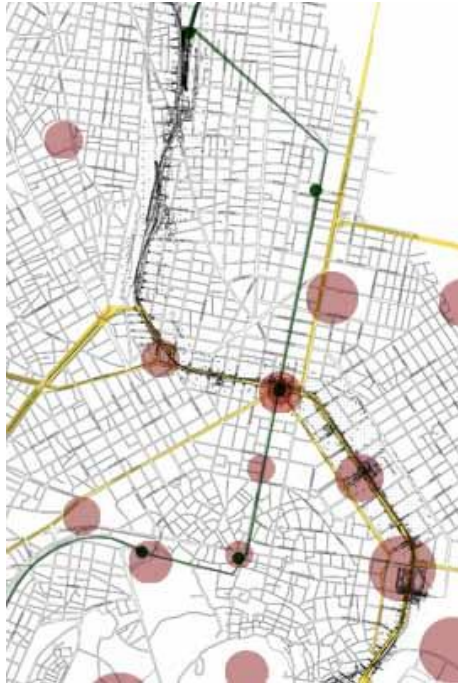


Image 6

After having noted the potentials of this central place, one could continue with discovering some problems and problematic situations. Watching the uses and the functions of the ground and upper floors of the buildings of Omonoia it is shown that there is dominance of commercial uses in the ground floors and of services and offices in the upper floors⁴. But the most important conclusion is that there is no pivotal relation nor interaction between the buildings, their functions, their users and the square.

Moreover, there is much interest in the study of the kind and character of the market around Omonoia square. With registering and photos of the signs of the stores, it is concluded that there is a distinct separation between the east region of Omonoia and that of west. At the east side and heading towards Syntagma there are labelled stores, the worldwide well-known ones, with impersonal relationships of people and marketing techniques. On the contrary, at the west side of the square and heading towards Metaxourgeio there is diversity of the origin of the products, local character of the merchants and kind willing of personal service. In a place with this kind of market variety it is easily read that Omonoia has wide cultural shine. In addition to this, Omonoia has always been the centre of demonstrations and manifestations of any kind of organizations. Thus, it is a vivid city core with cultural diversity.



- house
- market
- restaurants-cafes
- library-bookstore
- education
- service
- parking
- no use
- square

Image 7

After the cultural interpretation, one should continue with the examination of the streets around the square. The main means are the observation and the photographs. The streets have different characters with much interest in discovering it. For example, 3rd September Street, Aghiou Konstantinou Street and Panagi Tsaldari Street have similar characteristics as the disturbing presence of vehicles, stores in the ground floor with touristic products, mobile technologies, cafeterias and snack bars, abandoned buildings with beauty of the past. Athinas Street and Stadiou Street have also stores in the ground floors, with a bit more variety of products (especially in Athinas Street where there is also Varvakeios Market). Then, there is also Panepistimiou Street with more known stores with marketing techniques, public spaces and ways of entertainment (theatres, cinemas). All the streets around Omonoia square have interesting prospects and views which worth admiring.

CONCEPT-METHODOLOGY

At this point, the main idea and the concept have better be presented. The aim of the research is to accentuate the need of the determination of Omonoia square, which seems to have been lost. It is a place with much strength and importance for the city web and this core has to come to the public surface and present its multifunctional character.

The methodology of the research starts with the study of current problems and continues with the development of the potentials of the centre of Athens. In this way, the main proposal can be summarized in a circular design expressing the crucial central point of the heart of the city which can be accentuated with the opening of Omonoia square.

The aim is to accomplish the design of a vivid city centre for the citizen, the traveller and the visitor. This is going to be a vital and pivotal part of the entire city web, as it is an activated core which offers daily activities in the everyday life of the city. Furthermore, there is strong connection with the buildings, the streets and the prospects around the square, as well as there are relations with the nearby neighbourhoods and regions.

MANAGEMENT OF OMONOIA

The proposal of management of Omonoia is based on creating pavements in the streets around the square for the facilitation of the pedestrians. The new pavements are between the streets Veranzerou, Sokratous, Evripidou and Aiolou, with the only exception of the Streets Peiraios and Stadiou. As Omonoia is an important place of transportation, it is not completely deprived of the vehicles but they are reduced so as to limit the disturbance and to free the walking of pedestrians. The alternative route of vehicles has been thoroughly studied so as to satisfy any potential road connection.

Also, it is strongly recommended the start of a politics of using the empty spaces in ground floors of Omonoia, basically around the square and afterwards all over the area with the pavements. These spaces can obtain functions as storages for equipment for external exhibitions, laboratories, projections, or even lectures in open spaces. In this way there is immediate and vivid connection between the square and the buildings, which now collaborate with the public space in harmony.

ATTICO METRO

Analysing with detail Omonoia square created the need to discover the current plans and designs. Attico metro had the generosity and the willing to start the interesting collaboration and communication for the data needed for the present research. With the study of the designs and the understanding of the special needs of such a venture of opening Omonoia square (literally and metaphorically), the research and the proposal accomplishes to satisfy all the technicalities and to combine the urban design of a public space with the restrictions of the underground metro stations⁵.

MASTERPLAN

The main design of Omonoia square is circular so as to accentuate the meaning of the central point, the core, the heart of the city which is in harmonious synthesis with the basic city axes. The axis of 3rd September Street and Athinas Street is visible in the design of the square, as a hole which makes visible the inferior levels. The connection is not only visible, but there is also sound and appearance of the multilevel core of Omonoia square. There are bridges for the pedestrians so as to cross the parts of the square.



Image 8

At the level of Omonoia square, there are three basic points with the same kind of synthetic operations. The first point is the *garden*, full with small colourful plants with unique natural perfumes. The synthetic scale of triangles is small, while it becomes bigger as one heads to the other two points of the masterplan.

The second point of the square is that of *stay*, the place which is a meeting point, a reference point, a place to watch, to enjoy a break. There are inclinations on the wooden triangles (planking) with a play of heights.

The last point of the synthesis is a small sheltered market with bigger scale of plywood triangles. There are benches for florists, local products, sweets, books, herbs, dried fruits, handmade products and other goods.

It has been also considered a place designed with panels for exhibitions, photo or drawings with equipment which is sheltered in the empty spaces of the ground floor, which are now used in the design.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the opening of Omonoia square develops the necessary operations for the emergence of the hidden virtues of this historic central place. It is strongly connected to the urban web, it is a significant point of reference in the city of Athens and it combines many means of transportation. It could be defined as the starting point of any route of a visitor because it is near every important place of the capital. Many landmarks are around the square and thus the multifunctional meaning of Omonoia is indicated, as it collects cultural, social, environmental, educational, historical values and references. The city is a well connected vivid entity having its heart in the city center, the Omonoia square which is now open to the public space of Athens.

Images

Image 1 : Kaupert (1875), map of Athens, personal elaboration

Image 2 : Mpiris, K. (1996). Athens from 19th to the 20th Century. Athens: Melissa. Wordsworth, C. 1837

Image 3 : Omonoia square (1970). <http://ngradio.gr/news/various/gia-tin-omonoia-omfalo-tis-polis/>

Image 4 : Omonoia square (2001). <http://www.newsbomb.gr/tags/tag/50125/plateia-omonoias>

Image 5 : Buses leading to Omonoia, personal design

Image 6 : map of Omonoia with metro lines and road axles, scale 1.25 000, National Technical University of Athens

Image 7 : designs of uses, functions and character of market at Omonoia, scale 1.200 000

Image 8 : masterplan of the research Opening Omonoia square to the public space of Athens, scale 1.8 000

References

¹Karidis D.(2006), The seven books of Planning, Papatotiriou (in greek). D. Filippidis (2009), Ephemeral and Everlasting Athens, PIOP (in greek)

²Karidis D.(2006), The seven books of Planning, Papatotiriou (in greek). D. Filippidis (2009), Ephemeral and Everlasting Athens, PIOP (in greek)

³<http://www.iefimerida.gr/news/125461/%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B5%CE%B2%CE%BF%CF%8D-%CF%83%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%BC%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%AC%CE%BA%CE%BF-%E2%80%93%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%B9%CF%83%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C-%CF%86%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%BC%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%BF-%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82-%CF%80%CF%8C%CE%BB%CE%B7%CF%82-%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%B1%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%84%CE%AD%CE%BB%CE%B5%CF%83%CE%B5-%CF%83%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%BF-%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1%CF%86%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%AC%CF%82-%CF%84%CF%89%CE%BD>

⁴Batoudi A.(2008) *Study of urban planning and traffic elements of Omonoia Square and other squares of the center of Athens, proposal of reformation of Omonoia square*, thesis, Athens, National Technical University of Athens

⁵ http://www.ametro.gr/?page_id=81