

A study of the development of commercial activity in city centers: the Commercial Triangle of Athens

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SUMMARY

Over the last decade, Greece has been the field of a series of changes with respect to real estate and the form of retail trade. With the financial crisis and the insufficient adaptation of the local economies to the standards of globalized economy being the main cause, retail trade is experiencing changes not only in its location and organization but also its basic business unit structure, which, in the case of Greece, is SME (Small and medium-sized enterprises).

One of those changes is the development of new commercial areas in the outskirts of cities in response to their declining commercial centers. Such cases are the big shopping malls and discount villages, which after being introduced in America and Europe, have also made their appearance in Greece.

This practice has proved successful, since these shopping areas manage to attract a large number of visitors daily. However, it has to be pointed out that such establishments cannot serve the needs of consumers effectively due to the time-distance factor, while at the same time their inactivity during the hours and days of non-operation of the stores could be regarded as a waste of space.

These issues can be mitigated through the development of open malls in city centers. This practice contributes to the simultaneous regeneration of neglected urban areas, especially in large urban agglomerations.

This study is aimed at identifying and analyzing these specific issues by presenting a similar proposal for the areas known as the commercial triangle and Gerani. The aim is to define the framework for remodeling the existing Athenian commercial center in order to reduce the spatial effects of the crisis. For this reason, base information was collected via literature review in order to undertake a site analysis in which it was based the formulation of design intervention proposals. It may be noted that it was significant to examine the international experience concerning the practice of open malls, ways were identified to implement similar interventions and specific types of interventions were proposed tailored to the specific circumstances of the Athenian example.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 20th century is a period in which a number of changes were observed in urban areas. These changes pertain to both the form and function of cities which are significantly altered in their entirety, with direct influences in their central regions, where their most important activities took place historically and therefore constitute their key sensitive point (Aravantinos, 2002).

The above observation raises questions about the meaning of the center. How is the center of a city defined and how was it affected by the structural and social changes of the previous century?

The approaches vary. According to McCann (2002), the concept of the center is directly linked to its business and commercial activity. Indeed, this is true in many cities around the world, such as America and Australia, where the center is identified with the term Central Business District (CBD). In the above definition, Aravantinos (2002) adds that the concept of the center, in addition to its economic activity, is associated with the exercise of power and the sharing of ideas, through daily interaction, culture and art, common in European and Eastern cities in which the center is a wide area incorporating a special mixture of activities. These activities are developed independently and not co-supportively and thus, economic activity coexists with culture and recreation, the driving forces behind human concentration in a European city.

Morphologically, centers have a similar typology in which the public urban space plays a key role. Such key areas are the urban square and the street. The first one comprises an imaginary, symbolic and materialized node, with a strong sense of centrality given its morphological and geometric layout (Moughtin, 2003; Carmona, 2003; Kyriakidis, 2015). While the second sometimes acts as an artery that animates squares or alternatively as a narrower and oblong square, which, as in the case of the square, is due to the vitality of land uses that stir social interest (Moughtin, 2003) and are part of a (semi-) public concept (Kyriakidis, 2015).

Because of the multiple functions of the central regions, there is a tendency towards the development of more central cores, even in medium-sized cities. The concept of the “open city” promoted in Greece through the development of functional spatial units, where a residential network of towns or villages comprises a polycentric reality is applicable proportionately to the large cities, on a different scale and lower standards of services. In such cases, there is an obvious relative specialization of centralities for the purpose of dispersing activities with a view to balance the development of the settlements.

Such, however, "specialization" is also observed in large cities due to the existence of many centers. Typical examples of this, are the cases of business centers and art and recreation centers throughout the European territory, like Canary Wharf in London, Potsdamer Platz in Berlin and the City of Arts and Sciences in Valencia. In these cases, each center is identified

as a different area due to the fact that both their functions and their architectural morphology differ considerably. However, commerce is a common variable almost everywhere, since it is organized as an independent element only in suburban or outer ring areas (Gospodini, 2006), in the form of shopping malls, as a result of technological developments in transport and communications (Gamagari, 2000) and, by extension, the intensification of interactions with the surrounding residential network (Arseniou, 2009) and savings (Begg et al., 1998). The spatial organization of commercial activity is the subject of the next section which attempts to approach the matter over time.

2. APPROACHING THE PHENOMENON OF COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY IN URBAN SPACE

In the previous section it was noted that the commercial activity is a thriving activity in the urban fabric. In recent years, out of necessity, retail trade has become a trend and a way of life in the context of projected consumption patterns. This trend, combined with extended sprawl trends, has led to the development of intervention points where businesses could enjoy “economies of scale” and to which consumers can have easy access. Shopping malls became a reality in the second half of the 20th century in America and a little later in the northern and central Europe, setting aside commercial centers and smaller linear commercial activity nodes along key roads that had been up to that point the heart of commercial activity.

In this context, the approach of Agnew (1987) speaks of places without character and an almost indifferent sense of space. This relates to the views of Appleyard (1982) according to whom the new developments, often in the West are more centered on the acquisition of capital and power and less on the promotion of character and social development. However, in light of the above aspects, one wonders whether even these places, the big malls which are mainly built on economic grounds, create a certain sense of space. Based on the view of Relph (1976), even these types of developments are of specific character given the fact that the user of the site can realize when he or she "enters" or "exits" these areas since they are characterized by a peculiar organization and form.

In any case, however, cities comprise a space where people with different, social, economic and political backgrounds meet, and as such they are a subject of perception and experience (Parmenides & Charalambidou-Divani, 1989). They are places where the sharing of ideas as well as the movement of people take place, since in our times migration, legal or not, is a fact. Each social group, defined by certain common characteristics, tends to be polarized in space. In places where the polarization is strong and significantly different from the prevailing approach expressed through organized malls, its expression in space is also stated through the appearance of more traditional, open markets, especially in places where there is no building limitations between urban space and retail trade but a freer interaction prevails.

Such cases of markets can be found in many cities around the world. They are many times distinguished based on their category of produce, such as food markets, leather markets, traditional buzzards, etc. There are also, however, more conventional markets that, despite being characterized by an original and almost traditional sense of space they actually operate as a whole and under a scheme of joint management thus establishing another type of market, the open mall. According to Geren (2016), the open malls are areas with shops which are "partners" or "tenants" of the open mall and in which there are no enclosed spaces between

the shops. The characteristics of an open mall are better addressed by Ching & Winkel (2016) according to whom, the connecting streets between the shop sites are usually pedestrianized, thus implying a car-free zone, and the height of the buildings is low (maximum building height -three floors). It is a formation in the city which has blurred the boundaries between the mall and the city, according to Frieden (1994). It looks like a part of the city and not an independent business district, non-public (on the whole) property. Indeed, in cases where the climatic circumstances permit it, an open mall can work particularly well (Frieden, 1994).

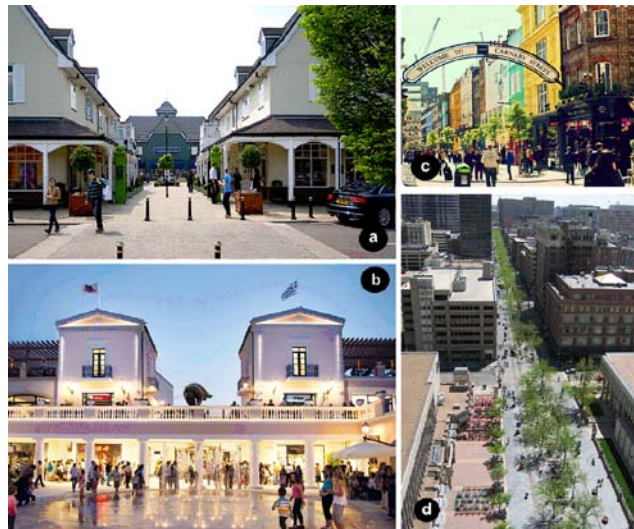


Figure 1. a. Bicester Village: an open mall in the outskirts of London; b. McArthur Glen in Athens (outskirts); c. Carnaby Street in London; d. 16th Street Mall in Denver.

Source: a. <http://www.lsharch.co.uk/bicester-village.html>; b. <http://www.thatslife.gr/tag/mcarthur-glen/>; c. <http://www.chsrentals.com/carnabv-street/>; d. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th Street Mall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th_Street_Mall)

The success of open malls compared to common shopping centers has resulted in this example being developed in both urban centers and their outskirts, in such high concentrations that they could be identified with suburban or extra-urban epicenters of commerce and recreation (Gospodini, 2006), which were discussed in the previous section. A typical example of the former is the case of Carnaby Str. in London (Figure 1c) where through specific policy and management the district has achieved recognition as a predominantly commercial area in the center of London, despite its proximity to the commercial axes of Oxford Str. and Regents Str. The latter is a category that includes the famous discount villages (Figure 1a,b) developed in all major European capitals, Athens being one of them. These particular spatial concentrations usually display urban morphology sharing the characteristics of the areas they occupy.

However, the crisis appears to influence significantly the choice of location for the businesses and thus the organization of open malls. A recent ACCI study (Attica Region and ACCI, 2016) supports that a large number of companies prefer to establish themselves in areas that already have a commercial character, high consumer traffic, easy accessibility and a high quality environment. In that case, it can be concluded that the central areas of Athens are more favored than regional commercial spots/centers and as such, at this stage of the city's life cycle, the centrifugal forces that contribute to its organization are more powerful than the centripetal ones (Colby, 1933).

The above assumption sets the framework within which this problem solving process of this study is developed, and through which the formulation of proposals is attempted for a substantial revitalization of the center of Athens.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the previous sections it was mentioned that shopping malls have been developed in the outskirts of cities. In Athens, there are quite a few in the periphery as well as in various neighborhoods. At the same time, the city center is declined and as a result, a large proportion of the Athenian population prefers shopping centers contrary to the city center. Hence, a main query is raised: How can we regenerate the Athenian center in order for the city to be livelier and for the commercial activity to be upgraded?

An obvious answer could be the development of an open mall. However, the matter was how to develop an open mall and what interventions should be implemented in order for this proposal to be a successful one. In order to answer this research question we decided to examine some famous open malls as case studies. Case study research is a form of qualitative descriptive research that, among others, analyzes policies and decisions (Thomas, 2011). According to Bakogiannis et al. (2014), case studies are quite a successful method in urban planning and sustainable mobility projects that offers the potential of comparing similar practices in different urban environments and helps gathering new information, both qualitative and quantitative (Jennings, 2001).

Concerning the study in the Commercial Triangle of Athens, secondary data were used in order to analyze the existing situation in the studied area. The situation was assessed and recommendations were proposed for the development of an open mall in the area. Mapping was also used for illustrating the existing situation as well as the proposals were formulated.

4. AN OPEN MALL IN THE ATHENIAN CENTER

4.1 The initial idea

Recently, a proposal to develop a new commercial center in the center of Athens was suggested by the National Confederation of Hellenic Commerce (ESEE). A better wording would speak of the reorganization of an already existing commercial center/core in the north east of Omonia namely between the streets of Ch. Trikoupi – Solonos – Kaniggos – Veranjerou – Patision - Panepistimiou (Figure 2). This area, located in close proximity to the commercial triangle of Athens and Gerani locations, which are historically established as trade areas, exhibits an existing commercial activity. However, it is relatively limited, probably due to the poor quality of its urban environment (small streets and tiny pavements, high building density, old buildings, small open spaces, a primary road (Academias St. crosses the area) and its limited variety of shops. The open mall of Athens seemed to be an organized effort to implement an investment plan which would include local businesses operating in the framework of a common policy (S.S., 2014). The actions would be focused on mapping the open mall, taking action to better promote and advertise the commercial enterprises, combined with leisure activities, such as street events and social events and the implementation of a specialized marketing plan (Fortune.com, 2014).



Figure 2. The first idea for the development of the Athenian open mall. Source: Own elaboration

In addition, however, to the promotion of businesses, the fact that the region will have a specific character and will serve as a new epicenter and a reference point is considered positive (Katsoli, 2014). In this context, such an action, in conjunction with the redevelopment works of Panepistimiou Street, would significantly contribute to the revitalization of the greater area of Omonia.

Ultimately, both projects have not implemented. Panepistimiou Street will continue to be under the occupation of cars with its pedestrianisation, even as a festival -temporary -symbolic action seeming distant. At the same time, the idea of the open mall could not be implemented in the remaining, due to red tape, limited time frame required in order to be eligible for funding by the NSRF for 2007-2013 (Gounaris, 2015).

And while it seems that a great opportunity for the center of Athens was lost, another view claims that this approach would not have had the expected positive effects as it was initially believed. The reasons are not related to the idea of open malls, itself, but to the area which was chosen for its development. Alternatively, other central areas could be proposed with better urban characteristics that favor savings and a greater absorption of funds in the actions taken for its promotion.

On the following pages there is an attempt to establish such a view, proposing a neighboring region as an ideal open mall.

4.2 The open malls through international experience: Urban Features

Open malls appeared in an organized manner in America in the 1960s and 1970s in response to suburban shopping malls (Memphis Center City Commission, 2008). Based on this concept approximately 200 such malls were quickly developed in North America, taking advantage of major streets to facilitate pedestrian traffic and to use as commercial activity spaces.

In retrospect, experience has shown that this contradicts the organization patterns of the American society. According to the findings of the Memphis Center City Commission (2008) research, large pedestrian roads led to the development of a sense of insecurity, as the number of empty shops increased and the functional magnetism of the area decreased. It appears, that the centrifugal forces expected to bring Americans to the center brought about different

results, because practically this could not be achieved through pedestrianisation, in a society where the average citizen travels everywhere with their car.

Indeed, in most examples in America, operating comfort (accessibility) was limited while, as noted previously, the functional magnetism (the region functioning as a pole of attraction, attracting consumers regularly to cover a range of their needs) and the functional prestige (developed fame) showed systematic reduction. In the same context, the poor, and at the same time different from the rest of the city, landscape limited solely to pedestrianisation interventions did not managed to attract consumers and over the years such areas declined further, as photographically documented. However, open malls located in close proximity to a pole of attraction such as a university, the waterfront, etc. received different treatment (Judge, 2013).

Therefore, the elimination or redesign of such projects prevailed. Indeed, as underpinned by a relevant study by Judge (2013), many open malls were redesigned focusing mainly on accessibility to both pedestrians within the region as well as their access to the area primarily by public transport. According to the same scholar, "by combining various modes of transportation, these spaces allow for greater access, connections, eyes on the street, and choice for the user".

In the new approach which can be described as a 'hybrid', the pedestrian is the primary user and for this reason is assigned more space, however, this does not exclude, but integrates infrastructure to allow access and connect these areas to the rest of the city. Typical such cases are the Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis, State Street Mall in Madison and Denver's 16th Street Mall (Figure 1d).

Nevertheless, pedestrianisation was treated differently in Europe. For decades the centers of many European cities, which were organized based on a pre-existing medieval network, utilized the limited public space and developed pedestrian areas in which the easy movement of pedestrians and cyclists is secure. Such areas, where social interaction and free movement are favored, were considered optimum for the development of commercial activity. Indeed, both in the European north and south, pedestrian sections of the city center are particularly lively during most of the day. However, key points are considered the proximity of the pedestrian areas to public transport, a good quality environment, a mixture of compatible land uses and the restriction of the intervention scale to reasonable levels.

Indeed, in the case of Carnaby Str. in London we can establish its proximity to metro and buses, the good quality of the environment, which is apparently regularly maintained, the mixture of commercial uses with recreational uses, offices and residences as well as its small size, which is restricted to the length of three blocks.

It should be noticed that a large number of open markets have also been developed in many Asian cities as well as in cities in South America. These open markets are traditional markets where residents and tourists can find various products (food, clothes, gifts, etc). However, most of them are not managed in planning and marketing terms. That is why they differ from organized and designed open malls and why we have focused on studying just the American and European experience.



Figure 3. The proposed open mall in the Commercial Triangle in Athens in a close proximity to the first proposed open mall (Source: Own elaboration)

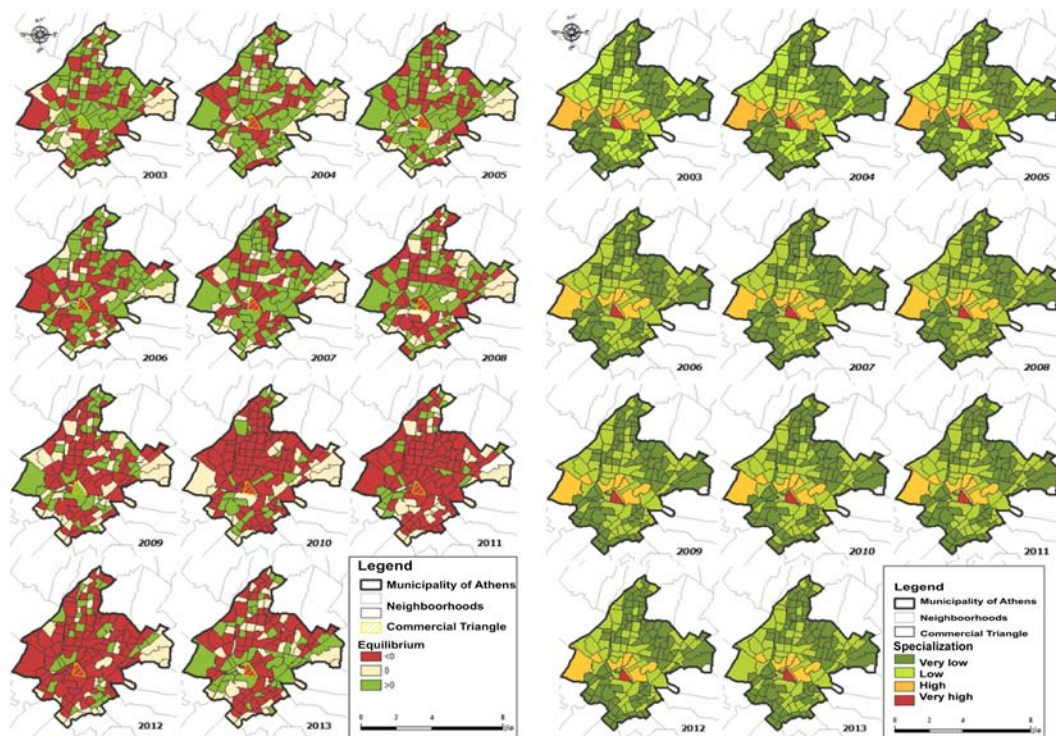


Figure 4 : Equilibrium between establishments and deletions of companies (left) – Specialization in activities in the neighborhoods of Athens (right) (source: Vasiliou, 2015)

4.3 Gerani and the Commercial Triangle of Athens

The Commercial Triangle (Figure 3 - right) is an area characterized by a mix of commerce and recreation. Historically speaking, it is considered a commercial center since during the second half of the 20th century it was used as a focal point of industrial production and trade (Kyriakidis & Siolas, 2013). The commercial activity blossomed there primarily due to the centrality of the region and secondly because of the fact that the bourgeoisie of Athens chose it as a meeting point, and a place where they could exchange their political ideas and share their culture (Miltiades, 2011).

The noise disturbance which developed during the 80s due to the growth of wholesale commerce and storage and processing of leather goods, was addressed by the institutionalization of the EMP study (1989-1991) through the reinforcement of housing and accommodation facilities (Aravantinos, 2007) and the removal of uses disturbing the peace. The numerous empty buildings, however, were delayed to accommodate new uses until in the early 21st century when the establishment of enterprises focused on leisure and art started (Kyriakidis & Siolas, 2013). Today, the Commercial Triangle is an area with high specificity rate as far as the type of entrepreneurial activity (Vasiliou, 2015) (Figure 4).

On the other hand, Gerani (Figures 3 - left) is clearly a shopping area of different character. It acts as an immigrant reception area, most of whom are passing by and who after experiencing Gerani as a stopping point continue their journey from their country to another country in Europe (Vlachou & Vaughan, 2015). Their settlement in the region has resulted in the market area catering accordingly, as required, to their needs and the needs of residents.

Indeed, despite its close proximity to the commercial triangle, its stores differ considerably.

Several shops are targeted at immigrants of certain nationalities, since even the signs are written in specific languages, while there is a large numbers of specialist shops, such as the spice and delicatessen stores in Evripidou Street. The contrast is also apparent on the form of the urban environment as well as the detectable absence of a mixture between commerce and recreation.

Athena Street, which acts as a separation axis between the two areas, is a road which connects Omonia and Monastiraki and on which are housed the Hall of Athens, Varvakios Market (central market of Athens) and a series of commercial activities. Although it serves a significant amount of traffic it does not prevent the easy movement of pedestrians and the communication between the areas.

In summary, it is clear that the above region varies considerably. Its diversity is apparent in urban morphology (Vlachou & Vaughan, 2015), in the level of urban architecture, environment quality, developing activities and social geography. These differences do not allow the area to be recognized as a unified commercial area but as a collection of sub-areas. Therefore, while the south part of the Commercial Triangle is perceived as a leisure center (Kyriakidis & Siolas, 2013), Gerani is considered a degraded area with an increased feeling of insecurity (Kyriakidis & Siolas, 2014). The degradation of the northern part of the area is also influenced by the low quality of the environment in Omonia.

Having taken the above into consideration, it is believed that the above-mentioned area comprises an ideal spot for the development of an open mall in Athens, as it presents a number of ideal characteristics identified in related studies (Judge, 2013; Attica Region and ACCI, 2016): (a) It is an area with easy accessibility as it is connected to the whole Athenian

agglomeration in various ways (pedestrian movement, public transport, cars), (b) it is already home to a large number of companies and a variety of commercial activities, and it was so in the past when viewed in historical context, (c) it is a region characterized by a mixture of land uses and (d) it is already pedestrianized to a large extent.

It is also quite important that there is a considerable number of buildings not being used today, which can be utilized for the development of new business in the region.

Finally, the northern part of the region is a central area which is degraded with relatively low land values (Vlachou & Vaughan, 2015) which allow for easier attraction of investments, as Figure 4 illustrates. An expected outcome would be the revitalization of the greater area, taking into account the overspill effect on neighboring areas.

4.4 Proposed Interventions and Expected Outputs

The aim of the proposed interventions –case studies help us determine these interventions (Table 1) - is the creation of a pedestrian friendly region (Figure 5), integrated with the neighboring areas and simultaneously regulated by uniform policies.

Table 1. Captions should be typed in bold lower case letters, centered directly above the table

Case study	Carnaby Street	16 th Street Mall
Location		
City Center	√	√
Public Transport	√	√
Morphology		
Linear/Network	L	L
Cultural Heritage-History		
Market tradition	+++ More than 3 century market-place	++ Business and shopping character
Specialization	+++ Specialization in clothing	+
Culture	+++ Hippie-style/Popular bands	-
Interventions and related policies		
Pedestrianization and Marking	+++ Pedestrianization (1973) / London's wayfaring signs (2004)	++ Pedestrianization (1982)
Land use policy	+++ Land use mixture-reusing unused areas-reclaiming areas reputation	++ Land use mixture
Organized management and marketing strategy	++ Website/Events	+++ Website/Meet in the Street Sunday events – activities bring people together
Sense of place/sub-areas	+++ Design-Morphology/ Kingly Court / Newburgh Quarter	+++ Design-Morphology/ Sings – banners

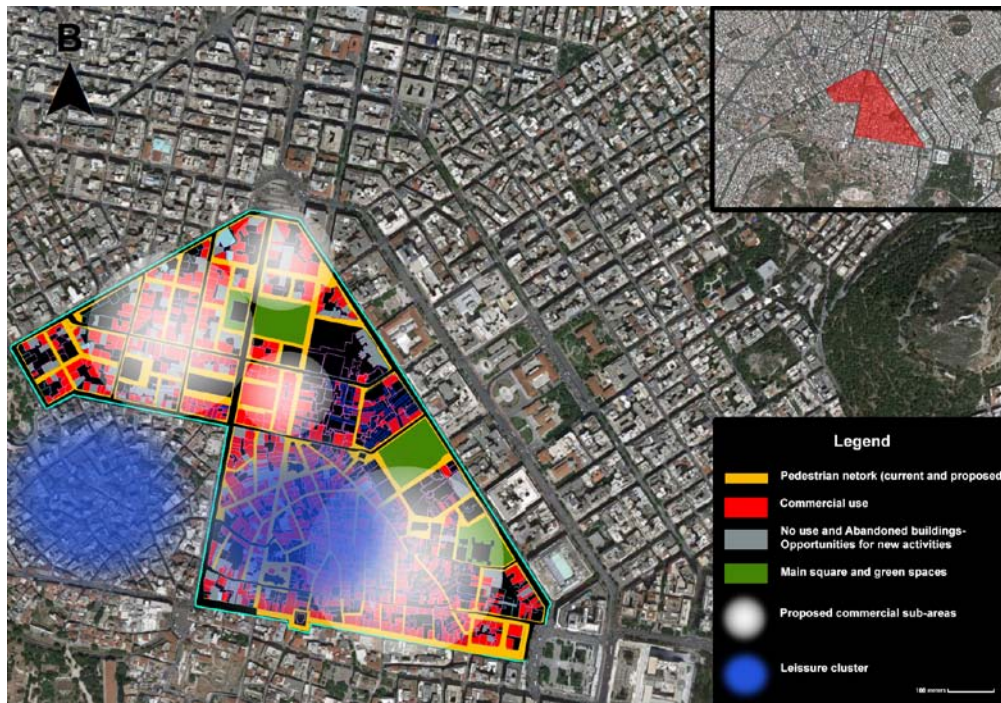


Figure 5. Conceptual proposals for the open mall in the centre of Athens. Source: Own elaboration

The main focus, then, of these interventions is to develop a car-free area where private motorization will be limited to small areas, while public transport will complement pedestrian movement and movement by bicycle. The expansion of the pedestrian network in the study area is believed to be able to link the areas of Plaka, Anafiotika and Thissio, following in the direction of the first applied interventions which have taken place in the context of the unification of the archeological areas. Indeed, a future extension of the pedestrian network in the area of Psiri (Vlastos, et al., 1998) will contribute to the creation of a specific identity of the historic center of Athens.

Such an extensive pedestrian network raises questions about the vitality and safety of the pedestrian area and the impact it will have on local businesses. Despite the fact that these reservations can be considered, in part, well founded, a number of cases disprove them bringing to the forth the reverse expected outcome. According to the findings of the Research Institute of Trade (FFH) Berlin (1978), the pedestrianisation contributed to an increase in commercial activity. 83% of the 1800 respondents indicated that, after the pedestrianisation of the street on which their stores were located their turnover increased. Contrary to that, in non-pedestrian areas, this happened to only 20% of the respondents (Hass-Klau, 1993). A similar outcome was recorded in health stores, which showed an increase in customer numbers.

Similar results were recorded in the city of Edirne in Turkey where a comprehensive intervention on the shopping street Saraçlar was realized. According to the survey of Sirel (2015), the businessmen respondents believe that they have benefited from the project, while consumers share the same view. Visitors to the area feel the same and are almost all satisfied with the intervention which contributed to the improvement of their movement in public space and enhanced their sense of security while walking, whereas at the same time transformed the image of the area.

Indeed, the image of the area is believed to be further improved by increasing the green surfaces. Improving the environment (locating benches, artworks, trees and green spaces, improving the lighting and marking) where commercial activity takes place is one of the forces that attract consumers (Tsouderos, 2002). Beyond aesthetic improvement (TTRSA, 2012 in Athanasius & Manaridou, 2012), however, this action leads to the improvement of the microclimate of the area and the reduction of noise levels (Pournara, 2013). This particular intervention is included in the framework of the reorganization of space through pedestrianisation since the proposal is required to present an organized framework for urban regeneration. There is talk of a single redevelopment proposal and not many smaller local interventions. In formulating a specific proposal of urban design the area will be able to obtain a specific character that allows for the perception of the "internal" and "external" environment by the user. At the same time, this is expected to attract new businesses in buildings which are not in use today (Figure 6) thus reducing the feeling of insecurity through the revival of the vitality in the region, an increase of the number of "eyes on the streets" (cf. in Jacobs, 1961) and the possible expansion of opening hours.

However, the proposed interventions should not set aside the historical authenticity and the special character of the area. The aim must be to promote an internationalized architecture plan, but with respect to existing uses and the unique cultural features of the area. For this reason, it is believed that the study should address a number of issues, one of which should be the building facades. In particular, proposals should focus on the protection, conservation and enhancement of the facades which are of architectural interest, the careful and discreet placement of signs as well as the reformation of facades which are believed not to "tie in" with the character of the area. In this way the architectural contrasts found largely in the study area will decrease. This central area which is visited daily by many tourists throughout the year, lacks the special characteristics that make reference to early Athenian and Greek history. Additionally, the north-western part of the study area is believed to have to preserve this particular multicultural character for two reasons: (a) Because it is part of the historical character of Athens and (b) In order to avoid, if possible, even to a degree, a gentrification of the area and the expulsion of all immigrants who have found shelter in Gerani area.

This, of course, is associated with the policy of land use. Specifically, it is believed that the proposed open mall should be developed in the concept of smaller sub-regions (Figure 6) where a certain type of activity will be projected as the dominant one. Such a strategy which is illustrated often in organized shopping centers is expected to provide individual identities to the points/spots of the proposed open mall, allowing for further development of economies of scale and facilitating consumers in their purchases.

Unfortunately, even so, it is believed that the gentrification of the area even partially cannot be avoided. The main reason lies in the increase of land values. It is typical in the case of German centers. The pedestrianized spaces in commercial areas contributed to the increase in turnover of the neighboring shops. However, rental increase was quite high so many businesses suffered from it (Athanasidou & Manaridou, 2012). As a consequence, there were reactions from the commercial world of local communities, which affected to some extent the expansion of pedestrian areas in German cities at that time.

Another risk from such extensive intervention is the occupation of the new pedestrian surfaces by private cars and motorbikes. Given the fact that the region has to combine commercial activity with recreation and housing, there should be a provision to meet the mobility needs of

residents and visitors. For this reason, parking lots should be created. Developing underground parking spaces would also work, as a measure which would strengthen types of policies such as "park and ride", in order to facilitate access to the open mall. However, the target is to limit motorization in the historic center of Athens. For this reason, public transport must be strengthened, something that can be achieved through the major streets surrounding the study area and Athenas Street, which should not be serving long private motorized vehicles, as it does today.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The development of centralities in urban areas is a phenomenon that is directly integrated in the life cycle of the city. In the postmodern city, centralities tend to grow both in suburban and extra-urban areas because of the low price of land and the ability to obtain larger unified land areas, as well as in the center of cities through the redevelopment of degraded areas. Similarly, in this case the reason is the low level of land values and simultaneously the centrality which is an important element needed to attract the public.

A common feature of centralities in recent years as seen in modern cities is the mix of land uses. The mix of uses does not refer to an unregulated presence of various activities, but to the activities which can coexist in a region in such a way so as to avoid problems caused by incompatible ones.

Commercial trade is an activity that takes place in most clusters. However, each trade cluster develops in outskirts and extra-urban areas for reasons related to the cost and availability of land. Discount villages are such examples where commercial activity is the main function of the areas while other activities act supportively to help its smooth operation during shop opening hours. During the rest of the day, the area is deserted, awaiting for the start of the business cycle again.

To prevent this, open malls in city centers seem to be a satisfactory solution. In recent years this implementation was discussed regarding six Greek cities, of which only four have moved forward with this proposal. Athens ultimately failed to implement the action planned for the northeast of Omonia.

The commercial triangle, an area with intense commercial activity and entertainment is a response to the failure to implement the aforementioned plan. A consequence of this is the fact is that any new attempt will be "built" in an almost ready region both in terms of infrastructure and in terms of functionality, since the commercial activity is already established (given the fact of the presence of the central market in the region) while its character is also established in the conscience of Athenians since it already acts as an entertainment and commercial center.

The area is pedestrianized to a degree, which is important to an open mall, since in that manner it increases the safety and mobility of pedestrians and bicycles. The simultaneous reduction of motorization helps improve the quality of the environment and, thus, increases the number of visitors attracted to the region.

On a different note, the area of Gerani in the west of the commercial triangle is a commercial area aimed at a specific target group (people with specific origin or language, and by extension, habits) or consumers interested in buying items relating to food (spices, meat, etc.). The low property prices in the region and the presence of buildings which are often vacant,

due to migration flows, enable the development of the region as a continuation of the commercial triangle. This does not necessarily mean gentrification, but the development of a more organized space that fosters a social mix.

In this way, it is believed that the commercial triangle will be substantially upgraded. At the same time, neighboring regions, such as Psiri and Metaxourgio, will benefit from such an intervention. Therefore, in the long run, such an intervention could help revitalize the historic center of Athens.

In order, however, for this plan implementation to stay alive and successful it is essential that any urban planning and traffic measures be accompanied by a properly organized marketing plan for the proposed open mall. Essentially, what is needed is a series of actions that will attract the general public throughout the year. Ultimately this is what the center of Athens requires to be both in terms of urban design and financially viable.

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