

Title: Planning and Architecture in Greece in the Neoliberal Era

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Abstract:

The first decade of the 2000s was an extremely interesting period for Athens which repeatedly captured the world's attention for several reasons. The capital of Greece welcomed the mixed blessing of the Summer Olympic Games of 2004, was faced with major riots during December 2008 and became the focal point of the country's financial crisis; this latter event, igniting extensive protests and demonstrations culminating in the "indignants" movement in the summer of 2011. Today, Athens is experiencing a severe deadlock; neglect and deterioration of the city centre; the establishment of immigrant ghettos; the severing of social fabric; the decomposition of the middle class; the perceived breach of security; and increasing homelessness.

Over the past decade the tradition established with the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974, of considering the city and its infrastructure as a 'public asset', has been overturned. This was most notable during the preparations for the Summer Olympics between 2000 and 2004 during which a new emergency statutory framework for urban planning was introduced in the name of speed and efficiency. For the first time, public works, state property and enterprises of public interest were privatised. However, the end of the Games did not initiate a return to the former public status quo. On the contrary, the financial crisis that occurred a few years later promoted the 2004 'emergency' model to the position of permanent planning policy. More recently in 2010 and 2011, a series of new laws have been added to this which essentially abolish the state's position of primacy in urban planning decisions, eliminate public consultation at local government level, and reduce environmental and archaeological controls. In short, the private sector has been allowed to establish land-uses that have transgressed previous town planning and environmental norms. At the same time, these laws transfer state land assets to the newly founded Asset Development Fund so as to contribute towards the reduction of the country's international debt. The consequences of this deregulation have been profound.