



# Planning Cultures in Europe

Decoding Cultural Phenomena in Urban and Regional Planning

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Bringing together an interdisciplinary team from across the EU, this book connects elements of cultural and planning theories to explain differences and peculiarities among EU member states.

A 'culturized planning model' is introduced to consider the 'rules of the game': how culture affects planning practices not only on an explicit 'surface' but also on a 'hidden' implicit level. The model consists of three analytical dimensions: 'planning artifacts', 'planning environment' and 'societal environment'. This book adopts these dimensions to compare planning cultures of different European countries.

This sheds light not only on the organizational or institutional structure of planning, but also the influence of deeper cultural values and layers on planning and implementation processes.

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# **Planning Culture and the Interference of Major Events. The Recent Experience of Athens**

*Konstantinos Serraos, Evangelos Asprogerakas and Byron Ioannou*

## **Introduction**

During the last decades, planning in Greece was identified as an essential pre-requisite towards a balanced spatial development and the necessary institutional frame was formed. As a pre-requisite for a successful application of the related policy, the main peculiarities of the public administration and some old planning culture rigidities had to be confronted. In this framework, the interference of planning for the 'Athens 2004' Olympic Games acquires distinctive importance due to the magnitude and the appeal of the event. The main question addressed is in which way the planning procedure for the Games is integrated into general spatial planning and how the policy applied and the infrastructure developed is going to affect the spatial development of the area.

In order to answer the above question, this paper initially gives a brief presentation of the planning and the administrative system, identifying the contemporary situation and problems. Thereafter, the basic spatial features of Athens Metropolitan Region are presented, focusing on the most important spatial problems and the related policy, illustrated by specific cases of spatial plans on both regional and urban level. The main planning aspects for the 'Athens 2004' Olympic Games are presented and evaluated. More specifically, the planning policy is analysed emphasising the implications for the spatial development of the area and the directions for the post-Olympic era. Ultimately, the potential detrimental effects and the unexploited opportunities of Athens and its inhabitants are evaluated. During the whole process the main characteristics and peculiarities of planning culture in Greece will be revealed.

## **1. System of administration and spatial planning in Greece**

### *1.1 Administrative structure*

The Greek constitution defines the relationships among the different powers at national level. The legislature is represented by the parliament. Executive power rests mainly with the central government and is limited for the President of the Republic. Government is a collective instrument, consisting of the Council of Ministers. The parliament establishes the structure and the procedures of spatial and town planning in the country, through a series of framework-acts (laws). Concerning the judiciary powers at national level, a significant role in the Greek system is played by the 'Council of State', the involvement of which is already very important in the spatial planning process, especially in creating judicial standards for the interpretation of domestic, community and international legislation concerning the sustainable development perspective (ESTIA 2000).

The country is divided into 13 state administrative regions for the purpose of planning, programming and co-ordinating regional development. Each region is headed by a General Secretary who represents the national government at the regional level and includes a number of prefectures with elected authorities (second tier local government). The

first tier of local government is constituted by 900 municipalities and 133 communes. The role of municipalities in urban and regional planning remains mostly advisory, with the exception of certain powers delegated to some municipalities (e.g. a number of important municipalities are now empowered to grant building permits).

The governmental executive power, in the field of spatial planning, is represented mainly by the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works (YPECHODE). Other important ministries are the ministries of Economy and Finance (which controls regional policy), Development (industrial policy), Rural Development and Food (rural development and forests), Transport and Communications, Interior, Culture (archaeological sites, cultural heritage) and the Ministry of Tourism. There are also two 'regional' ministries, the Ministry of the Aegean and the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace. The responsibility for urban and regional planning in Athens and Thessaloniki metropolitan areas rests with 'The Organisation for Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens or Thessaloniki' respectively. They are autonomous public authorities under the auspices of YPECHODE.

Law 2742/1999 has established an advisory council, the opinion of which is required for the approval of the 'General Framework for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development' as well as for the nationwide strategic 'Special Frameworks' (e.g. which are under elaboration for tourism or industry development). This council consists of representatives from major stakeholders of the public and private sector (Wassenhoven 2005).

National Level	Ministry for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works (YPECHODE)
	Sectoral and "regional" ministries
Regional Level	General Secretariats of Region (13) headed by the Regional General Secretary and a Regional Council (not elected body)
	Athens & Thessaloniki Organisations
Local	2st tier local authorities (54 Prefectures) headed by the Prefect and a Prefectural Council (elected body)
	1st tier local authorities (900 Municipalities & 133 Communes) headed by the Mayor and a Municipal Council (elected body)

**Table 11.1:** Key institutions of spatial planning

### *1.2. Institutional framework and planning instruments*

The Greek constitution contains specific clauses concerning the obligation of the state to plan the structure of the national territory and settlements and to protect the physical and cultural environment. On the national and regional scale, the law 2742/99 concerning 'Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development', which replaced the previous one that was not implemented since the mid 1970's, aimed at attempting an overall confrontation of territorial issues in Greece, mainly through the institution of spatial plans.

A national plan, known as the 'General Framework for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development' (GFSPSD), is based on Law 2742/1999 setting specific goals concerning

conflicting issues in land-use management, which aim at the sustainable use of land and the minimisation of negative environmental impacts. The same law requires the production of ‘Regional’ (RFSPSD) and ‘Special (sectoral) Frameworks for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development’ (SFSPSD).

<i>Planning Levels</i>	<i>Plans</i>
National Level	General Framework for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development (L.2742/1999 – plan in progress) Special (Sectoral) Frameworks for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development (L.2742/1999 – plans in progress)
Regional Level	Regional Frameworks for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development (L.2742/1999)
Local Level	Structural Metropolitan Plan (SMP, L.2508/97) concerning Urban regions, Metropolitan areas, Large urban centres. SMP Athens (L. 1515/85) SMP Thessaloniki (L.1561/86) General Urban Plan (L.1337/83, L.2508/97) concerning Cities, Towns Urbanised areas and Countryside/Rural space. Town Plan Study <i>implemented by</i> Implementation Plan (L.1337/83, L.2508/97) concerning Cities, Towns, Urbanised areas.

**Tab. 11.2:** The general structure of the Greek planning system.

Since 1983, and until the late 1990s, the core of urban planning legislation was Law 1337/83 on the extension of town plans and urban development. Its main characteristics were the introduction of a hierarchy of plans (general and local) and of controlled urban zones to direct urban development, the safeguarding of sensitive areas and the restraining of unplanned construction and sprawl. In accordance with this law, general town plans were produced for many municipalities. In 1997, this law was updated by Law 2508/97 on sustainable urban development, which introduced a comprehensive organisational framework for urban renewal, as well as new provisions permitting organised housing development in the outskirts of cities and in areas of secondary and vacation home development.

The two-step planning procedure at the local level consists of two main spatial planning instruments: the ‘General Urban Plan’ (GUP) and the ‘Town Plan Study’ (TPS). The GUP has to cover the whole area of the municipality, providing the general guidelines for its spatial development. The local authorities are responsible for the elaboration of the GUP, while it is ratified through ministerial decision. A series of TPS’s constitute the second step of the local spatial planning procedure. According to the general guidelines of the GUP, they have to provide detailed and specific land-use and development guidance for certain parts of the urban area. After their approval by the Minister for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works the GUPs become binding, not only for public authorities but also for private individuals, especially concerning street alignments, building lines, land-use designations, as well as building regulations (minimum plot size and plot dimensions, maximum plot ratios and floor-area ratio, etc.). The

implementation of the Town Plan Study, which mainly includes property adjustments, is achieved by another special plan, called 'Implementation Plan' (IP) (ISoCaRP 2002).

### *1.3 Comparisons with the European countries*

Legal, administrative and planning systems in Greece have historically been influenced by French and German models (see also Puscasu's contribution in this volume). In recent decades the professional training scores of Greek planners in the UK and USA have added several influences from the Anglo-Saxon tradition (Wassenhoven et al., 2005). However, the Greek system of planning is considered to be less effective than the equivalents of the above countries. One crucial reason for this might be the division of power in Greece, between the core and the periphery, which has resulted in the fact that the most significant decisions are made by the central government (Baiba et al, 2005). Thus, the implementations of some decisions do not inspire the regional or local authorities or the people and that could be a reason why they are occasionally directed to an opportunistic behaviour. As a consequence, the implementation of spatial planning is not certain or secured in some cases.

The division of power is important, because spatial planning is actually an act of policy. Although planners only propose while politicians make the decisions, the implementation of a plan is a political action as it incorporates a number of regulations, motives and propositions that influence people's lives. However, people tend to resist when they are enforced to do things they are not inspired by. Thus, the stronger the role of central government, the more ineffective spatial planning is (see also contribution of Vettoretto in this volume).

European countries such as Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Austria have, historically, exceptionally balanced systems of power between core and periphery. As a result, most of the spatial problems are solved at the appropriate level and spatial planning is favoured by social support. Finally, the grade of certainty about the implementation of spatial planning is extremely high (Baiba et al. 2005). In between the two contrasting cases mentioned before there are several others. Countries such as Belgium, France and Italy have already managed to transfer power from the central to regional/local governments successfully. The Netherlands, Portugal, France and Greece keep a powerful central government, although the procedure of decentralisation has already begun.

However, in Greece this will not be an easy procedure. When second tier prefectural authorities were created, substantial powers were devolved to them by the central government, but unfortunately this decentralisation is endangered by the controversial interpretation of the constitution espoused by the Council of State. Moreover, according to L. Wassenhoven (et al. 2005), there is at least some evidence that local authorities may be reluctant to undertake additional spatial planning competences which are rated as harmful for their popularity in comparison for instance with infrastructure projects which are more popular (Wassenhoven et al. 2000).

Moreover, the particular post-war evolution of the Greek society has led to the current spatial development model where Athens is the centre of almost every significant activity, attracting a huge division of the country's population. The extravagant approach for developing small ownerships was the only solution to the housing demands and an

agent of social justice and political stability as well, explaining the important role of the specific construction industry (Antonopoulou 1991). Thus, a complex set of economic, social and political relationships was created, making it hard to apply any planning action, regulation or intervention (Ioannou and Serraios 2007, compare also contributions of Stanionas and Puscasu in this volume).

Countries	Central Government is the prominent factor in spatial planning system	Balanced system of Spatial Planning
Austria		V
Belgium		V
Denmark		V
Germany		V
Greece	V	
Finland		V
France	V	
Ireland	V	
Italy		V
The Netherlands	V	
Portugal	V	
Sweden		V
United Kingdom	V	

**Table 11.3:** Division of power in EU countries

The Greek spatial planning system is currently under a process of change, in accordance with the international trends and with a major influence from the European Union and its policies. However, there is much to be done in the near future if the spatial planning intends to overcome its malfunctioned implementation.

#### *1.4 Problems of the Current Administrative and Spatial Planning System*

The organisation of the Greek territory was accomplished in the first decades after World War II, in the virtual absence of a restrictive regulatory framework concerning the spatial planning of productive activities, social facilities and urban development. This had serious impact on Greek territorial organisation, such as regional and local disparities, a stronger core region to the detriment of the periphery, although this was also the result of other historical reasons, environmental degradation in urban areas and, in some cases, in coastal and island areas, as well as widespread unauthorised development, especially housing. In the 1980s and 90s the spatial planning system was strengthened and equipped with more effective instruments, but its potential impact is still weak due to several shortcomings (Serraios et. al. 2005; Wassenhoven et. al. 2000):

- Planning law is not consolidated.
- The legal and institutional framework is piecemeal and chaotic.
- The administration is not able to formulate consistent, long-term policies addressing an issue or problem and subsequently develop a strategy of policy implementation.
- Departures from approved plans are frequent and the gap between official planning and the reality of development on the ground is wide.
- In most cases, plans are simply adjusted to already stabilised situations and do not lead to development.
- Plan approval procedures are very slow, especially because of public reaction and political 'realism'.
- There is lack of co-ordination between levels of spatial planning and development.
- Effective systems of land registration are still at an early stage of development and control of plan implementation on the ground is weak.
- There is a lack of efficient mechanisms for public involvement in the plan-making process at the local level, as well as an absence of consultation mechanisms with the economic and social partners at the national and regional levels of planning.
- Formal, legal, adversarial and closed patterns of interest intermediation have been established, with informal and ad hoc bargaining between regulatory authorities and private interests.
- There is lack of efficient support, control and monitoring mechanisms for the application of the spatial planning policy.

## **2. The involvement of planning in the Olympic Games of 2004**

### *2.1. Basic spatial characteristics and problems of Athens Metropolitan Area.*

The metropolitan area of Athens includes the administrative boundaries of the region (perifereia) of Attica with an extent of about 2000 sq.km and a population that approaches 4 million inhabitants. The majority of the population (over 3 million) is assembled in the basin of Athens with a total extent that does not exceed 500 sq.km. We are dealing with an over-populated and densely structured area with very small proportion of free spaces and green areas and with significant environmental problems that are due to the exceptionally high concentrations of population, activities and built areas. The demographic and building pressures that continue to exist (up to a certain degree) in the metropolitan complex of Athens (with a very reduced pace compared to its recent past), are now defused in the eastern part of Athens, including the area of Messogeia and the new airport. This area (until recently an area of mainly seasonal residence), presents heavy signs of urbanisation with obvious marks of alteration, even mutation, of its recent rural character. In the Athens basin, on the contrary, various tendencies are observed. These include the reduction of the population in sutured and undervalued areas of the centre and its near suburbs on the one hand, and a continuing increase of the population of other regional municipalities on the borders of the basin on the other, with its total population remaining steady nevertheless (NTUA 2004).

Athens is not classified as a city of global impact according to its international role and its position in the world hierarchy by researches (Beaverstock et al. 1999). This is due to

both its geographic position (outside the main global land areas of development), as well as the country's limited economic influence and the great degree of introversion of the Greek economy. Nevertheless, Athens appears to have a powerful potential of performing an international role, especially in sectors such as tourism and culture but also the advertising sector. Furthermore, it appears that a wider dynamic is emerging for cities of global impact which were not included in the territorial zones of international development up to recently (North America, Western Europe, Asian Pacific). Athens is included in this group of cities and is considered to have all favourable potential to play an important role in Europe and the Mediterranean (Taylor, 2000).

Athens occupies a dominant position and possesses a sovereign role in Greece thanks to both its population size (over 30% of country's population) and the economic activities that it attracts (more than 30% of the annual gross domestic product (GDP) of Greece). Its geographical position is rather crucial (placed in the centre of the country) and it is considered to be the most important urban complex in the region, including the neighbouring Balkans, especially in sectors such as transport, services, industry and commerce. The sovereignty of Athens in Greece is reinforced by the centralised structure of the Greek governmental and administration system which makes the city the absolute decision-making centre of the country. This centralised system has favoured Athens for many decades but has also led to significant problems such as unequal development in the country and the creation of anti-economies of scale, such as environmental pollution and degradation of the quality of life in the metropolitan area (NTUA, 2004).

## *2.2. Policy and actions. The 'Olympic Poles'*

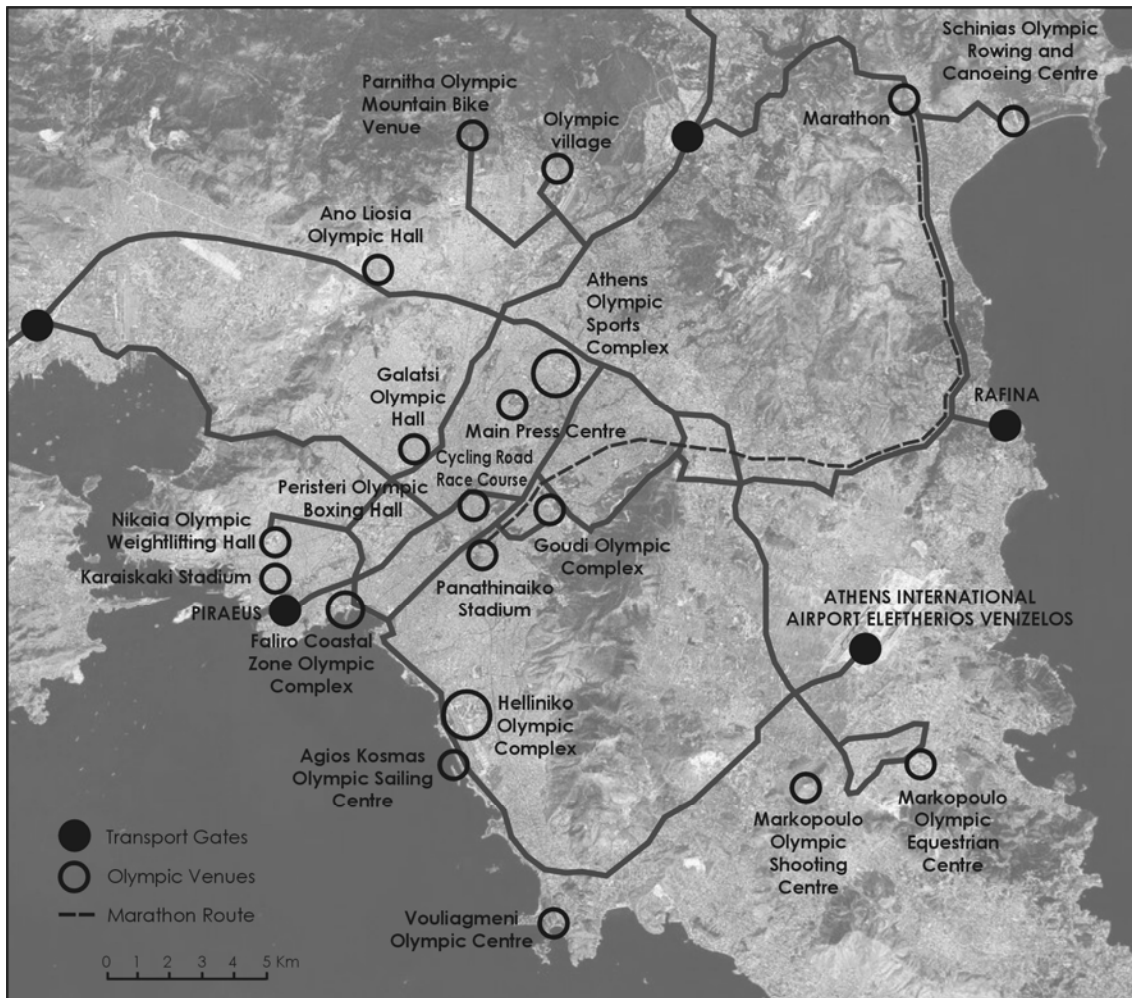
Since 1985 planning regarding the centres' structure has become crucial for the Athens Basin (AB), while a completed centre hierarchy was proposed through the 1985 Structural Metropolitan Plan. Since then the proposed centres' structure has always been following the emerging development trends (Serraos et al. 2007).

Even though the decisions concerning the placement of the Olympic infrastructure were not directly based on an analysis of the spatial dynamics and the centralities of the Athens Basin (AB) or the wider Metropolitan Region of Attica (MRA), it is believed that there is an indirect relation between the existing centres of the AB and the decisions about the placement of the 'Olympic Poles' (OP). That is, because there is at least one common main agent for both functions; accessibility, i.e. the connection with the transportation and circular network of the conurbation. The development of central urban poles is connected with the transportation network by definition and the access to the main road axes, while this same parameter is vital for the functional interconnection of the Olympic venues and therefore for the successful conduction of the Olympic Games. Moreover, the OPs were, on purpose, placed in the AB using a scattered model that in some aspects reduced the effectiveness of their influence on the city (Gospondini and Beriatos 2006, 179). Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that these decisions were directed by land availability (Figure 11.2).

The Olympic Games were initially presented as a catalyst for a positive intervention in the conurbation, despite the limited margins given for innovative planning policies, while they have promoted the strategy for a completed transportation network, a renewed network of urban infrastructure and finally an upgrading of the urban environment (Committee for the Athens 2004 Candidacy 1997). At the last stages of planning



and implementing the projects, greater emphasis was put on reinforcing the role of Athens on a regional level, as well as on its position in the hierarchy of the world cities (Zifou et al. 2004).



**Figure 11.1:** The Athens 2004 Olympic Venues

The Athens Olympic Centre in Maroussi was an existing venue. The poles of Ellinikon/Ag. Kosmas and Faliron had the greater concentration of athletic activities (Figure 11.1.), while the Olympic Centre in Goudi, an area designated to become a metropolitan park, can be considered as a fourth main pole. A number of recent evaluations (Committee for the Athens 2004 Candidacy 1997; Dekleris 2003; Zifou et al. 2004) have shown that these three poles had, some crucial characteristics before their inclusion in the programme of the Games:

- they had already functioned as sites of athletic activities, while a part of the necessary infrastructure was already available,
- they had access to the existing main circulatory network and they could easily be interconnected by the proposed Olympic Ring, and connected with the planned, upgraded public transportation system at the same time,

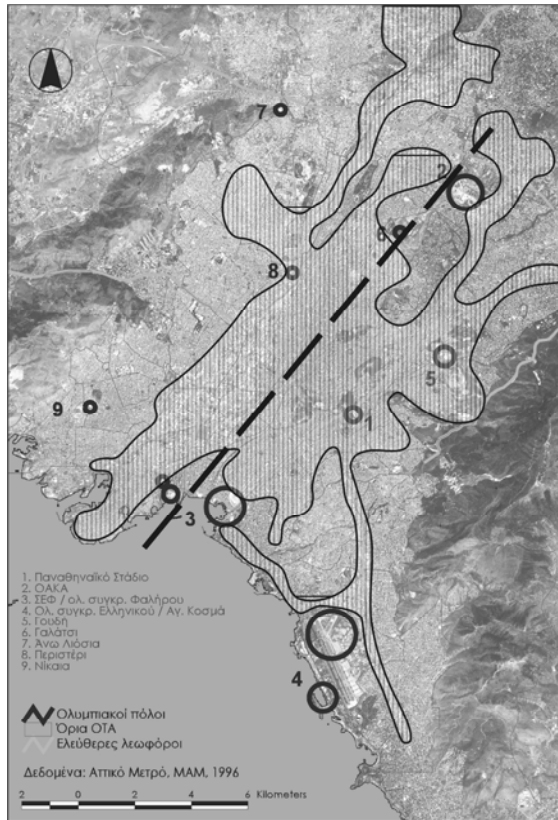
- they consisted of vast, non-developed, empty land, having relatively clear ownership status and a possibility of design and constructing without unforeseen obstacles and reactions.
- they were institutionally characterised as areas of metropolitan importance or areas of supra-local uses of recreation, sports or metropolitan parks by the official plans, or they were thought to become institutionally characterised for years,.

In our opinion, their selection as basic poles of hosting the Olympic venues was, a choice without alternatives for these reasons, since they were almost the only places in the AB adequately satisfying the above criteria. The objections from society mostly concerned the management of the environmentally sensitive Faliron waterfront and the designated metropolitan park in the area of the ex-airport of Ellinikon. Nevertheless, the importance of the specific poles for the successful organisation of the Games has eventually led to the fast-forwarding and materialisation of all relevant Olympic planning. Consequently, there was a kind of inflexibility of the Olympic planning alternatives due to the existing conditions already shaped, at least for the specific areas.

Another equally important element derives from the placement of the poles, and is connected with their relation to the main existing central poles of the AB conurbation. Based on the analysis of NTUA (2004) we can conclude that (Figure 11.2):

- The Athens Olympic Centre pole of Maroussi lies in an immediate relation with Maroussi, a developing centre of economic activities and financial headquarters.
- Faliron Gulf neighbours the metropolitan pole of Piraeus and the main centre Kallithea without being functionally embodied with them, because of the current structure of transportation and the circulatory network that isolates it from the urban fringe.
- The area of Goudi is on the outskirts of the Athens metropolitan centre area.
- The venues of Ellinikon and Ag. Kosmas are next to Glyfada, which is the most dynamic centre in the southern part of the AB.

Hence, it is proved that the basic Olympic poles were in a direct relation with the upgrading centres of the AB. The construction and the function of the Olympic venues in the examined areas do not seem to turn over the existing equilibrium in the AB substantially. The north-south development axis is maintained and reinforced, while three of the four main poles are placed on it. The West AB was always in disfavour considering its centrality and its role in the conurbation, letting it stay outside of any significant placement decision. Therefore, the opportunity of balancing the distribution of the development poles by the placement of a main pole in West AB has been lost. Several exceptions are the Olympic venues at Ano Liossia, Peristeri and Nikaia (Maps 11.2 and 11.3) which are of less significance compared to the other ones. What is yet to be concluded during the next years is the size of the impact of the Olympic interventions and the post-Olympic use for each pole on the area of the immediate influence of the centres (Serraos et al. 2007).



**Figure 11.2:** The spatial correlation of Olympic/ post- Olympic poles with the areas of the basic poles of central activities, building density, population density and concentration of places of labour.

### 2.3. The post-Olympic use of the venues

The post-Olympic use of the Games' infrastructure is regulated by the Law 3342/ 2005. The 'Olympic Properties S.A.', a private law-enterprise, has the responsibility of managing a big number of the Olympic sites in almost every specific area (Serraos et al. 2007).



**Figure 11.3:** Ellinikon Olympic Canoe/Kayak Slalom Centre.



**Figure 11.4:** Faliró Bay Complex.

The post-Olympic use of infrastructure is highly related to sports, recreation, cultural and free time activities in general, which the urban centres of the AB lack to some great extent. The infrastructure facilities were not located in order to serve these specific purposes in the most effective way. This reveals the lack of connection of the Olympic Games interventions with the long-term planning procedures.

The uniqueness of this procedure rests on its extended scale in terms of time and space. It also reveals consolidated administrative discontinuities while planning authorities are rather peripheral consultants of this process. This process seemed effective while the Games were successfully organised, but it neither assures the positive post-Olympic use of the venues, nor the maximum efficiency of the projects in any term of economic or socially sustainable planning.

### **3. Conclusions**

In comparison to the rest of Europe, planning in Greece has theoretically been identified as an essential pre-requisite towards a balanced spatial development quite recently. The necessary institutional frame that covered the gap was formed during the last decades. The result, however, was a quite complicated and ineffective legislation, rather too weak to control the development mechanisms as this process of planning usually follows development instead of anticipating and defining it. Characteristically enough, the town plans made during the decade of the 1980s preceded the plans on regional and national level, some of which have still not been completed. The problem is partially attributed to the centralisation of public administration, a feature that differentiates it from

the corresponding administrative structures in central Europe. Although important reforms are currently imposed there is still a long way to cover, as old planning culture rigidities have to be confronted.

In the existing way planning remains captured by land-use control with weak strategic orientation while some special cases are just occasionally confronted. The plans for the Olympic facilities are a case which is not conditioned by a wider policy, neither has it been officially related to the existing regulatory plans (see also contribution of Prehl/Tuçaltan in this volume). However, as the choice of their positioning was determined by objective factors such as accessibility, the new poles created followed the structure of the old or emerging centres without necessarily being identified with them. The north-south axis concerning the development of the centres is maintained and reinforced. The chance of balancing the distribution of the development poles through the positioning of a metropolitan pole in the functionally downgraded western Attica has been lost.

What is achieved has to do with the complementary nature of the post-Olympic functions of the Games' facilities and the neighbouring urban centres. The new -Olympic -poles do not include uses of trade and services which would compete with the functions of old urban poles. To a great extent, they maintain their athletic, leisure and cultural nature that could not have been developed in the old poles. In this way the infrastructure developed for the Olympic Games can cover current needs and tendencies. The future development of the region around these poles is quite interesting in the case of them becoming units for development of new economic activities, probably of metropolitan range.

In any case, the example set by the Olympic facilities proves that a short-term policy related to specific interventions in the urban net and infrastructure building projects can dynamically form new balances in the urban space, particularly when the formal planning system seems to be ineffective. Nevertheless, however successful the function of the new Olympic poles can be considered, this case is difficult to generalise and thus result in a kind of new model. It will always remain an occasional situation of adjusting the process of covering the immediate needs of the city to the peculiarities of the Greek planning culture in relation to the administrative and planning system. All in all, the internationalised role that is Athen's target demands substantial and intervening planning combined with an organisation of those mechanisms that will make its application effective.

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