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CULTURAL CAPITALS OF EUROPE:

The cultural infrastructure, the urban interventions and the spatial identity of four Cities – C.C.E.

(Athens, Glasgow, Lisbon & Thessaloniki)

Abstract

The article presents synoptically the results of the cultural infrastructure and urban interventions analysis in four cities, that became Cultural Capitals of Europe (C.C.E.: Athens 1985, Glasgow 1990, Lisbon 1994 and Thessaloniki 1997). Moreover, a comprehensive consideration of the relationship between their urban spatial structure and the programs mentioned above is attempted, through the concept of 'spatial syntactic identity'. This concept is defined theoretically through the concepts of 'urbanity' and 'intelligibility' within the framework of Space Syntax Analysis theory. This complicated analysis leads to some useful results, with respect to the evaluation of the impact that the C.C.E. institution had on the spatial structure of the European cities, as well as the apprehension and revealing of their rich urban and architectural heritage, as well as the quality of life improvement in the same cities. This approach is based on the author's PhD research under the same subject. The epistemological foundation of the concept of urban 'spatial syntactic identity' is considered to be her major contribution to knowledge so far. This - maybe not explicitly but surely implicitly- economical approach of the E.C.C. institution can be considered mainly as a basis of the relationship between urban culture and urban development. The convergences and divergences among findings reflect the common 'womb' of the cultural characteristics of the typology of European urban spatial configurations, as well as the similar ways in which the relationship between spatial configurations and building and urban interventions were decided. They also underline the call for the production of new knowledge, in order that the institution be appreciated with objectivity and justice, and go ahead even more creatively, right into its new era, that has already started.

A.P.

A) Introduction

The institution of cultural Capitals of Europe was initiated in 1983, after an idea of the ever memorable Melina Merkouris, then Greek minister of Culture, in order to “bring European people close and together”, in an attempt to support the unique world – wide endeavour of contemporary era, the unification of Europe. In the passing of time, European cities understood that, in the composite object of discovering our common European cultural background and the revealing of every city particularities, they have also to include their socio-economic prospects.

Glasgow set the issue so clearly for the first time, in an attempt to resolve its acute problems of de-industrialisation. From that period on, all the more European cities – C.C.E. recall culture, as the central constituent of their development process. The experience gained is reinvested by the following cities in their programs, so that to pursue not only the fundamental goals of the institution, but also the enhancing of their quality of life, as well as the promotion of their image.

If the most synoptic definition of culture is “a system of values and a life style”, development and especially spatial development is a concept also evolving over time. I will refer briefly to some of the results of the research I elaborated for my Ph.D. under the title “Cultural Capitals of Europe: the cities’ spatial identity through their programming of cultural infrastructure and urban interventions”. Four cities were investigated: Athens (C.C.E. 1985), Glasgow (C.C.E. 1990), Lisbon (C.C.E. 1994) and Thessaloniki (C.C.E. 1997). I will refer to:

- The Total Cultural Infrastructure
- The New cultural Infrastructure and Urban Interventions
- The discourse about the (european) cities and their future
- The spatial syntactic identity and its possible transformation, due to the institution

B) The Total Cultural Infrastructure

From all cities of the first cycle (1985 – 1997), the four cities investigated focused on their cultural infrastructure and urban interventions.³⁰ Of course, the way they managed their existing as well as new infrastructure differs across the sample, as it also differs their spatial planning context.

Athens programmed their necessary infrastructure within a vague planning context, since in 1985 the District and Development Plans were elaborated in parallel (Map A-1). Glasgow afforded a non - legitimated District Plan (1984) and a collection of unimplementable Development plans, due to their mutual overlapping. Lisbon acquired its District Plan in January 1994, year of C.C.E. Thessaloniki is the only city affording legitimated District and Development Plans, that they facilitated, although not very efficiently, the decision-making process with respect to the cultural infrastructure programming.

³⁰ Thessaloniki opened the second cycle, starting from 1997.

The geographical distribution of the same infrastructure performs similarities and differences. Athens is the city with the greatest distribution (up to Epidaurus), while the other three cities, although referring to their entire urbanized areas, addressed the same relation in different ways. Nevertheless, in all cases, there has been noticed a remarkable concentration of cultural activity in the city centers, a phenomenon having its roots in older conceptualizations about urban culture, an attitude that the C.C.E. committees appeared to be fighting from the era of Athens.

The infrastructure of architectural scale (buildings, wholes), is ranked in a typology of six categories: a) spectacle / audition (theatres, dancing halls, cine, multi / video), b) viewness (museums, photothèques, glyptothèques), education (congress halls, libraries, multi-purpose halls), visitation (historic and modern sites) and participation (workshops, clubs, open-air gathering places, athletic grounds).³¹ The ranking was processed separately for every city, included the total infrastructure, as well as the new one, so that the efforts made by every city, to be revealed. Furthermore, it was processed for all four cities, aiming at the revelation of similarities and differences among them.

Every city gave its own interpretation to the institution, emphasizing some of the infrastructural categories (Graphs 1-4). Athens, e.g., gave priority to the infrastructure of spectacle / audition, viewness and education, while Glasgow to those of viewness and visitation.

From a total of 870 installations, Glasgow is the city with the greater number of installations (381, 43,79%), then Thessaloniki (204, 23,45%), then Lisbon (189, 21,73%) and finally Athens (96 installations, 11,03%, Graph 5). Typologically, most of the installations refer to viewness (316, 36,32%) and the least to education (78, 8,9%, Graph 6). Across the typological classification, the installations of spectacle / audition and education perform the major concentration in the city centers, while the installations of participation in the peripheral quarters.

Moreover, there have been noticed considerable fluctuation across the sample with respect to two basic town planning indicators, namely 'cultural installation / inhabitant of central municipality' and 'category of cultural installation / inhabitant of central municipality (tables 1 & 2).

C) The New Cultural Infrastructure and the Urban Interventions

There were totally implemented 136 installations of an architectural scale, where the installations for spectacle / audition prevail, then the ones of viewness, then visitation and finally the installations for education, while there are not found any new installations for participation. More over, in all four cases, the extended projects of restoration, recuperation and rehabilitation of historic or / and old and abandoned buildings prevail. The most prominent ideas for the typological organization of installations as well as the new trends in architecture, were identified in the peripheral quarters, where more land was available and freedom for architectural creativity flourished.

³¹ The typology is proposed in a similar content by professor A. – Ph. Lagopoulos, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Athens is the city with the greatest geographic distribution of new installations across the sample (Map A-2). According to the official correspondence of that time, Mr. Spyros Merkouris, Head of the Office for Athens – C.C.E. 1985 pursued with zeal this goal, although the time available was extremely limited.

Glasgow had a limited program of new infrastructure and this is due to the fact that the city had already implemented some emblematic installations for the city's image and identity. The Festivals Office collaborated with the local institutions in some extended projects of building restoration urban interventions.

In Lisbon, the program was organized along a major urban Route, the Sétima Colina, with culturally significant public spaces, buildings and open-air gardens dating back from the 18th and 19th centuries, while the urban spatial interventions that took place, were interesting.

Thessaloniki elaborated the most ambitious program of infrastructure and urban interventions. This program, a fairly small part of which had been implemented by the beginning of the the 1997 manifestations, is characterized by a second originality: it is the first time that urban space is so organically integrated to the program, while culture is nominated as the key-concept of the otherwise necessary urban re-articulation.

C) The discourse for the European city and its future

From Athens 1985 to Thessaloniki 1997 we notice significant differentiations with respect to the philosophy of urban interventions. The discourse for the post – industrial European city, its demands and possibilities, is integrated all the more systematically in the C.C.E. programs. Issues of protection and revealing of cultural and architectural inheritance, protection of the environment, rehabilitation of disused, by previous modes of production installations, quality of life enhancement through the cultural functions decentralization, constitute the new axes, around which the C.C.E. programming evolves. This discourse dates from the Athens' era, through the organization of exhibitions, congresses, national and international competitions of an architectural and / or urban scale etc. In this process, the prevailing concept was – and still is today – the open public space, to which is associated the composite concept of urban / spatial identity.

D) The spatial syntactic identity and its probable transformation in the context of C.C.E. institution: Convergences and divergences

Apart from cultural infrastructure identification and classification, the basic and simultaneously composite question set in the research, has two components: a) the cities nominated C.C.E. afford some particular characteristics in their spatial structure, that provide the city with some kind of uniqueness, responsible for its revealing as an important case of the European urbanism and justifying its nomination? and b) Suppose that the four cities – C.C.E. afford these characteristics, how were they articulated with the C.C.E program for cultural infrastructure and how did they

contribute to the amelioration of their cultural and contemporary urban spatial structure?

The answer to these questions is attempted through the epistemological definition of the concept of 'spatial syntactic identity', which I propose to accrue as a tertiary attribute, from two secondary syntactic attributes, namely 'urbanity' and 'intelligibility', extending Space Syntax theory.³²

Here are some of the findings of this complicated analysis:

- a) All the syntactic identity cores (axes representing the coinciding axes of urbanity and intelligibility cores) are aa) morphologically continuous and bi-focal, where their 'beady-ring' form prevails the linear form in all cores except in the case of Thessaloniki, ab) identified to the city centers of eclecticism era and not to the older historical centers, usually under organic patterns, ac) articulated to buildings or wholes of art nouveau/ art deco architectural form, ad) loosely related to the district and neighborhood centers, as well as the peripheral cultural centers, programmed by the district and development plans, ae) were not sufficiently used, even intuitively, by the C.C.E. programs, as well as the national and international competitions set in the context of the institution.
- b) The correlation of four cores with the architectural and urban infrastructure showed that: ba) the coinciding of cores and infrastructure is noticed in the urban eclecticism in Athens, Lisbon, Thessaloniki and the hippodamean pattern in Glasgow, where most of the rehabilitated historic buildings are met (maps A-3, A-4). bb) Although the urban interventions were programmed across areas much broader than the cores, the absence of any correlation between them contributed for the attempts to remain fragmentary. bc) The best correlation was found in Athens, then in Glasgow, then in Lisbon and finally in Thessaloniki.³³ In all cases, although a strong relationship between the cores and cultural infrastructure in the city centers, this relationship appears always discrete (1 – 2 axial steps) and almost never direct (map A-5).

E) Conclusions

The C.C.E. institution contributes all the more to the broader developmental, cultural and spatial upgrading of European cities. From Athens to Thessaloniki it has been found an increasingly strong relationship between the cultural programs and the district, development and local plans.

The analysis of the total, as well as the new cultural infrastructure was undertaken in order, the underlying common cultural background of all cities to be revealed and at the same time their probable differentiations. In the total of installations, Glasgow performed the most and Athens the least. Furthermore, the installations of spectacle /

³² Empirically, the public space network, that represents the spatial syntactic identity of a city, is identified with that part of the whole spatial configuration that performs simultaneously the attributes of maximum integration in the global spatial network, as well as the best possibility of intelligibility of the same network, without any conscious attempt. It constitutes the quintessence of a city's qualitative attributes that become comprehensible from its open public space.

³³ In fact, the absence of this correlation in Thessaloniki deprived the city of the possibility to unfold an integrated program of urban upgrading, especially in the peripheral urban quarters.

audition and vewiness are the leading categories, while the cities fell short with their educational installations.³⁴

De-centralisation of installations and urban interventions toward the peripheral quarters are significant achievements of the institution.

The discourse was inspired by the contemporary quest in the disciplines of town planning, architecture and urban design. Their preferable subjects were the upgrading and rehabilitation of historic or/and degraded buildings and urban wholes, the revitalization of the 'urban voids' and their transformation to permanent 'nuclei of sociability' and liveliness, the restoration and rehabilitation of historic buildings, but also the creation of new installations reflecting the contemporary architectural trends.

The identification and use of the concept of 'spatial syntactic identity' in spatial configurations of the four cities- C.C.E., firstly contributed to the sufficient correlation between these spatial configurations. The convergences that have been noticed, verify the existence of a common cultural background, upon which urban planning/ design and architecture in European cities are based. The divergences reveal their multifaceted diversity and hence, attractiveness, as a visualized, but also worth of living through the urban experience, part of European Union culture, namely the European city.

Additionally, the correlation of syntactic identity cores to the C.C.E. cultural installations and urban interventions revealed their prevailing common constituents against the differentiated ones, a fact leading to the conclusion that the spatial structure of these cities was valued, be it unconsciously, in a relational manner. Finally, there have been identified great possibilities for the improvement of this relationship, an element that could be taken up by the future cities – C.C.E., that are advised to base their decisions on new concepts and new knowledge.

³⁴ It is noticed that Athens, Glasgow and Lisbon had ready the greatest part of their infrastructure, whereas Thessaloniki had almost the ¼ of its program implemented by 1997 and today, 10 years later, is implemented the 65% approx of that program.

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