

Re-shaping urban environment through major events: The Athens Olympic Games

Introduction

During the Athens Olympic Games (their “Homecoming”), we have witnessed the city showing its best in terms of atmosphere and urban environment, public services and administrative effectiveness, complemented with high standard aesthetics and a sense of festivity. Was this a “dream” period never to repeat itself, or was it part of a well structured plan taking advantage of the opportunity to improve the city through the Games’ operational standards necessities, to re-shape its urban environment as home for new economic activities and leave a legacy for generations to come?

This paper deals with the efforts made, through the Games, to give the city a qualitative character in terms of functionality, cultural context, urban aesthetics and support of new ideas and innovation, principles of high-standard planning as well as backbones of a “creative economy” context.

1. The Athens Planning Context

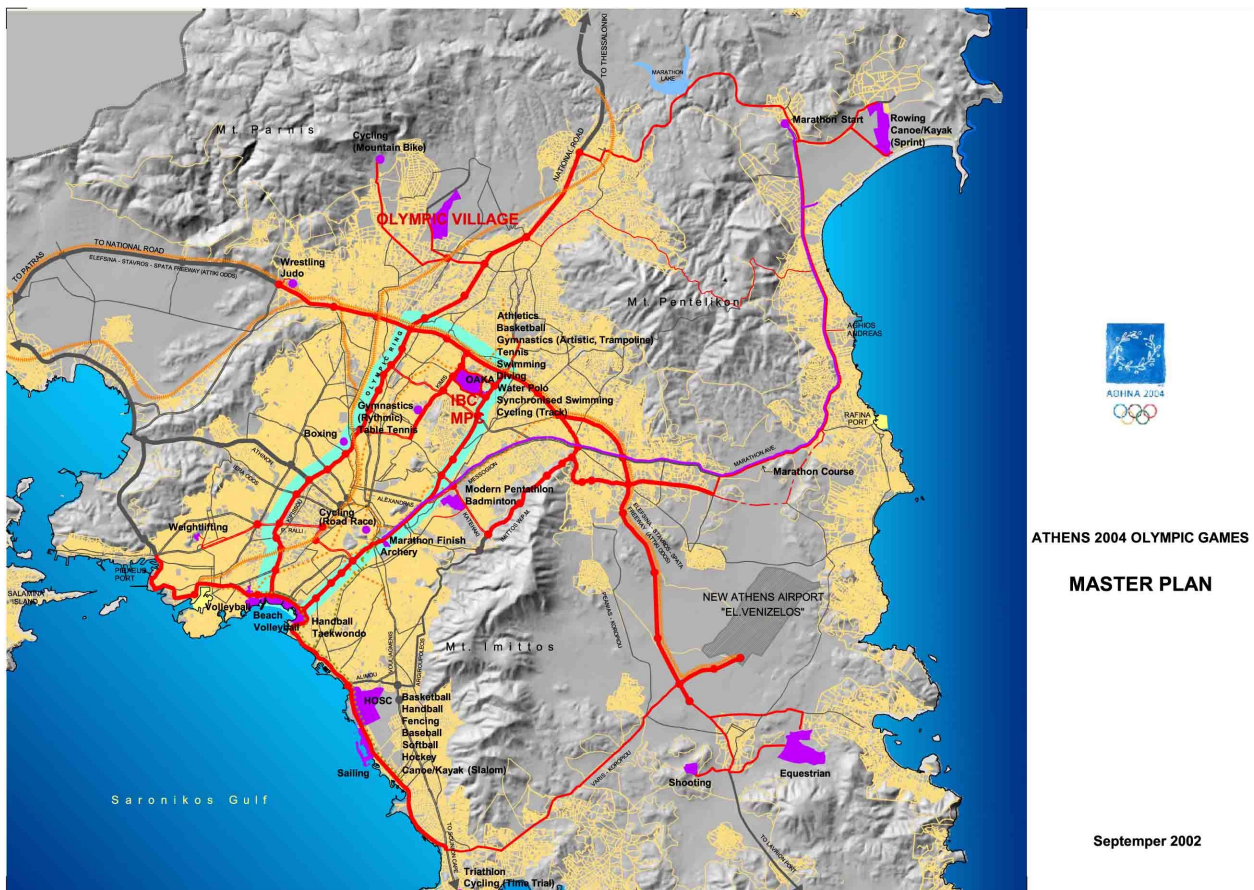
After the Greek independence from the Ottoman empire in the 19th century, Athens was declared national capital (1834) and a master plan was prepared for the city. In 1834, the city had 4.000 inhabitants but the master plan creators Kleanthis and Schaubert envisaged the growth of the city in a European context. The plan produced reflected the principles of 19th century Romantic Neo-Classicism and its main goals were to provide for the northward expansion of the city and the restoration of the ancient centre. In 1859, the plan was amended to accommodate a population of 50.000. By the 1940s the population had exceeded one million but it was during the 1950s that the city experienced rapid population and economic growth. Most of the current built volume of the city is actually only four decades old. Today the Athens region which encompasses 157 municipalities and four prefectures, has over three and a half million inhabitants (34,3% of the Greek population). The most important structural problems of the city in terms of planning are thus considered, the following:

- The city has grown with little planning and control and at a rapid pace, “illegal” settlement being widespread;
- Athens is a dense agglomeration of mixed uses, with limited open spaces and green areas;
- There is a critical traffic congestion and pollution problem;
- Growth is balanced between the periphery of Attica and the rest of the city, though in relative (%) terms the increase of population in the periphery is much more considerable;
- Important growth is expected in the plain of Messogheia and around the new airport in the forthcoming decade.
- Demand for housing and social polarisation may be intensified as an effect of the increasing foreign immigrant population.

On the other hand, there is an abundance of high quality characteristics within the city context, considered distinct advantages as such that could lead to a “unique” Athenian environment if used as design goals by architects and planners visualizing the future of the city:

- a) The cultural heritage of Greece and particularly Athens is one of the most important globally, and is apparent in many aspects of the city’s life, including urban space. The integration of the historical background, the ancient structures and the archaeological findings in the modern environment, remains important as a most critical design challenge.

- b) Part of this heritage is the relation of the city to the sea; in fact, historically, the city depended physically and conceptually on this close relation (Athens was well known for its nautical power).
- c) Another important factor is mild climate and the way the city lives in the open throughout the year, with large open spaces to host all kinds of activities that, in other cases would be taking place in closed gloomy halls. One can witness today what is known from ancient times: open spaces are the scenes of very important social activities (such as those that were taking place in the ancient Agora).
- d) Finally, when planning the future, the metropolitan character that Athens proclaims, as EU's "representative" for Southeastern Europe and the Balkan States is an important issue to be taken into account.



Olympic Games Master Plan, source: Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games, ATHENS 2004

Recognising the huge broader and longer term urban regeneration potential of hosting the biggest sport and culture event in the world, the Olympics, the challenge planners and executives were faced with, was then exactly to exploit these competitive advantages in deciding the Olympic infrastructure and Venue locations, scope and post-Olympic use.

This paper selects and compares specific Olympic projects and the Olympic Games' general aims and objectives to their actual effects on the city's functions, as well as their impact on the city's legacy. It also attempts to trace their effects in relation to the generation of a "creativity context" in the city.

It first focuses on a Competition Venue entity, the "Faliro Olympic Complex", a project with strategic objectives well over its primary target, which is developing into a city landmark on its own right.

The second area of interest is the transport infrastructure developed for the Games, not a multi-use, or entrepreneurial programme with a financial perspective as such, but a necessary operational support for whichever prospect the city may be heading for. Its final focus will be the Olympic Games projects in relation to the scope and prospects of urban planning in Athens in general.

2. The Faliro Olympic Complex: More than Olympic Games planning

2.1. The context and history of the project

Faliro Bay, with a total surface of the coastal zone of 75 hectares and a coastline of six kilometres length, is the nearest physical opening of the Athens Basin to the sea and connects comfortably to the city centre and the Acropolis through a major road artery. The Bay had been the first Athenian harbour at the time of ancient Democracy. In modern times Faliro Bay lived days of glory in the 19th century (since the 1870s) and until the 1930s, when it developed into a seaside resort and entertainment area.

Yet later it fell into decline until it ended up in the 1970s and 1980s in an isolated and often flooded “no man’s land” and a dumping ground, with severe pollution, degraded estuaries of the two rivers running through the city urban fabric, mainly due to line channelling, covering and abuse of the rivers themselves, derelict cars, municipal garbage and various other materials, as well as several faltered sports facilities.

Upgrading attempts had often started but with poor results. Until the late 1980s the residential development in the areas of old Faliro and Flisvos, to the east and south east, the construction and operation of “Peace and Friendship Indoor Hall”, home for various sport activities (including indoor athletics, basketball, volleyball), to the immediate west, and the often flooded areas of Kallithea and Moschato, including the Horse Race Track and its support facilities just north of the coastal avenue, emphasized even more the “blind spot” in between and stressed the need for remedial action.

The Olympics was the starting-point for change. The “Faliro coastal zone reformation” was one of the Olympic Projects included in the successful bid file, not only as sports but also as a project with targeted spill-over effects on many aspects of the city’s life. The Olympic Master Plan was outlined in September 1999 during an international workshop involving distinguished architects from US, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy and Greece, who were invited to elaborate a set of design criteria and guidelines. Several alternatives were valuated and communication with various stakeholders proved valuable in terms of better reflecting the situation and possible uses in the area.

The subsequent detailed design, realised by a group of professionals led by Greek architect Th. Papayiannis and completed in summer 2001, upgraded the area as a whole and incorporated the Olympic Venues in the Master Plan. Its concept aimed primarily at re-valuing the natural environment of the Bay and making the sea element predominant in a modern context, as it was in the past.

Two other Olympic competition venues were to be located in the area per the Olympic Master Plan, the existing to-be-renovated Peace and Friendship Stadium for Volleyball and the demolished and reconstructed Karaiskaki Stadium for football tournaments. Furthermore, sizeable transport infrastructure projects were also located there, including the coastal avenue - Kifissou junction, southern and western branch of the Olympic Ring Road respectively, making it the most important of Olympic transport projects.



Aerial view of the Faliro Bay, source Organisation for Master Plan of Athens, 1999.

2.2. *Outline of the Project*

The main objectives of the Project were:

1. To re-establish the Faliro Bay, from a historic point of view, as an important arena of the city's public activity.
2. To re-establish the physical connection of the city to the sea and to re-confirm the sea's eminent position in the Athenian mentality and culture.
3. To develop the necessary infrastructure (maritime and hydraulic works) to make the area usable all year round and to protect northbound Kallithea and Moschato municipalities from flooding.
4. To create large spaces by the sea easily accessible and open to the public, which would support all sorts of sport and other activities and add a "public gathering" character to the area, generally missing from the Athenian urban environment before the Games.
5. To upgrade the distinct ecosystem of the area, practically vanished for years.
6. To attract the kind of activities that would make the project's ownership and management financially viable after the Olympic Games. It was to be, in brief, the "Games Gateway" and then the, equally necessary, "City Gateway".

The project was outlined and scheduled for completion in two phases, pre- and post-Olympic.

The Project's Olympic phase scope of works included:

1. Transferring the Horse Race Track to another location and removing all associated activities and facilities, inside or around it.
2. Removing all deposited material and other offensive uses, such as garbage reloading, faltering sport facilities, small temporary residence quarters, illegal dumping etc.

3. Infrastructure works such as landfill, maritime and flood protection works, canalisation of Ilissos river estuary and geo-technical works. Public services, internal road network, road accesses, underground crossings to link the area with residential zones to the immediate north from the coastal avenue.
4. Construction of a Beach Volley centre (130.000 sq.m. including surrounding area), consisting of: Open –air amphitheatre with a capacity of 4.000 seats (which were upgraded to 8.000 for the Olympic tournament by transforming it into an arena), eight (8) training and warm up courts and support facilities of 8000 sq.m. total surface hosted in a linear building across the complex's longitudinal axis, visitors' facilities, parking areas and landscaping .
5. Construction of a nautical sports marina (93.000 sq.m. area) with space for over 350 boats, for sport and recreational purposes. The marina is complemented, to the north, by a linear service building, of 4900 sq.m.
6. Creation of functional open spaces of about 240.000 sq.m., to be used for street attractions, public exhibitions, sport, recreation etc. during the Games, apart from being the Athenians' favourite promenade spot by the sea. Those included, amongst other:
 - a. A pedestrian bridge (Esplanade) 40 meters wide and 800 long, connecting the adjoining urban areas through the old racetrack and over the coastal avenue to the sea. Together with the line of buildings' roofs along the complex's longitudinal axis, parallel to the coastline, it creates an elevated promenade of about 1km length over the whole complex, ideal e.g. for road exhibitions, art and other cultural events etc.
 - b. The Water Plaza, at the Esplanade's end towards the sea. The Plaza was transformed into a Sponsors' village during the Games with significant success in terms of cultural events (concerts), public games of various kinds, marketing and merchandising.
 - c. The old Race Track area, which was used for parking of spectators, sponsors and athletes' transport media.
7. Construction of a multi-purpose Indoor Hall of 4.000 permanent seats (raised to 8.000 capacity for the Olympics) and support facilities of a total surface of 11.600 sq.m in an area of 161.500 sq.m, to host the Tae-Kwon-Do and partly the Handball Olympic tournaments and to be used as a landmark for the eastern end of the area. This Hall is situated on the Axis of North-South running Syngrou Avenue and its silhouette is visible when heading from the city towards the coast. Its sophisticated roof design shape was intended to mitigate its large volume.

Final design, land acquisition and construction cost reached 243 Meuros. The design took 12 months to complete, tender processes lasted three months and construction works were completed in 28 months, about four months before the Olympics for the whole area.

The success of the Olympic site was immense. More than 30.000 spectators (and visitors) were on site per day during the Olympics, due not only to the hosted sports' own attraction but also to the site itself. At the same time, all other forms of entertainment or events hosted in the area showed its potential as home for innovative and at the same time remunerative forms of activities, not only in terms of possible income but also of better quality and conditions of living in an urban context.

The post –Olympic scope of works includes:

1. Completion of hydraulic and flood protection works, parallel and northbound from the coastal avenue. The plan provides for relocation of the raised artery about 100 metres towards the sea front and submerging of its axis in line with the ground level. The necessary road works inside the Faliro Complex area were completed within the Olympic phase scope. The plan also includes the replacement of the

- old artery with water canals linking with the Ilissos riverbed, to serve as flooding water routes, as well as the construction of two bridge form crossings linking the adjoining municipalities local road network with the Faliro Complex area.
2. Transformation of the Beach Volley centre into a home for cultural events (concerts, theatrical plays) and a point of attraction for the area. The linear support facilities building will host, as an initial plan, social purpose uses of the neighbouring municipalities.
 3. The closed functional spaces in the area, and particularly around the Esplanade and the Water Plaza will be used as reception and information areas, whereas public uses such as a thematic museum, eg around Faliro itself, are also possible.
 4. The old Race Track is to be transformed into a green area and in any case to be exploited for mild and environmentally friendly activities.
 5. The area at the western end of the Bay, between the two river estuaries, undeveloped in the Olympic phase, is to be transformed into an ecological park including an environmental centre and mild sports facilities.

2.3. *Post-Olympic prospects. “Creative” concepts and visions*

The main parameters of Faliro master plan, design and construction and, most importantly, the allowable uses of the area and the respective environmental terms during and post-Olympics were consistent with the Structural Plan for Athens (SPA), prepared in the early 1980s. SPA set the basic goals, objectives and priorities for the development of Athens with regard to urban structure. It generally envisaged the development of multi-nodal urban areas, the relocation (or at least deconcentration) of port services, the development of major recreation/open space areas, the protection of the surrounding mountains, etc.

Unavoidably, due to the totally different economic and planning context at the time it was prepared, the SPA, which was actually the base of all programming in the city until the Olympic Games, did not propose in any of the planned interventions, including Faliro, elements related to quality of life that could attract new investment and entrepreneurship activities.

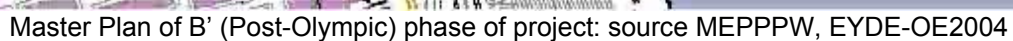
After the Olympics, having to balance environmental issues, legal restrictions and financial viability, and taking into account the rapidly expanding “creative economy” concept, there was a lot of discussion about the possible uses of the Complex. After some deliberations, in June 2005, the “Olympic Venues Post-Olympic development and social utilization Act” (3342/06.06.2005) was voted by the Parliament, to amend the Olympic sites’ programmed post-Olympic uses and construction allowances. For the Faliro Complex, it mainly provided for the transformation of the Indoor Hall into a Metropolitan Conventions Hall, ideally located due to its proximity to major hotels, the city centre and the coast.

The main issues one has to consider in valuing the post-Olympic prospects of the Faliro project as well as its role as “creativity” space in the future include the following:

1. The project will be operationally justified only when post-Olympic phase works will be completed and functional integration reached. It is reminded that the area’s master plan includes the totality of works later divided in two faces and is based on a long term perspective of the area as the abovementioned “city gateway”.
2. The achievement of a sound financial, social and environmental result is not an easy task and the various prospects have to be carefully considered. In an older research executed for the competent Ministry, without including possible new establishments or uses, the operation and maintenance cost for the area was estimated yearly at around 5-7 Meuros and the respective possible income from the Marina and the Indoor Hall as a sport facility at 2-4 Meuros (University of Thessaly, 2003, “Post-Olympic utilization of Olympic Venues”). It obviously cannot be covered without a realistic yet innovative business plan, incorporating new activities in the area.



Master Plan of A' (Olympic) phase of project: source MEPPPW, EYDE-OE2004



3. In the above context, those activities will have to combine all the area's and the city's assets, namely the cultural element (plays, concerts etc), the open space element (recreational space, restaurants, cafes, open promenade), the natural elements of the sea and the high quality general environment, a landmark activity (the Conventions centre) etc., able to attract investment and generate public interest and income, not only for the area as such, but dispersed and exploitable by other city economic sectors.
4. The lately adopted, and shortly-to-be legally enacted in Greece, Public-Private Partnerships, offer a good opportunity for financing such a long-term business plan. The context of such an endeavour has though to be carefully studied before its application.
5. In the period after the Games, it became obvious that local government agreement and the inhabitants participation into the above can and has to be transformed from a possible stumbling block into a basic success parameter.

The Faliro Project, albeit one of the big successes of the Games, has yet a long way to go to prove its role as a success for the city and its new economy. The prospects are there, the political will is strong, yet time will tell if those are enough to produce the expected results.

2. Transport infrastructure. Metropolitan functionality

2.4. The context

On the day of September the 5th, 1997, when Athens was voted as the city to organize the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad, that is the 2004 Olympic Games, the urban environment of the Greek capital had major and easily spotted differences from the environment that actually hosted the Games. The Airport was still functioning from the site of Hellinikon, Metro lines were still under construction, the national motorways adjacent to Athens were in "bad shape", Kifissos river kept on flooding occasionally, and, last but not least, Attiki Odos was at that time a long-desired-however-not-mature-yet project.

The International Olympic Committee members voted for Athens, after having thoroughly examined the Bid File. In this three-volume city "manual", the basic design principles of the Olympic Games Masterplan were posed, explained and justified on the basis of operational needs. Gathering a number of venues in two main poles –one north and one south- and connecting them, as well as more Olympic competition venues, through the Olympic Ring Road were priorities "inherited" to the Organising Committee. Despite all the changes in the venues location that occurred in the following years, the two aforementioned design principles had always been the fundamental issues of the Athens Masterplan.

In a city of more than 3,5 million inhabitants and only one obsolete [and not reliable] train line, it was logical that the need for infrastructure projects for the connection of the venues was a priority of equal importance to actually constructing these venues. The figures of the Olympic Games were huge [16,000 athletes, 2,000 VIPs, 21,000 media representatives, 350,000 spectators per day, 150,000 staff members] and the number one need was to successfully carry all this crowd to and from the venues, to and from the Airport, to and from the sea, to and from the city centre, to name only a few popular destinations. However reaching the surprisingly high number of approximately 50 new transport projects contracts seemed like a fairytale.

Actually the Athens case seems to confirm in an absolute way that as you move on the way, you get to dream more, you get to plan for more and eventually you get to construct more. In relation to city transport needs, the Olympic Games fulfilled three roles at the same time: the perfect "alibi" [design-wise], the perfect motive [money-wise] and the perfect goal [operations-wise]. Urban planners and transport engineers -under the auspices of the Ministries and with a little help from the construction companies- eagerly exploited the

opportunity to propose more than the city could have imagined ten -or even two- years prior to the Olympics.

The transport projects are mainly divided in two big categories: the road projects and the fixed rail projects. This categorisation is primarily based on the similarities in the scope of works of each category's projects; however a secondary resemblance within them can also be spotted. Road projects were designed to serve the car and bus fleet of the Athens 2004 Organising Committee, carrying the accredited members of the Olympic Family: VIPs, athletes and media. Fixed rail means were to be used mainly by less important groups [however bigger in size] of the Olympic Games: staff members and spectators. Bearing in mind that the two latter groups were not "allowed" to use their private cars during the Games, one can easily add certain quality and quantity characteristics to the two big categories of the transport projects. The road projects aimed to carry a fairly big number of cars and buses, however goal number one was to maintain a certain speed and meet the timelines for each itinerary / distance. The priority for the fixed rail projects was to carry more than the average capacity of the transport means, meeting also the timelines.

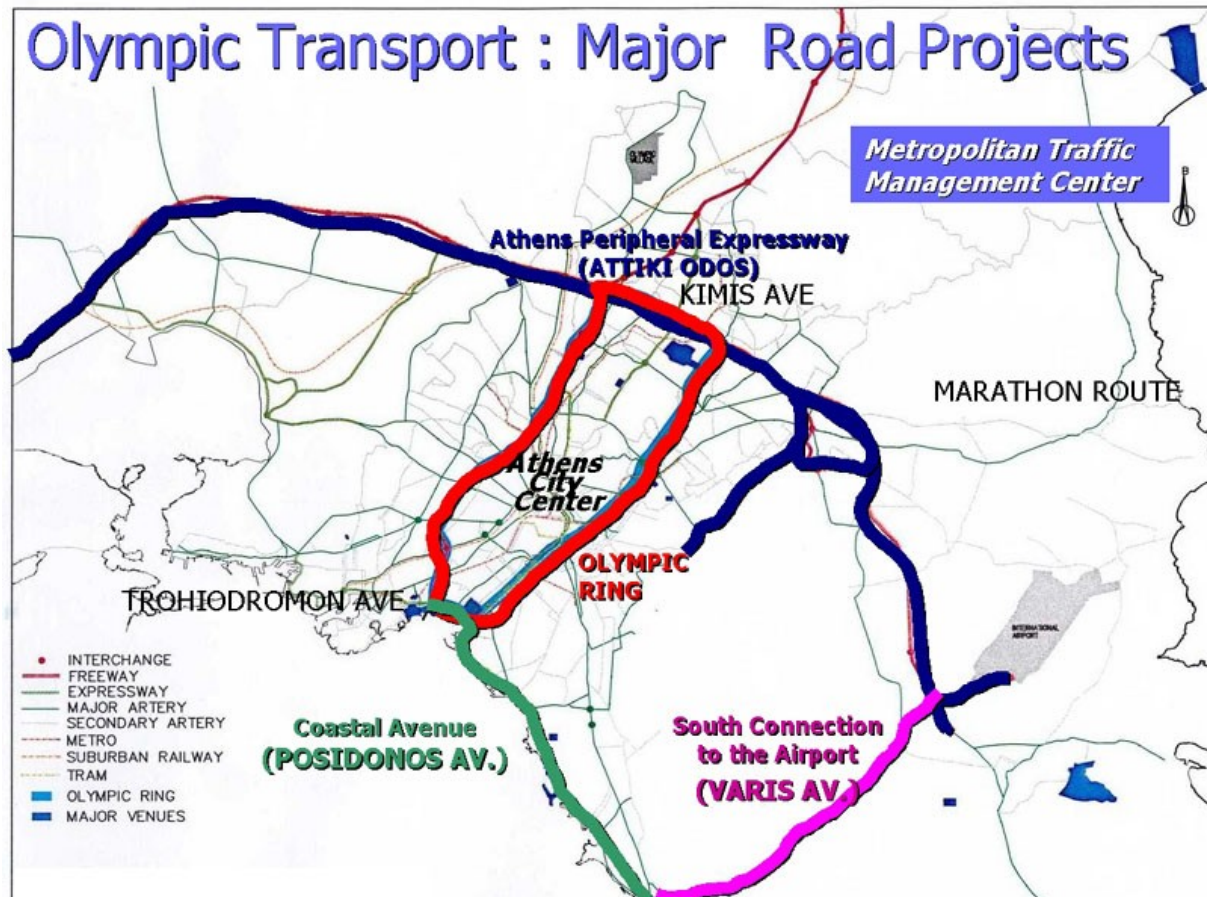
2.5. *The Road Projects. Planning for the Games?*

The **Olympic Ring Road** is a road network of almost circular shape mainly consisting of existing arteries, that was designed to be the main transport route and to carry more than half of the daily Olympic transport operation. The Olympic Ring Road is formed by the coast line Poseidonos Ave. on the south, the national highway connecting Athens to Thessaloniki on the west, Attiki Odos on the north, and the traffic backbone of the city as the eastern branch: Syngrou Ave. beginning from the seaside and expanding to Kifissias Ave on the north towards Attiki Odos. Eight contracts of either new construction or upgrading of existing roads, refer to the Olympic Ring Road. Due to the proximity of the Olympic Ring Road to the city centre, as well as due to the creation of this circular mainly-high-speed road network, all the Olympic Ring Road projects seem to be the most important ones for the city's transport legacy after the Olympic Games.

Attiki Odos is the second BOT (partly privately financed) project ever to be constructed in Greece. The new highway of 3 lanes per direction, with a total length of 65 kms was a project initially conceived many decades ago. It is worth noting that all those years that Athens was expanding towards all directions, the footprint of Attiki Odos remained as an unobstructed no-man's-land, as a palimpsest of the future. Attiki Odos is the main [if not the only] road leading to the new Airport, connecting the western to the eastern suburbia, crossing the national highway and other important road arteries of Athens and the Attica basin.

Upgrading the National Highway -Kifissos Avenue- [improving at the same time the hydraulics of a river that was occasionally flooding] was another big advantage for the city occurring from Olympic planning. Syngrou-Poseidonos-Kifissos-Attiki Odos are now a 3-lane motorway interconnecting many different parts of the city, El. Venizelos Airport and the Messogheia area. On the other hand, the new interchanges on Kifissias Ave, are serving a big number of cars going to and from the city centre.

Among the significant road projects for the city's future are the projects created for the connection of the city to the Port of Piraeus [6 contracts awarded]. However, the upgrading of existing roads and the construction of new ones may have added transport capacity to the route towards the Port, but might be regarded as an incomplete project, since it was not combined with any severe changes in the port's post Olympic operation. Other road projects had marginal effects in the city's operations, improvement and overall attraction of "new economy" uses, for they serve mainly as connections of new venues with existing road arteries. The benefit out of these road projects would be evident, only if the post Olympic use of the constructed venues was such as to require an improved road network.

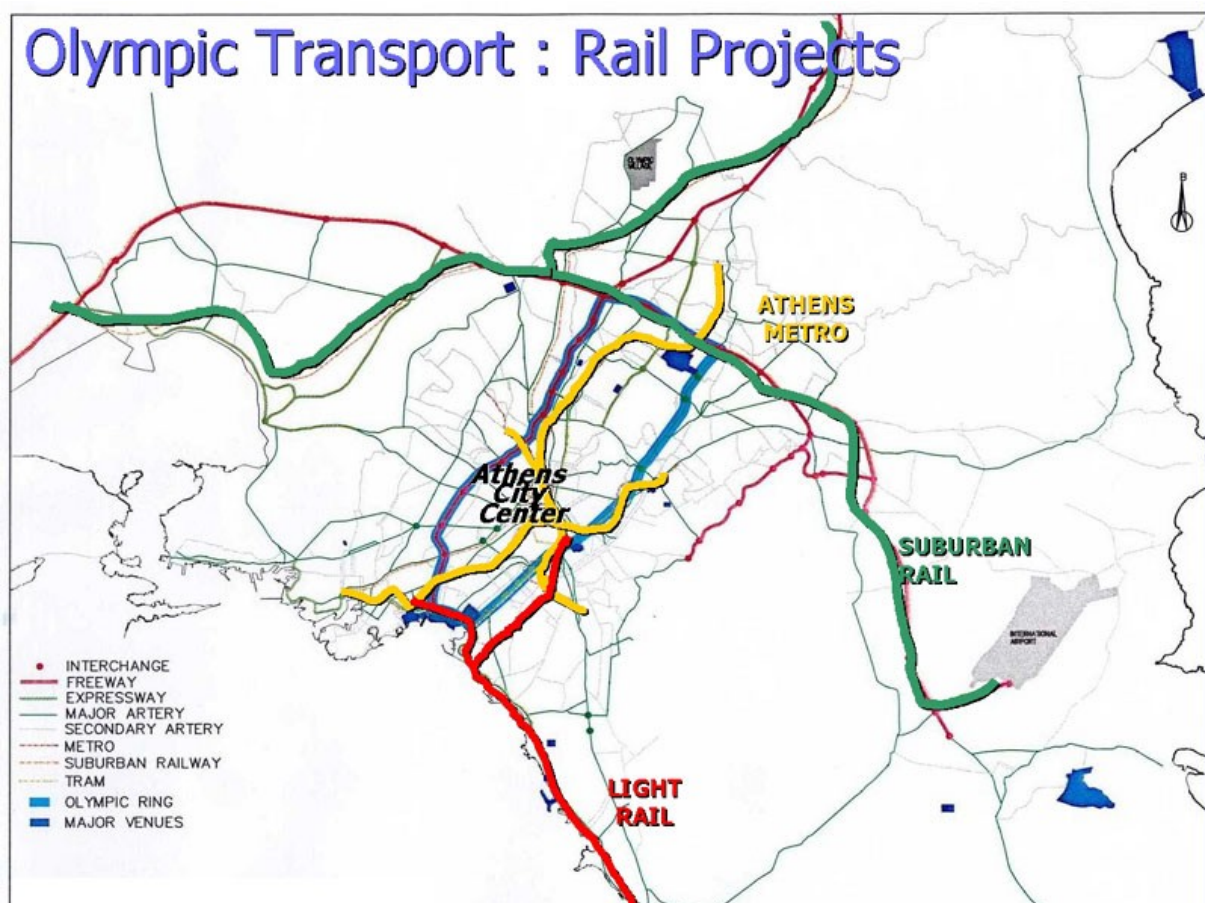


Master Plan of Road Projects, source Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, ATHENS 2004

2.6. The Fixed Rail Projects. Serving spectators / citizens.

As mentioned, the main goal of public transport operation during the Olympics would be to carry the huge numbers of spectators and staff to and from the Olympic competition venues. The existing train line and the two recently inaugurated Metro lines were not sufficient for the connection of the venues, while the bus network did not seem reliable time-wise. The need for extra support was more than obvious, especially about the transport connection with the main Olympic pole [OAKA, Athens Olympic Sports Complex], the coastline Venues and the Airport. The three projects that were launched to improve the public transport of Greek capital were creating a new network of fixed rail means: the extension of the Metro lines, the construction of the suburban railway and the construction of the tramlines.

The operation of the Athens Metro was a project, initially planned for completion for the Centennial Games of the 1996, were these to be held in Athens and not Atlanta. However, and mainly due to unforeseen underground conditions, completion and actual operation of the new Metro lines began with a 4-year delay, in January 2000. The Olympic requirements and the city's needs coincided then in the extension of the two Metro lines to all directions. These extensions were included in the initial scope of works of the Metro construction company, and the organisation of the Olympic Games simply accelerated the process. The two [not entirely] new fixed rail projects were the tram and the suburban railway. Athens is the city where a unique phenomenon occurred: that of re-constructing the light rail network that had been deliberately demolished in the 1950s. A much different tram service was operational in the city centre for many years; however its operation was terminated after being "accused" of unreliability. The debate for the design of the new tramlines was huge and all interested parties expressed different opinions about the areas to be served and the actual configuration.



Master Plan of Rail Projects, source Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, ATHENS 2004

The outcome of the debate was seriously delaying the project that at the end was completed only one month prior to the Olympics. The main goal of the new tramlines was to connect the city centre with the coastline venues [Karaïskaki Stadium, Peace & Friendship Stadium, Beach Volleyball Centre, Faliron Pavilion, Hellinikon Complex and Aghios Kosmas Sailing Centre], with a T-shaped network of three lines. Now that the Olympic Games are over, the frequency of the service and the time required for average distances problems remain prominent.

The suburban railway is the last but not least important project in the list of transport projects that we are presenting in this paper. Unfortunately, it seems to be the least wisely thought of and planned. Designing such an important project as a city's suburban railway was in the case of Athens only based on two issues: on one hand, the need of connecting the Airport with a fixed rail mean of transport was imperative and on the other hand, the biggest section of Attiki Odos was already constructed and fully operational. The solution to quickly constructing was to use the median lane of Attiki Odos. This decision produces a controversy which is commented upon in the following section.

2.7. *Transport as an integrating catalyst*

All transport Infrastructure described above, new construction, upgrading or even traffic management programmes were, besides the Olympics, at the same time planned as the supporting network, prerequisite in any urban fabric for operational efficiency and dispersion of activities. The issue though of actual "bonding" and economic interaction of the areas connected through it, rests on many other social and planning parameters and remains currently unresolved.

3. Urban planning and the Games: an overall assessment

The third issue that we examined is to what degree and to what direction the Projects and Works for the Olympic Games have influenced the overall urban planning process of Athens and the resolution of its long standing problems.

Firstly, what is the official (Ministry's responsible for planning issues) position on the city's planning:

The basic concept of the physical planning authority on urban development in Athens has a dual aim. On one hand to initiate and strengthen programmes of rehabilitation and enhancement of central city areas and on the other to restrict urban development in the peripheral areas and the Attica countryside, areas under constant pressure for development.

This concept reflects the common sustainable planning maxim that, for countries in the European Union, what constitutes the urban problem is no more urbanizing new areas, but making the existing city liveable again, by the re-use of the neglected buildings, by the renewal of the degraded areas, by improving the efficiency and the sustainability of its services and infrastructure networks, by resolving the social problems caused by unemployment, urban poverty and minority groups and the urban problems of "pockets" or ghettos associated with these, by making the benefits of new technologies and of the information society accessible to all citizens.

No one could reasonably disagree with the validity of this concept in principle. But let us see how this concept is implemented in practice in the Athens region.

- (a) **City Centre:** A significant amount of resources was channelled in renewal and rehabilitation programmes in the historic centre of the city, run by the Ministry of the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works, by the Ministry of Culture, by the Unification of Archaeological Sites of Athens S.A., by the Municipality of Athens, and other agencies.

And yet the character of these programmes remains one-dimensional and the concern of the agencies managing them seems to have gone only as far as the physical design of public space per se. Little or no regard for establishing efficient ways of maintaining and managing the newly uplifted, of high aesthetic quality and costly public spaces; little or no regard for protecting them from becoming parking spaces or noisy entertainment areas; little or no regard for the design and implementation of a traffic and parking management scheme that would cater primarily for residents and would resolve through-traffic pressures;

There is little or no regard for the design and implementation of a plan to manage tourist crowds visiting the important monuments of the city, a plan that would accommodate in a sustainable way the access and parking of tourist coaches; little or no regard for the implementation of a land-use plan to protect neighbouring residential areas, while safeguarding at the same time normal conditions of function for commercial uses; no regard for a system of incentives and disincentives to avoid gentrification and to protect small artisanat establishments from becoming night clubs.

Take for instance the work of pedestrianisation of an important through-traffic route, Dionyssiou Areopagitou and Apostolou Pavlou, between the hills of the Acropolis and Pnyx, realised by the Unification of Archaeological Sites of Athens S.A. This project is of quite high standard from the viewpoint of aesthetics, construction and general environmental quality. Judged from a functional point of view one would describe it as half-baked; on the one hand the project has secured priority parking for all residents, on

the other no real alternative route has been provided to avoid the infiltration of through-traffic in the residential zone;

Enhancing the architectural character and improving the quality of public space in the historical centre is one thing (and a **worthwhile** thing). It is another thing to make sure that in doing so, we are not diminishing the functional efficiency and the everyday amenities and services that residents demand to lead a normal life. If we wish living in the central areas to be a result of free choice by households wishing to enjoy the diversity of the city centre and not an obligatory refuge of immigrant or low-income people alone, we have to make sure that central areas retain or reclaim their “normal” living conditions. And, incidentally, this includes –unfortunately, but so it is- catering for the cars of the residents; they also must have access to their home and a priority of parking space over visitors and other users of the city centre.

- (b) ***The Periphery:*** Going to the other end of the picture, to the vast peripheral areas of countryside, into which the city gradually expands, we find that the natural environment around the built-up area is developing under the same market conditions as always. It is difficult to discern a rational concept that explains this state of affairs. Much worse, it is impossible to discern a concept of sustainability. All we hear is the perennial motto “*no further expansion of the city is required*”. Were the authorities in a position to control urban development and prohibit it from swallowing the countryside, I would go along and support this as a rational decision. But are they able to control it? Stipulating minima plot sizes as a prerequisite for building development and then cancelling them with a long list of exceptions does not advance any land saving urban policy. Urban development in the form of urban sprawl into the countryside of Attica goes on unhindered, whether authorised or unauthorised.

This is particularly true in Messogheia, east of Athens and Mount Hymettus. This region deserves our attention and concern, because it is under enormous pressure and it seems that little is being done to guarantee that this pressure is channelled towards a sustainable form of development. What has to be emphasised is that this area is not simply an extension of the basin of Athens. Due to its mild microclimate, its natural characteristics, its coastal zone and the limited points of access from the west (thanks to the sizeable volume of Mount Hymettus), Messogheia has retained a low profile urban development with land uses associated with vacation, entertainment, agriculture, non-noxious industry. In spite of the location there of the Eleftherios Venizelos Airport and the business and commercial development accompanying it, in spite of massive land transfers foreshadowing large-scale development, Messogheia is still a low density and sparsely populated area; it will not remain so for long. Above all **Messogheia is a most important natural resource for Metropolitan Athens** and should be developed in a balanced way. For the time being the central planning authority is not only ignoring this enormous challenge (and enormous opportunity), but is also aggravating the problem by its inverted priorities of **first** increasing the accessibility of the area and **then** thinking about controlling urban development.

This observation refers to the immense programme of infrastructure projects exposed earlier: a multitude of both new road construction and improvements and junctions along important arteries, the tramway, the Metro extension, the Suburban Rail and, above all, the Attica Motorway, a high capacity peripheral road built to relieve traffic considerably from the central areas. It is this latter road, which massively increased the accessibility of the region of Messogheia from the rest of the city and thus lifted the last obstacle to the extension of the unplanned Athenian style development over the other side of Mt Hymettus.

To avoid this, the Ministry for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works must abandon the pseudo-policy “*we do not need town expansion*” - because **the city does expand, whether the Ministry wants it or not** - and draft a Sustainable Plan for Messogheia based on **planned** development. This would aim at locating nodes for private investment in urban development, already visualised by real estate interests, with the co-operation of public funds; at servicing the important concentrations of development by road and rail; at implementing strict controls and disincentives for dispersed development and at protecting the natural areas (Romanos, Aristidis, 2003, “Physical Planning as a tool of sustainable development”, in “Making Taxes work for the environment”, Ellhniki Etairia, Athens)

One important, and constantly neglected, instrument to assist this plan is public transport. So far the Metro and the Suburban Rail are used as instruments of therapy to alleviate an urban situation that was left to explode in the first three decades after World War II and to cover the whole *basin* of Athens.

Coupled with intensive control measures and a system of disincentives discouraging dispersed development beyond town plan limits, the Suburban Rail and the Metro could be used **as instruments of planning** to initiate and **determine** the pattern of urban development in Messogheia.

It should be noted that the Suburban Rail contradicts its name in that it does not really serve the suburbs, as it is constructed in the middle of a fast arterial road designed to do exactly the contrary, i.e. to avoid the suburbs; the Suburban Rail serves really to link the Airport to the city centre (and the main athletic venue during the Olympic Games). If the Suburban Rail were to serve the suburbs then the existing line should be linked, via a secondary rail or coach network, to the existing settlements, thus allowing the great majority of commuters to use public transport.

Based on public transport to cater for daily trips to work, a transformed urban structure of Attica (at least eastern Attica) would greatly assist the creation of a sustainable urban environment **until** the somewhat futuristic location-free employment installations, due to clean production technologies, become a reality.

You might think, it is late for this “revolutionary” idea, that planning must precede the phenomenon planned for! Tomorrow is going to be later.

The picture of sustainable physical planning in Athens is not very bright. This is good, because there is room for improving it!

4. Epilogue

When we attempt to define the projects that, though connected to the organisation of the Olympic Games, constitute also an unquestionable legacy to the city, we are faced first of all with evaluation criteria. An Olympic project that is judged as incidentally useful to the city is very different from one judged as indispensable to the city. Such an evaluation disregards the fact that all projects should satisfy four conditions:

- (a) harmony with the city planning's strategic goals,
- (b) financial viability on their own and creation of economic opportunities in a wider and up-to-date context,
- (c) to be in the list of priority projects and,
- (d) opportunity cost.

The Faliro Bay rehabilitation, the road and rail infrastructure works, the urban renewal projects and those improving the image of the city, some of the Media Villages (such as the two University accommodation installations and the two private housing developments), the Olympic Village (though the opportunity to create a model settlement of sustainability and of architectural excellence was lost) are among the Olympic Projects that are widely considered as a worthy legacy to the city of Athens in this respect. This leaves out basically the Competition Venues, which pose the serious problems of financially feasible post-Olympic use, of operation and maintenance costs and of a socially relevant integration in the function of the city.