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SOCIAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS

AGAINST THE OLYMPIC GAMES 2004, IN ATHENS

Introduction

The target of this paper is to demonstrate the spatial and environmental repercussions, together with the financial and social effects, of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, and to relate all these changes to the general restructure of Greek capitalism and its expansion within the broader area of European Union, now comprised of 25 member states.

Athens as the capital of Greece is an example, both particular and typical, of the deep changes that globalized neoliberal capitalism is bringing about all around Europe and the rest of the world. It is simultaneously a case study of grassroots reactions in a country that has not succeeded in establishing a strong tradition of mass and autonomous social movements, either old or new.

The hosting of the Olympic Games in the era of globalization was selected, on the one hand, as a tool for imposing Greek capital's hegemony in the Balkans and Turkey by expanding the international role of Athens and Greece and, on the other hand, as a tool for strengthening and promoting Athens' comparative advantages in the context of contemporary competition between cities.

Social, financial and political elites thought it would be easier to impose their neoliberal and antisocial policy on the majority of the population in the guise and glamour of a "great national idea" and in the name of a better future for all.

The "great idea" was partially convincing in the beginning, but later a great number of working people disagreed and still reject the decision to hold the Olympic Games, firstly because of the huge public debt they incurred and the resulting reduction of social resources in order to pay for them.

Globalizing Cities: some theoretical references

Cities still play an important role in the context of globalizing economies and societies. Contemporary changes have been expressed in the structural mutation of the global economy and assumed concrete shape according to particular places.

The widely accepted notion that density and agglomeration will become obsolete because global telecommunications advances allow for maximum population and resource dispersal, is poorly conceived (Sassen , 1991)

We recover the material conditions, production sites, and place – boundedness that are also part of globalization and the information economy. A detailed examination of the activities, firms, markets and physical infrastructure involved in globalization and concentrated in cities, allows us to see the actual role played by cities in a global economy. (Sassen, 2000)

Spatial dispersal, which creates the need for extensive financial control and management, on the one hand, and the process of international integrations and financial trends, on the other, reserve new roles for cities that are interweaved with local particularities and the different historical constitution of each city. Changes, now familiar to us, such as the stripping of once strong industrial centres, the emphasis on the Third World's industrialization and the rapid internationalization of the financial economy in a global network of transactions, have altered cities' relationship with the global economy.

Cities have entered into a process of internal restructuring with continual feed back in national, regional and international networks, aimed at extracting economic activities that correspond with and address "exogenous" motivating powers. This externality does not dispense the "endogenous" productive and economic functions of cities, on the contrary, it is exactly this interweave of the external / internal process that is the real creator of cities' new identities.

Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen use the term *globalizing cities* in order to describe the phenomenon of cities' restructuring under all these evolutions, emphasizing in this way the process of change, not on the stabilization of a model. (Marcuse, van Kempen 2000)

The two authors do not argue that the nature of this involvement is uniform or that all cities converge on a singular model of *globalizing city*.

Finally, the processes of economic globalization are reconstituted, according to Sassen, as concrete productive clusters, being localized in particular places which contain a multiplicity of activities and interests, some of them not connected with international processes.

By focusing on cities we can observe the geography of strategic places at a global level as well as the microgeographies and policies that arise in these places. Most importantly, through cities we can go deeply into social formations and see the social subjects of economic processes, the dominant and dominated classes and social groups acting in a concrete time instance.

Unemployment, low-paid, precarious jobs with meagre social security benefits, immigration, social polarities according to class, race, gender, religion, ethnicity and culture, ecological imbalance and cultural homogenization, all these new and old phenomena, arise and can be recorded and interpreted on the ground of cities. The product and driving force of socioeconomic processes, described above, is the spatial order of cities which has to do both with the central districts and the peripheries, with class geography and spatial exclusions as well as the accessibility of housing, social infrastructure and collective possessions.

Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen posed the question if *there is a new spatial order in cities* to a number of researches. The conclusion they arrived at refers not to a formation of new cities' but to a strengthening of previous spatial inequalities and polarities. (Marcuse, van Kempen 2000)

Surely, the forms of spatial exclusion that the two authors present, such as fortress, ghetto, enclosure e.t.c., have mainly to do with American and Third World cities. These extreme spatial polarities are not often found in Europe despite of the fact that here, too, we find exclusions, entrenchments and lines of divisions between rich and poor. Athens appears much more homogenous with respect to its socio-spatial fragmentation, in comparison to cities polarized according to class, race and national divisions.

Finally, Marcuse and van Kempen discover three types of spatial changes in cities: enforcement of spatial divisions with increasing inequality between the different parts and walling of each part, particular new spatial formations inside the basic divisions

and a number of “soft ” places where changes have taken place (seafront, central production areas, brown fields that were previously industrial districts, central areas with offices, housing and places for recreation and tourism, extended areas of social housing, historical buildings, public spaces and so on).

All these alterations produce, according to Edward Soja and other researchers, the deepest inequalities in human history, imposed precisely for the reasons mentioned above through authoritarian regimes and policies, even through wars. Since restructuring is absolute and general, it is impossible for it to be understood from the beginning of the processes, just as it is difficult for partial reactions and resistance on the part of the grassroots to be effective. This was the case of Athens as a *globalizing city* undertaking the Olympic Games.

The undertaking of the Olympic Games as a tool for a broader restructuring policy of Greek capitalism

The organization of the Olympic Games was the culmination of and functioned as a tool for a broader restructuring policy of Greek capitalism in the context of the European Union and the united market and in the perspective of a new role that Greece is intended to undertake, being the strongest economy in the Southeast European area. Athens’ position, in that sense, is strategic.

Under the ideological cloak of the Olympics and after the reversion of declarations about regional development, decentralization and polycentricity in Greek space, environmental upgrading and social cohesion, Athens was converted into a huge worksite and repository of a large amount of, mainly public, resources. These investments created new jobs for Greeks and immigrants who worked for the production of the major sporting and transportation projects under extraordinary working conditions.

The Olympic Games was the means for bringing about the adaptation of financial, social and spatial structures of Athens to enable them to correspond to both old and new centralized and profitable areas of capitalist activities, the demands of free European markets and competition between cities.

It was no coincidence that Athens’ restructuring was supposed to fit in with the enlargement of the European Union towards the east and the demand for new markets in a stable political context, for “safe” investments and profits in central and eastern Europe where low labour costs is a very attractive factor in the transitional period of the so-called economic and social “convergence”. The displacement of the European Union’s political and spatial priorities objectively strengthens the role of Greece and helps it to function as a preferential vehicle for the market forces’ penetration in the former “ socialist ” countries.

Athens in particular but also the broader periphery of Attica play the main role in national space, being the strongest administrative and financial centre with the most adequate infrastructure in Greece, the highest level of education, number of skilled workers and a strong geopolitical position. Athens’ central position in Greece as regards to its approaches to the European Union, the Balkans, the countries around the Black Sea, the eastern Mediterranean and the North Africa, could transform it to a “pre-emptive district” for the European Union and to a pole of reference with peripheral influence in its broader perimeter. The estimation above underlies a kind of strategy, although uncertain, for Greek capital which has been disputed by some Greek authors (Stathakis – Hadjimichalis, 2004) , and in any case, it is objectively precarious given the fragmentation of Balkans.

However, the displacement of the geopolitical centre of gravity of the European Union because of the new markets and the enlargement of Europe to an area where Greece has historically exercised influence, strengthen the possibilities of penetration, profitability and political domination of Greek capital. The Balkans and the areas around the Black Sea in particular could be preferential places for the market's expansion and offer opportunities for the financial enlargement of the whole Greek economy, while the periphery of Attica could be the strategic base for financial units with outstanding activity in these countries.

The turning to account of the geopolitical position of Athens according to the new strategic plans of Greek capitalism led to new priorities due to the Olympic Games and with the resources of the Community Supportive Frameworks I, II, III for the additional reason of a long period of productive and financial stagnation in Attica. Besides, the rapid evolution in both the European and the international economic environment and the expansion of the high technologies are expected to strengthen the European Centre and the zones it extends over, emphasizing spatial and social inequalities in European peripheries.

So the networks between Athens and other metropolitan Mediterranean and Balkan areas arose as a counterweight to these trends. Athens is expected to be transformed into a peripheral pole of the united enlarged European space which is based on mutual advantages and specializations, creating new capital activities like tourism, culture, recreation etc.

Given that the technological restructuring of Athens based on the extension of its productive base with new high technology products would be an unfeasible goal, it was decided to pursue a policy of both partially holding onto and renewing Athens' productive infrastructure in areas of existing traditions and specializations, such as construction, tourism and culture, together with the strengthening and modernization of some new branches of enterprise like telecommunications, energy, financial and credit services and so on.

The perspective for all these directions was Athens' incorporation in the Mediterranean, Balkan and Turkish network of spaces and the attraction of investments to it in order to empowered it in the international competition between cities.

The hosting of the Olympic Games was connected to a great number of transportation works – a new airport, new local and international roads, an urban railway, suburban train and ports' enlargement –financed from the Community Supportive Framework III or with private investment, after the assignment of their use and exploitation according to preferential agreements. In addition, a great number of sporting venues and other Games-related fixtures financed with public resources of both land and money, were concentrated in 16 Olympic Poles which are now to be conceded to large speculative private corporations for the most cruel exploitation, creating a new destruction of the surrounding natural and urban environment.

There was also a kind of gentrification in the broader area of the historical centre of Athens, aiming at improving the city's image and function. All these interventions were not designed to improve the everyday life of the majority of Athenians but for the prestige of Athens that was expected to be transformed to an international and extrovert capital, a place of tourism and administrative services.

Spatial and social repercussions of the Olympic Games in Athens

As is already clear, the driving forces of spatial transformations are financial and relate to choices, decisions and investments aiming at the extrovert orientation of Greek capitalism.

The competitiveness was based on the use of cheap labour force, on the use of public land of immeasurable value, on planning incentives for the land's exploitation and on public resources estimated at about 13 billions euro.

The great majority of the workers had no contracts regarding salaries or work schedules, they worked intensively, resulting in a large increase in the number of work accidents, especially fatal ones. The construction time schedules were very pressing, so any labour protest and particularly strikes were seen as a kind of betrayal of the nation.

During the Olympic Games working hours were deregulated, thereby opening the way for a later law that created a situation in which small enterprises could not compete and therefore a compulsory centralization of trade.

Moreover, the Olympics imposed more flexibility within labour relations and the further exploitation of salaried labour, whether in commercial, construction or tourism businesses. To a great extent, the current drain on the people's income through one-sided austerity, taxation and the retrenchment of social expenditure, is used to pay off the Olympic debt.

The development of the Olympic Games strengthened the tendency of aggressive capital to centralize, and to distribute profitable investments according to the interests of large and powerful groups of companies: construction, telecommunications, banks, media, up-market tourism.

The Olympic Games increased the centralization of Attica and imposed the historical polarization of Greek space between two metropolitan centres (Athens and Thessaloniki) , on the one hand, and many other medium or small centres, on the other. Athens and its periphery have a population of about 4.000.000 inhabitants while the total Greek population is estimated at 10.500.000 inhabitants.

The Games expanded the commercialization of space and imposed private business interests on the economy even though they were not investing their own but public money and speculating on public land and the stock exchange.

Before the Olympics Athens already had high population densities. It was not developed according to a plan but ignored its physical geomorphology. It developed without adequate public and open spaces or proper infrastructure, and after the destruction of a large number of historical buildings and the beautiful landscape of Attica. Nevertheless, this kind of development, which produced shapeless conurbations and an unlimited expansion of the city, enabled, in spite of its class character, a great number of the grassroots to acquire their own home. But at the same time, since this policy was based on a lack of planning and individual arbitrariness, the urban environment of the poorest strata was downgraded and deprived of public and social infrastructures, like open spaces, transportation, social services of health, education, culture, e.t.c. The result was not only the declining function of the city for the sake of all its inhabitants and the low indicators of collective, compared to individual consumption, but, in addition, the demerit of the collective, social and finally political meaning of the city.

Anyway, apart from these findings that refer to a previous period of development, it is certain that the contemporary, generalised commercialization of space leads to a new orientation of investments. Not only the sporting and the other major Olympic venues, together with new complexes for recreation, commerce and exhibitions, the expensive

housing and office projects, have to do with big and medium-sized businesses, in contrast to the small and medium-sized ones of the past, but, at the same time, the real estate market becomes inaccessible to the grassroots. Home prices have been increasing constantly since the Games and the plans of gentrification in the historical centre have led to changes of land-use and to high rent, thereby forcing many previous inhabitants to the periphery.

Spatial interventions in Attica during the past 15 years have brought about radical reversals of Athens' dominant spatial structure, which had been created gradually on a North-South axis, following the national highway and the train line, along the central national axis of development, which had divided, in a schematic way, the whole of Attica into eastern upgraded districts and western, downgraded ones.

After the decision to destroy the natural ecosystem on the Mesogheia plain, through the planning of the new international airport, and which led to a lot of transportation works, and with the construction of the Attiki Odos highway and its extensions in the Mesogheia plain, the spatial structure of the city changed radically, as a new axis for investments was created along the Attiki Odos.

The traditional organization of commercial spatial exploitation, concentrated mainly in the centre of Athens and secondary centres of the municipalities, has gradually been transformed following the above-mentioned decisions regarding the Olympics.

At the same time this spatial restructuring has motivated a new wave of interior urbanization and major economic activity that has imposed an urban division of labour, emphasizing the outward urbanization of Attica that is now being extended to the plain of Megara.

The new 16 Olympic Poles are going to deepen the internal spatial divisions and inequalities, in addition to the fact that the new interventions have been directed towards the already upgraded districts of Attica because of the pre-existing infrastructure and the expected greater profitability of capital from land surplus – value.

From the point of view of transportation, the situation after the Olympics is ambivalent. The new rapid circulation routes have increased the use of the private car, while the underground and the train have relieved the urban tissue of traffic and have supported the collective use of the city's infrastructure. Nevertheless, the tram was designed in order to serve the Olympic installations so it doesn't suit the everyday needs of Athenians.

The Games have had negative results on the ecological equilibrium of Attica. Its continuous deprivation from agricultural land and voracious urban expansion, either to cultivated areas or to surrounding urban space, mountains, forests and sea fronts, have exhausted the ecosystem's equilibrium, made it difficult to deal with typical natural phenomena such as rain, and produced dangerous atmospheric pollution.

Ecological, environmental and urban downgrading is expressed according to social differentiations that are spatially imprinted. The dividing lines between rich and poor districts are created on the basis of the above-mentioned upgrading or downgrading, respectively.

Another issue, closely connected with the quality of urban space and the natural environment as well as the relative equalization of some deep social inequalities or extreme speculative interventions and arbitrariness, regards the role of state in urban planning. Although the state didn't reject its political, ideological and institutional role in capital accumulation, on the other hand it by-passed the Master Plan of Athens and withdrew public regulations and restrictions, disclaiming this way public property and bringing back a regime of spatial *laissez faire* for capital interests. But, if the restriction of the state's intervention in planning was initially favourable, in a wrong

way, for the grassroots, the current release of capital accumulation in space will have negative effects not only on the physiognomy of the city but on the socio-spatial inequalities, as well.

We will insist on the city's physiognomy.

Outward urbanization, free of planning restrictions with regard to public infrastructure, open spaces, low population densities or multifunctionalism, flattens space through homogenization, disintegrates the small historical cores and creates a kind of conurbation that is deprived of all these elements that would give the extensions either the characteristics of a city or those of a suburb. Instead of a cluster of urban or suburban units and villages connected to the centre of Athens, the continuously extended urbanization breaks up the centre as well as the extensions. Henry Lefebvre describes in the decade of '60 the process of *deurbanization* – *suburbanization* which produces a double loss : on the one hand the continuous extensions of the city lose the features of urbanity, that is, its centrality and cohesion and, on the other, these extensions do not acquire real natural features.

If one considers the city as oeuvre of certain historical end social "agents" "... it cannot exist without things, without something to shape, without practico – material reality, without a site, without a "nature", a countryside, an environment ... To exclude the urban from groups, classes, individuals, is also to exclude them from civilization, if from not society itself. The right to the city legitimates the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregative organization. (Lefebvre, 1968)

So, the material reality of nature laid waste and a disarticulated city, that has emerged from the Olympic Games, poses a matter of civilization and constitutes an important area for objections and radical critique.

The idea of a city constantly under police surveillance is applied nowadays in cities where social and class polarization is strong and has been expressed in space through the ways Marcuse and Van Kempen have described.

Athens and other European cities, in spite of the enforcement and generalization of the police surveillance of space, according to the new, so-called antiterrorist, policy, applying firstly to the immigrants and concerned groups of young people, are not cities with very extensive or deep socio-spatial divisions imposed by repressive measures.

However, the Olympic Games opened the way for such new measures of policing and surveillance to be exercised in Athens. With the monitoring of the city from land, air and sea, the new role of the army as guarantor of social order, the uncontrolled action of international secret services, and with other analogous policies that cost 2 billions of euro, there a plan of suppression was applied according to the doctrine of "preventive danger", leaving negative effects after the Olympics: hundreds of cameras to supervise citizens, the reorganization of the police, the use of torture on immigrants, the policing of public space and, above all, the perception that states of emergency can be applied as the occasion arises.

Social and political resistances

An analytical presentation of the strategic plans set in motion by dominant social, economic and political forces through the Olympic Games make clear that a mass social movement against the Olympics ought to be expressed at many different levels. It ought to challenge not only the effects of this giant enterprise on the natural and urban environment, on land usage and prices, on social, labour or human rights and on

the incomes of the lower strata reduced because of taxation to pay for Olympic infrastructure, but at the same time, it was obliged to connect all these repercussions to an overall criticism of Greek capitalism in the context of neoliberal globalization.

Only a simultaneous examination of the partial and general dimensions could make it clear that the results of the Olympics were going to create new permanent socioeconomic and spatial polarities. So, in spite of the negative results of the Olympic Games on labour conditions and the everyday life of the majority of the population as well as on the environment, democracy and culture, the resistance organized against the Olympics were not in proportion to the extensive attack on the grassroots; the overall criticism didn't have any direct broader influence.

Some definitions of the terms in use are necessary in order to describe accurately what really happened both with the protests against the Olympics and the ideological positions of both supporters and opponents, as well as with a kind of consensus among the majority of the population with the prevailing decisions that was expressed mainly in the first period of the undertaking.

According to Charles Tilly *social movements combine three kinds of claims: program, identity, and standing. Program claims involve stated support for or opposition to actual or proposed actions by the objects of movements claims. Identity claims consist of assertions that "we" – the claimants – constitute a unified force to be reckoned with WUNC (worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment) performances back up identity claims. Standing claims assert ties and similarities to other political actors.*

...As it developed in "the West after 1750, the social movement emerged from an innovative consequential synthesis of three elements :

- 1. sustained, organized public effort making claims on target authorities (let as call it a campagne)*
- 2. employment of combinations from among the following forms of political action : creation of special – purpose associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, petition drives, statements to ...in public media, and pamphleteering (call the variable ensemble of performances the social movement repertoire);and*
- 3. participants' concerted public representation of WUNC: worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment on the part of themselves and / or their constituencies (call them WUNC displays) (Charles Tilly,2004)*

Since the first time that Greece had been a candidate country for the Olympics, in 1989, there had been two opposing trends within the population: the great majority of people supported the new major, national idea promoted by all the parliamentary political parties, while a small minority organized itself in order to pose its opposition publicly.

Greece is a country where public opinion is shaped to a large extent according to the polls and the media culture. Without any discussion of the benefits or harm of hosting the Olympics, people saw it as a national victory for their country, which according to main imaginary representations, is not recognized from strong and successful nation states.

Another reason for the consensus is ideological too, emerging out of the context in which collective identities are constructed. The former ground was the nation, the second, collective participation in a national and international athletic spectacle that functions like football, where people are identified with their team, expecting its goals and victories to be theirs, too.

People invest in records and phantasmagoric ceremonies since they themselves feel deprived of active roles in cultural creativity and of direct participation in the creative content of the Games. So, the Games were for the majority of Greeks something

pleasant and at the same time remote and, from the material point of view, without any visible economic, social or other cost to them.

Can we talk about a kind of movement for active support of the Olympic Games? No. There was neither a social motivation for supporting the Games nor permanent organizations to encourage popular action and participation in the organizational processes. Perhaps it is explained by the fact that the state, through its administrative, political and ideological mechanisms was the formal organizer. In most cases movements appear as a reaction by society to a central, usually state policy or in order to present their claims to the authorities. Besides, according to the definition of Charles Tilly, social movements organize campaigns, involving a range of political actions for the promotion and success of their goals and, in any case, they have *worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment*. Not one social intervention was organized in the period of contestation, nor were there permanent groups to support the event. The consensus of the majority was not active but estimated through polls and according to very general questions.

The participation of some thousands of people in mainly cultural displays was marginal and not directly connected with the support.

It is also noteworthy that the Olympic Committee didn't succeed in motivating a sufficient number of volunteers from the beginning. Many of the people that finally participated without pay in the Olympics expected to have some benefit to their future career; some others really wanted to help the collective national effort, which they believed the Games to be, but were disappointed with the real goals when they came in contact with the organization.

In contrast to the passive acceptance of the Olympics by the public, activists against the undertaking had to be organized in a permanent manner in order to pose the many different levels of criticism namely the social, economic, environmental, democratic, cultural and so on repercussions for Athens and Greece.

From the very beginning in 1989, collective initiatives were undertaken by citizens active in urban and environmental social groups, journalists, social and economic experts, specialists in sports issues and members of some small left-wing organizations. They tried through the *creation of special purpose associations and coalitions* (of course small and of limited influence), *public meetings, demonstrations, statements to and in public media, and pamphleteering* to make the theme widely known and to press the government not to persist with the undertaking.

The organized forms of resistance against the Olympic Games didn't succeed in preventing the undertaking but only to bring about a break in the as yet unbroken front of the consensus.

Although it is not absolutely correct, the use of term "social movement", mainly because of the small number of participants and the respectively limited influence both on society and the authorities, it is correct to use terms like *protest, conflict, struggle* and in some cases *movement* in order to describe the social mobilization in the two periods of contestation. In contrast to the very limited definition of Castells for the case of *urban social movements*, authors like Lowe, Pickwance, Danleavy, Saunders, use terms like *urban protest, urban conflict, urban struggle*. (Lowe, 1986) We can use the same or similar terms not only for urban mobilisations but in a broader way, in order to express collective initiatives pushing towards changes of some kind, at the same time distinguished from conventional pressure groups and voluntary associations.

In the second period of contestation, in 1996, the reactions against the Olympic Games were more on a mass scale, better organized and assumed an international dimension. Besides, the parliamentary renovative left-wing party was against the

undertaking and the traditional Communist Party didn't support the Games ardently as before, so their members participated in protests and other kinds of reactions. During that period the so-called movement against the Olympics made its positions clear both to Greece and to the International Olympic Committee. It held meetings, presented its views in the media when they were willing to present the opposite viewpoint, took recourse to the courts against the Greek Olympic Committee and the Government, accusing them of a lack of transparency and of squandering public money, and held a demonstration at the Acropolis the day before the decision of the International Olympic Committee for charge Games to Athens, when nine members of the protest organizing committee were arrested.

The government and the main opposition presented the undertaking as a great national success and a form of international recognition for Greece, trying this way to regain the ground they were losing because of their unpopular economic and social policy.

The ambivalence in public opinion regarding the Olympics can not only be interpreted ideologically but, also from the fact that people were not able to link the Olympic Games with past and future policies on economic, social, environmental, democratic and cultural issues. So the work of the so called anti-Olympic movement after the undertaking has been complex and its reconstitution in the new conditions is difficult.

On the one hand there has not been a clearly uniform goal for all the dispersed reactions so as to constitute a common vehicle of resistance, as was the opposition to undertaking in the period before the Games, and on the other, no tangible results of policies that were supposed to be applied were evident, as a means of influencing public opinion against the Games. Struggle was seemed to be in vain and the prevailing perception was that since we've got them we might as well try and make them a success.

Under these difficult circumstances the movement against the Olympic Games was constituted, following a gradual process of development. The "anti-2004 campaign" was a permanent, although not large team, that functioned as coordinator of all the dispersed protests and resistance, helping organize new action. Over time people began to realize the consequences of undertaking, particularly since the Olympic Committee, especially its president, were extremely arrogant, didn't keep to any democratic management, wasted public money and rejected any monitoring.

Most of the repercussions of the Olympic Games that the first part of this paper tried to present, appeared, less or more explicitly, during the period of preparation.

The first results had to do with the destruction of the natural and urban environment in the 16 Olympic Poles because of the giant sporting venues and complementary infrastructure that was quite useless either for mass athletics or other cultural events.

Urban social resistance that developed in most of these places succeeded in cutting down the size of some works and averting some others. They didn't succeed in preventing the construction or the planning of installations or the extent of the costs that were exorbitant due to the contractors' profits.

An international protest was organized to protect the archeological site of Marathon and the nearby wetland of Schinias, where the Olympic rowing center was built. The movement brought together environmental organizations, archeological schools and universities and many groups of active citizens throughout Attica. Although it proposed other sites, the movement didn't succeed in having an alternative accepted, but the case of Marathon made clear that neither the Greek Committee nor the Government intended to take reasonable objections into account. They were serving specific interests and therefore took decisions in the most authoritarian manner.

From the above point of view it becomes clear that however strong the anti Olympic movement was, it wouldn't have been able to prevent, for example, the environmental disaster, which meant stopping the projects and therefore stopping the Games.

So it set the target of trying to reduce the worst effects and to explain publicly the real objectives of the prevailing social, economic and political forces, as well as the repercussions on the majority of working people, the environment, urban space, democratic institutions and the sporting culture.

If the first front against the Olympics was environmental and for the protection of public space, over time social resistances emerged at many different levels.

The intensive working conditions in the construction sector, with the effective abolition of limits to working hours, and with daily accidents, didn't result in a strong labour movement because in this case working rights had been suspended. Of course, some protests developed and working conditions became known through the media.

Another sector of the people's resistance was human rights and national sovereignty. During the last few months of preparations, the government deployed a military and police network of measures and decisions for the so-called safety of the Olympics. AS it was already told, it was carried out through the intervention of the army in political processes, the imposition of the police, the unrestricted presence and action of foreign services and secret agents in Greece, the everyday surveillance of citizens and public space with cameras as well as the suspension of working rights and the establishment of forbidden "red" zones in city.

Many different forms of resistances developed against this giant project of repression. The most important of them was a mass demonstration against the presence of the US Secretary of State Colin Powell at the closing ceremony. The demonstrators succeeded in violating the red zones and denouncing, before the international mass media gathered in Athens for the Olympics, the war and the exploitation of the Games not for the sake of peace but for the legitimatization of war-mongering governments. Apart from this organization a form of mass disobedience was expressed in two ways: the destruction of surveillance cameras and insulting gestures directed up at the Zeppelin that kept Athens under surveillance from the air during the Games.

But the most important strike against the value and morality of the Olympic Games were the revelations regarding doping among champion athletes.

The anti – Olympic movement had often condemned the model of the supernatural athlete constructed in by medicine rather than in the arena of high ideals and noble emulation. Now that medicine is able to intervene in human DNA and the athletes' physiology for the greatest profit of the multinational corporations, the only way to stop this development is to stop the Olympic Games as a giant organization and to substitute it with meetings on a human scale based on mass athletics for all.

When the World Anti-doping Agency (WADA) imposed sentences on all doped athletes the consensus among the Games spectators wavered considerably and the anti Olympic movement seized the opportunity to explain, once more, the false basis of the Games with regard to athletic ideals.

Mass athletics for all does not need giant installations, giant spectacles in order to promote it nor exorbitant expenditure usually with the public money of the grassroots. On the contrary, it needs open space, clean sea and air and greenery. The chasm between true sport and the Olympics, between individual effort and spectacles, between health and doping, between real records set by real people and records as a result of doping, all these contrasts were explicitly expressed during the Games showdown. And although the Games and records set there usually enforce racist behaviors and nationalism, during the inaugural ceremony Greeks applauded

countries like Iraq, Palestine and Cuba which have been occupied or threatened by the USA.

After the end of the Games what became clear was the extent of the massive public debt, the heavy taxation on the grassroots, the retrenchment of social expenditure, the suffocation of the environment, the reduction of working and human rights and the loss of the human athletic ideal.

So support for the Olympics radically turned in the opposite direction and the high consensus broke down. A number of circumstances facilitated the demystification of the Olympic Games as an sporting and cultural event and made clear its economic, political and ideological effects. In this context the so-called movement against the Olympic Games acted as a catalyst.

Did the anti-Olympic, as well as being a reaction against changes resulting from Athens' radical transformation in the context of neoliberal globalization, movement have some features in common with the anti-global movement in Europe and the whole world?

From the point of view of its presence in European fora, we can say yes. In Florence, Paris and London, where meetings of the European Social Forum took place, there were seminars on the Olympic Games. Especially in London, in 2004, the city that has already undertaken the next Games, Greeks carried all the experience of the movement to the Londoners.

The Greek Social Forum was also one of the main participants in the Greek anti – Olympic movement as a meeting place for individual reactions. Last but not least, the global movement against neoliberal globalization is constantly enriching local and national movements, bringing together people with both different and common experiences and traditions and helping them to interchange ideas, practices, forms of organization and so on. The anti – Olympic movement as well as any movement in Greece that has a global perspective have been positively affected and changed through their communication with European and global movements.

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