

Field Trip 4:

Natural Areas within the Urban Context of Athens: the Natural and the Public in Dispute

The objective of this field trip is to reveal various aspects of the co-existence of natural with urban areas within the urban context of Athens. Issues concerning this field trip will be: in the particular context of Athens, what is a natural area, how it is defined and by whom, both in regulatory mechanisms as well as in the public debate.

The field trip focuses on areas in dispute as far as their natural and public character is concerned. Apart from being plotted, their final status is set by constant dynamic relations; on one hand there is a claim for public land and struggle for conservation and rehabilitation of remains of natural areas within the urban tissue, and on the other hand there is pressure by city expansion and private interest. Citizens' movements and a number of collective mobilisations arise over this issue. In particular, we will move on the eastern side of the city of Athens, where broader natural areas, which relate to the mountain Hymmetus, extend.

Issues examined in this field trip apply to the historical case of regulation status within this particular context of Athens. Fragmentary regulation of natural area often resulted in the assimilation of the natural into the urban. Physical and natural parts of Attica scenery such as streams, gulfs, hills and fields, disappear as urban areas develop, often without prediction and plan for open, public space. The question of open spaces and natural areas in Athens is often the question of managing voids, areas which remain unbuilt often by chance, rather than discussing issues of design of public parks.

Stop 1: Goudi Metropolitan Park

Our first stop is going to be at Goudi Metropolitan Park; a large open area that remained inbuilt and became a park by chance. The park's environmental significance lies on two reasons: first that it is a 'green' transition from urban to suburban and natural areas and second that it lays on top of the convergence of Imittos Mountain and Illisos

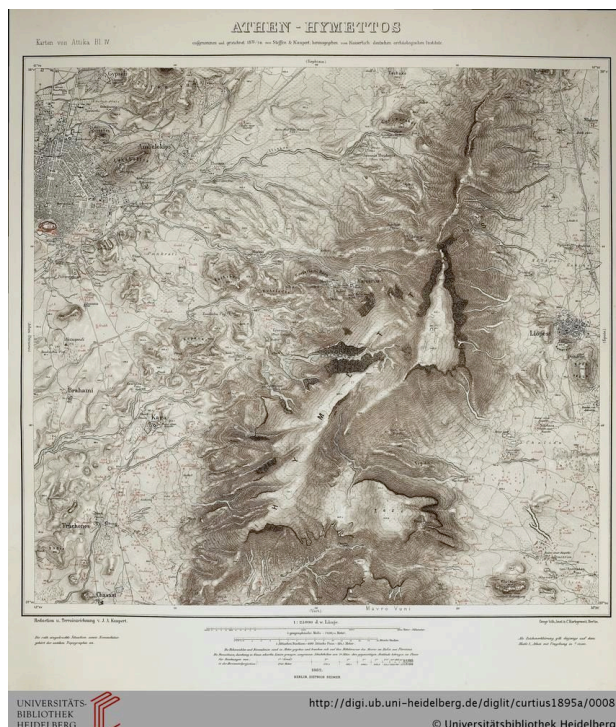


stream. Furthermore, Goudi is an ex-military camp that often housed several governmental buildings. Nevertheless, the park is considered as one of the most privileged open areas in Athens that has yet to be ‘properly’ exploited. As a result, it has been under strong pressures for being built and commercially developed. Another interesting feature in Goudi’s park history is its disputed characterization as an open area. Although it has been characterized by Regulation Law 1985 as public land - a park - there have been numerous attempts to try claiming it for private use or for public, commercial uses. More recently, it was used as a site for certain **Olympic Games** facilities; something that was supposed to be a temporary use albeit these facilities are still there. Out of all these, a strong popular movement was developed in order to advocate for the area’s use and struggle for regulation and against development pressures.

Stop 2: Villa Zografou

Going further into Athens’ urban neighborhoods, our second stop is at Zografou Villa, in Zografou Municipality. An example of an open area within a densely populated neighborhood, Zografou Villa has been an element of conflict between private and public interests for some decades. Since 1974 numerous legal acts were drafted, trying to define the public or non public land status of this 8,000m² area. A citizens’ movement that struggles against opportunistic decisions and legislation was organized. The case of Zografou Villa and its disputable nomination as to whether it is public or private land raises further questions concerning the opportunistic character of legal acts driven from individuals’ needs and claims, that often in the lack of official legislation may serve as means of institutional regulation.

Stop 3: Kaisariani



Afterwards, we will arrive at the top of Kaisariani hill from where, apart from an intriguing view of Athens, one has the opportunity to understand the topography of Attica region and the ways that urban sprawl has ‘conquered’ past natural reserves and green areas. The green hill of Kaisariani, although it looks like it’s been like that for centuries, is in reality an ‘aesthetic forest’; a manmade forest whose planting started in the early 1900s. Despite this effort to revitalize Kaisariani’s forest, even this aesthetic forest is nowadays threatened by the city’s expansion and by private interest. During this stop, we will have the opportunity to discuss the current struggles with a representative of

local movements aiming to protect this forest.

Stop 4: Stream of Pikrodafni

The stream of Pikrodafni springs from the Hymettus Mountain and flows down to



the Faliron bay while crossing the municipalities of Ilioupoli, Aghios Dimitrios, Alimos and Palaio Faliro. The urban tissue reaches the adjacent areas of the stream across its route; and in some points, especially in Aghios Demetrios, gets almost into it. Moreover, in some cases its bed is transformed into a cement bed, and it forms houses' back yard. In the municipality of

Ilioupolis the stream is covered for the most of its route and until 2000, remained uncovered only one kilometer. In 1995, Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works [YPPEXODE] characterised Pikrodafni stream as a “natural formation under protection” and integrated it in the master plan of Athens. But the Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Company (EYDAP) on the basis of certain projects held by it, started works of drainage and constructed a cement basin for the stream at the region of Ilioupoli. It is a usual policy, as far as the arrangement of the stream is concerned; to settle the stream by covering it, as a form of cleansing it. On this occasion, a diverse social movement emerged in that region, linking citizens across the route of the stream. They organized protests, demonstrations, in an attempt to prevent the works from being realized. They appealed to the Council of State for proclaiming illegal the works. Therefore, in 2001, the Council of the State decided that these works should be cancelled, as they didn't provide the “natural formation” with the protection that the law demanded. The Council of the State, a superior juridical institution has many times questioned the legitimacy of such acts, resulting in regulating the status of a natural area in dispute. As a result, 700 out of 1000 meters of stream have been saved.

Programme

9.00 Meeting in front of the NTUA building [42 Patission St. (28 Octobriou St.)]

9.45 Stop 1: *Goudi Metropolitan Park*

Presentation:

Vozikakis G., Representative of Commission of Residents for Goudi Metropolitan Park, "*Goudi Metropolitan Park: Practices and Perspectives of the Commission of Residents for the Goudi Metropolitan Park*".

12.00 Stop 2: *Villa Zografou*

Presentation:

Ploubidis G., Representative of Struggle Commission of Residents for Zografou Estate, "*Villa Zografou: The reclaim for open space*".

13.00: Stop 3: *Kaisariani*

Lunch -Break

14.00

Presentation:

Schizas G., Writer, Publisher of OIKOTOPIA, "*Hymmetus Eco-System: Issues of Urban Ecology*".

15.30 Stop 4: *Stream of Pikrodafni*

Presentation:

17.00: Back to Athens

See also:

Web Site of Struggle Commission of Residents for Zografou Estate:

www.vilazografou.gr

"*The map of social resistances in open spaces*":

<http://www.buildings.gr/elxw/index.htm>