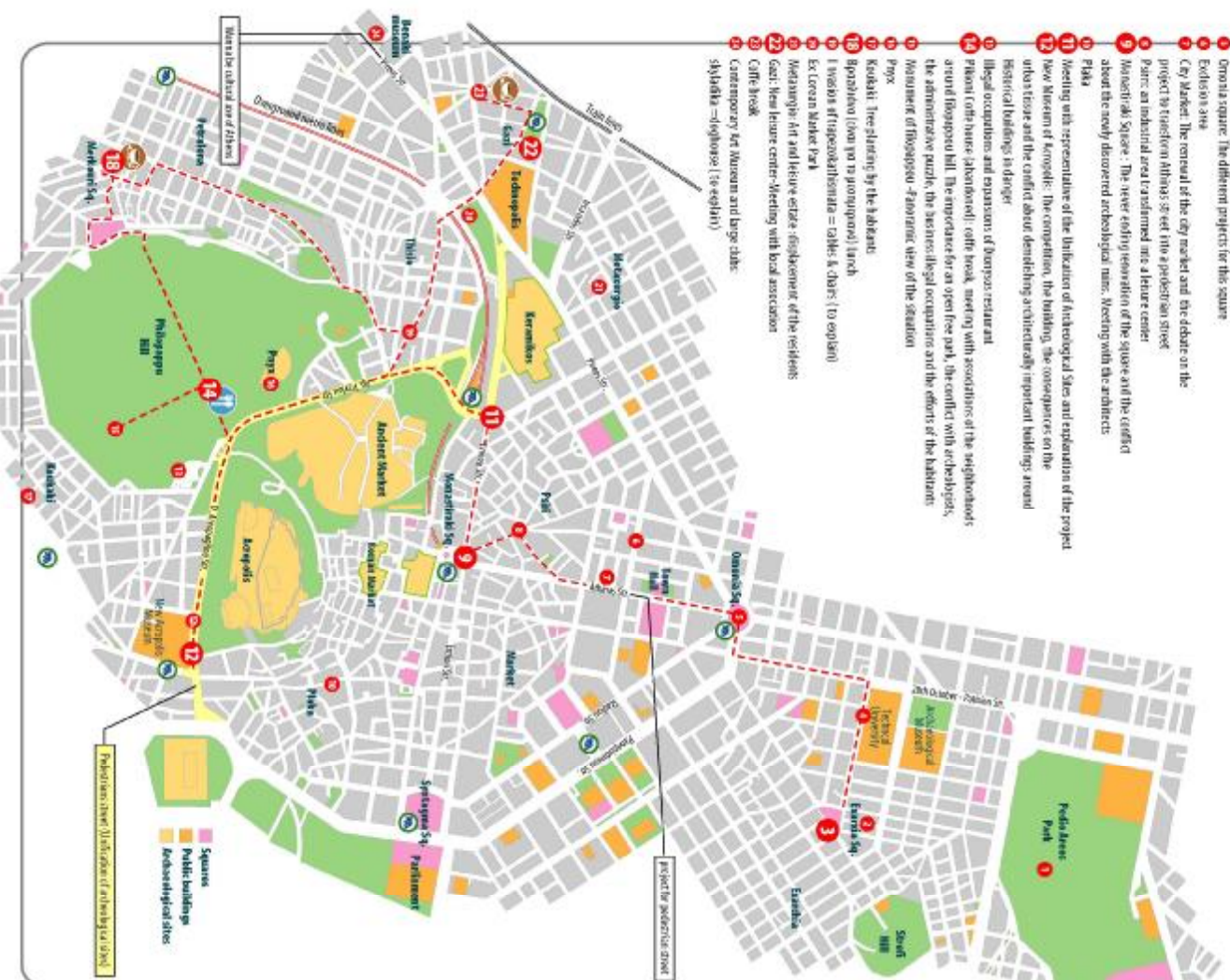


INURA 2008 - Field trip 1

Public space in the historical center of Athens: tensions between heritage, cultural/ touristic economy and neighbourhood life

- 1 Piree Acropolis Park
- 2 Small garden of Samonou - transforming an small energy field in to a garden for the habitants
- 3 Exochia Square: Meeting with 'Komnenaia for further' - taking and arch in Exochia
- 4 Strouton Street: Main street of stroutles
- 5 Omnia square: The different projects for this square
- 6 Exochia area
- 7 City Market: The removal of the city market and the debate on the project by Triantifon Athanas: street into a pedestrian street
- 8 Panar: an industrial area transformed into a leisure center
- 9 Metaxiotika Square: The never ending renovation of the square and the conflict about the newly discovered archaeological ruins; Meeting with the architects
- 10 Pflaka
- 11 Meeting with representative of the utilization of archaeological sites and explanation of the project
- 12 New Museum of Acropolis: The competition, the building, the consequences on the urban tissue and the conflict about demolishing architecturally important buildings around historical buildings in danger
- 13 Illegal occupations and expansions: of Omeropou restaurant
- 14 Pirkouf (old house Jakobsonoff): coffee break, meeting with associations of the neighborhoods around Neopiroussi hill, the importance for an open free park, the conflict with archeologists, the administrative practice, the business/legal occupations and the efforts of the habitants
- 15 Measurement of Neopiroussi -Favorite view of the situation
- 16 Prox
- 17 Kodakki: Tree planting by the habitants
- 18 Bopoulidou (from you to panopticon) / church
- 19 I vivada of Tripsodakhseniata = table & chairs (to explain)
- 20 Ex Crown Market Park
- 21 Metaxiotika art and leisure estate: (re)placement of the residents
- 22 Guest House center- Meeting with local association
- 23 Coffee break
- 24 Contemporary Art Museum and large table: sikhilida —(to explain) (to explain)

To stop ● To mention ●



Brief description of the fieldtrip:

In this fieldtrip we will visit a relatively large number of points in order to assess the local nuances and expressions of a process that embraces almost the whole inner city. We will make 3 major stops in order to meet people who are active in the area and we will have the opportunity to discuss with them issues that occur during the walk.

Stop1: Exarhia Square

Exarhia is a very lively neighborhood with a strong political and alternative cultures tradition. We will meet the local association and inhabitants that are mobilised in different ways in the area, trying to give alternative solutions to rehabilitation projects (redesigning the main square) as well as to everyday life (creating small inhabitants park, promoting fair-trade shops etc). Exarhia is an area, which has been a kind of indy center since the 80's and in way resists to the trends of the rest of the city trying to propose an alternative kind of culture. It is also the base of several political and social organizations that have their meeting places/ social centres in the area.



In the morning we will only start our fieldtrip from here.

>>>We will come back at the end of the fieldtrip in order to meet the local association and participate in the inauguration of an open air photo exhibition on Exarhia square about the abandonment of the neighbourhood, an initiative among many others that aims at the re-appropriation of public space.



See also: Text of Exarhia Association's activity ([pdf in English](#))

Leaving Exarhia, we will pass from Omonia, the central square of the city, and we will go down the Athinas street that leads to the heart of the historical centre. Omonia Square has been redesigned as part of the wider project of 'Unification of Archaeological Sites'. However, the administration's intervention leading to the modification of the chosen architectural project rises questions about the role of architects and design, in a wider sense, within the framework of the rehabilitation of the historical centre.



The case of Athinas street poses questions about the actual transformation of the historical centre. Actual public debate concerns the possibility to include the street in the project of 'Unification', by transforming it to a pedestrian axe that will connect Omonia Square with Monastiraki (and, through the latter, to Acropolis), as well as the commercial centre of the city with the touristic neighbourhoods of the historical centre. Even if there is no strong negative reactions vis-à-vis this project, questions arise about the possibility of local traditional small retail trade businesses to remain in the area after the expected rise of property values.



Before reaching Monastiraki, we will leave Athinas street and turn on the right, to visit Psirri neighbourhood. Psirri (as Thissio neighbourhood that we will visit at the end of the fieldtrip), which used to host lots of small manufactures, is a 'trendy' neighbourhood of the historical centre, which concentrated a large number of restaurants, bars, galleries and theatres since the early 1990s. This kind of cluster of small leisure and art businesses is typical of the 'upgrading' of the inner city, as it represents one of its major economic forces. It entails small, but important as a whole, investments. It shapes also the utilization of the public space, as restaurants, bars and other leisure spaces occupy, often illegally, open spaces.

Stop 2: Monastiraki Square-Acropolis hill-Filopappou hill-New Acropolis Museum.

Acropolis and the neighbourhoods of the historical centre constitute a key-area for the very image of the city of Athens and are the main attractive point for tourists. However, at the same time, it is close to three residential neighbourhoods (Thissio, Petralona, Koukaki), which are directly influenced by the projects. The Filopappou hill (at the South-East of Acropolis) is one of the few green spaces of the city centre where one finds, apart from important archaeological sites, a remarkable network of paved paths and mild interventions made by the architect Dimitris Pikionis between 1951-54.

Thus, this is about an area where the interests and the wills of inhabitants, archaeologists, architects, entrepreneurs, visitors and the state are in conflict at various levels and on an every-day basis.

>>>We will have the opportunity to meet a representative of the Society for the Unification of Archaeological Sites (SUAS), the state-controlled semi-public institution that supervises the homonym project. The inhabitants' associations are also very active and we will have a meeting with one of them during the fieldtrip. These associations are concerned by 'small' every day questions of their neighbourhoods, as well as by the larger issue

of the Filoppapou hill and the project of Unification of Archaeological Sites. We will start from visiting the [Monastiraki Square](#). The discovery of antiquities during the realization of the rehabilitation project of the square entailed the intervention of the administration that, as the case of Omonia Square, sought to modify the original proposal. Tensions between administration and architects around the rehabilitation of the major squares of the city illustrate some contradictions of the processes of production of public space in contemporary Athens, which involve heritage, professional interests and logics of bureaucracy.

>>> we will meet the architect's team who won the competition and they will explain us the history of the realisation of this project



See also: About [Monastiraki square and Iridanos River](#)



We will then walk around Acropolis (or take the touristic small train), following the new pedestrian zone, to reach the New Acropolis Museum. The latter has been at the centre of an intense public debate regarding the relation of the building with its urban environment as well as the planned abolishment of four outstanding adjacent buildings (that impede the view of Acropolis by the museum).



Concerning these issues, we will attempt to meet a representative of the Organization for the Construction of the New Acropolis Museum (the SUAS' counterpart for the construction of the Museum) and a representative of the association defending the preservation of the buildings.

See also: The [blog about the two buildings](#) in danger next to the New Museum of Acropolis

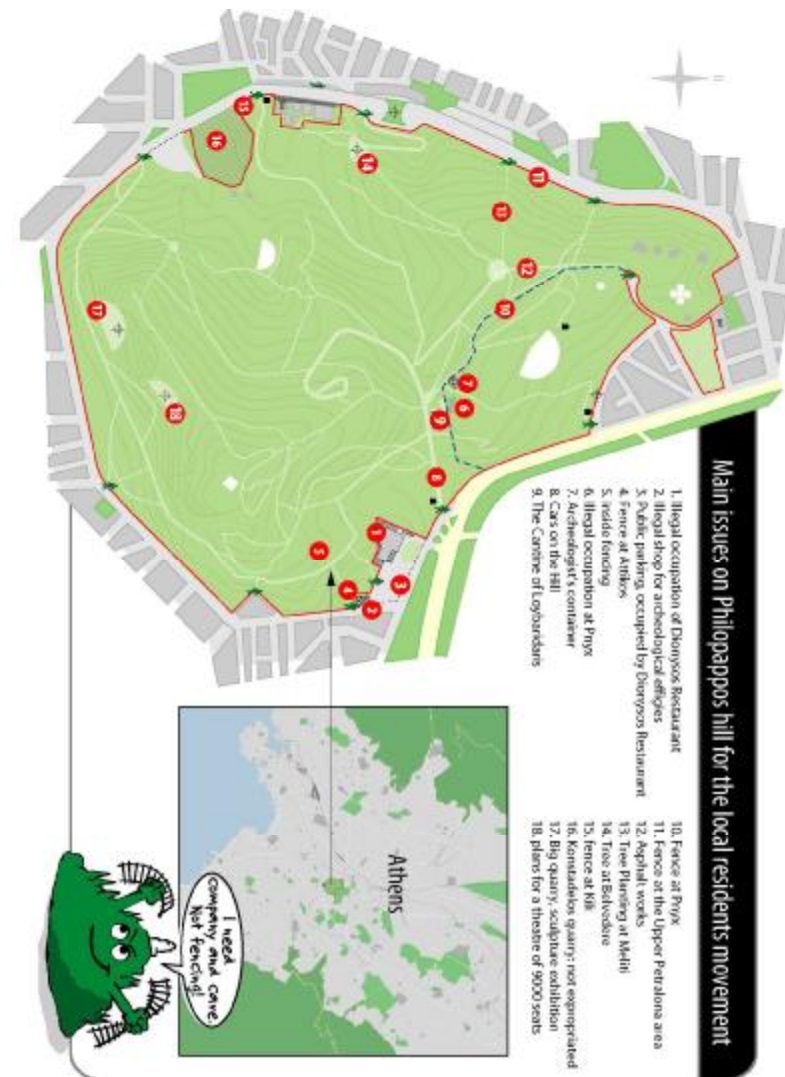
>>>We will continue by meeting representatives of the associations 'Intervention of Koukaki-Petralona-Thission' and 'Filopappou hills', with whom we will walk in the neighborhoods and in the hill.



The issues concerning the Acropolis and Filopappou hill area vary: illegal occupation of public space, privatization of the public space in the hill, destruction of (19th and early 20th century) architectural heritage, treatment of archaeological sites and others that will be discussed with the inhabitants.



See also: [Filopappou Hill, detailed satellite photo](#) with points of interest/conflicts etc ([pdf in english](#))



By the end of the walk we will pass by the Old Korean Market Park whose little green space represents a victory of the inhabitants' organization. Despite the fact that the time that we will dispose will not permit us to visit all points presenting interest for the organizations, we will try to fulfil the gap through discussions with the latter about the complexity of the historical centre's situation.

Stop 3: Thission, Gazi, Metaxourgio. Thissio is one of the historical centre neighbourhoods which has been entirely dominated by the abundant bars and cafes at the inhabitants' expense. Gazi and Metaxourgio are the two neighbourhoods that succeeded Psirri and Thissio in the 2000s as the new fashionable areas of the city.



Although small leisure businesses also play here an important role, these neighbourhoods illustrate more clearly the meeting of art and real estate. We will discuss the contribution of recent artistic events (in the framework of the First Athens Biennial in 2007) to the change of their image that facilitates their transformation in middle-class residential areas. Yet the whole process occurs at the expense of the poor community of Thrace-originated Greek Muslims that were installed in the area in the 1970s.

>>> We will have the opportunity to discuss these issues with the local association of inhabitants of Gazi. During this last part and going back to

Exarhia, we will also discuss the role of "indie cultures" in the centre of Athens.



[See also: About Remap KM art programme and the displacement of the residents in the area of Kerameikos-Metaxourgeio](#)

Some questions

To sum up the logic of the historical centre fieldtrip, we will pose questions, common in a large number of cities, about the relation between culture, urban change and urban development. At the heart of this relation lay the economic function of culture and the transformation of the city in favour of entrepreneurs and tourists at the expense of the inhabitants (mainly the lower classes). Nevertheless, in the case of Athens we have, also, to take into account some local 'specificities': the role of ancient heritage as the main cultural resource of the city, the small leisure businesses as one of the main economic forces in the rehabilitation processes and, last but not least, the tensions within the administration and different opinions and attitudes of administration or scientific institutions of various scales (for example amongst archaeologists and architects) that reveal a kind of statism coexisting with the above-described culture-oriented entrepreneurial urban strategies.

Programme

9.00: Meeting outside Exarhion hotel
9.00-9.30: Walk to Omonia square, Athinas Street, Psiri
9.30: Monastiraki square
10.30: Presentation of Unification of Archeological Sites project at Exile Museum (31, Ag. Asomaton St, Thission)
Between 11.30 and 12.45 we will be visiting several places (see above)
13.00: Picnic with inhabitants at Filopappou hill
Then we will walk to Thisio and Gazi (Keramikos). Probable coffee break at Petralona
15.00-15.45: Meeting with inhabitants at Keramikos Square
16.00: Metro to Exarhia
16.30: Meeting with local association at Exarhina Square (or Tsamadou Street)

Further reading:

Filopappou Hills

By Stella Markantonatou

In the mid nineties the Greek State began the preparations for the Olympic Games. Reshaping of the center of Athens was a major task. There were older plans, relying on studies and supported by politicians of PASOK, mainly Antonis Tritsis and Melina Merkouri, that originally aimed to relieve the Athenian Center from traffic and create larger free and green areas for recreation by, among others, re-defining (and clarifying) land allotment and 'unifying' the archaeological sites dispersed in the area. Although the Unification of the Archaeological Sites of Athens was dubbed as "the most important urban planning intervention in the history of the City", no strategic cooperation between the State and the Municipality was achieved because they were governed by opposing political parties (State: PASOK, Municipality: right wing). What was eventually implemented between 2000 and 2004 by mainly the PASOK minister of

Culture Venizelos and then by the right wing prime-minister and minister of Culture Karamanlis bore a faint resemblance to the original plans:

I while there were studies and provisions about land allotment in the original plans, little or nothing was materialised;

I as regards the archaeological sites, the view that prevailed in the circles of the Ministry of Culture and was implemented was that of the 'touristic product'. This in Greece materialises in fencing the sites, building premises for private functions and imposing a considerable entrance fee;

I as regards the traffic, both planning and implementation were flimsy. Dionisiou Areopagitou and Apostolou Pavlou were turned into pedestrian roads but no studies were made, let alone implemented, about the consequences of the diverted traffic for the life of the neighborhoods of the Center and about the life within the pedestrian area itself; perhaps, the overall issue had to do with the plans they had for the coastline, that only now become apparent and consist in selling out public property to private capital (the coastline had been proposed by EAXA (the state company that undertook the management of "Unification") as part of a plan for relieving the Acropolis area and the Center from traffic caused by touristic busses)

The common denominator of the above strategies is that "unification" planning mainly focused on the fast absorption of large amounts of European and national money by the real estate and constructions sector that has been dominating Greek economy since the Civil War (1944-1948) and, to some considerable extent, dominates the political life of the country. Of course, the companies selected to materialise the works belonged, as a rule, to supporters of the governing party (PASOK at this time).

The situation on Filopappou hills illustrates the policy described thus far:

1. The hills were fenced for the first time in history and an entrance fee would be imposed. Costs summed up to 1,5 million Euros.
2. Several large non-reversible structures made of concrete were planted in the hills and their perimeter: the sales shop for replicas, the toilets next to Dionisos, the open air sculpture exhibition (170,000 Euros); there were plans for a 900 people theater but did not work out.
3. The parking lot next to Dionisos, originally paved with expensive Vezuvio stones and designed to match Pikionis' Works, was dug up,

covered with cement and transformed to a very ugly platform for the Acropolis buses. No study was conducted or implemented for the traffic burden caused by those large vehicles (their number rising to 200 hundred in a normal summer day). Unknown cost

4. All constructions were made with public money to be given to private capital for exploitation

To accomplish these works, the State did not hesitate to

I trespass upon municipality property and land that was reserved for parks and squares: the parking lot, the toilets and the sales shop have all been built on such land. The municipality tacitly supported this behavior by putting no claims on its own land and providing permits for the buildings. For other buildings, such as the open air sculpture exhibition, no permit has ever been issued, and no action has been taken for their removal despite the citizens protests

I give green light to the works (by ministerial decisions) before environmental studies were concluded and approved despite the fact that this was a strict requirement by the funding authority (EU).

The works in the hills caused serious damages to the ecosystem (fires, chemicals, traffic, new materials) that was already in decline because of draughts and years of neglect. The damage was maximised in summer 2004 when all medium height vegetation was killed with chemicals for safety reasons. It should be noted that the hills host about 80 hundred different species of birds and four species of reptiles, one of them being endemic to Attica, that belong to endangered species in towns.

The people living in the surrounding neighborhoods, when they realised the State plans, expressed their will very clearly: the hills should remain free and in good shape. They expressed their views with public gatherings, they took initiatives and worked systematically towards the following goals:

I the hills would not close: against the State's reality, the neighborhoods put their own reality --- that the hills would not be fenced

I all knowledge about the hills that was an privilege of State administration would become knowledge of the neighborhoods so that the case could be fought at statutory level succesfully; knowledge about (the mess in)land allotment was proved to be of outmost importance. Administration was (and still is) extremely unwilling to provide any

information despite the fact that they are obliged by the law. After six years and the investment of hundreds of manmonths, of loads of courage and of considerable financial resources, a lot of the knowledge about the hills is available to the neighbors and has helped in several ways

I preserve the ecosystem: the neighbors have collected the rubbish, they have planted trees, they have protected the forest against fires

I stop any trespassing attempted on the hills: they have been successful with Dionysos and Loumbardiaris, both State properties run by private companies that have put illegal buildings and uses within the archaeological site and the forest

I make sure that the valuable Works of Dimitris Pikionis would be preserved and respected

It is evident the indifference of the State about quality of life issues such as minimising traffic burden and reduce lack of green space for the citizens:

I the very controversial building of the Museum was erected and it is about to open its gates to the public while no study about the traffic has ever been made

I traffic burden in the inhabited areas has increased: Ano Petralona, the Acropolis area and Philopappou are the main victims at the moment

I commercial uses (coffee shops, bars, restaurants,...) put enormous pressure on the inhabited areas (that are, in fact, the traditional center of Athens), the main victims being Thissio, Psiri and Gazi while Ano Petralona and Koukaki follow

I trespassing efforts by individuals on public land with the help of the authorities, especially the Municipality (the case of the little park on Mouson street)

I a new ministerial decision was issued demanding that Philopappou will be fenced and accessed in controlled hours.

Some thoughts on the role of indie cultures in the center of Athens

By Katerina Chryssanthopoulou

Within the greater movements that form the “cultural”- in its vast sense-chart of the center of Athens (in great majority discussed in the fieldtrip) lies something like a latent dynamic worth mentioning because of its ambiguity in terms of categorization. We are referring here to the alternative cultural scene, also described as “indie” (independent), often “underground” and sometimes mixed with “experimental”.

If we are bothering to discuss this phenomenon for the city of Athens, it's because in the last years the indie scene has had a remarkable presence in the center. Although spaces hosting events of this kind have more or less existed for a long time (Booze cooperativa, Bios, Vinyl Microstore...), in the past they appeared more dispersed and less interconnected, always addressing to a small core of fans.

Why today, why/how in Athens?

The gradual rise of a middle- high class in Greece from the 80's on was accompanied by a new generation having studied, lived and worked abroad and returning to the country, importing foreign novelties and eager to open new horizons. Greece is becoming a less remote destination for foreigners. Since a few years free press magazines (based on the NY Village Voice model) have flooded Athens and are weekly being consulted by more and more people. All those facts have contributed in the production of a “city center urban culture” within which lifestyle restaurants, small galleries, spontaneous concerts in flats, experimental dance and film festivals are all ingredients of a multi-flavored soup. As confusing and suspect (not to mention politically ambiguous) this might be, it has participated in the accessibility of certain events to a wider public and the construction of a common identity shared by people living and activating themselves in the center. It has also permitted the multiplication and variety of smaller cultural events.

Despite its very essence of remaining independent, this scene is always flirting with state and private institutions and vice-versa, sometimes assuming the role of a subversive factor, often trying to exploit the system

from the outside and other times becoming a label or a publicity stunt to promote a so-called alternative product (See the case of KM in Kerameikos) whether the latter is voluntary or not.

In a moment where Athens is striving to create a contemporary cultural identity (Art Biennale, Athens + Epidavros Festival, Film Festival, Synch, Video-Dance...) it is precisely the versatility of “indie cultures” that allows them adaptation to its ever-changing cultural landscape. Although they are not motors of change themselves, they interact with all other actors and create new polarities within the center.

Spatially, the indie scene is not localized in a specific neighborhood, but punctuates the entire center of Athens and beyond. Its particularity lies in the fact that it doesn't follow the movements of new culture-leisure districts (see Exarhia, Psirri, Gazi) but rather chooses “outsiders” for its implantation. The center of Athens with a mix of abandoned neo-classical buildings, small industry leftovers, craftsmen districts and all sorts of contradictions offers a fertile ground for such settlements.

But could this be a milder and more vicious process towards gentrification? Is it an alternative to questions of social mixture in the city center? Is indie culture a pioneer, a follower or a trend maker, a revolutionary or a product up for exploitation? Is naming it or regrouping under “indie” different activities and motivations already an act of institutionalization?