THE ATHENS SEA-FRONT REHABILITATION PROJECTS.
EUROPEAN GUIDELINES IMPLEMENTATION IN METROPOLITAN COASTAL AREAS

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Mavo Evangelidou
Architect & Spatial Planner, in
Organization for Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens
E-mail: m-evan@otenet.gr

Abstract
The paper presents a critical review of the experience gained from planning projects of the Athens Urban seafront area promoted by the Organization of Athens, independently or within various European programs. Structural weaknesses in the existing planning system in Greece (administrative malfunctions, social practices and scientific approaches) result in difficulties in applying an Integrated Coastal Zone Management policy. The new approaches suggested by European policies have both strengths and weaknesses and point to solutions. Lessons learned through innovative approaches the project for the Rehabilitation of the Drapetsona - Keratsini Port-Industrial Zone, leads to reflections of general interest about the role of public spatial planning.

Introduction
The Organization for Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens (OA) is the metropolitan agency responsible for drawing up, overseeing and coordinating the Athens Master Plan (AMP), which is the general regulatory plan for the entire Attica region. The agency comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works. Its role mainly concerns land use planning for each municipality, but also the promotion of specific ‘strategic urban interventions’, including coastal planning projects.

The involvement of OA in the European Commission sponsored Terra-Posidonia initiative as part of the European Spatial Development Perspective (CEC, 1999 a,b & CEC 2000) and the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Demonstration Programme, provided opportunities to implement integrated sustainable management policies using European guidelines in order to go beyond the usual Greek practice of physical planning using only regulatory instruments.

The Urban Context and Coastal Zone Policy
Athens is a metropolis of 4 million inhabitants, with a dense urban fabric situated in a mountain-locked basin. The phenomenon of urban sprawl beyond the basin is present in both the coastal and agricultural zones of Attica, and is hard to control. Therefore, enhancing the city’s natural opening towards the sea-front by facilitating access to the coastal area and by regaining the swimming beaches is of vital importance in regional planning, since it contributes to relieving the demand on secondary housing in Attica’s saturated coastal areas.

Another factor making coastal zone policy in Athens important is related to the strategic goals of the 1985 AMP to improve the quality of life in the western part of the basin: according to studies conducted in early 1980s, (Leontidou, 1990) the Athens basin is characterized by a sharp socio-geographic and morphologic differentiation between the sectors divided by the NE/SW axis. The rockier western part, traditionally a location for industry, port facilities, and working class residences, fewer social infrastructure facilities and services, and is cut off from direct access to the sea. Restoring this access is a constant demand of local population.

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Finally, the coastal zone policy is stimulated by a new strategic goal of the AMP to enhance the international role of Athens within a framework of competitiveness among cities. (Economou 2000). The 2004 Olympics represent a good opportunity to promote major strategic projects to upgrade the profile of the city, a challenge that demands coordinated attempts to implement the objectives of AMP, in tandem with the construction of the necessary installations for the actual staging of the games themselves. The idea that Athens should repeat Barcelona’s successful experiment was a challenge for the city, to which the OA has made every endeavor to respond despite the limited resources at its disposal and its marginal role in the organization of the games.

The Posidonia Network in the Framework of the EU TERRA Programme
The Posidonia project, concerning five Mediterranean cities, was the only Terra project to focus on urban rather than regional spatial policy. The network’s core theme was the relationship between city and sea and the pressure exerted on the city by the functioning, restructuring and expansion of ports. Apart from the OA, the network includes the Provincial Authority, Municipality and Port Authority of the city of Naples, and the Municipalities of Taranto, Palermo and Barcelona. The Italian cities were engaged in a comprehensive review of their coastal zones, while Barcelona and Athens, with smaller budgets, have promoted limited size projects.

The provincial Authority of Naples worked on the ‘coordination plan’ focusing on the multi-modal land and sea transport system and on the improvement of the tourist infrastructure. Naples municipality concentrated on the restructuring of the Ital sider industrial area at Bagnoli. Palermo was engaged in making modifications to the city’s Master Plan with regard to the sea front renewal, attaching particular importance to the preservation of small, traditional fishing harbors. Taranto was reclaiming part of the land and sea area of Mar Piccolo (partially belonging to the armed forces), and carried out urban renewal projects in residential areas and the improvement of aquaculture methods. Barcelona adopted an environmental approach to assess impacts of two big development projects in areas near the delta of the Besós and Llobregat rivers. Athens worked on the rehabilitation of the port-industrial zone, west of Piraeus Port, while another project, in the East Saronic Gulf, although not financed by the Posidonia budget, was used as reference during the network’s collaboration.

The concept of ‘coastal sustainable management’ was a key-term in the network’s vocabulary and the fact that partners chose different aspects to focus on among the components of sustainability (environmental, economic development, social) was a useful aspect of the exchange of experiences. Within the Posidonia project, a comparative analysis of each country’s institutional framework for urban planning in general and especially for coastal zones was carried out, with interesting results. (CEC and Provincia di Napoli, in print).

The ICZM Demonstration Programme offered an additional opportunity to gain experience from exchange with northern Europe countries, as well as a remarkable systematic methodology for comparative studies. The Italian and Spanish experience in building local partnerships, and the northern-European experience in stimulating social participation was very useful for the Athenian project. The recent Italian innovation of considering local territorial partnerships as a criterion for channeling funds from the III Community Support Framework (CSF) was of particular interest in terms of introducing a spatial dimension for the orientation of public funds.

Implementing an integrated management policy in a country where there is no well established spatial planning framework involves confronting the chronic weaknesses of the whole system. (CEC & Provincia di Napoli, anex 1, in print)

Administrative Framework and planning levels
There are many statutory levels of planning in comparison to other European countries (Master Plan (Strategic Directives), General Land-Use Plan, Local or Street Plan, Implementation Act...
(property remodeling according to the Land Contributions) and building permit) (Economou, 1997). This fact obstructs integrated approaches, both from a geographical and a scientific perspective, and has led to time-consuming processes of project approval. On the other hand the assignment of competencies is not always logical. The detailed level of planning (the street or local plan) remains a Ministerial competency, being enacted through a Presidential Degree, while the general land-use plan is enacted as a Regional Secretary’s decision; thus the concept of a progressive procedure from the general (center) to the particular (local) is missing. The attempts at decentralization, initiated since 1986, have suffered from repeated abrogation. Following from a resolution of the Council of State which suggested decentralisation is contrary to the Constitution with respect to environmental issues, Local Authorities (LAs) can only exercise implementation competencies. This distinction between planning and implementation obstructs the “vertical” cohesion of planning, the necessary feedback, and follow up being difficult. It also accounts for the limited application of regulations, and for the phenomenon of unauthorized buildings which local authorities are unwilling to demolish. The legislative autonomy of sectoral public bodies and the large number (150) of first degree LAs in Attica accentuates coordination and management problems in urban projects. These are often addressed by setting up particular administrative units responsible for the management of special projects, such as major transport infrastructure. This practice reduces the OA’s powers in exerting its coordinating role as provided by its founding law. The idea of reforming the system through establishment of a Metropolitan Body in Attica incorporating the OA has been long debated (Getimis and others, 2002) but as yet there is no formal proposal to advance this.

Planning system and public participation
The multiple-level approach, provided by the planning system, is also responsible for the sterility of public debate, because plans where they lay down general guidelines, defer their practical implementation to the subsequent stage, lack a truly operational character and do not offer a vision for the future are inadequate as a basis for public discussion. Debate therefore is often limited to arguments about permitted floor-to-area ratios, and is unable to challenge other crucial issues related to environment or management.

On the other hand, the centralization of the planning system is responsible for the lack of planning and management skills by the LAs, which, being responsible for organizing participation procedures, seldom take responsibility for differentiating their standpoints from that of their electorate, be it land owners’ profit or environmental Organizations’ NIMBYism. Finally, the lack of transparency during the sectoral bodies’ negotiations with private landlords accentuates the mistrust on the part of local societies. The various NGOs tend to prefer a policy of ‘resistance’ to prospective large-scale projects, rather than engaging in a dialogue during the planning process. They also have the right to appeal to the State Council when the legal document (Presidential Decree or other) is published – an option which tends to encourage a perception of the planning procedure as a legal battle rather than a debate on specific proposals. Recent case law reflects environmental awareness, but may lead to inflexibility in the planning process. Public participation based on non-statutory initiatives is hard to apply, as is the commitment of NGOs such as Neighbourhood Planning Committee foreseen by the Law of 1983, in the monitoring of project implementation.

Tools provided by planning legislation
The Legislative framework has normally been limited to regulatory measures focused on land use control, and is seldom accompanied by the implementation of active policy, despite some provisions in urban legislation, such as financial incentives or other economic instruments, which encounter legal obstacles in their implementation. The only active policy applied in urban planning concerns land administration and establishes a system of ‘land and money contributions’ in case of urbanization. This focuses on residential areas extension and is hardly applied in special use zones. Building permission in non-urbanized areas favors certain uses such as industry and hotels, with the result that there is no interest on
the part of land-owners in being included in land use plans. The obligation of ‘General Urban Plans’ to include both urbanized and not-urbanized zones, foreseen since 1997, is not yet applied (Arvanitaki, 2002) resulting in difficulty in controlling urban sprawl. The piecemeal nature of competencies and the time-consuming planning procedures often lead sectoral authorities to create ‘shortcuts’ by enacting ad hoc regulations and legislative amendments, which are enforced without public consultation. This practice, which is supposed to ensure flexibility, gives rise to reaction in the form of mobilization of local objectors, and often succeeds in delaying or even preventing implementation. A good example is Law 2160/93 on tourism which sanctioned the construction of a major marina at Falliron, flouting planning and other provisions.

The introduction of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) under the 1986 environmental law in response to the EC Environmental Assessment directive, is a step in the whole development procedure, which compels the sectoral authorities to consult planning authorities before final development decisions are taken, and thus stimulates horizontal coordination. Other provisions of environmental law concern only natural protection areas and are not applied in urban zones.

Cooperation with the private sector (Public/Private/Partnership) has no tradition in Greece, because the policy of ‘Mixed Economy Societies’, foreseen by the law since 1979, has not been activated. Few public societies have any experience in management of urban development. The public agencies, which manage coastal areas, usually interact with the private sector only through land-leasing or rent. Revision of the planning legislative framework is –in the author’s opinion- vital for the success of spatial planning in Greece. The tendency to use specific legislative formulas to integrate spatial planning procedures for each urgent project, such as the Olympic games installations, is a method that doesn’t help in improving coordination in the implementation of spatial planning legislation.

Public debate concerning the ICZM policy is foreseen as a result of the preparation of a national directive based on the new spatial planning law. The directive will be issued after consultation of the “National Council for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development”, a forum grouping representatives of several economic and scientific organizations. A considerable number of Greek planners, especially in the public sector, wanted stronger European ICZM legislation in the form of a ‘Directive’ in order to influence national policy.

**The Eastern Saronic Gulf Coastal Zone Project**

The Eastern Shore project focused on an elongated zone surrounded by middle class residential areas starting at the central city’s coastal front and stretching for some 30 Km SE. The area includes the narrow strip of coast and shore, publicly-owned, whose public use is ensured (1st law in 1940), as well as broader sections, where the shoreline has been widened by alluvial deposits or artificial land-filling. These are state's assets, available for economic exploitation. Sections of the area are administered by state sectoral agencies (for tourism or sports), while others are ceded to the LAs, dedicated de facto to public use but not formally characterized as public open spaces. This status causes confusion about building possibilities, and leads to conflict between local communities and state bodies.

The managing agencies have sought means to exploit the zone’s economic potential in order to cover the operating costs of the various public services. As a result of cuts in public funding, this trend has been reinforced by a general privatization policy. Unauthorized buildings, usually put up by the private leaseholders are condoned by the public bodies owning the land and ignored by Prefectures responsible for their demolition.

The principal aim for planning action was to secure a balance between objectives for preservation of the natural environment including the extension of swimming beaches and for modernizing leisure and tourism activities, while controlling the tendency towards intensification of land uses. The Project has formulated a draft Presidential Decree (dPD) with detailed land-use zoning, including measures for aesthetic enhancement.
The dPD was initially well received by the local society. Subsequently, part of the area was designated for important Olympic games activities, namely beach-volley ball and other light sports, and a Marina for the nautical sports. Close to this marina, a third Olympic project may be developed on part of the former Airport area.

The dPD was not finally approved before decisions for Olympic installations were finalized. This delay has facilitated updating of the project, but has forfeited social consensus because of the additional changes brought to the area by the Olympic installations.

Recent renewal projects of ‘organized beaches’ and Marinas launched by a new agency to which all public tourism infrastructure property was transferred has been rejected by parts of the local society due partially to an ideological thesis against privatization. Parallel projects such as the construction of new road junctions and a tramway line had the same response.

The general land-use framework studied before the decision to hold the Olympics in Athens has served as a basis for cooperation between the OA and the different public bodies in a process of a mutual adjustment required for the Olympics and the other current public projects. The fact that important public and private funds have been invested in renewal or infrastructure works relating to the preparation for the 2004 Olympics has given a more concrete character to the OA initiative, going beyond its initial perspective as a purely regulatory instrument.

A final Presidential Decree (PD) has foresees some kind of monitoring institution - an innovation for standard Greek legal practice. Steering Committees (SCs) will have the role of supporting Prefectures during implementation and suggesting complementary measures to be taken by other management bodies involved regarding issues that the PD cannot resolve, such as operating rules or entrance ticket prices. They may be created according to administrative or geographical units and will unite all relevant parties in the same panel, including the OA and local NGOs. Despite its limited size, the study area falls under the administrative control of no fewer than eleven Municipalities, three Prefectures, the Regional Authority and eight different public agencies. The difficulty of coordinating the above agencies under a unified management is evident. This option therefore seems more flexible and effective than creating an overall new body as was initially proposed.

Another innovation is a proposal to the create a special fund to collect fees from cost-effective activities, as a redistributing mechanism, to provide funds for environmental improvement or for maintaining public open spaces and beaches. This measure will need a special law prescription to be introduced in the PD. Both those possibilities need a clear political will to be applied - something which is not yet evident.

The Urban Renewal Project in the Port- Industrial Zone

The major pilot area is situated between the cargo and passenger sections of Piraeus Port. This used to be a thriving industrial zone with over 2000 people employed and vital for Western Athens but is currently in decline. The area displays significant degradation problems regarding both its economic and environmental profile, but its strategic location in the urban agglomeration offers an opportunity to become an essential feature with which to enhance the image of Piraeus and increase the port’s competitiveness in a Mediterranean and international context. Large-scale infrastructure works are transforming Piraeus into an inter-nodal hub linking the new Attica’s airport, the national railway and motorway system and through them to the trans-European networks and will contribute to the urban upgrading of the ‘Athens Southern sea-gate’.

The renewal project’s aim is to attract economic activities related with the port and the city, vitalizing the local employment market, and to enhance the local identity by relating the renewal to the adjacent urban context. Thus themes such as emphasizing the importance of industrial archeology and ensuring a large range of new land-uses offering jobs adapted to the local skills demand special concern. In contrast to the eastern coast, which has to a great extent already taken its future shape, what is required here is active “guidance” of the trends at work, and radical restructuring of the area, including wholesale cleaning up at ground level.
The land is used by four large landowners, three of them multinational companies: a cement manufacturer (12 ha), heating oil and lubricant storage areas of two companies (3.6 ha, 4.7 ha, and the National Bank of Greece which owns a fertilizer factory (39 ha). Part of the land belongs to the two municipalities (8 ha) while the coastal zone belongs to the Piraeus Port Authority (PPA), which leases it to the manufacturers.

Evidently it is not easy to envisage a convergence of the aspirations of the various stakeholders involved. The cement manufacturer is now the prime mover behind the program, the fertilizer subsidiary is less flexible due to the semi-public status of the Bank, one oil company is negotiating its relocation with a demand for expanding its installations at another municipality, while the other is definitely interested in remaining in the area, a fact viewed with no enthusiasm either by the other players or the two municipalities. At the same time the PPA owns 16 ha of the sea front and considers this area to be reserved for any future passenger port extension; however their short-term plans are not clear. Finally the local community desires that redevelopment will guarantee a large proportion of public open spaces, and face onto an open sea front. The industrial premises in the area were still active and the cement manufacturer was still interested in the construction of a major cement distribution terminal. Compulsory measures for land use control to force relocation of the industrial activities appeared to be the only option.

Project Formulation and Innovations
The Terra project offered a good opportunity to implement alternative planning practices going beyond the empiricism usually predominant in the decision-making process. Innovations adopted during the whole process were at the scientific, administrative and political level. The aim was to reach an agreement and protocol signed by all relevant parties.

The study: New type process calls for new procedures for project formulation.
At the scientific level, the OA foresaw the need for an integrated study, involving the elaboration of an operational plan on the basis of a continuous feedback and assessment of economic feasibility, and appraisal of physical planning proposals. The approach was to embrace both general strategic choices and detail design issues building on a study carried out by the School of Architecture of the Athens National Technical University. The elaboration of alternative development scenarios was also undertaken in order to supply decision makers with assessments of the costs and benefits of different options. The financial estimates concerning the surplus-value generated by the rehabilitation were to be an element of the public debate, in order to inform local communities wishing to avoid crowded development taking in consideration the viability of the required investment. In other words, the study method was adapted to reflect the will of the local people by applying a “bottom up” procedure to improve the project’s initial proposals.

The study approach did not thoroughly respond to the ambitious prescriptions set initially, for the following reasons:
• The examination of alternative scenarios at the preliminary stage proved to be premature, in the absence of crucial questions regarding the PPA and the oil company’s short-term plans, or the uncertainty of the cement company’s intentions regarding cement distribution activity in the area. Therefore proposed scenarios were not able to overcome traditional empiricism: their main criterion was the number of properties that would be involved in the renewal project, precluding consideration of alternative development perspectives to be explored for the area.
• The classical step-by-step pattern of planning, based on inflexible formal prescriptions and corresponding fees, has been proved more resistant than creative thought: introducing integrated approaches is an option that may conflict with traditional mentalities.
• The intention of consensual planning, responsive to the views of private agents led to confusion over the role of the study and its propositions, especially since major land owners were expected to lead their own market researches and feasibility studies.

• The estimates contained in the economic appraisal (carried out by OA consultants) were considered overoptimistic by the landowners, who hesitated to present their own appraisals. A basic drawback was the absence of a cost-estimate for the soil decontamination and the uncertainty of possibilities to finance the project by public funds. To sum up: until recently the feasibility of the project was in question.

*The Steering Committee and the consultation process.*

The main administrative and political innovation was the setting up of a Steering Committee, with representatives from key stakeholders (State, LAs of 1st & 2nd degree and private landowners) to supervise the program during its formulation and not after completion, as is usually the case. This tactic was designed to ensure both horizontal and vertical coordination, as well as private/public sector negotiations, and was to end by the signing of a protocol. The establishment of absolute transparency formed a basic element of the whole process thus a systematic presentation of the project to the local community (inhabitants, social and professional NGOs) was envisaged at every stage of the study.

This experiment was undoubtedly a positive step for on-going discourse in the effort to create a trusting environment and generate consensus concerning the project. The following remarks may, however, be noted:

• The participation of functional and political representatives (Mayors) in the same forum lent a peculiar character to the task, which did not facilitate mutual adjustment on solutions.

• The participation of the private sector agents, from the very start, was belittled by LAs, thus worsening the lack of confidence towards both the private and the state stakeholders (PPA and Energy Secretary responsible for oil supplies).

• The particular character of one of the basic property holders – the National Bank of Greece – which is a private agency, serving semi-public interests and closely connected with government circles, has given rise to LAs refusing to accept it as a private interest investor.

• The sizeable number of participant bodies led to the need for more flexible procedures: bilateral negotiation has been organized instead of plenary meetings, in order to reduce clashes and resolve specific problems by partial commitments.

• During the whole process the OA has regularly presented the standpoints and objectives of the project to citizen committees explaining the possible approaches to resolve specific issues.

An environment of confidence was achieved in the SC although the signing of a Cooperation Protocol proved impossible in the run-up to local elections. In the next stage a revised composition of the Steering Committee will be necessary, to make a place for the participation of new stakeholders involved in the following phase (authorities responsible for industrial buildings regeneration, public funding etc). Further public discussions will also be needed.

*Lessons from the Urban Renewal Project*

Two main lessons were derived from this initiative. First, the determination of alternative scenarios did not lead to the immediate choice of the best “integrated solution”, but to a progressive presentation of appropriate choices, which may lead to solutions. The study remit consisted of stating the case, and setting the premises and the method of approach in a way to build up decision rules. At every stage, examination of alternative scenarios (even coming from opposing parties) may be required to support the exchange of views among stakeholders and support the decision-making process. This procedure does not lead to the curtailment of the public planning role into that of a neutral mediator among conflicting interests or views, as often considered. (Gerundo, 1999) On the contrary, public planning activity requires increased
design and synthesis skills, together with management or mediator ones, in order to guide and support the innovative procedure of decision-making. Second, the management of a systematic process of coordination is constrained by the need for extraordinary powers and for a management capacity, which surpasses the jurisdiction appointed to planning bodies in Greece to date. Setting up a metropolitan body in Attica seems a wiser option than creating special bodies for every single complicated project. Otherwise the partnership among public bodies -at least- must be promoted by special economic incentives. Concerning the participatory process an interesting lesson came out, namely the importance of the objectives list as a first draft of a common vision for the area, and the necessity of coming back to them at every step of the procedure, in order to formulate mediating proposals and convince partners. (Fisher et al., 1991).

The Projects’ Future
The historical conjuncture of the 2004 Olympics in Athens has basic implications for both east and western coast projects. The western project is currently suspended, because the 2004 deadline for the renewal was too optimistic. The OA has adjusted the draft protocol, according to the bilateral commitments achieved, and has elaborate a text of ‘principles and methodology’ setting out a process to address conflict areas (such as density, preservation of historical buildings, the port extension) and finally a new development scenario to be formulated together with that elaborated by the other stakeholders.

Meanwhile other big projects in Athens are advancing at a fast pace, and the future cityscape is becoming clearer, although the post Olympic use of some big areas may bring further changes. For example the idea of promoting the installation of a Conference Center as an engine for the renewal is now out of question since other locations have already been chosen.

Some observations regarding the new phase and trends:
• After the local elections it is hoped that a shared time-schedule among stakeholders will be possible. Turning to advantage the impact the Olympics will have in increasing urban tourism in Athens, as well as the use of the III CSF (2000-2006) funds for certain works, will be the next challenge to achieve common timing, although discussion among landowners advances very slowly.
• Relocation of the first oil company has been decided, while the second company’s continued operation in the area now seems largely acceptable and compatible with the first stage renewal. Voluntary relocation might follow when the progressive implementation of the project leads to increases in land-prices.
• The advancement of Olympic regeneration works, as well as the PPA’s changed legal status and management direction, have accelerated decision-making concerning the central and eastern part of Piraeus port, a, transforming process related also to the prospective entrance of PPA into the stock market. (The new law transforming port authorities into Société Anonyme, permits the development of activities not strictly related to the operating of the port (hotels, for instance). The agency has adopted a medium-term dynamic business plan.
• These changes are presented both as opportunity and threat for future negotiations on urban renewal in the specific zone, since the PPA’s will is to exploit new legal possibilities of adopting a real-estate policy. Further collaboration with the private landowners will be necessary in order to avoid competitive choices, and with LAs in order to avoid new clashes.
• Although the PPA’s business plan is not yet precise for the port-zone of the specific project (between passengers’ and cargo ports), the prospective use of a section for cruise-ships and for high-speed passenger links to the Aegean islands seems now more possible. In the light of this perspective, the OA’s proposal to consider the area as part of the Athens ‘tourist product’ seems to initiate the consent of the local population about the port’s expansion. The conservation of industrial buildings should be considered as an imperative for the
project’s future concern. OA has proposed a supplementary floor surface ratio as an incentive to achieve voluntary engagement in this purpose.

- Mobilization of public funding is essential to the achievement of the wide spectrum development and social policy goals that have been set up. Public Private Partnership (PPP) has no tradition in Greece and thus the prevalent option is self-sustained projects, based exclusively upon market forces and trends. The real estate market has recently displayed a remarkable dynamism, which has led to an unrealistic rise in land prices, re-enforcing the tendency for renewal projects favoring a gentrification profile. The OA’s proposal is to work on three directions in public funding research: the reuse of an industrial building for cultural activities (e.g. there is no museum of industrial archaeology), the use of special economic incentives for providing buildings to house small- to-middle size light manufacturing firms (often located at present in dense residential areas), and support to ensure the leasing of some offices by central public services’ (e.g. a Ministry). For the moment the private sector is positive only regarding the last option. The construction of a new mode of public transport connecting the area with the Piraeus Metro terminal, through the port-zone, is another area where OA is engaged in collaboration with APP.

Conclusions
The Athens Posidonia project was a venture clearly having the character of a pilot initiative, both for the OA and for the whole country: coastal zones policy is vital for Athens agglomeration, as well as for other big or medium size Greek cities (Gospodini, 2000). However, there should be reservations as to whether such pioneering experiments can be extended to other parts of Greece without a profound reform and rationalization of the legislation and the administrative structures involved in planning. (Evangelidou, 2002)

Reform is also becoming imperative to reverse the negative climate for important investments in urban renewal resulting from bureaucratic difficulties and instability in decision making process, etc. In this respect, the establishment of a practice of consensual planning ensuring transparency in the consultation process must be recognized as a “sine qua non” element. During the actual debate over the establishment of new forms of urban governance, one side is stressing flexibility, rather than public consultation, considering participatory planning impossible for Greece, or a “residue of the past”. This thesis overlooks the fact that flexibility cannot ensure stable decisions, if consensus is not gained.

The European Commission’s contribution in elaborating and disseminating ‘know-how’ in spatial planning is beyond doubt, and the Demonstration Programme is a proof of that. Since the Posidonia network focused on coastal cities, it has been also been drawn into urban policy issues. Partners’ concerns evolved during the 28 months of the programme: interest in the coastal zone was initially conceived as reclamation of the waterfront for improving the quality of life for local inhabitants; later, in the light of other international experience, the same topic was enriched and related to the development of urban tourism policies. Finally, within the European Spatial Development Perspective aims, the waterfront and port issues were considered as integrated in a more general perspective, and thus urban structure and function were treated in the light of metropolitan competition in the international arena. The Intereg III programme could offer a good opportunity to extend this theme and incorporate the dimension of competitiveness and complementarity among metropolises and regions within a polycentric framework as a means of contributing in the Mediterranean basin’s cohesion. (CEC 2001)

The “European added-value” might be considered in two fields, namely: stimulating the national planning practice to mature, and creating opportunities for coastal management to be integrated into broader European spatial policies within the globalization framework.
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