

TITLE: INTEGRATING PUBLIC SPACES THROUGH ACTIVE TRANSPORT IN ATHENS

THEME: PUBLIC SPACES AND ACTIVE TRANSPORT

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CONTEXT & CHALLENGES



Athens, being an historically rich city in Greece, is facing several issues in the present due to over population. The urban development has turned the city in a concrete jungle where the planning itself doesn't emphasis the presence of green spaces. This has gradually led to uneven distribution of public spaces within the city limits and lack of infrastructure to link them. In addition to this, the population heavily rely on their motor vehicles as the city has not been equipped with active transport provisions which also have indirect negative impact on the social life of people.

Public spaces in Athens are not utilized to the fullest by the residents and also, they are not given priority by the administration. Also the unequal

distribution of public spaces in Athens, they do not establish an efficient connection between each space, it also discourages people from using them because of the difficulties in commuting.

Moreover, the city of Athens is not practiced with the use of active transport. The citizens are mostly dependent on their vehicles for their daily commute. Cycling infrastructure in the city is minimal to nonexistent. Pedestrian conditions are also quite terrible with narrow pavements, sometimes occupied by parked cars and bikes or even dustbins and local shop stalls. Apart from these, vehicular traffic pollution and noise also prevents people from using them.



Unconnected network of public space in Athens (Produced by Author)



Pedestrians occupied by restaurants (Produced by Author)

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PROCESS & DEVELOPMENT

From the literature review, it is concluded that people feel safe and secure in the environment where they are surrounded by more people which also encourages them to use the space. A public space is considered positive when it welcomes diversity, fosters coexistence and embraces people to spend time on the street by providing the circumstances for stability (Pacheco, 2017). Instead of being fragmented, the public realm should be connected that may foster sense of community, improved safety and security (Francis et al, 2012; Erickson, 2012). Active transport is a way of increasing physical activity and decreasing physical inactivity which can help in many health benefits in their daily life (WHO, 2010). Active transport has the potential to enhance health, reduce traffic congestion and enhance social contact between people which can make the city livable (Pucher and Buehler,

2010). Because of the slow-paced movement, people get a chance to meet their neighbors on the streets when they are on foot or cycle that can make the street safe, not only from traffic but also from crime (Pucher and Buehler, 2010). Green corridors have the potential to increase the use of public transport, walking and cycling as a part of transportation that encourages physical activity while providing shade from the trees, providing comfortable walking infrastructure and protecting the pedestrians from harmful pollution (Natural Walking Cities, 2019). Employing green corridors have attracted people to use it as a means of transport in many cities (Geehan, n.d). The political framework and programs are analyzed using the developed analytical framework of permeability, comfort and safety in the selected neighborhood case studies.



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PROPOSED STRATEGY



“Athens integrates its public places, encourages active mobility, offers a high standard of living to everyone with access to the public areas which are greener than before. Establishing good connections between neighborhoods through an effective infrastructure for active transportation and encouraging individuals to foster social cohesion with a great provision of public realm.”

The above vision for integrated public spaces through active transport for Athens refers to the connection of public spaces in a healthier way by promoting physical movement within the city, which is not in good practice currently. The isolation of public spaces and unbalanced focus on neighborhoods shall be diminished by the active transport corridor. Additionally, this strategy also

helps to fight the urban heat island effects which the city is facing by acting as a green corridor.

The aim of this vision is to Increase social interaction in the city with the benefit of active transportation and provide thermal comfort to the people with more greenery through sustainable active mobility planning and policies.

The proposal suggests a few designs guidelines that could serve as a foundation for developing the interventions needed to improve the neighborhoods and connect public spaces. That includes providing (1) cycling infrastructure, (2) gathering spaces and (3) incorporating more trees.