

# GENTRIFICATION

## Definition, Types of intervention, Concerns

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### ***1. Introductory approach: Defining the concept***

ANTISTHENIS, the ancient Greek philosopher, (444 BC - 370 BC, Athens), among other wise heritage he left us, he established a great “principle”: the acquisition of knowledge starts with the definition of the content of concepts.

Based, therefore, on this “principle” in a first, if not final, approach, the term gentrification<sup>1</sup> (and urban gentrification) is indicated (in the area of Planning) (or Sociology as well), as the “refining” of a city area, the removal from this, (in various ways), of social groups, usually of low-income and the placement there of artists, the operation of art galleries, restaurants, etc. However this “change”, regardless of whatever other consequences has, results also rising of land prices (and the potential relative speculation).

The term gentrification is found at first in the UK in early 1960s and it refers to the then observed trend of wealthy people to buy property in poor areas of London, upgrade them, stay themselves sometimes there and thus old residents are being indirectly “squeezed”.

A description of this phenomenon is included in the work of Sociologist Ruth GLASS at the same period, while similar situations were recorded in other major cities in Western countries, by other Researchers.

Since then, the issue has preoccupied several scholars and for its more comprehensive approach are being summarized below, from the various interpretations of the phenomenon of gentrification, the following:

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*1. The term comes from Sociologist Ruth GLASS, 1912-1940. Ruth GLASS was born in Berlin, where she made her first studies. In 1932 she published an important study entitled: Youth Unemployment. The same year she left Germany and after continuous movements for studies and research in Geneva, Prague, London and New York she came back to London, where in 1943 she published studies regarding city planning. In 1950 she became teacher in the University College of London, where she continued her social research. Her public action and her work are characterized by a passion for justice. See also: COLLINS ENGLISH DICTIONARY. 10th edit. WIL. COLLINS SONS AND Co Ltd. London 2009. WIKIPEDIA: The Free Encyclopedia: Gentrification: G. ALEXANDRI: Abstract. <http://www.uncanny.net/wetzel/gentry.htm>*

In a sense, the phenomenon is due to a trend of a new category of social groups to “return” to the city, leaving the purlieus for several reasons: high costs in money and time to travel from the purlieus to downtown, where work place is, lack of the sense of safety at the distributed residencies outside town centres, search for better services of health, education, entertainment “at the heart of the city”, (possibly) lower living cost of, “withdrawal” from private car easier access to markets, etc.

According to another approach, the phenomenon is due to a systematic and long-term informal effort by organized groups, manufacturers, brokers of buying and selling real estate, etc., for the depreciation initially of part of the urban web, in a variety of ways, in order to achieve the “assisted”, “voluntary”, (actually sometimes informally “forced”), abandonment of the specific area of the city in order “insiders” to buy real estate, generally in low prices with aim to sell them at the appropriate time in higher prices, and thus gain significant economic benefits.

Furthermore, it has been mentioned that the phenomenon of gentrification is also due, to a great extent, to state and local initiatives and interventions such as rehabilitation programs (of disadvantaged) areas of cities, construction of public works in these areas (to provide better services to citizens, deal with specific problems, such as large groups of immigrants, etc.) which might change the “character” of the area but certainly they will have as consequence the increase of land prices, etc.

This opinion and its individual aspects will be the main topic of this article.

As it has already been mentioned, the phenomenon of gentrification is not observed only at the place where it firstly became subject of scientific sociological analysis (United Kingdom), but many other local governments in various countries “experienced” or “provoked” it. Where, apart from that the various generally social issues, that occasionally arose, there have been significant changes, positive or negative is indifferent, at the prices of land, buildings, industrial plants, etc., regardless of their location in the cities.

Indicative are the following information regarding specific cities, where “interferences” of Local Authorities were observed in order to “consolidate” and “refine” their areas, but at great cost for them.

Thus, local Authorities of Venice, in order to meet the big expenses of maintenance, rehabilitation, upgrading, etc. of areas and buildings of the city began to sell palazzi on the banks of canals, etc.

Mutatis mutantis, for the same, reasons Budapest faces financial problems, which is in danger to be declared «junk», ie insusceptible to lending by financial institutions, due to the high debt of Local Authorities.

Local authorities in Lisbon resorted from time to time to borrowing in order to improve the provided services to citizens, to regenerate disadvantaged areas etc., so any arisen benefits are usually reaped by individuals but they (the Local Authorities) are unable to pay the loans.

Similar situations are faced by other cities such as Naples, Genoa, Florence, Barcelona, Madrid, Athens, Piraeus, etc.

Indicatively here are mentioned the following data for Athens and its surrounding area, with the reminder that according to recent surveys (2010) Greece is not included in the investment map in real estate (houses, offices, shops, etc.), since, among the 27 States it takes the 26th place (Istanbul is the first and Dublin is the last)

In Athens today there are more than 1,600 abandoned buildings.

More than 500 abandoned blocks have been occupied and used as accommodations by immigrants (sometimes with rent, “depredatory” or “symbolic” is indifferent).

Ten thousand stremmata (1 stremma = 1000 m<sup>2</sup>) of public land are occupied by 15,000 abandoned cars.

Property prices in some areas have been declined compared to last years up to 50%.

Private investors have announced that they intend to invest the amount of 100,000,000 euros during the next five years to upgrade buildings in the areas of Keramikos and Metaxourghio, whatever that means, positive or negative.

## ***2. Administrative intervention***

As already noted, the phenomenon of gentrification, (according to a rather correct opinion), is also due to interventions of institutions, both of Central, and Regional Local Administration, through programs of Regeneration of Areas, Construction of Public Works, etc.

In Greece, the relevant competences are distributed between several administrative levels: Central, regional, local, (First Grade Local Administration).

This dispersion of competences does not always, bring the desired results despite the intentions of the parties, which may be the best, because of overlapping, co-responsibilities, lack of understanding, differences of opinion, etc.

From the co-competent bodies here are mentioned indicatively the General Directorates of Urban Planning and Works, (Directorate of Special Works), General Secretariat of zoning and urban Environment of Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, SA under the title “Unification of Archaeological Places and Reformation, Archaeological Services Prefecture Agencies (until the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2010), Municipal Services, etc.

With the administrative change which came into force from January 1, 2011, Law 3852 New Architecture of Self Government and Decentralised Administration Programme «KALLIKRATIS»<sup>2</sup> the following are provided among others:

Creation of 7 Decentralized Administrations, which are formed as single Units for the Decentralized Departments of the State and they exercise general decisive

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*2. See general information in C.GE. ATHANASOPOULOS: Regional Administration and Local Self Administration: Greece, Other Members of the European Union. New Edition Volumes A and B Athens, 2010.*

competence of state affairs in their Region, based on Article 101 of current Constitution.<sup>3</sup>

Abolition of the 13 Regions of the Government Decree of 6/3/1987. 13 new Regions come in their place (Organizations of second grade local government) along with the municipalities (Organizations of first grade) as an expression of popular sovereignty, they consist a fundamental institution of the Greek public life, as guaranteed by the provisions of Article 102 of the current Constitution<sup>4</sup> and the European Charter of Local Self-Government.<sup>5</sup>

Abolition from 1/1/2011 of the Prefecture, Local Government of second grade, as it was provided by Law 1622/1986 (which ultimately was not implemented

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**3. Article 101 of current Constitution 1975/1986/2001/2008:**

- *State's administration is organized according to the decentralized system.*
- *Administrative division of the country is formed on the basis of geo-economic, social and transport conditions.*
- *Regional Institutions of the State generally have decisive competence on issues of their province. Central Government, apart from special cases, has the general direction, coordination and control of legitimacy of the Regional institutions as provided by law.*
- *Common legislator and Administration, when they act normative, they are obliged to take into account the special conditions of island and mountainous areas, ensuring their growth.*

**Article 101A**

*Where Constitution provides for the establishment and operation of an Independent Authority, its Members are appointed for a fixed tenure and they are governed by personal and functional independence, as specified by law.*

**4. Article 102 of the Constitution 1975/1986/2001/2008:**

- *Administration of local affairs belongs to Local Government Organizations of first and second grade.*

*To Local Government Organizations there is presumption of competence for the administration of local affairs. Law defines the extend and types of local affairs and the distribution between each grade. Law may delegate to Local Government organizations the exercise of powers that consist state's mission.*

- *Local Government Organizations have administrative and financial autonomy. Their authorities are elected by universal and secret voting, as provided by law.*

*Law may provide the establishment of compulsory or voluntary associations of Local Government Organizations for works or provision of services. These associations may be administrated by elected bodies*

- *State exercises supervision over Local Government Organizations, which concerns solely to legitimacy control and it is not allowed to block their initiative and freedom of action. Legitimacy control is exercised as provided by law. Disciplinary sanctions to elected bodies of local administration, apart from cases involving automatic deduction or idleness, are being applied only with the consent of a Council, consisted at majority of regular judges, as provided by law.*

*The State takes all the legislative, regulatory and fiscal measures needed to ensure economic independence and provides the necessary resources for the accomplishment of the tasks and the exercise of competences of Local Government Organizations with simultaneous ensuring of transparency in the management of these resources. Law defines the relative with the and distribution, among Local Government Organizations of taxes or fees, determined in their favour, and collected by State. Each transferral of competences from state's central or regional bodies to Local Government implies transfer of corresponding resources. Law provides the relative regarding definition and collecting of local revenues directly from Local Government organizations.*

**5. Because of their importance, issues of Local Government Organizations have become subject of a series of Conferences, International Conferences as well as regulations at**

regarding that matter ever), and Laws 2218/1994 and 2240/1994, which were effective since January 1, 1995.

Provision for operation at First Grade Local Government level of Committees with responsibilities established for the first time such as, among others, Committee for Quality of Life, (decisive and initiator body for exercise of the related with quality of life, zoning, urban planning and environmental protection, competences of municipality with more than 10.000 inhabitants) and Consultation Committee (as a body with advisory powers on matters of Development Programmes, Action Programmes of the Municipality, etc.).

Regarding the under research matter of every type intervention at city level with several Restoration Programmes, etc, here are mentioned concisely the responsibilities of the new Decentralized Administrations and new Regions and to a greater extent the (new) Local Government of first grade. Decentralized Administrations as successor of Government Regions have among others the following responsibilities:

Recommending for direct sale of public land or assignment of communal municipal or community lands for establishment or expansion of industrial and manufacturing installations. This provision does not specify whether such lands are within or outside cities.

Award monitoring and oversight of the elaboration, as well as improvement of Studies, General Urban planning projects, and Plans for territorial and housing organization of Open City (Law 2508/1997, Law 2539/1997).

Assignment of plot land of the Port Land Zone for the construction of the buildings for “docker’s roof”.

Specialization of general guidelines and directives regarding issues of Urban Planning, Urban Affairs and Housing as well as Building Regulations within the area of their territorial jurisdiction.

Monitoring, coordination and expression of opinion regarding programs of the General Urban Plans of the territorial area of their jurisdiction.

Approval of amendments of previously approved town planning, uses and conditions for their building in OT on the main road network of prefectures of Attica and Thessaloniki.

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*International Organizations, Bodies, etc level.*

*Among the recent international activities regarding the subject, here are mentioned indicatively the Seventh Conference of European Ministers responsible for issues of Local Organization (8-10 October 1986 a.D.). The eighth Conference of European Ministers, Responsible for Local Government at kong of Ireland (14-15 September 1988a.D.), the elaboration of a “special charter” for Local Government by Council of Europe (October the 15th 1985 a.D.)*

*The European Charter for Local Autonomy of Council of Europe has been ratified so far by 22 countries, was signed by another 7, while it has not been ratified and has not signed by other 9.*

*The countries that have not signed the Charter are: 1. Albania. 2. Andorra. 3. Czech Republic. 4. Ireland. 5. Latvia. 6. Lithuania. 7. Moldova. 8. San Marino. 9. Switzerland*

*Greece has already ratified the Charter, based on paragraph 1 of Article 28 of the Constitution with prejudice, that the country does not undertake the responsibility to be bound by the provisions of Article 5 (protection of the territorial limits of L.G.Os.), 7 par.2 (prerequisites for exercise of competences at local level 8 par. 2 (administrative control of L.G.O. acts), etc., (L. 1850/10.5.1989). See other items in: Const. GE. ATHANASOPOULOS: op. c., Volume II, p. 144 et seq.*

Execution of decisions to demolish arbitrary buildings or structures, which are issued by the competent services of the municipality, within their administrative limits.

Elaboration of traffic studies within the area of their territorial jurisdiction, etc.

The (new) Regions as Units of Second grade Local Government, have the following responsibilities among others:

Expropriation of real estate within the area of their territorial jurisdiction. The reasons for the expropriation are not defined.

Sale, exchange and donation of property and establishment of proprietary rights on real estate located within the area of their territorial jurisdiction.

Purchase, concession for use, lease and rental of property within the area of their territorial jurisdiction, etc. The reasons, particularly the ones for concession, lease, etc are not defined.

At level of (new) Regions, it is also provided the operation of several Committees such as the Regional Committee of consultation which has advisory character to the institutions of the Region. This Committee is composed of representatives of various agencies, organizations, individuals etc.

Regarding the related, with the under discussion subject, competences of First grade Local Government the following are being mentioned:

#### *Committee on Quality of Life*

The Committee on Quality of Life is recommended to municipalities of more than ten thousand inhabitants, it is a decisive and recommendatory body for the exercise of Municipality's competences regarding quality of life, zoning, urban planning and environmental protection

During the exercise of these competences it takes special concern for planning actions which aim to the improvement of the quality of life and generally service of people with disabilities.

Specifically:

It is responsible for:

Issue of pre – approval for establishment of shops and enterprises after pre – check of the relative request of the interested.

Recall or permanent removal of permit for establishment and operation of shops, businesses and the rest of installations and activities that belong to Municipality's competence

Issue or recall of license for music operation.

It recommends to City Council:

Issues of setting land use

Issues of regulatory plans, programming of regulatory plans application, issues of Housing Organization in Open Cities, issues of application of the General Urban Planning, urban studies, issues of reconstruction of areas, Urban Intervention,

Funding Programs for Restoration, Reconstruction of degraded areas, urban reformation of problematic areas, compensations issues, Urban Settings,

Contribution in land or money, areas of special regulated urbanization and adoption of Urban Studies.

Decision making regarding issues of environmental protection.

Decision making regarding issues of cemeteries location, within the provisions of Law 2508/1997, cremation centres and others relative with the subject of its competences.

The draft of regulatory decisions issued under Articles 79 and 82 of the Code of Municipalities and Communities.

The Quality of Life Committee composes an annual proceedings report on the areas of its responsibility, which is discussed and approved by the City Council.

The Quality of Life Committee is composed of the Mayor or a Deputy Mayor appointed by him, as president and six members if the Council has up to twenty seven members, eight members if the Council has up to forty-five Members, and ten members, if the Council has more than forty-five members. Two members of the seven membered, three members of the nine membered and four members in the even membered Committee are elected by the Municipal factions of minority.

#### *Municipal Committee for Consultation*

In municipalities with more than ten thousand inhabitants a Committee for Consultation is created by a City Council's decision, which is taken by a majority of two third of its Members and is being issued within two months' period from the establishment of Municipal Authorities. Consultation Committee is a Body with advisory powers.

The term of Municipal Consultation Committee does not exceed a period of two and a half years.

A Municipal Consultation Committee may be established in smaller municipalities also, by a relative decision of the City Council.

Municipal Consultation Committee is composed of representatives of local society, such as:

Local Business and Professional Associations and Organizations.

Scientific Societies and Institutions.

Local unions of employees and employers.

Municipality's employees and legal entities.

Unions and Associations of Parents.

Sports clubs and cultural associations

Organizations of volunteers and Citizens' Movements.

Other organizations and agencies of civil society.

Local Youth Councils.

Citizens.

The total number of the Members of the Municipal Consultation Committee including the President may be from twenty-five to fifty members. In a percentage, one third of the total number of Members of Representatives of bodies additional members are defined, after draw, Citizens registered in electoral lists as well as those who are registered in the special electoral lists.

Municipal Consultation Committee is chaired by the Mayor or the Deputy Mayor, defined by Mayor's decision.

In Committee's meetings according to the case and without voting rights are invited to participate, Representatives from Relevant Government Authorities, local organizations of political parties as well as the head of the Municipal factions that are represented in the City Council.

### *Municipal Consultation Committee*

Advises City Council regarding Development Programmes and Action Plans of the City, the Business Plan and the Technical Plan of the municipality.

Expresses opinions on issues of general local interest, which are referred to it by the City Council or Mayor.

Examines the local problems and municipality's development potential and expresses opinion regarding problems solving and exploitation of those potentials.

It may make observations on the content of regulatory decisions, which are issued in accordance to Article 79 of the Code of Municipalities and Communities.

Expression of opinion by Municipal Consultation Committee does not exclude the simultaneous Online Consultation with citizens through Internet. Proposals for the Electronic Consultation are collected and systematized by the competent Services of Municipality and they are presented by the President of the Municipal Consultation Committee during its corresponding meeting.

Municipal Consultation Committee meets in public, after invitation of its President, mandatory once a year, before the preparation of the budget and annual Action Plan drafts and at least once every three months for other subjects that are introduced for discussion.

City Council may vote a relative Consultation Regulation which regulates all matters relating to the consultation process, participation of institutions and citizens in it as well as presentation of consultation findings to the competent body of the City.

### *Citizen's Supporter*

In municipalities of more than twenty thousand people, a person of recognized status is elected as Citizen's and enterprise's Supporter. This person is elected by City Council's decision after proclamation published on the website of the municipality.

Nominations are submitted by declaration, filed to the Bureau of the City Council at the beginning of the selection process.

The supporter's term follows the term of the Municipal Authorities.

The process for the selection of the supporter must have been completed within an exclusive deadline of two months from the establishment of Municipal Authorities.

Citizen's and Enterprise's Supporter is elected by a decision taken by secret voting.

Supporter has administrative support from municipality's services, receives complaints directly from affected citizens and businesses regarding maladministration of municipal agencies, Municipality's legal entities and



municipal companies and it mediates to resolve the relative problems, while it is obliged to reply in writing or electronically within thirty days to every interested.

The submission of a report or a complaint from a citizen or an enterprise to the Supporter does not alter the relative power of the Ombudsman as an independent authority, or responsibilities of other auditorial institutions and authorities as well as the responsibilities of the Auditor of Legitimacy.

Citizen's and Enterprise's Supporter composes an annual report. This annual report is presented by him and it is discussed at the special public meeting of City Council for the statement of the Municipal Authority.

Supporter may also make suggestions for the improvement of Municipal Administration and its relations with the public.

Citizen's and Enterprise's Supporter receives recompense equal to the recompense of the President of the Municipal Council. The relevant provisions of the Municipal Councillors apply regarding the statutory position and the responsibilities of the Supporter.

#### *Immigrants Integration Council*

An Immigrants Integration Council is established and operate after a relative decision of the City Council in each municipality as an advisory body of the municipality to enhance the integration of immigrants into local society.

The Immigrant Integration Councils consist of five to eleven Members, appointed by the relevant Municipal Council. As Members are appointed Municipal Councillors, Representatives of Immigration Bodies, since their headquarters or their appendage is located within the administrative limits of the municipality or Representatives, chosen by the immigrant communities, who are residents of the municipality concerned, in accordance with the terms provided by relative Regulation issued by decision made by the relative City Council as well as representatives of social institutions which develop action on immigrants problems within the administrative territory of the Municipality concerned.

By the same decision, President of the Immigrants Integration Council is defined one of the Councillors who are its Members.

Foreign Councillors who may have been elected are mandatory defined as Members in those Councils. Participation in these councils is honorary and unpaid.

Subject of Immigrants Integration Councils is the recording and investigation of problems that immigrants who reside permanently in the area of the specific municipality face, regarding their integration into local society, their relation with public authorities or Municipal Authority, the submission of proposals to the City Council for the development of local actions to promote smooth social integration of immigrants,

And generally solving of the problems they face, particularly through the organization of Advisory services by Municipal bodies as well as the organization of events in collaboration with the Municipality concerned for the awareness and enhancement of local population's social cohesion.

Whether and how these new Administrative Structures will successfully implement the competences they have regarding matters of interventions within

cities in order to regenerate their areas, etc, (of course if other necessary conditions stand also) is something that will be proved in the near future.

The new fact is that from now on the conditions for intervention are better than the past because of the clear definition of the responsibilities of each reconstituted Administrative level, and because of the settlement of the source matter of financial resources for its function.

### ***3. Typical cases of intervention***

#### **Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change.**

General Secretariat for Zoning and Urban Environment

General Directorate for Urban Planning

Collection of the Study for Elaboration of Third Chapter (compilation of Implementation Act) of the Planning Study Area for Eleonas area, Municipality of Peristeri Attica (06/11/2010).

#### **Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change.**

General Secretariat for Zoning and Urban Environment

General Directorate of Planning and Works

Approval of allocation of the project:

Formation / Restoration of the Coastal Area in the subregion of EAK of St. Cosmas (former FANTASIA) in Municipalities of Alimos and Elliniko in Attika region (12/16/2010).

#### **Unification of Archaeological Sites and Restoration S.A.**

Competition of Ideas "Athens X4"

Agonothetes

Unification of Archaeological Sites and Restoration SA. (EAXA SA)

17 Lycurgu str. 105 52 Athens

Sponsor: National Bank of Greece SA

#### ***Purpose and scope of the Competition***

The purpose of the Contest is to seek proposals for the basic cell of the city, the City Block. Since Greek city is characterized by small squares with a dense network of streets, narrow sidewalks and fragmented green spaces, the goal is the creation a larger more block (blocks \_ 4, ATHENS X4), which will affect positively the microclimate of the area, the quality of life, the image, and the operation of public space.

Purpose of the contest is the free choice of 4 typical blocks in neighbourhoods of the Basin with degraded urban environment (due to either high building factors or high-density, or lack of green spaces, communal or public utility facilities, or in old building stock etc.) and the submission of a proposal for utilization of the "cross", ie the intermediate tracks, combining them with gaps or open spaces. Contestants are asked to face space in its three dimensions.

#### ***Type of Competition - Participation***

Ideas Contest for under the provisions of Civil Code regarding proclamations. Right for participation have young architects individually or as responsible of Groups, TCG members, up to 40 years old Other specialties, and architects from other states or students may participate in the group of bidders (the limit of 40

years is estimated to the deadline of the submission of proposals and it concerns all the contestants, group managers and all its members). Each contestant may submit up to two entries (whether alone or as a group member).

### *Evaluation Criteria*

They will be taken into account: The originality of the solution, its pilot character (ie the possibility to use the idea / principle in other areas of Athens - Attica degraded urban environment as well and possibly in other regions of Greece with similar problems), the potential applicability and bioclimatic approach. Also, they will be evaluated innovative proposals which require changes to the hitherto standard / normal organization of the space for long-term application in areas of aged building stock to be replaced.

Setting of deadline and ways for submission of proposals.

Deadline for submission of proposals is Wednesday 22/12/2010 at 15.00.

### *Jury*

The jury will have seven members. Architects, members of the jury (and their deputies) will be established scientists in the sector appointed by Agonotheti and after consulting the National Bank of Greece SA

The Committee will be established by resolution of the Agonothetes Board and it will be announced at least 30 days before the deadline for proposals submission.

The jury's decision is final and binding for the Contracting Authority since it is not contrary to the terms of the proclamation.

### *Number and amount of prizes*

5 equivalent prize will be awarded of 8,000 euros each. Also it is possible to be given 5 rewards of 1,000 euros each after suggestion of the Jury. Prizes are being awarded to the team but the money equivalent will be given to the person responsible for the Group until 22/3/2011.

### *Other information*

Language: Greek

Proclamation of the contest will be posted on the Agonothetes website, [www.astynet.gr](http://www.astynet.gr), on the [www.ypeka.gr](http://www.ypeka.gr) and sponsor's website [www.nbg.gr](http://www.nbg.gr).

The discussed prizes have already been awarded.

**Reconstruction works at St. Panteleimon Acharnon and Attica squares, and their connection through Agorakritou Street and St. Nicholas of Acharnes.**

The Directorate of Special Projects of Regional Update of MoE has completed the final architectural study of these projects, taking into account the views of Athens Municipality, DMEO, Ministry for Infrastructure, Transport and Networks and Athens Urban transport Organization, within the framework of the required process design advice. Procurement procedures are planned to start of in 2011.

**Architectural competition for the reconstruction of Theatre Square area. redevelopment area.**

The architectural competition of patterns on 'Regeneration of the area of Theatre square' was launched in early July 2010 and studies submitted by end of September 2010. Winners were announced on October 21, 2010. The final study for

design and implementation will be awarded soon with a view to begin implementation in 2011.

Reconstruction of refugees buildings in Kesariani.

**Greek Parliament: Special Permanent Committee on Environmental Protection: A Plan for the historic center of Athens.**

Last year in March, the Environment Committee of the Greek Parliament, after long research published a special Finding regarding the necessary interventions at the area of the centre of Athens. It took into account the views of: Residents' Committees of the area (Metaxourgeio, Koumoundourou, Gazi, Psiri, Platon Academy, Plaka, Exarchia), the Citizens' Movement for the salvage of the historic center of Athens, the Technical Chamber of Greece, the Association of Licensed Architects, the Athens Traders Association, the Athens Hotel Association and an NGO.

Apart from the Members of Parliament in this Committee participated ministers, Representatives of the Prefecture of Attica and the Mayor of Athens.

According to the Committee's opinion, degradation in the historic center of Athens has taken large dimensions particularly since 2004 and onwards.

Particularly, this degradation is observed in the neglected building network, the dramatic lack of free space, the high levels of air pollution and noise, the predominance of private versus public space, the excessive concentration of "entertainment industry", the removal of public services, the reduction of legal business activity and the increase of illegal business activity. It is also observed in the changes of land use which lead to aesthetics and social degradation, increased concentration of immigrants without the necessary infrastructure or integration means, the increased delinquency, etc.

Even though the Committee focuses its approach to urban environment, due to its competence, it realizes that the overall assessment of the problem cannot ignore its economic and social dimensions, which affect and are affected decisively by the situation of the urban environment.

The Committee notes that public investments in projects for reconstruction and emergence of the historic center were eliminated to 15,000,000 euros in total for the period 2004-2009, while during the previous period, 2000-2004 they reached the amount of 120,000,000 euros.

The Committee does not underestimate the actions initiated to protect the historic center. However, the power of interventions of the interested Bodies is weaker than the intensity of the problems. Additionally, the lack of co-ordination among the interested bodies results further weakening of the relative competences.

Based on data, which were at the disposal of the Committee, more than 500 buildings at the center of Athens are abandoned, while at Metaxourgeio area have been recorded 211 abandoned buildings, at Psirri area 110 etc.

The Committee considers that the basic targets of an effective "Rescue Plan" should be:

- a. Halting of the abandonment of the Centre from its citizens due to urban devaluation which is recorded, but halting of the problematic security conditions as well.
- b. Rehabilitation of the Centre.

Further, the Committee notes that it is absolutely necessary to maintain the great social stratification that characterizes - or ought to characterize - the Centre. Otherwise, the final result would be the creation of a “refined” urban environment, which will select as its residents only those who will have the ability to respond to the increased prices of land, houses, and it will alienate people who could not respond to the newly formatted surplus values.

According to the Committee, rehabilitation does not refer only to permanent residents, but also includes the “temporary” residents, ie, people who work at the Centre, and citizens who visit it for various reasons (entertainment, shopping, public services, tourism, etc.).

In addition, the Committee notes that it is self-evident, that whatever measure is taken for the economic, urban and environmental reconstruction of the historic center of Athens it will remain incomplete, if safety conditions in the region are not guaranteed.

Consequently, a catalyst for the implementation of the proposals is restoration of law and order in the historic center, namely: Settlement of the issue of immigrants without legal documentation, combating drug trafficking and prostitution, strict control of land use and especially of buildings which are being used illegally as “hotels”, sealing of abandoned buildings, etc.

Finally, it is stated that the Committee Plan includes the following eight axes, which “function” complementary and they are specialized in specific actions:

Axles:

- Urban reconstruction:
- Rehabilitation of the Center.
- Quality upgrade of the urban environment.
- Unification of Archaeological Sites.
- Economic growth.
- Social cohesion.
- Environmental consolidation.
- Cultural establishment.
- Institutional upgrading.
- Financing.
- System to monitor the progress of interventions. New Master Plan of Athens / Attica

#### **New Master Plan of Athens/Attica.**

In July of this year it was delivered to public consultation (until November the 1st), the legal text of the New Master Plan of Athens / Attica, the first after 25 years, which basic philosophy is summarized in the concept of “cohesive city” of which it is attempted to enhance the cultural and tourist profile, (and) with the use of track transportation infrastructure (eg tram).

It is recalled that earlier considerations of the previous government, were relatively provided a comprehensive program of regional roads, expansion of metro lines, etc.

The new plan provides the expansion of regional roads, new metro lines, extensions of the tram line, construction of new highways (Eleusis / Thebes / Iliki), the phasing abolition of aberrations of building in off building sites, smaller than 4 acres, etc.

Moreover, particular attention is paid in the “recycling” of land and building in the city of Athens, with recovery of use of buildings (reuse), urban reconstructions and halting of “diffusion” of the city (especially) in Athens.

The plan, moreover, provides “new tools” for spatial planning and land development, such as the purchase of land rights, “strictualization” of the existing provisions regarding building, promotion of alternative uses of land off plan, etc.

#### **Ministry of Environment: New policies.**

In addition, the Ministry of Environment announced that it will implement new policies for the return of residents to the (broadly and for different reasons) degraded center of Athens, such as:

Provision for reduced municipal taxes for those who will ‘resettle’ to the Centre in cooperation with the municipality of Athens.

Granting of subsidized loans to purchase a first home in the Center and raise of the tax-free limit to buy it, with differentiations between married and not married people.

Reduction of personal income tax rates, etc. Reduction of seven points (from 10% to 3%) of the real estate transfer tax within the next two years in the center of Athens city.

Exemption from taxes for donation or parental donation for amounts exceeding 200,000, euros under the prerequisite that the donation or parental donation is made for the purpose of building first home, etc.

Exemption for a further five years’ period of the obligation to declare the origin of the money given to purchase property within the center of Athens city.

Deduction of the taxes regarding spendings for rehabilitation, renovation and modernization of preservable buildings (located in the center of Athens).

Special deduction of tax on lease payments for premises in Gerani area of Athens.

Gerani area was chosen as the first application area of new policies, while, it is foreseen to expand the application of new measures in the areas of Vathi square, Agios Nikolaos, Kato Patissia, Kipseli, etc.

#### ***Instead of an epilogue***

To those who have dealt systematically with the phenomenon of gentrification it is quite clear that the mesh of causes that produce it in all of its dimensions, is very complex, such as the motives of those involved in its management.

The series of recent policies and measures and announcements for its more effective management, regardless of the “logic”, “internal consistency”, “sustainability” the possibility of financing “of the project, raises valid hopes for positive first steps.

However, the most worthy to mention fact remains the unexpected awareness, of both Citizens and Representatives of Authorities (Central, Regional, Local) for the necessity of relevant and effectual interventions.