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Planning and urban transformation in the Balkans in the 19th and 20th centuries

State, Society and Market in Preveza - Historical Time and *Historical Centre* in a Small Greek Town.

Ioannis Rentzos
University of the Aegean
Geography Department
iren@sa.aegean.gr

Nikos Giannoulis
University of Ioannina
Hydrobiological Research Center
ngianuli@cc.uoi.gr

Jannis Kallinikos
London School of Economics
Information Systems Department
J.Kallinikos@lse.ac.uk

Abstract

In this contribution a reconstruction of Preveza's historic past is attempted in order to produce a paradigm for the study of its urban history. A critical approach along with some examples will permit to see how the modern state institutions and the free market forces continuously shrink small-town's space *and* time. Their interventions result in some new iconographies, recommend new behaviours and produce unreal memories. An arbitrary or specific spatial and temporal entity, the so called the town's 'historic centre', instead of offering elements for recognising Preveza's history, distorts its past and produces meanings and values, the most important being the 'ones' of luxury products and services in free time shops' space. Except from expanding on the subject under discussion, the authors also incorporate further aspects and discuss in what degree, in the national framework and context, a small town, its name, its space and time constitute inalterable map references and material points with an objectively historical interest.

Key-words

Actium, Battle of Preveza, AWACS, internal colonialism, Preveza's moat.

... [The] gates were strong and beautiful too, for beauty does not detract from strength. A broad, deep moat, fast flowing during the winter floods, washed the foot of the walls all round Preveza... At night the gates were closed [...] and Preveza slept peacefully.

... You saw at once two long, parallel streets, running without a break, without disturbance, almost in a straight line, crossing each of the townships from end to end, from south to north... Something of this ground plan still remains...

We prefixed a description of old Paris to the text, as it is found in *Notre Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo (Hugo, 1993), and we compare the humble, small Mediterranean town of Preveza with the resplendent French capital. In the above extract we changed only the name of the city; however there are several similarities...



Fig. 1. On the upper right point of this roundabout, a small house resists demolition of the *Porta Messinià*. Cars are entering the moat road.

What the previous generation of Prevezans bequeathed to the present authors may not be the exact medieval image of the town presented in the above quotation; however,

they were left with some vivid accounts about its character and way of life that allude to such an image. In fact, in many ways, Preveza's urban image had kept its medieval, namely Ottoman Eastern-Mediterranean, aspect alive until the 1950's and 1960's. We can mention here the Muslim temples and the fact that, apart from Christian churches, no other element witnessed the ethnic/national integration of the population inhabiting the town. It was during that exact period when national monuments were erected, depicting war events and the corresponding names. What followed was the cultural "tidying-up" of the surrounding area. Until then, only the signs of street names demonstrated the ethnic/national identity and the adherence to the national Core's culture (Avdikos, 1993).

The moat (Velenis, G., 1997) still existed, literally "protecting" the town from "alien" populations (fig. 2, a curved line passing through the points 3-1-2). The town wall had already been demolished since 1920 (fig. 2, from point 4 to approximately point 5, Moustakis, 2002). But the moat excluded in particular the *Syrrakiotes*, bilingual Latin-speaking cattle-breeders from the Prefecture (*Nomos*) of Ioannina, who were not yet fully integrated into the Preveza's municipal area; they had encamped, more or less permanently, in huts outside the moat, which was itself in danger of being a public property totally encroached upon until 1980. Today, a big part of it constitutes an asphalt-paved road, while one of the gates is now being transformed into a modern roundabout (2004, *Porta Messinia*, fig. 1 and fig. 2 – point 1). The owner of the adjoining small house and building plot, which must be expropriated, claims higher damages, thus contributing to preserving the spatial historical memory of the town a little bit longer, until necessary proceedings come to an end. But, who is in need of it, given that increasingly longer convoys of cars swarm into the town in search of a place to circulate, to park and to let drivers have a coffee? Besides, the same applies to all Greek cities (Kallinikos, 1998) that "host" entire working-class populations of the world motor industry, from the suburbs of Tokyo, Paris, Stuttgart or Turin...



Fig. 2. A Map of Preveza.
The traditional nucleus of the town and the *historical centre*, around the point 5.
All other numbered points are explained in the text

Do small towns have a history?

The above title conveys one of the questions we pose. The answer does not lie in the sole fact that this conference does not include a session dedicated to small, "insignificant" towns. This would be an ill-disposed interpretation. Nevertheless, in a country such as

Greece, whose history, archaeology and pedagogy follow a tradition oriented towards the historically glorious and distant, even by inventing never-ending urban successions, the act of highlighting small, "insignificant" modern Greek towns is of particular importance to the town's history. In relation to Preveza, we can draw attention to Avdikos's Ph.D. dissertation (Avdikos, 1978) that put on the map many of the various social aspects of a modern Greek town, without seeking the greatness of the glorious *past* and the recognition coming from the *ruins* in the surrounding area.

We believe, however, that the question on whether small towns "do have" a history can be answered by taking account of the experiences we gained from a pedagogic research on urban history. During this research, Greek lower and upper secondary school pupils were asked to locate geographically the legendary –or rumoured as for the details– event of the "Dance of Zaloggo" (Rentzos, 2002), which is associated with this place-name and place, approximately 20 kilometers north of Preveza. Children were given a picture of the monument created by the recently deceased sculptor, G. Zoggolopoulos, at the place where the women of Souli sacrificed themselves. Then, they were asked to remember the name of this place (= *Zaloggo*) and locate the region (= Prefecture of Preveza) among the following multiple choice answers: (1) *North Epirus*, (2) *Prefecture of Ioannina*, (3) *Prefecture of Preveza* and (4) *Region of Missolonghi*. The right answer (*Prefecture of Preveza*) came last in the children's preferences. Even the children who ignored the place of sacrifice (*Zaloggo*) chose another answer. The answer that came first in the pupils' preferences was Missolonghi; a historic place fraught with heroism which, according to the children who have justifiably forgotten the details, *should* be the one associated with the region where the *heroic* event occurred. Towns that are small and insignificant for the national historiography and pedagogy are deprived, in the eyes of the public, of any trace of historical importance they may have.

Besides, the inhabitants of these towns and regions themselves, through specific geopolitical and ideological processes, refer to "their" historical past by way of selected historical events. For example, in Preveza there is now a museum dedicated to the naval battle of Aktion/Actium (-31), while allusions to the naval Battle of Preveza (1538) are rare, even though i) this event is well-known to the historical literature (Braudel, 1985) and ii) at stake was always the same thing: the delimitation of the borders between the Occident and the East. Of the borders, which pass through the beaches of Preveza.... Of course, there is no need to remind the participant of this conference that the Ottomans' victory in that naval battle casts this important event into institutionalized historical oblivion. A fairly recognized local historian, known for his contribution to the popularization of the region's history, told us that, thanks to the enquiries of an Austrian researcher who visited Preveza in 1984, he was for the first time informed about the importance of the naval battle of Preveza and its impact on the historical-geopolitical perception of West and East in the Mediterranean (Katsaounis, 1984).

What can we consider as history of Preveza? A project for an urban history paradigm

Urban policy and urban planning along with politics, the control of the space and the society through interventions *and* ideologies can be critically studied within a single framework (Hastaoglou, 1982). The very concept of a city's history implies "centrality" of the city itself, as the main hero, far from spatial generalizations and territorial integrations. The city as *polis* and its moral life (Aristotle) are opposed to any pan-Hellenic (Isocrates) or pan-European and globalizing scheme (Brown [et al.], 2002). In our opinion, the following aspects are or must be considered as key elements in the urban historical study of Preveza, especially those which i) constitute aspects of the local identity and ii) highlight situations of internal colonialism in the national periphery (Hechter, 1975):

The self-organization, the subsequent unplanned expansion and the population of Preveza (Komis, 1999), as opposed to the organized founding of the two older towns of

this area – Nikopolis and Kassopi – the remains of which are of impressive archaeological content;

The comparison of Preveza's role as the western-most town and port of the Helladic mainland during the Venetian domination and the years of the Ottoman Empire, and as a boundary area of European Turkey, and later as an isolated part within the Greek territory;

The perpetual geostrategic / geopolitical nature of the town's geographical point of growth, as reflected in certain facts of international, national (Greek) and local history:

- World history: deployment of *NATO's AWACS* base – 1980s and then (Archives, NG, 2000)
- World / European history: bombardments in 1940/41 as well as just before 6 June 1944 (D-Day), in the event of a military diversion (Tsolka-Stefopoulou, 2001)
- Eastern-Mediterranean history: Aktio (Cape Actium, -31), Barbarossa - Doria (1538)
- Greek National history: sabre-rattling from the Greek fleet by way of an attack against Preveza's *Turkish* ground – 1897 (Pangalos, 1950)
- Regional history: *destruction of Preveza* – 1798 and its autonomy status – 1800 (Papageorgiou, 1999; Stamouli, 2000)
- Local history: The *urban* civil war – 1945, events of *Parginoskala*, (Katsanos, 1986).

The political image of the town, as reflected in the institutional political conflict over local government without the participation of part of the working people (immigrants), and over i) the two-seat parliamentary representation in the context of ii) a two-party system, which constitute elements leading to the *constant* predetermination of the election result (1-1) at prefectural level;

The town's modern physiognomy and image

- as it emerges from various interventions and destructions, as well as from the logic underlying the urban master plan, from the erection of monumental buildings (*temples of Mammon* [commercial banks, (Booker, 1990)] as well as churches) and the diffusion of the ideal of a modern street layout as the secret ideology of the suffocating domination of cars;
- as reflected in every detail of urban daily life, defined by the blatant prevalence of the logic that dictates the satisfaction of one's immediate self-interests (small-scale constructions, annexes, the habit of parking as if it is meant to be a takeover);
- as reflected in the obvious institutionalized stifling of public space in various levels (relating to: respect towards the *other*, impersonal democratic function of the material structures of the town, protection of the basic aesthetic and cultural right of living *within the town* – concept of the historical centre, see below);

The *persisting* depictions and metaphors of this town, in the way literature/poetry (Mafredas, 2001) and the relevant discourse (poems and letters by K. Karyotakis, as well as numerous later references) *prescriptively* produced them;

The important project of Preveza-Aktio undersea tunnel, for bypassing the road of the Amvrakikos Gulf shore, which is recently finished, and "is designed to aid transport to Albania and the Dalmatian coast" [URL2]. Does Preveza enter the "pathways of globalisation" (Sarigiannis, 2004)?

The origin of the name *Preveza*, a word of typical Slavic root (Cf. Serbian *prevoz-prevoza* = transport-transport's [URL1]) corresponding to its geographical location and function, but which has always been considered, probably and especially, after the Russian Revolution (our hypothesis), as Albanian (Fourikis, 1924; Giannopoulos, 1927);

Preveza's *common* local vernacular, *Privizán'ka*, which has not yet been lost, in the light of local identity, local attitudes and consciousness, which eventually are tied with particular language use but are opposed to occupation, gender, and origin correlations.

Last but not least, the movement from the port services industry and the fisheries to the agriculture in Preveza's economy and the migration from and to Preveza; the everyday life at the households' level according to the geographical origin of the population (Lefkadites, Syrrakiotes, and traditional Prevezans) and the role of women – all these points giving also ideas for monuments and statues in the central squares of the town...

In what degree is Preveza's centre historical?

The main feature of Preveza's town planning is Irinis Avenue. Its southern part seems to divide the town into two sections: the traditional area, which is closer to the sea and includes the waterfront and the port, and the areas that were developed later on. More specifically, Preveza's historical centre (see Fig. 2), for which there exist special town planning provisions as regards the volume of constructions, the covering of building plots and the preservation of the form of some buildings (Greek Government Gazette, 1989), is delimited further to the south of the town and includes the business centre, the traditional trade centre, as well as the administrative centre. We could even maintain that the building of the National Bank of Greece, in the port's centre, represents the "centre of the centre".

The western part of the town, which is also the newest, includes spots that are as old as those of its eastern part, three churches, the old high school building, and many residences that are being demolished and replaced one after the other by blocks of flats, instead of setting the standard for a further urban regeneration (e.g. Tsinavos's residence, 1999-2002, Paparoidamis, 2004). The area where one of these churches of Saint Nicolas is located, at the southern most part of the town, is considered to be the original historical nucleus of the town (fig. 2, point 6). In any case, the town is expanding mainly towards the north and towards the west as well, so as to cover the entire peninsula.

Irinis Avenue itself is of particular interest. It constitutes a clear linear intervention, contrary to the town's traditional morphology; it has blocks of flats on both its sides and lends itself to a combined use as both high street and highway, as far as possible. This means that today it forms an extension of the exit from the tunnel that connects the town to Aktio. However, the ground floors of the blocks of flats serve for commercial purposes to the point of satiety. During the last decades this street was still known by the name "river" and had orchards on its right and left. But was there any river on the small peninsula of Preveza?

According to Pouqueville's description (Pouqueville, 1820), the river's banks with their vegetation of citrus trees that was still luxuriant created a scenery of exceptional beauty. Rainfalls in western Greece during autumn and winter allow us to believe that a stream with a rather irregular regime was conserved. From what the elders relate, we can trace the elimination phases of this stream. The name *Karydàs River*, a name that was invented, is a deliberate scholarly corruption alluding to the content of sewers. As Dimitrios Vyzantios had reminded us in his *Vavylonia*, the word *kourádi* (from which *Kouradàs* and then *Karydàs* are derived) is not used all over Greece with a meaning that refers to cattle breeding (= *kopadi* [flock]). So, since the stream was first reduced to an open sewer, in the next phase it was covered. That is, failure to perceive the value of this urban environmental element and, apparently, financing difficulties brought about its depreciation and covering, instead of leading to its improving development.

From a purely constructional point of view, the eastern row of blocks of flats on Irinis Avenue forms a wall that limits the historical centre in an asphyxiating manner. A typical

case is the recent construction (2003-2004) of a block of flats on Irinis Avenue; this also assimilated the small *public* garden-plot that constituted a space of vital importance for a traditional complex of mew-like residences and tied in, in terms of urban morphology, with the monumental complex of Syrrakiotes. This fact reveals the following reasoning: on the one hand, the State signs the delimitation of the historical centre and, on the other, it approves of the allotment of ownership of public spaces to private individuals by decision of a public authority, thus stifling its vital functions (Papadimitriou, 2004). Besides, the fact that municipal authorities are deluged with requests for the buying of land by way of allotment of ownership by decision of a public authority is a typical phenomenon of this period (Doumos, 2003).



Fig. 3. A new block of flats (2003-2004) on Irinis Avenue eliminates the small public garden-plot.

This coarse logic is however evident in the inner part of the historical centre as well. The each time approved change of land use in the central market area (*Ethnikis Antistaseos* street) shows that what is not respected at all is the town's history as a place of people. The demolition of the traditional "Brikos bakery", in order to be replaced by a –nice– glass-covered store of a well-know shoes brand name, is an example of the disregard for the town's history, in the heart of a *dehistorising* historical centre.

Doxiadis's reaction in front of a similar traditional building, "Arbiros bakery", is known to the town. Escorted by town councillors during the preparatory phase of his project-study for Preveza (1965) and reaching the spot where the bakery stood –it almost blocked the street (representing the Ottoman, Mediterranean, town-planning)– he was asked: "What are we doing with that?". His answer came directly and naturally: "We leave it as it is. We just restore and preserve the building". And then he referred to the cities' character to create not only visual images but also olfactory experiences (Koronaïos, 2001). What kind of olfactory experiences can we expect of shoes?

However, the dehistorising intervention in the historical centre incorporates obviously many more dimensions. It possibly serves as an excuse for facilitating the infringement of the "right to the city". No matter what the initial cultural intention was, the actual result is the emergence of a peculiar, huge, summer "saloon". That is, instead of promoting the ideal of living within the entire town –seen as a place to work *and* to reside in *and* to spend some free time– respecting at the same time its whole urban profile, the monoculture of the market has merely transformed the pier into an embellished transmitter for the production of meanings. The rest of the town is just being divided into building plots and filled with cars, while the history of the production of its space is being treated with contempt. The *acquired* rights of *mild* production of space and *mild* use of the surroundings are being infringed upon.

In place of conclusions

In one of his books, Don Mitchel (Mitchel, 2001) reminds us to what extent we encounter in cities and towns the tendency to eliminate the facts of their real social and urban history, and to produce a different one. He alerts us about what happens in cities that are being embellished by “eras[ing] the labor history of the city”. The cover of his book depicts nothing less than the destruction of *Guernica*, which is however a caricatural representation of the famous painting by Picasso (made by Ron English and entitled *Culture Wars*). The various figures, both people and animals, have a cartoon’s muzzle and are victims of a cultural war.

In Preveza, the State signs on the one hand the delimitation of a historical centre, it paves it, takes care of it and embellishes it, while at the same time depriving the rest of the town and people with less means (children, elderly people, people with disabilities) of the right to the city. In practice, this becomes evident from such basic issues as the width and quality of pavements. From a symbolic, thus cultural, point of view, it is done by destroying the town’s historical structure, imposing the alignment of streets, spreading the logic that underlies the construction of blocks of flats, causing the violence of automobile transport.

During the life cycle of a generation or two, but most of all since the time that Preveza was annexed to the Greek state, all the features of a beautiful, humble and medieval town have been eradicated. Its territory along with its soil became Greek. However, this town is older than the Greek State. And not few of the elders remind us with some resentment that Preveza had some features that should have been treated with respect.

Notes

Gr stands for Greek-language publications
n’ in *Privizán’ka* is pronounced like ñ in España
NG, one of the present authors.

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