

GAZI, ATHENS

PERI ARTHUR



The city of Athens, Greece is one of the world's oldest cities with a history spanning approximately 3,400 years. According to Greek mythology, the city was named after the goddess Athena after she won a competition with Poseidon over who would become the protector of the city. The city's location (in the fertile plains of Attica between the Parnitha, Penteli, and Hymettos mountains), proximity to the Saronic Gulf, and its mild climate were probably the main reasons why the founders of the city chose to live there. <sup>3</sup>

Athens has a very extensive ancient history, but the main purpose of this study is to focus on the modern development of the city which began after the Greek Revolution of 1821. Greece was established as a modern independent Greek state in 1830 by the Treaty of London. Athens was then made the capital and a Bavarian prince, Otto, was proclaimed King of Greece. During the time of King Otto's rule, Athens had a population of only 4,000-5,000 people who were located in the district of Plaka. Athens was chosen as the capital of Greece for historical and sentimental reasons. Once the capital was established, a modern city plan was laid out and many public buildings were erected. <sup>1</sup>

Athens experienced its first period of explosive growth following the disastrous Greco-Turkish War in 1921 when more than a million Greek refugees from Asia Minor were resettled in Greece. Modern day suburbs of the city such as Nea Ionia and Nea Smyrni began as refugee settlements. <sup>2</sup>



Athens was occupied by the Nazis in World War II and experienced terrible privations during the later years of the war. Heavy fighting between Communist forces and the royalists backed by the British broke out in 1944.<sup>2</sup>

After WWII, Athens began to grow as people migrated into the city looking for work. Greece joined the European Union in 1981 which brought in many new investments to Athens, but also increased social and environmental problems. At the time, Athens had some of the worst traffic congestion and air pollution in the world which posed a great threat to the ancient monuments. Traffic vibrations weakened the foundations and the air pollution corroded the marble. Because of the environmental and infrastructure problems, the city failed to secure the 1996 centenary Olympic Games even though it was the host of the first modern-day Olympic Games in 1896.<sup>2</sup>

Since the failed attempt to secure the 1996 Olympics, the city and the Greek government, aided by the European Union funds, started major infrastructure projects such as building a new Athens Airport and a new metro system. The City of Athens also restricted the use of cars in the city center to reduce the air pollution problem. The restoration of the old gasworks district, Gazi, was also part of the capital improvement plan to revitalize the downtown area.

The Gasworks district was built by the Athens Gasworks French Company in 1857 in order to bring light into the city when the Industrial Revolution was beginning to make its appearance within the newly established Greek

State. The gasworks began with a royal decree issued by King Otto under a unanimous decision by the Athens Municipal Council and great importance was put on selecting a centrally located site to house the new industrial complex. The site chosen is on the main road to Piraeus at the third corner of the commercial center of Athens creating a rough triangular shape for the city. In previous plans drawn up by Kleantes and Schaubert (1833) the site was to be the location of Kekrops Square and in Klentze's plan (1834) the site was to be the location for the royal palaces.<sup>6</sup> The construction and operation of the gasworks took place in four phases and continued to supply gas for city utility demands until the operation was suspended in 1984 due to the inefficiency of the energy processes and the

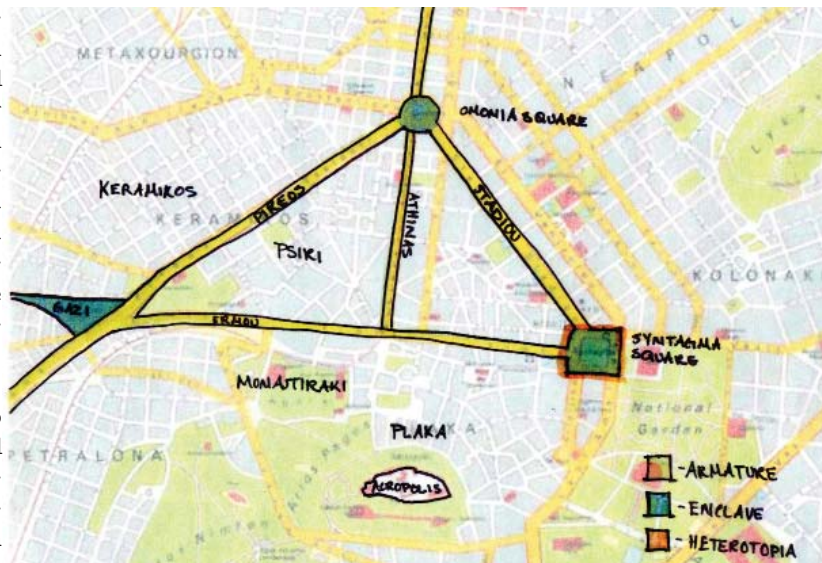
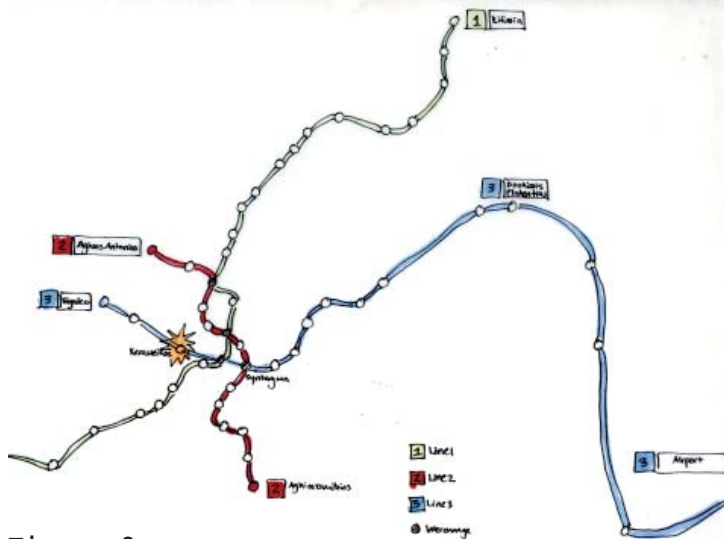


Figure 2

the city. In previous plans drawn up by Kleantes and Schaubert (1833) the site was to be the location of Kekrops Square and in Klentze's plan (1834) the site was to be the location for the royal palaces.<sup>6</sup> The construction and operation of the gasworks took place in four phases and continued to supply gas for city utility demands until the operation was suspended in 1984 due to the inefficiency of the energy processes and the



**Figure 3**

and heterotopias within the city. Based on the analysis of central Athens, the streets of Ermou, Pireous, Athinas, and Stadiou serve as armatures connecting the enclaves of Omonia Square, Syntagma Square, and Gazi (See Figure 2). The armatures of Ermou, Pireous, Athinas, and Stadiou are lined with shops, restaurants and hotels and serve as excellent vehicles for communication. Omonia Square was built in 1833 and serves as the

amount of pollution the plant produced in such close proximity to the Acropolis.

The triangular shape of the city inspired an analysis of the downtown portion of Athens. A figure ground drawing (see Figure 1) similar to the ones used by Rowe and Koetter in Collage City made the organic layers of development over the past 3,000 years more evident. The figure ground drawing also helped to identify the major armatures, enclaves,

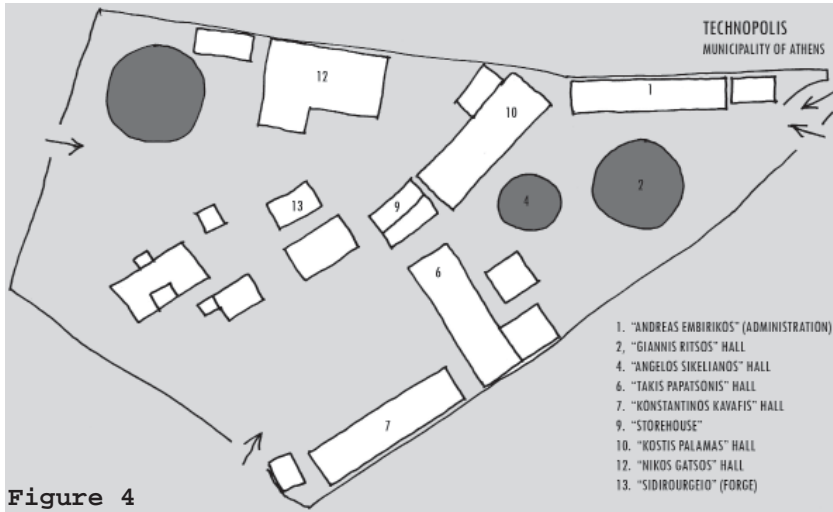
business center of Athens. Omonia Square is surrounded by shops, offices, and hotels and because it is easy to travel from Omonia to any other part of Athens, it has become a major transportation hub equipped with a trolley, bus station, and metro stop. Syntagma Square was built and named after the constitution that King Otto was forced to grant to the people after a popular and military uprising in 1843. Syntagma Square serves as the political center of Athens since it is where the Greek Parliament buildings are located and it is the main site for political protests. Because it was built to be the political center of Greece and all of the functions that happen within the square are politically related, Syntagma Square is also a heterotopia within the city of Athens. The third enclave which caps off the main armatures running through central Athens is the neighborhood of Gazi (shown in blue on the figure ground drawing - Figure 1) which will be further discussed throughout this analysis. Other heterotopias which became evident in the figure ground drawing where the areas shown in green. These areas such as the Ancient Agora, the Acropolis, Kerameikos, and the Temple of Zeus had many different purposes in ancient times, but today, they are primarily used as archeological and tourist attractions.

As part of the city's revitalization effort to gain the 2004 Olympics bid, one of the enclaves, the Gazi district, was repaired, restored and reestablished as an entertainment district due to its proximity within the center of Athens. Though the 19th century stone buildings were restored in the late 1990's and the industrial museum of modern architecture (Tech-

nopolis) was built there in the early 2000's, it wasn't until the Metro (Line A) continued construction and opened a stop at Kerameikos in 2007 that the Gazi district really took off (See Figure 3).<sup>6</sup> The restoration and availability of public transportation to the area brought an influx of art exhibits, musical festivals, and numerous bars and restaurants to the area. Gazi is home to the Technopolis which is a 30,000 square meter industrial multi cultural center that plays host to many different kinds of exhibitions throughout the year (See Figure 4). Technopolis opened in 1999 and is dedicated to the great Greek composer, Manos Chatzidakis. In the past ten years, Gazi has also become the gay village of Athens which was formerly located in Kolonaki and Syngrou Avenue. Gazi has continued to grow in population as the area is reformed and new, more expensive housing is built.

After a little research into the work of Network Nomadic Architecture, I found confirmation that Gazi is the up and coming area of Athens, but because of the lack of planning by the city government, it is one of the only nice areas to live in Athens.<sup>4</sup> The city of Athens forced development in the area to become an entertainment district before the 2004 Olympics and since then, the city administration has failed to enforce good planning practices that will encourage long term development. Though the transformation of the area appears to be hugely successful, city planners and administrators refuse to identify the gentrification that is happening within Gazi as a result of the revitalization. Many artistic and musical cultural innovations are currently happening in Gazi as it continues to





**Figure 4**

migrants from Thrace (the Turkish speaking Muslims with Greek citizenship), and artisans are now being displaced as expensive lofts are being built and more bars and galleries move into the area.<sup>4</sup> The real estate development of the area has driven up the price of rent to the point that the existing residents can no longer afford to live there. The axonometric drawing (See Figure 5) shows the Technopolis district and the surrounding business developments which are slowly pushing the existing community out.

grow, but what are the consequences happening to the pre-existing communities that were completely ignored in the development process? The existing communities of Gazi which included: old Athenian families who remained in Gazi after resisting the trend in the 1970's to move to the new middle class suburbs, internal

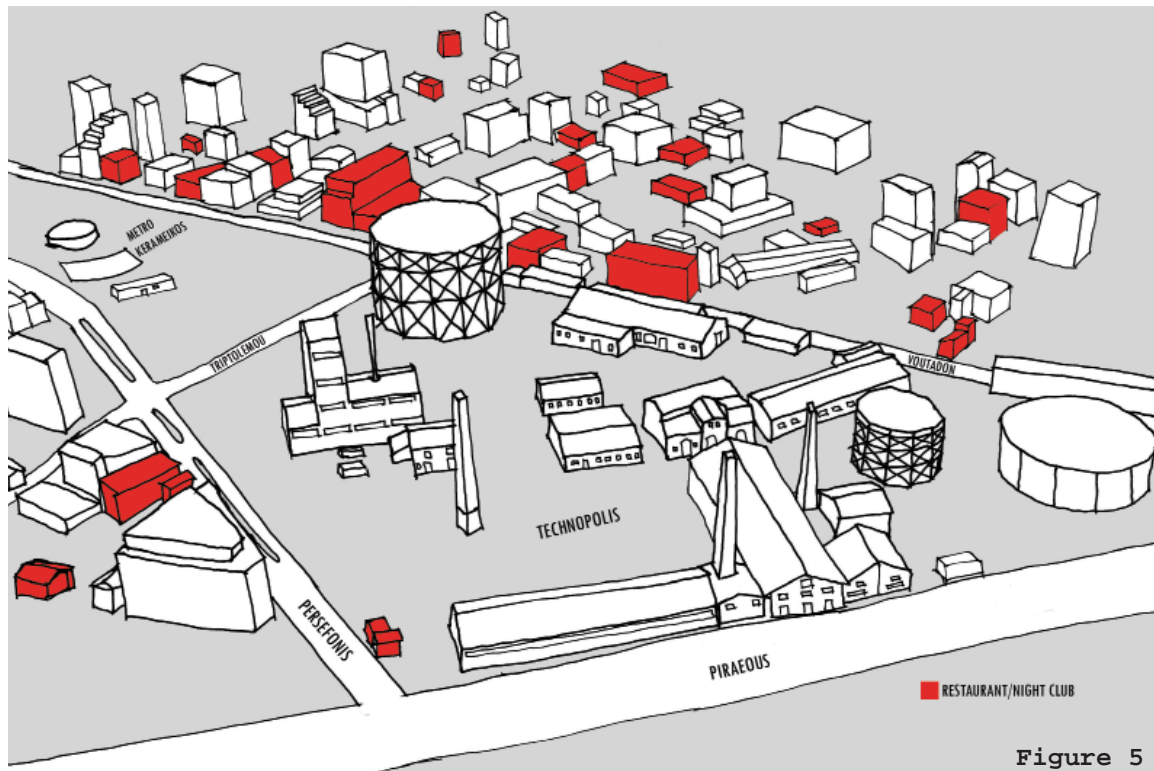


Figure 5

Another article by the Network Nomadic Architecture group further discussed the situation of the other downtown districts of Athens and why Gazi is currently the only nice place to live within the city. The Network Nomadic Architecture group stated that due to its geography, the city of Athens has become one of the main entrances of migrants directed towards Europe. As a result of the influx of migrants, the center of Athens has seen the creation of many gathering places such as coffee shops, grocery stores, restaurants, and internet cafes. Though there are many gathering places, there is still no official reception policy established by the city administration for immigrants and asylum seekers and they are consequently faced with a system of brutal arbitrariness. Out of necessity, the international immigrants have colonized the vacant buildings in the city centre. Though they have succeeded in bringing life back into the derelict properties, the inhabitants nevertheless lack the means to improve things substantially.<sup>4</sup> Because of this lack of planning, the center of the city is hardly recognizable and the conflicts have made the streets very unwelcoming as violence and fear has eroded the friendly expression on people's faces. If no action is taken by the City of Athens administration, the displaced city people from the Gazi district will be forced into the same living conditions as the international immigrants because they cannot afford to live anywhere else.

Some of the ways that the existing residents of Gazi and the city administration can resist the gentrification process include: community organization, inclusionary zoning, zoning ordinances, community land trusts,

and rent control. Community organization is where the members of the community get together and form socio-political strategies required to retain affordable housing.<sup>5</sup> These strategies may include direct action techniques of sit in protests to preserve vacant community land or a more formal organization of establishing community development corporations. Inclusionary zoning are ordinances which require a certain percentage of housing complexes to remain affordable for the original low to moderate income residents.<sup>5</sup> Zoning ordinances can be used to recognize and support local business that may get evicted during the gentrification process. Zoning ordinances may require or provide incentives for business developers to keep existing commercial tenants or allow for new housing near a commercial corridor to increase foot traffic to the local businesses without redeveloping them. Community land trusts resist gentrification by preventing property values from increasing during land speculation by removing the real estate from the open market.<sup>5</sup> The final way that communities can resist gentrification is through rent control. Rent control regulations may back fire, but they are intended to restrict the amount of rent that can be charged so that incumbent residents are not forced out of their residences by increasing rents.<sup>5</sup> If the city of Athens were to enact one or several of these options, gentrification of the Gazi district may be avoided. The Gazi district should continue to develop as a multi-purpose cultural center without forcing the eviction of the existing residents or the new artist residents who moved into the area seeking lower rents.

## Resources:

- <sup>1</sup>"A Brief Reference to the History of Athens." Athens Greece Guide. Web. 1 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.athensguide.org/athens-history.html>>.
- <sup>2</sup>"HISTORY OF ATHENS." HistoryWorld - History and Timelines. Web. 31 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ac45>>.
- <sup>3</sup>"History of Greece - Ancient Greek History." Around Greece. Web. 31 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.aroundgreece.com/ancient-greece-history/index.php>>.
- <sup>4</sup>"Invisible City." Network Nomadic Architecture. Web. 2 Apr. 2011. <<http://nomadikiarxitektoniki.net/>>.
- <sup>5</sup>"Policy - Provide Pre-development and Acquisition Financing." Housing Policy.org. Center for Housing Policy. Web. 9 May 2011. <[http://www.housingpolicy.org/toolbox/strategy/policies/predevelopment\\_financing.html?tierid=133](http://www.housingpolicy.org/toolbox/strategy/policies/predevelopment_financing.html?tierid=133)>.
- <sup>6</sup>"The History of Gazi - Athens." PlacesOnLine - World Travel Guide, Tourist Information, Hotel, Travel and Vacations. Web. 10 Apr. 2011. <[http://www.placesonline.com/europe/greece/athens/landmarks\\_and\\_historic\\_sites/the\\_history\\_of\\_gazi.asp](http://www.placesonline.com/europe/greece/athens/landmarks_and_historic_sites/the_history_of_gazi.asp)>.