

Kousidonis, Christos Th.

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Thessaloniki and the International Trade Fair: A case of Conflict?

Christos Th. Kousidonis

University of Thessaly

The recent proposal for a rather intense redevelopment of the site of the International Fair in the central area of Thessaloniki, Greece, triggered a conflict among the ‘Thessaloniki International Fair S.A.’ and the City Council. It brings out questions about the design of the central part of the city, the spatial structure of the city and the future of the city as a socio-spatial entity.¹

1. The territorial role of Thessaloniki

1.1. The principal dimensions:

Thessaloniki in history

Thessaloniki was founded in 315 B.C. by king Casandros who compelled 26 small cities to unite forming the new city. The city was christened after Casandros’ wife, sister of Alexander the Great. It was immediately fortified and most probably organized on a regular gridiron plan. Since its foundation, Thessaloniki became the major city of Macedonia, and retained a similar, if more formal, position during the roman period, when it was appointed capital city of the Region of Macedonia. It was an administrative and cultural center and a major trade and transportation hub, attaining a population exceeding 200,000 in the second century A.D.² *Via Egnatia*, the famous road starting from Dyrrachium, a major port at the Adriatic, led to Thessaloniki and, later, through Thessaloniki to Constantinople. Thessaloniki was one

¹ The author was a member of a team formed in December 2005 by the TCG-CMB (Technical Chambers of Greece, Central Macedonia Branch) to consult the Executive Committee on the question of the central area of Thessaloniki.

² Thessaloniki, entry in: Encyclopedia Papyros-Larrouse (in greek), *Istoria toy Ellikikou Ethnous* (History of the Greek Nation), vol. ΣΤ (in greek).

of the most important urban centres of the Byzantine Empire, combining a great port with its nodal position on the road network. In 1490 the Turks took the city. It remained under the Ottoman rule until 1912 when it became part of the contemporary Greek State.

The years 1912 to 1922 were a period of radical transformations in the North Eastern Europe. The Balkan wars of 1912-13 end with several treaties which put on the map a new state (Albania) and major territorial expansions of Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia at the expense of Turkey. The period of conflicts culminates to the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922, after which a population exchange takes place between Turkey and Greece. More than 800,000 people (from a total of about 1.5 million) of the Greek immigrants from Turkey settle in the prefectures of Macedonia. The northern borders of Greece at the end of 1922 remain the same to the present.³

1917 is the year of the great fire that turned to ashes most of the city. In a surprisingly short time, the decision is made to radically redevelop the city. This lends to the implementation of a plan that continues to be a principal component of the city's spatial form.⁴

The interwar years from 1923 to 1940 are a period of intense economic, political and social problems. The forties are spent almost entirely in war (WW II) and civil war and *generate a process that continues to evolve until today: the main component of this process is a heavy and long-term polarisation of Macedonia on a zone of settlements and activities around Thessaloniki.*

The early fifties find Thessaloniki and Northern Greece in a peculiar situation. The northern border of Greece was the border to the "iron curtain" countries as well. The impact oh this remained strong until the seventies to gradually diminish with the change in the political climate.

The current geopolitical environment

The nineties witnessed a new thorough change on a rather global scale with the developments in the former Soviet Union and the Eastern European States and the

³ Istoría toy Ellikikou Ethnous (History of the Greek Nation), vol. IA (in greek).

⁴ For a history of Thessaloniki from a town-planning point of view, see Karadimou-Gerolympou AI (1995). The reconstruction of Thessaloniki alter the 1917 fire. A landmark in the history of the city and the development of town planning. Studio University Press (in greek)

prevailing of free market economy. The repercussions of this in the wider region of Thessaloniki were rather dramatic, reaching to the level of actual warfare in and among the States of former Yugoslavia and, eventually, the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The Balkans once again went, and indeed are still going, through a period territorial rearrangements and emergence of new States, the last incident so far being the ... of Montenegro to depart from the

The formation and enlargement of EU is the second major component of the current geopolitical scene in which Thessaloniki is to accept or, as the *Zeitgeist* of the day would command, invent its regional role. To vividly illustrate the new picture that the conditions in the Balkans are morphing to, it would probably suffice to mention that Bulgaria and Romania, formerly members of the Soviet block, are now strong candidates for the next enlargement of the EU.

1.2. Thessaloniki as a central place /communications hub:

Thessaloniki has been an important node in the urban network of south-eastern Europe since the days of Roman Empire, to say the least. This nodal position was closely associated with the development of the major road network and the importance of the port.

The hinterland of the port extended a long way to the north, grossly covering the territory of former Yugoslavia. Since the liberation of the city in 1912, a 'free zone' was established as a major part of the port, to accommodate cross-border trade and transportation, free zone functions including trade and manufacturing. Yugoslavia held its own 'Yugoslavian Free Zone'.

The potential of the port was boosted by the development of the railway network. The railway connection of Thessaloniki to Skopje was established as early as 1871; to Belgrade in 1880, to Monastir in 1893, to Alexandroupolis and Istanbul in 1895, and to the south of Greece in 1914.⁵

At present, the main components of the communications network of the region are considered as an integral part of the TENs (Trans European Networks) developed by the EU.⁶ (Fig. 1)

⁵ Encyclopedia Papyros-Larrouse (in greek)

⁶ See http://ec.europa.eu/ten/index_en.html

The recent decision of Montenegro to divorce from Serbia and become independent, after the May 21 vote, makes the port of Thessaloniki the obvious, if not the only, choice for FYROM and Serbia. Another recent development regarding the port is the emergence of a noticeable passenger component. Until 1990 the passenger flows were practically non-existent. The passenger flows are mainly to and from the Greek islands, while some international cruises include Thessaloniki in their schedule for a brief stop to visit Halkidiki and some monuments of the city or the nearby archaeological sites.

Thessaloniki has an international airport and good road connections to nearby areas of tourist attraction, mainly the coast of Halkidiki, and several locations of cultural interest including the Byzantine era monastic community of Mount Athos and ancient period archaeological sites. (Fig. 2)

1.3. Thessaloniki and territorial administrative units.

The city of Thessaloniki does not coincide with a single territorial administrative unit. Its namesake Municipality, the Municipality of Thessaloniki, is certainly just a part of a coherent city. The next semi-formal territorial formation is the *Poloedomikon Syngrotima* (*Πολεοδομικό Συγκρότημα*, usually translated as ‘Conurbation’) of Thessaloniki, comprising 15 municipalities (NUTs IV level), the combined urban parts of which form what we loosely call city of Thessaloniki (the term ‘city of Thessaloniki’ bearing no formal status) with a population of around 900,000 in 2001. The Municipality of Thessaloniki, with a population of around 365,000 in 2001, is in every sense the most important among the 15 municipalities.

Moving up to the next level of administrative units we encounter the area of jurisdiction of the ‘Organization of Thessaloniki’ or ‘Or.Th.’, this being the territory of the ‘Thessaloniki Development Plan Study’ (commonly translated as ‘Master Plan of Thessaloniki’). The ‘Organization of Thessaloniki’ is supposed to monitor, evaluate and adjust the development of the greater Thessaloniki area, mainly in spatial terms, as in the case of monitoring the implementation of a master plan. The population of this area is around 1,000,000.⁷ Moving up one step at the time we arrive

⁷ Greece, Thessaloniki (2005) Presentation in: Structural Change in Europe 4 – Entrepreneurial Spirit in Cities and Regions. Hagbarth Publications, p. 9.

at the ‘Prefecture of Thessaloniki’ (NUTs III level) and the ‘Region of Central Macedonia’ (NUTs II).

2. Thessaloniki, the T.I.F. and the EXPO institution:

2.1. A brief history of the T.I.F.

In 1926, when the first Thessaloniki International Fair (T.I.F.) was held, Trade Fairs had already a long history of being a strong factor in European economic and social development. T.I.F. was planned as an annual event, in order to improve the trade relations with foreign countries and firms. Organizing the first T.I.F. went through various pitfalls, including the suspicion and opposition of the Greek manufacturing industry and Athens based businessmen. In spite of the adversities the new institution gained momentum attracting increasing numbers of private and official foreign State participants⁸, and as soon as 1929 it was officially recognized as ‘International’ by the Union of International Fairs (Foire Internationale Union).⁹

Since its inception, the International Fair takes place on a site to the east of today’s CBD, to the east and close to the fortification wall that surrounded the old city. The site is practically identical to the geometrical centre of what we could call the contemporary city of Thessaloniki (as opposed the Municipality of the same name) and covers an area of some 18,4 hectares (Fig. 2). The installations are used not only for the *Annual General Fair*, as the original Trade Fair came to be called, but for various specialized exhibitions, congresses and cultural events as well.

The T.I.F. eventually developed into a company with varied activities under the brand name *Helexpo – T.I.F.* and went on by that form until 1999, when Helexpo – T.I.F. split up into two companies: The *HELEXPO S.A.* and the *Thessaloniki International Trade Fair (T.I.F) S.A.*¹⁰ The Mayor of Thessaloniki believes that the

⁸ For the early history of the TIF (until 1940) and interesting period photos of the facilities, see Dangas Al. et al (1998) Contribution to the research for the economic and social development of Thessaloniki: Economic structure and division of labour (in greek).

⁹ <http://www.ufinet.org/pages/ufimembers/membrdetails.asp?IdMember=403>

¹⁰ <http://www.tif.gr/>

split caused a series of problems and that the two companies are, in essence, competitors to each other.¹¹

The area and the facilities in general are property of the T.I.F. S.A.

The HELEXPO S.A. has the right of use of the site in general, and the exclusively the right of use of facilities of special importance for holding exhibitions, conferences and similar events. [Both companies are engaged in the organization of fairs, exhibitions, conferences and cultural events. Obviously the Mayor's opinion is at least partly justified. It is worth nothing that both companies are, for the time being, controlled by the state. (According to the 1999 statute of the T.I.F. s.a., article 6, 'The shares of the Company all belong to the Greek State and cannot be transmitted.'¹² The State has recently tried, without success, to sell or privatize the HELEXPO .¹³

In this author's opinion, the split of the original *Helexpo – T.I.F.* into the two companies resulted in a rather contradictory situation: On the one hand the two companies may indeed be in competition to each other, but on the other hand they are joined together not only by a common history but mostly by the organization of various events at the T.I.F. facilities or other somehow common efforts of wider interest like Thessaloniki's run for the organization of EXPO 2008.

2.2. Thessaloniki as an EXPO candidate.

- The International Fairs / EXPOs

Helexpo S.A. is a member of three International Associations involved in the organization of exhibitions or congresses and conventions, namely *The Global Association of Exhibition Industry* (UFI), the *International Congress & Convention Association* (ICCA) and the *International Association of Congress Centres* (AIPC).¹⁴ The members of these associations are, to varying degrees, involved in activities of a commercial nature.

¹¹

http://www.thessalonikicity.gr/Ypiresies/Grafeo_Dimarxou/apologismos/2004/apolog04_HELEXPO-DETH-EXPO2008-toyrismos.htm

¹² <http://www.tif.gr/en/katastatiko.htm>

¹³

http://www.thessalonikicity.gr/Ypiresies/Grafeo_Dimarxou/apologismos/2004/apolog04_HELEXPO-DETH-EXPO2008-toyrismos.htm

¹⁴ <http://www.helexpo.gr/>

As already stated, the organization of trade fairs is deeply rooted in European history. Yet, there has been established a different kind of major exhibitions, which defines an already long tradition, clearly distinct of that of the trade fairs. It's the 'International Exhibitions', in the recent years most commonly known as EXPOs. The first International Exhibition is generally considered to have been the one held in London in 1851. The organization of such *International Exhibitions* is essentially controlled by international diplomatic decisions. The success of the London 1851 Exhibition set a trend that produced many similar events throughout the world. Some of these events were just poor imitations that threaten to disgrace the emerging genre of International Exhibitions. To address this situation, '*a diplomatic international Convention*' on *International Exhibitions, held and signed in Paris in 1928, 'established the BIE [Bureau International des Expositions (International Exhibitions Bureau)] and set out simple rules, which restricted the number of exhibitions which could be held and defined their characteristics. The original 1928 Convention has been amended by various additional protocols, but the basic framework of that Convention is still valid today.*'¹⁵

The function of the BIE '*is to regulate the frequency and quality of exhibitions falling within its remit. This may simply be defined as covering all international exhibitions of a non-commercial nature (other than fine art exhibitions) with a duration of more than three weeks, which are officially organised by a nation and to which invitations to other nations are issued through diplomatic channels. The BIE is therefore not concerned with trade fairs and indeed the degree of commercial activity carried out at BIE exhibitions is carefully regulated.*'¹⁶

'From the earliest date, the BIE has accepted the need to differentiate between two categories of exhibitions: major events which last for six months and with a theme of a general nature and shorter, more economical events, where the theme is more precise and specialised. The two categories of exhibitions and their distinctive characteristics are as follows (more information www.bie-paris.org)

- *International Registered Exhibition (or World Exhibition)*

¹⁵ <http://www.bie-paris.org/main/index.php?p=-198&m2=238>

¹⁶ <http://www.bie-paris.org/main/index.php?p=-198&m2=238>

- *Frequency* : *every five years*
- *Duration* : *6 months at most*
- *Area* : *not restricted*
- *Theme* : *general (cf. General classification for International exhibitions)*
- *International Recognised Exhibition*
 - *Frequency* : *during the interval between two International Registered Exhibitions*
 - *Duration* : *3 months at most*
 - *Area* : *25 ha at most*
 - *Theme* : *specialized*

This type of event could give all nations the possibility of hosting an international exhibition.

The BIE will also continue to recognise those Horticultural Exhibitions such as the Netherlands Floriade 2002 and IGA 2003 Rostock in Germany, recommended to it by the International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIPH), and the Milan Triennale, an exhibition of long standing featuring the decorative arts.’¹⁷

Greece is a member state of the BIE since 1928.¹⁸

The next International Recognised Exhibition is scheduled for 2008.

The next International Registered Exhibition is to take place in Shanghai, China, from May 1 to October 31 (in process of registration). The theme of the ‘EXPO 2010 Shanghai’ is ‘better city, better life’.

- The run for EXPO 2008.

As stated above the International Exhibitions ‘*are officially organised by a nation*’, but they are named after the city in which they take place, and every proposal is indeed city-related. Thessaloniki was one of the three candidates for the 2008 Expo, the other two being Trieste, Italy, and Saragossa (Zaragoza), Spain. The winner was Saragossa and the theme of the ‘Expo 2008 Zaragoza - Spain’ is ‘Water and the Sustainable Development of cities’.

¹⁷ <http://www.bie-paris.org/main/index.php?p=-198&m2=238>

¹⁸ <http://bie-paris.org>

Thessaloniki proposed a site of some 9,5 ha, west of and close to the city, comprising (a) the proper Expo Site, the EXPO Hotel and accompanying facilities and (b) the EXPO village (Fig. 2).¹⁹ The planning proposal went into details to address the issue of accessibility and the visitors' accommodation. The theme would have been 'Terra Mater: Knowledge of the Earth, Agriculture and Nutrition'.

Helexpo S.A. was a leading actor in preparing the dossier of the application for the EXPO 2008.

- Future prospects and competition.

The application to organize the EXPO 2008 in Thessaloniki did not meet with success, but the effort was not totally in vain. Besides being an exercise in collaboration among several local and national actors, it probably left the city with the ambition to rebound. Applying for a future EXPO, to take place in 2012 or 2017, is a possibility that surfaces in scenarios regarding the development of the city or relevant actors like the Municipality of Thessaloniki, the Helexpo S.A. and the T.I.F. S.A.²⁰ Running for a future EXPO has not attained the status of an official decision as yet, but apparently it is a factor to be seriously reckoned with in scenario writing.

The exhibition-and-related-activities industry is highly competitive, and one heavily relying on publicity and *prestige*. It is obvious that organizing a major Exhibition of worldwide attraction would seriously add to the potential of both the city (and the region) and the exhibition related sector of the city (and the region).

Thessaloniki and the local exhibition industry (Helexpo and T.I.F. in particular) are already facing competition at the cross-border regional scale from Filipoupolis, Belgrade and, most importantly, Istanbul. To get the complete picture, add to this Smyrna preparing a dossier to apply for the 2015 International Exhibition.

3. T.I.F. and the spatial structure of Thessaloniki:

¹⁹ For the spatial organization of the proposal see: HELEXPO and Expo2008 (December 2004) Regional and Town-planning study of the greater area of EXPO 2008: Present situation and proposals. (study group: Asimos P, Lagopoulos A.-Ph, Dimitriadis E. P, Stathakopoulos P, et al)

²⁰ On the recent newspapers the years of 2012 and 2016 or 2017 surface in several occasions, including Mayor's speeches. Both 2012 and 2016/7 are scheduled for Recognised Exhibitions. 2015, mentioned in several unofficial occasions, is scheduled for a Registered Exhibition; Registered Exhibitions are events of a magnitude probably well beyond Thessaloniki's capacity.

3.1. The T.I.F. facilities.

As mentioned above, the T.I.F. site covers an area of about 18,4 hectares. The area would be significant just in terms of size; but it becomes all the more important when the factors of location, activities and development are taken into account.

The built-up area is close to 50% of the total area of the site.

The on site facilities include 44,000 sq m of exhibition spaces (some 64,000 including the auxiliary spaces of the exhibition buildings), two convention centers one of which (Ioannis Vellidis) in a dedicated new building with a capacity to host 2,400 people, 16 stores, a major sports arena, a small open-air movie-theatre, a small-to-medium sized museum of modern art, and two organized parking areas: one open-space (210 seats) and one underground (420 or 430 seats) at the basement of the Ioannis Vellidis Congress Centre. The total floorspace of the facilities is grossly about 90-95,000 sq m. excluding the Ioannis Vellidis Congress Centre, the sports arena and the art museum.

3.2. The site's city-scale importance

The city of Thessaloniki has a spatial form reminiscent of butterfly wings: It comprises two major loosely triangular built-up sectors aligned with the sea shore. These sectors are merging into a narrow zone of largely non-residential activities and low density development, spread from the sea shore, to the S-W, to the hill forest surrounding the city from the N-E. (Fig. 2 and 3).

This zone lies to the S-E of the C.B.D. of Thessaloniki, in fact being a limit to the C.B.D., contains the site of the T.I.F. and has a number of important features (Fig. 3):

- Regarding physical development, the zone marks a sharp distinction from the adjacent areas of city, and indeed the rest of the city in average: It is relatively sparsely built-up and scores a very low gross density ratio (in the sense of floor space to total area). All the more so, some parts of it are covered by green.

- On the activities or uses of space level of analysis, it comprises mostly public, or semi-public, activities and facilities: Green spaces, education and culture, health-care, sports and administration facilities. The education activities include two Universities. The zone contains the campus of the Aristotle University which is the

largest University of Greece, and the facilities of the University of Macedonia. Included among the culture facilities are two major museums, the Archaeological and the Byzantine one, with worldwide importance exhibits, and two major theatre buildings (one comprising two theatres). The Town Hall of Thessaloniki, currently under construction, is the latest important development in the zone. The site of the old military camp to the S-E of the site is a truly special case: The strictly military use of the camp is reduced to administration headquarters, and part of it has been converted to war museum. Both the museum and the headquarters are housed in beautiful, turn of the century, buildings.

As a rule, the attraction of these activities covers, and in some case evidently exceeds, the city-region scale. The theatres have a city-region scale, the hospitals exceed the Region (as in NUTS-II) scale range and the universities have a nationwide attraction. The attraction of the General Trade Fair, some of the specialized exhibitions and the museums clearly exceeds the nation scale.

- The zone includes significant historical buildings and monuments: The *Lefkos Pyrgos* (White Tower) on the seashore promenade, part of the old fortification and the city's symbol to many, parts of the city wall and a small well preserved tower, the old graveyard just outside the city wall and some turn of the century neo-classical buildings.

- Regarding rights of property and/or control, the zone is own and controlled by the state (or the municipality of Thessaloniki) to an impressive degree. The T.I.F. site is also state property (if only somehow indirectly –cf. above).

- On the traffic flows and transportation level of analysis (inextricably related to that of the activities) the zone plays an important role: Not only is it sort of a hub of the road network of the city, and home to some of the worst traffic congestion points, but, as a container of some of the major traffic generators, it heavily contributes to the congestion problems. Apparently, the addition of the Town Hall will only worsen the traffic puzzle.

The summer of 2006 will mark the start of the works for the long-due metro subway. For the time being the scheduled works are restricted to only a 9,6 km line to be completed by late 2012. Expansion of this line to a proper network is loosely planned and subject to future decisions. The metro is expected to seriously ameliorate

the road traffic. The metro is one of the two 'major public works' asked by and promised to Thessaloniki, the other being an underwater road by-pass of the central area, its construction also scheduled to start in 2006. Although asking for the underwater road has been part of the local actors' rhetoric for a long time, its feasibility in both functional and financial terms is heavily questioned by many.

The TIF site is enclosed by major roads. Three of the worst traffic jams in the city occur at road crossings at the TIF's perimeter.

To sum up, the zone in question is a relatively sparsely built-up, low-density (in the sense of floor space to total area ratio) area, mainly of public ownership, open to public use, and indeed covered to a high degree by public green. Regarding the important feature of being really, or unconditionally, open to the general public a short comment is due: Some parts of the zone are formally and practically public open spaces; others are only practically and, perhaps, temporarily or periodically so, as it is the case with the open spaces of the university campus and, to a certain degree with part of the TIF site. The open spaces form a ribbon that virtually, and indeed perceptually, connect the seashore with the small forest on the hills surrounding the city from the S-E.

Evidently, this zone presents a potential of critical importance for the spatial organization and, in the final analysis, for the development of Thessaloniki.

3.3. The site's potential

It seems that the zone could morph into a functionally coherent zone of mostly open-space activities. Other activities (non open-space), already present in the area or not, could be integrated into the zone. The open space and the open-space activities could provide the integrating factor while simultaneously, and metaphorically and literally, allowing the space for the other activities to present themselves.

The planning direction towards which this assessment could lead is not an automatic consequence of a neutral survey of the situation. It is based on implied goals regarding the quality of everyday city life, the spatial structure and the development of the city as a whole.

Before the decision to pursue such a planning direction is actually made, the expected costs and benefits should be estimated from different points of view and for

a variety of actors, interested or affected parts, users or potential users. And of course, the synergy, compatibility or contradiction should be assessed between the general planning direction and certain developments, planned or otherwise, that could drastically change the perceived situation. Such is certainly the case with the recently revealed plans of the TIF S.A. for the development of the T.I.F. site.

3.4. T.I.F. S.A.'s plans to develop the site

In November 2005, the T.I.F. SA announced preliminary plans for 'renovating the Site of the International Trade Fair', in the form of a 'Financial feasibility study'. The outcome of the study was a proposal based on a rather radical redevelopment of the site, to be undertaken by a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) scheme. The legal framework for the PPPs in Greece had just been introduced by the Law on the PPPs (Law 3385/2005). The new development included 12,500 m² of retail facilities, 13,500 m² of office facilities, an 11,200 m² multiplex with restaurants-cafeterias and movie-theatres, and a 'parking station' (2.880 underground and 500 ground-level seats). A lot was assigned for a future hotel development (24,200 m², 300 beds).²¹ The proposal had already been submitted for approval to the Ministry of Economy and Finance, Special Secretariat for the PPPs.

The TIF SA claims that the proposal is beneficial to the city in several ways: It provides more parking seats (although not on a free basis), helps to address the traffic problems, opens a 'secured and relaxed urban environment of culture and recreation', and reinforces the traditional centre of the city in general and the in-town shopping in particular.

3.5. The major actors' reaction to T.I.F.'s plans

In spite of the TIF SA claims about their plans for the TIF site redevelopment, the reaction the plans received from the major actors was nothing short of rejection.

The president of the TIF SA made a presentation of the proposal to the (Municipality of Thessaloniki) City's Council Meeting on January 26, 2006. The Mayor was more than clear in his position: 'This, I call it a mall' he said about the

²¹ All area measurements in this paragraph refer to floorspace. The figures are taken from Doxiadis Office, 2005.

proposal and asked the TIF SA to withdraw it, ‘as a gesture of good will towards the city’. Furthermore, he threatened to file a formal claim for an area of 1,5 hectares inside the TIF site, thus neutralizing the proposal. The Mayor went on to stress that if the proposal were to be implemented, it would cause serious problems to the city centre. All the parties of the City Council were unanimous in rejecting the proposal. Given the explicit rejection of the proposal, their positions covered the range from accepting exclusively exhibition activities, provided that the city is not given the opportunity to develop another exhibition site, to asking for the site to be turned into a public green space. The position of the mayor’s party was the conditional acceptance of exhibition activities.²²

The Ministry of Economy and Finance was only to consider the TIF SA proposal on the condition of it being unanimously accepted by the city actors; in this context the rejection by the City Council meant the proposal reached a dead-end.²³ This, of course, does not mean that an essentially identical proposal, submitted in a slightly different package and under more favorable circumstances, could not hope for better luck.

A related point of friction was the TIF SA commission to the world-famous architect Santiago Calatrava, a household name in Greece since his work for the Athens 2004 Olympics, to design a project for the TIF site or the central zone as a whole. The project was never really presented in public; it was first referred to in the newspapers in September 2005 and the procedure of privately commissioning such a project caused strong criticism from several city actors²⁴. In the City’s Council Meeting on January 26, the Mayor and the President of the TIF SA argued as to whether the Mayor had been supportive to the Calatrava project, the Mayor strongly denying that.²⁵

²² See the city’s newspapers (Angelioforos, Avriani Makedonias Thrakis, Makedonia, Tipos Thessalonikis) of January 27, 2006. Angelioforos and Makedonia went into more details.

²³ See Angelioforos, January 27, 2006

²⁴ Technical Chambers of Greece (the Union of Registered Architects and Engineers of Greece, official adviser on technical issues to the State), the Architectural Association of Thessaloniki and professional parties (in the fields of architecture and engineering).

²⁵ Makedonia, January 27, 2006. Also see Angelioforos, January 27, 2006.

In general, the major actors in the city were against the TIF SA proposal.²⁶

The issue of the TIF site's development, even specifically from the exhibition's industry point of view, should be addressed in the context of the opportunities presented, and the demands forced, to the exhibition industry itself. One such major opportunity arises in the will of the city to apply with a new proposal to host either the 2012 or the 2017 EXPO. In the event that the will of the city actors, and the municipality in particular, receives the necessary central government support, the site of the event should be an important feature of the application. By all accounts, the current TIF site does not meet the standards of such an event and this was obviously the reason why the unsuccessful application for the 2008 EXPO provided for a different site.

The Mayor asked the central government to announce whether it is to support the city in applying for the 2012 or 2017 EXPO (as stated above the proposal to the BIE is formally submitted by the State, not the city). In case of State support, the municipality is willing to develop a contemporary exhibition centre in Lahanokipi²⁷, an area in the west part of the city, as yet not included in the 'town plan' limits, close to the port. Then, the TIF could relocate to Lahanokipi.

Proposals for relocation of the TIF, and development of its current site as an integrated part of the city, has been a recurring theme in the public discussions on the city's future. The General Development Plan of Thessaloniki, issued in 1993 and attaining Law status, reserved a site of 6,5 ha to the west of the city and in a short distance from it, for exhibition and trade related activities. This provision was made on the account that the site is property of the TIF SA, but the possibility of relocating to the site has been dismissed because the site came under the conservation status of the Ramsar Sites. The Lahanokipi alternative did not reach the stage of accurately delineating any specific site (on the lot scale). But given that the area has been really built-up, nor became part of a proper town-plan, it would be easy and economical in both legal and financial terms to assign a site as 'Exhibition and related Activities area' and buy (or expropriate) it. Most importantly the area is not reserved in any way

²⁶ See the press review until February 4, 2006, contacted by the Technical Chambers of Greece

²⁷ Lahanokipi (*Λαχανόκηποι*) means 'vegetable gardens'. Formerly a rural area at the city fringe, mixed rural – low density residential-manufacturing later, in the recent years attracts offices, recreation and retail activities.

that would exclude the exhibition and related activities. In that sense, relocating to Lahanokipi is still an option. In fact, Lahanokipi was the choice of the Technical Chambers of Greece for the 2008 EXPO site (choice not shared by the official proposal).

3.6 Reassessing the scenarios

The wide publicity, negative for the most part, received by the TIF SA proposal had an important side effect. It brought the development of the central zone of the city to the attention of the media and thus the general public. More specifically, it forced the parties of the city council and other actors of the local community to express an opinion on the issue or, at least think about it as to be ready to stand for their interests. Hopefully, this may lead to reassessing the scenarios regarding the development of Thessaloniki as an integrated socio-spatial formation, with the intent to coordinate the actions of the local actors, and indeed of all those acting on site (in the wider territory of the city) as to create the highest possible synergies. This would mean to proceed with an efficient governance scheme that would eventually produce and/or embrace and implement new, innovative, scenarios for the city.

Some first steps towards participation, exchanging views and finally efficient governance are already made. In this direction, the Technical Chambers of Greece, Central Macedonia Branch (TEE-TKM), invited all the significant actors to participate in discussion about the future of the central area of Thessaloniki, on Monday 19 June. Prior to that, TEE-TKM formed a team of its members to consult the Executive Committee of the Chambers on the subject.²⁸

4. Conclusion

As already implied, the future of the TIF site in the central zone of Thessaloniki is not clear. The conflict about the (re)development of the TIF site, not only is still open in my opinion, but it may eventually resolve in opposite directions.

The conflict touches on several interesting topics.

Apparently, the core issue is a conflict of interest between the part and the whole. But in a more careful reading, it may well be a conflict of perceived interest. It

²⁸ See footnote 1.

is true that the financial interest, in monetary terms, of the TIF SA, and at least for a certain time span, seems to be served by TIF proposal. Yet, and on a strictly business basis, it also seems like a no risk – no vision approach, unless of course the TIF SA were to seriously claim that the proposal was just meant as a first step into a wider inspired plan. As it is, one is led to believe that the TIF SA simply tried to seize the opportunity to gain profit as a land owner and real estate developer.

On the other side, if the TIF SA were to consent to relocate to Lahanokipi (or a spatially equivalent position), perhaps in exchange for its property in the centre, it could be a partner in developing a contemporary exhibition-and-related activities complex. This new development would be an asset if the city is to apply for a future EXPO. In any case the exact content and magnitude of this development should be monitored in accordance to major parameters, applying for or eventually organizing an EXPO being an example. Relocating to such a new site would create a cyclical process of synergies among the exhibition activities and the city. The TIF would be hosted in better facilities, with positive effects to and from the other activities in the new complex. The new site, especially if properly designed, would be an asset for the city as a whole. The central zone of the city, relieved from the old facilities, could be an important element not only for the every day life but also for creating a better image of the city. The central zone and the (new) exhibition site (should) present the city with the opportunity, if not the obligation, to create emblematic or iconic buildings or spatial compositions. The central zone and the new exhibition site should be an asset to each other.

For the time being one can only hope for efficiency in governance and innovation in planning.



Fig. 1: The TEN-T (Trans European Transportation Network) in Greece (only roads shown).

Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/ten/transport/>

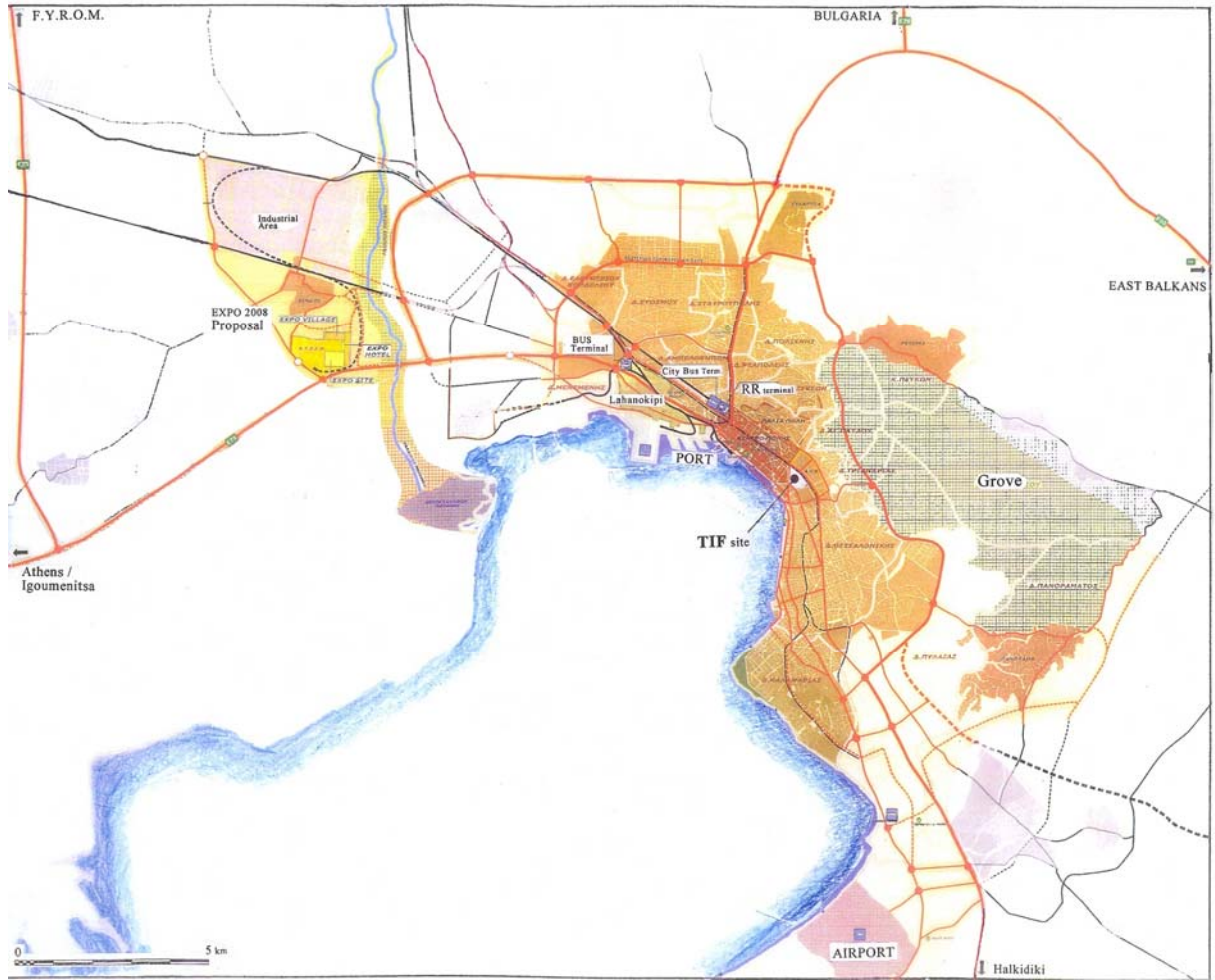


Fig. 2: Thessaloniki Conurbation.

(based on: HELEXPO and Expo2008 (2004) – see fn. 19)

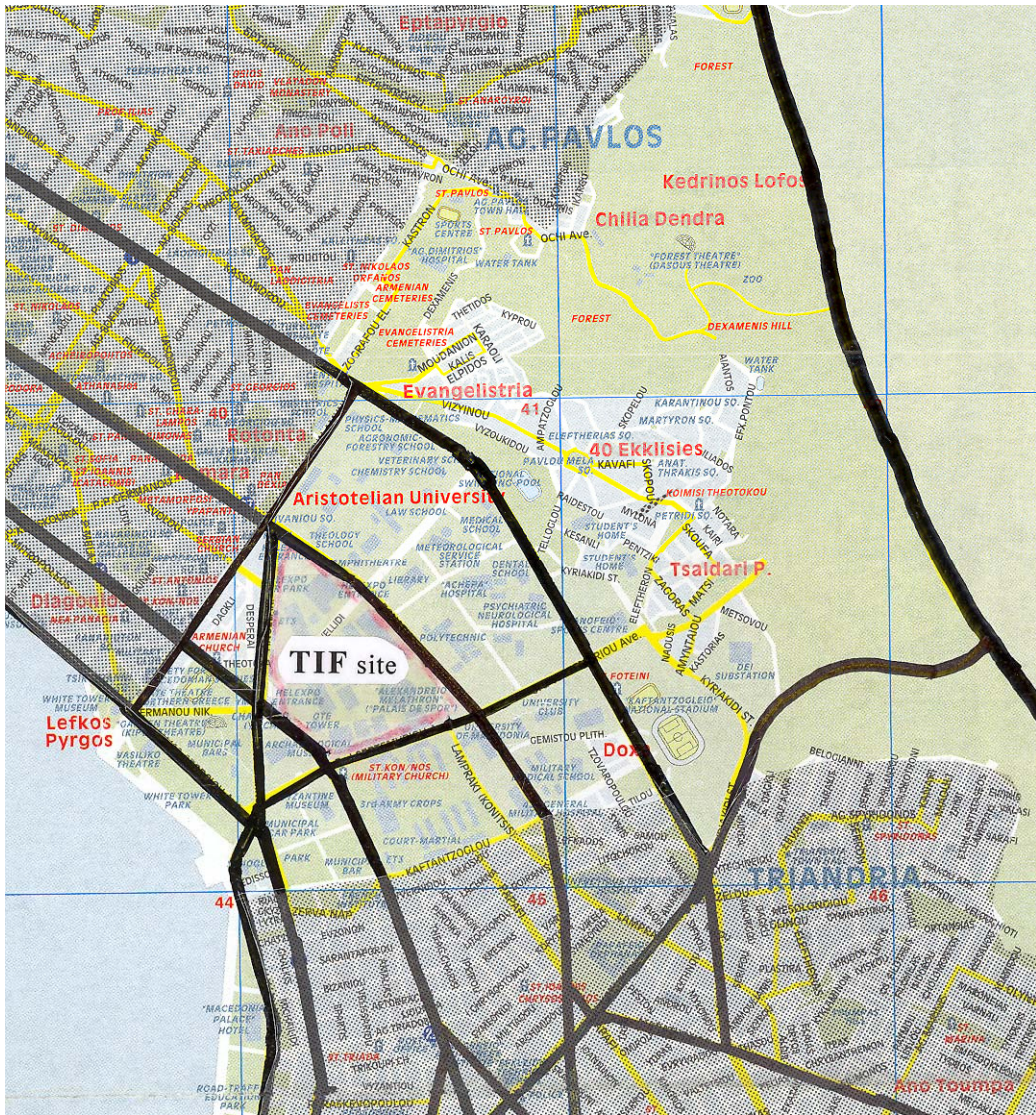


Fig. 3: Thessaloniki: The central zone.