

HAROKOPIO UNIVERSITY  
Department of Geography

Post-Graduate Programme  
'Applied Geography and Spatial Planning'  
Domain: European Policies, Planning and Spatial Development

**(RE)APPROACHING VACANT AND ABANDONED LANDED ASSETS IN  
URBAN AREAS: THE ENABLING POTENTIAL OF URBAN COMMONS**  
*Challenges in Athens city center*

Master Thesis of Student Myrto Galani

Athens, 28 July 2015

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Supervisor: Pavlos-Marinos Delladetsimas

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Myrto Galani

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that the discussion on the issues of vacancy and abandonment in cities is linked to the aftermath of de-industrialization and urban sprawl of the past, in the context of recent years' economic crisis, they have re-emerged. Vacant or abandoned landed assets/properties (land and /or buildings) are often conceived as a problem, a negative situation that requires correction. Yet, beyond this perspective, there emerge alternative conceptions. Far from being an unrelentingly negative condition, vacant land, activated by governance mechanisms, may appear as a shared urban resource that localities could maximize and build upon. Urban Commons, as alternative ownership models and shared resources themselves, can constitute an aspect of this alternative strategy, as basis to sustain local development, and thus contribute to managing vacancy impacts on urban areas.

More specifically, set in a context of contemporary economic crisis experienced by Athens and many Greek cities, vacancy and abandonment are re-generated and evolve by various reasons. Increased numbers of vacant landed assets reflect different pre-existing (or pre-crisis) conditions, affect different sectors (housing, retail, office) and inhibit different trajectories in the future development. In the central area of Athens, in particular, vicious spiral effect of abandonment and dereliction are evident. Spurred by this phenomenon, conditions of decay and urban decline are intensified, spreading to the whole agglomeration and leading even to "ghettoization" and de-valuation of inner city areas. At this point, the prospect of integrated re-development of those areas, with specific target to vacancy and abandonment, is an anticipated trajectory.

The dissertation's aim is to (re) approach vacant and abandoned landed assets in urban areas in the context of urban commons. Adopting this perspective, the main hypothesis is that Urban Commons have the potential to constitute (a part of) an alternative strategy to address vacancy and abandonment. Hence, through the case study of central Athens areas, the dissertation will first trace the distinct parameters and magnitude of the issues of vacancy and abandonment; second it will examine how existing land can be maintained and managed within the existing planning and governance mechanisms and also if and how urban commons can contribute to managing the added 'layer' of crisis; then, it will focus on the study of several initiatives concerning the potential of reutilization-redevelopment of vacant-abandoned assets, in an attempt to produce an alternative vacancy policy agenda in dealing with the issue, associated to local development and social regeneration processes.

**Key Words:** Vacant Land, Abandonment, Urban Redevelopment, Urban Commons, Athens

## INTRODUCTION

Vacant Landed Assets can be perceived in many ways by public and policy makers. Generally, they are considered as a negative situation that requires correction. This can refer either to abandoned, contaminated lands that present high risk/danger or underutilized properties that for various reasons constitute a barrier to development.

The issue of Vacant Lands internationally has mostly been emphasized concerning large scale assets, that hinder a risk, like derelict, contaminated lands, brownfields (remittances of de-industrialization or environmental contamination), or undeveloped assets that are considered opportunities for markets in urban and non-urban areas (Wood, 1998). Smaller scale assets, such as fragmented abandoned properties in urban areas have not been (traditionally) highlighted, despite the fact that urban sprawl has had major impacts in many city centers. Accordingly, the issues have not been effectively addressed through spatial development planning and land policies; there has been a lack of vacant land oriented policies-strategies, despite the fact that there are quite a few good practices to mention. This is mostly the case of Europe though; United States have a long standing tradition on strategies addressing urban vacancies (effective or not). However, the recent crisis impact has urged existing problematic issues to show; vacancy and abandonment have had an extensive impact on many international cities, both larger and smaller ones, indicating old and new vacancies, housing, office, commercial and also industrial. The prevailing growth-led approaches on spatial planning and market oriented policies avoid or show no interest in addressing those issues. Meanwhile, there are growing social needs, housing, food security, quality of life, that are 'collapsing' with market goals in terms of claiming land and resources. As a result, various alternative initiatives, from the bottom, have emerged, in many of which one can trace characteristics of landed commons.

Vacant lands, either private or public properties, face specific barriers concerning their (re)development. Among those, challenges related to ownership are prevailing; multiple owners and conflicting interests, inelastic ownership statuses, fragmentation of property. 'Traditional', top-down approaches have proved inefficient to deal with such local scale issues; this reflects a necessity for a change in existing governance structures with emphasis in bottom-linked inputs (Goldstein et al., 2001). Landed Commons, introducing alternative ownership and innovative governance models for land management, can constitute an aspect of this alternative strategy, as basis to sustain local development and spatial planning, and thus contribute to managing vacancy impacts in urban and rural areas. It is a fact that landed commons are often built and developed in vacant,

abandoned, underutilized areas, lands and buildings and vice versa, such lands often present opportunities for commons to be developed. Still, the connection between commons and vacant landed assets has not been extensively highlighted (Clapp and Meyer, 2000). Interesting examples can be spotted in urban areas; the collective re-use of vacant and underutilized lots and brownfields in urban and suburban areas as gardens and neighborhood parks (with minimal or maximal support from institutional and governmental actors), co-housing and collective housing (e.g. under a Community Land Trust) in abandoned buildings and degraded built environments, re-adaptation of underutilized buildings and spaces in community and cultural ‘forums’. Despite the fact that there are quite a few ‘good practices’ to mention in local scale internationally, they often remain locally-centered and are in many cases barriered by institutions, authorities and market pressures. Still, those exact actors have proved, under different circumstances, that have the power to actually not only ‘tolerate’ but most importantly to foster and enable local initiatives (Foster, 2012).

This dissertation will attempt to emphasize the fact that landed commons can, under circumstances, contribute in vacant and abandoned landed assets re-development; and vice versa. Of course, it is highlighted that besides their positivist nature (De Moor, 2012), commons are not a panacea for solving land issues, and this is also the case for their activation in re-developing vacant lands. Also, institutional and practical replication of ‘good practices’ without taking into account different contexts can prove from impossible to even ‘dangerous’. However, commons could contribute in changing the perception of (re)development towards bottom-linked directions. The following chapters will attempt to approach ways in order to facilitate the building, governance and proliferation of commons, as an alternative for vacant land regeneration, but where and when there is an actual need and space for them. “When and where” can be defined through contextuality and path-dependency, and also through case study analysis; that is why the case of Vacant and Abandoned Landed assets in Athens will be explored. The perspective followed will be rather broad, focused in understanding the phenomena of vacancy and abandonment and their spatial imprint in Athens, adapting the urban commons in the Greek context and provide several preliminary horizontal strategies.



## METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this dissertation is to (re) approach vacant and abandoned landed assets in urban areas in the context of urban commons.

A basic hypothesis is that Urban Commons have the potential to constitute (a part of) an alternative strategy to address vacancy and abandonment, and this potential is dependent on specific parameters. Those parameters will be posed as main research questions:

- The (main) actors-stakeholders, their scale of action and power relations
- The impact of governance dynamics and spatial planning
- The role of context and path-dependency

An answer to these dilemmas will be attempted through a theoretical overview, followed by their articulation into a specific case study context. The case of Athens, Greece is selected, with a focus on the Athens inner city area. Athens center is considered as a highly interesting case to be studied in this dissertation, due to specific challenges:

1. the phenomena of vacancy and abandonment are increasingly evident, in multiple expressions
2. the current management of vacant and abandoned landed assets is, in general considered insufficient, disjointed and in many cases absent; thus alternative strategies or re-reading of existing strategies are considered necessary
3. the Greek (urban) context is in general not familiar with the commons, both in terms of institutions and practice

The methodology used is based on a critical literature review of both academic work and policy papers. In addition, in the case of Athens, a review of institutional documents and press articles has been used.

This methodological framework is going to be articulated in the contexts of the dissertation, in two parts; the theoretical framework (part A) and the case study (part B). In the first chapter of the theoretical framework, the urban expression of vacancy and abandonment is broadly explored. Vacant and abandoned landed assets, as it is shown, have multiple dimensions, which are different in each city, but patterns can be found. Thus, starting from their definition, causes and effects, the chapter then attempts to trace the different approaches in managing the issues, either through policy approaches and/or academic literature indications.

The second chapter will attempt to address the vague and complex topic of urban commons, and trace their connections to vacant and abandoned landed assets. First, urban commons are going to be defined and described, drawing the necessary inputs

from the broader commons' framework, followed by the detailed descriptions of several selected paradigms. A defining parameter, for the urban commons and their potential to be implemented in a vacancy strategy, is governance dynamics. In both its organizational and institutional dimension, governance can activate various actors, from state and municipal governance, to local communities, non-profit organizations and developers. In the core part of the chapter, the contribution of urban commons in managing vacant and abandoned assets is shown, by de-composing the urban commons' characteristics and selecting several examples of good practices. Finally, the conditions for an enabling context, in order for the commons and vacant landed assets to relate and sustain are going to be summarized.

Drawing the necessary theoretical structures from the first part, the second part of the dissertation focuses in the case study of Athens. First, the definition and perception of vacancy and abandonment in the Greek context (in terms of policy approach) is summarized. Then, zooming in the center of Athens, spatial expressions and patterns of the phenomena are described. In specific, residential, commercial-retail and offices vacancies are chosen as indicative examples, with emphasis in the impacts of economic crisis. In addition, causes and consequences of the phenomena are summarized.

In the last part of the chapter, a brief overview of existing policies (if any) concerning vacant/abandoned buildings in the center of Athens is made, through study of institutional framework and spatial planning policies. Taking into account that spatial planning and development strategies have been proved inefficient to address the chronic impacts of the phenomena, the potential of Urban Commons will also be examined; institutions, policy and practice. Due to the lack of 'familiarity' in both theory and practice with the commons in Greece, this potential is highly challenging; yet, several implications for an enabling spatial planning and development framework will be made, by proposing several horizontal strategies.

# PART A-THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## **1. VACANT AND ABANDONED LANDED ASSETS IN URBAN AREAS**

Land matters in urban areas can pose multiple challenges. From one side, they can represent competing interests in an often limited space. From another side they can also represent neglect and underuse, or unwanted place. Vacant Landed assets can roughly be integrated in the second category, as undeveloped or previously developed areas that represent problematic issues for cities and neighborhoods. However, in the contemporary urban context, there are interplays between those aspects. Limited availability of land and growing urban needs have transformed vacant lands in contested spaces, that various actors are interested in claiming.

Vacancy and abandonment of land and its resources are broad phenomena in contemporary cities. There is practically no city without vacant landed assets; there are cities and urban areas that are 'hit' harder than others (Goldstein et al., 2001). Vacancy and abandonment constitute a constant process and not an "on-off" situation that happens overnight (Wachsmuth, 2008). To some degree, vacant land is a transitional phase (or flow) within the urban development process. It can be viewed as a transient feature of the urban environment brought about by economic and social changes stimulating adjustments in land use patterns (Goldstein et al., 2001).

Vacancy and abandonment are generally linked with de-industrialization, though in practice it is not the case for every city internationally (Maloutas, 2013). Inner city areas have experienced the chronic pressures of urban sprawl, shrinking population and economic activities, which have left their imprint on the land and building capital, a situation intensified through the current economic crisis. Vacancy and abandonment are forms of spatial expression of those phenomena. These situations, of course, are not new; what can be recognized as 'new' is their large scale extent, and their impact in any urban area; vacancy is not anymore only linked with declined urban neighborhoods, but also with more 'developed' areas.

Recently, it is quite often that vacancy is attributed to contemporary crisis. It will be argued in this dissertation that crisis is merely an extra layer to an existing phenomenon, and has forced already existing problematic situations to show and magnify: socio-economic issues (poverty, unemployment, immigration, homelessness), market imperfections (inelastic offer-demand, overpriced assets, bubbles), and also insufficient policies, either directly targeting land and property or broader issues. According to Alexander and Powell (2011), general economic decline within a community—with accompanying joblessness, population loss, and disinvestment—may well explain a rise in vacant and abandoned property inventories. It rarely, however, serves as an adequate justification for legal

systems that encourage abandonment, and it never justifies having high rates of abandonment in concentrated neighborhoods in an otherwise stable community. Vacancy 'symptoms' were more or less evident; it can be said that crisis effects urged them to be 'contagious'.

A literature review can indicate the range of vacant/abandoned landed assets in various cities worldwide and different ways to deal with them. It should be noted that the studies concerning the phenomena in United States (US) cities are considerably more numerous and extensive compared to European cities. This can be partly explained through the chronic presence (or better: chronic realization on behalf of local to federal authorities) of the phenomena in old industrial American cities (e.g. Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Detroit and other 'legacy cities'), urban shrinkage tensions and the pressures of the housing and mortgage crisis recently, issues evident in numerous cities. In Europe, on the other hand, until recently, vacancy in core urban areas has not been broadly studied, though existent. Wood's (1998) report about vacant land in Europe (studying The Netherlands, France, United Kingdom and Italy) is representative of the general perception of vacancy as a phenomenon, giving emphasis to larger scale land uses, former industrial sites inside and outside urban areas and derelict, contaminated sites (also called urban brownfields), rather than underutilized/neglected properties. Crisis, urging vacancy to show and magnify as mentioned in the previous paragraph, has also triggered academic interest, not only on former derelict and contaminated areas but also on small scale, fragmented properties in inner city areas.

It is a fact that there is a general lack of primary data sources on the nature and extent of vacant land. Also, when existent, such data are often based on surveys from different local authorities with different criteria on the assessment of vacant land. Many studies are suggesting policies and mechanisms to tackle vacant land based on second hand data sources (Freire-Trigo, 2012). Again, quite a few of the research examples derive from American Literature. Bowman and Pagano's (2004) research has indicated that 15% of a US city's land and building stock is vacant, percentage that is growing with the years, reaching up to 19-25% in some cities of more than 100000 residents (Mc Phearson, 2013). Several indicative examples from United States cities are provided:

- In New York City, there are nearly 30,000 sites identified as vacant lots
- Baltimore has more than 42,000 vacant housing units, constituting 14 percent of its housing stock, and more than 17,000 vacant lots
- Cleveland counts more than 25,000 vacant and 11,000 abandoned properties

- Philadelphia's vacant properties total more than 60,000 (27,000 abandoned residential structures, 2,000 abandoned commercial buildings, and 32,000 vacant lots) with nearly 10 percent of the city's housing described as abandoned. St. Louis has one of the highest vacant housing rates in the country, at over 29,000 or nearly 17 percent of total housing units

(National Vacant Properties Campaign, 2005 data quoted in Brachman, 2005 ; Mc Phearson, 2013 ; Bowman and Pagano, 2004)<sup>1</sup>.

In any case, besides the complexity of their nature, the phenomena of vacancy and abandonment are perceived, approached, measured and evaluated differently in each city. This process often defines the ways the phenomena are dealt with, the actors involved and their power structures. In the sections below various definitions, causes and consequences and ways to deal with vacancy and abandonment in urban areas are approached, in an attempt to give a general framework to understand the phenomena, though always emphasizing the need for context-specific details.

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<sup>1</sup> The data provided, though almost a decade old, are mentioned in order to indicate the extent of vacancy/abandonment in urban environments, even before the contemporary crisis's pressures. Of course, the numbers are expected to be much larger today.

## 1.1. DEFINITIONS

Vacancy and Abandonment are different phenomena, or different expressions of the same phenomena, depending on the case. Vacancy is different from abandonment, in a sense that vacancy can be a status referring to whether a property is occupied or not, and can be temporary, long-term, or permanent. Knowing that a property is vacant often indicates nothing about its financial or physical condition. Abandonment, on the other hand, is a staged process, and asks for the multiple causal pathways leading to it. The abandonment process is better understood as a cycle rather than a linear series of events (Hillier et al., 2003).

Vacancy is approached macroscopically from policy-makers but also from various academics, who usually correspond with policy-makers, seeking operational definitions for vacant land (Bowman and Pagano, 2004). Policy-makers' definitions emphasize vacant assets as 'properties' and often specify 'practical' issues, such as period of time on which the property is vacant/abandoned, its condition, its ownership status, and prospects of being (re)developed<sup>2</sup>.

Definitions can be multiple and context-specific, and also frequently depend on the causes that trigger the phenomena in each city's case. Here, for methodological reasons, 'vacant land' will be considered as a general 'umbrella' concept that includes abandoned landed assets and derelict landed assets (land and/or buildings), corresponding to the generalized term suggested by Pagano et al. (2000:2): "Vacant land includes not only publicly-owned and privately-owned unused or abandoned land or land that once had structures on it, but also the land that supports structures that have been abandoned, derelict, boarded up, partially destroyed, or razed". Bowman and Pagano (2004) adopt, in purpose, this 'elastic', approach, in order to overpass the dilemmas explained above. Vacant land is not necessarily damaged or derelict land. It can simply be abandoned or neglected land that is unused, but is capable of some beneficial use (such lands are often 'victims' of speculation, left vacant on purpose). In a general definition the term vacant refers to land not occupied or being put to use, meaning land on which some previous productive use has ceased for a significant period of time (Handley, 1996:6).

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<sup>2</sup> Indicatively, in real-estate terms, 'the vacancy rate is a numerical value calculated as the percentage of all available units in a rental property, such as a hotel or apartment complex, that are vacant or unoccupied at a particular time. It is the opposite of the occupancy rate, which is a calculation based on the percentage of units in a rental property that are occupied'.

Still, however, the distinction between vacant and abandoned assets/properties will be clarified. An abandoned property is a property whose owner has stopped carrying out at least one of the significant responsibilities<sup>3</sup> of property ownership, as a result of which the property is vacant or likely to become vacant in the immediate future. (Mallach, 2006:13) According also to Hillier et al. (2003), abandonment is the process of neglecting the responsibilities of ownership regarding minimum functional, financial, and physical upkeep.

Respectively, an abandoned property<sup>4</sup> is not always the same as a vacant property. A property, for example, that is vacant for a small period of time (few days or weeks) before someone moves in or is awaiting rehabilitation, is not considered abandoned. Conversely, a property that is not entirely vacant may still be considered an abandoned property. For example, an apartment building whose owner has stopped providing services to the remaining tenants and is not (or no longer) paying taxes or utility bills is considered abandoned, even if tenants are still habiting in the building. A vacant property on which taxes are being paid is considered abandoned if the owner allows it to become a nuisance to the neighbors (Mallach, 2006: 13).

Generally, it is indicated that studies on vacancy show a growth led approach that determines both the way vacant land is perceived (e.g. land without a beneficial use) and the condition of vacancy (desirable or undesirable). Freire-Trigo (2012) suggests a more holistic theoretical framework, inspired by the work of Henri Lefebvre (1974). She argues that vacant land is mostly judged from an abstract level (conceived space) and other dimensions playing part in the tangible nature of vacant land (perceived and lived spaces) are not so considered, though useful as they may prove to be.

Bowman and Pagano (2004) pose two fundamental distinctions in approaching vacant land: ownership and developability. First, the ownership status of the land, public, private (or common!), affects its management potential and outcomes. Vacant land is not perceived the same as vacant property (Wood, 1998:104). Second, the 'developability' potential of the land, regardless of ownership is important. Developability can depend on physical features of the land, the presence or absence of legal and financial complications of the local real estate market and the land use or development plans.

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<sup>3</sup> Responsibilities of property ownership include: paying taxes and municipal charges, maintaining the property in conformity with relevant codes and ordinances, preventing the property from becoming a nuisance to the community (Mallach, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> The word 'property', rather than land is emphasized here, because abandonment is a dynamic process, closely connected to ownership and its transitions. 16



It is emphasized that the element of ‘developability’ of vacant assets as answer to specific social needs is usually not targeted in those definitions. “City governments...tend to view vacant land only as a revenue-generating commodity. Because this perspective obscures land’s value as a community resource, city officials lose sight of their responsibility to manage land in ways that promote public values.’ (Goldstein et. al., 2001:17). The function of urban land needs to be understood in terms of the ‘relationship between a parcel of land and the wider physical and socioeconomic spatial systems to which it belongs’ (Platt, 2004: 39, in Foo et al., 2014). Policies that address vacant landed assets should aim to address localities, and solve the local vacant land problems by supporting the local business and residential community and thereby creating new local demands (Wood, 1998).

In this frame, Foo et al., (2014) adopt a neighborhood scale approach to vacant land within its broader socio-economic context and relations, and argue for the need of a multi-level understanding of both vacancy and the prospect of redevelopment. The concept of “neighborhood” situates the context of urban vacant lots between their formal political jurisdiction and informal governance and cultural meaning. The authors also emphasize the importance of how communities, grassroots groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) perceive and deal with vacancy. The definition of what is vacant, abandoned, derelict is not so contradictory with the definitions of policy-makers when examining the negative aspects of the assets, but embodies a specific difference when potential of reuse comes in the discussion: it is not just a revenue generating commodity, but also a way to satisfy social needs. The interplay between those two ways to define, and also deal with vacancy and abandonment will be explored in chapter 2.

## 1.2. CAUSES AND EFFECTS

There are multiple causes that trigger vacancy and abandonment of land and buildings. The causes are mainly related to economic parameters, but an attempt for a broader perspective is attempted. The causes are strongly case-specific, again, but a general framework is presented below, based on general trends spotted in urban areas. It can include three broad (interconnected) typologies of causes:

- **External Causes:** Referring to a broader and local socio-economic context, markets, a mix of macroeconomic and demographic trends, environmental issues, and other parameters that can trigger directly or indirectly abandonment. Historical parameters can be also included.
- **Internal Causes:** Referring to the landed asset itself and its characteristics (ownership status, land use, etc) and also reflect the inability or unwillingness/ lack of incentive on behalf of property owners to maintain their properties. Mallach (2006) provides a context of different reasons that trigger abandonment in multifamily rental properties, single family houses, commercial –retail and mixed use properties, industrial properties (e.g. gas stations, small industries)
- **Policy and Legal factors (both internal and external):** Referring to (urban) policies, spatial planning practices and their according institutional framework, either targeting vacancy directly or indirectly through other urban interventions, legal frameworks, development strategies and their outcomes.

Table 1.2.1: Causes of Vacancy-Abandonment in Urban areas

External Causes	Internal Causes	Policy – Legal Causes (operating both externally and internally)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in the demographic, social income composition of inner areas. (e.g. urban population decline)</li> <li>• Suburbanization processes and urban sprawl</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age and quality of the building assets</li> <li>• Escalating maintenance costs</li> <li>• Complicated ownership structure of the asset.</li> <li>• Hereditary issues associated to the ownership of the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent control measures that have stipulated a process of scarce maintenance and decline (e.g. abolishment in UK)</li> <li>• Planning policy-development control problems.</li> <li>• Planning blight.</li> </ul>

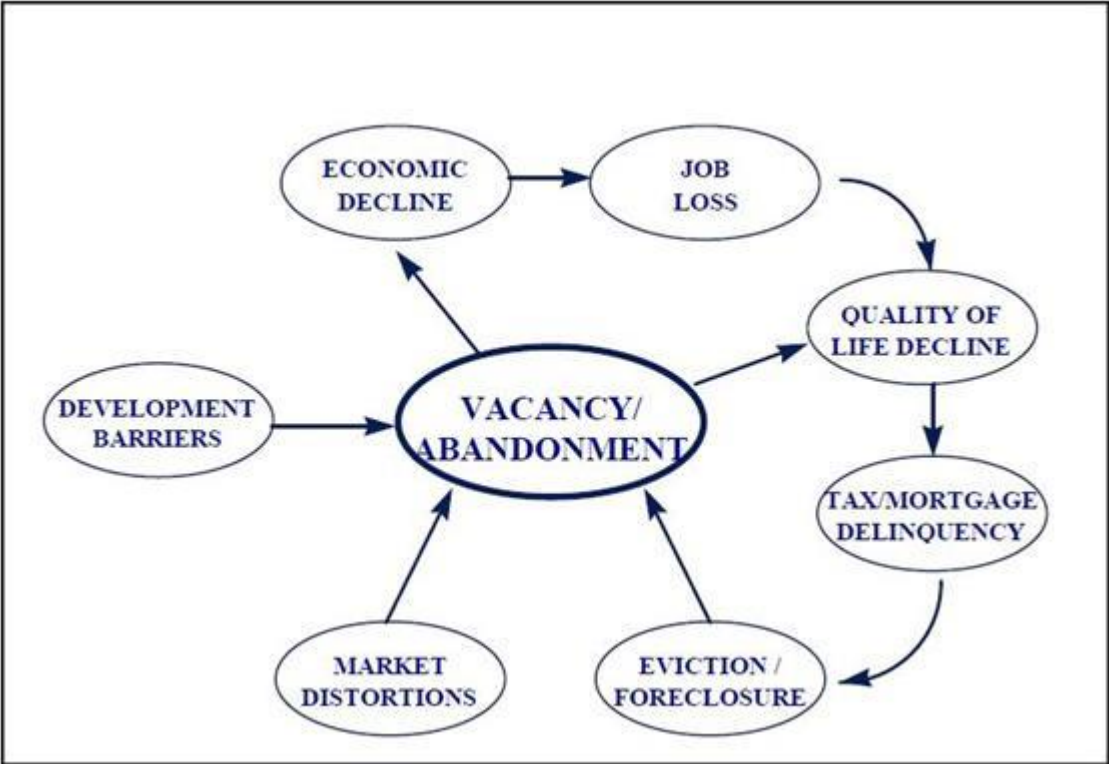
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socio political conflicts and rioting stipulating, of “out- migration”</li> <li>• De-industrialization and Decentralization process of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and industrial activity</li> <li>• Real estate crisis affecting both buying, selling and rented sector properties</li> <li>• Weak local markets’ potential</li> <li>• General urban decline and over-concentration of socio-economic problems in distinct areas</li> <li>• Relocation and closure decisions (abandonment triggers more abandonment)</li> <li>• Environmental problems (traffic pollution, industrial pollution and noise nuisances)</li> <li>• Natural disasters and inflicted damages.</li> </ul>	<p>assets producing re-utilization bottlenecks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speculative behavior on behalf of the land owners directly related to expectations deriving from investment renewal and transport projects in adjacent urban areas.</li> <li>• Physical-structural rigidity of the assets to reconversion and adjustment to new and more intensified uses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal issues deriving from mortgage policy (e.g. confiscations).</li> <li>• Scarce management-valorization of available public property assets.</li> <li>• Heritage and Protected (or ‘listed’) building policies affecting maintenance renewal and reuse costs.</li> <li>• Not always successful vacancy-targeted-strategies (e.g. demolition urban renewal policies relocation of residents), leading to exclusion, isolation and often ‘unapproachable’ urban areas</li> <li>• Foreclosure Policies that have been proved ineffective (e.g. not transfer of titles, use of eminent domain in order to acquire land for infrastructure without careful planning)</li> <li>• Zoning regulations that have failed to adapt in urban transitions (e.g. to de-industrialization, land-use change)</li> <li>• Ineffective and non-flexibly adaptable taxation policies</li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High tax rates that prevent people from habiting in an inner city area and chose another destination (e.g. suburbs)</li> </ul>
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Source: Delladetsima, 2012; Mallach, 2006; Brachman, 2005; Bowman and Pagano, 2004; Goldstein, 2001, processed by author

The presence of vacant and abandoned properties in urban areas, especially if in vast numbers, often undermines the well-being of a community and how it is perceived by both its residents and outsiders. They aggravate many of (other) issues (already) faced by communities, especially considering troubled, declining inner-city neighborhoods. Abandonment triggers more abandonment, and causes and effects engage in a vicious cycle, where consequences turn themselves into causes and vice versa (Mallach, 2006; Goldstein et al.,2001). A common example of this cycle is illustrated by Goldstein (2001), and is shown in the figure 1.2.1:

Figure 1.2.1 The cycle of urban vacancy/abandonment



Source: Goldstein et al. (2001)

The consequences of vacant assets are ominous, first, for the neighborhoods where they are located, and, depending on how massive the phenomenon is, equally acquire larger scale, thus affecting the whole city. The effects of vacancy are manifold and interconnected. Among, those (as shown also in the figure) are the following:

- Higher rates of criminality (e.g. drug trafficking, prostitution and other criminal activities in decayed areas with abandoned buildings),
- Environmental degradation and risks to security and public health, (e.g. debris and waste disposal, contamination sources, fire and earthquake hazard), and thus general degradation of quality of life.
- Increased cost and lost tax revenues for citizens and cities (e.g. to secure, clean or demolish abandoned properties, to take legal control of properties, to cover the costs of the added police and fire services they demand)
- Impacts on property and land values (e.g. either drop of prices and /or cause land speculation, owners less willing to maintain their properties),
- De-valorisation of single assets, neighbourhoods and even real estate markets.
- Barriers to (re)development, by creating marginalized areas and blighting surrounding areas.

(Mallach, 2006; Brachman, 2005; Goldstein et al., 2001).

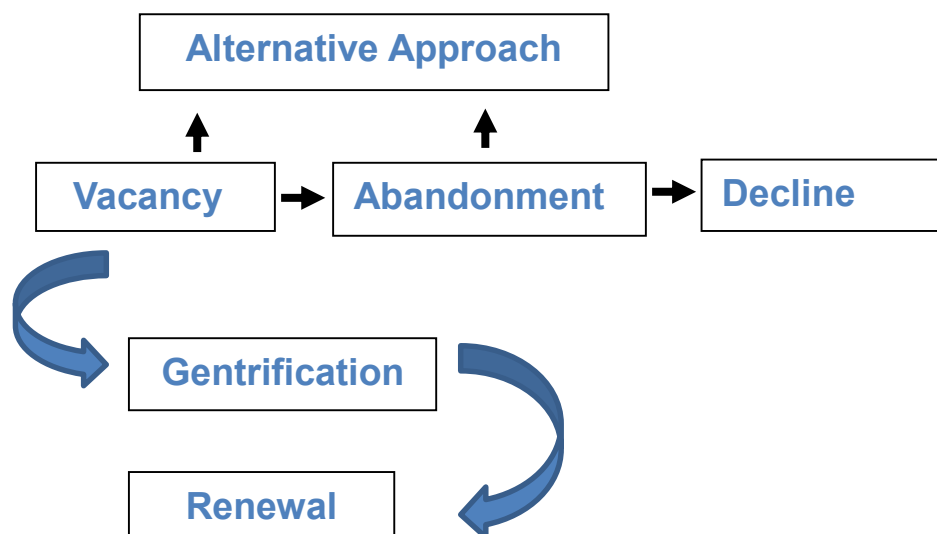
Abandonment and vacancy are even most insidious when they become accepted as part of the status quo (Mallach, 2006). Too many communities have “learned to live with” vacant buildings and lots for so long, that any prospect of amelioration or re-development is not addressed (either internally by the community itself, or externally, on behalf of policy-makers).

## 2. DEALING WITH VACANCY AND ABANDONMENT IN URBAN AREAS – DIFFERENT APPROACHES

There are various approaches concerning how to address and deal with urban vacancy and abandonment, and equally, various ways to see them. For example, different policies/practices per city or country can be described. Many cities adopt a vacant land policy, others integrate interventions in broader policies and others deal with the issues individually. In this chapter, the division is based on different aims on vacancy and different governance structures. First, a growth-led approach is described, which is considered dominant, both in practice of contemporary cities and also academic work. This approach is characterized by hierarchic top-down governance (strong role of state governments) and also, adding to the context of contemporary government deregulation, enforced role of private sector and markets. Vacant and abandoned land redevelopment in this case is synonymous to gentrification and/ or urban renewal. In the second approach the ‘alternative’ refers to the fact that the main aim is to address various socio-economic issues of urban areas related to vacancy and abandonment, and not solely to achieve economic growth. In terms of governance, this approach is characterized by emphasis on localities; both through a city-scale policy approach and grassroots self-organized initiatives.

The basic distinction between the two approaches can be seen in Figure 2:

Figure 2. Dealing with vacancy and abandonment -approaches



Source: Delladetsima (2012), processed by author

## 2.1 GROWTH-LED APPROACHES

Growth-led approaches both in defining and dealing with vacancy, are dominant in academic literature (Freire-Trigo, 2012). In those approaches, vacancy is considered solely a negative situation that requires correction. Vacant land in this case means undeveloped land, and often contaminated land (being or not), a vacant property symbolizes a lost market value and therefore should be facilitated to enter the market and be (re)developed. According to Bowman and Pagano (2004), based on their research on vacant land in US cities, it comes out that expanding cities tend to view vacant land and buildings as assets, but only in the sense that they can potentially contribute to capitalist expansion. In the same logic, shrinking and depopulating cities tend to see vacancy as a 'red-flag', symbol of a declining past of economic development.

Vacancy, in this perspective, is mainly the result of a weak property market, and also triggers even more weakening. Focus is mostly on the macroscopic economic reasons that trigger abandonment in large scale (de-industrialization, sprawl, crisis, etc). Not much attention is given on broader frame of reasons that caused the phenomena, just on the fact that vacant assets exist, and how to 'correct' the situation. Vacancy in this case is mostly measured and assessed through city or nationwide statistic bases, and real-estate indicators, reading the results also in relation to GDP and investments data (e.g. Scottish Government Reports of 1999, 2004, etc, which provide a detailed statistic work and use the typologies 'derelict land' and 'urban vacant land').

All this macroscopic perception, leads to vacancy being realized as an issue when it expands in large scale, when it 'shows'. Therefore, policy attention is polarized towards large scale vacant landed assets: former industrial sites, abandoned commercial and office buildings, big boxes, dock areas, or abandoned small properties in an extended area. Often, these assets are either publicly owned or easily to be obtained. On the other side, small scale, fragmented vacant assets are considered unprofitable for development, as they often belong to multiple private owners and are difficult to be acquired (Brachman, 2005).

Vacant land (re)development becomes synonymous to urban renewal or gentrification. So, 'development' equalizes to generation of economic growth, often focused on physical regeneration and beautification. Vacant property re-use is mainly a means to boost real-estate development, capital flows, and trigger property value rise, to attract investment. Focus is also on foreign investment attraction instead of re-structuring of city and local markets. In most cities, urban revitalization is presented as an opportunity to change economic hierarchies and functions within the urban region, creating new jobs and

strengthening the city's position in the urban division of labor. In this way, the search for growth turns urban renewal into a mediated objective, a necessary precondition for economic regeneration (Swyngedouw et al., 2002)

Large Scale Projects are a representative image of 'successful' development. Efficiency is measured in terms of size and growth. Such projects are the material expression of a developmental logic that views megaprojects and place-marketing as means for generating future growth and for waging a competitive struggle to attract investment capital. (Swyngedouw et al., 2002) the main objective of these projects is to obtain a higher social and economic return and to revalue prime urban land. The production of urban rent is central to such urban redevelopment strategies. In addition, city is perceived as a 'consumption space'. Commercial Property Development is dominant, rather than housing and social infrastructure. However, there are several initiatives that target social issues to mention, even incorporated in top-down, market-oriented approaches. A characteristic example is the adaptive re-use of large vacant office buildings to student housing in the Netherlands.

The key actors in these types of vacant land redevelopment are mainly defined by their economic capacity to invest or regulate capital flows. One can say that the main strategy of existing vacant policies in this context is to put vacant properties back in the market, regardless to whose actor's hands, as long as this actor is capable and 'strong enough' to support development (Brachman, 2005). Swyngedouw et al. (2002: 563) accordingly mention that city can be viewed as 'an elite playing field on which the stake is to shape an urban future in line with the aspirations of the most powerful segment(s) among the participants'. Traditionally, the decisions in such growth-led approaches constitute basically an interplay between governments and markets.

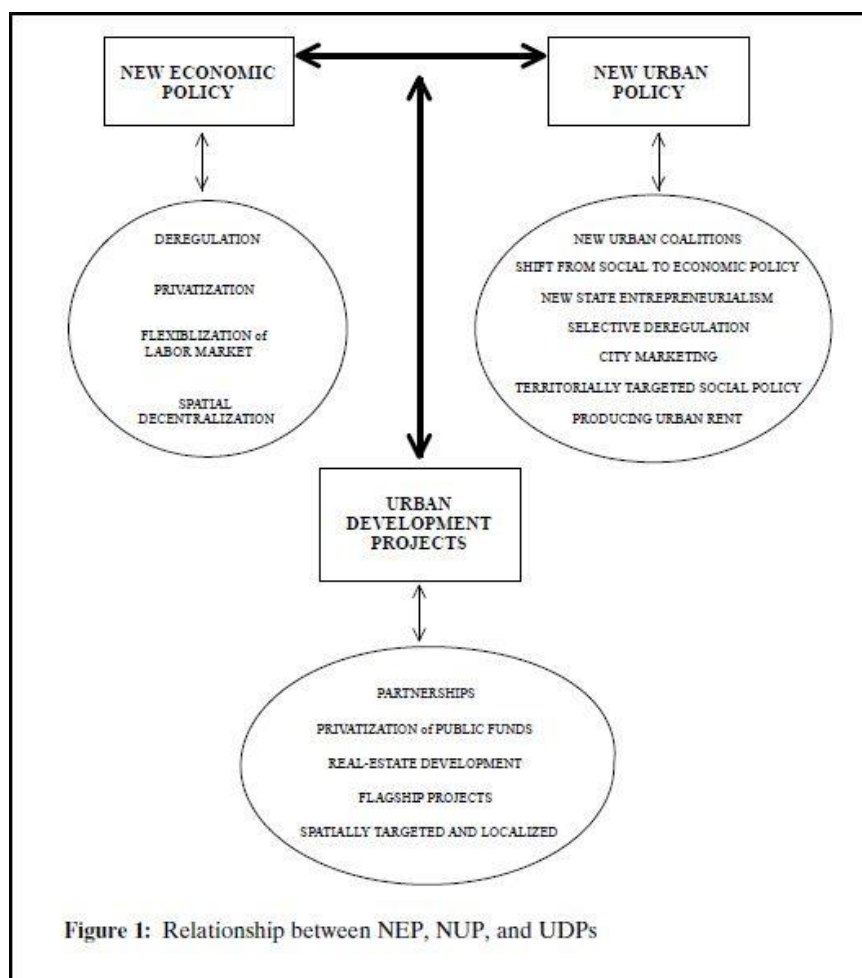
The role and scale of governmental authority can differ, and depends on contextual parameters. In Europe, for example, the role of state is traditionally strong. Wood (1998) summarizes the situation on (mostly large scale) vacant land in Europe, and shows how different levels of government intervention yield different results. For example, UK's policies and programs seem to be incentive-based to attract private investment. The French approach seems more codified and part of a greater plan to manage growth and keep cities vibrant. Italy, on the other hand, seems to work without a comprehensive approach, and this has led to more incremental, project-driven development. The approach in the Netherlands appears to be heavily driven by the public sector. These four case studies imply that European governments are more likely than the U.S. government



to step in and use government powers and resources to bring vacant land back into productive use (Kotval, 2006).

In most of the ‘traditional’ examples of vacant land redevelopment in Europe, according to Wood (1998) the role of state (either local or central) is crucial; Property-led approaches are evident, but governments, in their majority, did not seem to depend on market conditions to solve the ‘problems’ related to vacancy and abandonment. Characteristic examples are big urban projects in the Netherlands and France. However, since the 90’s the situation has changed a lot, mostly including the extra layer of recent crisis. This shift has its roots to what Swyngedouw et al., (2002) refer to as new urban policy (see also figure 2.1.1.): ‘One of the key components of the new mode of socioeconomic regulation in cities has been a gradual shift away from distributive policies, welfare considerations, and direct service provision towards of more market-oriented and market-dependent approaches aimed at pursuing economic promotion and competitive restructuring’.

Figure 2.1.1 New Urban Policy and Urban Development Projects



Source: Swyngedouw et al., (2002)

In the growth-led approach to vacant property (re)development there is a growingly strong role of real-estate markets, and dependency to market conditions. Especially during the current crisis period, and lack of governmental fiscal resources, the private sector is enforced as the main regulator of decisions concerning vacant landed assets. Market Competition is strong and also, speculative tensions grow. In addition, privatization and enclosures of urban publicly owned spaces as often considered as a 'solution' to vacancy. Local property markets are often considered not 'strong' enough to generate renewal, or are dependent on subsidies. Small scale vacant and abandoned assets are often 'lost' in the pressures of free market (Huron, 2012).

Spatial planning in this case is often aligned with property development. Planning tools are used to facilitate acquisition of land and siting of the project pending development. Large-scale urban projects are often presented as project-focused market-led initiatives, which have replaced statutory planning as the primary means of intervention in cities. Planning through urban "projects" has indeed emerged as the main strategy to stimulate economic growth and to "organize innovation," both organizationally and economically (Swyngedouw et al., 2002).

Planners and local authorities adopt a more proactive and entrepreneurial approach aimed at identifying market opportunities and assisting private investors to take advantage (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Planning Tools are in the 'hands' of free market. Massive and often unplanned dealing with vacancy are also frequent, such as massive foreclosures and demolitions that are activated without often further plans for redevelopment. Massive demolition is often considered as a means for urban renewal, as in the case of Baltimore row houses (Cohen, 2000). Demolition, as a practice, continues to be a part of city's (market-oriented) strategy, in the context of "Vacants to Value" programmes ([baltimorehousing.org](http://baltimorehousing.org)).

It is not the aim of this chapter to condemn economic growth as a non-desired outcome neither/or to romanticize development processes. It is a well acknowledged fact that vacant landed assets exist and operate in a context of markets (directly or indirectly), and this dimension cannot and is not intended to be overseen. Hence, what is argued is that a monocentric focus to economic growth can overlook social needs and often lead to (large-scale) projects that are proved ineffective even for the purposes they were built for. Therefore, a need for a much broader perspective seems necessary, as it will be shown in the following paragraph.

## 2.2. 'ALTERNATIVE' APPROACHES

Recently, more and more academic work focuses on the need to address vacancy and abandonment in an alternative way, through a shift of scale and goals. This approach is considered 'alternative' in term of its general aim towards (re)development, which does not solely orientate on economic growth but to an integrated development of urban areas and neighborhoods. Bowman and Pagano (2004) refer to vacant land as 'ultimate urban resource' that can generate hope and upon which various actors (from governments to localities) can benefit. The development potential of vacant land thus can reflect a dual approach: both generation of fiscal value and structure of social issues. Vacant and abandoned land and buildings may therefore, under circumstances, be perceived as assets for fostering local development and neighborhood revitalization.

Kotval (2006:387) provides an important clarification in the distinction between traditional and innovative/non-traditional approaches to reuse of vacant landed assets. This distinction refers from one side, to alternative uses of vacant assets (e.g. culture and recreation, urban agriculture, urban ecology) and also different and creative ways of approaching traditional reuses (e.g. adaptive reuse of offices to housing or recreational spaces). From another side, the 'innovative' may concern governance restructuring, dynamic entering of more stakeholders in the 'game' and creative use of existing and new planning tools and mechanisms through forming an agenda not only on property-led development but also for social purposes.

In terms of governance dynamics, this approach has a two-fold outlook: from one side, a city-level regulated urban strategy for vacancy aiming to local development and neighborhood revitalization; from the other side, bottom-linked initiatives that emerge in and from the grassroots through self-organization and collective action (often with no or minimal governmental support). Those aspects can co-exist, and ideally, collaborate in forming a holistic strategy. Though both aspects are considered important 'components' of an alternative perception on vacant land redevelopment, the current chapter will focus on the first one, emphasizing institutions and governance parameters.

Therefore, concerning the aspect of city scale, alternative, 'innovative' approaches to vacant land redevelopment can be characterized by 1) restructuring of existing, top-down governance structures and roles of actors and 2) activation and use of various institutional and planning mechanisms and tools, in various scales. Three key points [based on Goldstein et al., (2001)] are summarized in this context; the development of a specifically-targeted-to-vacant-land-strategy, the role of governmental authorities (local-supra local) and the power of local actors and organizations:

- Vacant land redevelopment strategy may be addressed either through broad policy approaches (such as regional governance and land use planning) and or through programmes/initiatives targeted to address specific place-based barriers (such as urban scale land strategies for housing, environment, etc.). Of course, the existence of a strategy alone, without an according governance structure (that will support this multi-scalarity and take charge of implementing the strategy in practice) will prove ineffective.
- The role of governments is considered crucial (often through significant restructuring of co-ordinate functions) in order to foster (urban) redevelopment. This can be achieved by providing clear and regulated policy signs to developers on how to promote redevelopment of vacant assets, through easing the (re)entering of properties in the land market (with foreclosure and property disposition mechanisms) or regulating alternative uses of the properties outside market pressures. Also, it is in the role of governments to enable public/private partnerships (PPPs), and other hybrid forms, and integrate them in fostering and supporting city policies. Those elements concern both state and local governmental authorities, but an enforced role of the local ones is considered necessary. Several specific measures on behalf of governmental actors can include:
  - Deep understanding of the roots and causes of vacant/abandoned/underutilized land (especially if they are triggered through the lack or absence of a policy)
  - Identification of available financial resources and tools, along with their potential scale of implementation (e.g. state, regional, municipal, neighborhood)
  - Integration and regulation of vacant land through exercise of city's land use and zoning mechanisms
  - Horizontal and vertical co-ordination among the various agency actors
  - Attempts for elimination of policy and regulation barriers
  - Activation and use of non-monetary resources, such as: political leadership, provision of expertise and information, provision of supportive community facilities and ability for their maintenance
- Emphasis is given in local land use planning and bottom-linked decision-making, activating a variety of actors. In many cases, 'traditional' (top-down) approaches to redevelopment have proved inefficient and, at the same time, Community

Development potential has been proved rather crucial and efficient. Important actors in this shift towards localities are various neighborhood entities and organizations (inside and outside governmental circles), such as Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and other. Mallach (2006) also emphasizes the role of non-profit organizations. Those actors can contribute in:

- Realizing of place-specific reasons that trigger vacancy and abandonment, and equally forming a place-based strategy
- Encouraging Consultation and Public Participation processes
- Immediate addressing and communicating with local and neighborhood scale stakeholders

Spatial planning, land policies and property management can be proved important ‘allies’ in fostering such an alternative concept in vacant land redevelopment. There are quite a few mechanisms, instrument and tools that can be summarized here<sup>5</sup>. It is highlighted that some of those tools can be equally used in the context a growth-led vacancy policy. What differentiates the outcome is not the tool itself, but the broader aim it serves, that equally defines how/when/why/for whom and by whom it is used. Examples can include:

- Carefully planned and targeted compulsory purchase and /or acquisition of blighted and tax-delinquent properties with no potential to be reclaimed by their owner. Changes/adjustments to the institutional and operational rules (utilization of eminent domain, punitive sanctions) can be important, aiming to easing the process of cities’ acquisitions of property
- Co-ordination of demolition plans through activating neighborhood planning and voluntary cleanup-demolition programmes. The aim is the redevelopment of abandoned assets, focusing on localities’ specific request of vacant land in order to encourage redevelopment and rehabilitation
- Revitalization initiatives of vacant properties through incentives such as: transferring them through give-away, leasing, auctioning, public subsidies to communities, individuals or entities (non-profit organizations, social groups willing to repair and occupy them for a specified minimum time period)
- Land banks, enabled by state action, can aid localities in the acquisition and redevelopment of vacant and abandoned properties located in their areas. Land

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<sup>5</sup> The terms ‘mechanisms/instruments/tools’ coined in this chapter are referring to a broad context of ownership relations, planning tools and practices, property management practices, and governance interventions. Of course, reference is made to several selected ones.

banks can acquire abandoned properties with the goal of returning them to productive use

- Taxation implementation and Community levy plans in cases where properties do not pay taxes (or tax-delinquent properties), in order to reduce public revenues potentially important to change local taxation system
- Split-rate property taxation, a system which divides taxation into two parts: one for land, and another for improvements on the property. Taxes are also reduced on buildings to encourage improvements and renovations. Taxes are increased, meanwhile, on land as a means of discouraging land speculation. By taxing land at a higher rate than improvements, split-rate taxation laws encourage the development of vacant parcels
- Building Rehabilitation Codes, referring to the introduction of new building codes to overcome the barriers for reinvestment in existing buildings
- Establishing alternative ownership models for housing (such as Community Land Trusts, tenement trusts) environment (such as urban gardens) or other purposes
- Utilization of Business improvement districts (BIDs) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) areas
- Activation of geo-spatial technology, geographic information systems in local scale (e.g. neighborhood information systems)

(Foo et al., 2014; Foster, 2012; Garnett, 2012; Mallach, 2006; Brachman, 2005; Alexander, 2005; Hillier et al., 2003; Goldstein et al. 2001; Cohen, 2000)

The mechanisms-tools referenced above represent an indicative sum of practices that have proved to be useful applied in urban vacant land redevelopment. Of course, they cannot, by any means, be presented as ideal solutions for every city or every case of vacancy. Context specificity and path-dependency are emphasized, mostly in terms of governance traditions in a distinct city (some cities operate under inflexible chronic top-down structures, while others have embraced a focus towards localities) and to the institutional and policy toolbox of a city or a state (which may have difficulty in incorporating several new tools). In any case, institutional and practical replication can prove from unsuccessful to 'dangerous'.

Due to this argument, some review of strategies in practice is necessary. There are many (recent or older) examples of vacant and abandoned properties' strategies developed in (or targeted in) local scale (city or neighbourhood) that can be mentioned, especially from

US literature, but lately, increasingly also from Europe (e.g. Germany, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, etc). Some indicative examples of ‘good practices’<sup>6</sup> from the US are:

- In Portland, Oregon, the city authorities aiming to form a compact city and reduce urban sprawl tensions have initiated an urban growth boundary (UGB) already from 1979. This ‘boundary’ aimed to restrict development outside of the metropolitan area, thus ‘forcing’ population return and (re)development inside the city. Of course, this is an innovative planning and governance mechanism that aimed for a broader restructuring of urban policies, but has had an important impact on vacant land redevelopment as well. From 85000 acres of vacant land in 1979, after the boundaries’ implementation the number fell to 46000 acres in 1998.
- In Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, an innovative tax mechanism has been implemented, including a two-tier tax plan (higher proportion of tax from the land value than the value of improvements). This tool aimed to encourage private vacant property redevelopment, an aim that has been largely accomplished as in Harrisburg, for example vacant land has been reduced in 88%. It should be mentioned that the implementation of this taxation tool has been accompanied by a general restructuring of land taxation system in terms of governance and implementation, not focusing solely on underdeveloped land.
- In Providence, Rhode Island, a vacant land-oriented strategy has been adopted. The municipality has appointed an inter-agency to make a plan for the redevelopment of vacant properties and the city was accordingly triggered to legislate a set of reforms. The strategy included: a restructured governance system, aiming to more effective co-ordination of agencies, improvement of owner-maintenance of vacant properties, a geographical information system database for vacant properties, environmental clean-up programmes, prosecution, fines and liens were rules were not implemented and in addition, a programme that facilitated purchase of vacant lands that cannot be maintained by their owners from neighbours, neighbourhood organisations, non-profits. This strategy has namely contributed a lot to vacant asset redevelopment and activation of localities.
- In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the municipal departments of horticultural society and city planning have initiated a vacant land redevelopment strategy based on collaboration with community development corporations (CDCs) and other organisations. In the context of this strategy, some aims included: facilitation of

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<sup>6</sup> The term ‘good practices’ is coined here because the referenced examples have existed for a considerable period of time and are considered (at least on behalf of some authors) effective for their scopes.

land acquisition, cleaning and maintenance, partnerships between municipal agencies and CDCs. Quite pioneering is considered the work of New Kensington CDC, especially considering urban gardening (Goldstein et al., 2001).

Those examples of 'good practices' are not mentioned solely in terms of reduction on areas of vacant land; what is rather worth-mentioning are the innovations implemented in terms of planning and governance restructuring. Much emphasis is suggested towards the cases of Rhode Island and Pennsylvania, that have managed to integrate localities actively in the vacant land strategies developed. In addition, there are numerous other recent examples of locally grassroots initiatives that manage vacant land through self-organisation and collective action, with or no governmental support; such are rapidly emerging in the context of current economic crisis. In this local, but also a broader context, as it will be argued in chapter 3.2., Urban Commons as a concept and practice can be integrated in an alternative vacant strategy, and often also contribute in its implementation.



### **3. VACANT LAND AS AN URBAN RESOURCE – THE URBAN COMMONS POTENTIAL**

#### **3.1 THE CONTEXT OF URBAN COMMONS**

Urban commons constitute a relatively new typology in the broad topic of landed commons. They can be approached as part of the general new turn in perceiving and managing commons in more complex environments, scales and for heterogeneous actors. Contemporary Cities, being accumulative centers of global populations and activities, are representative of this complexity. In this chapter, drawing the necessary inputs from commons' general framework, a brief and critical literature review on urban commons (or: commons in urban areas) is going to be presented, emphasizing how they can be approached and defined, why they are important/ necessary to discuss and ways that they can be built, managed and governed.

Theoretical academic work on urban commons cannot be compared with the bulk of work on 'classic' commons and Common Pool Resources, but it is a topic quickly emerging as Kip (2013) also notes. Several points are observed reviewing existing literature:

- There has been little work to theorize specifically the urban commons. Bravo and DeMoor (2008) recognize many 'new' land uses and new ways of their management that are emerging in the sphere of urban commons, and point out the need for more case studies. Urban Commons are often perceived as a direct translation of traditional commons' notions (mostly common pool resources) in the urban space.
- Urban Commons are defined broadly and often quite vaguely (in purpose or unintentionally). They are used to refer to 'shared space', 'shared resources' or ways/actors/institutions to manage shared space and resources (with emphasis on the 'collective' element). There are many cases analyzed thoroughly in literature as urban commons, or commons in urban spaces. Also, there are many examples of cases whose characteristics can put them in the urban commons sphere (e.g. shared ownership, collective action, non-commodification), but are not stated as urban commons. In addition, Harvey (2012) has posed the dilemma if it is actually good to define and 'restrain' the broadness of (urban) commons.
- The differences, similarities or transitions from 'classic' to urban commons are not clearly stated. Kip (2013), based on Parker and Johansson (2011), summarizes the differences in three points: urban commons can be of larger scale, have contested character, and derive from cross-sectoral collaboration. Parker and Johansson (2011) and Poklembovai et. al (2012) attempt to trace the transition comparing the principles of Common Pool Resources (as stated by Ostrom, 1990) in the case of urban

commons (they are reviewed in section 3.2). Of course, commons share similarities, but, for example, translating the notion of a medieval local pasture organization system to a high-dense urban block community management scheme is obviously contradictory.

- The question why urban commons are needed, and what benefits they can guarantee is not always clearly answered. Commons is a generally positivist term, and often used as such per se, without further problematization. In addition, good practices in the local level are often considered as a formula for replication elsewhere, without taking contextualization into account. It is argued that commons cannot be considered good or bad per se, without a specific case implementation. In the context of the current paper, the focus will be on the potential effectiveness of commons in the case of urban vacancy and abandonment.
- There are no clear implications on the appropriate governance structure concerning urban commons (and they probably cannot be, given the strong need for contextualization). Of course, the focus on local element is dominant, but it can prove quite generic and derive from collaboration of interscalar structures. The main tensions that are examined and critiqued are collective action and/or self-organization, increased privatization, state-private binaries, authoritative state control, enabling of intermediaries (NGOs, non-profits, QUANGOs), etc.

### 3.1.1 DEFINING THE (URBAN) COMMONS

The concept of “commons” is a rather broad and vague one, and landed commons are equally multidimensional; there is no single perception/definition of the term ‘landed commons’, a fact deriving both due to the transitions they have overcome and their contemporary complex diversity. The various definitions for the commons may (and often should) differ, depending on each case study. A general guiding definition that the current dissertation chose to adopt is the following:

*‘Commons are a particular type of institutional arrangement for governing the use and disposition of resources. Their salient characteristic, which defines them in contradistinction to property, is that no single person has exclusive control over the use and disposition of any particular resource. Instead, resources governed by commons may be used or disposed of by anyone among some (more or less well defined) number of persons, under rules that may range from ‘anything goes’ to quite crisply articulated formal rules that are effectively enforce’ (Benkler, 2003:6).*

Landed commons, in particular, may be defined from two perspectives:

- As resources or areas which by their nature and use may be regarded as more naturally communal than individually possessed. It is highlighted that this definition does not define ownership, or
- Alternatively, commons may be defined by the fact of their communal ownership; that they are acknowledged (at least in customary or common law) as being the shared property of a definable group of persons. Shared property in this instance means property held in undivided shares (common property, or commonhold), whether or not so recognized in statutory law (ILC, 2011:4).

Concerning landed commons, there are roughly two main categories that can be discussed: the ‘traditional/historical commons’ and the ‘new/contemporary/modern commons’. The ‘old’ or ‘traditional’ or ‘classic’ landed commons inside the European manorial and feudal systems were limited to ‘territorial type’, concerning mostly agricultural and pastoral lands and resources (common pastures and meadows, common wastes, common arables), managed (and/or collectively owned) by small and distinct local associations, communities, villages. They were referring either to ‘common lands<sup>7</sup>’ themselves or to the associations-corporations-groups engaged with their management (De Moor, 2012; De Moor et al., 2002). Some characteristic of common pool resources

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<sup>7</sup>‘Common Land’ is land owned by one entity over which another is entitled to exercise “use rights of common” and these rights are generally exercisable in common with others.

(CPR), as introduced by Ostrom (1990) can also apply in several traditional commons' cases. Those systems were largely dissolved during the 18th and 19th centuries, 'hit' by enclosures and privatization, following the pressures of industrialization, urbanization and the emergence of national states and markets. However, their structures are not completely extinct; apart from some 'lonely survivors' in Europe, there are numerous contemporary examples from third world countries (Asian, African countries are among the most emerging in academic research), where communities manage and organize land in ways that approach the concept of commons and common pool resources (ILC, 2011; Ostrom, 1990).

'Contemporary', 'modern' or 'new' commons though, incorporate much more complexity than those examples. They can be entirely 'new' in terms of land uses, resources, systems, or represent 'new', alternative ways of dealing with traditional common land and resources. They can concern public, private, common property, be of smaller or larger scale, be governed by hybrids of public or private entities, associations and organizations, communities (De Moor, 2012; Foster, 2012; Dietz et al., 2002; Hess, 2000). Most importantly, 'contemporary commons' as a term can equally refer to both land and resources and to the systems that govern land and resources<sup>8</sup>. However, in the new commons literature the distinction between common-pool resources and common property regimes is rarely discussed (Hess, 2000). As Dietz et al. (2002) argue, it is very important to distinguish between 'the characteristics of the resource (common-pool resource) and the regime that manages the resource (common-property regime or other)' (Poklembová et al, 2012).

Therefore, among other parameters, Contemporary Commons encourage an alternative perception of property "from title to entitlement", discussing property and values with aim to achieve fundamental balance between rights of individuals and of society (Garnet, 2012; Gaisler, 2000). Thus, in order to study the commons, the consideration of alternative concepts of property rights into spatial planning is important; attempting to detach real estate from the right to property itself and encourage "collective" approaches to rights of property, motivated by the (specific) needs at stake. Models and tools that blend aspects of public and private ownership are emerging in policy debates. They are addressed by various names, "third sector", third way", "social property" and of course "commons" (namely or not). The characteristics of this perspective can be summarized in the following 'principles':

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<sup>8</sup> However, De Moor et al. (2002) have indicated that this was often the case for traditional commons in Europe, and followed this line for their research in North-Western European Historical Commons.

- “Landownership is neither public nor private but hybrid. Though the title can be held by an individual, an association, users/producers or a non-profit corporation, ownership rights are shared among multiple interests
- The property’s primary function is to meet broadly defined social needs as well as individual needs, not merely to increase individual wealth
- The property’s price is restricted, while acknowledging the individual’s right to equity in initial investment and improvements, thus preserving affordability and access for people of different means. Property Speculation is undercut, if not eliminated.
- The focus of control over property, though sometimes tiered, is primarily local.
- Decentralized management of property benefits a decentralized ownership system and has substantial likelihood of remaining democratic as long as other civil liberties are respected.”

(Geisler and Daneker, 2000: xiv)<sup>9</sup>

There are various typologies of contemporary commons: (New) Rural Commons, Environmental (Green) Commons, Infrastructure Commons and most notably, Urban Commons. The interplay of those categories is different per country (related also to its past) and thus creates different dynamics. The current dissertation will focus on Urban Commons (or, to emphasize their spatial dimension, ‘Commons in the urban space’), acknowledging the fact that they may overlap with the other typologies mentioned. In order to approach urban commons, one has to see how ‘urban’ and ‘commons’ connect. First, urban areas can represent pressures over land, heterogeneity of population, conflicting needs, sources and manifestation of social wealth (Huron, 2012). Also, urban setting is characterized by mobility, permeable boundaries (Parker and Johansson, 2011). Cities are characterized by high population densities, properties that are located in proximity, blurred distinction between public and private (O’Brien, 2012) and conflicts over claiming space, land and resources. ‘Common’ emphasizes shared/collective ownership and/or collective action in managing and governing resources<sup>10</sup>. Thus, urban commons pose as alternative ways to collectively manage urban land and resources, in order to answer specific needs and generate value.

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<sup>9</sup> Much more discussion and comments can be provided on the broad topic of landed commons; however, in the current chapter the intent was to briefly set a context for the reader to be introduced in the topic. More emphasis is given on Urban Commons’ problematic, in regard to their (possible) connection with vacant landed asset (re)development.

<sup>10</sup> According to DeMoor et al. (2002:18), concerning the historical commons in North-Western Europe: ‘Common’ can refer to the fact that the land is used by several people or households during a certain period (in distinction to land used by only one person or household throughout the whole year)

The definition of Urban commons, as in the case of landed commons, embodies considerable terminological issues; characterizations may range from common property per se, or include a form of collective ownership, and/or collective action on private and/or public property. Correspondingly, the range of definitions, refer to 'what' (urban resources, tangible and intangible, including land), emphasize the 'local' scale, refer to 'how', by mentioning 'shared' and 'collective', but still describe vaguely 'ownership relations'. Through a literature review on terminologies, quite a few definitions/perceptions have derived:

#### Urban Commons as shared 'resources':

- Foster (2012), posing local scale, considers urban commons as 'local tangible and intangible, collectively shared urban resources'. Accordingly, Parker and Johansson (2011) consider urban commons as broader scale than neighborhood commons and define them as 'shared resources, tangible and intangible, available in a citywide or smaller scale'.
- Hess (2008), defining commons as resources, considers urban commons as part of neighborhood commons.
- Borch and Kornberger (2015), approach urban commons as shared resources based on various forms of collectivity.
- Ponzini (2011), in the urban context, refers to 'common goods' as urban goods and services, often spatially defined, that can be interpreted into forms (or projects) capable to produce effects which are collectively shared'.
- Webster (2006), in his arguments in favor of club goods and 'private commons' in private urban neighborhoods considers them as 'resources that are governed by common (shared) use rights (that tend to deplete through unrestrained competition)'.

#### Urban Commons as 'shared spaces':

- Davy (2014) considers 'spatial commons as shared land uses typical of cities and other human settlements'.
- O'Brien (2012) sees the urban commons as 'shared spaces in neighborhoods' which can be 'non-excludable, non-depletable public goods whose maintenance affects those who use it'.
- Boydell et al. (2007), incorporate property rights in their definition, and refer to urban commons under the name 'contemporary commons' and characterize them as contested spaces as a result of mosaics/spectrums of property rights, and range from spaces with unrestricted public access to private leasehold properties with limited

public access rights. The corresponding property rights were gathered by the authors in a table and are shown in figure 3.1.1.1.. This table is emphasized here as an enrichment to Schlager and Ostrom's (1992) classic identification of five property rights<sup>11</sup>.

Figure 3.1.1.1: Property Rights relevant to Urban Commons

Table 1: Property Rights Summarised (adapted from Boydell, 2007) evolved from: (Crocombe, 1975, Payne, 1997, Riggsby, 1998, Sheehan and Small, 2002, World Bank, 2003, Power, 2003, Farran and Paterson, 2004)

Right	Explanation
Direct use	Rights to plant, harvest, build, access and similar, may be shared rights
Indirect economic gain	Such as rights to tribute or rental income
Control	Conditions of direct/indirect use, held by persons other than the user
Transfer	Effective power to transmit rights-by will, sale, mortgage, gift, or other conveyance
Residual rights	Remaining rights at the end of a term (such as lease, death, eviction), includes reversionary rights
Rights of identification (symbolic rights)	Associated with psychological or social aspects with no direct economic or material function
Duration	Length of time property right is held, indicating profits and/or savings
Flexibility	Right should cater for modifications and alterations
Exclusivity	Inverse of the number of people with shared or similar rights, more relevant to water property
Quality of title	Level of security that is available as tenure shifts from the perceived optimum of notional freehold
Divisibility	Property right can be shared over territories, according to season, etc.
Access	Entry/ admission onto the land
Withdrawal (extraction)	Extraction of resources by owner despite leasing property
Management	Be able to make decisions on how and by whom a thing shall be used
Exclusion	Disallowing others from entry and use of resources
Alienation	Transfer of an interest (right) in property to another, in perpetuity

Source: Boydell et al., (2007)

Overall, keeping in mind that commons are built, and do not exist per se, and also 'do not come freely and do not self-replicate' (Huron, 2012), in this dissertation the aim is to adopt a more dynamic perception, emphasizing urban commons as 'a context of shared ownership relations, where the building, management and governance of (specified) resources is described and integrated in the urban space'.

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- <sup>11</sup>Access: The right to enter a defined physical area and enjoy non-subtractive benefits (for example, hike, canoe, sit in the sun).
  - Withdrawal: The right to obtain resource units or products of a resource system (for example, catches fish, divert water).
  - Management: The right to regulate internal use patterns and transform the resource by making improvements.
  - Exclusion: The right to determine who will have access rights and withdrawal rights, and how those rights may be transferred.
  - Alienation: The right to sell or lease management and exclusion rights (Schlager and Ostrom, 1992)

A literature review reveals various (and interconnected/overlapping) examples of assets, resources, ownership relations that are (or can be) are integrated in the sphere of 'urban commons', such as:

- Housing Arrangements under collective ownership regimes (homeowners' associations, residential communities, apartment buildings, public housing, CLTs, Limited Equity Co-ops, etc) (Horlitz, 2012; Huron, 2011; Hess, 2000)
- Collectively managed Urban Public Spaces (Neighborhood Parks, Park Conservancies, Playgrounds, Local Streets, Neighborhood Alleys, Sidewalks, Street Vending, parking areas) (Poklembovai et al, 2011; Parker and Johansson, 2011)
- Urban Ecosystems or Urban 'Green' Commons –UCGs- (green areas, street trees, urban wilderness -industrial sites, brownfields, wastelands, neglected parks, abandoned areas- as potential commons) (e.g. Foo et al, 2014; Clapp and Meyer, 2000)
- Urban/Community Gardens (e.g. Foster, 2012)
- Gated Communities (Residential, Commercial, Retail), Condominiums and Private Inner City Areas (e.g. Webster, 2007; Lee and Webster, 2006, Foster, 2012)
- Squatter Areas and buildings (Informality in planning and property rights) where various forms of collectivities are developed (Strigklogiannis, 2014; Porter, 2011)
- Infrastructure commons (transportation systems, water management systems) (Parker and Johansson, 2011)
- Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) (e.g. Foster, 2012; Garnett, 2012)
- Intangible goods (landscape commons, social capital, crime prevention and enhancing feelings of security, cultural commons)
- Social movements to reclaim urban spaces (mostly based on and inspired by the writings of David Harvey)

Some of those examples are going to be more analytically discussed in section 3.2.2, concerning vacant land redevelopment potential.





### 3.1.2 GOVERNANCE DYNAMICS

The element of governance is crucial in any discussion on commons; it actually defines the nature of 'shared' and 'collective' and therefore what is and what is not 'common'. There are various and often conflicting discussions on the ideal governance regime for commons. Debates often concerns the scale (strictly local and/or hyperlocal) and the nature of the initiative (self-organized, enabled by policies or governmental action, emerged inside market). There are also major transitions from the traditional to contemporary perceptions of commons. In the cases of traditional commons, the situation was way simpler. Before the emergence of modern form states and markets, commons were governed by their localities; communities, local authorities and local institutions and bylaws in the feudal and manorial systems of the period (DeMoor et al., 2002). In the case of contemporary urban commons, the situation is more perplexed, due to the contested character and conflicting property interests of urban areas. On the urban commons field, governance can be perceived in the context of making not simple decisions under uncertainty, in very complex and conflicting environments (Foster, 2012).

There is a general assumption that commons should exist outside of states and markets, as they are 'dangerous' for the sustaining and often considered the 'enemy'. This assumption derives from the pressures of the emerging national states of the past for privatizing and enclosing the commons (Europe), or Hardin's advocating towards tragedies of commons outside state-private binary. In addition, one-sided interpretations of Ostrom's arguments on collective action and self-organization as the only effective solutions is often the case. Under this context there seems to be a polarization towards two-sided argument of governing the commons: the 'external' (states-markets, governments) from one side that self-organization outside governmental interventions from the other side. Beyond the debate among Ostrom and Hardin's supporters though, there are more 'hybridic' concepts. Summarizing the existing literature on urban commons, the main management and governance 'tensions' are basically similar with traditional commons, however referring to a more complex context. Existing literature emphasizes both institutional and organizational aspects of governance, and the main tensions are:

- State-private dichotomy
- Increased privatization
- Co-operative management and/or collective action
- Self-organization

(Foster, 2012; Garnett, 2011)

Some points must be emphasized in terms of the above. Huron (2012) detects a polarization between two critiques in the literature on commons' governance. The first critique refers to the perception that commons and capitalism are considered contradictory to relate. In the current contested urban areas, 'capital' is linked to enclosure and privatization tensions, perceived as a goal and not as a means, and thus contradicting commons' principles. Huron (2012) argues that capital availability is, among others, a further incentive and a means for urban commons, but still not their ultimate goal. The non-commodification element of their definition refers mainly to their endogenous nature, on the entities that own and develop commons. Exogenous parameters that affect landed commons are highly dependent on capital, especially when called to operate and sustain in competitive land markets.

The second critique refers to the relation between state and the commons. Given the weakened role of decentralized states and their frequent ineffectiveness to protect and sustain common lands, state is frequently intended to be 'thrown out' of the commons' discussion. Bottom linked collective action and self-governance initiatives are often considered as means to replace state action. Although urban commons are addressing localities and in many cases have emerged due to the same inefficiency of state to provide for expressed needs, self-governance does not imply 'per-se' rejection of state, as Huron (2012) argues. Time is an important factor evaluating the 'success' of commons, and state (or governmental) intervention can be crucial to enable commons sustain. Foster (2012) examines urban commons and the efficiency of collective action in the urban space. She considers collective action a key point to define commons. She argues that although there has been a serious amount of work, inspired by Ostrom's work, on the benefits of collective action concerning fields of classic commons, yet the transition of collective action in the urban space is not broadly studied. Urban commons exist in a tense relationship with state and market, both of which continually seek to exploit and control them. Initiatives to create "commons" are welcomed and even facilitated by governments in order to (re)valorize urban space and lessen the impacts of economic restructuring, while, at the same time, the creative and reproductive potential of the urban commons is undermined by continuing attempts to commodify them (Kip, 2015).

Of course, it must be recognized that states, governments and markets can (and often do) pose barriers for the commons. In the same time, however, they have the ability, under circumstances, not only to facilitate the existence of commons, but also to enable

their building and creation and ensure their sustaining. This ability derives from their institutional power and toolbox of planning and policy mechanisms (look chapter 2.2., in the case of -vacant land- urban redevelopment). Therefore, though co-operative management and collective action are undoubtedly important, necessary parameters for urban commons, in this chapter the aim is to highlight the ‘broader picture’ and emphasize the role of governments (state and local) and hyper scale actors in order for urban commons to be built and sustain (Foster, 2012). This enabling context, besides governmental authorities can also include non-profit organizations, community groups, developers, Community Development Corporations and other local actors. The current economic crisis is forcing cities to scale back various law implementation efforts, as well as limiting the financing available to fund sub-local investments in urban public spaces. It is possible that these pressures will lead the current urban-commons compromise to unravel — leading to less public regulation of urban public spaces, more pressure for private regulation, or both (Garnett, 2011).

Therefore, in relation to enabling commons, multiple scale governments can:

- Loosen control over a land/resource in order to allow a collectivity to provide services and goods within a geographically bound area, on the condition of existing benefits for the community(ies) of this area
- Enforce the institutional-legal relationship with collectivities, and enforce them with some (depending) form of regulatory authority, possession and control over land/resources.
- Distribute power to local actors that lack the assets or abilities to attract sufficient assets to manage resources.
- One solution in that context of re-interpreting the role of governments is the expansion or ‘ratcheting-up’ of their toolbox, in order to enable mechanisms to be used for commons, and by commons. (mostly referring to the control over land and by whom). Among others, they can enable collectivities acquire legal status, help collectivities grant access to funding sources and co-sponsor for grants, and enable/share control rights over land. For the latter, utilization or delegation of spatial planning and property can be important, providing that their use is carefully planned, monitored, and constrained. The careful use of such tools has proved to give a potential of high pay-offs in areas that need revitalization.

A reference, finally should be made on the attempt of Parker and Johansson (2011) and Poklembovai et al. (2012) to re-adapt the principles of common pool resources that Ostrom (1990) introduced for the urban commons. This framework can be proved useful

in case study research, in order to 'read' if a shared space/resource is actually in the sphere of urban commons; and accordingly trace its governance dynamics. The 'renewed' principles are:

- Clearly Defined Boundaries and effective exclusion of external unauthorized parties, is rather 'relaxed' in the case of urban commons (mostly due to the fact that public spaces are incorporated in the discussion), embodying various scale actors.
- Rules regarding the appropriation and provision of the resources in common should be adapted in local conditions
- Collective-choice arrangements that allow the appropriators (broadly defined) of the resources to participate in decision-making processes
- Effective monitoring by monitors that are part of or accountable to the appropriators (incorporating hyper-scale and authority actors)
- Graduated sanctions for resource appropriators that violate the community rules of the common
- Mechanisms of conflict resolution that are rather cheap and of easy-access
- Self-determination of the community is recognized by higher level authorities, whose enabling powers are often necessary for the formation of the commons. Cross-sector collaboration is also emphasized
- Multiple layers of nested enterprises in terms of organization for the cases of larger scale commons, and 'base level' for the smaller scale ones.

So, can there exist a standard governance 'scheme' applied for commons? The answer is as complex as the commons topic itself, and asks for specific context of implementation. A more flexible and broad approach is necessary, on the basis of specific case studies. 'Narrowing down' to the case of vacant land redevelopment, the following section (3.2.) will attempt to provide some clarifications.

### 3.2 URBAN COMMONS AS AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO VACANT LAND (RE)DEVELOPMENT

#### *3.2.1 VACANT LANDED ASSETS AND URBAN COMMONS*

Vacant lands can be considered as common lands per se in some cases, taking into account the commons' traditional notion. One of the dominant uses of common lands in the medieval Europe have been the common wastes (uncultivated, neglected land), lands that in the later years were considered of low value (economically). In addition, in the case of modern France, commons in urban areas (in specific, 'biens communaux': common

goods) are defined as vacant lands per se: "The commons are vacant lots, which belong to the private domain of Commons and, under Article 542 of the Civil Code "at the property or the proceeds of which the inhabitants of one or more municipalities have a vested right." (Code général des collectivités territoriales). However, this 'per se' connection can often add a negative connotation to the concept of 'commons', in the sense that they pose as solutions for utilizing lands that cannot be used in any other 'beneficial' way; that equally can be considered temporary and halted if a more 'effective' solution comes up. In this chapter, having indicated the benefit of urban commons, the aim is to highlight their potential beneficial impact as far as vacant landed assets are concerned, through showing why and how they can be linked (not per se).

A potential for a re-approach of vacant and abandoned landed assets in the context of urban commons can include many parameters. It is a fact that many frequently mentioned examples of urban commons are often based on vacant, abandoned or underutilized land. Most often, urban commons are connected to re-claiming of local scale vacant landed assets from the grassroots, within communities, with minimal or without any government authority support. Though such important examples of course exist, and have proven their ability to sustain, the issue is actually a matter of scale. As Foster (2012) argues: 'Collective management of urban resources does not occur only in small, homogenous, close-knit communities with stable membership. Many large-scale resources are in fact being cooperatively managed by groups of heterogeneous, and sometimes transient, users who access the resource for different purposes'.

Perceiving them as alternative property regimes (based on the new typology of property that Gaisler and Daneker (2000) pose, as referenced before), Urban Commons can contribute to vacant land management by introducing and encouraging alternative governance structures, that can accordingly be translated in spatial planning and property management. The link between Vacant Landed assets and Urban commons can be summarized in the following points:

- Vacant land is often considered low developability land, and thus is left degraded and undermined. Commons have the potential to help (re)perceive vacant land as an urban resource, an asset, by (re)attaching value to it, in a broader concept than just economic (like social, ecological, etc). Economic value is also generated, not by the common per se, but from its positive externalities.
- Urban commons symbolize the non-commodification of urban resources (Huron, 2012). This perspective can 'release' vacant land from the 'negative', non-developable character that it obtains in real-estate assessments, and open routes for new uses.

- Through vacant land re-utilization, commons can give the opportunity to realize and address specific urban needs. Since community development corporations (CDCs) and other local actors often struggle to find affordable land in urban locations, reclaimed vacant and abandoned land and buildings are ideal locations for affordable housing construction and rehabilitation, food production, greening environment.
- Property is a contested term. Historically, it conjures the enclosure, a process of literally fencing, staking and drawing boundaries leading to social exclusion (Delladetsima, 2012). Property title and acquisition are often barriers in fostering vacant and abandoned landed assets' reuse (Brachman, 2004). Commons, by posing alternative modes of governing ownership relations have the potential to contribute in eliminating several of those barriers.
- Urban Commons can contribute to urban development (Ponzini, 2011). According to Clapp and Meyer, (2000:2), commons provide 'frameworks through which to analyze the dimensions of urban redevelopment in neighborhood and metropolitan contexts'. These frameworks can provide: analysis of institutional design and scale for the regulation and protection of the commons, and also a reconsideration of the distribution of the private and public costs and benefits of development.
- Urban commons encourage control over land and decision-making in local level (local does not always mean grassroots, especially in the complex urban context). As argued above, a shift to localities and engagement of local actors in policy-making can be proved beneficial for vacant land redevelopment (Foster, 2012).

The potentials described are concerning a context where both commons and vacant landed asset redevelopment (in local scales) can co-exist. However, this can prove 'idealizing', given that contextuality is quite often a main barrier (see chapter 2.2.). Foster (2012) accordingly utilizes the term 'enabling context' for urban commons, in the sense of building an environment where they can be managed and sustain. In this chapter it will be considered that 'enabling urban commons' in general may translate also in enabling them in cases of vacant land redevelopment. In terms of governance, Foster (2012) considers such an 'enabling context' formed by a combination of both hyper-scale actors and collective action in the grassroots; applied, in this dissertation, to an alternative vacant land redevelopment strategy (see section 2.2.). There are several general conditions that specify an 'enabling context', such as:

- Inclusive Governance structure towards collective action of private, public and hybrid actors

- Cost-Benefit Balance, in the case that a collective action aiming to benefit and regenerate values for a specific community should not undermine and put cost/benefits to other communities.
- The land that is going to be built and managed as a shared resource should remain and sustain as a common to the community (as it is defined in each case), and continue to satisfy needs and generate value.
- Partnerships through actors should be governed through shared goals and mutual understanding in every stage of the action.

### 3.2.2 *EXAMPLES*

Among the various types of urban commons referenced in 3.1.1, based on the current dissertation's focus on vacant and abandoned landed assets, several categories are going to be examined in detail, in order to trace their characteristics, why they can be defined as commons, and their governance dynamics. Those are: the collective housing models (Community Land Trusts, Limited Equity Co-ops and Tenement Trusts), Collectively Managed Urban Public Spaces, Urban Gardens and Business Improvement Districts.

#### ALTERNATIVE, COLLECTIVE HOUSING MODELS

A major category in the Urban Commons' literature refers to collective housing models and various needs that they contribute in covering (affordability, preservation of quality of life, etc). In the cases of limited equity co-ops, CLTs and Tenement Trust, all are private models that function under market conditions, but incorporate aspects beyond it. Horlitz (2012) refers to them as 'models of non-speculative ownership that try to limit or eliminate individual profit towards a collectively owned good'. Which is why, in the context of this dissertation they can be considered as commons. Their main goal is to satisfy the need for housing, by providing both affordable and decent settlements.

- Limited Equity co-operatives (LECs): They are co-operative housing corporations, governed by residents in the housing units of the co-op, in local and neighborhood scale. LECs embed shared ownership in the sense that residents do not hold titles to the individual housing units they live in, but instead hold shares to the co-op. The goal of LECs is to preserve affordability and non-commodification, and thus there are several regulations made internally through the co-op by-laws, such as: definition of the price of shares (limited equity is defined) and restrictions on what



price units and shares are sold. On the opposite of markets, the prices have a fixed level. It is emphasized that the extent of equities and prices varies between different co-ops. It should be mentioned that in cases where there are market pressures, for examples in a developed area where the share of the co-op is up, the formula of the price can be 'tempted' to rise, reach in a non-affordable level, and thus the co-op to be 'lost' into the market competition. A way to deal with the commodification possibility is change in the organizational structure of the co-op, that many existing co-ops have implemented, including also non-residents (the structure remains in the form one member-one vote) (Horlitz, 2012; Huron, 2011).

- Community Land Trusts (CLTs): CLTs are community based organizations, open to participation for any person from a geographic area that the CLT specifies as 'community'. According to the definition of 1990 Affordable Housing Act in United States, a CLT Corporation is an independent community using development corporation (..) it is a membership organization; acquires parcels of land held in perpetuity; and transfers ownership of any structural improvements located on leased parcels to the lessees'. Members can be residents and non-residents, including also community officials. They represent probably one of the most characteristic examples of commons, both in urban and rural areas, emerging as an 'answer' to current financial and real-estate crisis, keeping relatively their foreclosure rates low. There are 259 CLTs in US, and also many in UK, and other European Countries, such as Belgium. CLTs operate with a dual ownership structure, separating buildings from land. In this case, the land is owned by the CLT and people buy houses, for which they sign a long-term lease by the CLT. The lease guarantees the affordability and present use right for the resident. The CLT defines a range of regulations, both to ensure rights of ownership, monitoring, etc, and also to specify a resale formula, keeping the house below market price (or out of the market in some cases, like the example of Cornwall in UK), and guaranteeing a satisfying refund when an owner leaves the trust. CLTs usually require financial support to start, getting funding either by governmental subsidies and/or donations. They can acquire land through various practices, usually collaborating with local governments. The case of Dudley Street neighborhood initiative in Boston, for example, was the first CLT authorized to exercise the mechanism of eminent domain in order to acquire land (Foster, 2012). Another important thing to mention in relation to CLTs is property taxation. In the US, CLTs operate within the local (municipal) taxing environments. Most of the CLTs pay

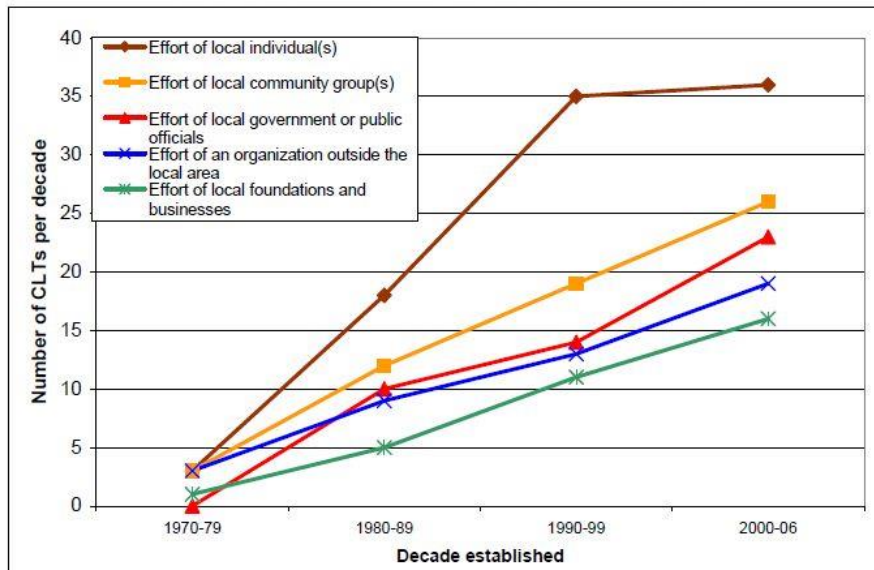
property taxes for the land and some also on rental housing. However, there are regulations in several cases permitting exemption for local taxes in their land, agreements to receive real estate property tax rebates, lower tax rate or exemptions on leaseholders' houses.

It is mentioned that the structure of the CLT requires a mortgage from the new buyers, a factor that may exclude low-income residents from housing (Horlitz, 2012, though mentions a different initiative in New York). Although CLTs have emerged from the grassroots, mostly in inner-city areas, they have experienced an upscaling from neighborhood to (even) city scale. This fact can raise contradictory remarks. From one side, upscaling can provide necessary land resources to satisfy more housing needs, from the other side it can bring a 'de-politicization' of the model (Horlitz, 2012). When a CLT is adopted as a programmatic activity of a non-profit community development organization, it is often because the organization wishes to diversify the activities of housing agenda by adding also a homeownership component. In such cases, CLT is not a separate corporation, but an internal programme of a sponsoring non-profit organization, to promote community development.

Each CLT has its own story, responding to specific conditions, shaped by people who collaborated in order to deal with various local circumstances. Researching 186 CLTs in US, Greenstein and. Sungu-Eryilmaz (2007) have found that CLTs have more than one initiators (Figure 3.1.2.1). They depend mostly of the efforts of local individuals and local community groups, but there emerges a growing role of efforts of local government or public officials, organizations outside the local areas and local foundations and businesses. Municipal-CLT partnerships are increasing, due to the shared goal of affordable housing, in the most cost-effective manner possible.

Figure 3.1.2.1

**Figure 4: Local governments play a growing role in the early formation of CLTs.**



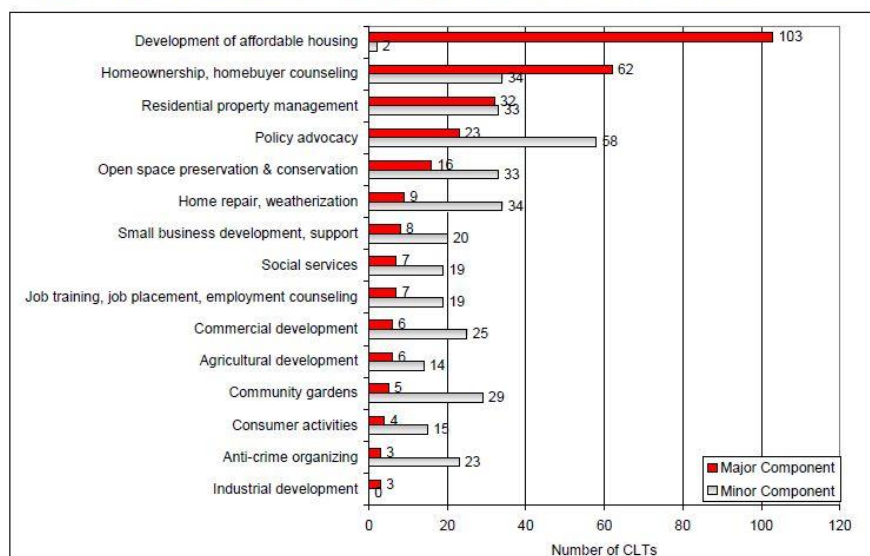
CLTs can have more than one initiator  
Source: Survey data

Source: Greenstein and. Sungu-Eryilmaz (2007)

The main focus of CLTs is provision of affordable housing, but their action has expanded to other fields, such as homeownership, residential property management, commercial development, community gardens, among others. Greenstein and Sungu-Eryilmaz (2007) in their survey indicated the main and minor component of the CLTs they have studied, which is shown in the Figure 3.1.2.2:

**Figure 3.1.2.2**

**Figure 19: Affordable Housing is the main program area for most organizations**



Source: Survey data

Source: Greenstein and. Sungu-Eryilmaz (2007)

- **Mietshäuser Syndikat:** It is a nationwide tenement Trust in Germany co-operating with self-organized housing projects. 'Self-organization' is translated into urban tenement buildings managed by their residents. Their motives for self-organization include collective way of living, protection against gentrification tensions, bringing more houses out of the market. Only tenants and members of specifically founded Limited Liability associations can be members to the trust, and surrounding neighborhoods have no role. The idea behind the organization and legal structure is to permanently remove houses out of the market, and provide affordable housing. It is another example of urban common, as it combines a dual form of ownership dividing the building in two parts: the title belongs to a specifically founded LLC (Limited Liability Company, divided in the association of tenants living and another LLC that represents the whole nationwide trust. The residents do not hold title. Sales and re-sales depend and are regulated by these actors, thus making it a 'permanently common' property. Financing requires borrowing from banks, and/or friends or alternative institutions, but there are no state subsidies. Another form of collectivity is also expressed through the collective gathering of the funds to pay the mortgage on behalf of all the tenants and the agreement for Solidarity Fund (Horlitz, 2012).

## URBAN GARDENS & URBAN PARK CONSERVANCIES

Urban or Community Gardens, refer to the growing of food, flowers, greenery on privately or publicly (or commonly) held land and are tools to manage urban vacant land in cities on behalf of both citizens and cities. Urban Gardens are managed, organized and maintained by groups/associations of citizens or residents, communities, independent entities or (pre-existing) community associations mostly self-organized, with minimal or stronger governmental support. In order for the gardens to obtain grants, achieve long term management, they often collaborate with intermediary organizations (mostly non-profit) such as land banks, land trusts, land reserve agencies. An aim is also to develop an operational structure under the non-profit law. They can constitute commons because a group or association takes over the management of an area (public or private), without often owning it and exercises collective action in order to manage. In many cases urban gardens are of (regulated) open-access to residents and public. The needs that can activate initiatives of self-organization include food security, quality of life, aesthetics, and various others. Multiple benefits of urban gardening have been recognized, such as open

space preservation, management of (new) green areas, new agriculture initiatives, generation of social capital and also contribution to economic values. Among the main issues faced by such initiatives are organizational issues and the limited or often fluid control over land. Outright ownership for each association is often difficult, as it requires a lot of control, monetary resources, time, and also encumbrances (property taxes, utility and other liens) There are authorizing municipal laws (e.g Seattle, Boston, New-York, Baltimore, Toronto) enabling lease agreements which, however, are relatively short-term and they can be terminated by the municipality upon decision. Such leases often require liability insurances. Also, like in the case of Chicago, gardens are not under lease but under agreement with the municipality for development to specific sites (also: 'Adopt a lot' programme, in Baltimore). In practice, squatting is often a way to claim land. Institutional and organizational barriers often require the collaboration with intermediaries. Those actors often contribute into mapping the area, determining ownership for each lot, search for tax/liens in each property. Land Trusts often operate by holding title, enabling (often) conservation easements. Private Land Owners are given motives to allow gardens in their properties through, for example tax-benefits, income and property benefits. Land Resource agencies can be activated to enable land acquisition to plots for gardening. American Land Institute has suggested a model for local governments in order to hold land for future development in the form of 'land reserves', or 'vacant land inventories', sources of public land that can be used for gardening. Legislation's barriers mostly refer to permanency issues, short period leases, authorization for gardens as public lands.

Urban Parks: There are two examples that can be mentioned in this category, that Foster (2012) differentiates in terms of scale and level of (local) governmental interventions: Neighborhood Scale Park Management and Park Conservancies. The first case is really similar in terms of organizational governance (and institutional reforms) to the small-scale urban gardens, so it is not going to be emphasized more in this chapter. Neighborhood groups aim to revitalize urban public open areas which often are neglected or underused by local authorities.

Park Conservancies are non-profit entities that co-operate with local governments and co-manage large urban parks. The local governments contribute with inputs of planning, design implementation, capital projects, capacities that local initiatives may lack, and sharing responsibility for the park maintenance, usually collaborating with other public bodies, such as police, etc. A usual practice for the conservancies to gain control over land is to sign (renewable) management agreements with local governments, so that

management functions are transferred from the city to the conservancy. The land titles remain public. The organizational structure consists of a board of trustees including local officials, representatives from non-profits, private corporations, etc. The conservancies aim to raise significant amounts of money to ensure the management of the parks. Funding sources are mostly governmental subsidies and donations. In addition, city funds can be enforced through PPPs (Public-Private partnerships) collaborating with a developer. The benefits include faster decision-making, raising funding, saving money. There is also criticism, mostly because the partnerships can result to dependence of the municipality to a private entity, mostly in terms of crisis, and the initial goals of the conservancies may be altered in name of profit.

#### BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS (BIDs).

BIDs are non-profit entities that are formed by property owners or businesses in defined urban areas (they can vary in size and scale), in order to promote economic activity and improve and maintain neighborhood amenities (street level services, improvement to streets, parks, etc in urban commercial districts. BIDs role as urban commons can be contested, however in this chapter it is emphasized as BIDs govern shared local resources. They incorporate collective action in the sense that they enforce co-operation of local private sector interests that may have not be aligned before. They are considered an answer to the general decline of inner city areas and commercial neighborhoods (middle class flight, urban sprawl, etc), deterioration of safety and consumer activity, and inability of governments to contribute, due to declining tax-bases and limited monetary resources. BIDs are enabled by state or local legislation, and need specific legislator authority; or an 'enabling' governmental role. Commercial Property owners in a defined area vote to form a BID and agree to pay a special assessment, and take control of managing streets, sidewalks, playgrounds and shared amenities in the area. They are governed by local property owners in partnerships with representatives from businesses, local governments and other neighborhood members (they should be property owners though, a governance structure which excludes other local populations from participating in a BID and its decisions). Municipalities collect the mandatory assessments from the property owners, and return back to the owners a part of funds for utilization in maintaining the shared local resources. Also, groups of BIDs have often initiated to tax themselves, in order to fund additional services at stake. BIDs cannot impose fees on users of the shared amenities, limit access or control land use change within the area, and also do not acquire any property rights (unless some specific arrangement is made). Formation

of BIDs, as mentioned, need specific institutional framework, and besides that they can often be costly in money and time to co-ordinate and prepare necessary groundwork and also positive outcomes may take a considerable period to show. BIDs are also accused for uneven distribution of public services and displacement of marginalized populations. However, BIDs are credited for revitalizing urban neighborhoods that have been neglected by local authorities and have positive spillover effects in broader scale (Foster, 2012).

Based on the categories described in this chapter, several indicative recent examples of vacant landed asset redevelopment initiatives that can be considered as urban commons are:

- the place-making initiatives for the revitalization of underutilized public spaces and abandoned buildings in Detroit, based on collective action on behalf of various communities of residents with the support of local authorities and private actors. Place-Making has also acquired an institutional framework in the city of Detroit (<http://www.pps.org/blog/tag/detroit/> )
- the Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative in Boston for reuse of neglected public space and revitalization through a Community Land Trust. The community of a neighbourhood with high-concentration not only of vacant and abandoned assets, but also social issues (poverty, criminality), formed a group initiative to clean up and manage vacant lots and buildings; this emerged later as a CLT, which provides affordable housing, co-ordinates urban gardening and public space management. What is worth-mentioning is that the CLT acquired the ability to exercise (itself) eminent domain for its purposes (<http://www.dsni.org/> ),
- the New York City Community Land Initiative, for provision of affordable housing through re-use of abandoned buildings. This initiative is still in the process of advocating for its implementation. The main focus is on social groups of homeless and low-income individuals, who actively participate both in the campaign and aid the organization of the Community Land Trust (<http://nyccli.org/> )
- Urban Gardening in various cities of US and Europe; The urban-gardening practice is one of the most rapidly emerging, but is mostly based on self-organized community initiatives occupying vacant lots. Indicatively the cases of Toronto, San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, New-York, Baltimore are mentioned, due to the fact that a local initiative managed to scale up and proliferate, also in forms of institutions (e.g. Toronto Community Garden Network) (look in the section of urban gardening above).

- Community Land Trusts that are an emerging practice in United Kingdom, such as the East London CLT for abandoned and derelict Buildings (e.g. St. Clements area) (<http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/> )
- Public Private Partnerships for revitalization of abandoned/underutilized brownfields (railway infrastructure, industrial sites) in Germany, such as a group that works with a brownfield recycling instrument in the Ruhr region, that has a pool/reserve/bank of old train track areas that they manage (<http://www.beg-nrw.de/>)



# **PART B- THE CASE OF ATHENS CITY CENTER**

#### 4. DEFINING VACANCY AND ABANDONMENT IN THE GREEK CONTEXT

As explained in the theoretical framework, what is and what is not vacant/ abandoned is debatable and depends on each case. In the Greek context, similarly to general tension, those definitions are not clearly specified. Reasons include the lack of update of relevant legislations, and various complexities referring to the distinctions of assets concerning urban and rural assets, land uses, ownership regimes, listed and non-listed for preservation assets and many other parameters. In the Greek institutional context, there are clear deficiencies in terms of definition and approach. Vacancy and mostly abandonment present important issues in the sense of dereliction, if they pose an amount of risk. The main current institutional framework concerning abandoned buildings is the article 268 in Code of Basic Urban Institution (ΚΒΠΝ) for buildings that pose danger in public health and the article 422 on dangerously derelict buildings. Vacant buildings are integrated in the broader category of unfinished buildings (article 6, law 4030/2011).

The new draft law plan (2014) specified for the management of Vacant and Abandoned Buildings, poses distinctions between vacant and abandoned buildings, among others concerning their ownership status (public-private or unknown owner). According to the Article 1 (Chapter A') of the Plan:

A building is vacant when at least three (3) of the following apply:

- is not habited and is not used for any (legal) activity, or is not (legally) owned for a period of 5 years minimum
- is a center of pollution, criminality and constitutes a threat to public health and security
- needs repairing of small or large extent
- there are not clear indications that it will be reused<sup>12</sup> or rehabilitated in the immediate future.

A building is considered abandoned when is semi-completed and to which no activities to be completed have been conducted during the last fifteen (15) years and in cases that at least three (3) of the following apply (necessarily the first two):

- no conservation has been taken place during minimum the last eight (8) years,
- its external façade and possibly its outer space present an image of abandonment and/or a danger characterization has been conducted
- is a threat for public health and security and/or is a criminality center
- does not obtain a direct connection to networks of provision of common benefits

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<sup>12</sup> As an indication of non 'reuse' is stated the non-promotion of the building in the market for sale or lease the last three (3) years.

- is not habited or used for any legal activity or legally owned or leased for period of minimum one year or has not put in market for buying or rent during the last 3 years.

A building of unknown owner is one for which there is a relevant registration in the Land Registry or Cadaster, and is not registered as public property. It can be roughly stated that the draft law plan defines vacant as half-finished and abandoned as derelict.

According to Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) census data, Vacant Dwellings are those that are meant for and are suitable for residential purposes, but are not used as such during the census period. In this characterisation old and decayed residences that are not habited (or do not show any sign of being habited in the future), incomplete dwellings under construction during the time of the census, spaces meant or not meant for residential purposes that are not habited, are not included (ELSTAT, 2011). ELSTAT does not keep record for vacant and/or abandoned buildings.

In addition, unstructured, underutilised and unbuilt areas ('adomites ektaseis') are also considered as vacant if they are registered in the city plan, in the sense that they have potential to be built but are not.

It is emphasised, again that those definitions, as with every policy-related definitions, should be approached critically. Images of abandonment are reflected massively in the Athens center, and can be interpreted differently on behalf of policy-makers, developpers, (neighborhood) residents. Scale is really important. So, statistics and numbers are indicative, but not considered enough to (always) describe each situation, especially in local level. In this paper, the purpose is to show patterns and indications of the phenomena in city scale, and thus those general definitions are used in a broader sense, having realised their limits to scalar interplays.

## 5. VACANT AND/OR ABANDONED LANDED ASSETS IN ATHENS

Athens, during the last 10 years has been experiencing a constant de-valorization of many of its central area building assets, stipulating also changes in use and activity outflows. In addition, under different conditions the vacancy – abandonment phenomena are manifested (and/or spread) in the entire agglomeration and especially in the most distressed and deprived areas of the city. In high-density inner-city Athens areas, the phenomena are mostly evident in building stock and urban voids through blocks of fragmented properties, rather than large vacant lots. A major particularity of the phenomenon, manifested in the urban center of Athens (the main focus case study area), is that it not concentrated in distinct big plots and buildings, but it predominately involves an array of small properties on various floor areas and building structures.

Evidently, the phenomena are a pre-crisis condition that poses significant obstacles in the search of an appropriate property management and planning strategy for promoting redevelopment and neighborhood revitalization. Current economic crisis reflects already existing pre-crisis conditions leading to vacancy posed an extra 'layer' of intensity to such already existing phenomena: population and activity outflows are directly linked to household economic restraints and business closures.

On the whole, three areas of spatial concentration of vacant assets are identifiable in central Athens: Omonoia square and the area around it, and the Commercial Triangle, mainly in its core part and secondly to its western part (Psirri and Metaxourghio areas). The decayed image of urban space is expressed either with fully or partly vacant assets and involves assets of various and mixed use patterns, housing, retail, offices, hotels. There are three basic buildings ages typologies affected by vacancy and abandonment :

- Old buildings, (19th and beginning of 20th century), houses (mainly detached and two-storey) mostly, located in their majority in the historical centre
- Buildings from mid-war and early post-war period ('30s- '50s), mostly offices and retail uses,
- Building from post-war and contemporary period ('60 onwards), ranging from housing, office and retail uses (NTUA, 2011).

Concerning the ownership status of vacant assets in central Athens, the majority of vacant buildings belong to single owner (physical or legal entity). In addition, abandonment trends were excessively manifested after early 2000s, accentuated also by the adverse effects of the conservation law. Finally, highly affected by abandonment are buildings of central state and other public institutions.

## 5.1 (MAPPING) VACANT AND ABANDONED LANDED ASSETS IN THE CENTER OF ATHENS

The case study area in this paper is the greater area of central Athens. The Center of Athens can be defined in many ways, referring either to the historical center, the central business district, the commercial triangle, the 1<sup>st</sup> municipal department, or all those areas together (Maloutas, 2013) Due to the fact that the concentrations of vacant and abandoned landed assets range, various sub-areas are going to be approached through this analysis. Since this paper is based on literature review and does not include field research, patterns of existing studies attempting to map vacant and abandoned assets in the center of Athens are integrated, in order to spatially define the case study area. The focus areas of two studies, in city scale are adapted in this paper; SOAP Plan and NTUA research.<sup>13</sup> It is emphasized that any adaptation is critical, and not aimed to follow exactly the 'routes' of those studies.

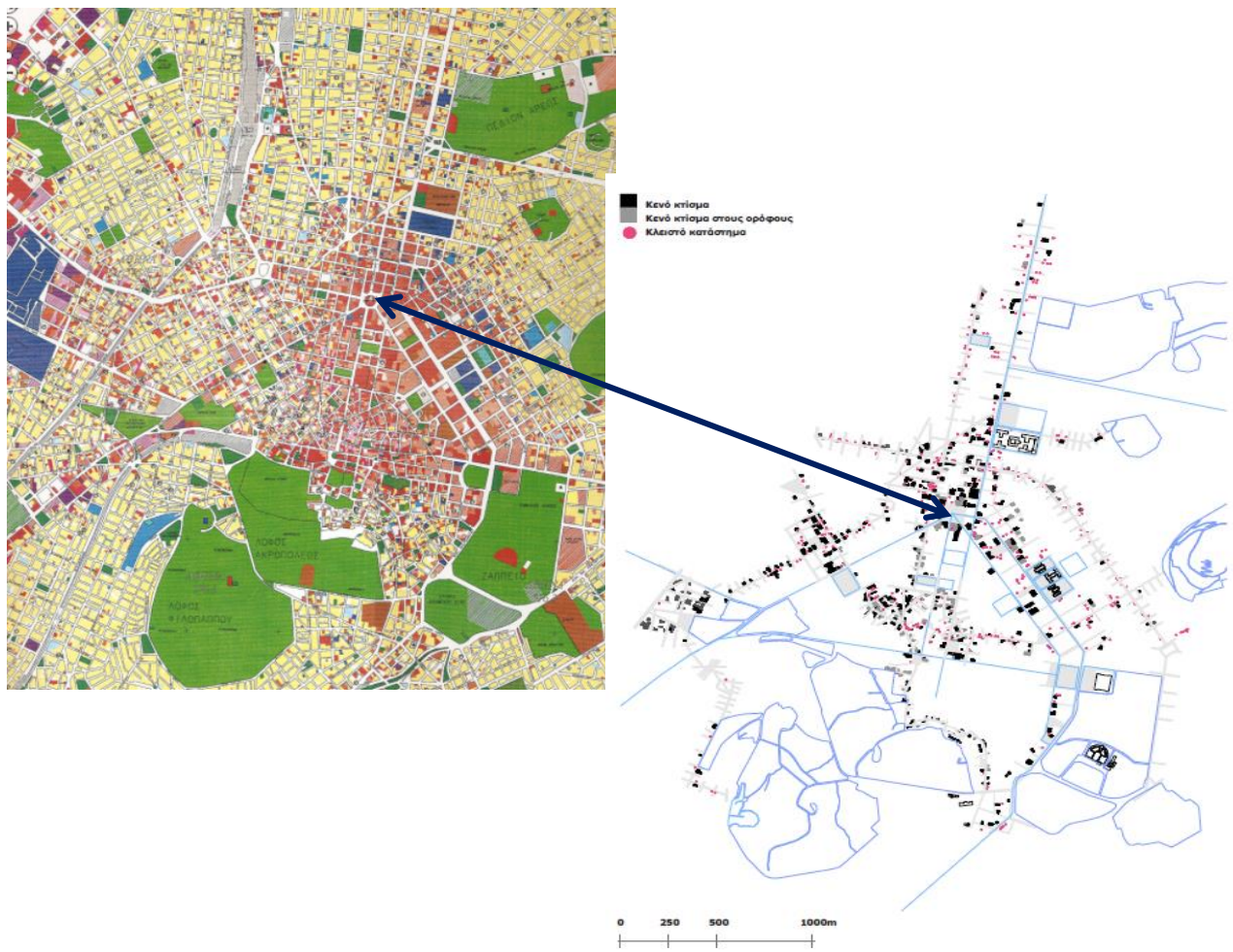
A general image of the scale of vacancy and abandonment in zoomed in the greater area of historical center is shown at the map below (figure 5.1.1.), as studied on behalf of NTUA (2011), and indicates fully vacant buildings (black), partly vacant buildings (vacant floors, occupied ground floor) and closed shops (pink dots)<sup>14</sup>.

Figure 5.1.1. Definition Of Zoom Case Study Area

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<sup>13</sup> there are several neighborhood scale studies that include/mention vacancy on behalf of Greek researchers (e.g. Gerani, Aghios Panteleimonas area Studies), but a bigger picture is attempted to be shown here

<sup>14</sup> It is highlighted that in this registration NTUA uses the term 'vacant ('kena')' broadly, to describe both vacant and abandoned buildings



Source: ΑΤΤΙΚΟ ΜΕΤΡΟ Α.Ε., ΝΤΥΑ (2011), processed by author

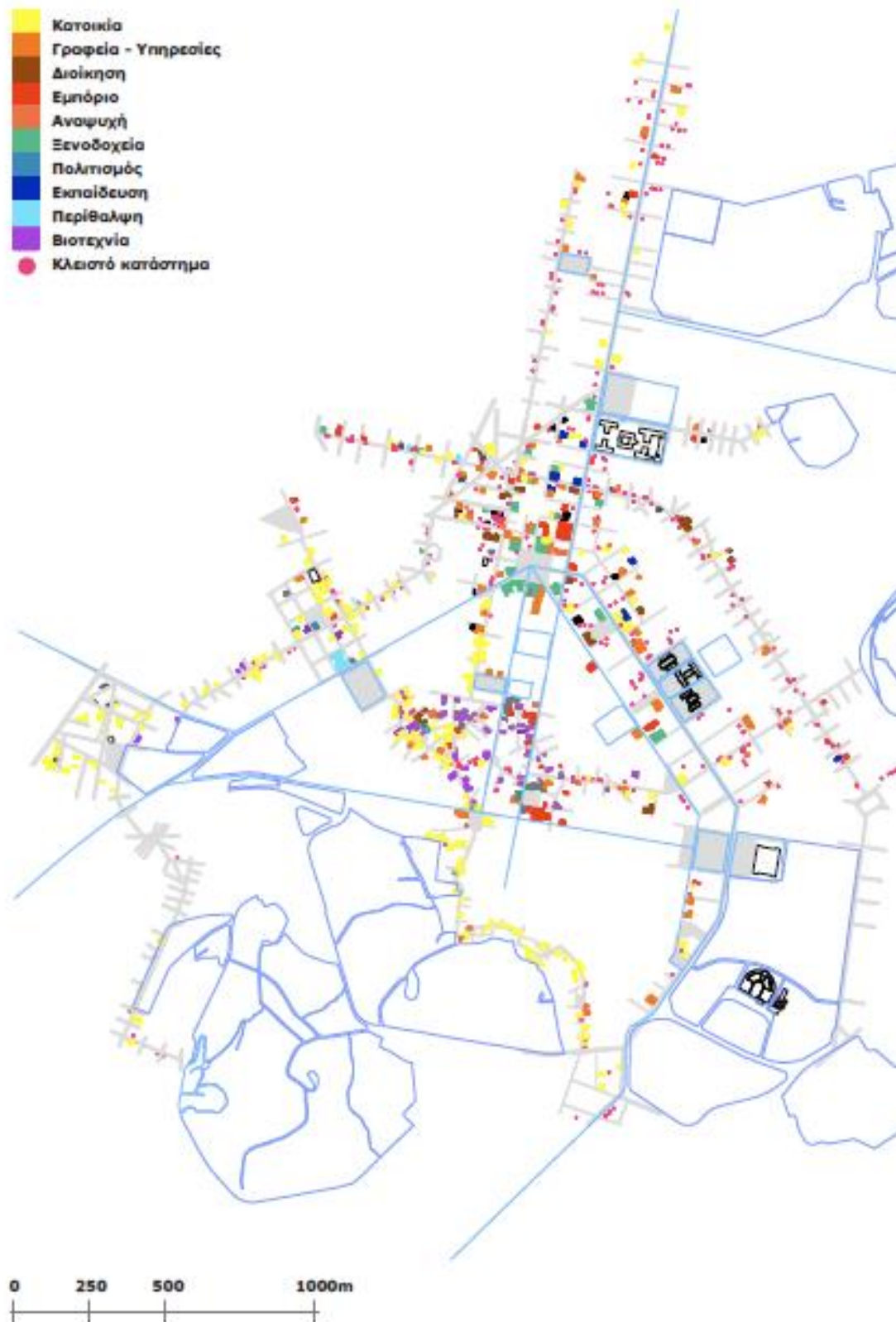
Figure 5.1.2 : Vacant and Abandoned Buildings in the center of Athens



Source: NTUA (2012)



Figure 5.1.3. Last Uses of Vacant and Abandoned Buildings in the center of Athens (Ground Floor)



Source: NTUA (2012)



**Table 5.1.1: spatial concentrations of vacant and abandoned buildings per land use (ground floor) in central Athens**

<b>Residential Uses</b>	Kerameikos, Metaxourghio, Psirri, Plaka
<b>Offices &amp; Administration Uses</b>	Greater Omonoia area, Stadiou Street, Panepistimiou Street
<b>Commercial-Retail (including recreation, restaurants and cafeterias)</b>	Greater Omonoia area, Stadiou Street, Panepistimiou Street, Akadimias Street, Patission street, Commercial Triangle; Closed shops are spread everywhere in the case study area
<b>Hotels</b>	Greater Omonoia area, Stadiou Street, Panepistimiou Street
<b>Industrial Uses</b>	Psirri, Metaxourghio

Source: indications from NTUA (2011), processed by author

Figure 5.1.4 : Vacant and Abandoned Buildings Listed for Preservation



Source: NTUA (2012)

This map indicates vacant buildings (black) and also vacant buildings listed under preservation. Those buildings are owned and managed by the Ministry of Culture. High spatial concentration of listed vacant assets is seen in the commercial triangle (especially Plaka and Anafiotika areas) and greater Omonoia area. Listed abandoned buildings are considered a really important and severe issue, given that from one side, important architectural and historical assets that could revive the image of the city stay undeveloped, and from the other side, various stated social needs that these buildings could potentially provide (such as shelter) also stay unmet.

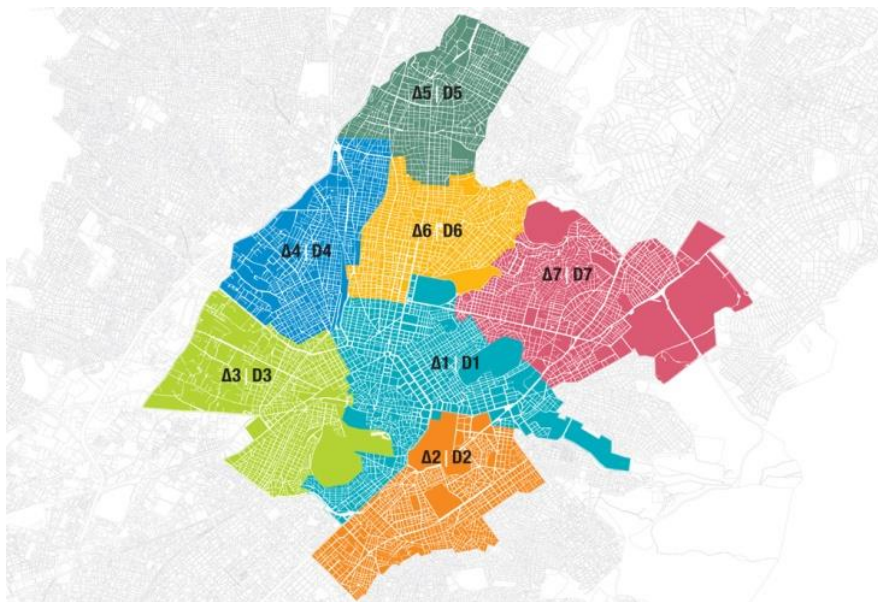
In the following sub-chapters vacant (and abandoned landed) assets per land use are shown, in order to trace in detail the different expressions of the phenomena, the different reasons that trigger them and the effect of crisis to their magnification. Data from real-estate reports and socio-economic data are used, in order to approach the issue broadly.

### 5.1.1 ABANDONED AND DERELICT BUILDINGS

In the Greek context and the case of Athens center in particular abandoned buildings are often perceived as synonymous to derelict. This approach, though often misleading has indeed much reality. It is a hint that the regional authority unit responsible for the registration of abandoned landed assets is the department of sanitation control and environmental health<sup>15</sup>.

Various sources refer to various numbers (more than 1200) of abandoned buildings in the municipality of Athens, whereas the mayor of Athens has recently mentioned up to 1800 buildings<sup>16</sup>. According to Local Government Institute-ITA-, 2009 their number is up to 1588 buildings. Their spatial distribution in the municipal areas (figure) is shown in the table below:

Figure 5.1.5 : *Municipal Departments of Municipality of Athens*



Source: NTUA (2012)

<sup>15</sup> The Attica Region has a record of registered abandoned buildings in area from 2008, but is not in a position to obtain information on vacant buildings. After communication with the regional department in charge, I was informed that this registry has not been updated since, and in most of the buildings' cases the owner is unknown. Yet, upon my request and due to the limited availability of registered data, I could not have any data available for the current research.

<sup>16</sup> Event of Presentation of Development Plan for Athens 2015-2020, April 7 2015.

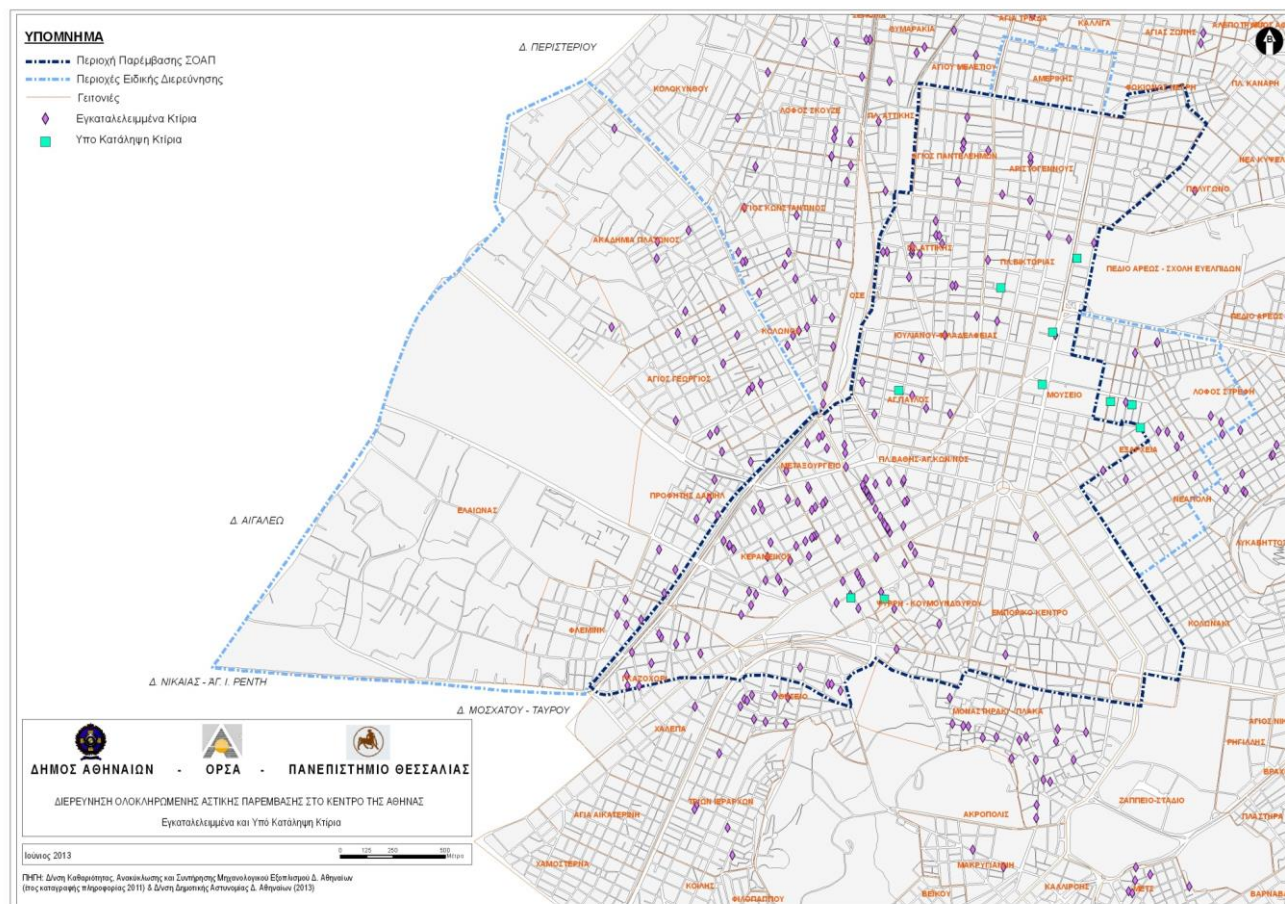
Table 5.1.2 : Abandoned Buildings in the Municipality of Athens per Municipal Department

<b>ABANDONED DWELLINGS -MUNICIPALITY OF ATHENS (2009)</b>		
<b>MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENTS</b>		
<b>1 (Exarchia, Kolonaki, Ilissia, Koukaki, Plaka, Psirri, commercial center, Vathis square)</b>	295	<b>19%</b>
<b>2 (Pagkrati, Neos Kosmos)</b>	125	8%
<b>3 (Petalona, Thissio, Rouf, Gkazi, Kerameikos, Metaxourghio, Votanikos)</b>	467	<b>29%</b>
<b>4 (Sepolia, Kolonos, Akadimia Platonos)</b>	391	<b>25%</b>
<b>5 (Aghios Eleftherios, Patissia, Prompona, Rizoupoli)</b>	108	7%
<b>6 (Kipseli, Attikis square, Amerikis square, Aghios Panteleimonas, Aghios Nikolaos)</b>	108	7%
<b>7 (Gkyzi, Ambelokipi, Goudi, Tourkovounia)</b>	94	6%
<b>SUM</b>	1588	1

Source: Local Government Institute-ITA-, 2009, processed by author.

The municipal areas with the highest percentages of abandoned dwellings are the 1<sup>st</sup> (19%) where the inner city area belongs, the 3<sup>rd</sup> (29%) and 4<sup>th</sup> (23%). The concentration of abandoned dwellings is shown zoomed in the SOAP Plan focus area in the map below.

Figure 5.1.6 : Abandoned Buildings in SOAP Plan Area



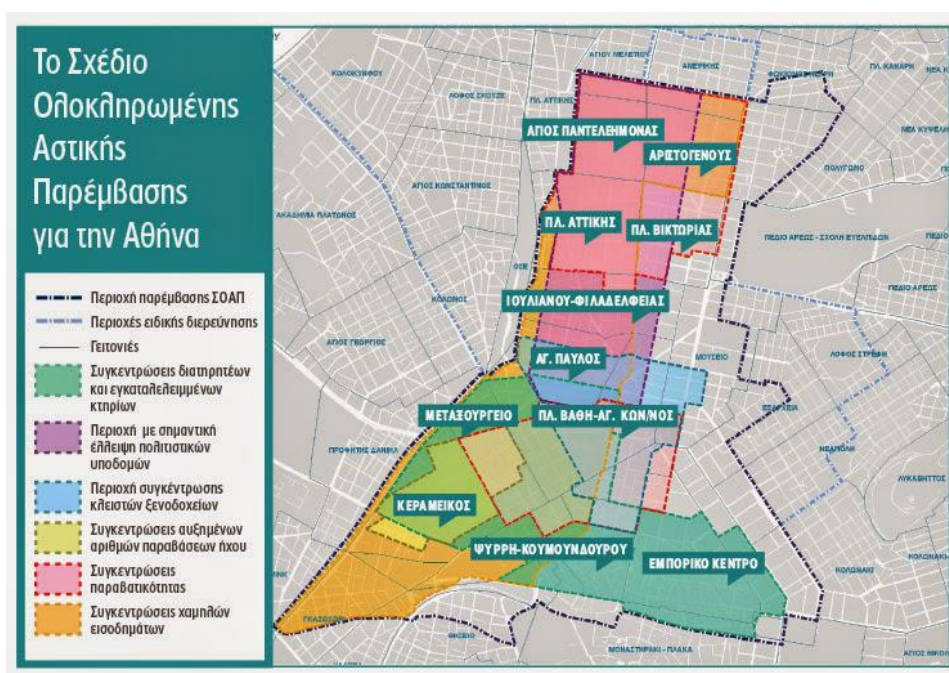
Source: SOAP Plan (2014)

This map, included in SOAP analysis plan and indicates the spots of abandoned buildings (purple signs) and occupied abandoned buildings (blue squares). The map includes areas of the municipality of Athens, with specific focus on the inner-city areas, where, as observed the highest concentrations are found.

In addition, there is also another map provided through SOAP plan, in the case study area for intervention, traces (among others) areas of spatial concentration of abandoned (and listed) buildings (the green areas in the map). Those areas include the commercial triangle, Keramikos, Metaxourghio, and greater Omonoia area.



Figure 5.1.7 : Abandoned Buildings in SOAP Area (2)



Source: SOAP Plan (2014)

Table 5.1.3: Abandoned Dwellings

	TYPE		%
<b>MUNICIPAL ENTITY OF ATHENS</b>		<b>383</b>	<b>100</b>
	DETACHED HOUSE (ground floor)	212	55,4
	DETACHED HOUSE (1st floor)	142	37,1
	DETACHED HOUSE (2 <sup>nd</sup> floor)	26	6,8
	DETACHED HOUSE (3rd floor)	2	0,5
<b>SOAP INTERVENTION AREA</b>		<b>168</b>	<b>43,9</b>
	DETACHED HOUSE (ground floor)	83	49,4

	DETACHED HOUSE (1st floor)	65	38,7
	DETACHED HOUSE (2 <sup>nd</sup> floor)	18	10,7
	DETACHED HOUSE (3 <sup>rd</sup> floor)	1	0,6

**Source: SOAP (2014) [Original Data from Municipality Of Athens (2011)], processed by author**

In addition, in the Municipal Entity of Athens there are 383 registered abandoned dwellings. 55,4% of them is ground floor, 37,1% 1-floor, and fewer 2<sup>nd</sup> (6,8%) and 3<sup>rd</sup> floor (0,5%). Many of those dwellings are found in the western municipal areas whereas SOAP intervention area includes the majority (43,9%). In the limits of SOAP, abandoned dwellings are concentrated in the areas of Kerameikos, Metaxourghio, Psirri, Koumoundourou and Vathi Square (SOAP, 2014).

SOAP plan also mentions the occupied abandoned buildings in the municipality of Athens which are shown in the map (blue squares) and in detail in the table below. Occupancy ('katalipsi') in this sense mostly refers to squatting, with the tolerance of authorities and/or building owner. The occupiers can be members of political organisations, immigrants, homeless, etc. As it can be observed, many of those buildings are found in Exarcheia area. The occupation of those buildings indicates the need for availability of land and insufficiency of social policies such as shelter, immigration, etc.

*Table: Buildings Under Occupation in the Municipality of Athens*

AREA	PROPERTY
MUNICIPALITY OF ATHENS SUM	16
Ambelokipi	Refugee Blocks (Prosfigika)
Petralona	Property of Athens' General Hospital
Neos Kosmos	Panteion University Student Residence
Kipseli	University of Athens/ Ministry of Education
Patissia	Private Property
Patissia	Property of Organisation of School Buildings

Exarcheia	Property of Navy Retirement Institution (NAT)
Psirri	Unknown Owner
Inner Center	Property of Organisation of School Buildings
Victoria Square	Property of Organisation of School Buildings
Aghios Pavlos	Unknown Owner
Exarcheia	Property of Navy Retirement Institution (NAT)
Exarcheia	Dromokaitio Institution Property
Exarcheia	Property of Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers (ΕΣΗΕΕΑ)
Inner Center	Athens Economic University (ΑΣΣΟΕΕ) Space
Exarcheia	VOX (ΒΟΞ) Social Center, IKA Property
AREA	PROPERTY

Source: Muninicipal Police (2011), SOAP Plan (2014), processed by author

### 5.1.2 RESIDENTIAL VACANCIES

Residential Vacancies in Athens Municipality range from new (or relatively new constructions) to old dwellings. Concerning the central Athens area two issues are mentioned: first, residential use is not the dominant, and second the amount of older dwellings is vastly bigger than new residences. The dwelling stock more 'vulnerable' to vacancy and abandonment is:

- Old houses, (19th and beginning of 20th century), mainly detached and two-storey, located in their majority in the historical centre
- Dwellings from mid-war and early post-war period ('30s- '50s)
- Dwellings from post-war and contemporary period ('60 onwards) (NTUA, 2012).

Despite the fact that residential vacancies are not a new phenomenon in Athens (especially in its residential central areas) the main focus in this chapter is the latest, pre-crisis and post-crisis period. According to Maloutas (2013) and Vatavali and Siatista



(2011)<sup>17</sup>, residential vacancies due to the crisis pressures are mostly expressed in vacant dwellings (many of which are abandoned and unsold dwellings. From the table, we can see that the numbers of vacant residential dwellings have risen from 2001 to 2011, both in the case of Attica Region and Greece. The percentage of vacant assets of Attica as a part of the whole stock in the country remains in the same levels, with a small rise (from 24% in 2001 to 27% in 2011)

Table 5.1.2.1

<b>VACANT DWELLINGS</b>			
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Change 2001-2011</b>
<b>GREECE</b>	1439041	2249813	56%
<b>ATTICA REGION</b>	343043	609058	78%
<b>MUNICIPALITY OF ATHENS</b>	108458	131993	22%
<b>Percentage of Vacant Residences in Attica Region compared to Greece</b>	24%	27%	+3%
<b>MUNICIPALITY OF ATHENS as a percentage of ATTICA REGION</b>	32%	22%	-10%

Source: ELSTAT, processed by author

According to recent census (2011) data from ELSTAT, 1 out of 3 residential dwellings in Greece is vacant (ELSTAT, 2011), a fact which is also the case for the municipality of Athens (see table)<sup>18</sup>. The municipality of Athens has traditionally high levels of vacancy as a part of the whole Attica region. Since 2001, however, this percentage has fallen (from 32% to 22%) even though still staying relatively high. The main reasons for this difference are considered exogenous to the municipality. As it is seen in the table, the numbers of vacant dwellings have risen in both region and municipality, but in the case of municipality

<sup>17</sup> <https://encounterathens.wordpress.com/2011/05/11/stegastikespolitikes/>

<sup>18</sup> This estimation does not include the vast stock of abandoned dwellings, some of those are in condition of decay and dereliction (see the definitions of ELSTAT for dwellings in the chapter of definitions above).

the increase is dramatic (78%). This is attributed mostly to the increased effect of crisis in secondary residences and vacation dwellings, many of which are located in outer region areas (look also table Table 5.1.2.3). So, other areas have contributed more than the municipality of Athens to the vast rise of vacancy in Attica.

This macroscopic perspective still however, does not undermine the rising percentages of vacancy in the municipality of Athens. In the table below, the case of municipality of Athens is approached in detail:

Table 5.1.2.2

MUNICIPALITY OF ATHENS	Sum Of Dwellings	Conventional Dwellings				Non- conventional dwellings <sup>19</sup>
		sum	occupied	Vacant (number)	Vacant /sum	
2001	398531	398132	289674	108458	27%	60
2011	428089	427825	295832	131993	31%	264
Change 2001-2011	+7%	+7%	+2%	+22%	+4%	+340%

Source: ELSTAT, processed by author

Vacant Dwellings number has increased in 22% in the municipality of Athens. However, what is even more interesting is that the percentage of vacant dwellings compared to the sum of conventional dwellings has also increased, from 27% in 2001 to 31% in 2011. The number of dwellings has also increased during the decade 2001-2011 (7%), mostly during the period 2006-2008, whereas the occupied dwellings have only increased in 2%. What is also interesting is the huge increase in the number of non-conventional dwellings, which is almost 4 times bigger. This increase reflects the decline of residential market and 'traditional' residential model, leading to use of non-conventional dwellings, such as offices, garages, etc. Phenomena of offices self-turned to houses (registered officially or not) are encountered massively in the center of Athens, especially around the greater Omonoia area (EMP, 2012; Vatavali and Siatista, 2011; TA NEA, 2009)<sup>20</sup>.

Table 5.1.2.3

MUNICIPALITY OF ATHENS (2011)	Numbers	(%)
Main Dwelling	258883	65%
Secondary Dwelling	4029	1%

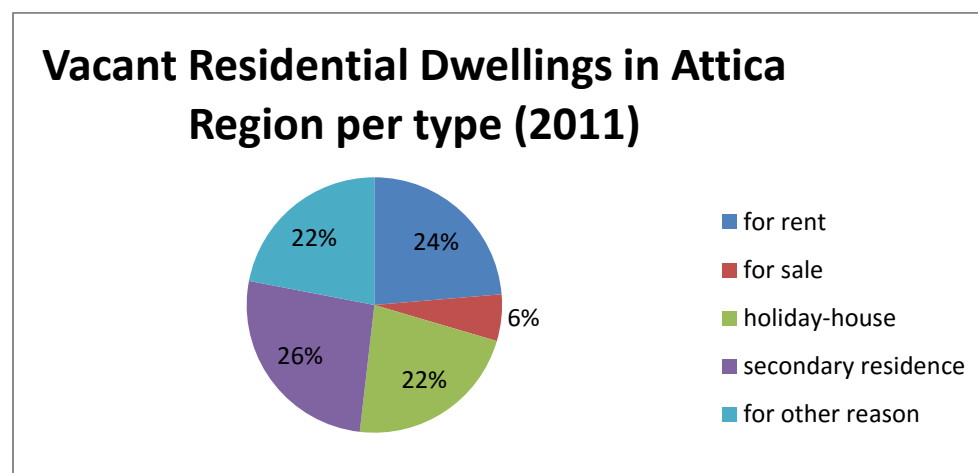
<sup>19</sup> e.g. other building intended or not intended for housing, such as office, garage, hut, etc

<sup>20</sup> For more detail, look in the chapter of Offices.

<b>Sum of Main and Secondary Dwellings</b>	289912	73%
<b>Vacant Dwellings</b>	131993	33%
<b>SUM</b>	398531	100%

**Source: ELSTAT, processed by author**

Figure 5.1.2.1

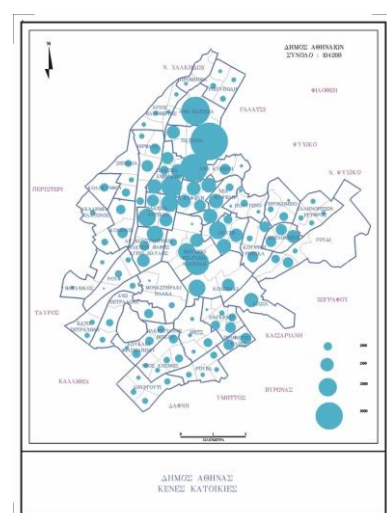


**Source: ELSTAT, processed by author**

The table indicates the types of vacant residential dwellings in Attica Region for 2011. The largest percentages include rental, secondary dwellings and vacant for other reasons. In the center of Athens secondary dwellings are not a big percentage, as shown in the table above.

Housing vacancies in the center of Athens is not only a crisis phenomenon, but reflects chronic problematic issues. According to ELSTAT data of 1991 there were already increased housing vacancies in areas that deal with the same issues today. The map below indicates spatial concentrations of vacant dwellings in Athens in 1991. Similar patterns to the current situation are observed.

Figure 5.1.2.2



**Source: University of Thessaly, data from ELSTAT (1991)**

Maloutas (2013) refers to phenomena of decay in the center of Athens and its housing stock starting since the mid '70s, in part as a result of construction policies. The first phenomena of vacant properties started to become evident since that period, but they were 'occupied' during the '90s from immigrants that have arrived in flows in the Athens center. The lack of housing and immigration policy on behalf of governmental authorities has led to massive rehabilitation of those spaces by various immigrant populations, and in many cases also to decay of many neighborhoods. **(MORE)**

Vacancy and Abandonment are strongly linked to the conditions of residential markets, referring to prices levels, mortgages, construction activity<sup>21</sup>. Private investment in housing across Greece was 9.8% of GDP in 2007, however it fell to 2.2% in 2013 and 1.3% in 2014. Real estate reports consider that a main reason that the market hasn't picked up in sales/acquisitions yet is the lack of financing.

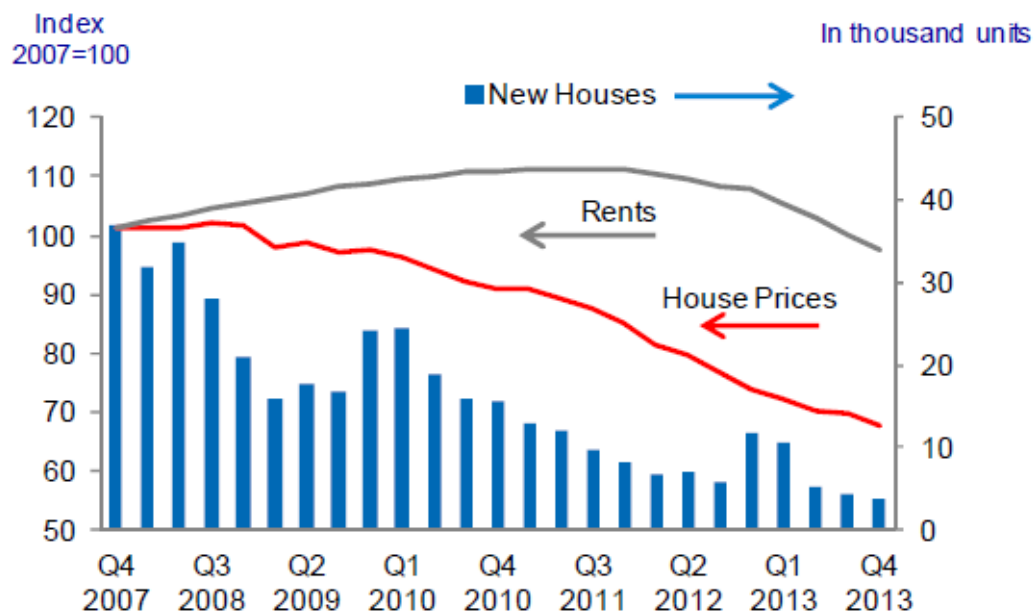
<http://greece.greekreporter.com/2015/05/12/250-000-unsold-properties-in-greeces-crisis-hit-real-estate-market/#sthash.XF6cpbvL.dpuf>

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<sup>21</sup> It is emphasized that the data concerning the residential market in Athens that are shown in this section concern the whole urban agglomeration, and not only the center. Moreover, real-estate and market reports often do not pay attention to the residential potential of central areas, as they are not considered prime locations, and focus on more attractive (or potentially attractive, given the crisis barrier) locations. For example, Naftemporiki.gr, using data from Eurobank, shows the route of residential real-estate in southern and northern Athenian suburb areas and also newly built residences in western areas. <http://www.naftemporiki.gr/documents/916340/i-poreia-tis-agoras-akiniton>

Figure 5.1.2.3 Diachronic Change in Residential Transactions in Greece (2002-2007)

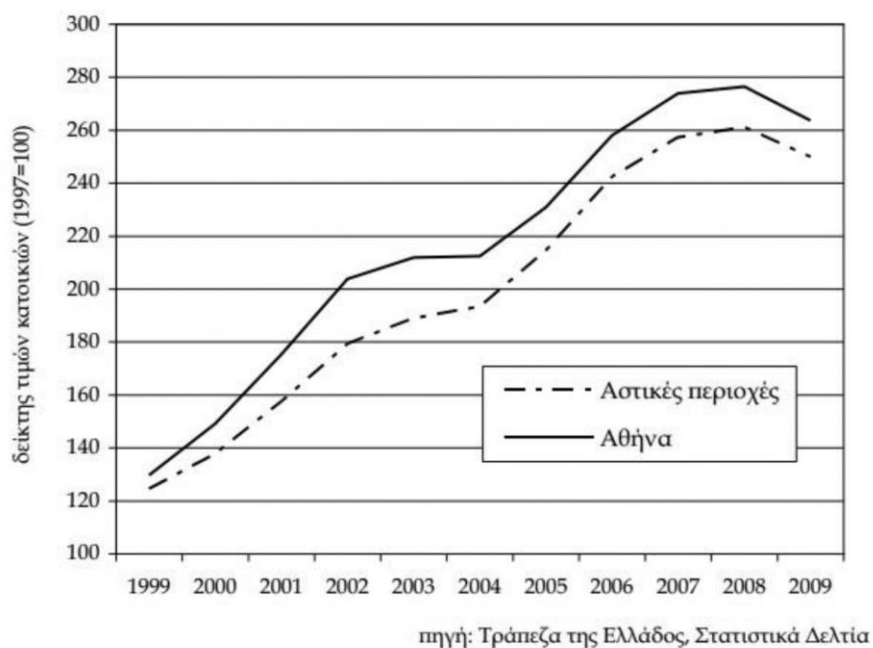
### New Houses, Prices, Rents



Source: Danos, 2014

According to data from the Bank of Greece (2013) during the crisis (2008-) residential property prices have decreased up to 29.8% in Greece. In Athens the prices have decreased as well, estimated to -30.6%. It is highlighted that Athens and Thessaloniki (-36%) are among the cities with highest percentages of decrease of housing prices among the Greek cities.

*Rate of annual rate Change of house price*



Source: Kandila and Triantafillopoulos 2009

Kandila and Triantafillopoulos (2009) based on data from the Bank of Greece, show the chronological route of residential prices, through a yearly housing price indicator ( ) in Athens and urban areas in general. Athens average prices are steadily higher from Greek urban areas. It is observed during the decade from 1999 to 2009 (pre crisis period and start of crisis) the prices have increased dramatically. Worth-mentioning is the post-Olympic Games period when construction market activities have boomed, until the beginning of crisis.

### *5.1.3 RETAIL-COMMERCIAL VACANCIES*

Retail and Commercial Sectors are considered the most hardly-hit sectors by the economical crisis, due to the low levels of commercial activity (the average reduction in 2013 retail sales has been lower than 35% since 2008), from one side, and highly-speculative tension in the real-estate commercial market from another side. The domestic buying power is continuously declining, as a result of endless austerity measures and the more and more higher unemployment rates. The growing disposable income until 2008 has led to an increase in retail spending which consequently pushed retail rental values significantly higher (especially in prime locations such as Ermou street in Athens center, Kifissia and Glyfada). Post 2008, a reduction in disposable income, credit availability and unemployment reduced consumer activity is observed.

Concerning the Retail market for 2014, real estate reports state that Consumer activity has remained in the same low levels, as well as with demand and supply mainly, and there are high vacancy rates though some evidence of stabilization is shown. However, this is the case for prime locations. The secondary submarkets are still characterized by increased vacancy rates. Towards the direction of reviving the retail market through the utilization of a significant number of vacant retail property, the Greek government decided, in the first quarter of 2014, the partial deregulation of retail rental. Real-estate markets are optimistic with this change both concerning primary and secondary markets, as yields are reported stable and range between 7.25-8.0% in prime markets, while for secondary markets the yields exceed 8.5%. (Eurobank, 2014)

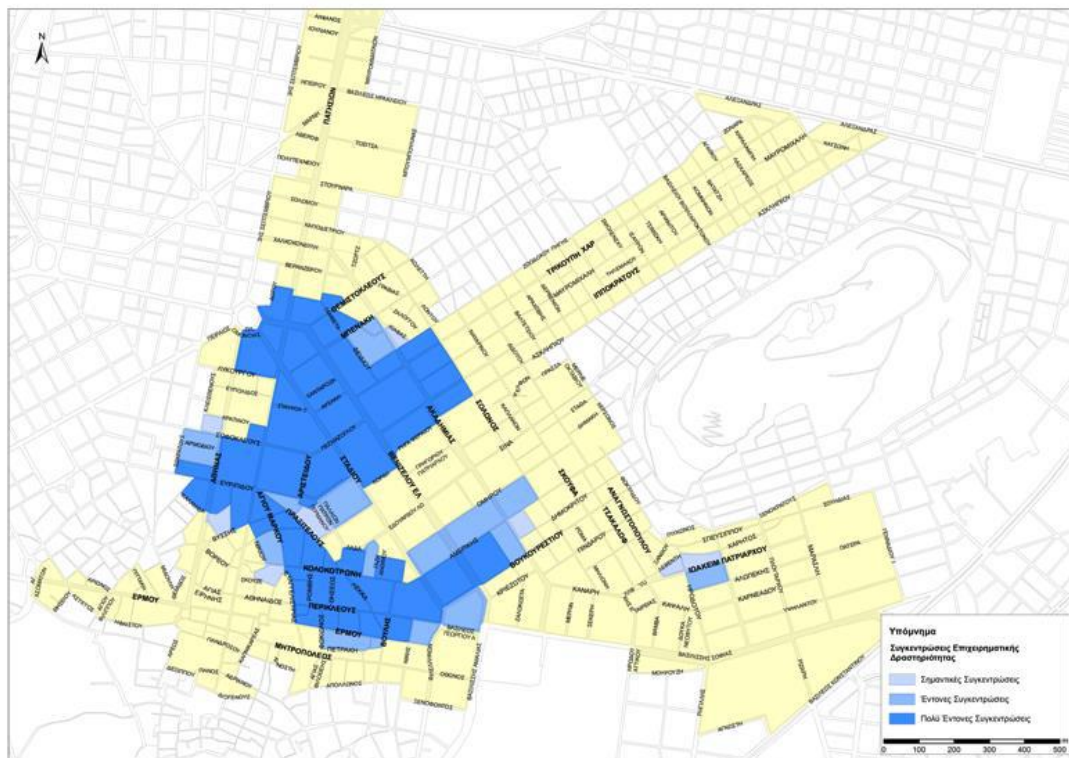
However, there are differences between sub-sectors and different areas. Vacancy rates are 5-10% in prime locations (Kifissia area, Glyfada area, Ermou street in the center), but reach 30% in secondary ones (the Athens center, besides the central commercial arteries is in this category). Malls have sustained the recession more effectively than the high

street uses. According to data of NAI Hellas (2013), vacancy rates in Athens' malls<sup>22</sup> are up to 6% and 2% in big boxes. However, many properties inside the malls stay vacant. Real-estate reports mention several encouraging facts for the market, including new leases and new brands relocated in existing malls (Agapitidou, 2015).

The commercial space in the Athens center is characterized by fragmented properties and urban policies that prevent the siting of malls and chain-shops in a big part of its historical part. So, small owners have been a core part of the commercial market of the center, especially in the recent period of tensions towards bigger retail markets and malls, sited mostly outside of the center (Souliotis, 2013; Delladetsimas and Loukakis, 2013)

The figure below indicates the concentration of commerce in the area defined by the study of the Greek Confederation of Commerce and Business (INEMY-ESEE) as the central Athens main market area (also including Patisson Street, which is not shown in this map). The greater area includes the commercial triangle, the central commercial streets (Stadiou, Panepistimiou and Akadimias), Kolonaki area and Exarchia-Neapoli area.

Figure 5.1.3.1: Spatial Concentrations of Commercial Activities in the center of Athens



Source: INEMY-ESEE (2015)

Concerning the inner city areas, the Greek Confederation of Commerce and Business (INEMY-ESEE) has conducted various studies since the burst of crisis, on closed

<sup>22</sup> The malls referred to by the survey are not located in the inner city

commercial businesses. It should be emphasized here that closed shops are not necessarily vacant. The data of this survey are used in the current paper to show the pattern and decline of commercial sector. The development prospects that real-estate reports mentioned above do not often include, as stated the high-street locations, many of those are in the inner-city areas. It is also mentioned that many of the shops in central areas, are small and fragmented private properties, which, if not rented or sold, often do not have prospect of being re-operated soon, thus having strong potential of turning vacant. Besides, many newspaper articles<sup>23</sup> (or, simply, a walk around the commercial center) indicate small shops that are closed and have not managed to re-operate for many years, often since the beginning of crisis in 2008.

The commercial businesses in the center are mostly occupied with commercial activities, from clothing shops to cafeterias and restaurants.

According to data from INEMY-ESEE (2015) the ratio of closed commercial spaces in the Athens market is constantly rising since the beginning of crisis in 2008. In the figure below, the route of the ratio is shown from September 2010 (16,3%) until March 2015. It is indicated that the percentage has slightly started to drop, after peaking in September 2013 (32,3%). However, on March 2015 there is again a slight rise from September 2014 (27,0%, 5%).

Figure 5.1.3.2: Percentages of closed commercial businesses in the center of Athens (September 2010-March 2015)



Source: INEMY-ESEE (2015)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=195063>, <http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=535798>, <http://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/o-thanatos-toy-emporakoy-katarreysi-tis-mesaias-taksis>



In the maps below INEMY-ESEE (2015) has mapped the closed shops in the case study areas:

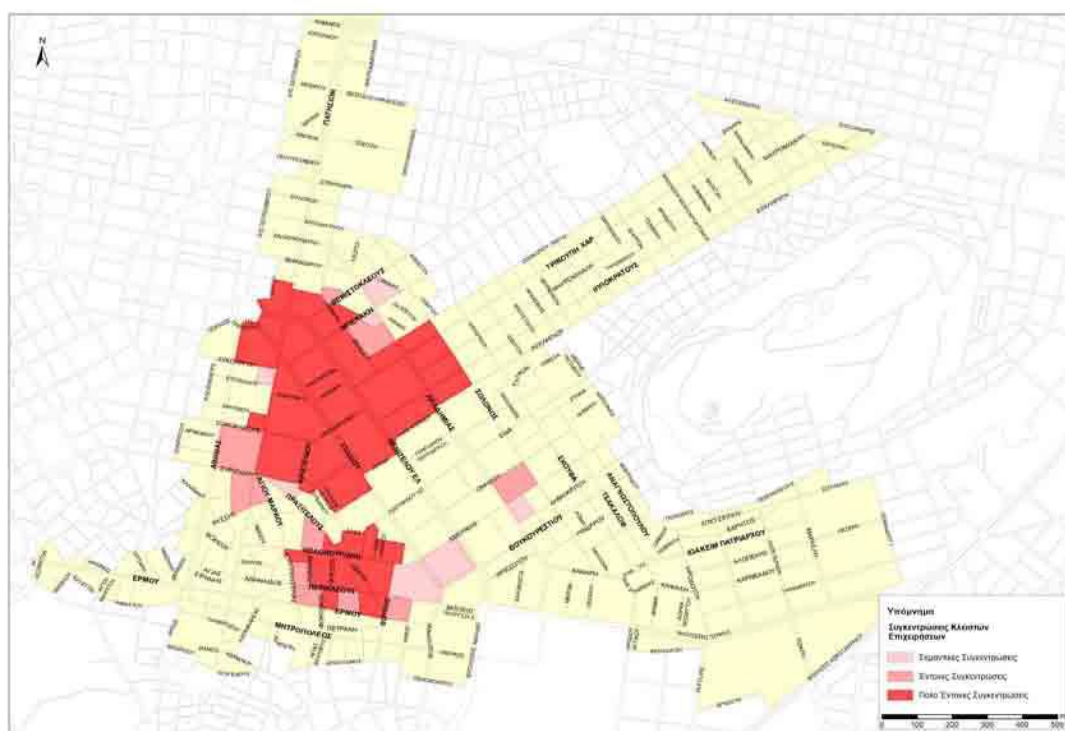
Figure 5.1.3.3: Closed commercial businesses in the center of Athens (March 2015)



Source: INEMY-ESEE (2015)

The map indicates the range of the closed commercial shops in Athens in March 2015. The shops refer to all kinds of commercial activity. It is observed that closed shops can be found everywhere in the central agglomeration. However, there are several spatial concentrations that can be observed in the figure below.

Figure 5.1.3.4: Spatial Concentrations of Closed commercial businesses in the center of Athens (March 2015)



Source: INEMY-ESEE (2015)

The phenomena in numbers are also projected in the table below:

**Table 5.1.3.1: Closed Commercial Businesses per Commercial Zone in Central Athens (March 2015)**

<b>Commercial Zone</b>	Operating Commercial Businesses	Closed Commercial Businesses	Sum	Percentage of Closed Commercial Businesses (%)
<b>Commercial Triangle</b>	1164	537	2201	24,4
<b>Exarchia</b>	526	275	801	34,3
<b>Central Commercial Arteries</b>	938	508	1446	35,1
<b>Kolonaki</b>	855	302	1157	26,1
<b>Patisson Street</b>	677	144	821	17,5

<b>Rest of the Center</b>	74	29	103	28,2
<b>SUM</b>	4734	1795	6529	27,5

Source: INEMY-ESEE (2015), processed by author

According to INEMY-ESEE (2015) the phenomena of commercial vacancy are dependent on spatial patterns, as also the commercial activity itself. Spatial Concentration of closed shops is shown in the table and map below. As a whole, out of 6529 commercial businesses registered in the study area, 1795 are closed, in a percentage of 27,5%. The highest concentrations are spotted in the commercial triangle between Stadiou, Mitropoleos and Athinas streets (24,4%), in central commercial routes (Stadiou, Panepistimiou and Akadimias Streets) (35,1%) and Exarchia area (34,3%). There is also a high percentage of closed shops in Kolonaki area (26,1%), considered one of the prime locations traditionally in central Athens for commercial activities.

In addition, a characteristic of the commercial Athenian Center are the commercial galleries/alleys ('Stoes'). According to the study of INEMY-ESEE (2015), many of those galleries also show increased percentage of closed/vacant commercial businesses.



'Commercial Gallery' ('Stoa Emporon'), located near Syntagma square is one of the many example of vacant galleries in the Athenian center. This gallery is vacant for more than 20 years. Recently, the municipality of Athens has launched a pilot plan to revive the vacant shops, by giving them to artist groups, in order to collect ideas on how to revive back the commercial center. The initiative is called "traces of commerce" and though pilot and local scale, it is considered successful, and that it can give potential.

<http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=430380>



Source: Traces Of Commerce



### 5.1.4 OFFICE VACANCIES

The Office Market in Athens since 2008 has witnessed an average fall in capital and rental values of between 40% and 50% respectively. Occupiers' priority has shifted to downsizing in space and achieving more affordable rents. According to Bank of Greece (2015), during the last 6 years there is low demand on office spaces, businesses are seeking low-cost solutions whereas new entrepreneurial plans are relatively frozen. Moreover, numbers of vacant office properties have risen.

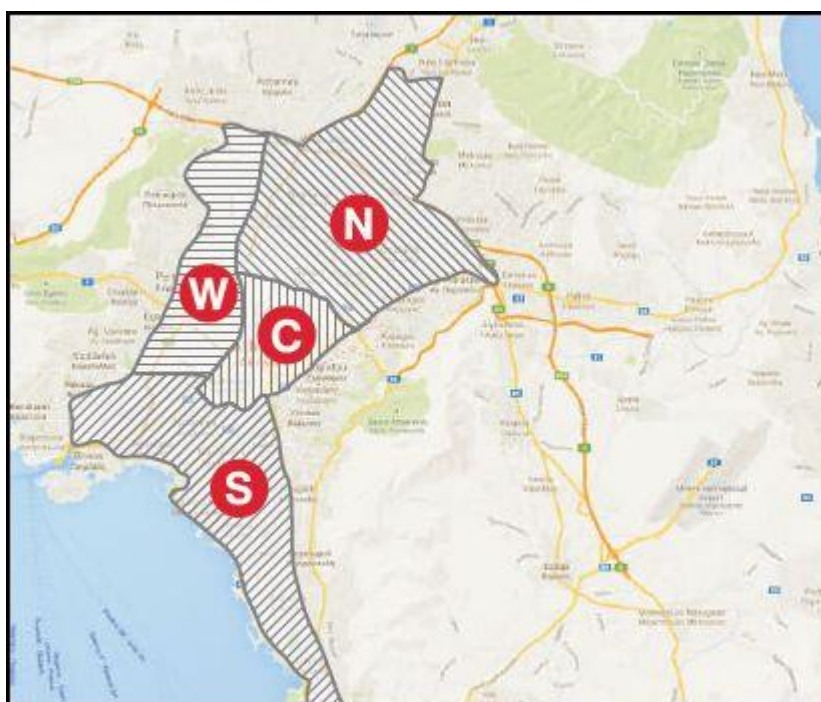
The office market in Athens concentrates in the areas shown in the following table. In the Athens Center the main areas are considered: the City Center, Alexandras Avenue, Patission Avenue, Piraeus Avenue, Vassilissis Sofias Avenue, Ambelokipi area.

Table 5.1.4.1 : Office Market Locations in Athens

Athens Office Market			
Athens Centre (C)	Athens West (W)	Athens North (N)	Athens South (S)
City Centre	National Rd	Kifissias Av.	Sygrov Av.
Alexandras Av.	Petrou Rali	Mesogeion Av.	Faliron
Patission Av.	Iera Odos	National Rd	Vouliagmenis Av.
Piraeus Av.	Thivon Av.	Attiki Odos	Poseidonos Av.
Vas. Sofias Av.	Athinon Av.		Piraeus
Ampelokipi			

Source: NAI Hellas, 2013

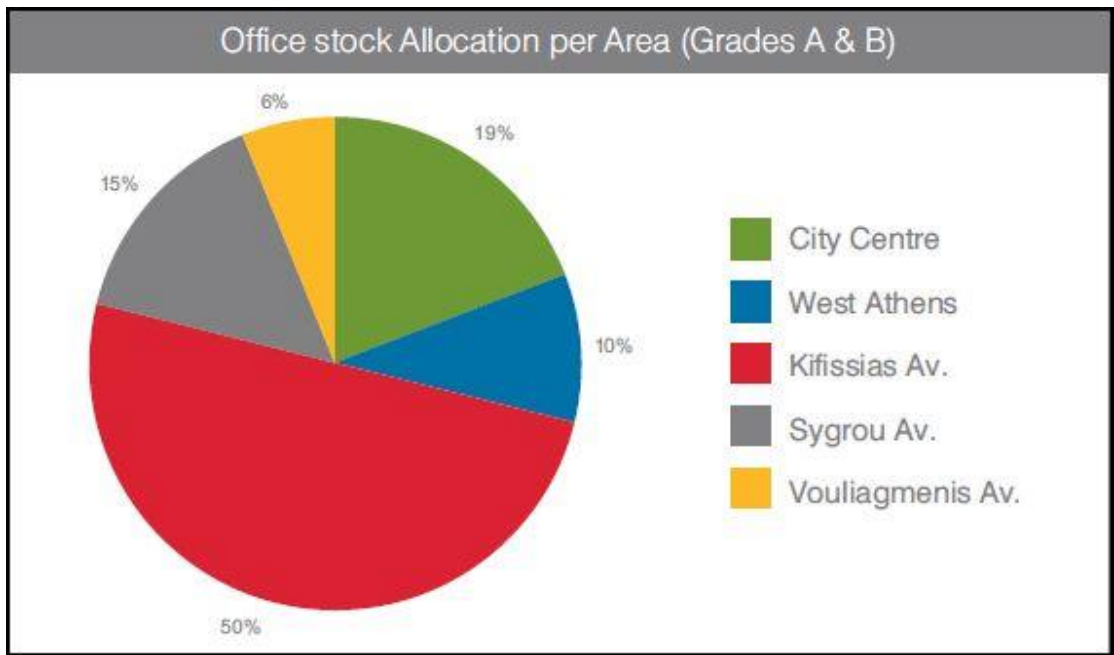
Figure 5.1.4.1 Office Market Locations in Athens



Source: NAI Hellas, 2013

The most ‘popular’ area for current office demand is Kifissias Avenue in the northern Athens with 50% of the overall office stock allocation (60% of overall office rents for 2014 according to Savills Hellas). The center of Athens, with 19% of the overall stock allocation is the second most popular. It should be though, that these data refer only to class A and B category offices.

Figure 5.1.4.2: Office (Classes A and B) Stock Allocation in Athens (percentages)



Source: NAI Hellas, 2013

It is highlighted that demand concerns the newest and better quality office buildings (Class A and B). Demand is mainly expressed on behalf of large companies that aim to relocate in new buildings with prices lower at minimum 25% compared to their current locations. The demand for old(er) buildings is low or even non-existent in less desired areas. Foreign investors, a main target for the Athens market according to local real-estate companies, are said to be difficult to attract, due to low construction rates of Class A offices (up to 5000 sq. meters). Existing demand is concentrated mainly on newly constructed office buildings totaling up to 1,500-2,000sq.m each with areas of 400-500sq.m/floor. The majority of future and existing tenants seeks relocation in less costly alternatives and quite a few are interested in newly constructed upgraded spaces maintaining the same cost (Eurobank, 2014).

Table 5.1.4.2

	Grade A			Grade B		
	Prime Rent	Prime Yield	Vacancy Rate	Rent	Yield	Vacancy Rate
Athens CBD	20.00 €	8.25%	3%	12.00 €	9.50%	16%
Athens West	12.00 €	11.00%	n/a	7.00 €	11.00%	n/a
Kifissias Av.						
Mesogeion Av.						
National Rd	15.00 €	8.25%	3%	10.00 €	9.50%	3%
Syngrou Av.						
Faliron						
Surroundings	14.00 €	8.50%	2%	10.00 €	9.50%	5%
Vouliagmenis Av.						
South Athens	12.00 €	9.00%	0%	9.00 €	10.00%	6%

Source: NAI Hellas

Source: NAI Hellas, 2013

A Chronological route of vacancy (in A and B Class Offices) can be seen in the Figure. There are increased vacancies in the pre-Olympic Games period, that start to decrease until their fall to 7% in 2007. Since 2008 and the burst of a economic crisis there is again a rapid increase of vacancies, that continues until today. 2014 was the sixth consequent year of decline for the office market. The main characteristics of this decline are the low demand and the rising supply of office buildings. This oversupply is not attributed to the construction of new office properties, but the shrinking of the business activity; the result is the multiply of vacant office assets. Yet, in areas with high spatial concentration of offices the numbers of the vacant ones, in this period are even bigger. In the center of Athens, the vacancy rates for classes A and B were respectively 3% and 16% (2013), whereas the vacancy rates for grade C and D units range between 20% to 30%, indicating that any signs of demand is polarized to good quality buildings, which are the predominant compared to lower quality ones (Agapitidou, 2015; Danos, 2015).

Figure 5.1.4.3 Office Vacancy in Athens- Classes A & B (2002-2014)



Source: Agapitidou, 2015 (from Athens Economics Ltd - Jones Lang LaSalle, March 2015)

Comparing to the European context, it is worth-mentioning that office vacancy in Athens is (one of) the highest. According to international real estate advisor Savills the average vacancy rate for the European office market was 9.37% in the first quarter of 2015, which is the lowest level recorded since 2009. In the first quarter of 2012 according to data from BNP Paribas Real Estate, Athens had the biggest percentage of office vacancy rates in Europe, up to 20%, compared to 15,5% in the same period in 2011. Indicatively, some data of other European Capitals with stronger office markets are also given (picture). In the same, vacancy in Amsterdam (the higher average for 2012 in Europe) has reached 18%.

According to Savills, for 2015 lowest versus highest vacancy rates continue previous trends with the lowest vacancy rates being recorded in London West End, Berlin and Stockholm at 3.8%, 4.3% and 5.75% respectively. The highest vacancy levels were recorded in Athens, Amsterdam and Warsaw at 18.5%, 16.1% and 13.4% respectively (Table). (<http://europe-re.com/european-office-market-vacancy-rates-drops-lowest-level-seven-years/50097#sthash.xO6z2o49.dpuf> )



Figure 5.1.4.3 Office Vacancy Rates in European cities (2013-2014)

	Take-up (m <sup>2</sup> )		Vacancy Rate (%)	Prime rent (€/m <sup>2</sup> /year)	Investment volume (€million)		Net prime yield (%)
	2014	2013	Q4 2014	Q4 2014	2014	2013	2014
Amsterdam	229,900	236,200	17.3%	365	1,462	1,007	5.45%
Athens	n.a	n.a	13.0%	216	n.a	n.a	8.75%
Barcelona	233,700	172,900	15.4%	222	993	375	5.50%
Belgrade	53,900	25,800	9.0%	198	n.a	n.a	9.00%
Berlin	609,000	453,000	4.7%	276	1,720	1,621	4.45%
Birmingham	66,300	61,700	11.1%	409	614	361	5.25%
Bratislava	155,000	80,000	13.8%	186	65	75	7.15%
Brussels	437,800	314,600	10.3%	265	1,539	978	5.00%
Bucharest	233,800	173,900	12.6%	216	153	221	8.00%
Budapest	251,600	190,600	16.2%	192	200	190	7.75%
Central London	1,490,900	1,199,300	5.1%	1,603	25,286	26,077	3.50%
Central Paris	1,807,800	1,597,400	8.3%	750	13,119	9,540	4.00%
Cologne	241,000	276,000	6.6%	252	720	453	4.80%
Dublin	246,900	195,700	13.2%	484	1,062	764	4.75%
Düsseldorf	325,000	415,000	10.6%	312	1,296	1,236	4.70%
Edinburgh	80,100	68,200	12.2%	387	309	239	5.25%
Frankfurt	411,000	493,000	11.4%	456	3,692	2,557	4.50%
Geneva <sup>(1)</sup>	-40,800	-21,000	1.6%	689	203	394	3.30%
Glasgow	85,500	77,200	10.3%	389	214	158	5.25%
Hamburg	513,000	440,000	6.3%	300	2,239	1,454	4.40%
Helsinki <sup>(1)(2)</sup>	23,600	9,500	13.0%	355	894	923	4.70%
Istanbul <sup>(1)</sup>	469,600	323,800	16.7%	384	477	260	6.75%
Lille	165,800	171,400	n.a	220	177	142	5.60%
Lisbon	126,500	77,800	12.1%	228	211	227	6.25%
Luxembourg	214,300	150,000	3.2%	480	808	490	4.60%
Lyon	242,600	251,700	6.2%	280	573	655	5.30%
Madrid	370,100	365,200	16.0%	318	1,211	299	5.00%
Manchester	189,100	160,600	15.6%	436	1,112	518	5.25%
Marseille	126,400	106,700	n.a	265	313	17	6.10%
Milan	275,300	231,500	13.3%	480	904	795	5.40%
Moscow	506,900	523,300	17.0%	550	1,250	3,377	10.50%
Munich	597,000	603,000	6.2%	414	2,999	2,899	4.25%
Oslo <sup>(2)</sup>	100,000	110,000	8.1%	582	4,701	2,856	4.75%
Prague <sup>(2)</sup>	189,100	151,000	15.4%	234	600	610	6.00%
Riga <sup>(1)</sup>	39,300	12,300	8.5%	168	41	30	7.25%
Rome	110,800	159,900	8.5%	400	268	562	5.80%
Saint Petersburg	189,100	153,900	12.0%	400	65	140	11.00%
Stockholm <sup>(1)</sup>	175,000	17,900	9.0%	502	5,696	2,586	4.45%
Tallinn <sup>(1)</sup>	17,700	35,300	5.5%	210	39	18	7.00%
Toulouse	139,900	109,800	5.1%	206	194	73	6.00%
Vienna	250,000	300,000	6.6%	309	1,495	435	4.70%
Vilnius <sup>(1)</sup>	34,300	30,400	2.3%	180	128	92	7.00%
Warsaw	400,000	451,000	13.7%	276	1,129	451	6.15%
Zurich <sup>(1)</sup>	32,000	32,000	2.8%	805	n.a	n.a	2.90%

(1) Net Absorption, (2) Investment data for the country

Source: Danos (2015)

Recent real-estate (e.g. Danos, 2015; Eurobank, 2013; NAI Hellas, 2013) reports talk about signs of improvement in the market, because of the recent slower rhythms of decline and prices' relative stabilization. 'After 5 years of decline, rents in the Central Business District and in most traditional office location in Athens started to improve in 2014. The market witnessed several relocations of large companies to bigger and better space. Tenants with bargaining power have been able to take advantage of grade A quality accommodation at lower rents. Polarization is evident in the market as the stock of ageing buildings continues to rise' (Danos, 2015).

Of course, it should be noted that real-estate reports and data are focused in the potential of assets available based on the market perspective. Besides the fact that the sector shows some recovery according to indications of such reports, it concerns categories A & B office assets (the most attractive for demand) and it is not the case for the lower-quality (C& D) category offices in the center of Athens. Still, the prices in the center are high, and the main tensions are towards renting cheaper and less extended spaces (in outer center areas).

In the center of Athens, there are the higher prices but also, controversially the highest vacancies compared to other areas. It is a fact that Athens office market is characterized by large supply of grade C and D offices, and a lower supply of A and B classes (NAI Hellas, 2013). In the center of Athens there is high spatial concentration of C and D class office assets. Older office property stock in the inner Athens, either whole office buildings or fragmented office properties, is experiencing decline and increased vacancies. In specific, there is an increased supply of small office spaces (approximately up to 30 square meters) in blocks aging more than 30 years (Special Permanent Committee on Environmental Protection, 2010). Old office buildings in the center of Athens (mainly in the greater Omonoia area, for example in Evripidou, Menandrou, Sokratous, Geraniou, Iktinou streets) are completely devalued. In 2009, such assets were rented approximately 5 euro/sq.meter and sold in 1000-1200 euro/sq.meter (TA NEA, 2009), prices that are estimated even lower now. The pressure for decline of office market in these areas derive not only from the general market conditions, but also from increased criminality phenomena, leading to major drops of prices (20-25% in 2009, estimated to have increased more since) and increased vacancies.

Following also the increased numbers of immigrant populations in the center, it is also noted that vacant office spaces in the greater area of Omonoia are rented to groups of immigrants (charged per person, and often over 100 euros per person) and are self-converted to unofficial residences. Press talks about 'ghettos' of the Athens center (e.g. TA NEA, 2009), and immigration is considered one of the main 'barriers' for development on behalf of real-estate speculators. Conditions of living in terms of health and hygiene are considered really low, not only for the tenant immigrant groups but also for neighboring buildings (TA NEA, 2009). The municipality authorities consider mixed uses (horizontally and vertically) and return of residential uses in the center as a prospect for the area (SOAP, 2014). However, until now no land use change has taken place, despite the fact that such phenomena are broadly acknowledged.

Due to lack of demand, many phenomena of speculation have emerged. The dropping prices in declined areas (such as Theater square) have attracted the interest of developers and constructors, that are looking for opportunities pending on the really low prices, based on possible future prospects of those areas. Abandoned former industrial buildings in Metaxourghio, Keramikos and Gkazi areas are sold in average prices of average 1500 euro/sq.meter for the old ones and 2500euro/sq. meter for new ones, and are redeveloped into lofts with prices over 4000 euro/sq.meter. Of course, this situation is now also 'frozen', due to crisis pressure to housing markets and lack of demand.

#### *Public Property Vacant Buildings and Insurance Associations' Vacant Buildings*

Apart from the general tensions of the office market described above, this situation has also been influenced by the withdrawal of public and semi-public authorities from buildings in the center, resulting to many of them to be left vacant since (EMP, 2012:262). Examples include the Ministry of Education, The IKA Building (Peiraios street), the Central Offices of National Security Company, the Athens Stock Exchange, etc.

In addition, the large stock of property owned by insurance associations in Greece have to be mentioned, many of which are located in the center of Athens and are shown in the table and map (). The vast majority of those buildings (almost 60%) belongs to IKA.

Table 5.1.4.3: Vacant Properties of Insurance Organisations in Greece per Organisation

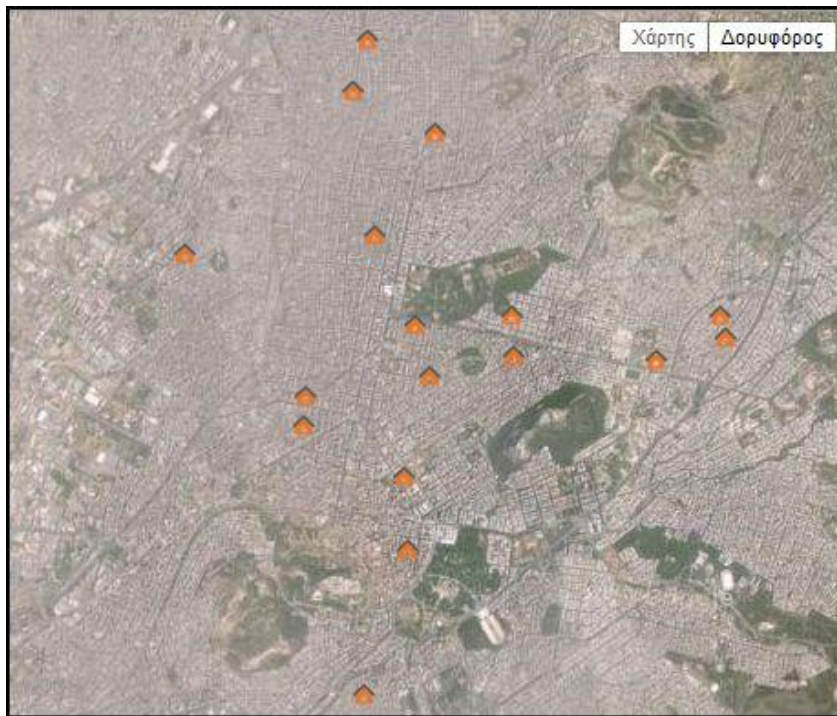
Organisation	Vacant Properties (Sum)	Area (sq.meters)	Objective Value (euro)
IKA	68	425.766	91.395.607,62
ΟΑΕΕ	2	4.801	17.190.891,16
ΕΤΑΑ	4	3.438	1.869.950,53
ΤΑΠΙΤ	2	7.628	1.971.409,19
ΕΤΑΠ-ΜΜΕ	7	14.571	7.112.800,44
ΜΤΠΥ	4	9.153	17.359.489,43
ΕΤΕΑ	3	12.591	6.739.290,79
NAT	3	5.374	11.669.180,00
SUM	92	483.322	155.308.619,2

Source: ESTIA (available in:

[http://www.idika.org.gr/estia/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=119:7-kena-idioktita-akinita-ana-forea-pros-ekmetalefsi&catid=87:statistika&Itemid=528](http://www.idika.org.gr/estia/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=119:7-kena-idioktita-akinita-ana-forea-pros-ekmetalefsi&catid=87:statistika&Itemid=528))

According to Electronic Governance of Social Security Website (idika.org.gr) 20 of those assets which are vacant are located in the municipality of Athens, ranging from whole buildings to apartments and lots. Their locations can be seen in the map:

Figure 5.1.4.4. Vacant Properties of Insurance Organisations in the Municipality Of Athens- Locations



Source:

[http://www.idika.org.gr/estia/index.php?option=com\\_fwrealestate&view=search&Itemid=483](http://www.idika.org.gr/estia/index.php?option=com_fwrealestate&view=search&Itemid=483)

## 5.2. CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

As described in the previous chapters, vacancy and abandonment in Athens have been recognized as an all embracing, rather than limited area based, phenomenon. Current crisis, as argued, is not considered the main reason for vacancy and abandonment, though often quite ‘easily’ characterized as such. It is considered more an extra layer, added to more or less chronic problematic situations, that forced them to show and magnify. Following the methodology adopted in the theoretical framework, the main causes of the phenomena in Athens central areas are presented below.

### External Factors:

- Changes in the demographic and social composition of inner areas. The post war internal migration phenomena and urbanization in Greece (from rural areas to the capital) has been one basic factor that led to rise of population in greater Athens Area with the habitation of low income population (Kipseli, Patissia, Omonoia areas). A Suburban Sprawl of middle-high income populations to ‘better areas’ followed, leading to gradual abandonment and decline phenomena in central areas. During the mid-1990’s, following shift in Greece’s migration policies, in the same areas that hosted inner migrant natives in the 1960’s-1970’s, there is observed a massive inflow of external migrants (mostly Albanian and Eastern Asian); this fact has led once more to suburban sprawl of native inhabitants.
- De-industrialization of higher or lower nuisance urban uses (smaller or larger factories inside city areas) in the late 1970’s- early 1980’s, leaving behind (large scale) brownfields and decaying neighboring areas (Metaxourghio, Gkazi areas).
- Disaster phenomena and adverse effects of the disaster recovery policy
- that had major effect in new buildings but also in chronically abandoned dwellings and their neighboring environments; resulting to increased dereliction. Examples are the 1981 and 1999 earthquakes.
- Socio political conflicts and rioting with urban imprint, and unsuccessful management of their negative externalities on building capital: e.g. arsons and destroyed buildings in riots that were not repaired (e.g. Attikon Cinema in Stadiou street in 2008, a building of great history and cultural value that still stands undevelopped)
- Environmental degradation of the urban environment, due to over concentration of activities and uses, and a lack of corresponding urban planning, factors that have turned areas of the center as non-ideal places to habitate. Some examples are traffic pollution, lack of green areas, increased densities.

- Real Estate Crisis, a phenomenon of latest period, which is expressed in ‘freezing’ of construction activity and scarce demand in rented and property sale sectors. Of course, this crisis has not happened ‘in the void’ or overnight; it reflects pre-crisis situations. extremely high prices of land and building capital (rents) in central areas, have urged interested parties/individuals to move to other or neighbouring areas, less pricing (mostly for commercial and office uses). Still, besides the crisis effect and increased vacancies, prices in many prime central areas are still relatively high.

Internal Factors, that concern causes characteristics of the assets and potential inability/difficulty of owner/occupier to handle them (the traditionally large owner-occupancy percentages in Greece should be kept in consideration in this case):

- Age and quality of the building assets, that often defines their ‘fate’, especially concerning the listed and post-war building capital.
- Escalating maintenance costs (old buildings, ‘listed’ buildings that impose specific interventions, etc).
- Complicated ownership structure of individual assets (multiple owners, family and inheritance factors). A main example are hereditary issues associated to the ownership of the assets producing bottlenecks for their re-utilization (e.g. lack of flexibility for owners of ‘listed’ buildings)
- Inability of owners to overcome inflexible legislation parameters concerning their properties
- Speculative behaviour on behalf of the land owner directly related to investment renewal and transport projects in adjacent urban areas (affected by negative externalities of various expressions in Athens)
- Physical rigidity of the assets to adjust to new uses (e.g. individual initiatives of owners to turn former hotels and office uses into housing, mostly for migrants)

Policy and Institutional factors:

- Lack of a coherent plan and vision concerning vacancy on behalf of State or Athens municipality which can be perceived both as a starting point as well as final outcome. Fragmented interventions, outside a context of strategic planning have been the most frequent case. This is linked to the fact that property development is almost in its whole extent driven by private sector (individual capitals and/or developpers), rather than spatial planning

- Limited, accordingly, experience on strategy building on vacancies and decay phenomena that could operate in various scales. Any (re)development initiatives were focused not on an integrated approach, but are mostly short-term, 'beautification' attempts, operating inside market competitiveness rather than urban sustainability (Gkazi, Psirri, Metaxourghio areas).
- Insufficiency and limited updating of existing planning tools/mechanisms. It should be highlighted that most of land plans, land use specifications and building rules were implemented in '80s and '90's (with the introduction of the urban planning legislation, the Law 1337/1983), and often remained as such (in paper), despite the fact that in practice the reality can be completely different.
- Overlapping on responsibilities and competences of various administrative actors, complicated further with the intervention of markets in their decisions.
- Institutions and Regulations that resulted to be barriers in (re)development. A 'classic' examples are the institutions for the historical buildings 'listed for preservation'. From the 1970's and on, due to the strict and inflexible character of specific institutionalization/regulation concerning preservation of older buildings, many redevelopment initiatives were 'frozen' (there are examples from the historical center areas)
- A specific mention should be made to the 'preparation' of city of Athens to host the Olympic Games of 2004. Despite the fact that major interventions took place, all in all the Olympics can be considered a lost opportunity for the regeneration of the city and an integrated area approach. Even located outside the center areas discussed in the current dissertation it should be highlighted indicatively that the majority of Olympic Games Stadiums and facilities (the ones that have not been re-adapted to other facilities, such as theater and concert halls) stand abandoned and decayed.

The consequences of the phenomena in the city, transformed into additional causes themselves and triggering a whole new 'domino' cycle of vacancy-abandonment can be summarized in the following points:

- Vacancy and abandonment are spreading from the center to the whole urban agglomeration
- There is a growing operational de-activation of and aesthetic degradation of urban space
- There are considerable environmental negative externalities and quality of life is degraded, not only in the assets themselves, but also affecting their neighboring

areas. For example, dangerous derelict buildings, buildings massively habited by immigrant populations under terrible health conditions, that affect also the blocks-buildings in their surrounding areas.

- Areas where spatial concentration of vacancy is spotted are often accompanied with increased socio-economic issues (criminality, homelessness, trafficking) (e.g. Greater Omonoia area, Akadimia Platonos, Patissia areas) that trigger further urban decay
- Depopulation phenomena in the center are frequent. Due to the crisis, we cannot refer to a suburban sprawl of people and activities, but rather to a permanent (more or less) 'disappearance' of them (such as the example of small commercial businesses that shut down, having negative impact on commercial activity as a whole)
- Marginalisation and Ghettization of social groups and whole areas are observed, thus resulting to a 'breaking' of local cohesion
- There are decreased tax revenues for the city (an externality even more problematic in the greek context of taxation), with major effects on public investments and (any) spatial planning application
- Urban development, blighted also by institutional barriers, is deterred
- Of course, in real estate terms there are major effects in land values. The tension general drop in property and real estate values, and according a disencouragement of investment in land. There are, though, some indications of rising prices; increased speculation phenomena are observed, with private developpers eager to step in and 'redevelop' decayed urban areas of the center. This phenomenon is not negative per se; however, it is in most cases outside of an integrated planning approach, and non-combined with the local character of the areas, being subject to market pressures.
- Pressures to chronic and solid 'traditions' in treating landed resources, such as owner-occupancy which has accepted major pressures. Property owners are less and less willing to keep their properties.
- There are also some positive outcomes to mention, resulting from the fact that the phenomena have acquired large scale. The decay of urban center has 'activated' policy makers to consider vacancy and abandonment as separate issues for the first time, and attempt to develop solutions to address them (more details in chapter 6). In addition the fact that the local scale of the phenomena has 'slipped' the control of governmental authorities and institutions, triggered some locally-oriented initiatives to emerge, outside governmental support based on citizen initiatives and self-organization. Some examples are reviewed in section 6.2.2..



It is realized that vacancy and abandonment, in their contemporary expression, constitute a problem that is intensified with the effects of crisis. The problematic dimensions of the phenomena, have also begun to be realized, recently, by policy makers. In the same time, there is a complex context of (contradicting and not) needs expressed directly or indirectly in the city, especially concerning land availability. Such needs include: provision of housing (e.g. for homeless and immigrant population), leisure uses, food security, economic revitalization, ecological qualities, and an overall urban regeneration, on behalf of the city itself. Thus, it seems the re-cycling and re-use of the vast capital of vacant landed assets can be an answer towards the satisfaction of those needs. The current economic conditions pose more challenges in the context, and ask for a framework of complete re-organizing of policy and strategies, activation and collaboration of multiple actors.

## **6. DEALING WITH THE VACANCY AND ABANDONMENT IN THE GREEK CONTEXT: POLICY APPROACHES**

In Greece, and Athens in particular there has been no (implemented) policy targeted specifically on vacant and/or abandoned landed stock. Vacant and abandoned landed assets were (and are still) perceived as an indication of decline: the higher their spatial concentration, the more declined the area. Their developmental opportunity has been relatively overseen by policy-makers. In terms of policies, issues of bad quality, derelict and/or vacant building stock have been addressed in the context of broader (re)development initiatives. It is also characteristic that the institutional framework for Redevelopment in Greece (Law 2508/97) states 'bad quality building stock' among the criteria for intervention.

However, the majority of interventions on vacant/abandoned landed assets in practice are disjointed, local scale initiatives, that are not integrated in broader area plans. It is highlighted also that those interventions are often initiated by private sector, owners, developpers in private vacant/abandoned properties, rather than public authorities, as with the case of urban planning itself. Speculative tensions are also evident, especially in previously declined areas that experience some aspects of gentrification. Public (state, regional, municipal) authorities have unsuccessfully dealt with the issues of vacancy and abandonment, either concerning bad management of public properties and lack of governance restructuring among public actors (numerous public properties with potential of reuse that stay vacant or abandoned) or lack of incentives to private abandoned property owners in order to manage their assets.

### **6.1 POLICY EXAMPLES FROM THE CENTER OF ATHENS**

The problems of low-quality building capital, abandoned buildings, vacant lots and urban voids have always been referenced in policy documents and urban plans; yet no specifically targeted attention has been given, apart from horizontal strategic directions. Taking into account that until recently there has been no strategy dealing with vacancy and abandonment in Athens center (despite the chronic presense of the phenomena, even without their contemporary scale) the context of these policies (if any) is described as a part of the general strategies followed in the center. These strategies concern (re)development programmes, gentrification, and disjointed initiatives. Examples of (re)development initiatives that include a small or larger degree of intervention in vacant and/or abandoned landed assets in the case study area are Plaka area regeneration, Gkazi area, and also Psirris and Metaxourghio areas. There are also several disjointed

local scale interventions in all the historical center (several buildings' facades restorations, and neglected public spaces' renewal), during the preparation for Athens Olympic Games in 2004. In these initiatives there have been interventions on vacant/abandoned landed assets, though no separate strategy exists to discuss of. The degree of public role is different in fostering those initiatives, and is often quite minimal (leaving room for private initiatives to actively form and regulate urban space, rather than planning tools). The success of those initiatives is debatable, depending on the perspective. Generally, it is considered that the outcome of all those interventions as a whole has not been a part of an integrated development; yet the focus has often been on technical interventions, beautification in order to promote touristic development and competitiveness, rather than consider also the internal dynamics of the areas (Chadjimichalis, 2013; Souliotis, 2013). Below, the examples of those initiatives are going to be briefly mentioned, in an attempt to trace the nature of (any) intervention on vacant/abandoned landed assets. A controversial element is that those areas, despite being redeveloped (or considered redeveloped, solely in economic terms) in a more or lesser extent, yet today have considerable vacant/abandoned building stock to project (either old buildings that have not been intervened on or newly vacant ones, after crisis impacts).

#### *6.1.1 PLAKA AREA*

Plaka ('Πλάκα') during the mid-70's, before its redevelopment initiative was presenting an image of partial decline. The area started to decline due to lack of public policies and strong pressures of 'disturbing' uses, that have urged many residents to leave the area and also loss of the area's traditional character due to a decayed building stock, mostly concerning traditional buildings. This decay is attributed, from one side, to the inability of the buildings' owners to maintain their properties (low heights predictions for the area, and high cost maintenance) and, from the other side, due to the negative effect of new uses in the area, such as recreation uses, warehouses, low-industry. Many of those buildings have been abandoned and left to dereliction, a fact that, in addition to disjointed demolitions on behalf of Archeaology Service, has added layers to the decay of the area. The first studies on Plaka area were initiated in mid 70s as well (Study of old Athens city, 1974), but until 1978 no implementation has taken place. In 1979 a renewed version of the first study was initiated, and Plaka was characterised as 'traditional part of the city of Athens (π.δ. 21/9/1979). The proposition of the study included pedestrianisations, morphological improvement of the image of the area, land use regulations excluding

disturbing uses, building and construction restrictions, foundation of 'Plaka Office' as low-scale administration actor, representing the ministry in charge with responsibility to intervene, monitor the existing area and regulate the construction of new uses. The abandoned and vacant building stock management was integrated in the general goal of 'protection, repair, conservation and projection of valued building stock', defining 500 buildings as listed for preservation (π.δ. 24.10.1980). In addition, the Ministry of Culture has contributed to the funding of restoration of severely damaged building facades, and to the full restoration of several buildings.

Despite the redevelopment initiative on behalf of public authorities, and the commercialized development of the area through private investments, due to a lack of integrated policy, there are many vacant buildings in the area, some of which abandoned and in state of dereliction. The majority of those buildings are listed for preservation, and thus owned by Ministry of Culture. 20 of those buildings are registered to TAIPED for sale, proposed as residential land use. The 'Plaka Residents' Committee' is in favour of the reuse of those buildings, and the return of residential uses in the area that stay vacant for years, without any prospect of development.

#### 6.1.2 PSIRRIS AREA

Psirris ('Ψυρρής') Area was a declined industrial and artisanship area, traditionally resided by low-income social groups and refugees. The industrial decline of the area initiated in the mid-80's along with urban sprawl tensions of mid-income residents towards the suburbs of the city, leaving behind vacant industrial and residential stock. The policies for redevelopment of the area aimed to sustain the traditional industrial character of the area (π.δ. Περί καθορισμού χρήσεων γης και ειδικών όρων και περιορισμών δόμησης στην περιοχή Ψυρρή-Κέντρου-Ομονοίας-, ΦΕΚ 233Γ/1998), have included several 'point' interventions such as in squares and green spaces (e.g. Koumoundourou square; concerning the building stock, interventions aimed to characterisations of listed buildings and several building facades' restorations.

Contrary to the initial aims, and without an integrated development plan, the area has massively attracted commercial and recreational land uses such as bars, restaurants. This shift has urged many old residents to leave the areas, either selling their properties in high prices or leaving them vacant (the case of smaller properties). This 'development' was urged almost entirely based on private initiatives, with minimal participation of spatial planning, despite the original plans. After 2004, however, the commercial character of the area has started declining too. Today, many shops are closed (picture), some are already

vacant for years, let alone the abandoned-derelict building stock (many also listed) that was not integrated in policy aims.

Figure 6.1.1. Closed shops in Psirri area (2010)



Source: <https://metaxourgeio.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/psurri.jpg>

### 6.1.3 GKAZI-KERAMIKOS AREA

Gkazi-Keramikos ('Γκάζι', 'Κεραμεικός') greater area has followed the same pattern of Psirris area. Since 2007 and the construction of the metro 'Keramikos', and the development of 'Technopolis', the previously decayed de-industrialised greater area Gkazi started to change. Despite the fact that the (supposed) desired outcome of the area redevelopment was the return of residential use to the area (what, also the general plan of Athens suggests), instead the area has been turned into re-creation, restaurant and cafeterias, leading to its commercialisation. The 'development' of the area is based on private initiatives of individual property owners, with no collaboration among them (Gkoni and Deffner, 2011). The public intervention is 'restricted' in the role of authorisation and licencing. In the area there was already a considerable stock of abandoned buildings, mostly small private properties, some of which were also derelict. According to Gkoni and Deffner (2011), abandoned and derelict buildings consist 14% of the land use sum, and vacant lots up to 4.2%. It is also highlighted that 50% of the whole vacant stock in the area is listed for preservation, with no prospects of their reuse apparent in the immediate future, due to the complexities of their ownership and preservation status. Any management of vacant/abandoned buildings in the greater Gkazi area has been almost completely up to individual initiatives and market rules, following the general pattern of

the area. After the development of the area and the vast increase of land values [according to Gkoni and Deffner (2011), from 2002 until 2009 there has been a 300% rise in prices while from 2009 until 2011 150% respectively], several vacant buildings were sold and redeveloped into recreation uses. However, the effect of crisis to Gkazi area has led many shops to close, thus leading to a cycle of new vacancies. Meanwhile, without any broad public policy for the area implemented, chronically abandoned buildings have been left to decline (Gkoni and Deffner, 2011).

#### 6.1.4 METAXOURLHIO AREA

Metaxourghio ('Μεταξουργείο') area is a mix of various land uses, from commercial and artisanship activities in the central routes, to pure residential areas in its core and office and services in its north-east part. The area started to decline since the 60's due to conflicting land uses, lack of free and open spaces, multiple urban voids and urban sprawl of many of its residents. Many vacant buildings that were left behind were later rehabilitated by immigrant populations, a number however stays abandoned since.

The area was integrated in the Historical center of Athens in 1979 (π.δ. 21.9.1979), and several redevelopment plans have been conducted in the '90s. The main goals include the return of residential uses to the area, and the creation of a more qualitative environment. The intervention on abandoned buildings is mainly oriented to listed for preservation characterizations. Several architectural competitions have also been organised on behalf of public and private actors, concerning the redevelopment of the area, such as UPTOP35, ReMap 2<sup>24</sup>, etc. However, any implementation has been restricted to disjointed interventions on buildings and open spaces, mainly in the areas that were 'upgraded' around Metaxourghio metro station. Today, partially vacant housing blocks co-exist with abandoned neoclassic buildings, old squat abandoned houses, and vacant lots, and also vacant former industrial uses.

#### 6.1.5 RECENT INITIATIVES

Recently, the crisis pressures have urged the phenomena of vacancy and abandonment to show and also spread in more areas and in larger extent. As shown in the chapters above, vacancy and abandonment are not just issues of declined areas. There are phenomena of 'new' vacancies, to areas that have not experienced such issues before (at least in large degrees), that are added in already existing situations. Apart from the

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<sup>24</sup><https://metaxourgeio.wordpress.com/category/%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%B8%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%86%CE%B9%CE%B1/page/31/>

rising numbers of vacant and abandoned landed assets there are also simultaneously rising socio-economic problems, such as increasing homelessness, unemployment, criminality.

Various attempted initiatives and programmes to plan different strategies have failed to be implemented, and stayed as plans. Examples include ReMap and Re Map 2 with aim to rehabilitate Athens' university students in Metaxourghio Area, and the architectural competition X4 for decayed city blocks with fragmented unbuilt spaces and decayed building stock (Kainotomo Erghastiri, 2011).

Lately, the scale of the phenomena in Athens has started to be realised on behalf of policy-makers (state, region and municipal authorities), and several attempts have been made to address them (regardless of their inclusiveness, success or effectiveness). The most characteristic examples concern the recent spatial plans concerning the Athenian center and its redevelopment, and more specifically the recently approved SOAP plan (Integrated Urban Intervention Plan=Σχέδιο Οργανωμένης Αστικής Παρέμβασης-ΣΟΑΠ), the Re-think Athens Initiative, (which has recently been rejected by the Council of State) the new draft law on Vacant, Abandoned and Unknown Owner Buildings.

SOAP PLAN (Law 2742/99) for the Athens Central Area has been approved on 19 January 2015. Among its strategic aims and sub-aims are included actions on vacant and abandoned buildings (Action 31: For the Abandoned Buildings, Action 32: Intervention to Building Stock-Withdrawal, Action 33: Listed Buildings). In the context of the plan those actions are integrated in a broader goal of area development, mentioning also socio-economic parameters. In the context of SOAP implementation, there have been announcements on the initiative of Athens municipality in collaboration with the Ministry of Production Reconstruction, Environment and Energy (former YPEKA) concerning vacant and abandoned buildings. These announcements concern pilot interventions, in a municipal and metropolitan scale in the abandoned building stock. It is highlighted that policy-makers attribute the urgency of these plans more to the problems and risks that abandoned buildings pose to quality of life, rather than their productive reuse (which is also in the plans).

It is stated that already from the previous year (July 2014) there have been relevant announcements, concerning a programme of demolitions for abandoned derelict buildings that would start in September 2014 (ypeka.gr). Demolitions can be either full or partial. According to these announcements more than 500 buildings (in an approximate number of 1800 abandoned) have been characterized as eligible for restoration and reuse. The restoration and redevelopment of the eligible buildings will be conducted by

the public sector, and after a transitional period of their use, they can be returned back to their owners (the example of Vizitsa and Pilio cases is stated as a paradigm, look the chapter below for detail). Reuse opportunities include offices, businesses and gathering spaces. For the effectiveness of procedures a restructuring in governance is planned, putting more mechanisms in the 'hands' of the municipalities. Characteristically, concerning the funding of the interventions, the municipality has already conducted research on the foundation of a separate funding institution, the 'Urban Development Fund' (Tameio Astikis Anaptiksis). UDF is intended to be based on European funds. In addition, plans about the creation of land bank are also discussed. In addition, motives such as taxation reforms are programmed.

- Draft Law (Not Approved Yet) on Vacant, Abandoned and no-owner buildings

The draft law of YPEKA is the first organised institutional attempt to fully address the issues of vacant and abandoned buildings and their management. The plan defines the issues (see definitions chapter above) and proposes governance restructuring. The law makes direct reference to SOAP Plan areas.

Main points of the draft law include:

- Clear definition of vacant, abandoned, and unknown owner buildings, and distinction between the ways of their management
- Potential to bring the management of vacant/abandoned/unknown owner buildings in the hands of municipalities for 50 years. This can include management without ownership and potential to use and/or lease (the owner continues to pay taxes and liens in this case) but also compulsory purchase, lease and transfer.
- There is also potential for municipalities to transfer the use, management, and even ownership to other public or private entities (public companies/institutions, construction companies, real-estate companies) and also granting to social vulnerable groups under a nominal fee.
- Concerning the urban areas (οικιστικές περιοχές) with high spatial concentration of vacant/abandoned building stock, the law proposes the establishment of specified zones, named ZEKPA (=ZEKΠΑ: Ζώνες Ειδικών Κτιριακών Παρεμβάσεων) : Special Building Intervention Zones. According to the article 7 of the law, ZEKPA are 'areas with problems of severe decay of their building stock, increased tensions of population sprawl or severe degradation of economic activities, criminality and decay of human, cultural and social environment'. ZEKPA must have at least two (2) of the following characteristics:



- Percentage over 20% of vacant or abandoned buildings over the whole area building capital.
- Percentage over 50% of the existing vacant and abandoned buildings are in need of restoration and extended intervention and repair, in order to adapt in the set rules for security, hygiene and environmental management
- Percentage over 30% of non-restored listed under preservation buildings, over the whole listed under preservation building stock of the area
- There is a population or economic activities shrinking at least 10% during the last 20 years, or change of socio-economic layerings accompanied by phenomena of criminality, illegal immigration and high percentages of unemployment.
- As managing and implementation bodies (φορείς διαχείρισης και υλοποίησης) of ZEKPA, the law considers either the municipalities or private entities (mentioned above). The law gives the potential for first plea to the private entities over public, concerning the management and ownership.

The draft law proposes interesting governance restructuring but it has been judged as unfair by many voices due to the increased power for private sector. The public governance restructuring and the emphasised role of non-profits though is considered an important innovation.

Finally, various bottom-up, self organisation strategies that have emerged to deal with abandoned , following practices of abroad, such as urban gardens and squatting. There are supporting and opposing voices to those practices, especially squatting. In any cases, such initiatives still stay in the local level. However, they reflect indications on lack of effective policy-making, unsuccessful or absent role of authorities to deal with vacancy. So, regardless the support or not of such initiatives, their indication towards more inclusive forms of governance and more participatory approach of urban needs should be considered.

## 6.2 URBAN COMMONS: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH FOR ATHENS CENTER REGENERATION (?)

### *6.2.1 THE (URBAN) COMMONS IN THE GREEK CONTEXT*

The greek context, both in terms of legislation and practice is not familiar with the notion of Commons. In addition, land tenure and property regimes are characterized by complexity, which is even more intense in their practical expression on land. Property in Greece has an almost unbrakable connection with the ownership rights, and has traditionally symbolized an asset (Vatavali and Siatista, 2011). Therefore, the clarification of what is and what is not common is quite vague. In Greece, 'public' and 'public goods' have traditionally a strong notion, based on the highly centralised structure of governance. Often, public land is paraphrased by some voices as equal to common land; common land, in terms of ownership and use belongs to the civil society (Chadjimichalis, 2014). According to the Greek Constitution and Urban Code of 1975 the state property can be either non-transaction public communal assets, or private real property of the public. Chadjimichalis (2014) considers the first category as a potential (non per-se, a fact that is emphasised) common land, if there exist the appropriate conditions for common ownership and management.

Kotsakis (2012: 34-37 in Chadjimichalis, 2014) approaches common property ('koini ktisi') as collective ownership of private entities (mainly referring to co-operative ownership) and public ownership of civil society (article 24 of the Greek Constitution). In the Greek context, categories of potential commons can include public communal assets such as protected areas (NATURA, RAMSAR, national parks<sup>25</sup>, forest areas, etc), pastoral and agricultural land management in mountain and island rural areas, coastal areas (and, for some, also urban public open and green spaces in cities). Concerning agricultural areas and grasslands in particular, Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), in the context of a Eurostat initiative, has researched common land in the context of Farm Structure Survey for 2010. In this case Common land in Greece is defined as the area 'used jointly by several holdings and which is not possible to assign a specific section to each farmer' (ELSTAT, 2012)<sup>26</sup>. In addition, some forms of property beyond state and private property can be metioned, such as co-operative-collective housing, public and green area

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<sup>25</sup> Laws: 1650/86 and 3937/2011 for protected areas, 2742/99 and 4014/11 for management bodies and NATURA areas

<sup>26</sup> In terms of land uses, common lands in Greece are usually rough grazing of permanent grassland used as pasture for cattle, sheep and goat. Common arable lands are by definition excluded. The definition adopted by Eurostat might be useful also here: "common land is utilized agricultural area owned by a public authority (state, parish, etc.) over which another person is entitled to exercise rights of common, and these rights are generally exercisable in common with others".

management in big cities. In the greater context of collective-co-operative housing in urban areas we can also include occupation (or 'squatting') of buildings on behalf of alternative communities that alternate them into social centers. Contrary to what many of those communities' members claim, Chadjimichalis (2014) argues that those spaces cannot be considered as common spaces, since they belong to someone (who has not necessarily approved the use rights and access to those communities). However, discussion on urban commons in Athens often has such initiatives as a main target (for example: Strigklogiannis, 2014), a fact that should be taken into account.

Chadjimichalis (2014) argues that there is no common land per se in Greece (and also in Europe anymore), and it is something that should be re-obtained. What can state, public and private entities do with the assets they own depends highly on regulations and non-material relations, such as urban and regional planning mechanism activation; the same conditions should be attached concerning any potentiality of common property. There are two aspects towards this potentiality: first, society initiatives and social movements strong enough to claim change, and second, a need for 'institutional enclosure' (example: zoning of NATURA and RAMSAR areas) of land and activation of institutional and cartographic tools (Chadjimichalis, 2014). Though it is argued that public participation and collective action are highly important for the sustaining of any institutional reform, the current chapter chooses to highlight the second aspect, in order to trace and study possible elements of commons in planning and governance institutions and mechanisms.

Focusing on urban areas (and built environments) there are elements that can be considered proximal to the commons' context that are included in (re)development institutional frameworks. To begin with, there is the legislative framework of Law 1337/83 to mention, specifically concerning the 'active urban planning' (*energós poleodomía*) and 'active block' (*energó oikodomikó tetragóno*), and also the common use of unbuilt areas, as stated in the Article 12 of General Building Regulation. However, besides several disjointed applications (e.g. active urban planning zone in Kozani city in Northern Greece), those regulations are generally considered unused, though innovative they might be characterised. Their validity was renewed through the following urban planning law (2508/97), but their application is relatively weakened institutionally. In addition, Neighborhood Urban Committee (*Poleodomiki Epitropi Geitonias*), an actor that could contribute in building, managing and governing potential commons in their local scale is equally weakened institutionally, though still valid (Lalenis, 2010).

An example of practice that can be integrated in a broader commons' framework are the EOT (National Tourist Organisation) public programmes for traditional urban settlements

(‘paradosiakoi oikismoí’). According to the developmental laws 1892/90, 3299/2004 and 2941/2001, the potential for listed or traditional buildings to be redeveloped into hotels, guest houses or traditional products workshops by public organisations (such as EOT and Ministry of Culture), be used for several years and then returned to their owners. As successful can be considered the example of Vizitsa in Pelion (Thessaly region, Magnesia prefecture) (ypeka.gr).

Finally, there are quite a few collective initiatives in urban areas, emerging in the grassroots based on self-organization and collective action among groups that are, at least by some voices, referenced as ‘urban commons’ (embodying a broader, social notion of the term). Those initiatives are in their majority not only non supported by hyper-scale authorities or institutions, but are often also barriered or halted. It must be emphasized here, though, that not every initiative of collective action is a common, nor is always positive per se; often, the lack of a legal basis can be problematic in ‘claiming space’ without use or access rights. In any case, in Athens in particular there seems to be a growing movement emerging, starting, as such voices consider, from the anti-austerity protests in Syntagma Square in 2010 (Harvey, 2012) and climaxing to self-organized gardens and neighborhood parks, like Navarinou Park and Academia Platonos (Strigklogiannis, 2014). There is an interconnection of those spaces with organizational forms of collectivities such as cultural groups and the academic community, but also from hyper-scale initiatives, such as markets without intermediaries, homeless food network and local kitchens, ‘Syn-Athina’ platform of Athens’ municipality. The recent festival of the commons on behalf of ‘Commonsfest’ association (15-17 May 2015) has addressed such initiatives. In the context of this dissertation, based on the hyper-scale enabling framework for commons and also to Ostrom’s criteria, as adapted for Urban Commons by Parker and Johansson (2011), no further reference will be made in those initiatives; this choice of course is mainly methodological, and does not intend to underestimate their importance and potentials.

### *6.2.3 HORIZONTAL STRATEGY GUIDELINES*

Athens, in terms of urban commons potential, faces similar challenges as other urban areas; contested and conflicting motives over land and space. Apart from those general characteristics, the specific issues of the Athenian center and whole urban agglomeration in the context of crisis that were discussed in the first chapter are also a barrier. Furthermore, it was shown that the Greek institutional and planning framework does not leave much ‘space’ for urban commons, despite the fact that several mechanisms exist.

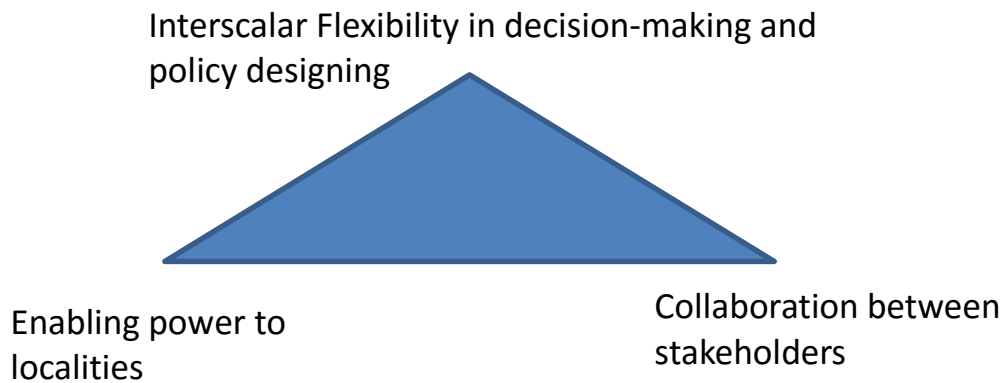
So, a general reform is a pre-necessity in order for the potential of commons to be enabled and sustained in Greek cities. A broader perception of urban commons is needed, in the context of separating the (unbreakable often in Greece) link between ownership rights and property titles, in order to trace possibilities of application and potential benefits. Thus, public or privately owned properties can equally be considered as potential application spaces for urban commons, without the 'barrier' (one can say) of characterizing a property as 'common property' per se (at least from the beginning). Changing the existing unflexible top-down governance dynamics is probably one of the most crucial necessary conditions for a 'solid' base on building commons; enabled also through institutional interventions and planning mechanisms (existing and new ones).

Besides any barriers, it is believed that existing mechanisms of urban planning and property development (also combined with new tools) in Greece have the potential to be used alternatively in the context of specific aims; also in the case of vacant and abandoned landed assets redevelopment. Under a general aim to reform existing problematic structures and form economic foundation to transit in an alternative socio-economic reality (Chadjimichalis, 2014; Kotsakis, 2012), vacant and abandoned landed assets can be considered 'candidates' to implement several reforms or alternative practices. A less distinct perception of the public-private property dichotomy, especially in a policy perspective could 'help' the city overcome various limits and barriers and re-invent itself. In addition, from the opposite perspective, the alternatives that urban commons set can be considered as a new way to manage vacancy and abandonment, that have been not properly addressed by past policies.

This chapter aims to provide several general guidelines for an enabling framework of building commons, as a part of an overall alternative strategy for vacancy and abandonment in the Athens' center. It is emphasised that, first of all, there is a need for a vacant land oriented strategy. The directions presented are horizontal, encouraging an alternative policy approach. Of course, they do not and cannot guarantee effectiveness, applicability or success. Commons can be a part, and/or enable this strategy. But they are not the solution to vacancy/abandonment per se. Commons, as a way to deal with urban vacancy and abandonment, should be considered not just because nothing else (in terms of economic development) is being done; instead, they can be an opportunity to re-read the phenomena in the context of satisfying specific needs and potentially achieve an integrated development.

The methodology proposed in order to (re) address the issue of redeveloping and reusing vacant and abandoned assets in Athens (following sections 2.2. and 3.2.) should be

based on multiple scales, and a two-fold approach combining simultaneously: the need for (a) coordinating body/institution(s), founded to address the vacancy issues in the context of an holistic horizontal approach, and a well-organized approach in micro-scales, where necessary networks and collaborations can be developed. Therefore, a general Framework for a vacant policy strategy with a bottom-linked approach that can enable urban commons (summarized also in the graph below) can incorporate the following<sup>27</sup>:



*Source: author*

- From power management to policy management (emphasis on commons' management)
- Flexible context, that provides tools and mechanisms (from rights to use and access, to the power of decision and regulation) to the hands of various stakeholders, depending on the case
- Avoidance of 'blind' institutional replication of good practices
- Holistic planning strategy
- Enabling and founding of partnerships
- Perception of vacant spaces as urban resources; management, use and connection with other resources
- Value-based practices (under a broad perception of value, incorporating social needs)
- Realistic approach toward planning and implementation potential (given the specific context)
- Participatory Initiatives
- Horizontal Regulations for large scale vacant/abandoned properties owned by one owner (private or public)
- Re-activation of vacant buildings of public and public benefit institutions

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<sup>27</sup> This perspective influences the strategy framework for urban restructuring proposed by Kainotomo Erghastiri (2011), concerning the Athenian Center, though vacancy or commons are not targeted in that research. The current context of crisis is taken into account, along with an holistic approach towards space that includes spatial, social and economic parameters.

- Management Strategy for fragmented small properties (offices, retail, housing) : collective management in the scale of the building can be a solution
- Targeted management of Vacant 'listed' buildings

In addition, applying some of the mechanisms for an 'alternative' vacant land redevelopment that were mentioned in the theoretical framework (2.2.) to the case of Athens (emphasizing, though, the 'dangers' of institutional replication), some suggestions can include:

- Constitution of a vacant land and property inventory, on behalf of the municipality, in collaboration with Public Properties Company ('EAD') and other actors. Detailed registration and cartography of vacant assets and their characteristics are necessary, that can derive partly from the existing cadastral surveys. Furthermore, such an archive can provide a larger scale characterization typology for sub-areas, depending on the concentration of vacant assets, and thus facilitate the formation of a strategy. Collaboration with neighborhood associations and neighborhood groups in the process can provide more acute (often) information concerning important details on assets.
- Municipality Activation in the aim of constituting of a body to address and deal with vacant assets. Differentiations of strategy depending on different characteristics of the abandoned asset, such as: (last) use of asset before abandonment, ownership status, vacant or not (e.g. squatted areas) operational status, specific value ('preserved', historic, etc). Launching an effective land acquisition strategy<sup>28</sup> on behalf of the Municipality is encouraged. Such an initiative should include use of the city's condemnation power, directly or through a community-based public/private partnership. This power is essential to assemble land for development projects, to acquire derelict properties for redevelopment, and to prevent speculator abuse of the revitalization process. Through targeted use of its zoning power, the city can direct, encourage, or prohibit certain types of development in designated areas (Goldstein et al, 2001: 23).
- Reformed judicial tax system, based on several favorable regulations such as: partly or fully tax returns, depending on the age and condition of property, split-rate taxation of property and levy, differentiating the land from building taxation (reducing tax in

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<sup>28</sup> The logic behind land acquisition integrated in a vacancy strategy is the fact that it is in the best interest of a city to get properties into the hands of owners who will pay taxes, converting the property from a liability to an asset. (Goldstein et al., 2001)

land and augmenting tax in building, in order to motivate the potential of reusing a vacant building), relax taxation (for a specific period of time) with the prospect of re-activating the asset and favor repairing processes, institutional flexibility of monitoring process.

- Parallel use of the compulsory purchase and acquisition, one of the most frequently used mechanisms to address vacancy in the existing Greek context is also encouraged, but as a part of large scale strategy instead of disjointed initiative.
- Another mechanism proposed is the pilot use 'Land/property bank' in local scale, in specifically defined areas, under the control of the Municipality or the Region of Attica. In the greek institution context a land bank can operate through transfer of building rights to other areas and/or property redistribution (Law 2508/1997, concerning the 'reconstruction of degraded areas'). Pilot use of Land Banks is proposed to operate through a negotiation and consensus building process between owners, communities and authorities. Merging of properties in terms of operational facilitating and co-management of landed assets registered between community organisations (potentially also municipalities) is also an option. Land banks can be used as potential mechanisms to deal with the phenomenon of small and fragmented ownership of vacant assets.
- Plan for temporary use of vacant assets, through partial management of vacant asset capital from the municipality (or a specific-purpose based founded organization). Such a plan can be a part of a broad (e.g. municipal) level social-oriented policy (e.g. Red Cross for immigration shelter, social housing policy, etc). In this case, a collaboration between the actor in charge, the users of the property and the owner of the property can be motivated, in order to manage and repair the property and then put it in rental status. Rents will be attributed to the municipalities, and any extra profit generated is attributed to the owner. The property can return always to its owner, upon request, charged also with the rest of expenses.
- In the prospect of integrating vacancy strategy in a larger scale strategy to redevelop an area, targeted use of development authorities and activating private/public collaborations are suggested. The mechanism of PPPs (Public Private Partnerships, in Greek 'ΣΔΙΤ') operates as a form of partnership. In Greece, though initiatives exist, the mechanism is not yet quite established. However, international experience of several types of PPPs, indicates good practices of action managing social and health facilities (hospitals, schools, rehabilitation centers, etc), potential re-uses for vacant assets (also concerning large scale vacant assets, like the vacant administration



buildings). Emphasis is given here on the forms of PPPs that the costs burden the users of the service provided and not the tax payer. In this case, the private entity can take up redevelopment activities in the whole area suggested for development, along with repairing and renewing vacant asset(s), profiting by their temporary use.

- Vacant Buildings under 'listed' status require also specific strategy (e.g. Plaka), considering first institutional reforms towards the flexibility of current legislation (e.g. diminish the time period of permitted action from 100 years –current- to 50 years and regulate action depending on different stages of preservation need). Concerning assets owned by Ministry of Culture, the state can assign public or private entities with their renewal and use under specific regulation (PPPs have the potential to be used as well). More active collaboration between state and local government actors is encouraged here. Specific programmes for renting and use of the buildings for specified periods of time to community, social, cultural organisations/groups can also be launched, assigning the users with preservation and use expenses (basic conservation expenses provided by public entity). Concerning preserved building under private ownership active compulsory acquisition initiatives are encouraged.

Of course, commons are by definition a local scale issue, and their potential needs to be examined in specific vacant/abandoned buildings and/or a specifically targeted area. In the context of this dissertation, no specific examples have been researched 'in the field'. However, several implications for further research can be given. Most importantly, existing attempts of self-organization in vacant lots and abandoned buildings can indicate potential social needs that ask for hyper-scale and/or policy support (e.g. Navarinou Park in Exarcheia, Refugee Housing Settlements 'Prosfigika' in Ambelokipi area, and Akadimia Platonos park and archaeological area) and patterns that can be followed, under circumstances, from similar cases in further city areas. Other examples can be traced exploring the existing vacant asset capital; the ownership status of the asset, though, can prove a bottleneck, given that obtaining access and use rights for a community (in legitimate terms) is a pre-necessity in order for urban commons to be built. Under this argument, the extensive stock of public properties (state, municipal) can be more 'easily' utilized compared to private properties (with the exception of chronically abandoned and derelict ones), given that public authorities create an according enabling framework.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the main findings of this dissertation are going to be summarized, and the verification (or not) of the main hypothesis and questions posed are going to be discussed.

To begin with, vacancy and abandonment are proved to be broad and multidimensional issues, expressed in different ways and different extent in every city. Their definitions are equally broad and complex, and, besides adopting a generalized definition for the purpose of this research, it derives that what is and what is not vacant should be specified in the context of each city/urban area, based on particular spatial, institutional and (socio-)economic parameters. In addition, the lack of local scale approaches (both intentional and unintentional) to vacancy and abandonment was critiqued.

Besides being connected mostly to broader phenomena, like de-industrialization, urban sprawl and shrinking cities, vacancy and abandonment are not only an issue of declined cities and urban areas; contemporary economic crisis conditions have urged the phenomena to magnify and spread in whole urban agglomerations. The 'newer' expressions include declining commercial and office building stock, vacant houses, in central, formerly developed and thriving areas. However, it was highly emphasized that crisis is considered a layer to already existing problematic situations that forced them to show, rather than a main cause for their appearance. Despite the large context of causes and consequences that was described, the chapter emphasized broader policy and legal factors, either triggering vacancy and abandonment directly or blighting redevelopment.

There are two main typologies in terms of policy approaches to address vacant and abandoned land that were recognized after a literature review; growth-led approaches, and alternative approaches. Growth-led approaches are dominant in both academic literature and policy practice. Especially in the contemporary crisis contexts, deregulation of state and municipal governments has opened a wider place for markets, which often define any prospect of redevelopment. More and more authors, however, have started to realize the problematics of monocentric growth-led approaches, and argue for alternative, innovative shifts. Crisis has also given the opportunity for grassroots, local level initiatives to emerge as an answer to social needs. Though the importance of grassroots, self-organized collectivities was also mentioned, it has been argued that an integrated, bottom-linked development strategy is necessary, a strategy that engages all stakeholders. Several initiatives from US cities, emphasizing vacant land redevelopment in the context of local and neighborhood revitalization were mentioned. The focus of the chapter was the governance restructuring towards a bottom-linked-focus that alternative

approaches promote along with the various planning tools and mechanisms that can be used in various scales of practice.

Argued as a potential part of an alternative strategy for vacant land redevelopment, urban commons were approached and described. The term 'urban commons' and their perception was recognized as rather broad, a fact indicated through a literature review. In this dissertation, considering urban commons as a part of the 'contemporary landed commons', and dragging elements from broader approaches on the concept of property (e.g. Gaisler and Daneker, 2000), urban commons were considered as:

- Alternative concepts of property that blend private, public, common property
- Hybrid landownership structures that differentiate/disconnect property titles with ownership rights
- Shared Ownership relationships that imply also shared responsibility and shared beneficiary relationships

Among multiple urban commons examples, Community Land Trusts (CLTs), Limited Equity Co-operations, Tenement Trusts, Urban Gardens, Public Parks and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) were chosen to be analytically described, in order to understand the dynamics of implementation and governance structures. It is also emphasized that such urban commons models have been implemented on vacant, abandoned, neglected landed assets. 'Good' practices of Housing CLTs and Co-operations and Urban Gardening initiatives were mentioned, to trace this connection in practice. In terms of governance, communities (though broadly defined) are by definition the main actors of the commons, but emphasis was also given to the interscalar interplays with other, 'external' actors, such as state and local governments and institutions, non-profit organizations and co-operation, even private entities. The chapter focused more in describing the enabling role of the latter (Foster, 2012), in the context of attempting to find ways for encouraging urban commons to be created and sustain.

In the case of Athens city center, vacancy and abandonment were considered, as in other cities a chronic but rather unrealized issue, attributed among other causes to insufficient (or inexistent planning strategies). The current economic crisis has urged the phenomena to intensify and spread in the whole city agglomeration and also in other uses; recently built residential dwellings, commercial properties and offices are left vacant, added to large numbers of chronically abandoned dwellings. Vacancy does not only concern small fragmented private properties but also large publicly owned buildings that are left undeveloped due to movement of activities in other areas. These landed properties are considered as 'problems', as they are deterring development and undermining quality of

life, among their many consequences. This concept can seem as a paradox, given increasing social issues, such as homelessness, poverty and immigration that could be targeted through a potential vacant building redevelopment strategy.

Some methodological issues should be highlighted for the case of Athens. In order to describe vacancy and abandonment, a variety of sources has been reviewed, which are often quite different or even 'contradicting': real estate reports, National Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) data, institutional framework and (local) government policy reviews were combined with academic literature. This 'mix' is emphasized because some of those sources, such as the real estate reports, often follow a growth-led approach and condemn vacancy and abandonment as negative per se, without emphasizing any opportunities. In addition, such sources quite often neglect the decayed central areas, considering them as non-important candidates for investment. However, they provide numbers and data, which are considered necessary for understanding the patterns of vacancies in the city. A fact rather worth-mentioning is that governmental and institutional sources also follow this line of approach in some occasions; though some recent attempts for vacancy-and-abandonment-oriented-strategies add interesting inputs. Despite the realized contradiction, the multidisciplinary of the various sources used has been deemed crucial for this research.

However, integration of social (or local) target in a vacant land policy seems a large step, since, until recently, there has not even existed a planning strategy directed to vacant and abandoned buildings. The issues had been partly realized, in the context of (re)development initiatives, such as the examples of Plaka, Psirris, Metaxourghio, and Gkazi areas. Those policies (often different in plans and implementation outcomes), though, were mostly targeting beautification, and were in large part disjointed and/or initiated by private developers. A worth-mentioning element is that, besides being (or at least considered) redeveloped, those areas include, today, some of the higher spatial concentrations of abandoned buildings. Recently, vacant and abandoned buildings have been targeted 'by name' for the first time in the context of a spatial planning policy, through SOAP plan and Rethink Athens initiative, and also in a draft law plan, but no implementation has taken place yet.

The original methodological dilemmas posed in the introduction, concerning the implementation of urban commons in the Greek and Athens' context have been verified through the case study research. In detail, the lack of familiarity, both in terms of institution and practice, with the commons and common property, and the perception of property as the ultimate asset, inseparable of its ownership rights, pose significant challenges.

Application can be more ‘effective’ (or at least happen) in rural than urban areas, given the ‘proximity’ of several, for example, protected areas, coastal areas and agriculture areas to common land principles. In Greek urban environments, especially in the extreme dense, highly regulated and contested central areas, common property regimes’ implementation would require radical structural changes which are considered highly challenging, if not impossible. A broader perception of urban commons though, as argued in the theoretical framework could be more applicable. Vacant and abandoned landed assets, given their neglected and underutilized character, could be ‘candidates’ for pilot implementation of urban commons practices. It is argued, though, that such an attempt can prove difficult into the current planning and governance system. Through the frame of a vacant property-targeted strategy, engaging various stakeholders, there could also exist a potential of urban commons.

Of course, in the context of the current dissertation only general, horizontal directions are provided. The need for further, field research is recognized, along with interaction with interested parties and stakeholders, in order to trace possible potential in practice. More emphasis should be given, in future research, on discovering innovating land and planning instruments for governing ownership rights and providing land, in order to motivate vacant land (re)development, or to support/boost/proliferate existing self-organized initiatives.

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