



## **Issues and inconsistencies in planning and management of public urban parks. The case of “Tritsis” Environmental Awareness Park in Athens**

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### **Abstract**

A crucial category of open urban spaces is metropolitan parks- well-designed open spaces aimed to attract the vast majority of citizens and visitors of a metropolitan city. According to Collins (1994), the benefits of such places can be categorized into four main groups: a) social, b) health, c) economic and d) environmental. Briefly, metropolitan parks exist as collective, public spaces where social interaction and various activities, such as sports, social events and educational activities take place. Their role is neither to substitute the sense of nature in the urban environment nor to replace pocket parks, but rather to enhance the organic relationship between the city and the natural environment and to support supralocal activities that cannot be found in the neighborhood area. Successful examples worldwide such as Hyde Park in London, Park Guell in Barcelona, Parc Andre Citroen in Paris, Central Park in New York et cetera have shown that the adoption of such spaces in urban cities demands both high landscape architecture quality in terms of aesthetics and functionality as well as a concise approach in provision and combination of environmental and culture activities. A similar attempt can be seen in Athens with Tritsis Environmental Awareness Park, which could have been an exemplar of such parks in the Greek urban environment, but unfortunately failed to do so for a number of reasons. William H. Whyte sarcastically argued once that: 'It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished', unveiling the numerous factors that can make such an endeavor to fail, regardless of the careful planning of such scheme. What happens in such cases is that apart from planning inconsistencies (i.e. lack of proper sitting and gathering places as in Parc de la Villette-Paris, indistinct entry points and dead-ends as in Phoenix-Arizona etc.), administration and management deficiencies appear to be the core issues of problematic development;

This paper aims to identify and elaborate on the above issues, while analyzing the correlation between the current economic era and the debates of managing public spaces. More specifically, it is structured in three sections; the first dealing with the theoretical framework and standard principles of developing and managing urban parks, the second focusing on the case of Tritsis Park in Athens, its identity, history, management sustainability and the last discussing the arguments of unsuccessful regeneration schemes regarding operational parameters, unimplemented business plans et cetera.

Tritsis environmental awareness park is the largest publicly-owned green space in the Athenian metropolis, located in West Athens- 8km away from the city centre, expanding in 120 Ha (indicatively Hyde Park expands in an area of 142 Ha). Although the place has a history since 1832, it remained for years a derelict and unbuilt land, though in 1993 the Athenian Planning Authority started an ambitious regeneration and business plan for the park. The park would be a unique, in terms of Greek park development, mixed-use thematic space which would combine educational purposes (i.e. environmental culture, awareness) and recreational facilities and activities. The implementation of the plan though presupposed private capital involvement in managing part of the activities as to achieve a balance in maintenance costs, marketing etc. A managing body was founded in order to promote and deal with the development of the business plan, attempting to make the park sustainable both economically and in terms of natural resources. Although, the recommended character of the park would be supralocal and thematic for environmental awareness, there were numerous reactions from the three neighboring municipalities in order to reappropriate it in the local level as well as from a number of collectives, regarding the private funds investments.



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This paper attempts also to provide the key principles for a viable alternative for managing the specific park adapted to the social requirements, while at the same time preserving its supralocal and educational character.

### Notes

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### References

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