

Urban Planning and Inadequacies of Implementation: The Case of the City of Larissa, Greece

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Abstract: Urban planning in Greece is identified by two characteristics: the domination of the legislative/legal level on the policy-making one, and the “implementation gap” between laws and plans, and related implementations. In fact, the most frequent reason for the implementation gap is the inability of local administration to compensate landowners. An additional reason for the non-implementation of Urban Plans is that if the expropriation/compensation is delayed for more than a legally specified period, the landowner can ask the lifting of the expropriation. Larissa faces such difficulties. Due to lack of money for expropriations, its—years-old Urban Plan has been implemented only by 77%. In the city, there are nearly 120 of cases to be expropriated/compensated, and the total amount needed is estimated to 150 million Euros. Obviously, the municipality is impossible to afford this amount, and the Urban Plan is in serious risk of not being implemented. In that context, the paper suggests a re-examination and a re-classification of the prescribed spaces based on three critical factors: the “urban importance” of each “prescribed space”, the economic affordability of financing its expropriation, and the legal characteristics of property rights.

Key words: City plan, expropriations, implementation, public space, urban planning.

1. Introduction

Urban planning in Greece began on the basis of the legislative decree of 1923 (07-17-1923) “on plans of cities, towns and settlements of the State and their construction”, which places great emphasis on regulatory urban planning as well as demarcation as and the determination of land uses [1]. The basic institutional tools at municipality level regarding urban planning, include the “General and Special Local Spatial Plans” and the “Urban Implementation Plan” according to the existing institutional framework, which replaced the “General Urban Plan” and the “Urban Study—Implementation Act”. The latter, however, still apply to most Greek cities, with the first tool covering the entire area of the municipality, providing general guidelines for its development and the second deepening and intervening by providing detailed information on both

land uses and instructions for the development of specific parts of the area [2]. However, the experience so far shows a significant discrepancy and inconsistency between the officially approved urban plans and the “reality” of a city, as well as multiple difficulties on the part of the respective Municipal Authority to implementing urban planning especially in relation to the prescribed by urban planning private properties for public use, ie the acquisition and creation of public space through expropriation, which obviously presupposes the financial compensation of the respective owners.

Larissa is the 5th largest Greek city and is a city that faces such difficulties. According to the urban planning of the city, as it is further specialized in the relevant studies that have been prepared, 2,235 acres have been prescribed and reserved as “areas of public open space and public utilities”, 525 acres remain “prescribed and reserved areas” for public use and the Municipal Authority has acquired through expropriation procedures 1,710 acres. Based on the above, the urban plan of Larissa has been

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implemented, according to its original plan, by 77%. Further study of the relevant data shows that the problem of the implementation of urban planning is two fold: First, it intensifies as we move away from the city center with the most important problems being located in specific “new areas” or “areas of expansion of the city plan”, ie areas recently included in the existing urban planning. Secondly, the implementation of urban planning is hampered by the existence of so-called “discontinuities of the urban fabric”, such as the Pinios River and the area around it, the existence of many military installations within the urban fabric, the passage of the railway network through the city as well as the facilities of the Public Power Corporation (DEI in Greek). In other words, the second dimension of the problem is related to the presence of large state-public owners who in principle “question” the existing urban planning and claim that their activities and consequently the land on which they are located are considered and placed by definition outside the existing urban planning legislation.

The Greek institutional framework recognizes three different categories of expropriations, first for the creation of public spaces and infrastructure, second for opening streets (streets don’t exist) and third for widening streets (streets don’t exist) as a result of urban planning [3].

If a property is reserved and proscribed for public use, the Municipal Authority must compensate its owner and if it can’t or delays then the owner can request the so called “lifting of the expropriation” of his property (through a relevant court decision). In the city of Larissa, nearly 120 cases of final court decisions are registered, which require the complete lifting of the expropriation for these properties. Consequently, the Municipal Authority must decide whether to compensate the owners of the properties and therefore implement the existing urban planning or release the blocked and proscribed properties and therefore not to implement the existing urban planning. According to estimates, the Municipal Authority

needs the amount of 150 million euros based on current market prices. Obviously, the Municipal Authority does not have this amount from its own resources, nor can it obtain through external financing.

The following work highlights the problem of securing public spaces in relation to the implementation of urban planning for the city of Larissa, describes the distribution of the problem by city region, connecting it with inherent weaknesses of the city and, in the end, argues in favor of a process “urban rationalization of the prescribed areas”, through a review and a reassessment of the existing urban planning and its implementation in the city, based on the priorities of the city and the provision to the inhabitants of an advanced urban environment. In this context, the review and the reassessment should be based on three critical factors, which must be taken into account: The “urban necessity or significance” of each “prescribed area”, the financial capacity of the Municipality (the amount of compensation required for the expropriation) and the examination of other issues (eg legal issues, property status of the ownership).

2. The Existing Legal Framework: Historical Background and Content

Urban planning is the means of exercising urban policy. It is a basic tool for regulating the urban, suburban and extra-urban space at the level of settlement, city or urban complex, but also at the wider spatial unit that includes an urban center [4]. For the orderly but also fair exercise of the urban planning policy, there are legal rules that define the principles and the process of elaboration and implementation of the urban plans. As a whole, these rules compose the institutional framework of urban planning, which aims at the rational organization of space based on the principles of Urban Planning [5].

Urban planning was created as a science to address the large urban concentrations of cities after the industrial revolution and as a social practice to address

the problems of the cities of those times and to manage policies for them, in the context of urban development. Based on that framework, it covers policies and interventions aimed at the development and quality of life in a city, while its main functions are considered to be, firstly, the formulation of plans aimed at spatial organization, secondly, the regulation of land uses, thirdly, the promotion and control of urban development and fourthly, the control of the location of buildings and building conditions [6].

Ensuring and expanding public areas in a city (open public areas and spaces for public utilities) is one of the main objectives of urban planning. Public space on the basis of urban planning requires the preparation of a specific plan (e.g. approved urban plan, city plan, urban plan-study), which regulates the building conditions, the open public and for public utilities spaces, as well as the permitted land uses in each part or zone of the settlement. Based on the Greek legal framework, open public space includes all kinds of streets, groves squares, and generally space intended for free sharing. Public utilities spaces are those intended for the construction of buildings of general interest [7]. The means and tools of securing public space are those of expropriation, self-compensation, acts of settlement and actuarial compensation, special building conditions (intruding and greenery). But there are other flexible tools, such as the financial contribution of land and money (in expansion areas), the right of preference (land bank) or free trade, the consolidation of uncovered and the “active building block”, the application of land levies to reconstructions and acts of urban regeneration and the one-off special financial contribution based on the Greek Law 2508/1997 [8].

The experience so far shows that Municipalities use the tool of expropriation and act of actuarial (for existing and “old” city plans) and the financial contribution of land and money (for expansion areas) to secure and enlarge public space. However, especially for ‘expropriation’, it turns out that this is

an abhorrent measure, which takes a long time as an administrative procedure, and is usually not completed (i.e. expropriation does not take place) due to a lack of money on the part of the Municipality and consent on the part of the debtors present, while in any case it requires the drafting and ratification of the relevant “act of settlement and compensation” [9].

The main problem with the above means and tools is the risk that designated and prescribed private properties for public space will be “lost” due to a delay or even non-expropriation and after the owner has appealed to the Courts with the request for the lifting of the expropriation and its successful trial. Lifting an expropriation means the procedure required to release property which has been bound by an administrative act and which has made the property public, or for its disposal for another public purpose [10].

3. The City of Larissa

The Municipality of Larisa has an area of 335.12 sq km located in the center of the Region of Thessaly. The city of Larissa is the largest, in area and population, city of Central Greece and capital of the homonymous Prefecture and region of Thessaly. It occupies a position of economic importance on the road axis of Patras-Athens-Thessaloniki-Evzon (P.A.TH.E.) which connects the two major urban centers, Athens and Thessaloniki (northern and southern Greece). At the same time, it is located on the main railway axis of Greece and is connected by road to the western part of the country (Epirus). It brings together first-level settlement functions and is one of the most important urban centers in the country. All of the above characteristics make Larissa one of the most dynamic urban areas, due to its geographical location [11].

Nowadays the Municipality of Larisa is divided into 19 urban units (23 urban districts). Based on the city plan, the majority of public open areas as squares and parks are located in the central and western sector of

the city. In the total area of the urban complex, which accounts for 15,000 acres, the organized public open areas cover an area of about 3,000 acres, i.e. 20%. Important public open areas are located in the urban units of “Agios Achillios” (fortress hill), “Agios Athanasios”, “Ippokratis” and “Filipoupoli”, but these are “old” public open spaces for which the expropriation tool was not applied in accordance with the existing institutional framework. The largest potential public open areas is the area of Pinios (old riverbed), while large public areas exist in the urban units “Neraida” and “Neapoli”. As far as the expansion areas are concerned, the areas designated by the General Urban Plan as public areas are small in size and scattered. There is an inability to implement the spatial plans of the city with a high percentage of prescribed private properties for public use according to the approved city plan.

4. The Provision of Public Space in Practice

According to the existing City Plan, 2,235 acres have been recorded as “public areas for open space and utilities”, 525 acres remain as “prescribed or reserved spaces-areas” and the Municipality of Larissa has acquired through expropriation procedures 1,710 acres. Based on the above, the City Plan of Larissa has been implemented according to its initial planning by 77%. Their distribution shows that 54.2% concerns “squares-green”, 40.9% “public spaces”, 4.6% “parking spaces” and 0.3% “roads” (unopened).

The analysis shows that in general the problem of implementing the city plan intensifies as we move away from the city centre. The most important problems can be found first in the districts of “Agios Georgios” and “Nea Smirni”, secondly, in the district of “Nea Politia”, if the areas of the National Railway Organization (called OSE) are calculated and, thirdly, in the district of “Hippocratis”, as long as the area of the park “Alcazar” is not calculated. For the district of “Agioi Saranta”, the low rate of implementation of the city plan results from the inclusion on the surfaces of

the prescribed and reserved sites of the Air Force Headquarters. The western districts of the city present a good picture of the implementation of the city plan (above average). In the central areas of the city there is a problem in the area of “Agios Konstantinos”. For the areas “Ippocratis”, “Nea Politia”, “Leivadaki” and “Station-Pirovolika” the implementation rates of the city plan apply if the areas of “Alcazar”, the areas of OSE and the areas of the Ministry of Finance as “Public Estate areas” respectively are not calculated.

In the district “Stafmos-Charavgi-Pirovolika”, the total number of public spaces, located in the area, is about 413,500 sq.m. Of these, 323,200 sq.m. have been acquired, approximately 88,100 sq.m. are still reserved, representing 21% of all public spaces in the area. Reserved areas include the OSE-owned areas with a total area of approximately 52,600 m². In the district “Livadaki”, the total number of public spaces, located in the area, is about 95,800 sq.m. Of these, approximately 56,000 sq.m. have been acquired, while some 27,400 sq.m. are still prescribed and reserved.

Also, an area of 12,348,57 sq.m. of public spaces is characterized as “Public Estate” belonging to the Ministry of Finance. The implementation rate of the city plan is 67%. If the public spaces are not calculated, then the implementation of the project as a percentage is reduced to 58%. The district “Ipirotika-Neraida” is an area with a poor proportion of public spaces to the total area (just 5.44%) and this classifies it as an area with significant problems, with regard to reserved public spaces. The total number of public spaces located in the area is approximately 47,800 sq.m. Of these, approximately 34,400 sq.m. have been acquired, while some 13,400 sq.m. are still reserved. For the area of “Nea Politia” the percentage of public spaces provided for in the City Plan is the second largest, at the level of districts (17.39%) and corresponding to approximately 285,200 sq.m. With regard to the picture of the implementation of the City Plan, if the OSE areas are taken into account, the urban area has one of the lowest implementation rates

of the project (53%), whereas if these areas are not taken into account, then it has one of the highest implementation rates (92%). In the urban district “Averof”, the total public and public spaces, located in the district, are about 163,500 sq.m. Of these,

approximately 154,600 sq.m. have been acquired, while some 8,900 sq.m. are left, which are reserved even representing 5% of all public and public spaces in the area, not including, for these calculations, the areas of the former Ministry of Agriculture.



Fig. 1 The city plan of Larissa.

Table 1 Prescribed and acquired spaces and percentage of implementation of the City Plan (per area of Larissa).

A/A		Reserved m ²	Communal m ²	Implementation %
2	Agioi Saranta	60,264.89	17,896.03	23
16	Agios Georgios	63,960.70	74,924.49	54
3	Agios Konstantinos-Agios Achillios	15,569.78	154,351.65	91
6	Agios Nikolaos-Agios Athanasios	247.40	53,936.19	100
9	Agios Thomas	7,619.65	35,059.29	82
4	Ampelokipi	5,352.78	29,714.02	85
13	Anthoupoli	11,179.85	74,463.77	87
15	Averof	8,866.66	154,583.97	95
7	Filippoupoli	22,636.98	54,442.30	71
5	Ippokratis	32,551.02	200,444.87	86 (61)*
8	Livavaki	39,811.43	56,010.62	58(67)***
12	Nea politia	135,050.51	150,300.61	53 (92)**
1	Nea Smirni	17,705.32	32,567.71	65
10	Neapoli	2,158.72	262,144.42	99
11	Neraida-Ipirotika	13,360.26	34,411.48	72
14	Stafmos-Charavgi-Pirovolika	88,131.08	325,453.49	79(90)****

Table 2 Ratio of communal spaces-areas to total area (at district level of analysis).

A/A	District/Urban area	Total area m ² (a)	Communal area (planned) m ² (b)	Communal area m ² (c)	b/a %
12	Agios Georgios-Toumpa	2,000,000	139,100		6.96
6	Agios Thomas	282,000	42,680		15.13
2	Ampelokipi	385,000	35,060		9.11
9	Anthoupoli	507,400	85,640		16.88
11	Averof ***	1,543,200	163,450		10.59
4	Filippoupoli	620,000	77,080		12.43
7	Ipirotika-Neraida	874,400	47,570		5.44
3	Ipporatis	700,000	63,500		9.07
5	Iivavaki	583,000	95,820		16.44
8	Nea Politia	1,640,000	285,200		17.39
1	Nea Smirni	905,600	49,710	32,567.71	5.55
13	Neapoli	1,000,200	264,300		26.42
10	Stafmos-Charavgi-Pirovolika**	2,598,000	413,500		15.92
	Total	13,638,800	1,762,410		12.92

5. The “Special Cases” of the “Prescribed” Public Spaces in the City of Larissa

The above analysis shows that the presence of large “institutional” state owners makes it difficult to implement the city plan in the case of the city of Larissa. These institutional owners, such as the Ministry of Defense (for the facilities of the military installations), the Ministry of Agriculture (for the areas of the former ETHIAGE), the OSE (as facilities and network), the Public Power Corporation (as installation and network) as well as other areas of the State under the control of the Land Office of the State (Ministry of Finance) in principle challenge the existing urban planning by claiming that their activities are considered and placed by definition outside urban planning legislation and contribute on the one hand to the poor image of the implementation of the city plan (since their areas are prescribed areas but not yet acquired) and on the other hand the non-possibility of further planning, since they question up even the ratification of the relevant urban implementing acts. In any case, according to the General Urban Plan, a large part of the premises of these institutional owners are classified as “public spaces”, but they are not acquired, i.e. they have not been attributed to the Municipality of Larissa.

Therefore, the city has an “official” urban plan which is very different than its “real” one.

Focusing on the military installations, historically it seems that the areas where those military installations settled in Larissa were outside the urban plot. However, today the city has spread to the south, thus having covered and encased the military installations, thus fragmenting the urban fabric. The urban districts occupied by installations are those of the 1st Army (“Sarimvei”), Camp “Buga” (“Anthoupoli-Neraida”), “303 P.E.B.” (Stafmos-Charavgi) and the Air Force Headquarters (“Agioi Saranta”) constitute an important part of the total area of the city (occupying about 5.25%) and are located in key positions. The Air Force Headquarters on the eastern part of the city is an obstacle to the natural expansion of the city. All these military installations in combination with the facilities of the O.S.E., interrupt the continuity of the urban fabric of Larissa and conflict with the use of the “general residence” prevailing in the area.

With regard to the premises of the O.S.E. and the railway network to Athens, Thessaloniki and Volos, all together create significant problems in the continuity of the urban fabric of the city. The facilities of the O.S.E. occupy an area of about 280 acres, which constitutes 1.8% of the area of the city. In addition to the existence of the above-ground railway

lines, which are a dominant problem for the communication of the south-eastern districts with the rest of the city (the districts of “Agios Georgios” and “Charavgi” also have a communication problem from the north to the south), the O.S.E. maintains within the city the facilities of freight, which prevent the organic connection between the different urban districts and divide the city to the west and east.

In the western part of the city are the transit lines of the Public Power Corporation (DEI in Greek) as well as the substation maintained by the company within the city. According to the General Urban Plan, these areas are classified as public and any building activity is prohibited, due to the health risks that exist from the magnetic fields created by the high voltage pillars. Despite these prohibitions and the risks they pose to residents, the area (parts of the districts of “Livadaki” and “Agios Thomas” has been built, while one of the most important demands of the residents is the removal of the pillars or their further elevation.

The areas of ETH.I.A.G.E are located in the southern part of the city. These are important areas owned by the Ministry of Agriculture and in particular the National Agricultural Research Foundation, which houses the premises of the Institute of Livestock Plants and Shepherds of Larissa (I.K.F.B.) and the Institute of Mapping and Classification of Lands of Larissa (I.H.T.E.L). These areas occupy about 2.4% of the area of the urban plan and constitute an important barrier to the communication of the districts located on either side (“Pirovolika” and “Nea Politia”). From time to time some spaces have been granted for the needs of the city (schools, sports venues), but the Foundation continues to maintain an area of about 354 acres in the area. Cooperation between stakeholders on any use of land may be considered.

6. Lifting of Expropriation of “Prescribed and Reserved” Areas in the City of Larissa

The Municipality of Larissa deals with three different categories of expropriation and, therefore,

acts: First, expropriation of land for creating communal infrastructures, second, expropriation of land for opening streets as a result of the implementation of the existing urban plan and, third, expropriation of land for widening streets as a result of the implementation of the existing urban plan. The above acts shall then be categorized as follows:

In acts for which there is no court order to lift or remove expropriation.

In acts for which there is a court order to lift or remove expropriation.

In operations for which there is a request for administrative lift or removal of expropriation.

A total of approximately 120 cases of final judicial decisions imposing the lifting of expropriation have been issued in accordance with the archives of the Directorate of Urban Planning. This number, based on the institutional framework and the socio-economic factors of the difficult current period, will increase creating a stifling situation for the city plan. The Municipality has to decide whether it compensates the owners of the reserved spaces-areas and keep the public land and therefore implement the urban plan or release the reserved spaces-areas and consequently not implement the urban plan. The most important problems, i.e. the largest number of lifting of expropriations, are recorded in the areas “Agios Georgios (16)”, “Nea Smirni (9)” and “Hippocratis (9)”. According to the current update of the Planning Directorate’s archive, there are 86 pending cases of lifting of expropriation and 28 ‘under settlement’, with most ‘settled’ cases concerning the areas “Averof” (5) and “Agios Georgios” (4) and from (3) in the areas “Abelokipi”, “Agios Thomas”, “Neraida” and “Charavgi”.

The total area reserved for the implementation of the City Plan currently amounts to approximately 524,000 sq.m. The estimated value for their expropriation exceeds 150,000,000 euros. Of the above areas, for about 114,000 sq.m. there are judicial decisions that require either the lifting of the

expropriation or the re-imposition by the municipality, but with the obligation of the Municipality to enter in its budget the corresponding amount of money for their acquisition. The estimated amount of compensation is approximately 46,000,000 euros. This amount cannot be reimbursed by the Municipality to cover all the allowances.

It is therefore necessary to review the whole issue, since the options are clear with regard to the available urban planning instruments on the basis of the existing institutional framework: maintain the commitment and start the administrative re-enforcement process after the amount of compensation or release and return the property to its owner, apparently to the detriment of the urban planning and the city itself.

Obviously, the second option is not an option in the sense that the freezing of properties was made for urban planning reasons during the preparation of the urban plan, so reserving the properties was necessary to ensure and upgrade the quality of the urban environment. However, it is also impossible to compensate all the owners of the reserved land for obviously economic reasons and this was shown by the analysis that preceded for the city of Larissa. Therefore, the choice is one, namely to maintain the commitment but on the basis of criteria and conditions. This means assessing the total number of prescribed and reserved spaces based on the real needs of the city and taking into consideration three critical factors: the urban importance of the prescribed and reserved space, the financial capacity for compensation of the expropriation by the Municipality and the legal and urban status of the reserved properties. It is also very important that the assessment be made with reference to the level of the urban district, in order to obtain the greatest benefit for the citizen.

But how exactly are the above defined:

The urban importance of the prescribed and reserved space is related to its size (large or small), its location in the urban area (central or not, distance), the type/scope of public space (square, road) and the

existence of other reserved and acquired public spaces in the area. If there is no other public space, then the prescribed and reserved space under evaluation is considered to be a priority.

The financial capacity for compensation of the expropriation by the Municipality is related to the amount of compensation and is probably the only criterion that can be negotiated between the actors involved. Experience has shown that owners overestimate the value of their property while the Municipality evaluates on the basis of the objective value of the property (prices given by the Ministry of Finance), but also taking into account current commercial prices. That is why most out-of-court conciliation procedures fail and this is the point where a consensus of views and a compromise are required because otherwise no agreement can be reached.

The legal and urban situation of prescribed and reserved properties is related in principle to problems in ownership (e.g. lack of contracts) and various types of burdens (e.g. bank mortgage). Experience has also shown that many cases did not proceed under the responsibility of the owner himself and the problems that his property had and which he apparently concealed from the staff of the Municipality.

To the above we must add the “special cases” of “committed” (prescribed and reserved) spaces in the city of Larissa (section 5). Existing urban planning includes “committed” public spaces in properties of the OSE, Public Power Corporation (DEI in Greek) and the Ministry of National Defense. Urban planning at the time of study represented the philosophy and spirit of that time and, rather, very ambitious projects (e.g. an underground railway network, removal of military camps outside of the city, urbanization of the area of the Airforce Headquarters), which didn’t and will not be implemented. Is there now the maturity on all sides to start a dialogue within the framework of the basic principles of governance and in the light of both the needs of citizens and the real city?

The process of evaluating the “reserved” spaces-areas is based on what Larissa needs as a city that aims at providing to its people quality of life and an advanced urban environment. Three critical factors are taken into consideration: The “urban importance” of each “reserved” space-area, the economic affordability of financing each expropriation and the legal as well owner status of each reserved “reserved” space-area. Therefore, the analysis should have first the district level as level of reference; second the level of urban entity and finally the level of the existing urban plot. Particularly important “reserved” sites (e.g., bb 867C, bb 867A) are considered as an urban priority.

7. Conclusions

One of the most important problems for the implementation of urban planning is the issue of prescribed and reserved public areas in the City Plan. These are land owned by private owners or institutional owners (for the city of Larissa) and have been “committed” as a result and implementation of urban planning. Any commitment means deprivation of ownership and therefore the owner should be compensated for this loss. This is precisely the problem: Properties have been frozen for many years without the owners having been compensated, resulting in an urban plan that has nothing to do with reality, i.e. a complete mismatch between the planned and the implemented and real city. Due to the current economic and social conditions the problem is constantly intensifying, resulting in the risk of undoing the City Plan. This problem is the main feature of the dysfunction of urban planning in all the urban complexes of the country.

The analysis showed that the city centre of Larissa does not show any significant problems, at the level of public space, other than the area of Agios Konstantinos, where there is a lack of public spaces in general. In the same area, however, a significant number of expropriations are recorded in certain

building blocks, which are located around the 1st Ancient Theatre (building blocks 867 and 871). These properties have been frozen for many years without being compensated as a result of the revision of the General Urban Plan and the need to highlight the monument. The above “commitments” have already begun to be an important issue for the Municipal Authority, especially since the institutional framework now allows the beginning of an administrative process of lifting the commitment, bypassing the Municipal Authority. At the same time, there is a significant difference in the implementation of the city plan between the areas of the city, but also in the ratio of public spaces in terms of the total area of the districts, outside the city centre. This difference is in favor of western districts.

As has been mentioned, the maintenance of the commitment of these properties and therefore the application of urban planning presupposes the administrative procedure for the re-imposition of the planning, which requires in advance the inclusion, in a specific budget code, of the corresponding amount of compensation. The total cost of these expropriations for the Municipality of Larisa amounts to the amount of 46,000,000.00 euros approximately and concerns the expropriation of about 112 acres. Finally, it should be noted that, following the establishment of a new institutional framework for expropriations, the Municipality is placed at a worse disadvantage.

Given the dilemma of choosing between consistency or not with the existing urban planning, the paper proposes the review and re-evaluation of the prescribed and reserved spaces on the basis of three crucial factors: the ‘urban importance’ of each prescribed and ‘reserved space’, the financial capacity to finance expropriation and the legal characteristics of the properties. All three are very important, if the issue is ‘urban realism’. In addition to the above, however, it is important to “operate” and strengthen the so called land bank, which as a concept was been created for the exchange of land or transfer of building,

from properties that are bound (for example preserved, expropriated, etc.). If the land bank acts as a real “building rights manager”, then property owners who have been committed by the Municipality for many years can have a solution to their problem, given the financial inability of the Municipality. A classic example of successful, we believe, application of the land bank could be the case of building blocks 867 and 871, which are located around the 1st Ancient Theatre.

In any case, the rationalization of the city’s requirements towards the land owners of prescribed and reserved properties due to the implementation of the urban plan is necessary in the context of social justice and the functioning of the city. Any decisions to lift expropriation or maintain the commitment must be taken after an overall view, at least at the level of the urban unit and with full justification, based on specific criteria.

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