

Case study ID

GR_02

KYPSELI MUNICIPAL MARKET

CASE STUDY SHORT SUMMARY REPORT

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Case Study at a Glance

In 2016, the Municipality renovated the Municipal Market of Kypseli to optimize its societal benefits, as part of a broader initiative to repurpose city resources. This effort promotes culture, innovation, and creative entrepreneurship, thereby enhancing the quality of life within the local community. The primary objective was to transform the Market into a catalyst for revitalizing the local economy, aimed at attracting new audiences and generating interest in products and services for residents and entrepreneurs, while providing new experiences for the citizens of Athens.

Activities include: Social activities, exhibitions, adult workshops, in-store workshops, theatrical and musical and theatrical events. The market's new operational model, non-profit in nature, emphasizes culture, education, social innovation, entrepreneurship, and the strengthening of the local economy. This represents the first application of such a model within a public space in the city.

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Case Study Profile

Topic

- ☐ Community Gardening & Urban Agriculture
- ☒ Community Hubs & Cultural Activities
- ☐ Urban Design & Planning Processes
- ☒ Public Space Development & Management
- ☐ Local Economic Development
- ☒ Urban Regeneration & Rehabilitation

Scale

- ☐ Metropolitan / city region
- ☐ City scale
- ☒ Neighbourhood scale
- ☐ Block scale
- ☐ Building scale

Resilience Challenge

- ☐ Environmental and ecological resilience
- ☒ social & cultural resilience
- ☐ Infrastructure and technological resilience
- ☒ Economic & livelihood resilience

Duration

- ☐ Immediate (less than 1 month)
- ☐ Project-Based (1–12 months)
- ☐ Programme-Based (1–3 years)
- ☐ Strategic (3–5 years)
- ☒ Structural / Transformative (more than 5 years)

Stakeholders

- ☒ Community members
- ☒ Local government
- ☒ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- ☒ Private sector
- ☐ Academic and research institutions

Type of Civic Engagement Supporting Neighborhood Resilience

- ☐ Resident-led and grassroots initiatives
- ☐ Collaborative planning projects or processes
- ☒ Advocacy and capacity building
- ☒ Volunteer and community service projects
- ☒ Short-term, more flexible project-based engagement
- ☒ Long-term, more institutionalized engagement (development of stable structures, etc.)
- ☐ Protest and resistance mobilization
- ☒ Art-and culture-based civic Engagement

Level of Civic Participation

- ☐ Information
- ☒ Involvement or participation
- ☒ Collaboration or co-creation
- ☒ Empowerment
- ☐ Resistance and protest-based empowerment

Empirical Basis and Methodological Approach

The Municipal Market of Kypseli project focused on the reuse and rehabilitation of public urban infrastructure through practices of community engagement and social entrepreneurship. Based on a mid-century purpose-built local market building, the project attempted to bring under the same roof local commercial activity, public services and community based cultural practices. The structure that has fallen in disrepair, was refurbished by the municipality of Athens, while the day-to-day activities were coordinated by a civil-society organization that organized the project's public programme, managed the allocation of space within the building and worked towards addressing the neighborhood's priorities.

The project managed to create a local market hub, featuring permanent store spaces, pop-up stores, bazaars and other ephemeral acts, reviving the heritage building and contributing towards instituting a space of encounters through empowering local economies, as well as socially and ecologically ethical forms of production. Furthermore, a local event's space was created, fostering cultural dialogue between diverse communities (e.g. exhibitions, shows, concerts, film and dance sessions, parties, workshops and communal discussion sessions etc), strengthening the neighborhoods identity and mobilizing creative groups.

As part of the case study, we collected visual and textual documentation on the project's planning and implementation process from open sources and internal stakeholder communications. In addition, we conducted in-situ observations and carried out a total of three interviews:

- **One interview with a representative of the initiating civil society organization.** The interview focused on all stages of the project's development, throughout the phases of initiation, maturity and as well as with disengagement of the original organizers. The initiator's approach proceeded with experimenting with a variety of practices such community events, workshops and events, along with small scale commercial uses that reinvigorated both the building and the surrounding neighborhood.
- **One interview with a representative of local administration.** The municipality of Athens is an important stakeholder for the KMM. First, the building is property of the Municipality, second, the market houses a limited number of municipal services but most importantly, the initial idea and actions towards implementation originated by the municipality. The interview revolved around the concept that kickstarted the project, the first tentative steps and the collaboration with involved stakeholders (private sector, civil society, citizen groups).
- **One interview with a local participant and beneficiary who followed the project closely.** The conversation was led by a bottom-up perspective, describing the atmosphere and experiences that emerged along the first years of the project. Particular attention was given to the gradual transformation of the project throughout its life cycle, as the project was perceived to oriented itself towards closer cooperation with the private sector, (local businesses and institutional actors). Also, the impact of the project in local urban life was stressed, especially contrasted with the realities of the contemporary environment shaped by the consequences of the financial crisis.

Compendious summary

Introduction

This case study belongs to TYPE: A municipal market focused on social entrepreneurship. Market typologies occupy an important place in the Mediterranean and Greek context, as spaces of commercial activity as well as social bonding, exchange of ideas and lastly as community spaces in the broader sense. The case of the Kypseli Municipal Market is a unique- in the context of Athens- project which involves public, private and civil society actors as well as local businesses, residents and the general public. Through the course of time, attempts to revitalize the KMM demonstrate a methodology that achieves in engaging institutions and citizens towards creating a model of neighborhood regeneration emphasizing inclusivity, social value and cohesion, while addressing issues of long-term financial sustainability and the viability of local urban infrastructure. Through the reuse of the existing structure, and the effort towards building a community of care and collective decision making, the story of the KMM reveals potentialities of experimentation that rely on a not-for-profit rationale, while remaining grounded in a realistic consideration.

Neighborhood challenges

Kypseli is a densely populated neighborhood in central Athens, occupying much of the city's 6th municipal department. The area is renowned for its rich history and cultural diversity. According to the 2011 census, foreign citizens accounted for 10.5% of Athens's population, with 9.5% originating from developing countries and the remaining 1% from developed ones. (athenssocialatlas.gr). Kypseli is known for its multicultural makeup, with a significant presence of immigrants from various countries. Originally a rural area with farmhouses, Kypseli transformed in the 1930s into a thriving urban neighborhood, attracting middle and upper-class residents. The predominant building type is the versatile 'polykatoikia' model, multi-story structures, that accommodate a wide array of uses. Following the typical patterns, concerning the central areas of the city Kypseli displays a variety of uses, that mainly revolve around its residential character.

However, Kypseli has important public spaces such as Fokionos Negri Street, a pedestrian area known for its greenery and social places, where the KMM is located. Its proximity to the center of the city makes it a prime location for students, young professionals, migrant communities, as well as a consistently present local population that inhabits the area since the mid 20th century.

Kypseli faces challenges such as poor connection to public transport, due to lack of adequate coverage by the city's underground railway system, limited accessibility for public use vehicles and reliability of bus service. In terms of vehicle accessibility, the neighborhood lacks parking space, and chronic street congestion due to its particularly unfavorable characteristics regarding high density and inadequate street planning. Furthermore, as a dense urban neighborhood, typical of Athens, Kypseli has limited access to public spaces and urban green. According to a 2009 report, there is only 2 square meters of green space per person in the area. In contrast, the city has an average green place of about 6.63 square meters per person in the city of Athens. The primary green area in Kypseli is Pedion tou Areos, a public park, which is about 27.7 hectares, which provides entertaining space for both the local people and visitors. Additionally, initiatives such as construction of small green locations, such as a pocket park

developed with the support of Deloitte in 2020, aims to increase the greenery of the neighborhood. These efforts are important in a neighborhood where green locations are rare, striving to improve the quality of life of residents.

Finally, Kypseli faces a hybrid housing crisis paired with challenges that stem from its aging building stock. The building stock in Kypseli, Athens, primarily consists of structures built during the mid-20th century, with a significant portion dating from the 1930s to the 1970s, when Athens underwent a period of rapid urbanization and expansion, driven by the need to accommodate the growing population and the influx of internal migrants. Buildings from this era typically have larger apartment blocks and were often constructed without modern amenities like elevators or proper insulation, reflecting the housing demands of the time. In the context of the Greek financial crisis, construction slowed down significantly, therefore older buildings fell into disrepair, while new construction is halted due to lack of buildable plots.

Response to the challenge

The initiator (Impact Hub Athens), a non-governmental organization was tasked by the Municipality of Athens with a) the preparatory phase, identifying aspects of the public programme, community groups to be engaged, possible events activities and uses, b) managing the space through its everyday function. The initiator was selected following its extensive experience in socially engagement projects, as well as its not-for-profit structure.

Spatial key issues addressed are the following:

- To combat the lack of social spaces, contributing to local cohesion, especially in the context of a high-density neighbourhood.
- The need to provide well organized space for small scale businesses and socially oriented enterprises and promote a financially viable and socially inclusive model.
- To reactivate a significant piece of public infrastructure, more specifically, the interwar period heritage building of the Kypseli municipal market

Chronology of action

Up until 2003 the KMM was functioning as originally intended, that is as a small neighborhood store space, serving local uses, groceries, butchers etc, however gradually falling in disrepair, following prevalent trends in consumers' habits. In 2009 it was occupied by a citizens' collective that used it as a self-organized local community space. Arguably, this phase contributed in creating a frontrunner model, that in a certain degree prefigured aspects of its utilization in the future, mainly those associated with grassroots initiatives and citizens' engagement, albeit in a structurally different manner. In 2012 the City Hall, decided to refurbish the Market using EU funding, which lasted for four years, and opted for subtle interventions, consistent with the building's character. In 2017, following a period of deliberation, Impact Hub Athens was tasked with managing the space and contribute towards a socially inclusive regeneration programme, emphasizing in its long term sustainability. During this period the KMM emerged as a place of local importance, functioning not only as a vibrant commercial space, but also as a space for community engagement and social exchange. In 2023, after the conclusion of this 'pilot' period the KMM was handed back to Technopolis A.E., an entity directly controlled by the Municipality of Athens.

Mechanisms of civic engagement

The City of Athens (during the mayorship of G.Kaminis) achieved to secure European funding to restore the building and plan the initiation of its public programme. The market was refurbished (it was closed since 2011) and delivered back to the municipality in 2016, along with the big question as to what kind of activities could the building host, and what model of economic development will keep it alive in the years to come. According to the public actors involved, ‘the model we have chosen is based on the collaboration of three sectors: civil society, social entrepreneurs and municipal services to better implement this model of social economy’. In this direction during the kick-off phase, the Municipality of Athens, directed an open call towards groups and individuals wishing to participate. Furthermore, local groups and community members were addressed by the project’s initiators throughout its course. Throughout this preparation phase the neighborhood contributed with proposing directions for the type and nature of activities to be pursued as well as with getting involved to day-to-day volunteering.

As reported by the initiators, the local community participated in specific events and activities where an extended degree of autonomy was granted. Those include cultural events (projections, concerts, parties) as well as workshops and communal discussion sessions. The latter tended to propose future activities in areas of their own interest.

As a beneficiary interviewee stated: ‘I participated in an open air theater play about the neighborhood of Kypseli, some vegan bazars, exhibitions about the history of the neighborhood and its urban planning, events about the Ethiopian culture and its integration in the urban fabric. Through my participation I formed a better perception of the neighborhood and its multicultural and complex structure. I participated in conversations and exchanged opinions with people that lived their whole life in Kypseli’. This statement reflects a range of participatory actions focused on local residents. Those include cultural events, cultural exchange events and community led discussions, concerning the neighborhood’s present and future.

Through the implementation phase (2017-2023) the initiator was in charge for the projects day-to-day function (e.g. space management, administrative duties, event planning etc.). The local government provided funding and was present through a public agency (KEP) that was located in the building. Private donors and philanthropic institutions participated in specific events as hosts, funding bodies or co-organizers. Local residents participated not only in attending events and the everyday life of the space, but also co-organized a wide array of activities (workshops, cultural event etc.). As it is observed, areas of intervention remained clear for the most part. However, overlaps and collaborations were quite common throughout.

The local community was largely supportive and engaging. However, members of the local community, as per the initiators, were initially skeptical regarding the projects scope and intentions. As the project gained steam, tensions were eased. As Kypseli’s population is largely of migrant background, cultural gaps of understanding often emerged. Developing a common ‘language’ in terms of administration, arrangements and task allocation was an important part of the process. Those concerns were minimized through the devoted presence and actions of the initiators and other participating parties who strived towards creating conditions of openness and acceptance for all. Moreover, concerns regarding the project’s scope and intentions were presented by parts of the neighbourhood. Building trust, meaningful relations and aspects of a collective identity was an integral part of the project.

Case study findings and lessons learned

It is observed that civic participation extended towards at least two directions the first being organic commitment to planning and implementation of specific activities and events, the second being participation in events, that enrich the neighborhood's cultural and social capital. Regarding the first category participation of local migrant groups (e.g. Kypseli's migrant women group) or other special interest citizen groups (e.g. live shows and educational sessions by El Sistema Greece). Regarding the second aspect, it should be noted that the presence of this public and open space enhanced in horizontal terms the neighborhood's everyday life, by keeping the facilities open to the residents and beyond. As a participant points out: 'We feel more connected to each other and to the neighborhood. The projects contributed to the promotion of a sense of community and collective identity and a deeper understanding of the strengths and the needs of the neighborhood.'

Furthermore:

- The revival of a typical yet fading spatial model, that of an enclosed market, with a linear typology of small shop spaces surrounding an inner courtyard. This heritage building type invokes memories of nostalgia, while remaining inviting, thus serving as a focal point for the neighborhood, and operating as a reminder of its modern history and identity.
- The KMM project organically invented beyond its boundaries, extending beyond into its immediate public space, Fokionos Negri pedestrian road. This gesture breathes new life to the neighborhood, also considering that public space in Athens remains undervalued and often unused.

Given the uniqueness of the project- as the initiators state, new forms of engagement, collaboration or even communication had to be devised in order to surpass feelings of distrust or even conflict, but also at certain times cultural barriers. The fact that before the market's renovation, the building used to be occupied by a group of local residents, resulting in occasional events of dissonance between groups of residents and the organizers. Another source of concern was the long-term financial stability of the project, as small businesses bear far more reduced capital and reinvestment capacities in comparison with more robust commercial actors. In that light, requirements in external funding seem to constitute a central question with no easy answers.

Conclusion

The KMM project showcases a multitude of concrete outcomes. The following seem to constitute the basic forms of interventions.

- The creation of a local market hub, featuring permanent store spaces, pop-up stores, bazaars and other ephemeral acts, reviving the heritage building and contributing towards instituting a space of encounters through empowering local economies, as well as socially and ecologically ethical forms of production.
- The identification of a local event's space fostering cultural dialogue between diverse communities (e.g. exhibitions, shows, concerts, film and dance sessions etc.), strengthening the neighborhoods identity and mobilizing creative groups

- The creation of an organized, yet often impromptu, space of dialogue, enabling collective imaginaries, forms of engagement, and vision, helping participants identify themselves as an integral part of the neighborhood with an active say on its future.

The project's history of planning and implementation seems to confirm the premises of this specific action, as a pilot project, rather than a wide-range urban policy agenda. Despite its stand-alone nature, the project participates in broader conceptualizations of resilience, as a part of the 2016-2020 Athens Resilience Strategy. However, it should be stressed, that it remains one of the rare examples of urban engagement projects in Athens, and therefore does not outline by itself a broader long-term strategy.

Recommendations for future civic engagement

Following the experience drawn from the KMM, it seems that future interventions aiming towards broader arrangements of civic engagement should:

- Strive to create spaces of collective well-being by encouraging citizen participation in a more structural manner in terms of decision-making especially in matters of asset allocation and resources management.
- Establish meaningful ways of coexistence, by seamlessly weaving their goals into the fabric of everyday life, following the rhythm and collective identification of neighborhoods, in contrast to disrupting their ways of everyday existence.
- Develop further channels of meaningful communication between local authorities and urban policy makers and the public, as well as organized groups of residents.
- Offer to local communities and individuals institutionally valid pathways towards participation in local and broader urban policies, enhancing relations of trust and accountability.
- Institutionally enshrine binding forms of governance that actively recognize citizens' participation and collective ownership of urban infrastructure
- Integrate participation tools that promote diagnostic methodologies, co-design and implementation.
- Develop community-based advisory boards within municipal planning departments to ensure continuous resident input in urban development.

Replicability

Notwithstanding the fact that the KMM created an inclusive and welcoming space, it remains a pilot project which suggests the need of further initiatives that gesture towards a similar direction and imply the need for creating broader networks of interventions. The project's contribution towards resilience suggests a framework of scalable approaches to similar challenges. More specifically:

1. Achieving social cohesion through enhancing ethical and sustainable local and circular economic networks.
2. Mobilizing public resources towards urban interventions that favour the integral involvement of local communities.
3. Enabling partnerships between diverse stakeholders with varying views and goals (public, private, grassroots)
4. Providing financial resources, technical knowledge and assistance towards communities, enhancing trust and institutional integrity

5. Scaling forms of participatory interventions, working towards creating expanding networks and thus forming environments and cultures of sharing and participation.
6. Institutionalizing forms of local governance, recognizing local communities as carriers of knowledge and valuable lived experience.
7. Enabling the revitalization of heritage buildings and sites while supporting local networks and interests.

Attachments

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UPRUN was cofunded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Erasmus+ National Agency for Higher Education (German Academic Exchange Service). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



This project has received funding under ERASMUS+ Cooperation Partnerships programme. Project No 2023-1-DE01-KA220-HED-000167004.

