From ‘void’ to ‘voidness’: a trans-scalar
and relational approach to urban voids in
post-industrial cities.
Learning from Eleonas, Athens, Greece.

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Abstract

Post-industrial urban environments are often constituted of a patchwork of urbanisms that result in the creation of urban voids; large inactive and neglected areas where key spatial, social and environmental factors are ignored.

Highlighting the importance of a relational and trans-scalar approach to planning, this thesis uses the ‘urban void’ known as Eleonas in Athens, Greece to investigate the idea that there is a transformative function proper to these spaces. This function, termed ‘voidness’ is defined as the capacity of urban voids to induce transformative urban change across scales and across urban form, activities and socio-economic contexts. Hence, throughout this thesis there is a gradual shift from the investigation of an epistemological object: the ‘urban void’, to the exploration of an ontological process: the ‘voidness’ and its implications in daily life and planning practice.

Drawing from the disciplines of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology, I trace the transformation of Eleonas in space and time and track how the notion of the ‘void’ is conceptualised at the scales of the region, the municipality and the neighbourhood. Using mappings, observations and interviews with policy makers, residents, local workers and academics I examine under what conditions areas are perceived as ‘voids’ and how this affects the decision-making of the local planning administrations. Furthermore, I explore the derelict and decaying morphology of urban voids, the dwindling local economic activity, the conflicts between local reality and regional planning and critically addresses the dismissal of these spaces as ‘backyards for unwanted uses.’

It was found that the conceptualisation of spaces as ‘urban voids’ is subjective and changes depending on the scale of investigation. Whether they are considered in a positive or negative light, these differing perceptions skew decision-making towards specific actions and developments often with catastrophic spatial, social and economic consequences. Hence, a reconceptualisation of the urban void is suggested and more appropriate planning tools and policies are proposed towards a more context-oriented approach to spaces such as Eleonas.
Impact statement

Current research on ‘urban voids’ spans across a wide array of disciplines interested in the condition of the urban environment – from Planning, Architecture, and Design, to Political Ecology, Sociology, Cultural Studies and more – providing a multiplicity of lenses and interpretations to understand this phenomenon. Yet, instead of converging, the inherent vagueness of the notion of the ‘void’ has developed, perhaps involuntarily, to describe a variety of urban areas and spaces that encompass a sense of dereliction, unruliness, decay and disconnection from the overarching urban environment.

This research has highlighted that this understanding has negative and polarising implications in the processes that guide urban change and that mono-dimensional approaches to the ‘urban void’ are not adequate to fully grasp the physical, systemic and socio-economic role of these spaces. In that regard, this thesis offers an original academic contribution by constructing a multi-disciplinary reading of space through the lenses and combined methodologies of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology.

The multidisciplinary framework of this study opens several paths for additional research avenues in social sciences, geography, architecture, urban ecology and to some extent economics. So far, the empirical part of the research has been shared via presentations to major academic conferences, symposiums and invited talks while its conceptual side has been the root of a successful paper session at the American Association of Geographers conference in 2018 and has been included, among others, in a successful application for funding for one UCL Urban Lab related academic event. Furthermore, part of the research has been included in a postgraduate lecture given at the National Technical University of Athens highlighting not only its relevance in the Greek context but also in higher education of future planners and architects. Currently, I am continuing the dissemination of this research by having two research papers considered for publication to peer-reviewed journals and a third one in progress. I am also planning to expand further the reach of this thesis by redacting a future monograph and translating it in Greek to make it available to local non-English speakers. Lastly, a subsequent comparative and possibly collaborative study is envisioned to broaden the scope of the research and enrich its current conceptual apparatus.
The planning contribution of this research is also very explicit and is addressed both to the global community of planners and to Greek authorities. From a disciplinary perspective, this thesis points at the necessity of reconceptualising urban voids from forgotten inactive entities to that of active urban spaces and argues against their dismissal as backyards for unwanted 'non-urban' uses. Secondly, the findings of this thesis imply two major practical impacts on Greek planning. Firstly, through its exploratory dimension, this thesis adds significant primary and secondary data to a significantly lacking dataset and sheds light onto an area that for decades has been considered a 'black box' amongst practitioners. Secondly, it points at the increasing need of a restructuring of Greek planning starting from the education of future planners to the current decision-making strategies. Hence, through this study I offer, to the authorities that were part of this research, the expertise and theory developed in this PhD to reconsider the current strategies and construct more appropriate planning tools and policies that could considerably improve the spatial, functional and social condition of Eleonas and of similar 'urban voids' in Athens, Greece, and elsewhere.
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1.1 The void as a result and a strategy of urban change

Absence and voids carry the heavy burden of being seen, predominantly, as failures. This research sets to challenge this idea from an urban and planning perspective. In the urban sphere, as cities are transformed by political decisions and historical events, they often generate special conditions characterised by a certain lack, a vacancy, an emptiness. In some cases, it is a lack of built entities, while in others it may indicate the inexistence of activity, of growth, of meaning or of everyday life (Komninos, 2013). These ‘voids’ are regularly portrayed as negative absences, nuisances or inconveniences by planners and local authorities. However, this research proposes the idea that such situations of voidness – defined here as the specific political ecology found in urban voids – within the urban system are inseparably interwoven with the emergence and transformation of modern urban society and thus should be seen not as ostracized failures but instead as active components of urban space and life.

The industrial development of the second half of the nineteenth century provided the opportunity to change radically everyday life, and subsequently the urban life through the extensive transformation of the city (Adams, 1935; Loures & Panagopoulos, 2007a). Still, extensive urban transformations were rare. Until the first half of the twentieth century the traditional city as a compact and rigid entity was to some extent oblivious to the drawing boards of planners. The destruction caused by WWII however, created in some cases a tabula rasa which was eventually accepted as an incredible opportunity for urban renewal (Graham & Marvin, 2001). A crucial moment in urban history ensued as the planning theories of modernism left the theoretical sphere and were applied to the real world (Eisinger, 2009). From the British New Towns, to cities in Germany, The Netherlands, France and even Brazil, the conversion of unbuilt land became the primary goal and metric of modern urban redevelopment and progress (Eisinger, 2009). As development and reconstruction gained momentum, the voids left by the war became the most cherished opportunities for urban transformation.

But, already by the end of the 1950’s, modernist reconstruction failed to fulfil its promises. It became clear that cities were far more complex than their mere physical
attributes. Towards the late twentieth century, humanity entered a time where economic logics, technological advancements, traditions and cultural mechanisms merged in cities, and the boundaries between sense of place, form and function were blurred (Koolhaas, 1978; Krier, 1996; Venturi, Scott Brown, & Izenour, 1972). Towards the end of the twentieth century, cities and growth became almost homonymous. The urban was converted into a laboratory where scientific, intellectual and economic growth, and prosperity were born and thrived in an anonymous way (Koolhaas, 1978). Concurrently, there was a substantial change in the nucleus, the perception and the purpose of the void. Until the first part of the 20th century, the idea of absence in the urban system was only linked to the physical form of cities in the sense of unbuilt space. With modernity, however, vacancy gained a metaphorical meaning linked rather to the expected use of space and therefore to a sort of temporal suspension awaiting new activity in line with the expectations of a capitalist society. Vacancy in the urban – in the etymological sense of something that is unused, or that is used but not in the prescribed form – was associated with a disruption of economic, urban or societal growth which from a capitalist perspective leads to an imminent necessity of filling (Heynen, et al., 2006; Rennie-Short, 2004). Consequently, vacant spaces and urban voids were ultimately perceived as problematic elements of decay expected to be ‘restored’ to their ‘natural’ status of spaces of opportunity; productively working towards the contemporary goal of modern society, that is growth.

At the brink of the twenty-first century, criticism of this model started to emerge by several scholars. Many argued that the trends of objectification attempting to render the traditional cities more efficient and attractive, induce a perceptual and physical fragmentation of the urban setting (Boyer, 1994 in GUST, 1999). In the contemporary post-industrial city, the political and commercial attention is being directed essentially towards sites that assure the highest ‘return on investment’. It is in this sense that “post-industrial” is understood and used throughout this thesis and there is a distinction to be made between the ‘post-industrial city’ as a theoretical object and ‘post-industrialism’ as an ideology. The post-industrial framework that is of use for this thesis refers to the second conceptualisation and to a process of urban transformation whereby, specific areas, neighbourhoods, or regions are privileged and a “city of increasing spatial differentiation” results (Boyer, 1994 in GUST, 1999, p. 39). Again, the approach to these fragmented spaces is gradually readjusted and currently divided between, on the one hand, an opportunistic view that remains axed on growth and ‘filling’ and, on the other, an almost self-effacing and protectionist perspective that tries to shed light on the non-economic value of such places.
Arguably, the trends of urban transformation – i.e. the shift from the industrial to the post-industrial city – have either utilised or left in their passage voids. Voids in a physical, metaphorical and conceptual sense. Voids are therefore part of urbanism, they’re part of planning; deliberately or not, formally or informally. This research deals with these places of transition, through the conceptual apparatus of the ‘void’. It is an exploration of the notion of the “void” as an intellectual construct and as a new lens through which to look at these ever-evolving spaces of the city.

1.2 Research framework and gaps

Existing literature has made evident that the term ‘urban void’ is used as an umbrella term to describe a variety of areas that encompass a set of attributes of dereliction. Urban voids are generally understood as areas or enclaves that are predominantly different from the overarching urban fabric of a city and include a sense of unruliness, decay and disconnection from the main urban networks. This definition however is vague and hence can include an extremely diverse palette of types of spaces. For instance, empty lots, parks, abandoned buildings and neighbourhoods or derelict industrial estates could all be considered urban voids. Urban voids are predominantly classified in dichotomous ways as either used or abandoned, empty or filled, useful or useless, public or private, growing or in decline, etc. These characterisations are largely mono-dimensional and even though they cannot effectively reflect reality, they often lead to areas being officially labelled either as problems or opportunities.

Through the review of literature and the conceptual framework developed for this research I argue that this understanding has tremendous effects on the real-life condition of these areas. Based on whether these attributes are perceived in a positive or negative light, decision-making related to planning is usually skewed towards specific interests and actions and this can initiate urban transformations that can affect the entire urban system. Although current research tries to address some of these dichotomies (Barron & Mariani, 2014; Borret, 1999; Hari, 2006; Kamvasinou, 2011), it remains, overall, very mono-dimensional as each discipline provides its own interpretation of urban voids and thus fails to address urban voids holistically. That is, in a way that encompasses their function in urban space, the dynamics and relations they entertain with the city, and the minutiae of the local environment.
Scholars are predominantly critical towards the prevailing opportunistic stance towards urban voids (Barron & Mariani, 2014; Doron, 2000; Kamvasinou, 2011; Talocci, 2011) and several authors argue for alternative approaches that propose safeguarding the messy and unruly aspect of these spaces (Edensor, 2005; Foster, 2014; Young & Keil, 2014). So far, arguments ‘in favour’ of urban voids are romanticizing the condition arguing that decay, unruliness and uncertainty have a place in cities and thus should be left untouched. However, as appealing as this rationale might be, it lacks the necessary depth to encompass the complexity of urban areas. Most propositions remain unconvincing or inapplicable in fast growing post-industrial settings mainly because current research concentrates on urban voids in a very zoomed-in and decontextualised manner or regard these areas as relics with inherent value available to be consumed. As such, research, design and policies lack the ability to consider the ‘urban void’ as part of city and account for eventual larger scale urban dynamics. The void, indeed, is not the absence of the urban it is instead a place that is at its core connected with the city and exists because of it. Broadly, the existing literature is conceptually limited to produce a shallow understanding of urban voids and is liable to get stranded in trivial arguments about the positive or negative aspects of ‘empty space’.

To go beyond these limitations and to fill these conceptual gaps, a relational and trans-scalar approach is necessary. Hence, the research framework I constructed for this thesis, is a multi-disciplinary approach drawing from Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology aimed at unpacking the complexity of urban voids and framing them in a less divisive and increasingly context-dependent way. This three-pronged framework is designed to look at the research subject from three different exploratory lenses that investigate respectively the built form, the urban flows, and the socio-economic structures of areas considered urban voids. I developed this framework to go beyond the duality and simplicity with which urban voids are treated – as either negative or positive entities – and to give them more conceptual and spatial ‘volume’, ‘thickness’ and ‘weight’ in the contemporary planning debates.

First, I look at the meanings of the void as a conceptual construct and investigate the semantic legitimacy of the term ‘void’ when used to describe urban areas but also the effect that the process of labelling has in planning as it is an identification that generates an urgency for intervention. Then, through a single case study I explore
the attributes that constitute urban voids to discover in what sense they diverge from other urban areas on the physical, metabolic and social fronts. Identifying these three distinct characteristics is key to make contextual and informed decisions about the future of these areas. All urban areas present their own contingencies, but urban voids do even more so due to the aforementioned three characteristics: (1) their uncommon morphology, (2) their distinct use and activity, and (3) the marginalised dynamics of human interactions. Not considering these three prongs in the conceptualisation of voids and post-industrial metropolitan transformation risks advancing to understandings of space that are incomplete, in the sense that they would inform only partial aspects of the urban condition. Not accounting for the peculiarity of urban voids and instead blindly copying and applying planning ideas, masterplans, and development patterns would at best fail and at worst be catastrophic for the city and the local communities (Healey, 2012).

1.3 Eleonas in Athens, Greece: a case study

Under this framework, the post-industrial area Eleonas in Athens, Greece has been chosen as a case study for its long historical significance as a major productive area and a core driver of the city’s exponential growth in the 20th century (Biris, 1966). The relevance of Eleonas for this research lies in the successive stages of growth and decline it went through from antiquity, and how these shaped the incongruous landscape it is today.

Eleonas is strategically located between the centre of Athens and its port Piraeus. Until the 17th century it kept a condition of a field of free movement except for the scarce appearance of small farms. The War of Independence (1821-1828) and the decades that followed however were the first in a series of events that largely changed the city and Eleonas’ landscape. In 1834 Athens was named capital which spurred massive waves of rural exodus and demographic growth until the first half of the 20th century as the city became the country’s main attractive pole. This triggered a small-scale industrial development and an important need for low-income housing both of which found the unbuilt land of Eleonas to be an ideal location. Due to the economic instability of that period, Eleonas was urbanised in a totally unplanned manner with arbitrary constructions being legitimised through ad hoc extension of the official statutory plan (Sapuntzaki & Wassenhoven, 2004). Infrastructure networks were at
this point inexistent and sewage, running water and electricity were handled through local and improvised solutions (Ropaitou-Tsapareli, 2006). This chaotic mass that Eleonas had become was interestingly still dominated by horticulture until 1950 when a shift in land-use drastically changed the landscape from a productive to an industrial one. After WWII, industries and manufactures expanded in unprecedented ways covering Eleonas entirely with large industrial and retail complexes only to be massively abandoned few decades later following the deindustrialisation of Athens.

This research will focus on the later stages of activity decline, characterised in parallel by an extensive infrastructure decline, social and political inertias, and persistent struggles in development. It is also during this time that the area began to be labelled an urban void, a ‘backyard for unwanted uses’ and the ‘cesspool of Athens’. That is why this research concentrates on this period to assess whether analysing this space as a “void” allows to explain the complexity of urban, political and social relations it embodies and question whether it can be in fact considered as a “void”.

1.4 Research questions and objectives

As this thesis argues, urban areas in a constant transitional state like Eleonas are often perceived as individual entities living outside of the urban system. Conceptually, these areas are referred to in a negative sense and characterised with connotations such as “empty abstract settings”, “backyards” or “dead zones”. These negative aspects are frequently used as a marketing tool for actions that serve specific interests that often overshadow the actual reality of the place. To avoid, therefore, the generic and inadequate planning of urban voids and begin accounting for their specific and context-dependent particularities, a reset of focus must occur. Research should attempt to uncover the essence and the function of urban voids in the urban environment. Only then planning practice can follow to face the challenges arising from a globalising world of contingent and heterogeneous relations.

Hence, in dealing with urban voids and their relational interactions with the structures of cities the overarching question of this thesis arises: **What is (are) the role(s) of urban voids in processes of urban transformation of the contemporary post-industrial city?** To approach this topic, the above question was subdivided into four
sub-questions dealing with different aspects of the notion of the void – conceptually and empirically, in Eleonas:

1. To what extent is the term ‘urban void’ an appropriate characterisation for the phenomena it describes? Is the urban void, urban?
2. Is the urban void induced by specific events in the evolution of the urban environment? How can we define the void at smaller scales?
3. Do the perceptions and understandings of the urban void differ from person to person? Why and to what extent? Do these perceptions impact the evolution of the urban void?
4. To what extent can the complexity of urban voids be harnessed to promote qualitative urban change?

The first sub-question examines whether the term ‘urban void’ is an appropriate characterisation for the phenomena it describes by identifying the conceptual and physical attributes of the “void” in urban theory. The second, explores the inception of urban voids at the large, intermediate and local scales and describes the current condition of the case study (i.e. size of buildings, size of lots, existing infrastructure, type of activity, demographics, economy). It investigates whether urban voids are naturally occurring phenomena, or instead caused by specific urban events – or both. The third sub-question concentrates on the way urban voids are perceived and examines to what extent the perceptions and understandings of Eleonas differ from person to person. This is used to contrast the perceptions of residents, policy makers and local administrations regarding the case study to judge whether subjective opinions affect the evolution of its urban environment. Finally, the fourth sub-question is to a great extent normative and inspects to what extent the complexity of urban voids could be harnessed to promote generative processes and trajectories for Eleonas, and urban voids in general, that current popular perceptions and planning policies may overlook.

1.5 Analytical approach

The analytical approach developed for this research integrates mixed methods drawn from the disciplines of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology. It combines qualitative and quantitative data to illustrate the complexity of
the case study and to approach the abstract notion of the void empirically. Table 1.1 outlines the scope and methods borrowed from each discipline as well as their relevance for this thesis and their limitations.

Table 1.1 Comparison between the three disciplinary approaches composing the ‘three-pronged’ conceptual and analytical framework of this research: scope, methods, contribution and limitations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPROACH</th>
<th>URBAN MORPHOLOGY</th>
<th>URBAN METABOLISM</th>
<th>URBAN POLITICAL ECOLOGY (UPE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCOPE</td>
<td>Analyses the structure, form and interactions between the different physical entities composing the human settlement. It allows to describe the processes of replacement and transformation shaping the urban setting.</td>
<td>Studies the interactions of material and immaterial flows that compose urban settings. It aims to find pathways to close metabolic loops and enhance urban flows by modifying the design and functioning of cities.</td>
<td>Looks at cities as products of socio-environmental processes and explains their urban metabolism as the outcome of broader economic, social and historical urban dynamics led by capital accumulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODS</td>
<td>GIS mapping and analysis, mapping of personal observations, photography.</td>
<td>Aggregation of quantitative datasets on activity, housing, demographics and transportation. Transposition of the above onto maps for analysis.</td>
<td>Desktop and historical research and analysis, semi-structured in-depth interviews and walking interviews, participant observation and thematic analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTRIBUTION TO THIS RESEARCH</td>
<td>Allows to decipher how the urban void of Eleonas in Athens came to its current urban reality and to what extent it contrasts with, or resembles, the overarching urban fabric.</td>
<td>An analytical sublayer of research which helps define the current state of the urban void and specifically Eleonas in relation to the city of Athens based on the active exchange of flows or lack thereof.</td>
<td>Allows to document urbanisation and the urban void as a socio-economic process capable of inducing active transformations within the urban setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMITATIONS</td>
<td>The investigation of urban form cannot solely explain the totality of reasons why urban voids are discarded as backyards neither why despite being disregarded they are in some cases still</td>
<td>The preponderance of quantitative methods generates a limited comprehension of the social interactions in the reading of the city and includes a risk to generalise biased</td>
<td>The predominance of qualitative approaches for investigation restrains the possible depth of analysis and by focusing too much on the nature of the city fails to look at</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The value of such a multidisciplinary framework lies in its synergetic value and its ability to cover spatial, systemic and social dimensions. The data collection included a pilot study, desktop research, in-depth interviews, walking interviews, participant observation and photography. Analysis included mappings, the construction of socio-metabolic profiles, and narrative and interpretative analysis based on thematic coding and interpretive themes. During this study, two ‘typologies of voids’ were created and assessed against each other. One based on the patterns and categories that emerged from the literature and a second built on the empirical observations of the case study.

1.6 Significance of the research

The contributions of this thesis are four-fold and outlined in Table 1.2. Firstly, an intellectual and disciplinary contribution to the fields of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology is enabled through the investigation of the ‘void’ as a conceptual construct via their respective scope. Secondly, a conceptual contribution is made through the reconceptualisation of the urban void as an important parameter in planning discourses. Thirdly, a methodological contribution is derived through the original three-pronged multidisciplinary framework of this study aiming towards an increasingly relational and holistic understanding of urban areas. Lastly, a practical contribution relates to the significance of Eleonas for the city of Athens and of urban voids in other post-industrial settings.
Table 1.2 Overview of the intellectual, conceptual, methodological and practical contributions of this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCOPE AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contribution to the fields of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology through the addition of knowledge of ‘urban voids’ and more broadly spaces of de-industrialisation to their respective literatures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Construction of a typology of urban voids against which other similar spaces can be assessed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reconceptualisation of the status and purpose of urban voids as elements vital to the operation of contemporary cities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Proposition of a shift in the understanding of urban voids from static to dynamic entities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Development of a new relational research framework mixing theories and concepts from the disciplines of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology for a more holistic understanding of urban areas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Development of a framework that includes considerations of urban form, urban flows and networks, and the socio-economic situation of urban areas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Design of a trans-scalar methodology towards an understanding of urban areas that encompasses global, regional, national and local dynamics.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Suggestion of more holistic and contextual approaches towards the development and management of Eleonas in Athens.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recommendations towards more inclusive regional policies for Eleonas and for urban voids broadly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recommendations towards local governance strategies involving placemaking, space configuration and socio-economic dynamics of Eleonas and of urban voids broadly.</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Currently, little has been published on the relationship between urban voids and their broader urban context resulting in a lack of knowledge regarding the complexity and distinctiveness of these spaces. The reason for this is hard to define but could possibly be due, on the one hand, to disciplinary boundaries, which make it difficult to deal with a trans-scalar approach, and on the other to a predominance of romanticised approaches to these spaces. However, in the contemporary post-industrial city (that is the outcome of a post-industrial approach to urban transformation), this is having important implications for the planning discipline and profession as once sites labelled ‘urban voids’ are put in the spotlight they are often
seen as problematic entities in need of ‘filling’. This research argues against this tendency and aims to reconceptualise the notion of the urban void and provide a rationale for alternative approaches. It tries to understand the intricate ways placemaking, space configuration and social dynamics are interwoven, to reconceptualise the idea of the urban void from a static to a dynamic notion. From something being thought as “empty” to something that encompasses people, activities, buildings as much as unbuilt space.

I argue that the characterisation ‘urban void’ works as a tool to categorise spaces in an over-generalising way that erases the distinctive features of urban areas. Instead, I advance the thesis that urban voids are very complex heterogenous urban entities that result from a dissonant layering of policies, developments and diverse events of urban transformation. In addition, as the policy landscape surrounding Eleonas suggests, if the understanding and imaginary of the urban void depend on personal experience, or lack thereof, then this understanding is highly subjective and therefore can result in decision-making that is skewed towards personal interests. Lastly, I join most contemporary scholars in Urban Studies, Urban Geography and Urban Political Ecology in defending that the attributes of urban voids are not inherently negative, but instead vital to the operations of the city. To that, I add that a holistic, relational and contextual approach towards urban voids is necessary to move towards developments that can enhance the built environment as well as the socio-economic and metabolic operation of the urban system.

At the same time there is a distinct lack of knowledge regarding urban voids, their morphological attributes, dynamics and socio-economic situations. By consolidating as much data as possible from a variety of existing sources, this research sets out to thoroughly document Eleonas by constructing a comprehensive image of the area that could be of interest to the city of Athens in its planning and decision-making processes. Furthermore, this research also aims to extrapolate the learnings from the case study so that they become useful in the investigation of other similar cases. In that regard, the combination of methods used for this research is also presented as a standalone methodology that could be adapted and transposed.
1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into 9 chapters, the first being this introduction to the background of the research, its scope and its aims.

Chapter 2 presents the current state of research and reviews the broader literature that discusses the notion of the void in urban contexts. In this attempt to cover the full spectrum of discourses, modes of understating and approaches – historical, spatial and semantic – surrounding the urban void, I explore a variety of disciplines (ranging from planning, urban morphology, and urban metabolism, to urban political ecology, sociology, architecture, design, and photography) and highlight some theoretical trajectories framing urban voids. This multi-disciplinary exploration is relational at its core and explores whether, and how, these disciplines related to the urban environment, conceive, debate and fit together when defining the notion of the ‘void’ in cities. This Literature Review delves into the various interpretations of urban voids and concludes that their conceptual and physical understanding varies depending on the specific disciplinary lens or entry point.

On this basis, Chapter 3 argues that a mono-dimensional approach would be limiting and flawed and therefore argues in favour of a new conceptual framework. A relational framework that would need to be trans-scalar and multi-disciplinary. In that regard, through Chapter 3, I outline why out of all the surveyed disciplines those of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology (UPE) are optimal to be used as exploratory lenses for this research, and how they are to be combined to form a new research framework that exceeds the reach of each individual discipline.

Chapter 4 details extensively the methodology of research. The Chapter starts by unpacking the broader epistemological framework of research and covers the rationale for a single case study research as well as the justification for the selection of the industrial area of Eleonas in Athens. In this chapter I define the research questions and objectives and the rationale behind why a mixed methods approach was optimal to fulfil the research objectives. I unpack all the methodological and analytical tools and explain how they fed into each other as well as how the diversity of data (qualitative and quantitative) was manipulated to produce primary and secondary outputs used broadly for a qualitative understanding of space.
Chapter 5 is a deep description of Eleonas at the regional and metropolitan scale that sheds light onto the current condition of the area and defines the ‘voidness’ as a constituent aspect of urban voids. Starting from the historical evolution of Athens and Eleonas, this chapter lays out the reasons behind the distinctive development of the area and explores how its role as a productive land has changed from antiquity to today. I look at the urban form, ongoing activities, demographics, and the various regional and local policies to grasp how the way the area works and understand the intricate relations between form, function and people that have shaped and guided the contentious nature of development patterns in the area.

Then, zooming in on two purposefully selected areas within Eleonas, Chapter 6 discusses the tensions and dichotomies surrounding the idea of the urban void as they appear at the local scale. Looking at the temporal, trans-scalar and spatial characteristics of Eleonas, I unpack why the area is currently conceptualised as an ‘urban void’ and a ‘backyard for unwanted uses’ by locals, policy makers and academics. Relying heavily on the conducted in-depth interviews this chapter reveals that this conceptualisation varies according to the relation one entertains with the area and their consequent subjective opinions and biases. By navigating these different perceptions, this sixth chapter, brings to the fore the gap that exists between the preconceived idea of an inert or ‘void’ Eleonas and the reality of a very active area, albeit in a non-mainstream way. The discussion that emerges from this analysis exposes that this polarised character, which is inherent to the notion of ‘voidness’ and proper to the political ecology of urban voids, perpetuates the neglect, obsolescence and dereliction of the area.

Chapter 7 uses the outcomes of Chapter 6 as a base and argues in favour a reconceptualisation of the notion of the void in cities. In this chapter I argue that there are important dangers in overgeneralising and labelling urban voids with degrading terms. I discuss the impact that this has on the current development and planning policies surrounding Eleonas. Using the empirical knowledge developed in Chapters 5 and 6, I present a tentative list of ‘anchors’ on which planning could rely to become more contextual and inclusive of local contingencies. Furthermore, it is proposed that planning and governance should acknowledge Eleonas as a very dynamic and active area with the ability to impact processes of change and transformation beyond its borders.
Taking this case-based analysis as foundation, in Chapter 8 I turn to a more conceptual discussion surrounding the notion of ‘voidness’ as a state inherent to urban voids and its core importance in dealing with these spaces. I return to some of the core literature that influenced this thesis and connect it the observations made in Eleonas to illustrate that there is more to the ‘voidness’ than current research is able to encapsulate and explain. Because urban voids are prone to very fast and extreme transformations, and even more so in Neo-liberal countries, I propose a reconceptualisation of the approach to these areas. Using recent literature and the conclusions of Chapter 7, I suggest that the ‘voidness’ is the only constant element in urban voids and ignoring it makes the direction of planning susceptible to be reset as public and private interests shift. Finally, I conclude the chapter turning back to the three-pronged framework of this thesis and stressing the need for deeper examination beyond the simplification based on the physical and visual character of areas such as Eleonas, to ensure that their spatial, temporal and social dimensions are taken into account.

Lastly, Chapter 9 summarises the answers to the research questions of this thesis and concludes on the capacity of urban voids to act as agents of transformative change in cities. I return to the distinctiveness of the multi-disciplinary approach employed for this research and highlight the conceptual, analytical and methodological contributions of a three-pronged framework investigating the Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology of space. Finally, I position the conceptual contribution of this thesis vis-à-vis other cutting-edge work and propose several potential future research avenues.

1.8 Towards a multi-faceted understanding of urban voids

Currently, the complexity and diversity of urban voids is not systematically included in either academic research, or in planning practice. Less in academia but very much in practice, urban voids are simplistically categorised either as problematic areas or as spaces of opportunity. This has tremendous implications for the development of such sites as administrations and developers override existing social structures and productive or commercial activities in a race to maximise profits aligned with a capitalist production of space. This research however argues that these areas, because of their uncommon spatial, systemic and social characteristics, are vital for
the evolution and transformation of the urban environment and that with the correct approach they could potentially be key to a forward-looking development of cities in the 21st century.

This research raises the question of what is (are) the role(s) of urban voids in processes of urban transformation of the contemporary post-industrial city, which opens a broader discussion on urban voids and incited me to consider theories and concepts brought from a wide array of scholars and disciplines dealing with the urban environment. This thesis starts with an ontological reflection around the ‘void’ in cities to define what urban voids are in the urban sphere. Taking an epistemological turn, I explore empirically Eleonas to shed light onto the delicate and hidden aspects of the area, the disjunction between local reality and regional planning and question the dismissal of Eleonas – and urban voids more broadly – as ‘backyards for unwanted processes’. It is argued that urban voids are, in fact, vital entities to the cities they are part of and that a contextual and trans-scalar approach to these spaces is required to tailor appropriate and applicable planning guidelines and recommendations. Finally, extrapolating the gathered knowledge towards a universal and more normative discussion I discuss the significance of the ‘voidness’ (i.e. the specific Political Ecology found in urban voids) for planning as a discipline and a profession.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The urban void is as much a conceptual construct as it is a physical entity. As a conceptual construct, the term *urban void* denotes a condition of emptiness and absence within urban space. As a physical entity, it is the representation of this emptiness in the tissue of cities.

The abstract notion of the *void* is often used to characterise a wider range of lacking spaces and, while there is a wealth of literature investigating the notion of the void, there is hardly any consensus as to what it is because each discipline brings forth its own definitions and viewpoints.

Many terms have been used to describe urban voids: “derelict land” (Barr, 1969); “zero panorama”, “empty abstract settings”, and “dead spots” (Smithson, 1970, 1996a, 1996c, 1996b, as cited in Reynolds, 2003); “vacant land” (Bowman & Pagano, 2004; Northam, 1971); “wasteland” (Gemmell, 1977; Nabarro & Richards, 1980); waste (Lindner & Meissner, 2016; Lynch, 1990); “cacotopias” (Lynch, 1990); “*il vuoto*” (“the void”) (GUST, 1999; Secchi, 1984, 1989); “urban wilds” and “urban sinks” (Lynch, 1990); “new, nameless spaces” (Boeri, Lanzani, & Marini, 1993); “shadowed spaces” (Wood, 2007); “dross” (Lerup, 1994) and “drosscape” (Berger, 2006); “no-man’s land” (Leong, 1998); “dead zones”, “transgressive zones”, and “SLOAPs” (Spaces Left Over After Planning) (Doron, 2000, 2007); “anxious landscapes” (Picon, 2000); “superfluous landscapes” (Nielsen, 2002); “unintentional landscapes” (Gandy, 2016); “spaces of uncertainty” (K. Cupers & Miessen, 2018); “*le Tiers-Paysage*” (“the Third-Landscape”) (Clément, 2003). As well as other common terms, such as “brownfields”, “in-between areas”, “white areas”, “blank areas” (Barron & Mariani, 2014).

This corpus of terms is interestingly dominated by negative connotations. “Derelict land”, “wasteland”, “dross”, “drosscapes”, “dead zones”, and “brownfields” refer primarily to abandoned industrial landscapes where the now obsolete activity has left behind vast polluted zones and decaying infrastructures. “Empty abstract settings”, “dead spots”, “vacant land”, “*il vuoto*”, and “in-between areas” imply an architectural absence, a cavity in the urban tissue frequently associated with the lack of activity.
and a strong potential of redevelopment. Lastly, “No-man's lands", transgressive zones”, “SOAPs", “white areas", and “blank areas" indicate spaces neglected by developers and planning commissions.

Alluding to all these conditions through the notion of the void is of great academic interest because of its relative indeterminacy, its role in multiple contexts and, as we will see later, the potential it has to shed light on the transformation of modern city environments – or ‘voidness’ as I will be referring to this capacity throughout this thesis.

Etymologically, the word ‘void’ has multiple meanings. Taken from the Oxford Dictionaries, as an adjective it qualifies something as “not valid”, “completely empty”, “free from, and lacking”; as a noun, it refers to a “completely empty space”, and a condition of “emptiness caused by the loss of something”; as a verb, it declares “that [something] is not valid or legally binding”, “that something is discharged or drained away”¹. These definitions refer to material or immaterial absences that may be voluntary, incidental or unexpected. The notion of the void as a figure of speech, however, must be distinguished from its scientific meaning. Physicists argue that the void in the sense of the absence of everything is “unachievable as particles are everywhere, occupying even different places at once” (Forshaw, 2011 in Wright, 2013, p. 64). Hence, the use of the term void in its current form is a metaphor which, when used to describe space, indicates the lack, yet, the possibility for presence at a given place. Using the metaphor of the void to qualify and describe urban areas presupposes an understanding of the idea of vacancy in relation to the components that constitute the urban system.

The definition of the urban, however, is as diverse as the disciplines that study it. Planning, architecture, design, ecology or studies in the social sciences all project their own interpretations of urban space. The aim of this literature review is thus to investigate the notion of the void through several distinct trajectories and to surpass the limitations and confinements of a single school of thought. Furthermore, these conceptual variations in the notion of the void permit me to avoid perceiving it as a linear process of cause and effect between emptiness and a necessity for ‘filling’. It allows instead to analyse it from different perspectives and to eventually argue that

the urban void is in fact considerably more complex than its apparent physical nature would suggest.

2.2 The void as a conceptual construct

Empty: And what would become of emptiness of space? Often enough it appears to be a deficiency. Emptiness is held then to be a failure to fill up a cavity or gap. Yet presumably the emptiness is closely allied to the special character of place, and therefore no failure, but a bringing-forth. Emptiness is not nothing. It is also no deficiency. (OMA, Koolhaas, & Mau, 1995). 

Exploring the void as a spatial conceptual construct, Lynch and Lefebvre offer great insight and relevant entry points. Both explore the relevance of the notion of the void in the production, evolution, decline and revival of urban space (although Lynch approaches it through the concept of waste). Lefebvre examines how space is produced (Lefebvre, 1991) and Lynch almost starts where Lefebvre stops and explores how a city is transformed (Lynch, 1990). Lefebvre uses the concept of the void to prove his thesis that space possesses a social character and not merely an ‘empty’ container filled with physical elements and sensory data. He writes:

“We know that space is not a pre-existing void, endowed with formal properties alone. To criticize and reject absolute space is simply to refuse a particular representation, that of a container waiting to be filled by a content - i.e. matter, or bodies. According to this picture of things, (formal) content and (material) container are indifferent to each other and so offer no graspable difference” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 170).

The void, therefore, is generative it is “a basis for action and a field for action” (Neuman, 2012, p. 160). Lynch on the other hand, uses “wasting” to describe decline and deterioration and talks about space as waste which he defined as:

“What is worthless or unused for human purpose. It is a lessening of something without an apparently useful result; it is loss and abandonment,
decline, separation, and death. It is the spent and valueless material left after some act of production or consumption [...]. As we have seen, there are waste things, waste lands, waste time, and wasted lives (Lynch, 1990, p. 146).”

Thus, the interest in reading both Lefebvre and Lynch in succession is of great interest as they complement each other and conclude that void and waste are highly subjective personal manifestations but also a necessary part of life and evolution.

### 2.2.1 The void in the socio-spatial sphere

Foucault in his essay “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias” brings to light spaces yet undefined (Foucault, 1984). He describes as “heterotopias” spaces separate from the overarching orders and systems of society yet physically present in reality. Heterotopias, comments Genocchio (Genocchio, 1995), are a “form of spatially discontinuous ground; [they] give the ability to transgress, undermine and question the alleged coherence or totality of self-contained orders and systems”. Yet, it is through this contrasting and opposing nature of the heterotopia that these spaces are related to the urban environment. These spaces are in fact not standalone entities but in constant dialogue with their surroundings, exchanging a multitude of social and spatio-temporal inputs. In this sense, heterotopias “constitute a discontinuous but socially defined spatiality, both material and immaterial at the same time” (Genocchio, 1995). But Genocchio raises a fundamental question: if heterotopias sit outside of, or are essentially different from all other spaces how can they be considered under the same overarching social space and order?

Augé (1992) gives a partial answer to this question when he considers such spaces to be the product of “hypermodernity” (supermodemité in French). He argues that the rise of technology and the push towards individualisation create “non-places”, spaces that are devoid of history, identity, “everydayness”, and basic social relations and are instead solely defined by their function (Augé, 1992). Such places include airways, railways, highways, airports, large hotel and commercial complexes or even modes of transportation such as the car, the bus or the airplane. These examples could hardly be described as empty spaces, yet the non-place conveys an immaterial absence related to a profound sense of anonymity. From the eye of the observer non-places are, an amalgam of images they gathered randomly as they were passing

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4 Ibid.
through places whose “action” was never of interest: places which they never interacted with but only recorded as an external factor to their existence (Augé, 1992).

2.2.2 The void the within spatial configurations (grids, patterns and land uses)

Following Augé’s thought, hypermodernity is characterised inter alia by the incremental growth of technical spaces and networks incidentally alienating the social space. Graham and Marvin (2001) point at the controversy of such realisation since in theory infrastructure networks work to bring heterogeneous places, people, buildings and urban elements into dynamic relations that would not be otherwise. Yet, the construction of spaces of mobility and flow for some, involves always the construction of barriers for others (Wall, 2011). As spaces across cities, regions or nations are unevenly brought together these processes support the emergence of an internationally integrated and increasingly urbanised and yet, highly fragmented network society. New premium infrastructure networks create highly valued spaces that they connect and at the same time they bypass less favoured places and redundant users (Castells, 2010). This creates, on the one hand, more “valuable spaces” everywhere for new opportunities for profit-making while on the other, “switched-off” territories will also be increasingly found everywhere. Thus, this “territorial unevenness of production” results in an extraordinary geography of differential value that sharply contrasts countries, regions and metropolitan areas (Castells, 2010). As Rosa observes (2014, p. 20), infrastructure such as motorways and railways “have been lamented as barriers to movement and generators of seemingly left-over and un-maintained spaces since their construction”. While the notion of the void is not used directly by any of these scholars to describe spaces left-over by infrastructure, the idea of marginality, abandonment and dereliction is constantly present.

Concerned by the spatial dimension of the void, De Meyer et al., (1999) link the processes of concentration and decentralisation to a radical fragmentation of the urban landscape. This spatial fragmentation, perceived in multiple metropolises (in this case taking the example of L.A. as a model for other cities), “lends a discontinuous structure to the contemporary cityscape” which is heavily underpinned by the presence of “so-called urban voids” (De Meyer et al., 1999, p. 39). Literal forms of fragmentation and voids – such as mono-functional districts and deindustrialised landscapes – eventually dilute the cores of cities and are accompanied by a fragmentation in the image people have of a particular city.
Processes of growth and decline affect the physical and social aspects of urban areas through the ever-changing policies and regulations they enforce to adapt to new and upcoming urban processes (Kamvasinou, 2011; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996). Loukaitou-Sideris (1996) in her exploration of the American city finds ‘cracks’ where modernity’s hard zoning, grids and patterns, and infrastructure networks meet and superimpose. Like Castells, she argues that contemporary urbanisation processes connect people and areas in uneven ways to the extent of creating “a collection of different social and physical realms rigidly separated and often purposefully segregated” (1996, p. 96) by a series of “in-between, residual, underutilised and often deteriorating” spaces (1996, p. 91). Trancik (1986) through the concept of ‘lost space’ is referring to this exact same condition where the link between buildings, spaces and people that inhabit those is lost as a result a predominantly two-dimensional planning and urbanisation (Love, 2016b). Lost space is the “ill-shaped and ill-planned” spaces that have emerged following, among others, the dominance of the automotive infrastructure, private interests, zoning, and Modernist architecture and planning (Trancik, 1986). In the same vein, discussing the modern city, Levy (1999) argues that it has undergone important and radical changes not only regarding its constant territorial expansion but also related the structure, elements and organisation of the urban fabric. Cities that were “dense, compact and continuous” he notes “have become diffuse, loose and discontinuous” (Levy, 1999, p. 81). Returning to Trancik, his theory of the figure-ground exemplifies this discontinuous aspect of the contemporary city (Hebbert, 2016; Trancik, 1986). Exploring the relative position of solid built space and void unbuilt space, Trancik found that the vertical development of cities – imposed by conditions of migration, over-population, interests, etc. – turned public space in an amorphous and “uncontrolled void” (Love, 2016a).

Hence, as Koolhaas later developed, the centrality of the traditional urban core is gradually dissolving (Koolhaas, 2001). This marks indeed the switch from a centralised and organised urban structure to an open and fragmented fabric composed essentially of unrelated individual units (Venturi et al., 1972). In a similar tone, Peter Buchanan, investigates the idea of the void at the larger scale of the urban fabric and claims that “it is not the presence of open space itself that posits a real problem” (Buchanan, 1993 in GUST, 1999, p. 42) as open space has historically been of great importance in cities and especially in pre-modern settings. The major issue appears when open space is stripped of its enclosing frame. In this sense, “in the
fragmented modern city, it is not the lack of open space [that is problematic] but rather the excess of it and its lack of definition” (Buchanan, 1993 in GUST, 1999, p. 42).

2.2.3 The void in architecture

Looking at the space left between buildings, Peter Rowe described this new landscape as the “middle landscape [...] a desolate and inhospitable space” (Rowe, 1991 in De Meyer et al., 1999, p. 41). Rowe points also to the relative indeterminacy and temporary quality of these spaces that offer no clear definition of primary function nor temporality. With that in mind, one could support that open space in cities has and needs to be always defined, organised or utilised to be valuable. Indeed, renowned architects such as Rem Koolhaas (1989) and William-Jan Neutelings expressed at the dawn of the 1990’s a strong interest in open space and described the void as a potential rather than a nuisance (GUST, 1999).

Rem Koolhaas used the notion of the void as a conceptual device and a tool for design for both the architectural and urban scales (OMA et al., 1995). He seems to be battling the enormity of his projects (e.g. the Competition for the Trèse Grande Bibliothèque, 1989) through the void. “The Very Big Library” he writes “is interpreted as a solid block [where] the major public spaces are defined as absences of buildings, [as a] void carved out of the information solid” (OMA et al., 1995). The void is here presented solely in relation to the built and cannot be conceived without the “massive block”. The notion of flexibility is inherent to the void for Koolhaas. It offers him the plasticity he needs to develop uses independent from one another, yet still enclosed within the same “external envelope”. But for Koolhaas, the utility of the void extends to the scale of the entire urban settlement. Referring to the compact European metropolis, he expressed that the bigger challenge was less a “matter of building volumes than of how to give emptiness an urban significance” (Paul Vermeulen, 1994 in De Meyer et al., 1999, p.43). In his project for the “Parc de la Villette”, Koolhaas again uses the “Void” as a design tool and writes: “[w]e have confined ourselves to devising a framework capable of absorbing an endless series of further meanings, extensions, or intentions, without entailing compromises, redundancies, or contradictions” (OMA et al., 1995). This conceptualisation, prominent also in the work of De Solà-Morales.

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5 ibid.
6 ibid.
(1995) presents the void as the ultimate place of possibility, the opposite of the designed landscape. He writes:

These strange places exist outside the city’s effective circuits and productive structures. [...] Unincorporated margins, interior islands void of activity, oversights, these areas are simply un-inhabited, un-safe, un-productive. In short, they are foreign to the urban system, mentally exterior in the physical interior of the city, its negative image, as much a critique as a possible alternative. (De Solà-Morales, 1995, p. 26)

This allows for a certain degree of freedom that renders those spaces much more adaptive entities and, in the end much more appealing from a design point of view because of the open possibilities they call for. Neutelings in a similar fashion, saw a functional potential in the void (Neutelings, 1989 in De Meyer et al., 1999). For him, with appropriate design, a low density of buildings – thus a higher amount of open space – may be linked to a higher density of functions essentially qualifying “the void” by preserving it. Adriaan Geuze, in resemblance to Koolhaas, tends to view the void as a methodological tool for design. Taking as example the Maas Plein in Rotterdam, Geuze observes how its “norm” is based on principles of “anarchy, exploration or self-expression” rather than planned facilities and programmes (Borret, 1999, p. 237, 238).

2.2.4 The void beyond design

Yet, Albert Pope (1996) argues that the obsession of architecture and design towards the void is a dangerous one. For Pope, the exponential expansion of the contemporary city has turned it more into a complex “statistical construct” rather than a clearly identifiable entity. As such, designers – used to work with objects – are blind to this new nature of the city and bind themselves to analyse and project onto “discrete and identifiable objects and spaces” (Pope, 1996, p. 3).

Citing other major works, such as “Garden Cities of Tomorrow, The New City, Learning from Las Vegas or S, M, L, XL”, Pope states that the contemporary city is not characterised anymore by its built form but by “the immense spaces over which built form has little or no control” (Pope, 1996, p. 3). “Amorphous” places, such as “vast parking lots, continuous or sporadic zones of urban decay, undeveloped or razed parcels, huge public parks, corporate plazas, high speed roads and urban
expressways, industrial and office parks and malls” (Pope, 1996, p. 4), he says need
meticulous study to make them more identifiable or accessible to citizens, designers
and decision-makers. For Pope, the persistence of seeing, analysing and
understanding the contemporary city solely through its “form” immediately limits our
ability to describe cases of absence without “transforming it into something else, that
is into something architectural”. Obviously, he says, “when absence is focused on, it
loses its distinguishing qualities and becomes presence” (Pope, 1996, p. 6). To some
extent this is paradoxical. If the contemporary city is not solely defined by its form and
if we cannot approach this otherness – in this case the absence or emptiness – with
design, then it is perhaps important to develop new tools to “reposition form so that it
effectively respond to a city dominated by space” (Pope, 1996, p. 7).

In this case, if the contemporary city is dominated by space rather than built, it is
arguably neither compact nor continuous. Instead, it is characterised by alternations
of density where elements of different nature and purpose neighbour. As such, the
main challenge of the contemporary city is not a question of “clear situations, clear
boundaries or borders, but the acceptance of heterogeneity”, (Hari, 2006). Hari
argues that this heterogeneous landscape is carved by the constant flux of people,
ideas and events that are projected onto the city. An idea that Talocci (2011)
represented through a metaphor. He described the city as an archipelago of
connected islands comprised by exclusive and “premium spaces” – very much like
the ones described by Graham and Marvin (2001) and Castells (2010). Everything
outside this archipelago is considered as the ‘other’ and is excluded from the
mainstream. Social exclusion manifests itself spatially, as the ‘other’ is confined
outside the productive structures of the city. The void is thus described in terms of its
spatial and functional dimensions as it becomes the “receptacle of otherness and
diversity”. Within this void, non-mainstream processes can occur thanks to the relative
freedom it allows (Talocci, 2011). But it is a freedom much different than the one
Koolhaas or Neutelings had perceived.

2.3 The void as a physical entity

Every city has its cracks. These are the gaps in the urban form, where overall
continuity is disrupted; the residual spaces left undeveloped, under-used or
deteriorating; the physical divides that purposefully or accidentally separate
social worlds; the spaces which development has passed by, or where new development has created fragmentation and interruption. (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996, p. 91)

Understanding the physical representation of the void includes two complementary realities. One that is linked to the specific “end” of place (i.e. transport, commerce, transit, entertainment) and another one linked to the relation people entertain with it (i.e. detached, lonely, distant or on the contrary, inclusive, protective). Such areas can be found in the urban context but also be enclosed within architecture as spaces where transgressions to the mainstream are informally allowed (Augé, 1992; Doron, 2007). Urban voids are indifferent to geo-political configurations and are thus a global condition with examples in very diverse contexts such as Tel Aviv, Amsterdam, London, Berlin, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Istanbul, Athens, Brussels (Doron, 2000; Panayotopoulos-Tsiros, 2016; Talocci, 2011) making their study extremely relevant.

2.3.1 The void as part of urbanisation processes

In the European architectural and planning discourse, the urban void enjoys an important attention from architects and planners. A first group composed by Bernardo Secchi and Stefano Boeri used the notion of the void as a descriptive device to read the sprawling disperse city. Bernardo Secchi as early as 1984, described how “large voids are opening up” in the European cities following two separate processes (Secchi in Borret, 1999, p. 238). The first is the disuse of nineteenth-century infrastructure – slaughterhouses, barracks, railyards, industrial complexes, etc. – that “tears huge holes – functionally as well as spatially – in the middle of the urban fabric” (Secchi in Borret, 1999, p. 238). The second relates to the contemporary city of the post-war era favouring the development of individual architectural entities that are tactically arranged the one next to the other and “create ‘empty’ spaces because they play no recognisable role” (Secchi in Borret, 1999, p. 238). Even though Secchi stresses the need of an integrated design, he still perceives them negatively as residual spaces with negative attributes:

At a lower level, from the vantage point of the passer-by, the void appears as interrupted design, a space that is hard to cross, the settlement for weak,
marginal, and barely institutionalised functions: merry-go-rounds, gypsies, parking lots for trucks, residences for marginal groups, for newly arrived immigrants, popular allotment gardens, activities on the edge of unlawfulness. (Secchi in Borret, 1999, p. 239)

In a similar way, Stefano Boeri, in his reading of the “città diffusa” acknowledges the existence of spaces that lack identity and are devoid of any code. These “undetermined” spaces in Boeri’s mind are residual areas that bring together two contrasting types of spatial development or are traversed by essentially different population groups and lack any semantic attribute. Yet, these areas are not empty. Referring to Solà-Morales’s (1995) terrain vague, Borret writes that “[their] semantic emptiness turns out to have less to do with an absence of codes than with a multiple presence of codes that are superimposed, that clash, or even destroy each other” (Borret, 1999, p. 240).

Concerned by the uncertain status of such areas, Solà-Morales (1995) in his exploration of the “terrain vague”, finds that these “enormous voids with imprecise limits and vague definition” (1995, p. 28) are not static but instead dynamic entities that carry traces of a fragmented shared history (Barron & Mariani, 2014). Solà-Morales used the term “terrain vague” to describe isles of marginality and neglect in the urban landscape (De Solà-Morales, 1995); which etymologically is very interesting. The first part: Terrain (from the Latin terranum, land) can refer in French to a portion of land, a field of activity or a state of mind. The second component: vague (from Latin vacuus, empty) has three connotations, meaning either wave, empty or indeterminate. As such, once combined, the term Terrain Vague is very seductive because it is neutral, in the sense that it does not convey negative or positive qualities but rather a state (Barron & Mariani, 2014, p. 4; De Solà-Morales, 1995; Lévesque, 2014). Similar to Foucault (1984) and Augé (1992), Solà-Morales argues that these places exist outside the effective networks and productive structures of the city and that the only aspect relating them to reality is their previous, now forgotten existence or state.

Solà-Morales (1995), used the concept of terrain vague to characterise empty or derelict spaces of the city fabric that, by being unused or underused, offer potentials for alternative appropriations and occurrences:
Empty, abandoned space in which a series of occurrences have taken place seems to subjugate the eye of the urban photographer. Such urban space, which I will denote by the French expression terrain vague, assumes the status of fascination, the most solvent sign with which to indicate what cities are and what our experience of them is. (De Solà-Morales, 1995, p. 25)

And later continues:

The photographic images of terrain vague are territorial indications of strangeness itself, and the aesthetic and ethical problems that they pose, embrace the problematics of contemporary social life. (De Solà-Morales, 1995, p. 28)

This view of the “terrain vague” or urban voids as areas contrasting with the average built environment persists in recent scholarship (Foster, 2014; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996; Secchi & Vigano, 2011), but tends to lose the relative indeterminacy Boeri expressed, as it acquires names and is related to specific contexts and situations (GUST, 1999). Loukaitou-Sideris (1996) takes a rather architectural approach to investigate the appearance of “cracks” in the American city and attributes their emergence to five urban trends: conflicts between individual architectural elements, social and political disregard, mono-functional zoning, the construction of massive transportation infrastructure and, lastly, the development of large extra-local centres of consumption. She writes:

Every city has its ‘cracks’:

- Cracks can be easily encountered in the urban core, where corporate towers assert their dominance over the skies, but turn their back onto the city; where sunken or elevated plazas, skyways and roof gardens disrupt pedestrian activity; and where the asphalt deserts of parking lots fragment the continuity of the street.
- Cracks can be found in the inner city, where parks and playgrounds are desperately needed, but have been left to decay; where public housing developments are fenced islands of poverty; where abandonment and deterioration have filled vacant space with trash and human wastes.
• Cracks can be seen in the extensive intermediate areas between the centres and the suburbs, loosely composed of automobile-orientated, commercial strips, with no sidewalks or pedestrian amenities; and the in-between – districts the realm of warehouses, and industrial complexes.

• Cracks can be spotted along channels of movement, along freeways, railroad lines, riverfronts and waterfronts, with these channels often acting as barriers rather than connectors, separating and marginalizing whole neighbourhoods.

• And cracks can be observed in the new developments, the 'outer cities', where shopping centres go dead in the evening, where urban villages are bounded by highways, and walled or gated planned unit developments assert their privateness by defying any connection with the surrounding landscape. (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996, p. 91)

What Loukaitou-Sideris is describing here is essentially the transition from the pre-modern to the contemporary urban landscape. A morphological transformation which according to Levy (1999) has been exacerbated by the evolution of the transportation infrastructure, which – in conjunction with the growing demand for mobility – created such post-industrial patterns. Indeed, as mobility has become a core part of the city, infrastructure (roads, highways, parking lots, etc.) has been used as the primary tool for expansion and incidentally urban change. He writes:

Ring roads, urban motorways, bypasses, detours, interchanges and traffic circles replace avenues, boulevards, streets crossroads and corners, while elevated walkways, platforms and shopping centres become the new public squares; supermarkets and malls replace department stores, market streets and covered markets; lawns and playing fields replace parks and gardens; towers and linear buildings replace individual units and blocks, and the new private housing estate supersedes the garden city. (Levy, 1999, p. 82)

These new features are the reason of a transformation towards a fabric that is now open, fragmented, heterogeneous and disrupted. Central part of these characterisations is the involuntary increase in open space resulting to the disruption of small-scale interactions and activities, and the total lack of connection between entities (Levy, 1999). For Koolhaas (2001), this change describes what he calls the
“Generic City”. The Generic City is the city that is “liberated” of its identity; that has replaced anything that was there; and has lost its reference to a core. The originality of the “Generic City” Koolhaas says, is that it doesn’t exist in the present. It is either reminiscent of its past or looking towards its future. In this sense, the Generic City is a “post-city” constantly building itself upon the “ex-city”. As such, the city is unified not through a “public domain” but through its “residue”. A residue that has the capacity to enclose the “hors-la-loi”, the incontrollable and something that is subject to infinite manipulations. In the Generic City, infrastructures are not designed to create functional “ensembles” but rather they have become functional entities ignoring the surrounding territory and eventually subdividing it in “enclaves” and “impasses” (Koolhaas, 2001).

Such residues are for Berger (2006) a “natural component of every dynamically evolving city” (2006, p. 239) who calls them “drosscapes”; borrowing the term from metallurgy where dross is a waste product of the smelting process. Echoing Koolhaas, Levy and Loukaitou-Sideris; Berger argues that drosscapes “accumulate in the wake of the socio- and spatio-economic processes of deindustrialisation, post-Fordism, and technological innovation” (2006, p. 239). Yet, these sites are not equal. Some find new life immediately; others are sealed due to severe contamination and many others are left abandoned until the market forces and the technological advancement are able to project onto them new meanings of existence. One of the most prominent examples being the High Line in New York which repurposed a derelict railway viaduct into a linear elevated park. Infrastructural ‘void’ spaces and predominantly post-industrial ones are increasingly becoming the re-development and urban renewal both from theorists and practitioners from the fields of Urban Design, Architecture and Urban Planning (Rosa, 2014; Rosa & Lindner, 2017). In a sense, deindustrialised sites spread in time from intensive activity to abandonment and eventually redevelopment and are thus imperatively transitional places.

Dealing with urban voids has become a major challenge for architects and urbanists; “how to approach the ‘emptiness’ of the dispersed city, how to use, appropriate and inhabit the space in between spread-out buildings, and how to redefine this space as part of the public realm” (Segal & Verbakel, 2008, p. 10) are all very valid questionings with no specific answer. And the reason there is no specific answer is because the idea of the void is arguably relative and is qualified only in relation to its immediate physical or existential context. As Neutelings wrote, “what is called empty should be understood in relative terms, specifying that of which it is vacant: vacant of buildings,
vacant of activities, vacant of human presence. It is a search for the materialisation of this emptiness: ‘the density of the void’” (Neutelings in Segal & Verbakel, 2008, p. 11).

*Relativity* and *temporality* are therefore two key aspects of urban voids that percolate in the majority of arguments but are rarely explicitly stated. Stavrides (2014) in his exploration of the “terrain vague” in the Cypriot context writes: “spaces are empty compared to others that are not, and spaces are perhaps emptied compared with others that are being filled” (Stavrides, 2014, p. 48). This realisation allows to explore whether *emptiness* does not describe the status of a space but rather its connection to processes that have or might occur. As soon as we acknowledge the urban void as part of the urban reality rather than an external occurrence, the temporal dimension in the sense of an element constantly evolving is well grounded. Williamson (2013), when discussing the urban form, expresses that it is intrinsically linked to the temporal dimension of evolution as the urban form is shaped and evolves following the economic, social, cultural and political forces at a given moment in time. As such, it becomes evident that the urban void is – equally as the urban form – a constantly evolving concept and a dynamic entity shaped by actions and events that induce continuous processes of replacement and transformation (Williamson, 2013).

Talocci (2011) further reinforces this point, as he looks at urban voids as entities formed by the conflict between forces enacting from within and from outside them. He uses urban voids as a medium to understand the complexity of the contemporary urban setting by paying attention to the dynamics of power between these spaces and the “forces above”. In that regard, he considers them as spaces of conflict of urban identity and separates them into two broader categories: spaces “left over” and spaces “taken outside” (Talocci, 2011, p. 2). On the one hand, “left over” spaces are decaying spaces – such as residual portions of land or abandoned buildings – “forgotten” by planners and development pressures and characterised by a deliberate state of exclusion. On the other hand, spaces “taken outside” are the disconnected enclaves produced by urbanisation itself. Territories that are segregated from the main constellation of islands (in reference to his metaphor of the city as an archipelago), because of the physical barriers created by different large-scale works and networks. Yet, for Talocci urban voids being either “left over” or “taken outside” present different opportunities for resistance. And the capacity of a void to “resist” lies in its ability to accept new meanings and uses. “Urban voids”, he says, “have been defined as those spaces able to escape the process of enclosure going on within the
city and then to remain inclusive, open to heterogeneity and differences” (Talocci, 2011, p. 15). This openness is the main focus of the next section.

2.3.2 The void as a ruin and a place of resistance

Echoing Lynch (1990), Loukaitou-Sideris (1996) was one of the first scholars to consider urban voids as spaces of opportunity. She sees them not as non-spaces but as suspended areas awaiting realisation. While she keeps a very design-oriented approach to address urban voids, she opens the debate for them to be considered in unison with their broader context, community concerns and the overarching fabric of the city. In order to avoid superficial views of urban voids, we must be careful when describing areas as empty because it quickly implies specific actions to remedy emptiness by appropriating or transforming it. Such actions are often linked with a will for development and usually aim for integration of the urban void with the rest of the city (Stavrides, 2014). Yet, integration is a slippery notion. As Solà-Morales (1995) expressed, architectural intervention has the power to alienate the characteristics of urban areas in its attempt to render everything recognisable, identical and universal. Echoing Loukaitou-Sideris, Stavrides affirms that empty spaces can be seen as areas of possibilities but only if “they are approached not as violently emptied spaces but as a blocked threshold” (Stavrides, 2014, p. 57).

Doron (2000) defines urban voids as places that look empty or appear as ones which do not have any use (anymore). Yet, drawing from different examples (Tel Aviv, Amsterdam, London, Berlin, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago) he stresses that these spaces are today in fact all active in a non-conventional way. The “Transgressive Zones”, as he calls them, are not created by destruction but by suspension of new plans for an area that is underused or has been abandoned by its formal activities. Spaces of transgression in other words are spaces where the lack of control and definite program allows for non-mainstream activities to exist just as much in official and regulated public space as in the “dead zone”, the void, the derelict (Doron, 2007). Arguably, such sites cannot be made, nor planned, nor known. Instead, they need to be “left-over” and “over-looked” in order to exist (Wood, 2007).

Polychronopoulos (2006) argues that voids are not defined by the lack of built entities. Instead, an “unconstructed space” even though it consists by definition an unbuilt “vacuum”, is characterised by activities, a specific role in the urban fabric or contents that fill them with interesting – or not interesting – actions of everyday life. In this
context, these spaces cannot be defined as “urban voids”. On the contrary, it could be examined to what extent even buildings could be considered urban voids under circumstances where they lack the above characteristics (Polychronopoulos, 2006).

DeSilvey and Edensor (2012) in their exploration of the industrial ruin, share many of these views. They describe ruins in a very poetic way discussing mostly the perception and – what could seem controversial – the ongoing activity of the ruin. The type of activity is intrinsic to the perception we have of these areas, to the idea of the forgotten, the “no-go”. As such, ruins are the land of opportunity in the search of useful materials which will serve to build camps, sheds and shelters; there is a type of “informal tourism” of vaguer leisure activities amongst a patchwork of “unpredictable spaces”; ruins can also be an escape from the urban, the daily life of most urban dwellers and refuges for wildlife (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2012). Regardless of the charming and sensitive views, he projects on the industrial ruins, their descriptions are very interesting to realise the plurality of things happening in those spaces that we conventionally consider abandoned. While their form and state might indeed be derelict, in fact we should not talk of abandonment when it comes to their use. In a previous article, Edensor (2005) writes:

Industrial ruins are exemplary spaces of disorder which produce this semiotic and material excess. They contain manifold unruly resources with which people can construct meaning, stories and practices. Far from being waste spaces in which nothing happens, industrial ruins are thickly woven into local practices ranging from the carnivalesque to the mundane, from the artistic to the eccentric. These sometimes dissident, transgressive pursuits can survive because of the lack of surveillance and regulation that centres upon ruins, by their aesthetic and semiotic chaos and by the unfamiliar or long-forgotten sensations they provoke through their sensual affordances, undetermined and provocative, industrial ruins are spaces in which the urban is practiced otherwise. (Edensor, 2005, p. 252)

Unfortunately, current strategies for urban voids rarely take into account these alternative uses. Taking as example the city of Athens, Greece, Polychronopoulos (2006) observes that a first characteristic reaction to the remaining urban gaps – even amid a density reaching the limits of saturation – is the practice of ‘filling’. The city seems to redefine urban voids as ideal places for the emergence of shopping centres, multi-storey complexes, parking areas, sports facilities or branded buildings. Under
the guise of ‘beautification’, spaces and notions that cause awkwardness or embarrassment, are treated in the most depreciating manner. Is there then a place for architecture and design in urban voids? Kamvasinou and Roberts (Kamvasinou & Roberts, 2014) argue that terrain vague, as Solà-Morales (1995) describes it, is not static neither devoid of purpose. Instead, it often proves to be a dynamic entity occupied by everyday uses; contesting views that classify urban voids as “unproductive or disorderly areas” (Kamvasinou & Roberts, 2014, p. 188). They raise two important questions: is architectural intervention in condition to allow for “interim uses”, to inform future plans while protecting the inherent attributes of terrain vague? And secondly, dwelling on the nature of the terrain vague, is it an idea that to exist must remain untouched?

Referring to Berger (2006 in Kamvasinou & Roberts, 2014, p. 188), landscape architecture, of the late twentieth-century in conjunction with post-industrial landscapes, supports the emergence of urban voids being turned into public spaces – essentially parks – that acknowledge and allow the existence of alternative and informal activities. Sbacchi (2017), in similar fashion focuses on the significance of the idea of the void for the development of landscape urbanism. She tries through the understanding of the void to reconcile landscape urbanism and the “stricter” realm of architecture. Arguably if we consider architecture and landscape as two opposite entities, the void per Sbacchi could be the mediator, the playground where the two merge. Literature on “urban wildscapes” (Banes, 2008; Keenan & Jorgensen, 2012; Kowarik & Korner, 2005) brings additional arguments for the preservation of the “wild, natural side of such spaces”.

The vulnerability of the urban void is, however, much more complicated to address. Setting the terrain vague as a temporal entity in addition to its spatial components, it would be against its very own nature to “freeze it in time” (Kamvasinou & Roberts, 2014, p. 188). In respect to this temporality, the growing field of “temporary urbanism” and “loose space” seeks to offer alternative strategies (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Groth & Corijn, 2005; Oswalt, Misselwitz, & Overmeyer, 2007; Temel & Haydn, 2006). This body of literature argues that vacant land can “accommodate a range of activities not easily permitted or tolerated in officially designated public spaces […]”, from which a lot can be learned in regard to urban resilience and a light framework of intervention” (Kamvasinou, 2011 in Kamvasinou & Roberts, 2014, p. 189).
Vacant land is here seen as a place for resistance. Very much as Talocci (2011) observes, urban voids are often perceived as marginal lands that allow for a certain freedom of use away from the heavily “monitored” spaces of the contemporary city (Kamvasinou & Roberts, 2014). Despite complex ownerships, their nature invites a “variety of interests and ages” to settle and mingle. As such, urban voids are often associated to spaces of resistance or spaces outside the law. Yet, Kamvasinou and Roberts (2014) find interest in this aspect that arguably could be turned from resistance to resilience through the allowance of interim uses. The urban void may become in this way a catalyst for progressive integration.

2.3.3 The void as it is perceived

In the previous sections, the urban void was explored as the result of unexpected urban events, as side effects of the city’s organisation, or as areas by-passed by the exponential evolution of the city. In this context, what matters is not their lack of activity but the difficulty to regard them as integrally urban entities. Arguably, it is futile to seek for permanent answers to urban voids since the way they are perceived and experienced fluctuate in parallel with the evolution of the urban condition (Polychronopoulos, 2006). Instead, as many have argued, the strongest feature of urban voids is their fluid state and their capacity to be open to activities not defined by design or policies. The place urban voids take in people’s imaginaries differs greatly depending on whether they are part of the “forces within” or the “forces above” these areas (Talocci, 2011, p. 2).

Foster (2014) in her exploration of the Petite Ceinture in Paris – a 32km long circuit hugging the inner edges of Paris – describes the diversity of users encountered there and looks at the environmental and socio-cultural significance of “vacant land”. Within the Petite Ceinture, one can find a very diverse flora and fauna but also “visitors” attracted by the isolation and marginality the area provides. These, among others, seek to engage in illicit excursions, to explore the surroundings, to exchange with specific subcultures, groups, and artistic endeavours, or squat the disused buildings and infrastructure.

As Lévesque (2002) explains, for many these indeterminate zones represent unacceptable socio-economic deterioration and abandonment and run contrary to the desired image of a prosperous city. Yet, for others these are
treasured landscapes where ecological succession is allowed to flourish, and atypical socio-ecological associations emerge. (Foster, 2014, p. 126)

Areas such as the *Petite Ceinture* equally disrupt the dominant logic of urban development, as “they are discontinuous with conventional Western aesthetics and urban patterns and processes” (Foster, 2014, p. 125) and, eventually, “it is this sense of vacancy, based on aesthetic expectations, that renders [such areas] ecologically and socially invisible” (2014, p. 127). This invisibility should not be by default attributed to negative situations, on the contrary many of these areas, when analysed closely, enable social and ecological prospects to thrive and act as refuge to communities and individuals.

Kamvasinou (2011) similarly attributes great importance to the social and environmental value of urban voids. Looking at the public value of vacant land, she argues that the perception of derelict industrial land has changed over the last decades to the extent of being even considered attractive – i.e. the High Line example mentioned earlier (Rosa & Lindner, 2017). Hence, the emergence of a tendency to accept reuse of derelict spaces as public amenities. Examples include among others the High Line in New York, the Landscape Park Duisburg in northern Germany or the Gillespie Park Local Nature Reserve in Islington, London (Kamvasinou, 2011; Latz, 2016). These spaces due to the increasing attention they have received have been turned into important public amenities. Yet, spaces “in-between” are not always perceived as positive open spaces. Usually found in prominent locations within the urban area, they can be perceived as blight on the urban landscape. She adds that this is mostly due to the abandoned condition of these areas and as they are filled with industrial waste and treated as dumping sites, this perception only worsens. As soon as this “danger” is removed, however, such places can be positively seen as public amenities. Until that point is reached, however, they may be invisible to planners, designers and politicians alike. Instead, it is often local communities who bring them into the spotlight through their everyday appropriation. Yet, once in the spotlight these local communities are quickly put aside in favour of economic and commercial developments. With that in mind, in addition to the potential ecological value, “publicness” – or the capacity of space to bring people together while being open and accessible – needs to be considered.
2.4 Towards a typological classification of urban voids

This literature review was to some extent an attempt to establish an original typology of urban voids as they are presented in current research and demonstrate that discontinuities and ‘voids’ within the urban and social spheres are at the heart of the post-industrial city. The aim of this section is to condense these findings and present a convincing typology of “urban voids” that summarises the research and engraves it within the various concepts and examples that have been expressed and explored until now.

The contemporary trends of objectification attempting to render the traditional cities more efficient and attractive, induce, undeniably, a perceptual and physical fragmentation of the urban setting (Boyer, 1994 in GUST, 1999). The rapid expansion of cities has been followed by increased flows that enter exit and/or accumulate within or external to city boundaries (Kennedy, et al., 2007) – a trend related also with the alienation of the urban morphology as described by Levy (1999). But, the splintered and decaying infrastructure that results from deindustrialisation unequivocally disrupts the optimal flow of commodities – such as water, transportation or shelter – and inevitably affects their users (Kaika, 2005). In most cases, however, the remnants of these obsolete activities, were deprived of their urban qualities and turned into isles of stagnation, informality and lower quality of life (Polychronopoulos, 2006). As Boyer writes, political and commercial attention is being directed essentially towards privileged sites while “the zones between these sites, the ‘residual spaces’ are ignored. [...] A city of increasing spatial differentiation results, and the gap looms larger between neglected land and revalued places, between the poor that the market ignores and the well-to-do that it privileges” (Boyer, 1994 in GUST, 1999, p. 39).

Research in Spatial Modelling and Space Syntax have produced meticulous work in analysing of how forms of deprivation are patterned spatially (Spicker, 2003 in Vaughan, et al., 2005) but they do not detail how, or if, these inequalities are related to the quality and accessibility to infrastructure and the flows they convey. Unfortunately, the social aspect of urban flows is still rarely accounted for in current research, which still favours technical quantitative analyses over social considerations (Zhang, 2013). The social component, however, should not be overlooked. The access to commodities depicts games of power and their improper management can in many ways brutally separate populations and urban areas (Allen,
et al., 2004). In this sense, urban flows and their infrastructures are important factors in approaching or turning away from socially and urbanistically cohesive environments (Cook & Swyngedouw, 2012).

Thus, the ‘urban void’ must be understood in relation to the broader spatial and socio-economic contexts and dynamics that constitute the urban environment. In current literature, two main categories of ‘urban voids’ are usually pinpointed: those that physically exist – in the sense of spaces that are built and used – and those that are absent – in the sense of spaces that are characterised by the inexistence of built entities and any activity. However, this reduction into two groups, is, at best, simplifying a very complex urban condition and proves insufficient when dealing with the rather abstract notion of the void. The following classification presents five categories of urban voids distinguished based on the processes that lead to their creation and on the processes that settled in afterwards. Table 2.1 groups all the examples reviewed in this Chapter according to this typology to ground it in theory and provide tangible illustrations of each category.

1. **Designed void**: that is, when the notion of the void is inherent to the design process of a said area or building. These are typically architectural arrangements of various sizes and functions ranging from spaces within buildings to large public squares and plazas.

2. **Accidental void**: that is, when the notion of the void appears due to the incongruous position of urban entities relative to one another. These spaces are usually the result of the lack of contextual approach to design ranging from small interstices between buildings to large redundant lots around urban infrastructure.

3. **Decaying void**: namely, due to neglect and the partial or total drop in the activity of an urban area or building. Spaces within this category vary in shapes and sizes and carry a certain historicity. They have often been subjected to transformations in use and status and are usually marked by the uncertainty of future use.

4. **Suspended void**: very close to the decaying void these spaces are distinguished by the fact that the notion of the void is related to an administrative stalemate and/or the decrease of attention from policy and governance.
5. **Transgressive void**: that is, the result of a long term "suspension". The notion of the void is interpreted here as the underperformance or the abandonment of an area’s formal activities and their replacement by non-conventional ones.

These five categories of urban voids are presented here as separate but it is important to stress that they can be interlinked both spatially and temporarily. For instance, an accidental void can morph into a decaying one which in time will be suspended and possibly re-appropriated through transgression. That being said, there are two clarifications that need to be made at this point. The first regarding the status of ‘transgressiveness’ as an attribute rather than a type of space and the second regarding the differentiation of re-appropriation and transgression.

The first four categories of voids (i.e. designed, accidental, decaying, and suspended) imply larger-scale decision-making processes with spatial implications. However, transgression, is a social attribute that could just as well exist in any of these other four types of spaces because it needs a physical platform to take place. In that sense, an urban void could not be transgressive without being also at least one of the other four categories as that space would therefore not constitute and urban void as defined in the frame of this thesis but rather, more generally, a ‘space where transgression occurs’. Still, transgression is worth a separate category because while it is an attribute of space that can be common to the other four types, it is not a condition for these spaces to be conceptualised as urban voids. Furthermore, transgression happens following certain processes. Hence, the interesting aspect in thinking about in terms of transgression is temporality. As defined above, transgression is something that exists almost permanently or for longer periods of time in sites of suspension or limbo but could also occur in designed or accidental spaces albeit perhaps within a much shorter time span before “forces from without” come in to chase it away.

As this research was framed, transgression comes essentially from the works of Doron (2000, 2007) and Foucault (1984). It could be argued that transgression is effectively re-appropriation. Something being used in a way differently to how it was intended to or simply used if there was never a clear intention in the first place. But transgression is understood here as a morally laden sub-category of re-appropriation. Wood’s (2007) “shadowed spaces” are a prime example of such marginal hidden spaces for people to practice transgressive activities that to some extent are a requirement of society. Oftentimes there are areas or parts of the city where people
are aware that they function as hidden pockets of illegality for drugs, prostitution, etc and which are treated as sacrificed zones that are paramount to the operation of cities. This aspect is core to this thesis and one of its main arguments throughout. It is exemplified by the selected case study (see following Section 2.5) which demonstrates that urban voids are also necessary for the evolution of the cities. And the evolution of the cities is intrinsic and directly linked to these spaces even though they might be considered ‘non-urban’.

Table 2.1 Typological classification of the ‘urban voids’ that emerged from the review of literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designed</th>
<th>Accidental</th>
<th>Decaying</th>
<th>Suspended</th>
<th>Transgressive</th>
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</thead>
</table>
Table 2.2 includes a different categorisation whereby the different terminologies included in the concept of the urban void as defined at the beginning of this chapter are considered against these five types.

**Table 2.2 Categorisation of the terminology used to describe "void" spaces as found in the literature.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designed</th>
<th>Accidental</th>
<th>Decaying</th>
<th>Suspended</th>
<th>Transgressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;il vuoto&quot; (&quot;the void&quot;) (GUST, 1999; Secchi, 1984, 1989)</td>
<td>&quot;empty abstract settings&quot; (Smithson, 1970, 1996a, 1996c, 1996b)</td>
<td>&quot;wasteland&quot; (Gemmell, 1977; Nabarro &amp; Richards, 1980)</td>
<td>&quot;urban wilds&quot; and &quot;urban sinks&quot; (Lynch, 1990)</td>
<td>&quot;transgressive zones&quot; (Doron, 2000, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;superfluous landscapes&quot; (Nielson, 2002)</td>
<td>&quot;unintentional landscapes&quot; (Gandy, 2016)</td>
<td>&quot;dross&quot; (Lerup, 1994)</td>
<td>&quot;no-man's land&quot; (Leong, 1998)</td>
<td>&quot;le Tiers-Paysage&quot; (&quot;the Third-Landscape&quot;) (Clément, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;blank areas&quot; (Barron &amp; Mariani, 2014)</td>
<td>&quot;in-between areas&quot; (Barron &amp; Mariani, 2014)</td>
<td>&quot;drosscape&quot; (Berger, 2006)</td>
<td>&quot;SLOAPs&quot; (Spaces Left Over After Planning) (Doron, 2000, 2007)</td>
<td>&quot;terrain vague&quot; (De Solà-Morales, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;spaces of hypermodernity&quot; (Augé, 1992)</td>
<td>&quot;heterotopias&quot; (Foucault, 1984)</td>
<td>&quot;brownfields&quot; (Barron &amp; Mariani, 2014)</td>
<td>&quot;spaces of uncertainty&quot; (K. Cupers &amp; Miessen, 2018)</td>
<td>&quot;industrial ruins&quot; (DeSilvey &amp; Edensor, 2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the above typology and Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 show, the concept of the void is of great interest because with the correct framing it can contain a very wide spectrum of spaces. So far however, current scholarship has yet to answer what is the role of urban voids in post-industrial cities and if, and to what extent, is it possible to promote a more cohesive urban environment taking into account the form, the underlying urban flows and the social configurations of urban voids? These questionings are the focus of an empirical case study, the aim of which is to bring a concrete and contextual understanding of urban voids as active parts of contemporary urban transformations. And within this research framework, the role of the above typological classification is to serve as a guiding ‘fil rouge’ in the investigation and exploration of the selected case study which is characterised and contains all the above categories.

### 2.5 An illustrative urban void: Eleonas in Athens, Greece

The industrial area called “Eleonas” in Athens, Greece, has been chosen as a case study because of its enormous size covering 9km² and its long historical significance as a major productive area and a core driver of the city’s exponential growth in the 20th century (Biris, 1966). The relevance of Eleonas for this research lies in the successive stages of growth and decline it went through since antiquity, and how these transformations have caused and have provided shape to this incongruous landscape it is today. But the purpose of this research is not only to describe Eleonas’ history and its characteristics; it will also explore its unique features which will further
improve our current understanding of the concept of void in urban space and the crucial role it can play in the spatial development of modern cities.

Eleonas is located between the centre of Athens and its port Piraeus (Figure 2.1) and was referred to as a “blessed” zone as far as in Greek Mythology and Ancient Greek History of the 6th century BC (Biris, 1966). Until the 1900s’, it did not possess any clear boundaries and was an area of free flow whereas today it is estimated to cover 9km² and is enclosed within the expanded urban areas of Athens and Piraeus. Eleonas, literally meaning “olive grove”, was a protected agricultural land – producing olives and olive oil – since Antiquity due to the extremely fertile grounds that surrounded the main two waterbodies passing through it: the Ylisos and Kifissos rivers.

![Figure 2.1 Location of Eleonas (circled) in Attica’s basin in relation to: (1) Athens’ city centre and (2) the port of Piraeus. (Source: NASA, 2005)](image)

This open natural area composed primarily of agricultural lands and pastures, was however gradually urbanised and transformed into the largest industrial zone of Athens, albeit without plan. The exponential growth that followed the Greek Independence from the Ottoman Empire (1828) and the designation of Athens as the new capital (1834) saw the city of Athens grow from 34,000 inhabitants in 1834 to
around 4 million in 2004 (Stergiouli & Hadjibiros, 2011), that is 117 times larger in terms of population in only 170 years. This growth boosted considerably the building-related and industrial sectors but the ‘protected’ status of Eleonas made that construction was not officially allowed. However, as the manufacturing and industrial sectors grew, they found the non-urbanised land of Eleonas and the rivers Kifissos and Ylisos to be ideal for their manufacturing processes (at that time, manufactures included small tanneries and textiles mills). Hence, the unplanned urbanisation of Eleonas began until it was completely built following a second wave of industrial boom after WWII. After the first waves of de-industrialisation that started in the 1970s, and an active political will to chase industries from the city to dredge the centre from smog in the 1980s, many of the industrial buildings of Eleonas were evacuated and abandoned. For the last 30 years, the area is in a state of advanced decay and dereliction and has been alluded to as an ‘urban void’, and an “urban, social and economic problem of tremendous dimensions” (Argyri et al., 1998).

This thesis will focus on the current state of Eleonas and will assess whether analysing the space of Eleonas as a “void”, in the sense described in the literature surveyed above, would allow me to understand better the complexity of its architectural and urban structures, the socio-economic forces that affected them and, ultimately, the unique place it still occupies in the polity of the city of Athens. The result will be, to further enhance the dominant understanding of the concept of “void” in directions and dimensions unexplored so far in the existing literature on the subject.

2.5.1 The downfall of exclusive building typologies and activities

Following Secchi’s notion of discontinuity (Secchi, 1984), Eleonas can be considered as a discontinuous entity in the Athenian landscape. Due to its exclusive industrial activity, the typo-morphology of its fabric is dominated by overall larger entities that heavily contrast with Athens’ overall residential built environment. Plots are extensive, buildings are massive and the infrastructure necessary to access them is scaled up to accommodate heavy traffic and material flows. Thus, the area is excluded from the city due to the surrounding highways, railways and the river embankment that work as physical and mental barriers.

As briefly mentioned above and illustrated in Figure 2.2 the development of Eleonas was unplanned, resulting in an arbitrary arrangement of buildings. Their unrelated positioning inevitably generated a plethora of interstitial spaces similar to what is
described in Secchi and Vigano’s later works (Secchi & Vigano, 2011). This chaotic organisation led in turn to an equally chaotic network of self-reliant smaller streets, appropriate solely for the processes and communication between industries and manufactures (Fotakis, 2013). As such no active connections were planned with the rest of Athens’ strict pattern. The incongruent intersections of grids, which Loukaitou-Sideris (1996) found in the American city, are recognisable in this case as well as the grids of Eleonas and of Athens meet in incoherent ways through dead-ends, derelict highway underpasses, fenced private lands, and several other inaccessible spaces. The centrality of infrastructure in both the development and the decay of Eleonas is key. As it will be developed in various points throughout this thesis, and as Rosa (2014) expresses very clearly, the development of infrastructure and networks – especially those linked to transport – play a key role in shaping the urban not only at its construction but as the city – and in this case Eleonas – evolves around it.

![Figure 2.2 Satellite view of the North-western part of Eleonas. The distinction between the urban fabric of residential Athens (left of highway) and that of Eleonas (right of highway) is consistent with two completely different modes of urbanisation. On the one hand a planned residential fabric, on the other an anarchic industrial development (Source: Bing Maps).](image)

Activity-wise, Eleonas’ spaces are the paragon of what Augé (1992) described as the result of “hypermodernity”: mono-functional, distant spaces, without identity and exclusively linked to the use of the place—in this case production, retail and
transportation. This aspect was further reinforced with the transition to the tertiary sector when, alongside the decline of the industrial activity, the larger peripheral roads were punctuated with massive clusters of production, consumption or leisure. Offices and retail sheds were planned mainly as points of attraction, but effectively worked in the opposite way as additional impenetrable walls that concentrated activity on the edges of Eleonas, stripping any potential interest from its inner core. As Castells (2010) described, this established a strong segregation between the new valued spaces connected by massive infrastructures and the old marginal ones that were on purpose or incidentally ignored and “by-passed.”

2.5.2 Splintered infrastructure and disrupted urban flows

Eleonas, could therefore be characterised as a discontinuity due to its distinct land use and urban form. At the regional scale, it is a disruption in the Athenian homogenous residential land-use, and, at the local scale, it presents within itself an unorderly amalgam of buildings, lots and streets serving exclusively the industrial sector. Activities in Eleonas were positioned arbitrarily, depending on the available space and networks but always in ways that were optimal for the cooperation between the primary and secondary processes (Fotakis, 2013). In this sense, it is a strong and coherent system when it comes to industrial processes, but also a deeply introvert one, denying all interaction with any element beyond itself. Because of this clustering of industrial activity, deindustrialisation had very brutal effects. The large empty lots and buildings left behind by the relocated industries, in combination to the deep economic crisis of the last years, made the contrasts within the area increasingly intense. Active and inactive nodes appear now within Eleonas and transpose the dichotomy that Graham and Marvin (2001) described for the larger scale, at the local level.

Urban infrastructure networks were in a way Eleonas’ most valuable asset but also the reason for its collapse. Transportation infrastructure facilitated the movement of people and goods, two core components for its operation. Consequently, the development of extra-local transportation infrastructure was heavily favoured over the other networks, such as sewage and irrigation systems, small-scale roads or public lightening. The latter ones were completely neglected leading to severe problems of water scarcity, floods, pollution of the natural environment and insecurity (Fotakis, 2013; Kasselouri, 2012; Panayotopoulos-Tsiros, 2016).
Due to this unsupervised and uncoordinated evolution of Eleonas, there is to this day an uneven distribution of urban flows and commodities making it increasingly complicated to track or monitor how urban flows operate, develop and are “metabolised” within the area. Despite several attempts to regulate the use of its space, the land and the natural water streams are still constantly polluted from dumping and the industrial activity to the extent where much of the land is now labelled unfit for development (Karalis, 2007; Oikonomidis, 2007). Much like several authors have illustrated for similar areas, Eleonas remains in a ‘lethargic’ state until the market could possibly discern it again as a profitable zone worth depolluting and investing in (Berger, 2006; Doron, 2000; Kamvasinou, 2011; Talocci, 2011). In the meantime, and sadly for the years to come, Eleonas will continue to appear as an empty area, an unused, derelict and forgotten space, hiding unconventional urban processes from the city and its citizens.

2.5.3 Unsupervised development and detachment of Eleonas from mainstream socio-spatial and socio-economic conditions

The development of Eleonas, could certainly be characterised as unusual for the Greek context and possibly other places outside Greece. Contrary to the rest of the city, the first official plan including the area was published in 1995 (Government Gazette (ΦΕΚ - Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως της Ελληνικής Δημοκρατίας in Greek), 1995), to promote more mixed-use developments. Unfortunately, its history of arbitrary development had created extremely complex ownerships or areas bound by legal constrains and thus the plan was never implemented (Fotakis, 2013; Kasselouri, 2012). The fact that for almost a century Eleonas has been housing unwanted activities or things (i.e. waste), marginalised populations (i.e. refugees, immigrants) and “dirty” processes (i.e. industries, manufactures), led to the appearance of “clusters” of various unregulated and alternative activities. A large portion of the remaining parks, the new “free” plots and streets or the abandoned sheds are invested and extensively used among others for leisure, exchanges, open air markets and squatting. In line with recent post-industrial scholarship, many of these places are neither empty nor abandoned but instead full of “everydayness” and imaginaries (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2012; Doron, 2000; Edensor, 2005; Foster, 2014). Nonetheless, its “components” (i.e. dead-ends, empty lots, vacant and decayed buildings, the unruly vegetation and the decaying natural environment) convey a sense of fear, not belonging and exclusion from the urban. As a result, Eleonas has
been removed from the Athenian daily life and erased from the collective consciousness.

2.6 Conclusion

Until recently, marginal areas – including urban voids – were considered in a very utilitarian and functionalist manner (Gandy, 2013). They were often viewed as niches disconnected from the city and considered as spatial spaces purely based on functional, and economic factors (Young & Keil, 2014). Urban voids, however, appear to host a multitude of processes that are hidden from direct sight (Foster, 2014); some are refuges to wildlife, others are escapes to the everyday life of urban dwellers but, most importantly, they are “open” to a certain freedom of practices and non-mainstream processes to occur (Foster, 2014; Talocci, 2011).

The way urban voids are perceived is changing. Yet, they still are rarely recognised as positive entities. Open areas, even parks and playgrounds are in certain cases socially and politically disregarded, locking them into cycles of abandonment and deterioration (Doron, 2000; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996). Eventually, the carelessness of local administrations or planners turns them into areas in suspension in an ephemeral state between their past and their potential future (Doron, 2000; Kamvasinou, 2011).

To this theoretical background, the thorough examination of Eleonas will look at spatial phenomena of emptiness and exclusion in a trans-scalar and interdisciplinary way, to study the use of the term ‘void’ as a description of urban territories, to explore how the ‘urban void’ can be conceptually defined, and to what purpose it is used in the modern urban discourse. I consider the case of Eleonas more as a platform to build theory and to develop a methodology for a better understanding of what urban voids are and what their interaction with the modern city and polity entails. This initial literature review chapter introduced the notion of the ‘urban void’ in a way that goes beyond the restrictive idea of an empty area awaiting to be filled. Instead it discussed the concept of the ‘void’ as an entity evolving in time, traversed by numerous flows, governed by political interests and full of socio-economical interactions. It positioned the urban void as a spatial entity inherently shaped by the very same human, corporate, socio-economic and political forces and agencies that influence the overarching urban landscape. The case of Eleonas, however, can be used to bring to light other aspects of the concept of urban void not much explored so far, that is an
entity in constant change that cannot be disentangled from the wider dynamics of urban transformation nor should it be seen as a static entity alienated from the people that spend time in it or live in the surrounding areas.
Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

3.1 Introduction

Void [vɔːd] (noun): a completely empty space; an unfilled space in a wall, building, or other structure; an emptiness caused by the loss of something.8

Vacant [ˈveɪk(ə)nt] (adj.): (of a place) not occupied, empty; (of a position or employment) not filled; having or showing no intelligence or interest.9

Empty [ˈɛm(p)ti] (adj.): containing nothing; not filled or occupied; Mathematics (of a set) containing no members or elements; (of words or a gesture) lacking meaning or sincerity; having no value or purpose.10

Conceptualising the void in a physical context – in this case urban space – is a challenging task as the notion of absence is in itself much more evasive to grasp than factual phenomena. As the review of the literature demonstrated: “void”, “vacant” and “empty” are etymologically synonymous, yet, when observed in the physical world, the definition of what is void, vacant or empty faints as we are confronted to something that regardless of how unoccupied it is, there is always something to see or discern. Such conceptions of the void, absence and emptiness are more about the narratives they create, about the interruption of the status quo and the possibilities that emanate from these breaks. With the voidness being framed as an inherent part of urban transformations, a narrow research framework cannot fully elucidate what is the role of urban voids in the contemporary city, neither how nor why they should be considered for future urban management strategies.

In the previous chapter I argued that the ‘urban void’ is widely perceived as an isolated entity. Here, I argue that the idea of the void is a relative one, and that the urban void does not possess specific attributes such as size, materiality, or activity. Instead, it varies in scale and nature, and a small interstice may be a void to the buildings

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surrounding it, to the same degree that an entire neighbourhood can be considered
a void when seen in relation to the whole city. Relativity and temporality are, therefore,
two key aspects of urban voids that percolate in the majority of arguments but are
rarely explicitly stated. This realisation allows to explore whether emptiness does not
describe the status of a space but rather its connection to processes that have or
might occur.

Yet, this view is not widely shared. The notion of the ‘void’ has a very straightforward
meaning and is treated as a negative compound which is perceived from the
vocabulary used to describe it and by the way it is treated. This negative meaning
immediately implies certain subjective assumptions about what would be appropriate
responses, about which actors are brought in, and what policy frameworks are to be
applied, which, often, are brutal and invasive towards the actual spatial, functional
and socio-economic structures of these spaces. Therefore, reconceptualising the
‘urban void’ towards a more contextual and integrated notion matters. If the
perception of urban voids is based on subjective connotations and these assumptions
trickle down to policies, then whether they are perceived in a positive or negative light
can have a very important impact on the reality and experiences of the people that
spend their ‘everydayness’ there, as well as the status these areas hold in the city.

Within this chapter, I focus on why a relational approach is particularly pertinent
towards this reconceptualisation and present the framework through which the
analysis of the case of Eleonas in Athens will be addressed to understand the urban
void in accordance to the trans-scalar and multi-faceted nature of the urban setting. I
use the term ‘relational’ to reflect the conceptualisation of the city as a complex
system which as Amin and Thrift (2017) wrote is “a mangle of machines,
infrastructures, humans, nonhumans, institutions, networks, metabolisms, matter and
nature” rather than simple “territorial formations” (Amin & Thrift, 2017, p. 9). In a
similar vein, Oswald, et al. (2003), argued that the complexity of a city, regardless of
its geography, “is not representative of the sole accumulation of buildings, and it
cannot be explained by the sum of the characteristics of its human inhabitants alone”
but instead through an awareness of the synergies between its physical, systemic
and social components. Towards this undertaking, using the theories and methods of
Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology (UPE) is
especially useful. I draw on Urban morphology to consider aspects of built space, on
Urban Metabolism to engrave built space into the wider dynamics of the city and lastly
on Urban Political Ecology to decipher the socio-economic aspects and impacts of
these dynamics. I present the intellectual tools each discipline offers and most importantly the academic value of combining them into a singular research framework for the analysis of urban voids and urban areas in general. Towards the end of the chapter, I return to the core problematic of the research which is to determine whether voids – regardless of how they are conceptualised – are paradigms of urban transformation and urban change. For this, I consider Solà-Morales’ concept of terrain vague (Solà-Morales, 1995), the appeal of which lies in the fact that it incorporates a wider range of characteristics than most concepts reviewed in Chapter 2. I lean on the inherent aspects and limitations of terrain vague to develop a flexible and contextual analytical framework that will allow to investigate the place and implication of voids in urban space.

3.2 A relational approach to urban voids

This research is based on the idea that situations of voidness within the urban sphere are inseparably interwoven with the emergence and transformation of the city, and modern urban society. Although the review of literature in Chapter 2 showed that the notion of the urban void as a totally separate entity is found in several discourses (Foucault, 1984; Genocchio, 1995), I argue that due to the very nature of a system it is impossible to conceive the existence of an a-contextual, completely disconnected and ex-nihilo created entity (Dekkers, 2015; Rahmann & Jonas, 2014). As such, the urban void by existing within the city is influenced by, and influences, the very same laws that hold the system together. Urban voids would, therefore, be as complex as the urban system itself and restricting their analysis to a specific geographic location and to a single discipline would inadvertently, yet surely, neglect core aspects. Thus, it is of great interest to develop a research project that encompasses this ever expanding and multifaceted nature of cities from the micro to the macro-scale.

3.2.1 Post-structuralist theory, relationality and scale for the investigation of urban voids

In this context, post-structuralist theory argues that society and urban form are not two separate and exclusive systems, but instead are open, dynamic and fluid (Murdoch, 2005). Under this light, it brings significant opportunities in the understanding of spaces of heterogeneity and conflict by acknowledging the
existence of a double-way interaction between people and their environment, through multiplicity and complex relations (Murdoch, 2005). Hence, the urban environment is not seen any longer as a container of processes but instead as something made by heterogeneous relations (Murdoch, 2005). In current discourses, urban transformation and evolution are often associated with the condition of urban space even though the first is a process whereas the second is the outcome of that process (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2015). For instance, are urban voids and the notion of absence to be understood as outcomes or processes of urban transformations? Using post-structuralism as an entry point alleviates some of the confusion as it allows to make a clear distinction between the two without disregarding the significance of one or the other. Thus, post-structuralist thought is key when investigating themes like ‘absence’ or ‘voidness’ in fast-evolving post-industrial environments such as Eleonas because it allows to conceive urban voids as both drivers and outcomes of urban transformations.

Borrowing from Massey’s relational approach to space (1998 in Murdoch, 2005), throughout this research urban voids are conceptualised as the product of very complex spatial, social and political interrelations at a specific moment in time. However, since time is not fixed, urban voids are in a constant state of unfolding. They are fluid in the sense that their ‘void’ status is defined solely in relation to their context and depending on the scale and timeframe of investigation. Hence, temporality and scale become core to the understanding of urban voids. As Amin (2002) notes, urban scales from the very local to the global should not be interpreted in hierarchical terms. Instead scale should be seen as the “length of relation” that ties places together (Amin, 2002, p. 391). Under this light, all places are related to one another by stronger or weaker bonds, and this defines the high or low relevance of scale for investigated space. Upon this, seeing the urban through the lens of the void requires the intellectual flexibility to understand that the same space might be conceptualised as a void at one scale but not at another. This raises the questions when, how, and why would an urban area morph into an urban void, and when, how, and why would an urban void disappear? Graham and Marvin (2001) offer some insight when they discuss the capability of urban flows and networks to simultaneously bring places closer while excluding others. However, this thesis aims to go deeper than the implications of physical connectivity and division and explore to what extent urban voids may become vehicles of integration or marginalisation as well as how absence can be used as a discursive tool for progress but also repression of local populations.
In the context of this research, a relational and multi-scalar reading of urban voids, allows to relate space, infrastructure, flows and people over larger geographical scales and acknowledges that the influencing forces are not always contained locally but instead spread across the urban governance and territory. More importantly, a relational perspective emphasizes the dynamics that urban voids entertain with the urban system and allows to consider them not as static or inactive entities but instead as spaces in constant flux (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1 Epistemological framework and main theories and groups of literature consulted.**
Chapter 2 detailed the contradiction that appears as the current trends of urban development prioritise connected “premium” spaces while they by-pass places of lower interest or expected value – and among those, urban voids (Castells, 2010). To understand this differential reality, it is necessary to understand first how the urban entities (i.e. spaces, infrastructures, flows and people) are constituted and connected across increasingly larger geographical areas. As such, the idea that places can be represented and explained through mono-dimensional discourses of space, function and socio-economy is lacklustre (Graham & Healey, 1999). Instead, following Graham and Healey (1999, p. 629), “to attempt to capture the multiple, dynamic, and contingent, lived worlds of places or cities, [we must] maintain multiple perspectives of the city simultaneously”. Embracing Graham and Healey’s urge to grasp how spaces and infrastructure networks generate “internal differentiation of spaces” and an “uneven socio-economic integration” (1999, p. 630), it is expected that this interdisciplinary and relational problematisation of the urban void can benefit spatial, economic, social and cultural relations across multiple urban scales.

3.3 Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology as the foundations of a relational ‘three-pronged’ conceptual framework

Various relational discourses can be constructed aiming to grasp the role of urban voids in the contemporary post-industrial city and how they can be used to promote more inclusive and sustainable urban management strategies. However, following the multi-faceted nature of urban voids that emerged from the review of the literature I considered that a relational approach to urban voids would especially be strengthened if embedded with multi-scalar and temporal ideas that encompass spatial, functional and social considerations.

In Chapter 2 these aspects of urban space were explored through literature and research pertaining to the disciplines of Architecture, Planning, Urban Morphology, Urban Design, Urban Landscape and Landscape Architecture, Post-structuralism, Post-modern Urbanism, New Urbanism, Relational Placemaking, the Diffuse City, Network Urbanism, Post-Fordism and the Post-industrial City, Urban Metabolism, Ecology and Sustainability, Urban Political Ecology, Urban Governance and Urban Policy, Sociology, Informality, and Post-colonial Studies.
Post-modern literature was instrumental in understanding the transition from the industrial to the post-industrial age. Scholars are very attentive to the complications that this change brought including the failure of infrastructures and systems, the abandonment and deterioration of open spaces and buildings. In a similar light, Relational and Network Urbanism condemned the uneven territorial development that followed and usually focus on the negative impact of urban voids in society and urban using words such as ‘disfigured’, ‘marginalised’, ‘severed’, ‘highly fragmented’. Post-industrial literature focuses particularly on urban voids as being the results of deindustrialisation and highlights the possibilities these spaces offer for alternative, non-mainstream activities and uses (for social, cultural or economic ends), but, often through a romanticised vision of the ruin. Broadly, the disciplines closer to Urban Design, Architecture and Landscape Urbanism conceptualise urban voids as areas that appear forgotten, empty and unused following disasters or important urban transformations. Although urban form blends with society and cultural values, Urban Design literature focused too much on the design and planning of small and localised interventions. Ecology and Sustainability insist that urban voids and marginal spaces are in a critical ecological state due to their exclusion from mainstream processes. Urban Ecologists point towards the potential alternative uses that these places could accommodate and how these could be beneficial for the urban dweller and the urban ecosystem. Although of great relevance the conceptual frameworks and methodologies of these disciplines were too systemic for the nature of this research. Finally, Urban Governance and Policy-oriented disciplines focus very much on the neglect of urban voids, their condition and declining activity. Interestingly, the subjective perception of these spaces is sometimes stressed but the spatial dimension of place-making is often overshadowed by policy and regulatory frameworks.

While all these disciplines brought interesting and relevant points to the ‘epistemology of urban voids’ that the Literature Review aimed to construct, the majority remained too constrained within the boundaries of their theoretical frameworks. One of the core assertions of this thesis is that to think about urban voids requires to embrace their space and form, their activity and urban flows, and their temporality and socio-economic context. Because of this complexity, none of the above schools of thought provided, alone, with the adequate tools to investigate the urban void – in this case Eleonas – at a sufficient depth. Hence, the need of a multi-disciplinary relational framework arose and was constructed around the theoretical apparatuses and methods of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology which
connected most strongly with the nature of the overall approach and the line of questioning of the thesis. In the following sections I unpack what these disciplines are, how they treat the urban and later, in Section 3.4 how they conceive and understand the urban setting and why merging them is highly valuable for a relational understanding of urban voids.

3.3.1 Urban Morphology

The study of the Urban Morphology attempts to analyse the structure, form and interactions between the different physical entities composing the human settlement (Vance, 1990). Spatial characteristics are a core metric for the positive or negative sense an area emanates (Vaughan et al., 2005). Spatial transformations stretch in time and often possess a long and heavy historicity. Urban voids, as singular as they may be, follow those very same laws and trends that shape the overarching urban settlement. As López García (2017) noted, the urban voids should be understood as the result of historical and temporary events that determine the contemporary city. In this attempt to understand it, it is crucial to identify these logics and trace them through the political and economic contexts of their times. Changes in the urban form, however, are only one aspect of urban transformation.

The urban setting, as per Urban Morphology, would thus be a constantly evolving entity shaped by actions and events of replacement and transformation. This condition was further defined by Williamson (2013) as ‘morphogenesis’. Through the concept of morphogenesis urban morphologists are able to focus on the built environment and “the tangible results of social and economic forces [that] mould our cities” (Williamson, 2013, p. 35). Moudon (1997) expresses that the urban form can be explained based on three fundamental components: physical elements, resolution – or scale – and time. She divides the physical elements into buildings and their related open space, building lots and parcels and streets and argues they should only be analysed in a contextual manner paying attention to four interconnected scales entertaining mutual relations: the building/lot, the street/block, the city and the region. Lastly, regarding time, Moudon (1997) indicates that the urban form can be fully understood only if we pay attention to the historical dimension of the urban transformations and replacements. For this research, this tripartite view of the urban fabric is particularly potent. It will allow me to decipher how the case study of Eleonas in Athens, came to its current urban reality and to what extent it contrasts with, or resembles, the overarching urban fabric. This multi-faceted investigation of urban
form, however, cannot alone account for the totality of reasons why the area has been cut from major urban infrastructure, neither can it fully explain how, despite being considered an urban void, it is still strongly connected to very specific urban networks. Chapter 2 gave a short overview of the research area and it became clear that Eleonas has been for decades the place for ‘unclean’ material and social processes and exchanges. Hence, why I resort to expand the research project to the discipline of Urban Metabolism to analyse these interrelations.

3.3.2 Urban Metabolism

The rapid expansion of cities that occurred after the industrial revolution is intrinsically linked to the improvement of urban infrastructure and the optimisation of urban flows (Amin & Thrift, 2017; Levy, 1999). The ensuing increase of urban flows was met with important morphological alterations (Kennedy et al., 2007) but also a transformation in the systemic operation of cities as their footprint began to grow beyond their physical limits. Increasingly, the urban setting is perceived as a complex and active system that shares many attributes with living organisms to the extent of being described in organic terms. Just as organisms breathe, consume, sense, and excrete waste; so, urban landscapes are traversed by vital material flows such as energy, water, food, waste, biomass, goods, money, sediments and people (Brugmans et al., 2015) which the field of Urban Metabolism is set to study and decipher (Figure 3.2).

Yet, the “metabolism approach” still fails to a large extent to effectively include social considerations (Zhang, 2013). Since Wolman (1965) developed the concept of urban metabolism, interest in using it to understand material and energy use in cities has grown significantly. The study of inputs, outputs and storage of urban flows provides a powerful tool for analysing energy and material flows within and between urban areas at different scales (Holmes & Pincetl, 2012). Labelled the “metabolism approach”, it redefines the way spatial challenges are understood and dealt with by focusing on the intricate relations between these flows and the social and economic urban processes (Brugmans et al., 2015). Hitherto, the linear nature of urban flows from production to consumption and then disposal posed “one of the largest challenges to sustainability” as cities became dependent on extra-local processes to meet their needs (Giradet, 2004 in Holmes & Pincetl, 2012, p. 2). Several researchers demonstrated that because of these linear logics of accumulation and disposal, urban flows remain open in contrast to a natural ecosystem’s circular metabolism (Brunner,
Over the last decade researchers have extended the Urban Metabolism framework to address other aspects of urban sustainability (Holmes & Pincetl, 2012). More than an analytical device, it has been used as a descriptive tool for urban design to envision more sustainable communities and cities (Holmes & Pincetl, 2012; Pincetl et al., 2012). Oswaldt, Baccini and Michaeli (2003) address the four components of urban metabolism – food, water, construction materials, and energy – to demonstrate how the reconstruction of the city can be informed by a combination of morphological and physiological tools. Urban Metabolism, by tracking flows through the urban system and attempting to close the metabolic loops, can serve as a complementary tool in the design or decision-making process (Holmes & Pincetl, 2012). Towards this direction, practice and ‘research by design’ offices such as FABRIC, 51N4E, AWB, H+N+S Landscape Architects, have produced a series of studies based on various urban contexts, confirming through practice that the metabolism approach offers, in
fact, a robust framework for a much more complex planning approach (Brugmans et al., 2015).

For this research, the objective of a metabolic approach is clear. It serves as an analytical sublayer of research, which will allow to redefine the current state of the case study based on its actual exchange of material flows. The aim is to show if and how Eleonas is a vital component of Athens' ecosystem and that a circular re-organisation of its material flows will benefit the broader region. This approach to urban issues has been a core vector in appreciating the interest and impact of Urban Metabolism and other circular concepts – i.e. Circular Economy, Industrial Symbiosis (Bisker, Chester, & Eisenberg, 2015; Grulois, Casabella, Crosas, & Perea, 2015; IABR, 2012, 2014, 2016; Moritz, Clerck, & Stessens, 2014; Moritz, Clerck, & Vanhaelen, 2013; Rieniets, Sigler, & Christiaanse, 2009; Vanin & Panayotopoulos, 2016). Yet, all these researches have been expressly sharing one common concern: the importance of considering the social factor, yet, how difficult it is to account for it for a longer term. It is one of the core aims of this research, to add to, and complement, this series of investigations by introducing Urban Political Ecology (UPE) in this process and attempt to bridge this gap that remains in current academic research and practice.

3.3.3 Urban Political Ecology

Urban Political Ecology (UPE), brings a new vision of the city: “as a product of global ‘metabolic socio-environmental process that stretches from the immediate environment to the remotest corners of the globe’” (Heynen et al, 2006, p.5 in Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2015, p. 18). Very much in accordance with the systemic view of the city, urban political ecologists take, however, a different approach to the ‘urban metabolism’ effectively relating the urban environmental problems to the broader economic, social and historical urban dynamics (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2015). A central contribution of UPE has been to transfer discussions of ‘metabolism’ – as in the exchange, assimilation and production of flows – to the urban sphere in order to reconcile the dualistic view of the city versus nature and society. As Swyngedouw wrote:

“In the city, society and nature, representation and being are inseparable, integral to each other, infinitely bound-up, yet simultaneously this hybrid socio-natural ‘thing’ called the city is full of contradictions, tensions and conflicts. [...]
Only over the past few years, a rapprochement has begun to assert itself between ecological thinking, political-economy, urban studies and critical social and cultural theory. This may provide the ferment from which a new and richer urban ecology or urban political-ecology may germinate.” (Swyngedouw, 1996, pp. 65–66)

Using ‘metabolism’ as a metaphor to describe the synergistic relations of the urban, the material urban flows and the social production of nature, they use it to argue that material flows are often “unjust” in the way they are created and distributed. Since the link between their users and their provenance is not always obvious and the networks through which they are linked to the physical space are usually hidden (Cook & Swyngedouw, 2012), this differential distribution is not acknowledged by the raw quantitative analysis of urban flows. Urban networks, as well as the production and accessibility of commodities, such as drinking water, electricity and food production, are intrinsic to socio-economic and socio-spatial processes (Cook & Swyngedouw, 2012; Kaika, 2005). As Gandy (2004, p. 373) expresses for water: “water is not simply a material element in the production of cities but is also a critical dimension to the social production of space”. This argument can be similarly made for the remaining urban flows of transportation, energy, food and waste as, in the same way, they imply multiple connectivities between local and regional systems, between social and physical entities, and between the visible and invisible dimensions of urban space (Gandy, 2004). UPE is, therefore, considering urban metabolism not simply as the material and quantifiable exchange of urban flows but as a dynamic process by which “new sociospatial formations, intertwinnings of materials, and collaborative enmeshing of social nature emerge” (Heynen, 2014, p. 599). Hence, for the purposes of this research, UPE is works extremely well in a combined framework with Urban Morphology and Urban Metabolism as it focuses on the production of these environments and synergies but considering ecological security, urban infrastructures and social cohesion (Heynen, 2014).

As Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw (2006) explain, UPE “combines the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy. Together this encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself” (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987 in Heynen et al., 2006, p. 8). Cook and Swyngedouw (2012) consider that socio-ecological transformation and the urbanisation of nature are deeply connected and affect bilaterally each other. The social structure and organisation of cities would,
therefore, be affecting the way urban transformations occur which in turn re-shape the social socio-ecological dynamics. In the case of Eleonas, this could not be more accurate. In addition to the unwanted urban processes, Eleonas has for more than four decades housed waves of marginalised and immigrant populations. As it will be described more in depth in later Chapters, this, not only affected the perception of the area from citizens, it most importantly started a vicious cycle of social and urban neglect from the governing authorities.

UPE has succeeded in documenting the city and urbanisation as a social process capable of transforming nature (E. Swyngedouw, 2006, p. 35). But according to Keil (2011) by focusing too much on the nature of the city itself, UPE has failed to look at the “networked matrix […] on which urban-nature relations are made and unmade” (Keil, 2011, p. 716). This relation, however, can be informed by learnings from the morphological and metabolic approaches. Hence, to achieve the aims of this research, the desired research design is a synergistic framework combining the otherwise separate approaches of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology. How these schools of thought will be merged to understand post-industrial urban transformations in large metropolitan areas through the exploration of the void is the subject of the following sections.

3.4 Morphological, metabolic and socio-political conceptualisations of the void

The notion of the void as constructed in Chapter 2, does not directly appear in the discourses of these disciplines. While it is sometimes hinted at through references to architectural absences and the lack of coordination, connections or social cohesion, the idea of the void as an exploratory device for urban issues is rarely found in current literature on Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism or UPE which tend to look at voids rather as the results of urban processes instead of the instigators of change. There is, thus – on top of the pragmatic interest for the analysis of the case study – an academic interest to infuse these disciplines with a new idea and, in continuation, use this new conceptual construct of the void as the medium for merging these three fields.
From a morphological perspective, the notion of the void could arguably be related to the absence of, or the disconnection between, the three basic components enunciated by Moudon (1997). A void within the physical entities, could entail in the simple absence of built structures; a void in resolution might be understood as the total disconnection of the urban component with one scale or the other; the void in time, however, would be much more complicated to approach. One might argue that it could relate to a halt in the evolutionary process of a given area, but this would be difficult to argue for, since as Vance said, history is essentially continuous from the origin of cities to the present (1990). In the context of this research, the void in the morphology of a city is seen as a combination of these points. The morphological void per se, relates to an incapacity to adopt the ongoing trends and transformations occurring within the overarching urban fabric. The result of which is an increasingly contrasting urban texture, the emergence of secluded areas, and the manifestation of differential levels of growth and progress.

In this constantly transforming urban reality, Urban Metabolism could relate the notion of the void to the inexistence of actual exchange of flows. Yet, as the review of literature showed in Chapter 2, it is rare to encounter an absolute absence of urban flows, even in urban voids. Thereby, it seems more appropriate to consider that the void in a metabolic loop is the inexistence of the loop itself. Urban voids, instead of being bereft of urban flows, are often created by spaces of flows (see UPE and the works of Swyngedouw) and morph into a distinct network that is either by-passed or used as start and endpoints of the broader urban networks. In this case, urban voids could be associated metaphorically to distinct pockets of unsustainability. An unsustainability that, as it has been argued, is not only material but very much socio-economic as well.

Following the discourse of UPE, urban flows and the social power they depict can in many ways brutally separate populations and urban areas both physically and based on the availability of amenities (Allen et al., 2004). Urban voids, indeed, are zones of social, economic and infrastructural friction and segregation (Doron, 2000; Kamvasinou & Roberts, 2014; Talocci, 2011). Their uncertain, non-permanent status and their informal, unregulated and uncontrolled use are all attributes prone to socio-environmental conflicts. Hence, why it is very cautiously that we must consider their future, as their ‘in-between’ geographical and social state could work to either foster greater urban and social cohesion or on the contrary generate new forms of political conflict (Allen, 2015; Bellet, 2014; Rosa, 2014).
It is anticipated that such a reconceptualisation of the void can add very interesting insights to on-going research about the void in urban settings. However, before attempting to conceive the future of urban voids it is imperative to understand the very basic – sometimes hidden – spatial, functional and social dynamics that define those places; and how, and to what scale, these affect the overarching urban environment.

The interest in approaching a research project through different trajectories is to enrich a certain conceptual framework with additional inputs to come closer to a holistic understanding of the subject matter. This is crucial to the analysis of urban voids and specifically in the frame of this research as it would be impossible to understand the research area of Eleonas in Athens without considering the intricate transformations it went through.

The principal aim of the morphological analysis is to understand the changes that led to the creation of Eleonas in the form it is today. Studying the urban metabolism enables me to unravel otherwise hidden relations a given area – regardless of size – might entertain with regional, national and global contexts. Understanding urban flows in coherence, allows to develop spatial interventions that proactively take advantage of the underlying structures of the city and work towards more sustainable and resilient territories (Brugmans et al., 2015). Lastly, UPE is brought in to refine the approach to urban areas by demonstrating that socio-economic characteristics can be combined with a more materialist approach to the city with great results. The appeal of such a three-pronged conceptual framework, is that it provides very strong tools, which once translated into a well-defined methodology and research project, have the potential to reconceptualise urban voids – in this case Eleonas – from static ‘wasted’ entities to dynamic components of urban space.

3.5 The terrain vague as a generative idea

The void as an analytical concept has appeared minimally in the theoretical apparatuses of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and UPE. It has, however, to some extent, been mentioned in the field of Architecture and Urban Photography by Manuel de Solà-Morales in his interpretation of a specific type of space he named the terrain vague (De Solà-Morales, 1995). Being the closest reference found so far to
the idea of the ‘urban void’ as it is constructed here, it is of great significance for this research. The terrain vague was briefly mentioned in Chapter 2 while reviewing the literature related to urbanisation processes and the purpose of urban voids (see Sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2) but was not explicitly deconstructed to show how it can inform the analysis and understanding of urban voids such as Eleonas.

Compared to other concepts describing voids and absences, the interest of the terrain vague lies in that it encompasses – philosophically perhaps – the multi-layered structure of the urban condition. Terms such as ‘derelict land’, ‘urban sinks’, ‘dead zones’, ‘transgressive zones’, or ‘unintentional landscapes’ (11) focus each on a limited set of considerations that emanate from the discourses developed by the disciplines they derive from. Alternatively, the terrain vague, although it emerged from the field of Architecture, describes in a more abstract way situations characterised simultaneously by morphological, metabolic and political ecology voids.

The conceptualisation of the terrain vague has been widely used as a descriptive device but has not been used for its capacity to project multiple, yet concurrent, paths for the investigation of urban areas and has, hitherto, rarely been applied to a more materialistic and relational framing. I interrogate the notion in more depth to demonstrate ultimately how it relates to the urban void and how it can be used to create an integrated research framework for the case of Eleonas in Athens.

### 3.5.1 Context and attributes of the terrain vague

Inspired by the dynamic of terrain vague, Mariani and Barron in their book titled “Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale” set out to explore the notion of the terrain vague through a series of distinct narratives coming from a wide range of fields (Barron & Mariani, 2014). They present an incredible array of cases – ranging from squatter campsites and underpasses in Boston (Barron & Mariani, 2014, p. 8); to interstices between buildings in San Francisco (Sankalia, 2014); fenced empty lots in Tokyo (Rahmann & Jonas, 2014); Detroit’s ruins (Herron, 2014); a demilitarised strip in Cyprus (Stavrides, 2014); or an entire neighbourhood in Beirut (Lévesque, 2014) – to portray the “paradoxical combinations of vacancy with freedom, of absence

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11 See Chapter 2 for a thorough exploration of the wide spectrum of terms used to describe instances of voidness
with possibility, and of limitlessness with mobility” that surround terrain vague (Barron & Mariani, 2014, p. 4).

Although attempting to categorise terrains vagues would be a futile exercise given their ever-changing and variable nature, it is worth expanding slightly on the different situations in which they may be found. Oftentimes, terrains vagues are part or even the result of Marc Augé’s non-places (Augé, 1992). They accumulate in and around man-made elements devoid of everydayness such as large malls, airports, or large transportation infrastructure. It is not uncommon for terrains vagues to exist where such large urban entities meet taking the form of accidental buffer zones.

At a smaller scale, the nature of the terrain vague becomes increasingly related to its activity – or lack thereof – than to its form. On the one hand, controlled and sterile strips of land between buildings; large complexes; parking lots; or private areas can be considered terrains vagues as they are rendered impenetrable for outsiders and, yet, do not possess any specific use other than tactically separating a very diverse collection of urban objects (Secchi, 1993). On the other hand, similar areas are found in public space, but they are more closely assimilated to Franck’s and Steven’s notion of ‘loose space’ because of the relative freedom of use they allow to citizens (Franck & Stevens, 2007).

However, defining terrain vague solely from the apparent presence, or not, of activity can be misleading. Certain forms of terrains vagues – such as the ones described above – are usually recognisable from the outside due to their phenomenal size and/or public exposure. As such, abandoned factories, slaughterhouses, airports, waterfronts or construction sites, are prime targets for ephemeral, regulated or not, activities (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2012; Doron, 2000; Franck & Stevens, 2007; Komninos, 2013). Contrastingly, subtler terrains vagues hidden from plain sight such as Paris’ Petite Ceinture, New York’s High Line before its re-design, or the Landscape Park Duisburg in Northern Germany are examples of areas totally secluded from the mainstream urban systems, yet actively used from specific communities, people and social groups (Foster, 2014; Kamvasinou, 2011; Latz, 2016). Thus, the social value of terrains vagues is not always discernible and in many cases even frowned upon, as such transgressive, unorthodox activities are negatively perceived.

Terrains vagues however are not limited to human appropriation. It is very common for an extensive and diverse fauna and flora to populate such areas (Meffert & Dziock,
Arguably, *terrains vagues* contribute to the increase of biodiversity in cities as they provide fertile ground for a plethora of species to colonise them and thrive. The opposite also stands, however. Many sites hold a history of intense industrial activity that has impaired the ability of natural life to develop, are deemed dangerous and remain in a state of uncertainty until new meanings are projected onto them.

Lastly, terrains vagues are not only accidental occurrences. Recent examples of constructed public space share many attributes with terrain vague. Architects such as Adriaan Geuze, Kristiaan Borret and Rem Koolhaas have been inspired by an uncertainty similar to that of terrain vague to design urban projects. Examples of those include the Binnenrotte square and Schouwburgplein in Rotterdam by Adriaan Geuze, the plan for Melun-Sénart in France and the Breda Chassé Campus in Breda by Rem Koolhaas (Borret, 1999).

Clearly, terrains vagues contain a very peculiar life but most interestingly, they influence not only what happens within them but also their surroundings. The alternative appropriations and occurrences Solà-Morales was sensing take arguably various forms according to the historical, social and economic contexts in which they take place. Yet, they all possess a common essence. Regardless of their nature, terrains vagues function, in one way or another, as refuges from the daily civic life, as observatories from which one can observe the world from outside the pressing activity of the city. These spaces present a singular urban condition “internal to the city yet external to its everyday use” (De Solà-Morales, 1995, p. 26) which, according to Solà-Morales, is due to the increasing speed with which changes take place in reality, in science, in behaviours, and in experiences. Albeit not in the spotlight of urban transformation, these spaces are deeply engraved within the urban space and timeline and it could be argued that they just represent a different manifestation of change.

### 3.5.2 Limitations of the terrain vague

The interest of terrain vague, as an expression, lies in its flexible application to different urban conditions and its neutrality; in the sense that it does not project negative or positive connotations onto the areas it describes. The features of the terrain vague thus are ideal for studying extensive areas such as Eleonas in Athens,
composed of a variety of void-like situations that sit outside the conventional urban rules, yet, its initial framing possesses limitations.

Lévesque (2014) expresses that while terrain vague is understood as an accumulation of singular liminal spaces, small pockets or lots it fails to account for areas that are formally inhabited but still understood as abandoned. In her exploration of the Beiruti terrain vague, she uses the term *vague urbain* to disentangle herself from the “precise, determined” connotation of Solà-Morales and engage with extended “swatches of the city fabric” (Lévesque, 2014, p. 36). There is, therefore, a certain limitation in terms of the scale that the terrain vague can encompass – both in the physical and temporal sense. The terrain vague documents phenomenally an urban condition but lacks the tools to look beyond the terrain vague itself and to reveal ongoing, past or foreseeable urban processes. In that regard, Gandy (2011) in a short blog post wrote:

> The concept of *terrain vague* seems, however, to be overwhelmingly visual in its scope. It is difficult to connect the essentially aesthetic response of Solà-Morales to a consideration of how such anomalous spaces appear and disappear within the city and how they might connect with or illuminate wider processes of urban transformation. (Gandy, 2011).

Although Solà-Morales (1995) hints at the necessity of a contextual approach to terrain vague, he is referring exclusively to Architecture and Urban Design. However, because of the peculiar status of such areas, it is necessary to consider the implication of planning – as Gandy suggested – to intersect terrain vague with urban theory and history (Gandy, 2011). Joining Gandy, I aim to achieve this via the conceptual apparatus I have constructed around the notion of the ‘void’. Although the terrain vague and the urban void share multiple attributes, the latter emphasises an urban dimension that its counterpart lacks to a certain extent. The terrain vague is decidedly urban but because it is principally based on the visual aspect of reality, it lacks the tools for a thorough understanding of urban areas. To resolve this, I attempted, through this Chapter, to frame the urban void as a notion encompassing the abstractness, fluidity and flexibility of terrain vague and the more practical dimensions of disciplines brought directly from the urban studies to create a holistic research framework.
3.6 Conclusion

To uncover the complex nature of urban voids and especially the intricate relations they entertain with the city, it is necessary to discuss the urban void as a dynamic and constantly evolving entity and through the different relations it entertains with the city and its transformations. This will require exploring how urban voids are created, appropriated and possibly contested in their use and identity and determining to what extent they are, in fact, inherent to urbanisation processes and, as such, whether they hold any role(s) in the development of the post-industrial city.

The current division in the perception of urban voids, as either harmful and unhealthy places of decay or on the contrary as places of positivity, freedom and potential, led me to think that there is a need to understand better the intricate ways in which placemaking, spatial configurations and social dynamics are interwoven in these areas. Additionally, the rather limited consideration of contextual characteristics in current research, left me partially dissatisfied and pushed me to consider various approaches. Among those surveyed,\textsuperscript{12} I found that the views brought by the disciplines of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology can be combined in a synergetic conceptual framework to resolve the dichotomy characterising urban voids (see Figure 3.1).

In this, starting from an investigation of the Urban Morphology is key as it allows to deconstruct the spatial, scalar and temporal characteristics of the urban fabric (Vaughan et al., 2005). Then, Urban Metabolism offers the tools to search for interconnections between these three components (i.e. space, activity and time). Understanding the metabolism of urban areas means analysing the networks of material and immaterial flows that connect urban areas regardless of distance and bring cities ‘to life’. Examining, thus, the exchanges of flows between urban entities, infrastructure and people allows to construct a vision of the city that extends from the smallest scale to far beyond its physical limits. However, as it was argued in earlier sections of this Chapter, urban flows are rarely equally distributed. The prioritisation of specific areas for development leads to a differential urban and economic growth very much related to the positive/negative divide perceived in urban voids. Hence, the questions and debates central to the discipline of Urban Political Ecology offer a great starting point for a much-needed discussion about the uneven development of urban areas.

\textsuperscript{12} See Chapter 2 for the extended survey of literature.
areas such as urban voids. Indeed, the alarming issue with urban voids is the fact that because they are labelled as ‘unhealthy’, urban redevelopment hastily converts these areas with little, if any consideration to the overarching urban context, ongoing activities or socio-economic structures. To that, Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and UPE project their own assumptions and ideal answers; from a morphologically coherent ensemble, to circular patterns of production and consumption and the need for a deeper social cohesion. Through this Chapter, I argued in favour of the combination of each discipline’s beliefs to achieve an equilibrium between space, function and people. The remainder of this thesis will seek to problematise the current imbalance of urban processes and promote an inclusive strategy to urban voids. The following chapter will clarify how the research methods of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and UPE can be connected and will specify how this new framework will address the complexity of urban voids in the context of the case study of Eleonas.
Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Tracing the evolution of urban voids through space and time, the significance of the notion of the ‘void’ emerged as central to the macro-trends of urban transformation and shaped the core questionings of this thesis. This chapter unpacks the research questions and outlines the methodology designed to answer them. It provides the rationale for the selection of the single case study of Eleonas in Athens and details how the multi-disciplinary framework presented at the end of Chapter 3 is applied and combined into a singular methodology. This Chapter also outlines how the research dealt with the ‘bigness’ and enormity of Eleonas by subdividing the research area into six smaller scale ‘units of analysis’ to make the complexity of the case study more manageable. From here onwards, the term ‘case study’ refers only to the entire area composing Eleonas (i.e. the large scale) and the term ‘units of analysis’ refer to the parts within Eleonas that were explored more in depth at the scales of the municipality and the neighbourhood.

In order to navigate these analytical and geographical scales, Chapters 2 and 3 made evident the necessity to conduct this research in a trans-scalar and relational way. Therefore, the research questions and methodology are designed to fully investigate the subject matter from the metropolitan, regional and local perspectives. Although I continuously try to understand the landscape of the case study by creating links across these three ‘levels of resolution’, focusing in on each scale aims to understand specific aspects of urban voids:

- the larger scale aims to clarify what the position of Eleonas is in the regional, national and international dynamics
- the intermediate scale investigates the condition of Eleonas as a ‘void’ by looking at its built form, ongoing activities, infrastructure and demographics
- finally, the smaller scale aims to reduce the complexity of the case and achieve a higher degree of detail by approaching very specific ‘voids’ within Eleonas at the neighbourhood level

This structure gives one the opportunity to traverse the various layers of the urban system in a way that is broad enough to account for the wider metropolitan networks and focused enough to reflect the reality of daily life. In this chapter, I present the
research methods, the workplan and the various steps undertaken to achieve this multi-faceted reading of the case study.

As illustrated in Chapter 1, the primary research question “What is (are) the role(s) of urban voids in processes of urban transformation of the contemporary post-industrial city?” is subdivided into four sub-questions to treat various features of urban voids from different perspectives. SUB Q.1 evaluates the validity of the term ‘urban void’ for the areas it describes; SUB Q.2 investigates how urban voids originate and evolve in the urban environment and is complemented by SUB Q.3, which explores how these areas are perceived and whether these perceptions change. Lastly, SUB Q.4 returns to the role of urban voids but in a normative way. The following Table 4.1 outlines the objectives of each sub-question and methods employed to answer them.

*Table 4.1 Summary of the research questions and research objectives as well as the methods employed to fulfil the aims of this thesis.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary research question: What is (are) the role(s) of urban voids in processes of urban transformation of the contemporary post-industrial city?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SUB Q.1</strong> – To what extent is the term ‘urban void’ an appropriate characterisation for the phenomena it describes? Is the urban void, urban?</td>
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<td><strong>OBJECTIVE:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>METHODS:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SUB Q.2</strong> – Is the urban void induced by specific events in the evolution of the urban environment? How can we define the void at the smaller scales?</td>
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<td><strong>OBJECTIVE:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>METHODS:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SUB Q.3</strong> – Do the perceptions and understandings of the urban void differ for person to person? Why and to what extent? Do these perceptions impact the evolution of the urban void?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OBJECTIVE 1:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>METHODS:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>OBJECTIVE 2:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>METHODS:</strong></td>
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To answer these questions, I employ the framework devised in the previous chapter, combining tools and theories from Urban Morphology and Urban Metabolism that feed a broader understanding of the Urban Political Ecology of urban voids. Thus, this “UPE+” framework consists of a mixed three-pronged approach. First, a morphological exploration that brings to light the stages of change and transformation occurring in space. Second, a metabolic analysis arguing that urban voids are in fact not a static condition but one that sees perpetual cycles of changes regardless of physical or administrative boundaries. And third, a socio-economic framing of the analysis that drives the reconceptualisation of the ‘urban void’ and more specifically the perception of the selected case study of Eleonas as one. In the following sections I unpack and expand on the major epistemic trajectories that treat with urban voids and present the epistemological framework within which this thesis is situated.

4.2 Epistemological Framework

As discussed in previous chapters (see Section 1.2 of the Introduction and Section 3.2.1 of the Conceptual Framework) there is an intrinsic relation between the emergence of the post-industrial city and the abandonment of areas that are known as ‘voids’. Post-industrial cities are laden with the remnants of the industrial age: unexploited, abandoned buildings and lots leading to what Pearsall and Lucas (2014, p. 121) referred as “a significant and growing urban problem” and an “open enigma” at multiple scales. This relation is further illustrated through the suggestion that urban voids are non-urban entities left from the industrial era, but which does not account for the fact that the very existence of these spaces depends on being part of the urban sphere. This dialectic framing is the centre of this research and, thus, why I am questioning it in the post-industrial space where vacant land and ‘voids’ are often
found to undermine urban revitalisation efforts (Accordino & Johnson, 2000); attract illegality, unruliness and criminality (Pearsall & Lucas, 2014; Spelman, 1993); and degrade the quality of life of neighbourhoods (Accordino & Johnson, 2000; Garvin, et al., 2013). Arguably, countries in economic hardships are in an even worse situation as the funds needed are inexistent and thus attempt to relegate the development to private firms with very little socio-environmental constrains. Such an example is the former Hellinikon airport in Athens which is now targeted for extensive urban regeneration (Komninos, 2013) and Eleonas is yet another similar case. Still, the definition of these spaces rests on the subjectivity of personal experience and depends on the intrinsic relation one entertains with it. In addition to the types of urban voids presented in Table 2.1, Eleonas could be said to be composed of a multitude of absences: activity voids, spatial voids, cognitive voids, planning and policy voids. Yet, it is full of all the above as well. It is gruelling with activity; its urban tissue is almost impermeable; has its own daily life; and is central to metropolitan plans and policy debates. So, what is, in this case, an urban void, and for whom?

4.2.1 Theoretical and conceptual timeline of urban voids in the post-industrial city

The transition from the modern and industrial age to the era of deindustrialisation, failure of infrastructures and systems lead to the abandonment and deterioration of open spaces and buildings. Hence, post-modern literature started paying attention to the conflicts that appeared in the ‘voids’ between the scales, planning grids and large architectural developments (Augé, 1992; de Certeau, 1980; De Solà-Morales, 1995). The failure of the network infrastructure was therefore heavily critiqued, and literature started pointing to the controversy between the offered connectivity of networks and the incidental exclusion of redundant areas, neighbourhoods and social groups (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996). Under this light, urban voids were perceived as disfigured, marginalised, severed and highly fragmented spaces that negatively impact society and the urban tissue (De Solà-Morales, 1995; Foo, Martin, Wool, & Polsky, 2014; Secchi & Vigano, 2011).

Towards the turn of the century, an important theoretical shift occurred as the subjective perception of areas began to be accounted for. This strand of urban scholarship sitting between urban design and governance looks at the reasons behind the appearance of forgotten, empty and unused spaces. Scholars started focusing on the impact of ‘wrong’ design, the current uses of these areas and their significance in
allowing ‘transgressive’ activities (Doron, 2000, 2007). The small and medium scales started surfacing as important factors in the evolution of places awaiting redevelopment, landscapes of deindustrialisation and architecturally “neutral” areas or ‘no-man’s lands’ (Rivlin, 2007). Urban voids for the first time are described as the result of problematic processes but their existence is usually portrayed in a positive way and as potentially beneficial for the urban setting (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2012; Doron, 2000; Foster, 2014; Jorgensen & Tylecote, 2007; Kamvasinou, 2011; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996; Lynch, 1990; Neuman, 2012; Talocci, 2011). On a similar note, research in Urban Ecology points towards the potential alternative uses that these places could accommodate and the important benefits they could offer for the urban dweller and the urban ecosystem. Gandy (2013, 2016) extensively writes about the cultural and aesthetical attractiveness of wastelands and “unintentional landscapes” looking at the urban and political processes that generated them in the first place. Similarly, Torres Garcia (2014) focuses primarily on the cultural significance of urban voids in the contemporary city as well as the dichotomies between positive and negative perceptions. One prevalent factor is the condition of the previous and current activity of the marginalised areas as well as the perception ‘outsiders’ have of these spaces. Increasingly however, the unregulated activities that usually fill urban voids are emerging as positive and worth preserving (Foster, 2014; Pearsall, et al., 2014).

Yet, urban voids are often still absent from the main preoccupations and discourses of planners, politicians and developers. This results to the lingering exclusion of people and urban areas from networks, socio- and spatio-economic processes and the productive structures of the city (Kamvasinou, 2011; Talocci, 2011). This led me to the necessity of expanding to a few additional conceptual directions that could include the socio-political conflicts and pressures surrounding geographies of resistance and marginal spaces.

4.2.2 Geographies of resistance, marginal spaces and opportunity pressures in post-industrial cities.

To cope with the socio- and spatio-economic significance of urban voids, this research draws on the literature of the ‘geographies of resistance’ (Pile & Keith, 1997; Stavrides, 2007; Talocci, 2011), emphasising that meaning and identity arise from “an interaction between system-wide relations and divergent ‘readings’ of those relations” (Murdoch, 2005, p. 11). It also partially draws on postcolonial studies (Corbridge,
focusing on the narratives, strategies and tensions between the production of urban space and the pre-existing socio-economic context.

The other major body of literature used in this research relates to the wider scholarship surrounding marginal spaces. In the last twenty to thirty years, an increase in interest has emerged for spaces described as disruptions, non-spaces, vague, unintentional (Augé, 1992; De Solà-Morales, 1995; Gandy, 2016; Soja, 1996), showing that urban space is not governed by predetermined and robust structures but is in fact fragmented. Marginal urban space was deemed “multi-sided and contradictory, oppressive and liberating, passionate and routine, knowable and unknowable” (Soja, 1996, p. 276). Drawing upon that, this research sets to investigate the binary and relational tensions that imbue urban voids at multiple scales and across the form, networks and socio-economic structures of their urban environment.

In recent years, various debates have emerged regarding whether post-industrial spaces are to be understood as opportunities or nuisances. The first viewpoint describes them as useless or as hotbeds of illegality, informality and other marginal activities, while the latter depicts them as exemplary spaces prime for urban renewal. Neo-liberalisation and the developmental state have made it easier to switch from one characterisation to the other by targeting them for large developments and regeneration projects (Loures & Panagopoulos, 2007a, 2007b; Pearsall et al., 2014; Trigo, 2013), brutally pushing these spaces from a certain stalemate to the forefront of urban transformation. Undermined by a ‘profit-race’, this approach often results in operations that are blind to contextual elements and structures feeding in debates about domination and resistance between spatial identities and spatial practices. This phenomenon implies the necessity for a reconceptualisation of the urban void that accounts for the multiplicity and diversity of present and future relations between urban form, networks and people.

4.2.3 Rationale and selection of a single case study: Eleonas in Athens, Greece.

In the previous chapters, I defended the position that unlike the consensus, urban voids are part of the broader spatial, political and social dynamics and hold great innovation potential specifically because of their indeterminacy. Phenomena of ‘voidness’ are thus inseparable from their context and are best understood if
investigated in conjunction with it. To produce this type of knowledge, the investigation of a case study is especially suited. As Schramm (1971 in Yin, 2009, p. 17) wrote: “the essence of a case study [...] is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result.” In other words, a case study is of great interest when the subject of investigation is an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon anchored in a specific context but where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are relatively unclear (Yin, 2009); and the ‘urban void’, as this research framed it, matches perfectly this description. The advantage of a case study is that it can “close-in” on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Hence, a case study approach is useful because it produces context-dependent knowledge necessary to grow expertise. It is also the most appropriate means for a holistic consideration of a research topic because of its closeness to real-life and its wealth of details. Effectively, it allows to clarify the deeper causes of a problem and its consequences rather than just describing the symptoms and how often they occur.

The case selection was heavily informed by my previous engagement with the area. Research I undertook at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in Brussels as part of my Masters’ Thesis on the causality between urbanisation and recurrent flooding events in Athens (Panayotopoulos-Tsiros, 2015). It unveiled a clear concentration of flooding events at the mouth of river Kifissos, the largest river flowing through the city of Athens. Above this area of concentration – in terms relative to Attica’s catchment – sat Eleonas, a morphologically unique area in the heart of Athens composed of large industrial plots. Intrigued, Eleonas became the subject of the Master thesis and the case study explored in a subsequent conference paper (Panayotopoulos-Tsiros, 2016). The research found that the increased concentration of flooding related events was largely due to three factors: the largely impermeable surface, the lack of green and permeable area and the inexistence of appropriate draining infrastructure. The paper concluded that the way Eleonas has been ignored, and remains to this day, was of growing environmental concern and that it’s decaying physical condition was in great need of improvement. Interviews with academics and consultancies working in the area alluded to important socio-economic inequalities between the area and

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13 In view of the 2004 Olympic games, river Kifissos was fully or partially covered and now flows along or under Motorway A1 linking Athens to Thessaloniki. The construction of the motorway (aptly named Kifissou Avenue) was followed by extensive flood mitigation works aimed at reducing flooding of the nearby neighbourhoods.
the rest of the city and criticised a looming sense of neglect from policy makers. However, the relation between the physical and socio-economic context of the area exceeded the scope of the research and were included in its limitations and suggested as potential future avenues for additional research alongside the need for additional fieldwork to compile a more comprehensive overview. Still, one core conclusion was that urban voids such as Eleonas might hold incredible potential for flood mitigation, one the one hand, because it is at the source of the problem and, on the other, because of the great flexibility and spatial freedom it could allow for experimentation of cutting-edge water management through urban design.

This thesis is therefore the continuation of this idea of possibility and opportunity but with a much broader scope that extends the question not only to flooding and environmental concerns but to problems concerning urban society and Urban Planning as a discipline and a profession. A research that would go beyond the physical distinctiveness of Eleonas and would instead treat the essence of the area and urban voids; that is the ‘voidness’. In the process of constructing the research framework of this thesis, the conceptualisation of the case study and my research questions influenced one another to the point of evolving almost in a synchronised manner. I wanted my case study to be particularly dense because I wish to test the thesis that the most interesting phenomena and potential of ‘voidness’ are found in the most hidden sublayers, the “neglected and unseen aspects” of cities (Gandy, 2002, p.183). I wanted to see if the dualism of ‘healthy/unhealthy’, ‘used/abandoned’, and other such characterisations metamorphose and vanish when looking sufficiently in detail.

In Eleonas, de-industrialisation and the shift towards the tertiary sector led to the decrease of industrial and manufacturing activities, the shutdown of companies precipitated the decline of its physical environment. Today, it presents a condensed and layered profile of otherwise unrelated buildings, streets and activities due to the multiple transformations it has undergone and is characterised by a clear ‘in-between’ condition of an intense logistics hub and a semi-abandoned historical industrial zone. Due to its exclusive industrial activity, the morphology of Eleonas is dominated by larger entities that heavily contrast with Athens’ residential built environment as illustrated in Figure 4.1. In Eleonas, plots are extensive, buildings are massive and the infrastructure necessary to access the area is scaled up to accommodate heavy traffic and material flows. Massive infrastructure facilitates the movement of people and goods, but at the same time, physically separates the area and its inhabitants.
from their surroundings. Additionally, the development of extra-local transportation infrastructure was heavily favoured over the other networks such as sewage and irrigation systems, small roads or public lightening – leading to severe problems of water scarcity, floods, pollution and urban insecurity. There is therefore a fundamental relationship between the creation of urban voids and infrastructure in Eleonas and is one aspect that is specifically explored and investigated in the following chapters.

Being an ‘out-of-plan’ area until 1995 resulted in an arbitrary arrangement of buildings depending on the available space and networks in ways that were optimal for the operation of industrial processes. Eleonas’ spaces are mono-functional and exclusively linked to the use of the place – in this case production, retail and transportation except for a very small number of residential units. As a result, this deeply introvert system denies all interaction with any element beyond itself and thus very few active connections exist with the rest of Athens. This aspect was further reinforced with the transition to the tertiary sector as the larger peripheral roads were punctuated with massive clusters of offices, consumption or leisure spaces. Initially planned as points of attraction, these developments work as impenetrable walls that concentrate the activity on the edges of the area establishing a strong segregation between strong peripheral axes and a neglected core.

This unsupervised evolution resulted in Eleonas housing unwanted processes and marginalised populations. Clusters of unregulated and alternative activities emerged in the remaining parks, the emptied plots and streets, or the abandoned sheds. Therefore, from a socio-economic standpoint Eleonas is massively heterogeneous. Evidence suggested that within its borders reside, work and commute an extremely wide array of people ranging from the lower end of the economic spectrum and illegality to employees of banks, and high-profile companies. Arguably, Eleonas is therefore neither empty nor abandoned but instead full of everyday activities of leisure, exchanges and creativity. Nonetheless, its components – the dead-ends, empty lots and decayed buildings – convey a sense of fear, not belonging and exclusion from the urban processes that remove Eleonas from the Athenian daily life and erase it progressively from the collective consciousness. Hence, the condition of Eleonas was optimal to address both the physical and social aspects of the ‘urban void’, and eventually to explore the multifaceted and hybridised role of such areas in the transformation of cities.
4.3 Methods and techniques of investigation

4.3.1 Mixed methods approach

Understanding the urban void involves explaining the wider dynamics that tie it with its context but also the intricacies and details that occur at the local level. It starts from a mapping of the basic urban elements and is completed by overlaying the perceptions and additional information that emerged from the broader spectrum of studied data (interviews, articles etc.). Eventually, the purpose of this methodology is
to superimpose the various layers of data and critically think about what the politics of the place are. In this, a mixed-methods approach is the most appropriate. Mixed-methods approach is defined as the intersection of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and is gradually being recognised as the “third major research paradigm” alongside qualitative and quantitative research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Mixed-methods research is an approach to research that respects the teaching of both quantitative and qualitative research while holding a pragmatist stance towards the researched subject-matter (Greene, et al., 1989; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Therefore, such a methodology offers the opportunity to consider a broader range of viewpoints, perspectives and positions (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). While there are some exceptions (i.e. mixing methods within the same research paradigm), the consensus is that within a mixed-methods framework it is quantitative and qualitative research that is mixed for the “broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 123). The degree of complexity we are now capable of processing allows for a combination of the numerical data that the urban systems generates and the intangible, immaterial sense and meaning of existing within the urban system itself. This research is an attempt to reconcile a scientific and interpretative approach to the study of the urban environment. The methodology is designed to convert quantitative numerical data into a medium that can be qualitatively analysed. These quantitative datasets include essentially morphological, metabolic and demographic data collected from various public agencies and institutions (see section 4.4). This quantified knowledge of the built environment, the urban flows and the socio-economic landscape is then converted into a collection of images, graphs, photographs and maps which will are used for qualitative analysis in conjunction with qualitative data collected from interviews. Hence, it is not the numbers that are subject to qualitative analysis but their actual representation in urban space. The workplan as outlined in Figure 4.2 was conceived on an iterative process between data collection and analysis; it includes a first pilot study followed by on-site fieldwork and a continuous review of the gathered material.
4.3.2 Pilot study and fieldwork

A preliminary pilot study in Eleonas was conducted in Athens from April 13th, 2017 to April 24th, 2017 to test and plan the research. Its aim was to validate the legitimacy of the case study, get an overview of the literature located in libraries in Athens, hence, not accessible from UCL, meet academics from the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) – the leading institution conducting research on Eleonas for more than a decade – and visit in person Eleonas to fine tune the trajectory of the methodology to adopt in view of the actual fieldwork. During that time, the NTUA gave me access to their library which allowed me to compile preliminarily an extensive list of books, articles and research papers related to the case study. During my time at NTUA, I had the opportunity to discuss the research proposal with two academics from the Planning Department of the NTUA: Prof Markou and Prof Avgerinou, with whom I remained in touch until the end of this research. The meetings were extremely
interesting, and essentially focused on a possible ambivalence in the use of the ‘void’ as a term to describe the area. I had the opportunity to conduct a preliminary survey of the area, which influenced my preconceptions of the area as it shed light onto an unexpected intensity of on-going professional activities in parallel to an alternative informal use of the space, ranging from squatting, to improvised markets and a temporary network of theatres and studios. Lastly, the great interest of this preliminary work was that it enabled me to get in touch with key people who became the base of a growing network of contacts and were later instrumental in snowballing interviews during the fieldwork. At this point, I had the chance to meet architects from the Greek Association of Architects who possessed valuable information on the area, and with the Residents’ Association representative – living for over 50 years in Eleonas – who was also available to discuss and share his long experience regarding the transformations that occur in the area. This preparation helped consolidate the methodological framework that was applied during fieldwork which lasted slightly over three months from 12 February 2018 to 19 May 2018.

The primary aim of this fieldwork was to provide a new, objective and comprehensive overview of the nature of Eleonas and to compile an empirical dataset that would complement the preliminary knowledge generated during the pilot study and my previous engagement with the area. Fieldwork was divided into two parts (Figure 4.3). The first (Part I) included preliminary desktop research covering essentially the history of Eleonas, the gathering of the necessary quantitative datasets and preliminary interviews. The analysis of these was instrumental in developing the second part of the fieldwork (Part II) which included an iterative process of archival, statistical and desktop research, on-site first-person observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Then, followed a deep analysis and description through mapping and thematic analysis. The following sections detail all methods used in the frame of this research both for data collection and analysis. In support of this, Figure 4.3 outlines in detail the various steps of the methodological process.
Figure 4.3 Detailed flowchart outlining the process of research from fieldwork to research outcomes where connecting lines represent methodological processes feeding into each other and arrows represent outcomes of these processes highlighted in green. “Parts I-II” refer to the two parts of the fieldwork and “Stages I-V” refer to the successive stages of analysis that occurred following fieldwork.
4.3.3 Desktop research

Desktop research (conducted during both Part I and Part II of fieldwork) was divided into two parts. Firstly, an investigation towards the meaning of the urban void in urban theory and practice. This initial part of the desktop research led to the creation of the typology of urban voids presented in Chapter 2. Its aim was to present a convincing categorisation that would situate the research within the various concepts and examples explored in that chapter. One of the key observations of the review of literature was that current understanding is too often limited to a dual understanding of urban voids as either being ‘void’ or not. However, this reduction into two groups, is, at best, simplifying a very complex urban condition and proved insufficient when dealing with the rather abstract notions of ‘void’ and ‘absence’. The second part of the desktop research was inherently historical. Eleonas is a very special case in the Athenian context because of its peculiar evolution and because of its current condition. To investigate the case through the lens of the void it needed to be historically approached as the notion of the void possibly had a different meaning depending on the historical period. This was achieved through a thorough documentary analysis of the various stages of transformation it went through until today and was greatly informed by previous studies undertaken at the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that, due to the economic hardships the country is going through during the last decade, the current situation of Eleonas is very complex and, thus, it is necessary to take into account the presence of a context of crisis and of great financial pressures and interests. Part of this historical investigation included a review of media articles and mentions of Eleonas to fill the gaps of the datasets received from the Greek authorities which cover roughly the years from 2005 to 2011. This process illustrated how Eleonas was perceived before 2005, how it is described from 2011 onwards and whether academic and media mentions of Eleonas relate to transformative events and potentially influence policy making. This research was followed by a short period of analysis that prepared the grounds of the deeper investigation of Eleonas. Eventually, during the process of analysis, the two approaches were superimposed to examine the possibility of an emergent typology of urban voids and against which Eleonas and other similar areas could be assessed.
4.3.4 In-depth semi structured interviews and walking interviews

In parallel to the desktop research, Part II of fieldwork involved planned in-depth semi-structured interviews and walking interviews, based upon the knowledge built from the preliminary analysis and the continuous development of a local network of contacts that greatly enhanced snowballing. They were crucial in understanding the various perceptions, ideals and visions projected onto the area and in-depth, subjective understanding of the context is necessary. Out of a great range of methods of collection such as biographical methods, individual or paired interviews and focus groups; individual in-depth interviews were the most appropriate for this research due to their depth of focus on the individual (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In the investigation of personal accounts and impressions, in-depth interviews provide an unrivalled opportunity for detailed investigation of each participant’s perspective. They give the opportunity to grasp the personal context within which the research phenomenon is located. As Ritchie and Lewis (2003) described, in-depth interviews “are the only way to collect data where it is important to set the perspectives heard within the context of personal history or experience; where delicate or complex issues need to be explored at a detailed level, or where it is important to relate different issues to individual personal circumstances” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 58). As such, very complex systems such as Eleonas are generally best addressed through in-depth interviews because of the depth of focus and the opportunity for clarification they allow (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Similarly, understanding motivations and decisions, or exploring impacts and outcomes, generally requires the detailed personal focus that in-depth interviews allow.

Due to the relative lack of definition of the area, the major challenge regarding the interviews was to compose the correct sample for the purposes of this research. The expected outcomes of the interviews were three-fold:

1. Fill in the gaps left from the data collection and provide an understanding of how Eleonas is currently operating beyond the conclusions that emerge from the statistical datasets
2. Explore the meaning of Eleonas in the public imaginary and compare it with its characterisation as an “urban void” or a “backyard” (Argyri, et al., 1998)
3. Obtain insights of the daily routines and lives of people living and working in the area.
Hence, it was decided that interviewees should be identified based on their current or past activity related to Eleonas, their proximity to the case study, or by being suggested or mentioned in another interview. In this, the preliminary pilot study was instrumental as it enabled me to construct a first list of interviewees. At the end of each interview participants were asked to recommend additional contacts to intensify the process of snowballing. This method was reiterated until the predetermined gaps in the data were filled and information started to overlap.

Walking interviews deserve a separate mention to in-depth interviews. Three walking interviews were conducted in total: two with Mr ELR1 (a resident of Markoni and the President of the Markoni Residents’ Association) and one with doctoral researcher Ms Tsadari and the Greek Association of Architects. These walking interviews gave me the opportunity to see the area through the eyes of somebody else and the two walking interviews with Mr ELR1 were catalysts in how the research evolved. Having already been in the area by myself, knowing it, to some degree, well enough and having walked it quite extensively, I had my own understanding of, for instance, its condition, which populations seem to live where, or what activities were ongoing. However, Mr ELR1 was born in Eleonas in the 1950s and lived there until this day and therefore has witnessed the transformation of the area first-hand. Hence, through our walks and through his stories I was offered an image of the evolution of Eleonas that I couldn’t have obtained through any desktop or archival research. As developed later on in this chapter, these walking interviews were mapped spatially and analysed and became one of the most valuable datasets of this research.

In total 22 interviews (including the 3 walking interviews) were scheduled as presented below in Table 4.2. Participants included public actors and policy makers involved with policies related to the studied area, academics from the National Technical University of Athens, residents and community representatives, and lastly employees and managers of local businesses. For each group the expectations differed. Policy makers were invited to share their views about the state and the efficiency of policies, the official stance towards Eleonas and the use and characterisation of the area as a “backyard for Athens”. Academics were instrumental in filling in the major gaps in the data by recommending additional literature, they were invited to share a more detached academic view of Eleonas’ condition and were questioned about ongoing research. Lastly, locals, residents and employees were asked about their opinion on the history and transformation of the area, their daily lives, the positives and challenges of living and working in Eleonas, and their
experience with policies and their implementation. All participants were granted anonymity. Academics were the only group that was not anonymised out of respect for their intellectual contribution to the field. All other interviewees even well-known public figures were anonymised for ethical reasons (see Section 4.5) and because, in the frame of this thesis, the position of said public figures is much more relevant than the person's identity.

Table 4.2 List of interviewees (anonymised). See Appendix 1 for additional rationale of selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Technical University of Athens</td>
<td>Code: NTUA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Maria Markou</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Associate Professor. Study of the city and design, in conjunction with the social, economic and cultural dimensions of urban space.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Sofia Avgerinou</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Associate Professor. Director of Planning at NTUA. Transformations, cultural heritage management &amp; sustainable development of the site.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Ioannis Polyzos</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Emeritus Professor. Urban planning &amp; analysis with an emphasis on the construction of modern Greek urban space.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents, employees, workers, or local business owners of Eleonas</td>
<td>Code: EL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr ELR1</td>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>President of the Markoni Residents' Association and resident of the Markoni enclave in Eleonas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms ELR2</td>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>Resident of the Markoni enclave in Eleonas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms ELE1</td>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>Employee of the Ministry of Immigration Policy working in Eleonas’ refugee camp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr ELW1</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Owner of major car dealership and repair in Eleonas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr ELW2</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Sales consultant at a second-hand car retail.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr ELW3</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Owner of large industry formerly located in Eleonas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr ELW4</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Architect. Owner of bespoke and furniture company.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hellenic Ministry of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr HMEE1</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Director of the Department of Urban Planning at the HMEE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Environment and Energy Code: HMEE

**Ms HMEE2** Policy HME employee appointed for the management of Eleonas

**Ms HMEE3** Policy Retired member of the now dissolved “Agency of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens”. Ms HMEE3 was involved in the creation of the Presidential Decree 1991 regarding Eleonas

**Ms HMEE4** Policy Town Planner. Has been a Secretary-General at the HMEE. Currently (2018) is a candidate for the DEMAR-Progressive Cooperation.

### ATTIKO METRO (public transportation of Athens) Code: AM

**Ms AM1** Policy Project director of the IBT transportation hub in Eleonas.

### Municipality of Athens Code: MOA

**Ms MOA1** Policy Director of the Mayor’s Office of the Municipality of Athens and President of the ‘Athens Development & Tourism Promotion Company’.

**Mr MOA2** Policy Planning Consultant for the Municipality of Athens.

### Municipality of Agios Ioannis Rentis Code: MOR

**Mr MOR1** Policy Topographer. He had been dealing with Eleonas with Ms HMEE3.

### 4.3.5 Transcription of interviews and thematic coding

In parallel to conducting the interviews, the recordings were transcribed on the day and in this way quickly analysed to inform the subsequent interviews. Once all interviews were done, the transcripts (in Greek – see Section 4.5 on Ethics) were coded and thematically analysed. Coding was an inherent part of the analytical process that was exclusively used in the thematic analysis of interviews (Boyatzis, 1998). Through two rounds of coding, a total of 69 codes (or nodes) were developed (see Appendix 2) in a deductive and inductive manner. Codes with broader meaning such as ‘identity of the area’, ‘policy framework’, ‘services’, ‘idea of void’, or ‘urban infrastructure’ stemmed from theory and the expectations going into research; whereas codes with narrower significance such as ‘unregulated construction’, ‘sense of community’, ‘inconsistency between plan and use’, or ‘political stalemate’ were developed during the interviews and the process of analysis. The same codes were
used for all groups of interviewees (policy makers, residents, working in the area, and academics).

The first round of coding (Figure 4.3 – **Stage I**) aimed at understanding Eleonas as an entity within the city of Athens and thus concentrated on elements that related to the larger scale of Eleonas (the second coding had a narrower scope occurred later during the exploration of the local scale as described later in this section). The process of coding consisted of going several times over each transcript to dissect the interviewees' arguments and categorise them under the various codes according to their relevance and meaning. With each coding, new codes arose, and the process was reiterated several times until new codes started overlapping old ones, meaning that all major topics were covered. Then, these codes were categorised and analysed to find recurrent themes (see Table 4.3 for a list and Appendix 3 for their detailed description). These themes emerged deductively and inductively. However, in contrast to coding, the themes were not only used for the analysis of interviews but for the entirety of collected data (i.e. statistical data, maps, interviews, photographs, etc.). It is worth mentioning that this process was not linear – in the sense that the ‘deductive’ themes did not necessarily precede the ‘inductive’ ones – but instead an iterative one between theory, data and analysis. The theory-driven deductive themes stem from the three-pronged approach developed in Chapter 3 combining theories from the discipline of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and UPE. As such, they are broader and concentrate on the ‘building blocks’ of the research area. The fieldwork-driven inductive themes on the other hand, emerged during the fieldwork period as research was conducted on site. They were informed first and foremost from the interviews, but also from personal observations and from the continuous examination of the obtained quantitative and qualitative datasets (see Section 4.4). Hence, they relate to subtler concepts than the deductive themes and are richer in the narratives they bring forth.

*Table 4.3 Summary of theory-driven and fieldwork-driven themes (see Appendix 3 for the detailed description of these themes)*

| Theory-driven deductive themes | activity, axes and regions, physical urban components, movements, people, policy and place-making, and perceptions |

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Fieldwork-driven inductive themes

- borders, radiation of big developments (i.e. the effect large developments have on their immediate and more extended environment),
- bottom up initiatives, distance from local socio-economy/political proximity, opportunities of contextual planning,
- syringe-like actions (i.e. large projects disregarding contextual attributes of place), and
- social exclusion and stigma

### 4.3.6 Thematic analysis

The diversity of collected data demanded a strategy of analysis that could encompass the full breadth of the data and thematic analysis was ideal in fulfilling this role. Thematic analysis is an approach to the analysis of data aiming to identify themes and patterns across the said data (Lapadat, 2012). It is a synthesising strategy which involves at first a classification according to main themes and then an interpretation of these by identifying commonalities, patterns, and relationships (Lapadat, 2012). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is the “foundational method” for qualitative analysis. Due to its applicability across types of analysis, thematic analysis has been presented rather as a tool or a process instead of a methodology (Boyatzis, 1998). Yet, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that it should in fact be considered a method “for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). Thematic analysis is also a tactic for “reducing and managing large volumes of data” (Lapadat, 2012, p. 1). Hence, thematic analysis is especially well suited for this research which in its attempt to bring together the three different methodologies of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and UPE is producing a diversified dataset (including maps, photographs and interviews) which might, at first, seem incongruous. Through a thematic analysis it is expected to bring clarity and structure to the collected data and to find relationships across matters and disciplines.

The core analytical strategy of thematic analysis is a process of identifying recurrent topics, themes and relationships throughout the collected data to build theory. This process can be done either inductively, deductively or in a mixed manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the inductive approach, the themes are strongly related to the collected data itself and may bear little relation with the initial questions or the researcher’s theoretical interests (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive analysis therefore consists in categorising the data in categories that emerge directly from the data.
instead of predetermined ones. In contrast, a deductive thematic analysis would be set within a predetermined theoretical framework. This type of research is therefore bound to produce a more detailed analysis of some aspect of the data and less a description of its full extent, wider significance or broader considerations. In the frame of this research, it was sensible to consider both inductive and deductive thematic analysis. Due to the wide diversity of data that will be collected, it was necessary to set some preliminary boundaries within which the research analysis will navigate. However, the complexity of the case study demanded for a looser framework capable of accommodating ideas and concepts that the research design will have overlooked.

As described above, a thematic analysis begins when the researcher starts looking for patterns, issues etc. and involves a set of steps starting from the moment of collection until finally reporting the content and meaning of the patterns identified in the data. These include an organisation of and familiarisation with the data, coding the data, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and finally writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is not a linear process however but instead an iterative one, meaning that a constant back and forth between the entire dataset, the coded data and the analysis is necessary to get the closer possible to the core meanings and characteristics of the data. For this research a wide range of data sources were used including interviews, impressions, documents, transcripts and field notes, photographs, and maps. Effectively, the thematic analysis fused aspects of history, media presence, statistics, loads, demographics, maps, diagrams and perceptions to generate a complete image of the case study. Then, it was a matter of exploring how this multi-layered image relates to a particular notion of the void. In this case, the relation Eleonas entertains with Athens and beyond.

4.3.7 Participant observation, walks and photography

The outcomes of this first coding and analysis were enriched with personal observations (Figure 4.3 – **Fieldwork Part II**). Participant observation and photography were fundamental in building knowledge, accumulating experiences and ultimately forming a personal understanding of the reality of the studied area14 (Jorgensen, 2011; Portell, et al., 2015). I visited Eleonas several times during the pilot study and fieldwork either to conduct interviews or explicitly to experience the area on a personal level. As Ritchie and Lewis (2003) wrote, observation offers the

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14 See Section 4.5 for the related ethical considerations
opportunity to record and analyse events, actions and experiences as they naturally occur. Drawn perhaps by a certain empiricism and positivism, physically experiencing this research’s central idea of the urban void was indispensable. Indeed, these visits and wanderings enriched the ethnographic and anthropological part of this research and proved particularly useful in filling gaps linked to human behaviour that the collected data was unable to cover. Primary data was, thus, collected via personal site visits, some of which were tracked using the STRAVA tracking app which allowed to also geo-locate any photographs taken during the visits (Figure 4.4). Additionally, the walking interviews were also tracked which allowed me to overlap afterwards the narratives and anecdotes that my interviewees shared over the area that was covered. This mapping exercise informed the next research steps and helped me in narrowing down the investigation of Eleonas to specific units of analysis (see Section 4.3.9) but also to go into a deeper level of analysis and understanding of the area.

Figure 4.4 Examples of tracked walks in Eleonas using the STRAVA app to geolocate photographs and observations.

This part of the fieldwork enabled me to go beyond the secondary data and investigate the area in a much higher degree of detail through first-person observational work. The first set of visits were aimed at familiarising with the case and included navigating it on foot and recording personal observations on a digital voice recorder. During these visits, attention was paid essentially to the condition of the urban environment and the way it was used. This part of the fieldwork aimed at understanding how buildings fit into their environs and answer broader questions such as:

- What does this place feel like to walk around? (busy/empty, safe/unsafe, vibrant/dead, noisy/quiet etc)
- Is this surprising? What should it or could it be like?
- Why is it not like this? (for example, if a high street is eerily quiet, why might that be)
The second set of visits was dedicated in enriching the first observations with local knowledge through informal discussions with business owners or representatives that were selected either during the analysis of the primary data or during the first set of observation-focused visits.\textsuperscript{15} These visits were also tracked using the STRAVA app. The aim of these informal discussions was to obtain insights on the various links businesses entertain with the built environment specifically related to the location rationale, accessibility, use of space, daily life of employees, and embeddedness as shown in Table 4.4.

\textit{Table 4.4 Broad topics inquired during personal observations and informal discussions with local business owners.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base information</td>
<td>Type of activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Size of business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Location rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and building</td>
<td>Fitting of space and flexibility to accommodate future uses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accessibility (i.e. transport, loading and unloading of materials, waste management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parking availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mix of uses and shared facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use and daily life</td>
<td>Possibility for encounters within the building and / or in public space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Existence / lack of spaces for socialising and their importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embeddedness</td>
<td>Degree of involvement in social matters of the neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dependence on the environment and the people / business within it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperation between businesses (local and extra-local)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In parallel to observation, photography was an inherent part of the methodology throughout the fieldwork. Leavy and Holm (2014) argue that there is an ambiguity in using photography as a research method because of the biased reality they portray. They argue that the act of photographing is never unintentional and hence photographs can never fully be detached from the researcher’s intentions (Leavy &

\textsuperscript{15} These discussions were not recorded as they were not planned.
Holm, 2014). Yet, in the frame of this research, it was this intent that was sought after. Photography was used with the intention to capture specific occurrences in space and time that reflected the notion of the urban void in its physical or conceptual aspects — as it was developed in the literature review and conceptual chapters. Consequently, photography served a double purpose. It is used as a tool to document real-life examples of the theoretical constructs developed in this research; and it is also a medium to transpose the readers to the place of research and give them the opportunity to reinterpret the photographs — effectively reinterpreting the conceptual apparatus of this research.

4.3.8 Production of analytical outputs

To fulfil the trans-scalar objectives of this research, I developed a multi-faceted and layered type of mapping that involved the extensive mapping of the variety of gathered information, including accounts from interviews, statistical data, GIS, media articles, academic publications and observations (Figure 4.3 — Stage II). All maps present in this thesis are personally drawn unless a source is mentioned. Several maps also combine personal drawings and sourced material, in that case, the source specifies which part of the illustration it relates to.

4.3.8.1 Mind maps and analytical flowcharts

The knowledge and information gathered through this process and mix of primary and secondary data was used to produce analytical outputs in the form of maps and mind maps or mental maps. Mind maps stem most prominently from the work of Lynch (1960) “The Image of the City” and are conceived as a medium of representation between a map and diagram used to visually organise data. They differ from hand-drawn maps in the sense that they do not necessarily relate to a specific geographical location nor do they respect physical attributes such as length or scale. Instead, a mind map or a mental map of space represents the subjective point of view of one person and their perception of that space. I used therefore this mapping technique to determine my personal subjective understanding of space which was subsequently analysed and correlated using flowcharts and diagrams. The main arguments pertaining to each code and theme were transposed into flowcharts and categorised according to the groups of interviewees they belonged to (Figure 4.3 — Stage II, Figure 4.5 and Appendix 4). This process allowed to create links between the various narratives, to oppose contrasting views and to create a first snapshot of the
perception that different people had of Eleonas as a whole. The practice of actively mapping information was core to the methodology and a method used throughout every stage of the research process.

To visualise spatially the existing tensions and socio-economic dynamics, a series of 11 mind-maps were produced based on the information extracted from personal observations and fieldwork, from academic and media articles, and from analysis of the interviews (Figure 4.3 – **Stage II**, Figure 4.6 and Appendix 9). These maps represented namely activity, big developments, the notion of borders, main axes and regions, bottom-up initiatives, political proximity, opportunities, movements of people and goods, isolated ‘syringe-like’ development actions16, and lastly social exclusion and stigma. These themes later evolved to become an inherent part of the coding and thematic analysis process, as it will be developed later in this section. These 11 maps were possibly the most instrumental aspect of this research as they effectively bridged the gap between quantitative and qualitative data, between hard evidence and

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16 The term “syringe-like” is, throughout this thesis, used as an adjective to illustrate a specific type of development project or planning strategy and action that is carried out without consideration of the overarching physical and social context or current land uses, but instead with clear and narrow economic aims. The term was coined by Mr ELR1 during our interview to refer to large ongoing developments in Eleonas.
subjective perception. Designing them involved an active process of extracting key information from a complex dataset and categorising it. This allowed me to relate these key aspects to one another, create unexpected links between seemingly unrelated actors and events, and bring to light relations that were less obvious or hidden which ultimately helped construct both the descriptive and analytical narratives.

4.3.8.2 Mapping of quantitative data and GIS analysis

In parallel, quantitative data and data from archive were mapped on GIS software and by hand where geodata was not available (Figure 4.3 – Stage II). Mapping the statistical data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority (HSA) was done by overlapping the raw statistical numbers to their related lots to visualise what Oliveira (2013) considers the four quintessential elements of urban form. These are understood to be the interface between the scale of the individual and that of the city (i.e. the dimensions of buildings, street blocks and plots), the accessibility of street system, the accessibility of plots, building and the plot use. Mapping the GIS data from the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) was done in GIS software QGIS.
A large variety of maps were produced to reflect the reality of Eleonas’ activity covering the distribution of activity per research area and municipality, and the clustering of activity per nature and per size.

Figure-ground theory and representation was also used partially to analyse spatial configurations within the case study. Developed by Trancik and inspired by the Nolli Plan (Figure 4.7) “the figure-ground theory is founded on the study of the relative land coverage of buildings as solid mass (figure) to open voids (ground).” (Trancik, 1986, p. 97). The aim of this research method is to construct a hierarchy of urban space and scales by distinguishing solids and ‘voids’ (Love, 2016a; Trancik, 1986). This approach however is limited in the sense that its outcome can be a “static and two-dimensional conception of space.” (Trancik, 1986, p. 98). Hence why additional layering of information is needed to create a comprehensive image of the urban. Still figure-grounds offer the opportunity to reduce incredible the complexity of the urban fabric by omitting other type of information such as topography, administrative boundaries, street names, or land use to exhibit only the plan-form of built and unbuilt space (Hebbert, 2016). In the frame of this research, several maps were created contrasting built and unbuilt form (i.e Figure 4.8) in order to explore questions of physical borders, density, porosity and permeability of the urban tissue of Eleonas.
This multi-source mapping process generated the appropriate morphological and metabolic knowledge on which the rest of the research was based and included understandings of the built environment, activities, transport and demographics. Through more flowcharts and diagrams, various links were made between these maps and datasets which once fully described became essentially the socio-metabolic profiles of Eleonas (Figure 4.3 – Stage III). Socio-metabolic profiles stem from research on the urban metabolism of cities (Hoogzaad, 2017). They are defined as representing “dynamic equilibriums of society-nature interactions and are characterised by typical patterns of material and energy flows” (Hoogzaad, 2017, p. 11). Effectively, they are a summary or compilation of quantitative and qualitative key urban characteristics and are instrumental in laying out the social and metabolic condition – in terms of material and immaterial flows – of a research area, in this case Eleonas.

4.3.8.3 Construction of socio-metabolic profiles

The first step in constructing a socio-metabolic profile was the selection of relevant criteria that allowed to develop an understanding of the case study based on imports and exports, land use, and anecdotal information (Hoogzaad, 2017). In the case of Eleonas the selected criteria included numeric values of the surface area, the population, the average income, the demand for products and services, and a non-numeric assessment of the effective extra-local relations and development priorities (i.e. rural development and diversification, agriculture and food security, eco-tourism,
renewable energy, assembly and industrial development, reforestation, sustainable mining and protecting the quality of water resources, etc.\textsuperscript{17}). Then, once the above data was gathered to a sufficient degree, began a mapping exercise of the various priority sectors, industries and resources. In the case of Eleonas, these include industry, retail, energy, education, arts and crafts, and migration flows. These maps aim to demonstrate where and to what extent the key sectors have an impact on the urban and social landscape creating either opportunities or challenges. Finally, a resource analysis was performed to weigh the inflow and outflow of goods, materials and social capital in terms of their nature and amount. Specifically, constructing the socio-metabolic profile of Eleonas consisted of going through activity databases, analysing the housing and building datasets, mapping the transportation flows and finally compiling the relevant information visually through diagrams and maps. These included material-flow diagrams, demographics maps and tables, maps and diagrams of inflows and outflows of goods, people and vehicles.

\textbf{4.3.9 Selection of smaller scale ‘units of analysis’ within Eleonas}

The outcomes of this multifaceted mapping process and the socio-metabolic profiles – predominantly linked to the larger scale of the Region – informed the process of narrowing down the scope of research into 6 areas or ‘units of analysis’ at the scale of the municipality (described in the sections hereafter) and were used to define their boundaries so that they would contain all the relevant aspects relevant to this research without being too large to be fully analysed (Figure 4.3 – \textbf{Stage III}). The ‘bigness’ of Eleonas indeed required focusing on a finer grained research to decrease the complexity of analysis and reach meaningful conclusions relating to the local scale and daily life. Accordingly, this involved understanding the parts of Eleonas, how they form the area as it is today, what is the role of each municipality and especially how does the segmentation of the area affect it. Zooming in on specific areas within Eleonas, was an opportunity to investigate the notion of the ‘void’ at the local and hyper-local scales of the lots and buildings and consider the personal connection that local populations have with the area. The benefit of this downscaling was that it used the learnings stemming from the investigation of the large-scale dynamics to understand the local ones. Within the enormity and complexity of Eleonas, six such ‘units of analysis’ stood out due to their distinct nature, their specific relation to the ‘void’, and their implication in urban transformation; namely: Akadimia, Markoni,

\textsuperscript{17} examples taken from Wilde, G. (Ed.). (2017). Circular economy strategies for Lao PDR Circular economy strategies for Lao PDR.
Polykarpou, Orfeos, Kifissou Avenue and Rentis as represented in Figure 4.7 (see Appendix 10 for additional maps and photographs). The boundaries of these areas were not influenced by administrative borders or any other predetermined division of the area. Instead, they were informed fully by the research undertaken during fieldwork and defined based on the outputs produced from the analysis of interviews (i.e. the interview flow charts and mind maps in Section 4.3.8, Appendix 4 and Appendix 9) and my personal observations of walking through the area.

**Akadimia** (total area of 0.73 km²) is located at the northernmost point of Eleonas and is an area essentially occupied by manufacturing activity (mostly cars) close to the archaeological site of Plato’s Academy. A considerate amount has been written in media for this area especially since it became the focus of a large mall development in 2017, namely BlackRock Mall. This project eventually did not go through and was abandoned in 2018 after several protests from the local residents and various investment-related complications. Akadimia is an area that has not seen major changes up until now and instead has been abandoned despite its important archaeological character.
Markoni (total area of 0.80 km²) is a residential area surrounded by industrial buildings, socially and infrastructurally deprived, home of new big projects and with an intense feeling of abandonment from residents. The area of Markoni includes several places worth investigating; first and foremost, the residential pocket of Markoni and the disused Naval base where an inaccessible park is frustrating residents and where a controversial project for the first mosque of Athens is planned to be built. Next, a massive “green” area owned by the municipality of Athens and developed as a park is inaccessible to the dismay of residents as it is projected to host another controversial project: the first crematorium built within the city of Athens.\(^{18}\) Of lower importance when seen through the lens of the urban void, is the

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\(^{18}\) The first crematorium in Greece was built in 2019 in Ritsona, North of Athens (Fassea, 2019; Lifoteam, 2019).
Agricultural University of Athens (AUA), whose campus is located on the northern side of Iera Street. Lastly, the area is of interest because of attracting a daily flow of commuters and students.

**Polykarpou** (total area of 0.85 km²) is an area of big interests and development projects, it is home to a refugee camp and an area of intense movement of people. Significant urban voids include a massive abandoned construction site which has been subject to several development proposals and waves of transformation, activity and decay. Today it remains in an intermediate state where half of it is an abandoned half-built stadium and the other half was offered to become the refugee camp. In the area one will also find several shells of abandoned industrial buildings, empty plots but also operating industries and companies. On weekends, an organized flea market takes place in the streets and in open lots and sees increasing movements to and from the city centre (especially Omonia Square). Lastly, from an environmental point, the stream of Profitis Daniil flows through the area contaminated by industrial waste dumping and untreated wastewater.

**Orfeos** (total area of 1.22 km²) is located either side of Orfeos Street, Eleonas’ most active industrial axis. One of the most important parts of this area is Orfeos Street itself. Holding an immense industrial history, it remains one of the most active areas of Eleonas. Yet, it encloses several cases of urban voids that are very often part and even contribute to the existence of its activity. It is one of the last areas where one might find agricultural land and, as is the norm in Eleonas, very large empty plots, either abandoned shells or unused lots.

**Kifissou Avenue** (total area of 1.31 km²) is one of the largest regional transportation axes towards and away from Athens. It is a massive infrastructure that connects remote areas but also divides the urban environment. The notion of the urban void here is linked to the infrastructure itself and the impact it can have on the urban landscape; on how the highway changes form, and how this creates various urban voids around and under it.

The area of **Rentis** (total area of 1.46 km²) includes a variety of urban conditions that are of interest in the investigation of the urban void ranging from social housing, to parks, sporting facilities, industries, retail companies, and unused plots. Located in the southern part of Eleonas, it is an area with limited activity described as “the rest” and an area where statistical and GIS databases are the least complete (information
void). It possesses however an interesting range of places from well-designed and developed ones, to industrial estates, residential blocs, parks, athletic complexes and the expected remains of older manufacturing. Of interest in the area are a couple of residential areas, a public housing development, football-training stadiums and importantly, the more ‘chaotic’ part of industrial developments especially along the stream of Profitis Daniil. The case of Rentis is also an interesting one to investigate more subtle notions of urban voids.

The analysis of these areas included selecting areas of interest, synthesising the available information from the first mapping and describing what these areas contain, what their boundaries are, who live and work there, etc. This was essentially done through maps, sections, texts, diagrams and photographs. It also involved tracing the moments of change and the intricacies of specific events of transformation; searching for changes in the meaning of the void related to events and things. Finally, the areas were broadly compared in terms of their environment, the narratives they create and their impact on the broader urban system and related to a typology of urban voids that stemmed from the literature review.

Along this, the typology of urban voids was continuously updated to include and reflect the 5 types of voids stemming from the literature review. It was taken further, and it was found that not only all these types coexist and serve different purposes and roles but also that they combine to create “context specific voids”. As it became evident, the notion of the urban void can contain a very wide spectrum of spaces and as such, it is to be examined with an analytical framework that accounts for such diversity (see. Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework – UPE+). The desire to improve this understanding led to a classification that presents five sub-categories of urban voids based on the processes that lead to their creation – ranging from conscious and deliberate actions on urban space to unplanned occurrences – and on the processes that settled in afterwards – from regulated activities, unsupervised ones and inactivity. The interest of this typological framework lies in that the case study of Eleonas is, and contains, all the above categories. This typology was also used as a tool to analyse Eleonas and its constituent parts and neighbourhoods in Chapter 6. Dividing the case study and classifying its neighbourhoods and areas according to this typology of urban voids was essential in understanding the divided planning strategies employed towards different zones of Eleonas and was key in understanding the multiplicity of contrasting perceptions locals, academics and policymakers had of the area. Table
4.5 below outlines the methodological procedure by which the units of analysis were derived to assist with analysis.

Table 4.5 Typology of urban voids as derived from the existing literature (including definition) and outline of the process leading to the analysis of specific areas within Eleonas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designed void</strong></td>
<td>That is, when the notion of the void is inherent to the design process of said area or building. In Eleonas such voids are rare since architectural or urban design is less relevant. Somewhat on a tangent, the refugee camp fits this category as a space designed from scratch with ample open space for ‘civic life’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accidental void</strong></td>
<td>That is, when the notion of the void appears due to the incongruous position of urban entities relative to one another. In Eleonas these voids are found at lower scales where the incongruent urban grids overlap with the seemingly random footprint of buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decaying void</strong></td>
<td>Namely, due to neglect and the partial or total drop in the activity of an urban area or building. The decaying void is found throughout Eleonas to the extent where the entire area itself could be considered one. In this category are included spaces and sub-regions that were abandoned and have fallen in disuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suspended void</strong></td>
<td>Very close to the decaying void these spaces are distinguished by being related to an administrative stalemate and the decrease of attention from policy and governance. Looking for suspended voids in Eleonas involved understanding at first the policy landscape and the governing strategies surrounding Eleonas which pointed towards specific areas within the case study that were at some point in the spotlight and later abandoned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transgressive void</strong></td>
<td>That is, the result of a long term “suspension”. In Eleonas this meant finding places that supported some type of social transformation which was the result or the reason of the abandonment of the area’s formal activities and their replacement by non-conventional ones.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Influenced by the morphological and metabolic conclusions, Eleonas was scrutinised to locate such context-specific voids; the majority of which were found to exist in the areas of Markoni and Polykarpou and lead to the deeper second layer of research.
and analysis at the scale of the neighbourhood. Data collection during the fieldwork was fruitful enough to be able to understand to a very good degree the state, place and role of Eleonas in the Metropolitan Region of Attica and discuss its characterisation as an urban void at the large scale. As described in the previous section, data was plentiful as well to allow a more detailed analysis and consider several case studies at an intermediate scale. Yet, this research’s aim was to go beyond the superficiality of this intermediate scale and percolate into the finer gears that construct the urban environment. This includes understanding the architecture, the socio-economic dynamics, the daily movements of people and goods, and the perspectives of residents, workers and passers-by to explore the motions that the daily life creates and thus challenge the idea of the urban void as a static entity. Eventually, this lowest scale of investigation became the starting point of a broader discussion aiming to connect the small and the large scales. Something that still lacks in many debates within the planning world and around areas described as urban voids specifically. This opportunity to elevate local considerations to the regional scale is core and of great importance for this research.

To that extent, two of the six areas of investigation were selected for further and closer analysis (Figure 4.3 – **Stage IV**). Markoni and Polykarpou were selected primarily because the desktop research and the interview analysis showed that within these premises is concentrated an overwhelming majority of spaces relating to the idea of the urban void. Then, the metabolic analysis showed that the areas of Markoni and Polykarpou included a greater variety of urban voids. Lastly, by looking at current articles in the press and media, it appeared that both these areas have become the targets for several major developments and thus are currently ‘voids in the spotlight’ of policy makers and development agencies awaiting to be transformed. Lastly, the obtained data was overwhelmingly richer in and around Markoni and Polykarpou and enough to explore the notion of the urban void at the scale of the individual. Hence, it became evident that these two sub-cases were most appropriate to answer the research questions of this thesis.

At which point a second coding and thematic analysis of transcripts was done (Figure 4.3 – **Stage V**) aiming at unveiling recurrent themes at the local scale which were mapped on new local maps and mind maps while. Quantitative data was re-surveyed for these areas to search for contingencies and patterns related to activity, transportation and local socio-economy and new maps were created. And finally, a more focused and narrow review of media and academic publications was done to
understand the local politics of space. The second round of coding consisted in re-coding the interviews with a more precise focus on the finer layers of Eleonas. It included coding for ‘history’, ‘demographics’, ‘activity’, ‘urban form’, ‘politics of place’, ‘elements of interest’, and ‘cases of void’ of each case study. A second analysis followed looking at the distinctiveness of each case, and because all cases were coded with identical codes their similarities and differences arose naturally. What resulted is a complementary coding process that integrated both the large and the local scales. Finally, a complementary desktop research on policy documents, legislations and news (web pages, blog articles, web newspapers) and academic mentions allowed me to investigate various past and contemporary plans and projects (Figure 4.3 – **Stage V**). These were key in linking the fieldwork’s local observations to Eleonas as a whole and move towards three research outcomes:

1. a context-based critique of the Greek planning system
2. a general critique of how planning deals with urban voids broadly
3. a proposal of ‘anchors’ aimed at guiding the future of Eleonas and urban voids

### 4.4 Three-pronged data collection

To fulfil the multi-disciplinary objectives of this thesis and to operationalise its three-pronged conceptual framework, secondary and quantitative data needed to be manipulated to produce the primary outputs (maps, diagrams and themes) that served the qualitative purposes of this research. Such quantitative data included numerical information regarding:

1. the physical condition of Eleonas’ built environment
2. the current state of activity (professional, regulated and unregulated) and its location within Eleonas
3. the location and condition of housing as well as its geographical and perceptual relation with other ongoing activities
4. the area’s degree of connectivity and transportation capacity
5. and lastly a clear understanding of its demographics and its socio-economic dynamics in comparison to the average socio-economic context of Athens

To generate these datasets, information was sought from state organisations and universities. The Hellenic Statistical Authority (hereafter HSA) was instrumental providing very precise aggregate statistics of the Attica Metropolitan Region; the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry (hereafter ACCI) provided GIS data of
all registered companies based in the area as well as their transformation in time; the
Hellenic Ministry of Environment and Energy (hereafter HMEE) was kind to share
their research regarding the existing state of the industry and consumer preferences;
the Region of Attica provided metrics of transportation flows over major transportation
arteries around Eleonas; and finally, the National Technical University of Athens
(NTUA) gave me access to their library and all academic and graduate research done
on Eleonas. The following sections provide short descriptions of the data gathered for
each of the above categories.

4.4.1 Built environment and housing

Aside from personal observations and walks in Eleonas, the area’s built environment
and morphology was informed from statistical data compiled by the HSA. The dataset
includes for each municipality (for selected lots) precise measurements of the number
of buildings per municipality, the number of units built per decade, their basic material
as well as the type of roof. The dataset finally specifies land use (single or mixed use),
type of ownership, and type of user (private, public, corporate). It is important to note
that data was not provided for all the requested lots because they did not exist (Figure
4.8). As such the result is a precise approximation but not an absolute image of reality.
Still, for the purposes of this research it remains a very interesting and essential
dataset.

The HSA was also key in providing data about housing in Eleonas. Their datasets
covered the number of housing units per bloc per municipality, which allowed to
calculate for each municipality an approximate density, the degree of occupancy, the
rate of new housing construction and the available amenities per housing. The
approximate density was based on the number of buildings per lot per municipality,
which is not a standard measurement of density but nevertheless allows to
understand which municipalities have concentrated housing more than others. The
degree of occupancy is related to whether the house is permanently occupied or not.
In the cases of non-permanent residence, the data specifies whether the building is
set for renting or selling, if it is a second residence, a holiday house, or set to be
demolished. The rate of new housing construction is based on two metrics: the
fluctuation of new housing throughout the sample area and the fluctuation of new
housing per municipality. Lastly, regarding the available amenities the data specifies
the number of homes with water provision, heating and the primary type of energy
used. Similarly, to the data on buildings, this dataset was limited in the sense that it
did not cover all the plots of Eleonas. Although this might seem at first glance a limitation it is also an indication of where housing is predominantly located as shown in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.10 Maps highlighting where the plots of Eleonas for which data was available regarding buildings (left) and housing (right) (Source: HSA).

4.4.2 Activity and urban flows

To fulfil the second prong of the research framework – that is the analysis of the urban metabolism of Eleonas – precise GIS and numerical data was considered and analysed covering the current activity of the area, the type, number and location of active companies and the flows of public and private transportation. Unregulated activity was not officially traceable but was extensively discussed during interviews. These eventually became essential in understanding a hidden and often disreputable category of activities ongoing within the area of the case study. Their extent and geographical location were, as it can be expected, approximated based on first person accounts and double checked for validity whenever possible across interviews. Although this thesis does not go into the details and the operation of unregulated activities, acknowledging their existence was fundamental to grasp the situation of Eleonas in Athens and the negative perceptions that follow it. The most accurate and consistent data of listed and regulated activity was provided by the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) in the form of a GIS database.
locating each registered company of Attica which was then translated into various comprehensive maps via GIS software QGIS.

The database was updated in 2015 but according to ACCI, there are potentially additional active but non-registered companies in the area. Out of 7418 companies present in the sample, 1132 were located within boundaries of Eleonas and categorised them as commercial, manufacturing and services. As it was argued in Chapter 2 and 3, this research focuses particularly on the manufacturing sector and the flows of transportation. To that extent the commercial and service activities were only relevant regarding their location and the load of transportation flows they create. Two factors that are key to understand the underlying structure of the area as it will be explored in later chapters. This allowed to gather a broader understanding of the impact of the commercial and service activities without going into the details of each company, and instead effectively focus on the manufacturing and transportation sectors. To understand whether there was any significant clustering of activities, the ACCI database was filtered based on activity sectors (i.e. manufacturing, retail, service or haulage/transportation companies). The most represented areas coincided with the major transportation arteries (i.e. Athinon Avenue, Orfeos Street, Kifissou Avenue, P.Ralli Street, Konstantinoupoleos Avenue, Polykarpou Street and Iera Street), which was taken into account when selecting specific areas within Eleonas to look into further detail.

Transportation flows linked to this activity were extracted from a dataset provided by the Region of Attica and online maps available from Open Street Maps, Google Maps and Bing Maps. The Region’s database covers a quantitative assessment of the number of all vehicles that pass from selected points of the road network on a specific day. The selected date (Thursday, March 15th, 2018) was chosen to be the most recent at the time of investigation. It was also selected to be during the working week to show flows related to the working hours. In some cases, data happened to be of an older date according to availability. Analysis of maps gave insight into the public transportation network available in Eleonas which is divided in three categories. The subway, the bus network (OASA) and the regional bus (KTEL). Each of these serve the area in different ways and with different purposes.
4.4.3 Demographics

Lastly, to fulfil the Political Ecology prong of this research, demographic data was required to fill in the gaps of the morphological and metabolic exploration of Eleonas. By combining demographic data to data linked to the built environment, housing, activities and urban flows, I was able to construct accurate socio-economic and ‘socio-metabolic’ profiles that outline the relationship that people (locals, workers, passers-by, etc.) entertain with the economy and the urban flows traversing the area. Essential data was provided from the HSA. It covers the latest 2011 census. The HSA dataset included quantified data of residents per municipality and their education level, nationality, working status, place of residence (1 and 5 years before census), and employment and location of work. As for all datasets from HSA, not all the requested lots were available, yet it is complete enough to be analysed and provide accurate estimates. It is also noteworthy that this data does not include the population living in the recent refugee camp built in 2015 and therefore after the date of the census. These gaps of information were filled through interviews with key actors, and the review of media and academic publications.

4.5 Ethical statement

4.5.1 Researcher positionality

The key ethical concerns related to this research, on the one hand relate to my own positionality as a researcher and, on the other, to the process of interviewing (i.e. the approach and access to interviewees, the actual discussion and the safeguarding of sensitive personal information that was gathered during the interviewing process). Although it happened unconsciously, being a PhD student of Greek nationality and coming from a well-known foreign university undeniably affected the way I was judged – positively and negatively\(^\text{19}\) – by the people I encountered during this research. My profile in a sense ‘ticked’ enough boxes to not be considered intimidating or disrupting. For local communities, despite my background and professional experience, I was Greek, still a student, with the ‘simple’ aim to learn. For

\(^{19}\) Negative judgements were very rare and short. It occurred sometimes that I introduced myself and was confronted to a harsh impenetrable wall that considered me as an outsider and an intruder. These situations were less than a handful however and always ended politely and courteously.
professionals and academics, I was part of their field too by being an architect and planner, partially related to the professional sphere, yet enough to be considered ‘one of their own’ (McDowell, 1998; Moore, 2015). Essentially, my position going into research was that of a ‘natural occupant’ of both sides (Markham, 2011), and a mediator between two parties that seldom talk and, in some respect, do not appreciate each other.

In most cases, my status allowed me to talk to people who otherwise would consider me as “one more researcher or planning official”. I was very much aware of this and it is something that was felt to various degrees with each person I interviewed. The power dynamics between interviewer and interviewee have been well documented (McDowell, 1998) and were undeniable as both parties “[desire] to make a particular impression in line with either one’s personal or professional ‘stake’ in the research subject area” (Moore, 2015, p. 379). In that sense, being a Greek male student with high-level education credentials was key in legitimising my work and purposes. Potentially, being a student also eclipsed any fears from the people living and working in Eleonas that I was coming from any private consultancy with shady or hidden agendas. Unlike the multiple waves of officials that have passed to “see” the area, I was a genuine researcher that did not make any hollow promises to the local community. Instead, I was ‘with them’, trying to understand the situation with the hope that their struggles would be publicised in an objective way. Conversely, when talking to planning officials, I was not a ‘threat’ to them either. I believe I was perceived more as an enthusiastic young researcher who they wanted to almost make amends with and explain the difficulties that they, as professionals, were facing in dealing with the area. Standing literally between these two groups, I consciously approached my interviews with a different attitude but always with the identical aims and ideology. While with locals I might have appeared more compassionate to their difficulties and with planning officials more critical yet understanding, my aim was to be always and invariably impartial and objective. Going into each interview I made the effort to erase my own preconceptions and biases and approach the discussion objectively and with an open mind. This does not mean that in the rare cases where the discussed arguments conflicted the reality I had seen, I did not confront it. On the contrary, I tried to discuss any conflicting statements with my interlocutors and listen to their explanation and point of view.
4.5.2 Establishing rapport and flow of research

The second positive aspect induced by my position as a PhD researcher was that it reduced the time where the dynamic between interviewer (myself) and interviewee transcended the interviewing environment and reached that of a casual discussion. It needs to be said also that I consciously designed my interviews more like discussions instead of questionnaires and that during the interviews I also consciously let my interviewee enough freedom to diverge from the topic and go on slight tangents. I was genuinely interested in hearing the thoughts of my interviewees. I hoped that, in this way, through their accounts my interviewees would become key actors of my research that helped me see and think of the research topic in alternative ways. I realise now, this favoured incredibly the process of interviewing and from what I could observe put my interviewers at enough ease to share personal experiences, opinions and thoughts.

Walking interviews raised separate considerations of ethics linked to my presence in that space and my interaction with locals. As mentioned in section 4.3.4, three walking interviews were conducted, two with Mr ELR1 (a resident of Markoni and the President of the Markoni Residents’ Association) and a second with doctoral researcher Ms Tsadari and the Greek Association of Architects both of which entertain close links with the neighbourhoods in which we walked. The walking interviews conducted with Mr ELR1 were catalysts in me getting acquainted with the two ‘units of analysis’ Markoni and Akadimia but also with several residents of the Markoni residential enclave. This personally put me at ease, but I believe my presence was also accepted by the rest of the community once I was introduced to various neighbours by Mr ELR1. Subsequently, this allowed me to return to the area alone, and although I was not part of the community, I was never considered an intruder either. As for Ms Tsadari, she has, through her doctoral research, developed a wide network of contacts throughout Eleonas and is familiar with the vast majority of the ‘Polykarpou’ unit of analysis. Her guided walking tour and interview introduced me to unfamiliar areas, but which are crucial to local communities such as the weekly flea market happening in and around the industrial shells of Polykarpou, the extensive archaeological and religious legacy of Eleonas as well as less known pop-up theatres and venues.

These guided walks allowed me then to conduct my own walks in Eleonas starting from the areas that Mr ELR1 and Ms Tsadari introduced me to. As a Greek
researcher, I was at first concerned that my position would be unclear to the local communities. Therefore, in the few occasions when I entered in unplanned discussions with locals (my interview with Mr ELW2 was scheduled following such an unexpected occurrence) I made certain to always explain my research, my intentions and my relation with the area fully, answer any queries and keep my personal subjectivities at bay and a neutral stance towards the reality I encountered. Regarding the actual walks, I never trespassed or walked on private property, I made sure the photographs I took were not intrusive and only documented what was visible from the public space of the street.

4.5.3 Informed consent and anonymity

In a sense, the research evolved in a very organic way but since I dealt with different groups of people related with Eleonas (residents, industry participants, workers, high-profile academics and policy makers), they expectedly held very different views and opinions about their personal situation and the current state of Eleonas that were very often conflicting and sometimes adverse towards the other groups. As described in Section 4.3.3 the topics discussed during interviews were influenced by the knowledge gathered from previous ones and therefore there were concerns that people might be inadvertently identified during the semi-structured discussions. To avoid this, great care was taken during the design of subsequent interviews questions to ensure that the anonymity of interviewees was protected and that no identifiable information was shared with any other interviewee.

Potential interviewees were initially selected based on their degree of relevance to Eleonas based on the information that was available to me during the desktop research and my previous engagement with the area. Then following the first series of interviews conducted during the pilot study more potential interviewees were identified following a snowballing process. Participants were approached either by a formal letter on UCL headed paper, by email from a UCL email account, or by phone in the case the first two were unsuccessful or could not be applied. Participants were recruited through a request to be interviewed, a full disclosure of the nature of the project, an informed consent (verbal), and a request to be recorded. All participants were granted anonymity on request and were read the same informed consent script and asked to confirm consent verbally. They were asked whether they would like their responses in their entirety to be anonymous and they were advised that they could ask for any specific statements made within the interview to be anonymous. They
were advised clearly that they may end the interview at any time. All the above were done in Greek as to avoid any potential misunderstandings. The interviews were fully transcribed in Greek to keep the full context of the discussion and were translated by myself when necessary and with the attention to not distort the main message.

4.5.4 Considerations linked to marginalised populations

A separate line of ethical concern was linked to ‘Eleonas Camp’: the refugee camp built in Eleonas in 2015 and other marginalised populations that I could potentially have encountered during my walks and first-person involvement with the area. Since Eleonas is known to be attractive to potentially vulnerable populations, it was necessary to adopt the following ethical practices during fieldwork: (a) vulnerable and marginalised groups were not approached directly; (b) only organisations and associations working with these groups were approached; (c) no children were approached at any point; (d) any identifiable information was not stored or recorded; (e) anonymity was ensured in all the documents that would be subsequently produced. During fieldwork I had no contact with any vulnerable person from either of these groups (refugees or known marginalised groups and populations) and my only interview related to Eleonas Camp was with Ms ELE1 who was very kind to share her insights on the situation in the camp and first-hand experiences.

4.5.5 Final remarks

This ethical statement was intended to unpack my positionality as a researcher going into Eleonas and acknowledge the impact that my own presence might have had on the research process. What became clear was that, as detached as I tried to be, my involvement with the space and the social environment of Eleonas was not insignificant. Throughout the rest of this thesis I will argue at various points that the subjective perceptions people have of urban voids affect their judgement vis-à-vis those areas. Undeniably, this applies to me too.

This study was ethically approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee on October 20th, 2017 (project number: 11523/001), cleared of any ethical concerns and complied with the Data Protection Act, 1998. No conflicts appeared with any of the contacted institutions and no issues related to ethics emerged at any point of the research. Access to collected data and data processing was only available to me. Data was stored on computers protected with a personal password and encrypted
hard drives or stored in secure office spaces on the UCL campus. Where possible, forms of data encryption were used to add additional security. Dissemination of the results from the analysis of the above data includes this thesis, presentations at academic conferences and publications in peer-reviewed academic journals.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter detailed the methodology followed to explore the notion of the urban void in the setting of Eleonas in Athens. An empirical case study design was constructed to examine the role of urban voids within the metropolitan, regional and local scales of investigation. It included the selection of one overarching case – Eleonas in Athens – and the focus on six and then two units of analysis within the area.

The examination of the case and the units of analysis was designed to provide a detailed and, as much as possible, a complete overview of the area. Desktop research, in-depth interviews, observation and mappings allowed to understand the gradual transformations that Eleonas underwent until today. Then, the core attributes giving each area its own character were laid out with the purpose to find contextual circumstances of urban voids that could be compared against a typology of voids as they appear in literature. A first investigation at the large scale dealt with the idea of the void at the level of the metropolis is to define it in relation to the city of Athens, as well as the impact of such conceptualisation from the standpoint of businesses, policy and socio-economy. Zooming in on the units of analysis at the scale of the neighbourhood served the purpose of challenging the mainstream conceptualisation of the urban void by looking at the finer-grained dynamics and interactions occurring in the socio-economy of the place to understand better the way in which the ‘urban void Eleonas’ operates. Thematic analysis was used to synthesise the above and the diverse results of the various employed methods by reducing the complexity of the case without losing hold of the context.

The fundamental challenges of this methodology were twofold. The first lay in the extreme diversity of data this thesis set to compile and analyse. An iterative process of thematic analysis remedied to that by continuously moving back and forth between data analysis, representation, maps and coding. The second was related to the relative scarcity of available data due to the case study being excluded from the city plan until 1995 – and thus undocumented. To fill in the various information gaps, in-
depth interviews and additional media and academic articles were used as sources of information.

The next chapters cover the empirical and analytical answers this thesis provides to the research questions. Chapter 5 is essentially descriptive and explores in depth Eleonas from a historical and morphological perspective. It goes through the various layers of transformation it was subjected to over the centuries and presents the urban entities that constitute the area today. Chapter 6 is of a much more analytical nature and reflects respectively the thematically driven analysis and its significance. It picks upon the descriptive elements of Chapter 5 and explores the tensions that occur between the emergent themes (i.e. activity/inactivity, public/private, and growth/decline). Chapter 7 reflects upon these tensions and in a more normative tone presents several avenues Greek planners could follow in planning areas like Eleonas. Finally, Chapter 8 returns to a higher level of abstraction as it ponders on the significance of these tensions and discusses the possibility of a fundamental reconceptualisation of the notion of the 'void' in urban contexts.
Chapter 5: Eleonas today, the “backyard of Athens”

5.1 Introduction

This first empirical chapter is treating Eleonas at the larger metropolitan scale and deconstructs its characterization as the “backyard” and the “cesspool” of Athens (Argyri, et al., 1998). Through the interpretation and production of maps, quantitative data and interviews, I look at Eleonas as an ‘urban void’ generated by urban transformations and influenced by external as well as internal forces. In Chapters 2 and 3 I argued that current scholarship polarises the understanding of the urban void between either a conceptual entity or a physical one. In response to what I consider to be a reductive oversight, I presented a tentative ‘typology of urban voids’ (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5) that encompassed both aspects based on the processes that led to the creation of urban voids and the activities that settled in afterwards. In this Chapter, I categorise the different spaces of Eleonas according to these types with the aim to determine the reasons why Eleonas is conceptualised as an urban void at the regional scale and by whom. This investigation is based on the rich material that was gathered and generated via the archival desktop research and during fieldwork to fill the voids of what manifested to be an incomplete understanding of the reality and day to day condition of Eleonas. This research is in this sense the one of the very few thorough investigations of the area called Eleonas since the 1992 study of the National Technical University of Athens (Wassenhoven & Markatos, 1992). Hence, this research, in addition to adding to the theoretical understanding of urban voids, also fills a very much needed informational void relating to Eleonas simply by gathering and concentrating a rich and varied material from a large spectrum of sources in one place. This material includes:

1. historical maps from archives and personally drawn present-day maps showcasing the morphological evolution of Eleonas and its current state
2. very precise statistical datasets of buildings, housing, activity, transportation and demographics that establish an objective view of the area’s operation
3. personal observations and reflections as well as first-person accounts from locals that I use to complement and fill in the gaps of the above two sets of data.

20 Other relevant academic researches: Fotakis (2013) and Tsadari (n.d.)
21 These are more extensively put forward in the following chapter that deals with the tensions existing in the subjective understandings of Eleonas
In the first part of this chapter I navigate the historical and morphological evolution of the area to study key transformative events in its timeline that led to its derelict physical condition and its abandonment from the government and planning authorities. I start with a historical exploration that sets the evolution of Eleonas within the history of the city of Athens from antiquity but with a more thorough focus on the years between the 1821 War of Independence and late 20th century, as these were catalytic in the transformation of the area from an agricultural land and ‘the most beautiful suburb of Athens’ to the most industrialised zone of the city and its characterisation as a ‘backyard’. I am using this historical overview of Eleonas to evidence why Athens and specifically Eleonas stand out among the multiplicity of global examples of urban voids as a very interesting, ground-breaking, and extraordinary case for the investigation of urban transformations through the lens of the void. I also set the context and lay out the timeline of the city of Athens, delineate the evolution of Eleonas as part of – yet parallel to – this timeline, and make sense of what underpinned the creation of an environment of neglect and informality.

Following this historical journey, I look at the mundane reality of Eleonas’ built and unbuilt environment, its road network and transportation flows, its official land use, the ongoing activities and its demographics to compose the empirical case of Eleonas which will serve as basis for further research. I delve deep into the morphological and metabolic aspects that separate it from the overarching urban tissue to explore how they generate a ‘backyard’ at the regional scale. I revisit the ‘typology of urban voids’ that emerged from the Literature Review and apply it specifically to Eleonas. Using this updated categorisation of ‘void’ spaces and activities, I delve deep into the designed, accidental, decaying, suspended and transgressive aspects of the case study to explore the extent to which it constitutes an ‘urban void’ as defined in this thesis.

Moving past the regional scale, I close this chapter by exploring how the notion of the backyard is embedded in, and affects, the intermediate level of the municipality. I zoom in on six units of analysis within Eleonas to explore and understand to what extent the morphology (i.e. urban form), metabolism (i.e. activities and material flows) and political ecology (i.e. socio-economic contexts) of Eleonas influence and feed into the negative conceptualisation of the area as a backyard and an urban void. As outlined in Chapter 4, the boundaries of these areas were outlined based on their relevance in the exploration of the notion of the ‘void’ rather than their administrative boundaries. Even though the planning strategies of each municipality undoubtedly
steer the evolution of Eleonas, looking past these managerial borders is essential to shed light onto the various morphological, metabolic and social tensions that surface in Eleonas and which do not stop at municipal borders. By exemplifying the impact of a fragmented municipal governance, as opposed to a holistic and unified perspective for Eleonas, I bring to light how urban spaces are dismissed as voids through their design, their unplanned transformation, their decay, their obsolescence and their suspension. I explore the diversity of urban forms across and within each unit and argue that the evolution of the morphology is directly linked to the evolution of the nature and permitted breadth of activities (i.e. legal, illegal, industrial, cultural, hidden, sportive, refuge, etc.). As the complexity of the institutional framework of Eleonas reappears at this scale, I look at how and why demographics differ within Eleonas suggesting that the reasons may be heavily tied to the historical preconceptions tied to the urban void.

5.2 History of Eleonas: from the ‘most magnificent suburb’ to the ‘cesspool of Athens’

The interest in studying the area known as Eleonas in Athens lies in the successive phases of growth and decline it went through and the incongruous landscape it is today which led to its characterisation as the “cesspool of Athens” (Argyri, et al., 1998, p. 2) and its conceptualisation as an urban void. Interestingly, this dilapidated landscape still holds the traces of the gradual transformation of the area making it an excellent case to understand the emergence and evolution of urban voids such as Eleonas in dense urban cores. Although not in the ‘fringe’ of the city, Eleonas encompasses many attributes of what has been coined as “fringe belts” (Hazar & Kubat, 2015; Whitehand, 1967, 1988; Whitehand & Morton, 2004). Fringe belts defined as “the zone of extensive land use that developed at the urban fringe during pronounced hiatuses in urban growth, among which those associated with city fortifications were especially obvious” (Whitehand & Morton, 2004, p. 275) is of interest when investigating Eleonas not for the morphological attributes that the ‘fringe belt’ includes but more in respect to its capacity to describe “the process of alternating hiatus and growth, and the subsequent processes of transformation which relates very much to the evolution of the area” (Whitehand & Morton, 2004, p. 275). To understand therefore its development and actual state, it is necessary to expose at first its history which can be divided into three key periods:
1. from antiquity to early 20th century
2. the big transition between 1832 and the period before WWII
3. the last decades from 1945 to today

5.2.1 A productive landscape until the 20th century

The fact that ‘Eleonas’ literally translates to ‘olive grove’ can seem today, at best, humorous. From antiquity and for more than 20 centuries thereafter, however, the area known today as Eleonas and its surrounding plains were indeed an extensive olive grove that provided Athenians with olive oil. Greek mythology proclaims that goddess Athena’s spear would have given birth to the very first olive tree of the city which initiated the formation of what would become the sacred olive grove of Athens (Bofilias, 2005). Hence, the area was favoured by Athenians for its vital role and was revered for its sacredness. From a more scientific standpoint, the area corresponding to the olive grove covered the centre of what is today the basin of the Attica Region and traversed by an extended network of streams stemming from the two largest rivers of the region: river Kifissos and river Ilissos (represented in Figure 5.1 and in blue in Figure 5.2). As such, this alluvial plain created a very large and extremely fertile zone amidst an otherwise arid landscape.

Figure 5.1 Map of Eleonas’s situation in the 18th century. Made based on J.A. Kaupert’s maps present in “Karten von Attica” drawn between 1875 and 1894 (Source: Curtius & Kaupert, 1878).
Figure 5.2 Map showcasing the situation of Eleonas until the early 20th century. The only existing urban-like settlements are that of Athens and Piraeus (north-east and south-west on the map respectively). The two main rivers of the Attica Region (Kifissos and Ylissos) are flowing freely and generate a very fertile alluvial plain (Source: Author).
From a planning perspective, this special status of Eleonas was depicted for the first time officially around the 6th century BC. Under a legislation protecting the area from being built, ruler Peisistratus (561-527 BC) ordered to extensively plant the area and turn it into a productive agricultural land. A rule that, as we shall see, would eventually lead to a fundamental lack of planning and the unsupervised evolution of Eleonas. During that period, Eleonas was not comprised within the city of Athens but was instead situated outside the city walls as seen on the map of Figure 5.1 and was a place of leisure away from the then city of Athens (Biris, 1966). Without clear boundaries and deeply cherished by the citizens it was a field of free movement and held at the time the name of the “most beautiful suburb” (Bofilias, 2005). During the Ottoman occupation from mid-15th until the 18th century, Eleonas was of extremely high importance in feeding the city during the occupation and remained unaltered if only for the scarce appearance of small farms (Ropaitou-Tsapareli, 2006).

Early in the 19th century however, the War of Independence (1821-1828) was the first occurrence that disturbed this otherwise bucolic area. The city was massively evacuated which reduced the need of agricultural production while simultaneously arsons and looting destroyed a great part of Eleonas. Despite these events however, it remained a productive landscape and still was composed of almost 150,000 olive trees until the end of the third quarter of the 19th century as seen on the historical maps.

**5.2.2 The big urban transition between 1832 and the period before WWII**

The decades that followed saw a series of major successive events that drastically changed the city of Athens and established it as the country’s major attractive pole. In 1832 Athens was elected capital of Greece and in an attempt to regain economic stability, the newly constituted state followed a very peculiar strategy of urban development. At that time (although this continued to happen well into the 20th and 21st centuries), the formation of the urban agglomeration in Greece started with the subdivision of agricultural land into smaller plots for sale. When the developing areas reached a considerable density (essentially residential) they were legalised by “Presidential Decree” (Προεδρικό Διάταγμα). Then, through expropriation, they were rearranged into the characteristic typography of the Athenian residential urban block, further densified and included into the urban territory. A development pattern based
essentially on unplanned growth and ad hoc legalisation of buildings (Loukopoulos & Kosmaki-Loukopoulos, 1980).

These agricultural lands which passed from the public to the private domain constituted also the entirety of Eleonas. As the series of sketches in Figure 5.3 show however, the move from agricultural to urban land followed a different route for Eleonas as opposed to the rest of Athens and Greece in general (Llop Torné, et al., 2012). Because Eleonas was a protected productive land, not a residential one, it was never part of any such development plan or vision. The subdivided lands were, in fact, never expropriated. Hence, the transformation from agricultural to industrial land was made through an unplanned fragmentation of the former into very large industrial plots according to demand and until the entirety of Eleonas was built up several decades later.
Figure 5.3 Sketches illustrating the evolution and development of two distinct urban tissues within Athens that led on the one hand to a compact and dense residential tissue and on the other a loose and unregulated industrial one. The aerial photograph evidences the contrast between these two forms and between Athens and Eleonas. (Sources: sketches from Llop Torné et al. (2012); satellite image from Google Maps).
Meanwhile, the growing housing demand exacerbated the need for an enhanced transportation and waste management network. Yet, as the state and private investors concentrated their efforts more on residential development the urban networks started to fail. Indeed, in 1896, as the population reached 176,000 people, diseases and lethal epidemics propagated through the unreliable water and sewerage systems (Dragonas, 2010). Thus, following the model of several major European capitals such as Brussels or Paris during the hygienist period (Park, 2014), the city of Athens ordered to cover the open streams by building new roads or by turning them into sewerage. As Figure 5.4 shows, the landscape of Athens and Eleonas was eventually totally urbanised at the expense of the natural element.

Figure 5.4 Maps showcasing the urbanisation of Attica’s basin (in black) and the destruction of a very large network of rivers, canals, and smaller water bodies (blue lines). From left to right: the situation until the early 20th century, after 1923, and during the last decades from 1945 to today (Source: Karali, 2000).

The third significant event in the development of Athens during the 20th century is what is known as The Great fire of Smyrna or the Catastrophe of Smyrna of 1922 which also marked the end of the Greco-Turkish War (Stewart, 2004). Following the destruction of the city of Smyrna, Minor Asia, in 1923 an unprecedented population exchange occurred during which 1.3 million Greeks looked for refuge in Greece. Arriving predominantly from urban centres, the refugees sought to settle in the largest Greek cities of the time: Athens and Thessaloniki. The sudden arrival of these populations escalated the need of housing which sped up the expansion of Athens and the areas around its port, Piraeus. Athens and Piraeus began to merge into one built mass, and Eleonas became progressively enclosed within an otherwise homogenous residential urban fabric (Figure 5.5). Interestingly, Eleonas remained untouched as the official statutory plan of that period was still recognising Eleonas as a productive land; a vestige of Peisistratus’ rule (Bofilias, 2005).
Figure 5.5 Map showcasing the situation of Eleonas in 1924. Athens and Piraeus have expanded tremendously and have surrounded Eleonas. Several small farms and manufactures begin to appear in Eleonas which remains a ‘protected area of free movement’. Rivers Kifissos and Ylissos are still flowing but a considerable number of canals and smaller waterways are engulfed by urbanisation. Iera Street (a) and Piraeus avenue (b) are two major transportation axes of the time. (Source: Author).
At the same time, the demographic growth triggered the emergence of a small and medium-scale manufacturing sector in Eleonas since it was the only non-residential part of Athens. Eleonas saw therefore the appearance of the first industrial units and some occasional low-income residential clusters to cater for workers and, for the first time in 2.5 millennia, large permanent buildings materialised within the river Kifissos’ alluvial plain. As Loukopoulos and Kosmaki-Loukopoulos (1980, p. 16) explain at the time “land and building speculation became both the protagonist and the means for the distribution of [private] benefits”. Hence, through innumerable ad hoc extensions to the statutory plans, illegal units were continuously authorised along the major transportation arteries of Eleonas, namely Piraeus Avenue and Iera Street as shown on Figure 5.5 (Sapuntzaki & Wassenhoven, 2004). This growth slowed down considerably during the two World Wars but eventually recovered and continued for many decades deep into the 20th century until Eleonas was totally urbanised and nothing remained of the old olive grove.

5.2.3 Last decades from 1945 to today

According to the historian Biris (1966), between 1930 and 1950 Eleonas was still dominated by horticulture, supplying Athens with a considerable amount of food during the wars. Yet, after WWII and the Greek Civil War (1946 to 1949) the urbanisation of Athens regained its pre-war momentum and, as Greece was progressively industrialised, Eleonas was gradually converted to meet the capital’s industrial demand. Biris (1966) accounts for this conversion to an unprecedented demographic growth and a crucial shift in land use from agriculture to industry boosted by the industrial revolution.

By 1945 the population of Athens skyrocketed to over 1 million and by 1970 it had reached 2.4 million residents evidently swallowing and converting any rural land to urban. At the same time, the industrial revolution boosted industrial and manufacturing processes, which expanded dramatically in Eleonas as the river Kifissos and its tributaries provided with enough water to power machines and an effortless and free way to reject industrial waste. By 1980 the population of Athens had exploded to almost 3 million inhabitants and Eleonas had become an intensive and extremely polluted industrial landscape (Figure 5.6).
But this industrial growth halted as the second part of the 20th century was characterised by the downfall of this productive landscape. In Greece, industrial decline started in the mid-70s and peaked in the 80s as the country entered recession and many industries went bankrupt (Kotsikou, 2009). Consequently, land ownership switched hands from individuals to banks and realtors. With this fast progressing deindustrialisation, services and retail businesses started settling in Eleonas where land prices were cheapest mainly along transport axes (Sapuntzaki & Wassenhoven, 2004). The high concentration of services on the area’s periphery led to the gradual drop of industrial activity and to the further neglect of Eleonas’ inner core exhibiting in a very brutal manner what Castells (2010) described as the emergence of a polarised dynamic between “new valued spaces” and “old marginal ones”.

Figure 5.6 Images of an industrial and productive Eleonas during the 1980s (Koultzinioti, n.d.; Papoutsakis, 1989).
The strategic position of Eleonas between Athens and Piraeus repeatedly attracts many retail companies which see enormous potential in the area due to its central position and its great connectivity with the regional, national and international transportation networks (Figure 5.7 and Appendix 5). Currently, Eleonas fulfils the role of a major wholesale and transportation hub of the city and houses mostly moving companies and large industries with a need to efficiently dispatch their products\(^\text{22}\) (Fotakis, 2013). In the meantime, smaller industries flee the area due to various economic or legislative pressures creating spatial and activity voids (see Appendix 6 for maps showing the location of companies that shut down between 2003 and 2015). Yet, the precarious state of Eleonas goes beyond its built form and stretches to its management and planning.

![Figure 5.7 Maps illustrating the steady increase of businesses locating in and around Eleonas per decade. The growth is representative of the attractivity of Eleonas. Each map shows new businesses in addition to those of the previous decade but only those register with the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry. According to locals more unregistered companies operate within the area (Source: Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry). For larger maps refer to Appendix 5.](image)

Today, agricultural production is eradicated from Eleonas (except for some patches of agricultural land that remain within the campus of the Agricultural University of Athens essentially for academic purposes), and with it the hydrographic network of Eleonas shrunk to the degree of leaving partially open only some sections of river Kifissos and the stream of Profitis Daniil\(^\text{23}\) as shown in Figure 5.8.

\(^{22}\) These companies are both national and international and include big names such as EVGA, DELTA dairy products, ETMA and UNILEVER.

\(^{23}\) The stream of Profitis Daniil, is worth a mention here as it will come back in later parts of this thesis as one of the only remaining natural elements in Eleonas.
Figure 5.8 Map showcasing the situation of Eleonas in 2015. The area is now completely urbanised with buildings and plots much larger than the overarching residential tissue of Athens. Rivers Kifissos and Ylissos are for the most part covered and none of the old water network remains as it has been converted to sewage, or simply covered by urbanisation. (Source: Author).
5.2.4 The policy landscape of Eleonas

Because of its very peculiar planning status, the policy landscape of Eleonas deserves a short separate mention to that of its evolution. In 1983, Eleonas was included in the city plan and its limits were set for the first time. Although it has been accepted as one ‘unit’, Eleonas spans across five municipalities (Athens, Egaleo, Peristeri, Rentis and Tavros) which are responsible of implementing planning actions (Figure 5.9). Since 1983, four proposals are worth mentioning as important attempts to revitalise the area. These are the two Presidential Decrees (PD) of 1991 and 1995, the 2006 ‘Double Regeneration’ proposal, and the most recent strategic plan for the region of Attica published in 2014.

Figure 5.9 Map representing the unofficial borders of Eleonas (grey line) and the administrative division of Eleonas into five districts according to the five municipalities it spans across. From top to bottom: Peristeri, Athens, Egaleo, Nikaia-Agiou Ioannis Rentis and Moschato-Tavros. (Source: Author).
The PD of 1991 was the first official move towards the redevelopment of Eleonas. For the first time, it set land uses, proposed massively densifying the area, mixing the industrial and wholesale sectors with housing and retail to raise land values while providing a negligible amount of greenery. This proposal however encountered a very high amount of opposition by local communities, administrations and policy makers and was never implemented. The first modification to the 1991 PD was published in 1995 and the land use plan that stemmed from it is the current basis for any development (see Figure 5.10). The new plan updated the proposed land uses increasing the parks and greenery by almost 30% and required that greenery should be proportionate to any new construction depending on the size of the project. In addition, the industrial, manufacturing and wholesale sectors were strongly reduced and clustered while, on the flip side, tertiary activities were strongly encouraged along major roads. Some attention was also brought to the few remaining residential clusters of the area, which were complemented with mixed use buildings and retail. Unfortunately, for reasons explored later in this Chapter and in Chapter 6, an extremely low percentage of the above have been formally implemented.

The first major interest regarding the transformation of Eleonas came in 2006, that is 11 years after the binding plan of 1995 under a proposal to build a stadium under a wider project of regeneration titled Double Regeneration. In 2006 a proposition was made to relocate the football stadium of Panathinaikos F.C. (a major team in the Greek football league) from the centre of Athens and give the team a modernised stadium. The large amounts of space needed and the necessity of optimal accessibility for a stadium, coupled to the relatively low land price and the strategic location of Eleonas, made the area ideal to receive the new infrastructure, even though the binding 1995 PD did not clearly allow such development. For this project, a land exchange scheme was proposed where the former site of the stadium would transform into a public green space in exchange of the green surface taken from Eleonas – hence the title of the project, Double Regeneration. In Greece this type of development is uncommon due to the lack of legal frameworks for public-private partnerships. Hence, the proposal was met with scepticism and suspicions of corruption (CCRE, 2009). Despite strong opposition from local communities, in 2010 the project eventually started (Balis, 2013) but in 2013, the works were halted and the ‘Double Regeneration’ subsequently cancelled because of economic complications in the public-private partnership and the major private investor Vovos S.A going into bankruptcy (Blog GR, 2012). In 2015, the unbuilt half of the site was transformed into a ‘refugee village’ to shelter incoming refugees from Syria. From a policy standpoint,
the interest of this case is the ease with which deviations from the official plan and ad-hoc additions to it can be justified.
Finally, the 2014 strategic plan for the region of Attica shown in Figure 5.11 is the latest in this series of actions and includes the most recent directives for the future of Eleonas. This plan does not overthrow the presidential decree of 1995, instead it is a regional strategic plan that determines the broad direction and planning objectives for the next decades for the entirety of the Metropolitan Region of Athens. On that regard, the directives proposed in this plan are suggestive as opposed to the binding decrees of the Presidential Decrees.

In 2014, the strategic plan focused primarily on economic growth and stressed the need for reformatting the industrial and tertiary sectors as the 1995 PD had prescribed. It adds the necessity to reinvigorate the river Kifissos and the stream of Profitis Daniil and proposes the creation of several business parks that would encompass industrial, manufacturing and research activities and the parallel improvement of the road network to suit these new needs. Although the 1995 PD and the 2014 strategic plan are in effect, to this day, none has been widely applied in any of the five municipalities except for the municipality of Agios Ioannis Rentis which has
advanced to the partial application of the 1995 PD. As I will touch upon in Chapters 6 and 7, reasons for this inactivity reach deep into the roots of Greek politics and planning. But, at this point, it is worth noting that for almost 25 years Eleonas remains in a state of permanent postponement that worsens its urban and socio-economic situation. As the later parts of this chapter will exemplify, however, this political delay and procrastination does not translate in an interruption of life and activity in Eleonas even though the area might seem lifeless and inactive from the outside.

Table 5.1 Timeline of Eleonas from antiquity to today (see Appendix 7 for a graphic representation of this timeline).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antiquity/BC</td>
<td>Eleonas (literally meaning “olive grove”) is a <strong>sacred fertile region</strong> surrounding river Kifissos producing olives and olive oil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561-527 BC</td>
<td>Ruler Peisistratus planted the area and <strong>legally protected Eleonas from being built.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC until 17th century</td>
<td>The area remained untouched and unchanged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821-1828</td>
<td><strong>War of independence.</strong> War, fires and looting destroyed the area. Nevertheless, it was still composed of 150,000 olive trees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 19th to early 20th century</td>
<td>Greece is free from occupation; <strong>Athens is designated capital</strong> (1834) and economic growth brings development and large waves of migration. At the same time, small manufactures and working-class housing clusters appear in Eleonas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td><strong>Catastrophe of Smyrna</strong> brought an important influx of migrants from Smyrna in Minor Asia, some of which located in Eleonas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-1950</td>
<td><strong>WWII.</strong> Horticulture dominated the area which supplied the city with food during WWII.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After WWII</td>
<td>Huge waves of <strong>migration</strong> from all around the country come to Athens. Various settlements pop up in the Attica Plain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950 to mid-1970s</td>
<td><strong>Explosion of industrial sector.</strong> Location of industries along Kifissos. Due to the lack of regulation, the industries are polluting the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td><strong>Athens is extremely polluted and unhealthy:</strong> news agencies are focusing on the worsening air conditions and smog. A discourse is then developed around a need to sanitize the city and push out industries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>A key <strong>Presidential Decree</strong> (PD) is published regarding the need to push industries and polluting activities away from the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Several grassroots initiatives take place in Eleonas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>First attempt to a PD that would include Eleonas in the city plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>The first comprehensive research about Eleonas is published from the National Technical University of Athens (Wassenhoven &amp; Markatos, 1992). It included detailed analysis of its built environment, activities and infrastructure. It defined several avenues for the future of the area and became the basis for the publication of the 1995 PD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Amendment to the 1991 PD. The 1995 Presidential Decree is the first official document including Eleonas in the city plan. It defines its future strategy and compiles a complete land use plan for the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990's</td>
<td>Plans and talks for the International Bus Terminal in Eleonas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Publication of &quot;Eleonas 1994-1996&quot; (Argyri, et al., 1998); an official document published by the Agency of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens describing Eleonas as a problem to be fixed and as “Athens’ cesspool”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>The Athens 2004 Olympic Games were preceded with major infrastructure works in the city. Two of those were relevant to Eleonas: Kifissou Avenue, which eliminated some major flooding issues that the area had, and Eleonas Metro station which is the only metro stop within Eleonas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Double Regeneration project starts. Using shady land exchange mechanisms, the project was planned to build in Eleonas a complex composed of a stadium for Panathinaikos F.C football club and a mall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Double Regeneration project is halted due to economic complications. At the same time although not specifically related, the Strategic Plan for Attica is being developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>The strategic regional plan is published and includes directives for the development of Eleonas. It aims for economic growth, plans the re-organisation of the industrial sector and the creation of “business parks” within Eleonas to attract investment and the tertiary sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd half of 2010s</td>
<td>Large controversial ‘syringe-like’ projects are planned for Eleonas. These include a mosque, a crematorium, a recycling facility, a large complex including a new International Bus Terminal and a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A note about the “large controversial ‘syringe-like’ projects” mentioned at the end of Table 5.1 is necessary here. All these projects are referred at various instances in the remainder of this thesis as ‘controversial’ and ‘unwanted’ even though at first sight one might argue that they are key and important civic places. In the case of the crematorium or the mosque they are places of sociability, memory and sacredness; a stadium and malls are generally also wanted places of commerce and social exchange; and an International Bus Terminal is an important addition to a lacking transportation network. Indeed, these could be seen as positive assets, not least to those who would use them, adding vibrancy and economic activity. However, within the respective cultural and social contexts of Greece, Athens and Eleonas these developments have sparked debates amongst local communities regarding, their incompatibility with the local cultural and social context, the disregard and destruction of the local activities and economy and also the ease with which they are projected to be located in Eleonas as opposed to any other area of the city. As it is explored in detail and through precise examples in the following sections and chapters the ‘controversial’ and ‘unwanted’ aspect of these projects relates to the idea of ‘Eleonas as a backyard’ as activities that are core for the city but deemed ‘incompatible’ with the overarching residential fabric of the city and, hence, end up in Eleonas hidden behind its spatial and social invisibility.

5.3 Eleonas through the lens of the ‘void’

Looking at Eleonas’ history it becomes clear that the area is deeply rooted in the evolution of the city of Athens not only from a geographical standpoint but from a functional one too as the area alleviated important productive and demographic strains throughout the ages. However, it also appears that the area has worked very much in isolation from the overarching trajectory of Athens forging its own function and legacy in the Athenian landscape. Indeed, this isolated and parallel evolution was the underlying factor that led to the appearance of non-mainstream urban entities such as large industrial plots and buildings, the anarchic transportation network and unregulated activities. Depending on the viewpoint, one might therefore consider the area either eventually leading to a discussion regarding whether it was full of unwanted and non-urban components or regard it instead as ‘empty’ of wanted and
urban components. In earlier chapters I argued that the perception of presence and absence in urban space – be it physical, social or related to activity – seems to be context dependent and inherently subjective to the experience of each individual. In this first empirical investigation of the area, I take the viewpoint of an external observer and look at Eleonas as a separate entity in the Athenian landscape. I delve deep into the components that separate it from the city, and those that simultaneously link it to the overarching urban tissue. From this relational standpoint, I investigate the interactions that Eleonas’ morphology and metabolism exhibit with Athens and with the area itself to understand to what extent these create situations of ‘voidness’ that contribute to the understanding as defined in theory of Eleonas as an urban void.

I come back to the typological classification of urban voids that I constructed following the review of literature in Chapter 2, to explore these underlying notions of presence and absence and how the existence or lack of specific urban entities influences the operation and status of the area from a socio-spatial object that is considered an urban void. This typology goes beyond the general divisive understanding of urban voids as existing or absent spaces and, instead, qualifies them as active components of urban space. In Table 5.2 below and the sections that follow, I revisit the basic typology presented in Chapter 2 to include notions of urban transformation, planning, activity and land use, and policies that emerged from the overview of Eleonas’ historical evolution. These updated categories will be used to interpret the reality of Eleonas and to study its morphology, urban flows and socio-economic characteristics at the metropolitan scale, as defined in the conceptual framework of this thesis. These include the built and unbuilt environment, the transportation network and flows of movement, the land use, activities and the demographics of the area. In the following sections, I study how these components generate each or a combination of different types of voids, to try and understand the extent to which they influence the narratives of presence and absence and contribute to the conceptualisation of Eleonas as an urban void.

24 The following Chapter 6 covers in detail how these two ambiguous points of view reflect to a large extent the perception of locals on the one hand and policy makers and investors on the other.
Table 5.2 Updated ‘typology of urban voids’ following the overview of Eleonas’ evolution. As Eleonas increasingly became associated to an urban void, the ‘typology’ that emerged from the review of the literature is here updated to include notions of urban transformation, planning, activity and land use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designed</td>
<td>The notion of the void is inherent to the design process of a said area or building. These are typically architectural arrangements of various sizes and functions ranging from spaces within buildings to large public squares and plazas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>In the context of urban transformation, an accidental void is an unplanned occurrence. These spaces are usually the result of the lack of contextual approach to design ranging from small interstices between buildings to large redundant lots around urban infrastructure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decaying</td>
<td>Decay is related to the neglect and the lack of activity in an area or building. Spaces within this category vary in shapes and sizes and carry a certain historicity. They have often been subjected to transformations in use and status and are usually marked by the uncertainty of future use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspended</td>
<td>Suspension is very close to the notion of decay, but suspended spaces are distinguished by the fact that the notion of the void is related to an administrative stalemate and/or the decrease of attention from policy and governance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgressive</td>
<td>Transgression appears as the result of a long term “suspension”. The notion of the void is interpreted here as the underperformance or the abandonment of an area’s formal activities and their replacement by non-conventional ones.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the three-pronged framework constructed for this thesis, I begin by the analysis of the ‘designed and accidental’ morphology of Eleonas, transition then to its ‘decaying’ industrial metabolism and activity and end on the ‘suspended and transgressive’ practices that have emerged in the ‘cracks’ of the built environment and because of the collapse of industries and manufacturing. Under this light, the study of Eleonas’ morphology, metabolism and political ecology often blend into one another as they are effectively interconnected. That is why, when exploring, for example, the morphology of Eleonas’ street network the discussion takes a ‘metabolic’ turn to unpack the various transportation flows that traverse the area. Inevitably, at that moment, the political ecology of the area surfaces as the road infrastructure is found to divide, hide, protect, or segregate social groups. Although the terms urban morphology, urban metabolism and urban political ecology rarely
appear throughout the text, the respective disciplines guide and structure the analysis of the area leading to the creation of distinct morpho-socio-metabolic profiles.

5.3.1 Urban built form of Eleonas

The lack of planning regulations combined with the very specialised industrial land use of Eleonas led to the creation of spaces of ‘hypermodernity’ in the sense of spaces devoid of history, liveability and sense of place (c.f. Augé, 1992). Places that indeed emerge from the superimposition of networks, buildings and activities and which, for the average citizen, are only visual stimuli recorded from an observer’s perspective. In Eleonas, these spaces of hypermodernity are created essentially by the interactions of two urban components: buildings (i.e. housing, industrial units and office buildings) and the road network (i.e. the capillary network of streets, the major roads traversing Eleonas and Kifissou Avenue). The combination of these two leads to the creation of open spaces which are either formal with clear boundaries, such as parks, private lots and industrial yards, or in-between areas that appear by accident such as overgrown patches of nature at the intersection or the side of roads, improvised plazas and dumps. Figure 5.12 illustrates on four different maps the unbalanced proportions of built and unbuilt areas of Eleonas focusing on residential, commercial and industrial buildings.
Figure 5.12 Maps illustrating the location and quantity of built and unbuilt elements of Eleonas: residential buildings (top left), industrial buildings (top right), buildings with commercial use (bottom left), and unbuilt spaces including vacant lots, yards and greenery (bottom right). (Source: Author).

Understanding Eleonas necessarily means understanding the condition of its urban morphology. Starting from the built environment, I transition to describe the road network before finally looking at the vast amount of open spaces. The unregulated state of Eleonas means that collecting data about buildings, transportation flows and activities is very challenging and results often in a discontinuous dataset which inevitably leads to approximations when extrapolated to the entire area. Nonetheless, in the frame of this research, these approximations combined with the analysis of maps depicting various facets of the urban environment generate an

25 Refer to Figure 4.8 for a map illustrating the areas of Eleonas where data on buildings was available.
accurate-enough image of Eleonas that serves extremely well as a base for further investigation.

Starting with the built environment of Eleonas, official data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority (HSA) counts in the demarcated area 3332 buildings as of 2011 (Figure 5.13). Up until 1990 the area saw a steady increase in construction but at a decreasing rate with a total of 416 new buildings in 70 years. This linear evolution was abruptly disrupted between 1991 and 1995 when an impressive boom of 1953 new buildings appeared in the area. The reason for this boom is not explained by the HSA but it cannot be considered random. The timeframe is very specific and coincides with the two major Presidential Decrees of 1991 and 1995. Therefore, it can only be assumed that this sudden emergence of new buildings is tied to the inclusion of Eleonas in the city plan and to the wave of regularisation of buildings that ensued. This assumption is further reinforced as the number of new constructions fell back to pre-1991 levels from 1996 onwards. This is indeed the first moment of major policy related shift in the 20th century and one that was pivotal in the evolution of the area, as I will explore further in later chapters. It increased the complexity of managing the area, froze any potential regeneration, eventually pushing it further towards the stalemate it experiences and its labelling as a non-urban area.

![Figure 5.13 Number of buildings constructed in Eleonas from 1919 to 2011 (Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority)](image-url)
The neglect and disregard of Eleonas however is also linked to the design of its buildings. According to the HSA, in Eleonas, only 25% of the buildings share party walls leaving 75% of the built environment to be constituted of detached buildings. This translates to an enormous amount of unbuilt space that is characteristic of a porous yet not permeable landscape. The space of Eleonas is therefore shaped and structured by the relative position and orientation of buildings instead of pre-determined plans, a cadastre, or any deliberate planning process. To facilitate the analysis of Eleonas’ built environment, personal observations informed the architectural aspects of the various existing architectural types that I sorted into three separate categories: (1) industrial and manufacturing, (2) housing and (3) offices and retail buildings (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Typology of building types in Eleonas according to their main use: industrial and manufacturing, housing, office and retail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industrial and manufacturing</strong></td>
<td>Large industrial</td>
<td>Structures built specifically for industrial purposes of large-scale production, not storage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shed type (either abandoned or in good condition)</td>
<td>Light structures built for various purposes of storing/manufacturing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small industrial – manufacturing legacy</td>
<td>Buildings built for medium scale manufactures usually 2 or 3 stories but still compact and engraved in the urban tissue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single-storey manufacture/garage, etc.</td>
<td>Old and one of the first buildings to be built in the area for the first manufactures. Single-storey buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aggregated buildings</td>
<td>Series of smaller units combined to serve as companies expanded and need more room for more sizeable activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td>Small country houses</td>
<td>Low-storey residential buildings usually found in rural areas. Eleonas was a rural area and has since retained some of these buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Polykatikia” multi-storey buildings</td>
<td>Predominant residential multi-storey buildings of Greece. Exclusively built for housing, can often accommodate retail and small manufacturing on the ground floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refugee shelter (container)</td>
<td>Temporary structures for immigrants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office and large retail</strong></td>
<td>Office building (70s-80s)</td>
<td>Typical office multi-storey buildings dating from late 20th century.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Industrial-type buildings accommodate industrial and manufacturing activities but also what the HSA categorises as “other uses” since the architecture of industrial buildings is very flexible to accommodate a variety of activities and can also be fitted with relative ease to various needs. They make up the majority of Eleonas’ form and are characteristically of very large dimensions and surrounded by vast open spaces (Figure 5.14). This architecture and its related urban design are the most important factors in the clear morphological distinction between Eleonas and homogenous residential fabric of Athens which clearly differentiates Eleonas and forces the conceptualisation of an isolated and alien region. As the industrial sector was gradually weakened in the last decades, several of these constructions were partially or totally abandoned with a large part of them falling into ruins and leaving Eleonas in state of apparent dereliction.

In total contrast to this industrial typology, the few houses of Eleonas range from single-storey houses, multi-stories apartment buildings to containers (i.e. refugee camp) and are of small scale relative to the industrial typology. Hence, they entertain
clumsy relations with the predominant industrial landscape surrounding them (Figure 5.15). Small country houses are the oldest houses in the area dating from before the wave of industrialisation that followed WWII. They are usually clustered together and form enclaves that are closer to the morphology of a village or of suburban areas. The ‘polykatikia’ type of housing is more recent – 1960s to 1980s – and usually found on the edges of Eleonas since the inner parts were at that time actively transformed into an incongruous industrial landscape. Lastly, the temporary refugee village is also worth mentioning as a residential typology since over 2,000 refugees currently reside in the area and form their own islet of life. These typologies do not mix, they are totally separated geographically and are dispersed among the five municipalities constituting Eleonas.

![Figure 5.15 Photographs of the housing typology of buildings in Eleonas (small country houses)](image)

Lastly, the relatively recent tertiary sector including offices and large retail found its place in newly constructed multi-storey glass buildings and large open space showrooms respectively. Following logics of location optimisation, they were constructed along the major transportation infrastructure. Their construction, however, reinforced the impact of de-industrialisation as the larger peripheral roads were punctuated with offices, malls and retail depots that concentrate the activity on the edges of the area. These new impenetrable designs effectively segregate further the inner parts of Eleonas from its surroundings as these new valued spaces construct a massive glass facade that rejects any attempt to penetrate the area (Figure 5.16). As Kotsikou (2009) observes, “highways constitute links of the city with the rest of the world, yet they also construct barriers in the neighbourhood level. So the dual character of these elements is then high connectivity in the national scale but low accessibility in the neighbourhood scale” (Kotsikou, 2009, p. 61). Incidentally, as Athenians enter Eleonas only to exit on the other side, these roads were designed to promote speed and optimal transit (Llop Torné et al., 2012) rendering all the areas behind them of secondary relevance.
5.3.2 Transportation network

Although these major transportation axes devoid of any urban quality are what most passers-by know of Eleonas, the transportation network of the area is strikingly diverse yet unreliable and inadequate for the heavy flows of a predominantly industrial area. As it can be seen on Figure 5.17 three types of roads serve Eleonas. Highways such as Kifissou Avenue (1) and Piraeus Avenue (3) that connect it to national and international road networks, a series of transversal roads (Athinon Avenue (4), Iera Street (5) and Petrou Ralli Street (6)) connecting the centre of Athens to its western suburbs and lastly a network of capillary streets that serve the inner parts of Eleonas and its buildings.

Figure 5.17 Maps highlighting the main transportation axes crossing Eleonas (in red): 1. Kifissou Boulevard; 2. railway; 3. Piraeus Avenue; 4. Athinon Avenue; 5.Iera Street; Orfeos Street. The rest of the road network (in grey) is composed predominantly of small street and dead ends. (Source: Author).
The most striking aspect of this amalgam is the lack of transversal connections between the main east-west roads which adds to the narrative of a secluded and impenetrable area.\textsuperscript{26} This difficulty and often inability to reach the inner parts of Eleonas is one of the main reasons it has transformed into a sanctuary for unregulated and transgressive activities as I will explore in the next section. But, besides the restrained movement from an outsider’s point of view, the capillary network of streets is far from optimal for the operation of the activities it serves. As it has been repeatedly mentioned, nothing in Eleonas followed deliberate planning and the road network is no exception. Indeed, these smaller streets were to a certain extent accidentally created depending on the arrangement of buildings and the location of the ongoing manufacturing and industrial activities. This type of network might have been adequate before the mass industrialisation of the area, but in recent decades its transformation saw an important shift from productive activities to logistics and storage which brought massive additional transportation flows. Figure 5.18 demonstrates that both in terms of connectivity and transportation the impressive number of dead-ends, the low amplitude, their constant change of direction and the lack of sidewalks translate into an overused and always cluttered road network that is unsuitable for the main activity it serves, unsafe for soft transport modes, and extremely polluting.

Public transportation in Eleonas is divided in three categories. The subway, the bus network and the regional/international bus service (KTEL). Each of these serve the area in different ways and with different purposes. Clearly the bus network is predominant in the area as can be seen on Figure 5.19. Bus lines run along all major transversal roads – Athinon Avenue, Iera Street, and Petrou Ralli Street – and occasionally penetrate the area. This happens five times:

1. in the north just above Akadimia Platonos
2. in the centre on Polykarpou Street (very heavily used by the refugee population living in the camp)
3. south of Polykarpou Street, on Orfeos Street
4. in the south within the residential neighbourhood of the municipality of Tavros
5. at the end of Agias Annis Street where the street meets Kifissou Boulevard.

\textsuperscript{26} Transportation data from the Region of Attica shows that 10,000 to 40,000 vehicles cross these east-west axes daily (see Appendix 8: Map of motorised vehicle flows traversing Eleonas).
Figure 5.18 Map showing the difference in street grids and connections between Eleonas and the rest of Athens. The boundaries of Eleonas are clearly apparent and the very low number of streets connecting the main roads to the inner parts of Eleonas is striking. (Source: Author).
Figure 5.19 Map showing the bus network of Eleonas, the current KTEL terminal (circled in red), the site for the foreseen International Bus Terminal (in red) and the location of the only Metro stop: Eleonas. The clear lack of service within the area itself is staggering and it is also clear that the bus lines are limited to the main transversal road axes passing through Eleonas. (Source: Region of Attica).
Apart from Agias Annis Street, all ‘penetrations’ are transversal and thus do not reach the ‘deeper’ parts of Eleonas as the lack of North-South connection is flagrant. Notably, two of these lines (on Orfeos Street and in Tavros) end in dead ends reinforcing the point about the lack of dispersed accessibility (Figure 5.20). It is notable that the bus network serves mostly residential areas except for Orfeos Street which is essentially populated with manufactures and services.

![Figure 5.20 Photographs illustrating the different types of roads that make the transportation network of Eleonas. Top row: small capillary streets and dead-ends; middle row: larger transversal East-West avenues; bottom row: the national highway Kifissou Boulevard](image)

This impact of this lack of connectivity means that the people working in the area are constrained to use their personal cars instead of opting for public transport to reach their place of work (Figure 5.21). A second consequence, perhaps expected, is that because buses are concentrated on the main roads, they add a significant load to the flows described above.
Finally, the construction of the metro helped in reducing the use of cars in Athens overall but not necessarily in Eleonas. As described above, the main roads traversing the area are mostly used as corridors to cross from the eastern or western parts of the city to the other instead of serving the area itself. Thus, the subway station is addressed to the people working in the area, the students of the Agricultural University of Athens and the residents. Unfortunately, as it was evidenced by the inadequate street network and the limited bus service, locals tend to predominantly use their cars. Some interviewees even argued that the large amount of free space in the area does not constrain them in terms of parking space and thus there is indeed no reason not to use the car. Nevertheless, Ms ELR2 (Markoni resident) explained that the subway is in fact heavily used in the mornings and afternoons by employees working in buildings located on Athinon Avenue.27

5.3.3 Unbuilt space, agricultural lands and vacant lots

Beyond the built reality of Eleonas, the unbuilt environment further distinguishes Eleonas from Athens. Open areas result from either interstitial space between two or more entities, or are the remainder of an already obsolete condition, land-use or activity. As such, designed public space does not formally exist. Instead, a certain informal activity develops as residents, workers and ethnic minorities occupy the territory in an ephemeral and temporary way. Unbuilt spaces in Eleonas are of three types: the natural pockets and public parks, the remaining productive lots and finally the residual vacant industrial lots (Figure 5.22). These places, used or abandoned, protected or free, were rarely created on purpose but were usually the fruit of multiple land divisions. This patchwork of vacant parcels combined with the deterioration of the built form conveys a sense of decay, abandonment and recklessness as limits are

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27 Unfortunately, these flows of movement were not photographically documented during fieldwork, but these descriptions were validated at separate occasions during separate interviews.
often vague, untreated and leave no sense of ownership if only the ephemeral passage of some forgotten activity.

![Figure 5.22](image)

*Figure 5.22 From left to right and top to bottom: Photographs of productive agricultural areas (1,2,3), natural parks (4,5), overgrown patches (6) and vacant lots (7,8,9) in Eleonas.*

The built environment has thus developed to be an exemplar representation of a porous, impermeable and fragmented urban fabric composed essentially of independent units connecting interestingly the works of Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour (1972) to those of Secchi and Vigano (2011). Now, the three elements explored in this section, the buildings, roads and open spaces, shape the program and activity of the built environment. However, the opposite stands too in the sense that activity favours a specific type of environment. A certain "mix of mixes" therefore organically emerges in the sense Wood and Dovey (2015) observed in Melbourne’s creative clusters. The presumed ‘urban void’ of Eleonas is not composed of a mix of urban entities (i.e. buildings, roads and open spaces) or a mix of activities, it is instead made of an extremely complex mix of both.
5.3.4 Land use and activities of a decaying industrial landscape

The reading of Eleonas' built environment informed three key observations regarding the evolution of the area in the 20th and 21st centuries. The processes of urban transformation shaped the relation Eleonas entertains with the city of Athens and led towards the creation of post-industrial patterns in the way Loukaitou-Sideris (1996) and Levy (1999) illustrate. Firstly, the downfall of the industrial sector in the 1970s and 1980s led to the partial or total abandonment of many industrial buildings and their eventual ruination. Secondly, the anarchic evolution of the area gave birth to a chaotic road network composed of the superimposition of national highways, regional roads and neighbourhood streets unsuitable for industrial use. Indeed, as the major transportation axes were used to convey development and economic growth, the condition of the smaller scale translates the incapacity of the city to confront and include Eleonas in its networks. Lastly, at the cracks between buildings and roads emerged a variety of open spaces either well defined or vague. Reminders of the former agricultural production and industrial activity of the area, or spaces of leisure such as parks and archaeological sites that are deteriorating at an alarming rate. Furthermore, as Greece navigated a political and economic state of crisis for over a decade, this decay was hastened. However, the obsolescence of built form is not the sole nor the main reason for its decay. In the face of deindustrialisation and the lack of planning vision and action, the activities that inhabit Eleonas are corroding its built, natural and social environments.

Datasets of business activity are slightly inconsistent between public agencies (the HSA and the ACCI) which raises another question of the availability and reliability of existing data to inform decision-making. A topic that is not explored in this thesis, but which is relevant to acknowledge as another obstacle in understanding the area which could, figuratively speaking, be characterised an ‘informational void’. These datasets do however inform several interesting readings which are explored in this section. Regarding activity and use of spaces, the HSA divides buildings between single and mixed use and according to their predominant activity. 64% of the buildings in Eleonas are of mixed use showing a very high degree of mix. Data on building occupation shows that 60% hold “other uses” followed by housing (19%), dedicated industry or manufacture (13%) and lastly offices and retail (3%). Secondary uses such as

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churches, hotels, schools, parking and healthcare account for the remainder 5% of buildings altogether. To understand the impact of this diversified activity and especially of the productive and commercial activities – totalling 76% of the building occupancy – on Eleonas it is crucial to understand first its composition and location.

Data from ACCI, represented in Table 5.4 and its related graph, reveals three major categories: a predominance of the commercial sector, followed by manufacturing and industry and lastly services of which transport companies are an important part. The first observation that can be drawn based on the nature of this activity is that all sectors – with the exception perhaps of the tertiary – induce an important physical strain on the urban fabric. Cars, trucks and pedestrians share the same narrow, capillary transportation network, which as the following photographs show, is in poor condition and deteriorating at a much faster pace than what could be expected from a proper industrial zone (Figure 5.23).

Table 5.4 Distribution of activity amongst surveyed companies in Eleonas. (Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTOR</th>
<th># of businesses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving companies</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1485</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.23 Photographs of the decaying road network within Eleonas and cases of intense flooding within the area.
Besides the traffic loads however, the nature of the ongoing activity and the lack of proper infrastructure to support it leads to the destruction of both private and public land. As companies are limited by space yet unaffected by regulations, they very often pollute the remaining natural environment – specifically the last open stream of Profitis Daniil – and surroundings by discharging untreated waste (ENVECO S.A., 2011a, 2011b). Interestingly, a certain informal use of public space has emerged in the form of loading and unloading, dumping, and even manufacturing as companies were seen to block streets with parked trucks, cut stones outside of their grounds, and expand their stores on the adjacent pavement and street. These occur to higher or lesser degrees throughout Eleonas depending on the location of active companies. Mapping the ACCI database using GIS software shows a significant concentration of activities along the most important roads crossing the area (see Figure 5.24). The following Table 5.5 features the streets in Eleonas where two or more companies are found and emphasizes the reality of this trend. The busiest streets are not only the largest but also the only few that cross Eleonas completely from North to South or East to West (i.e. Athinon street, Ofeos street, Kifissou avenue, P. Ralli street, Konstantinoupoloeyes street, Polykarpou Street and Iera Street).

Table 5.5 Streets of Eleonas where two or more active companies (highlighted in blue the current number of companies) are located. The most represented streets in this table coincide also with being the main arteries and busiest transportation axes crossing the area. (Source: Author).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANUFACTURING</th>
<th>COMMERCIAL</th>
<th>SERVICES</th>
<th>MOVING COMPANIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATHINON</td>
<td>AG. ANNIS</td>
<td>AG. ANNIS</td>
<td>KORYTSAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTIGONIS</td>
<td>ATHINON</td>
<td>KORYTSAS</td>
<td>KONSTANTINOUPOLEOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIMARAKI</td>
<td>DRAKONTOS</td>
<td>DRAKONTOS</td>
<td>ORFEOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRAKONTOS</td>
<td>IROUS</td>
<td>IROUS</td>
<td>POLYKARPOU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IROUS</td>
<td>IERA ODOS</td>
<td>IERA ODOS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IERA ODOS</td>
<td>KASSANDRAS</td>
<td>KASSANDRAS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KDMEIAS</td>
<td>KIFISOI</td>
<td>KIFISOI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIFISOI</td>
<td>ORFEOS</td>
<td>ORFEOS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORFEOS</td>
<td>POLYKRATOS</td>
<td>ORFEOS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. RALLI</td>
<td>S. PATSI</td>
<td>P. RALLI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLYKRATOS</td>
<td>STRYMONGOS</td>
<td>PEIRAIOS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRYMONGOS</td>
<td></td>
<td>SERVION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SIDOKASTROU</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adding to this point, Figure 5.24 informs of an impressive absence of activity in Eleonas in comparison to the rest of Athens with a clear interruption at the edges of the area and a gradual decrease of businesses as we move towards its southern parts. This pattern of a scarce yet diffuse activity that favours main roads seems to be repeated throughout the case study and is a distinctive characteristic of Eleonas as opposed to Athens where activity is instead heavily concentrated on high streets.
Figure 5.24 Map showing the location of active companies in and around Eleonas: commercial (blue), manufacturing (green) and services (red). The clear stoppage of clustering of activity at the borders of Eleonas highlights its 'void' condition. (GIS data from Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry).
And although the observed dispersion may seem at first random it is in fact not. It follows very specific rules of productivity, interest and market proximity as the history of Eleonas’ evolution showed leading activity to concentrate close or far from residential areas, along main roads, and on large empty plots depending on their needs. However, while this model of urbanisation may be optimal for the operation of these businesses and industries, it is catastrophic for the overarching environment of Eleonas as it generates enormous blank areas of inactivity – built or not – that are literally left to decay and eventually fall into disrepair. Furthermore, these alterations of density in constructions and activity define – often unintentionally – sub-regions within Eleonas that stand out even in cases where their borders are physically less obvious. Several such situations are explored in more detail in the following sections and chapters, as they are key in understanding the dynamics of the urban void and the way they affect the imaginaries of the population of Eleonas but also those of policy makers and the strategies they end up employing towards Eleonas’ neighbourhoods.

What is important at this stage is to stress that these are landscapes of residue or dross as per Berger (2006) that are pushed away because of their residual status and their dirty and non-urban activity. Thus, as the city turns its back to these spaces, Eleonas is restricted to evolve in an introverted way with the impossibility to create resilient connections with the city of Athens. Eventually this is translated in the ruining – as in the process of becoming a ruin – at all scales from the very buildings and small pockets of nature to that of large industrial lots leading eventually to the conceptualisation of the entire territory of Eleonas as a ruined landscape. Yet, the notion of the ruin is not a passive state of being. As Edensor argues, “far from being waste spaces in which nothing happens, industrial ruins are thickly woven into local practices ranging from the carnivalesque to the mundane, from the artistic to the eccentric” (Edensor, 2011, p. 252). This is very close to what was observed while surveying Eleonas and is absolutely core to the operation and perhaps the less obvious role of the area.

29 Refer to Section 5.2. for specific examples including tanneries that have historically located along the natural streams, and industries on large empty plots to dispose of their waste.
5.3.5 Suspended spaces and transgressive practices

As one travels either by foot, bike or motorised vehicle from the centre of Athens towards the west, they will be greeted abruptly by large infrastructure, buildings and inaccessible open spaces. Landmarks marking the end of a well organised Athenian landscape and the beginning of the “rest”, the “chaos”, the “unknown” that is Eleonas; to duplicate expressions locals used to describe their perception of the area. With this passage from one urban form to the other, planning action and governance also comes to a halt. The lack of coordination, cooperation or any type of discussion between the different public actors regarding the role of Eleonas in the larger regional dynamics, results in that Eleonas is generally faced with frustration by policy makers, who view the area as the first location where discarded activities and populations ought to be transferred. This aspect was not challenged during interviews with key actors, it was instead met with sour acknowledgement – except for some policy makers who did not consider this vision problematic. Therefore, voluntarily, by negligence, or due to specific constrains (i.e. economic, political, or social), the current planning system and its long bureaucratic processes postpone plans and freeze the area, its neighbourhoods and regions in a sort of temporal and administrative suspension.

Such ‘suspended spaces’ – all of which will be explored in detail in later sections – include the archaeological site of Plato’s Academy, its park and its adjacent neighbourhood, Markoni’s residential cluster, the rest – a large part of central Eleonas with relatively blurred boundaries dismissed by interviewees as inhospitable and eerie, and finally the construction site of the Double Regeneration. All these areas share attributes of decay as it can be seen from the photographs of Figure 5.25. What differentiates them however from other decrepit structures and places is their relative higher degree of accessibility. As mentioned earlier, formal public space does not explicitly exist. Instead, civic life occupies these suspended spaces, their buildings, greenery and deserted industrial often ephemerally and temporarily. In such a way, alternative, unregulated and marginal activities thrive in Eleonas underpinned by the indeterminacy that the environment of Eleonas allows. Here I should make a distinction between alternative and unregulated activities. In the frame of this study I define alternative activities as those that are at first glance incompatible with a heavily

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30 Planning discussions revolve rather around architectural interventions on specific sites within Eleonas instead. This topic is explored in much detail in the following Chapters 6 and 7.
industrial landscape. These include for instance theatres, open markets, radio studios, and nightclubs which find a place in Eleonas essentially because of the very low cost of land. But also, urban tourism that draws university students, architects, researchers and tourist group tours that find interest in the oddities that Eleonas has to offer (Mr ELW2 interview). On the other hand, unregulated and marginal activities include squatting, Roma camps, drug dealing, prostitution and trafficking which benefit from the potential to hide and be ignored.

Across policies, activities and spaces a notion of increasing entropy emerges in a metaphorical sense, as Eleonas is left unattended and its disorder and chaotic condition intensifies in comparison to the organised and static residential fabric of Athens. Indeed, the stable and organised condition of the urban centre is left behind. In the words of Bernardo Secchi, the built environment becomes “a space that is hard to cross [and] the settlement for weak, marginal, and barely institutionalised functions” (Secchi in GUST, 1999, p. 239). Eventually what is considered mainstream is reversed. If opposed to the rest of Athens, Eleonas stands out as the abnormal; but the opposite becomes true as well. And once the focus is put on Eleonas what would be considered mainstream urban functions become the exception as they are gradually replaced with uncommon and irregular ones (Figure 5.25).

Figure 5.25 Photographs illustrating the unregulated and bottom-up use of space which includes improvised weekly flea markets, squats, pop-up theatres (Cartel), etc.
5.4 Fragmented and marginalised: Six neighbourhoods to explore the local dynamics of Eleonas

So far, Eleonas has been depicted as an area either left behind the exponential evolution of Athens; as a side effect or an outgrowth of the city’s networks and systems; or finally, as the result of unexpected events (i.e. Picon’s (2000) anxious landscapes). In this context what matters most is not its worsening physical condition, its emptiness or the lack of activity. Instead, what is critical is the reluctance from citizens and policy makers to consider it an integral part of the urban system which leads back to the conceptualisation of the area as a *backyard for unwanted uses*. To better understand the underlying reasons of this situation, I move from investigating the regional scale to that of the municipality to explore the contexts of six carefully selected units of analysis, namely Akadimia, Markoni, Polykarpou, Kifissos, Orfeos and finally Rentis as shown in Table 5.6 and the map below (Figure 5.26). The table below reiterates the core aspects of each area which were first described in detail in Chapter 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Akadimia</strong></td>
<td>Located at the northern edge of Eleonas, the area is best known for the archaeological site of Plato’s Academy. It is currently heavily occupied by car garages and small manufactures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Markoni</strong></td>
<td>Wider area around the oldest residential enclave of bearing the same name. It includes an extremely high variety of uses from large productive industries, to retail, moving companies, a semi-operational military base, and the Agricultural University of Athens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Polykarpou</strong></td>
<td>Core area in Eleonas between the major transportation axes of Iera Street, Orfeos Street, Agias Annis Street. It encloses several large industries, the Double Regeneration construction site and the refugee camp. It is also of interest due to the existence of the water stream of Profitis Daniil, the only natural element remaining from the old olive grove.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orfeos</strong></td>
<td>Contiguous to Orfeos Street, this area is one of the busiest in Eleonas. Currently occupied essentially by moving companies it holds a very long industrial heritage and is fully in the rest part of Eleonas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31 Refer to Appendix 1010 for zoomed in maps of each unit of analysis.
32 Refer Chapter 4, section 4.9.2 for an extended description of the six units and the rationale for their selection.
| **Kifissos** | A segment of Kifissou Avenue between Iera Street and Petrou Ralli Street. Less populated by businesses, the massive infrastructure of the highway splits brutally the urban fabric and segregates the western suburbs from the rest of Athens. |
| **Rentis** | Sharing the name of the municipality in which it is located, this area covers the part of Eleonas that accounts partly to the municipality of Agios Ioannis Rentis and partly to that of Tavros. It includes a mix of industrial, residential, leisure areas as well as a large part of the rest. |

![Figure 5.26](identical-to-Figure-4.7) Map highlighting the location of the six 'units of analysis' within Eleonas and the administrative borders of the five municipalities managing Eleonas (dashed red line). (Source: Author).

In the following sections I observe and analyse the form, activity, history, transformation and demographics of these areas combining information from the datasets used for the large-scale investigation of Eleonas (i.e. statistical data from the ACCI and the HSA) with additional desktop research, interviews, maps, and
personal observations and photographs. Instead of looking at these units one by one, I have grouped their analysis under three narratives once more based upon the three-pronged conceptual framework. The first explores the links, and lack thereof, between urban form and land use, the second discusses the impact of inappropriate planning decisions and, lastly, the third covers how the morphology and policies affect and are affected by local demographics and socio-economic relations. This allows me to compare more directly the attributes and peculiarities of each area and draw important conclusion regarding the trajectory of Eleonas and its role within the urban system of Athens.

5.4.1 Interdependencies of urban form and land use at the scale of the neighbourhood

Unsurprisingly, the urban form of the six areas incorporate the morphological attributes of Eleonas as described earlier in this chapter. Yet, they also possess several distinctive characteristics and combinations of the above that make them stand out as separate systems.

**Akadimia**, displays the same unstructured network of roads that characterises Eleonas with dead-ends and sinuous paths that solely serve the adjacent businesses of which the majority are garages and building related manufactures. The large park of Plato’s Academy is extremely favoured by locals and works as a buffer between the houses and the part included in Eleonas where the urban form is composed essentially of small and middle scale fitted warehouses with large internal space. However, the precarious nature of the built environment accentuates the perception of a degrading area and it is not uncommon to encounter large open spaces that remain empty or are used informally as parking space.

Similarly, **Markoni**’s urban form is composed of a wide spectrum from small to very large lots that hint at the historical subdivision of land that occurred after the Ottoman period. Accordingly, the buildings’ size reflects that of the lot and to some extent also the land use as houses and small businesses (car repair, etc.) are located in smaller units and large manufacturers or storage (moving companies, storage and manufacturing) in bigger ones. Due to this unplanned allocation of uses, Markoni is marked by the odd and inconsistent coexistence of building types and incompatible uses. For instance, annexed to the residential enclave one will find very large paper and dye manufactures located in old and precarious buildings with sub-par safety
measures, as the majority of such constructions were self-built, and legalised often via briberies. The area is in fact saturated with a mix of uses, a quality that many cities planning authorities encourage (Ferm & Jones, 2016, 2017; Moritz et al., 2014, 2013), but which has yet to become the object of any vision or plan for Eleonas.

Conversely, in Polykarpou the same type of contrast emerges albeit much more brutally than in Akadimia or Markoni. At the easternmost border of Eleonas, where the railway tracks and Piraeus avenue mark the virtual end of the city of Athens, is located an important residential neighbourhood. As the following set of photographs shows (Figure 5.27), this dense residential cluster gives a certain thickness to the limit between Eleonas and Athens and tricks the unaware passers-by in presuming that they never left the continuous residential tissue of the capital. Yet, once they cross the last planned street a much more porous landscape of individual large units surrounded by large open space, greenery or concrete suddenly appears. It is the place where the highest diversity of uses of Eleonas is found. Indeed, from small and large manufacturers, to movers, coffee shops and canteens, informal and formal flea markets, recycling companies, the very last individual houses, the refugee camp and wholesalers, all find their place in the growing arbitrariness of Polykarpou’s built form.

![Figure 5.27 Photographs of the last residential ‘buffer’ before entering Eleonas.](image)

However, these architectural and planning irregularities are not limited to Polykarpou but extend, to various degrees, to most of the southern part of Eleonas; coinciding with an indeterminate area dubbed by many locals as ‘the rest’ most pronounced in and around Orfeos. As it has been mentioned several times in this chapter, activity and urban form in Eleonas are intrinsically related and affect one another. Most companies located in Orfeos are related either to manufacturing or logistics and transportation of goods. As heavy transportation flows navigate in and out daily, the road network is incapable to absorb them leading to incredible congestion problems. This is especially visible in Orfeos Street which does not exceed 6-9 meters in width,

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33 According to reflections from locals
yet where 35 tonnes trucks cross as they enter and exit the region. In fact, aside from the car load, the road infrastructure is lacking in size and condition for any type of land use, be it residential, commercial or manufacturing. Sidewalks and well-maintained streets can be found only in the residential enclaves following the initiatives of residents; drainage is non-existent in the ‘off-grid’ inner streets as it can be seen in Figure 5.28 and Figure 5.29 leading to flash flooding in the area on a yearly basis (Panayotopoulos-Tsiros, 2016). As for Kifissou Avenue, the infrastructure brutally divides its immediate urban environment as only very few exits, and crossings exists and are ill-disposed to pedestrian use (Figure 5.29).

Figure 5.28 Map showing the density of Athens’ stormwater drainage network (in dark blue). The incredible lack of draining infrastructure in Eleonas in comparison to the rest of the city is clearly visible and is also the root of yearly flooding events occurring in the area. (Source: Region of Attica).
However, as grim as this reality might seem, the diversity and complexity that Eleonas presents could be turned into a strength for its future. The location of this type of flexible environments connected to international transportation networks and located mid-way between the port of Piraeus and central Athens could be enhanced and preserved for the optimal operation of the city. Especially today where the ‘internet of things’ produces increased logistic flows, as I argue in the discussion that follows in Chapter 7. Yet, despite being vital zones for the city they still follow their own timeline parallel to the course of Athens and remain outside of the city’s main preoccupations for growth.

5.4.2 The crucial impact of mismanaged planning and political decisions

As the historical overview outlined at the beginning of this chapter, these areas were not always as chaotic and mismanaged. Ropaitou-Tsapareli (2006) gives us incredible insight in what Eleonas was a century ago which is of great interest to understand the major trends of urban transformation that took place after WWII. All areas where composed of a mix of houses, orchards, local shops and small manufactures. In this subsection, I go back in time and look at why and how each unit evolved differently despite being part of the same overarching region. Three types of change stand out primarily to have occurred in the contemporary era. These include changes in the neighbourhoods’ contexts, political and planning swings, and lastly several attempts at the implementation of very large projects. Searching for underlying strategies of development, I contrast the various documented visions and approaches to the evolution of each case, as well as why they were successful or not, and touch the surface of the finer grained relations between policy makers and their conception of the urban void – a topic that I continue to discuss extensively in the next chapters.
Alterations in the structure of the neighbourhood are most apparent in Markoni where residents cling onto their enclave and recall the very fast (less than 50 years) transformation of their neighbourhood and community. The broader Markoni zone was scarcely populated and was one of the first areas were Greek migrants would arrive leading during the 1950s to the construction of the houses that compose today the residential cluster. Based on accounts gathered by Ropaitou-Tsapareli, the Markoni area in the 1950s was full of orchards (mainly cultivating artichokes), fields for animals, and very few houses. Yet, until the early 80s when the residential enclave was included, like an “independent islet in the city plan”, 45 families or 350 people lived in the area (Koutsiotis, n.d.). During that period, in and around Markoni, one could find a taverna-caffé, a bakery, a football club, a butcher, a hairdresser and a dentist (Ropaitou-Tsapareli, 2006, p. 207) none of which remain today, according to Mr ELR1 (President of Markoni’s Resident Association); the director of the local residents’ association. Reminding more of a village setting than an urban one, a strong feeling of neighbourhood and community dominated – interestingly still present to this day despite the loss of all neighbourhood establishments – but the incredible place of free-play and full of life that older residents recall is long gone. Today, most former residents have left and are replaced by occasional waves of immigrants primarily of Pakistani, Albanian and Romanian origins (Ropaitou-Tsapareli, 2006, p. 207). The 100-ish locals however don’t mind, “we live calmly, it’s like a village here” Mr ELR1 (President of Markoni’s Resident Association) says. Yet, disappointment is heavily present. Residents condemn the lack of holistic vision as only syringe actions and projects: defined here as projects with very narrow objectives and ambitions such as malls, stadiums and large corporate buildings are planned and follow exclusively political and financial interests. Enhancing the locality is allegedly not on the policy agenda even though politicians have visited the area over the years to see first-hand the odd phenomenon of Markoni’s residential cluster. Instead, bottom-up initiatives are the only way that residents can move towards a healthier environment. One of these initiatives included working with a drug rehabilitation centre that prompted drug-addicts to work in the area together with the residents to build a small neighbourhood square. “The extremes broke us in Greece. It is either all green or all chaos” Mr ELR1 commented on the inability of the city to provide with meaningful changes which instead promises large redevelopment projects that never see the light of day.

34 A taverna is the Greek equivalent of a local restaurant-café.
An explicit case of this phenomenon was the unsuccessful development of one of Athens’ largest malls on a vacant plot north of Akadimia and along Kifissou avenue. Following 11 years of talks, BlackRock, a global investment management corporation, and the Greek government began in 2018 working towards a 120,000m² mall (Delevegos, 2018). In 2019, the project was dropped due to a “lack of confidence in the country’s economy” (Koukoutsas, 2018) reminiscent of the fate of the Double Regeneration project. Crucially, the location of the project close to small-scale residential areas attracted debates and controversies amidst residents. Many also found the development to be ironic, as the nearby archaeological site is left to decay. Like Markoni, grassroot movements attempt to rekindle the historical legacy of the Academy and make the area attractive for tourists but also for their community. Unfortunately, without the support of the state both the archaeological park and the broader area progressively decayed from within. This difficulty to grow can be linked back to the 1995 Presidential Decree. The land uses that were set at that time followed a hygienist approach and a logic of beautification of Eleonas through natural green spaces. Unfortunately, as Ms HMEE3 (Retired member of the Agency of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens) mentioned during our interview this vision was a utopia for the type of area Eleonas had grown into. The binding status of the plan however hinders the potential of companies to expand and evolve. Hence, although the PD could have been a tool and an opportunity to direct and control growth, it has turned into a policy that totally freezes development.

In Polykarpou, especially, this blockage is felt greatly. The multiplicity of companies located in the area have always provided an incredible richness to the neighbourhood. Until 1950 it was composed by a variety of uses including churches, orchards and gardens, furnaces, agricultural land, pastures, a couple tavernas, a cafe, various manufactures and chiefly the largest Greek paper and tissue manufacture: SOFTEX (Ropaitou-Tsapareli, 2006). SOFTEX was indeed a major player in the transformation of the area. Operating from 1936 until 2016, it gradually bought most of the land around its main plot (see map in Appendix 11) and turned what used to be agricultural land into an industrial complex of buildings, streets and yards. To this day, the streets built by the company for the operation of its business are used daily and are a clear example of how industries lead and dictated the transformation of Eleonas instead of planning bodies. However, in 2015 a controversial fire burned the main building of

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35 Of Greek and international origin. Among others the French manufacturer of roof tiles KYKLOPS (ΚΥΚΛΟΨ)
SOFTEX. The mother company, Italian Bolton Group, then deemed it too expensive
to recover and in 2016 permanently closed one of the most important Greek factories
despite pleas from the Ministry to keep the company running (Proto Thema, 2016).
The closure of SOFTEX meant the abandonment of all its buildings and sites leading
thus to the dereliction of a large part of Polykarpou. Yet, empty buildings and sites
are easily re-invested. Currently, informal squats but also new businesses have found
space in the industrial shells and open yards of SOFTEX. Polykarpou has indeed
been an area of perpetual transformations. Projects and developments come and go,
depending on the economic landscape and political will. The most recent ones include
the failed Double Regeneration project, the Refugee Camp, a pop-up theatre, and the
new International Bus Terminal.

If Polykarpou sits between development and negligence, **Orfeos** and **Rentis**
stand on the polar opposite sides of this spectrum. The first is totally neglected and the
second is the only municipality of Eleonas that has advanced in implementing the
changes brought by the 1995 PD. Orfeos was always the industrial core of Eleonas.
By the 1950s it was already composed of small manufacturers, tanneries, furnaces,
amidst the typical agricultural lands and pastures. Very few houses existed and by
extension only one grocery store**36** (Ropaitou-Tsapareli, 2006). Here the unplanned
development of Orfeos meant the creation of a chaotic environment hostile to non-
users. An area that is to some extent unmapped, which eventually was dismissed by
several interviewees as the rest. Yet, it remains the most industrially active area of
Eleonas and consequently also the most underdeveloped says Mr ELW4. Rentis on
the other hand tells a very different story, even though it is neighbouring Orfeos.
During the interwar period the area of Rentis was full of orchards owned by a handful
of people (Ropaitou-Tsapareli, 2006, p. 210). These orchards were planted with a

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36 More specifically, coming from Athens, on the right hand-side on the corner with Spyrou
Patsi Street one used to find unbuilt lots. Between that and Dimaraki Street were found in
succession: a grocery store, a furniture maker (beds, mattresses and metal frames), 2-3
houses, one taverna, a cultivated garden, a farm with many cows, next to which was located
on very big tannery (Katranakis). Further down the road there was a large crop, a stable,
another crop, a tannery, and two large crops including a dairy farm. After Dimaraki Street,
followed a couple of gardens and a tannery before we arrive at the stream of Profitis Danil.
On the left hand-side, on the corner with Spyrou Patsi Street was a bakery, an enclosure for
goats, followed by a few houses (probably neighbouring the ones on the right side) and after
today’s Amfipoleos Street was (and still is) the military base of ROUF. Further down were four
tanneries, a few crops and a tannery. Towards Petrou Ralli Street was an industry processing
animal bones which closed around 30-35 years ago (on Petrou Ralli Street was also the big
biscuit manufacture of Papadopoulou Biscuits which is still operating to this day). Followed a
few crops and a taverna. Further down one would find a furnace and at the end of Orfeos (at
Agias Annis Street) was a cultivated garden. Translated from Ropaitou-Tsaparelli’s essay
(Ropaitou-Tsapareli, 2006, p. 194) (in Greek).
variety of trees such as olives, apricots, figs, palm trees, pomegranate and lemon trees. All the produced vegetables were transported to the market of “Lefka” (Λευκά) in Piraeus by carts. At the time, there were no roads but only footpaths which, when the area was urbanised, was an additional reason for an unstructured street network to develop. However, the municipality of Agios Ioannis Rentis (not to be confused with the unit of analysis called Rentis in this research) is the only of the five municipalities to have worked towards completion of the PD’s directives. Even though, as we move away from the municipality’s southern borders, its residential neighbourhoods and reach deeper into Eleonas several parts are still abandoned and decaying, a large part of the area of Eleonas belonging to the municipality of Agios Ioannis Rentis is also the most developed side of Eleonas (Figure 5.30). A network of designed streets has replaced the old industrial impasses; the largest fruit and vegetable market has been built at the southern corner of Rentis and is extremely active and constantly growing; sport centres and official football training fields have been built. Undeniably, the reality found in Rentis is a great example showcasing the importance of political will.

Figure 5.30 Photographs of the developed parts of Rentis. On the left a residential neighbourhood; on the right a municipal square.

5.4.3 Disadvantaged demographics as the cause and the result of planning ignorance

At this scale, the demographic alterations become evident and the geography of their location highlights that there is a logic underpinning these choices linked to the differential evolution of each studied area. The last aspect considered in this quest to
decipher why Eleonas is perceived as a backyard is the social composition of the units that constitute it (Table 5.7).37

Table 5.7 Populations living in each of the six ‘units of analysis’ as of the 2011 census. (Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Number of residents</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akadimia</td>
<td>1341</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markoni</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polykarpou</td>
<td>28 (plus ~ 2000 refugees living in the camp)</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orfeos</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kifissos</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rentis</td>
<td>1443</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3173 (not counting the refugee population)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the six units, Rentis is the most populated with 1443 residents. Interestingly, it is also presenting the highest percentage of people with limited education with 23.4% having not finished primary school and the 9.3% being totally illiterate, while 85.2% of the population have not continued to higher education. Undeniably, this relates to social class, the conditions of the work environment and the nature of the work provided. Historically, the municipality of Agios Ioannis Rentis was the first residence of immigrants from Minor Asia following the Catastrophe of Smyrna. To this day, the working-class legacy of the area remains and is confirmed by the HSA’s data on building occupancy that shows in Rentis a predominance of industries over housing. All over Eleonas, this trend is generally repeated. In Akadimia and Markoni, despite high percentages of low-educated people (9.8% and 17.7% respectively), they also show much higher numbers of young people continuing in higher education (22% and 11.9% respectively), which could be read as a transition between older generations of workers who have encouraged and given to their kids the opportunity to study further. Interviews also showed that indeed a lot of younger people studied at universities and left the area to live in other ‘better’ parts of Athens reminding of tendencies for rural exodus, except that Eleonas is at the centre of Athens.

37 All data regarding the demographics of Eleonas stem from the 2011 census and was provided by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (HSA).
Linking the HSA data on demographics and first-person accounts from the interviews with locals, a clear trend emerges where the more native Greeks leave Eleonas, the more people from other nationalities settle in. Overall, Greeks are predominant throughout Eleonas, but what is extremely interesting is that the further we move towards the inner parts of Eleonas the ratio of non-Greek populations rises. For instance, looking at the northern and southern edges of Eleonas, Akadimia and Rentis, over three quarters of the total residents are Greeks (87.3% and 76.9% respectively – reinforcing the status of Rentis as the first home of migrants). Past Athinon street into Markoni almost 30% are foreigners and once we look at Polykarpou the percentage jumps to 53.6%, not counting the residents of the refugee camp as the census took place prior to their arrival. Data from the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) set the number of refugees in Eleonas Camp at 1.470 for August-September 2018 (Appendix 12) although the interview with Ms ELE1 (Employee at the refugee camp Eleonas) in April 2018 suggested that the population of the camp was closer to 2.000 residents (UNHCR, 2018). Once however these populations are added to the permanent residents of Eleonas, then Polykarpou (otherwise containing 0.9% of the population) contains 2028 residents which propels it to the most populated area of Eleonas. This realisation opens a crucial debate regarding the purpose of planning for ‘temporary’ populations which although transitory, in actual numbers, are far from temporary. Planning officials admitted that the refugee camp was an ‘unknown’ to them and thus was, unfortunately, inconsequential to the trajectory of planning. Yet, this is an extremely flawed way of conducting planning as ignoring Eleonas Camp also means ignoring the most densely populated region of Eleonas. Lastly, despite Orfeos very industrious nature, 103 people still live in the area where 29% are foreigners; the second highest percentage behind Polykarpou. While this reading might be considered coincidental, I would argue that it cannot be. Interviewees confirmed a gradual increase of immigrant people and families in the area corresponding very strongly to the period of austerity Greece faced and the global economic turmoil that followed the 2008 crisis. In this context, Eleonas and especially its inner regions seem to offer a safe net for populations that are possibly less welcome in the city or cannot afford it.

Indeed, data on employment and its location relative to the place of residence reinforces the idea that Eleonas attracts more vulnerable populations and citizens of lower income. Relevant data on this topic exists only for Akadimia and Rentis, the two most populous areas of Eleonas. In Rentis, the rate of unemployment of 13.5% is lower than the average for Greece (15 to 22%) in 2011 which is very interesting
when considered in combination with the low amount of higher educated people. Arguably, there could be a relatively high demand for low end jobs, which in the case of Rentis are fulfilled by people that either don't have access to higher education or perhaps choose or are constrained to stay in that line of work. Comparatively, the area of Akadimia also had even lower unemployment rates (8.7%). Additionally, most residents (77.6%) of Akadimia worked in their municipality (in this case the municipality of Athens) meaning that Akadimia’s residents find jobs and are employed relatively locally as opposed to Rentis where most people move outside of the area to go to work. Indeed, 51.1% of Rentis’ residents move beyond their regional unit to work. This generates important outflows of people commuting in and out of the area possibly by car given the lack of public transportation in the area. This is also lower than the national average of 61.7% of working people working within their own municipality. Therefore, in the case of Rentis it could be argued that the population is constrained to find jobs away from their place of residence. To some extent, this reinforces the argument that Rentis is not chosen as a place of residence because of the availability of jobs but for other socio-economic reasons.

The image these statistics paint of Eleonas is once again that of a very diverse and complex social distribution. However, there are several key characteristics to note. First, the feeling and perception that Eleonas consists mostly of industrial and working-class neighbourhoods is confirmed to a large extent through their demographics as well. Secondly, the higher percentage of non-Greek populations is perceived as a ghettoisation and, among other factors, can be linked to the perception of the physical world as increasingly dodgy, uncomfortable and unsafe after dark, as reported by interviewees. Lastly, at the time of the census, Eleonas showcased overall low unemployment rates, despite the very high national average and the lower levels of literacy and education, and a tendency to keep its residents to work in close proximity to where they live.

5.5 Conclusion – A backyard indeed?

Although the data presented in this Chapter did not always cover the entirety of the case study, it informed in much more depth a trans-scalar and temporal understanding of the urbanity of Eleonas than what the broad-brush exploration of the area allowed. The richness offered by this investigation allowed to explore at first
the diversity of urban forms across the six units of Akadimia, Markoni, Polykarpou, Orfeos, Kifissos and Rentis, which demonstrated through detailed examples that the design and transformation of their urban form is directly linked to the evolution, the nature and the breadth of the area’s urban metabolism. A metabolism here explored as the complexity of interactions between the area’s current activities (i.e. legal, illegal, refuge, hidden, cultural, sportive, etc.) and the impact they induce on the material and immaterial flows of people, goods, transportation and water. Then, the historical trends, various key events of transformation and local anecdotes evidenced that the lack of vision and planning not only accelerates the decay of urban form but also the quality of life of the local populations. Lastly, to further investigate the socio-economic context that is created under conditions of planning obsolescence, the study of local demographics offered a window into the social structures and their variance depending on contextual attributes.

So, is Eleonas justly labelled an urban backyard? I started this chapter with the aim to tell the contemporary story of Eleonas and highlight the aspects that pushed towards its conceptualisation and its function as a backyard for unwanted uses, processes and people. I looked at first at the area through the relations that its physical and non-physical components entertain amongst each other but also with the overarching networks and systems of the city of Athens. It appeared that these relations (here investigated as morphological, metabolic and socio-economic) create specific conditions or situations that tend towards the characterisation of Eleonas as an urban void or a ‘backyard’.

To plainly illustrate this fact, I linked these situations of ‘voidness’ to the general typology of voids that had emerged from the review of literature. I brought to light specific conditions of Eleonas relating to its design, planning accidents, obsolescence, suspension and transgression that connect it to the general understanding of urban voids in theory. I began by exploring the physical components of the area, that are its buildings, infrastructure and unbuilt spaces and the relations they entertain, the way they are superimposed and the results of this amalgamation. What became very clear is that the built form of Eleonas is inseparably linked to ongoing activity which profoundly sets it apart from the residential fabric of the city of Athens. This interdependence led to research the web of businesses, companies and industries which clearly showed that it played an important role in the gradual deterioration of its environment and to the creation of residual spaces. Yet, these
leftover territories remained in a state of temporal suspension that gives the freedom to transgress the prevailing codes of ownership and activity often in unplanned ways.

Yet, this analysis did not fully justify why Eleonas is considered a backyard for unwanted uses. I determined that there is a second overlapping conceptualisation of Eleonas that was linked not to its physical condition but to its function as part of the city of Athens, which could not be explained simply by looking at the elements that compose its morphological, metabolic and social aspects. Thus, there must be other circumstances that were pushing towards that second conceptualisation. Interestingly, I found that these emerge very clearly at a lower scale of investigation because they are not linked to the relations that the area holds at the regional scale. Instead, they are related to the very dynamics operating at the local and hyper-local levels of the municipality and the neighbourhood. Hence, a zoomed-in study was necessary to look at specific situations that exemplified the idea of Eleonas as an ‘urban backyard’. This was done at first through six carefully selected units of analysis that treated the historical, morphological, operational and social aspects of Eleonas and showcased the underlying reasons that Eleonas is perceived as a backyard. Following the same rationale, the next chapter will cover in more depth the two even more precise illustrative cases of Markoni and Polykarpou that elucidate how the Political Ecology of urban voids impacts decision making leading to the neglect of urban areas.

This chapter was essentially the stepwise, down-scaling process that allowed this study to move from the very large scale to the very local. In the next chapter I illuminate the existing discrepancies in the perceptions of locals, academics and policy makers depending on the subjective socio-economic background and position of each group and discuss the extent to which the urban void, in this case Eleonas, becomes an agent in a divisive socio-political process of urban transformation.
Chapter 6: Navigating the urban through the void

6.1 Introduction

The conceptual framework I constructed for this thesis supported that urban voids such as Eleonas are extremely complex urban entities that require a trans-scalar and multi-disciplinary empirical investigation. In this second empirical chapter, I navigate the local scale of Eleonas’ neighbourhoods through the thorough exploration of two of the six units of analysis I developed in the previous chapter; namely Markoni and Polykarpou. These two areas are particularly interesting for this research because their distinct nature, function and socio-economic contexts exemplify the tensions that were illustrated in Chapter 5. In Markoni and Polykarpou, the contrasts between buildings, networks and people are strongly manifested due to the brutal interruptions in the urban form, the mismatch of infrastructure and networks, and the incompatibility yet semi-co-existence of various socio-economic groups.

In the previous chapter I looked at how Eleonas is conceptualised as a backyard in a top-down way. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Eleonas feeds this narrative from within. I start this zoomed-in study by looking at the morphology of these spaces. As suggested by theory (Secchi & Vigano, 2011) and by the morphological analysis of Eleonas, the ambivalence of a porous yet impermeable landscape becomes immediately apparent. In the first part of this chapter I argue that this morphological peculiarity dictates to a very large extent the historical, contemporary and projected evolution of the area. Taking this tension as starting point, I then concentrate on the mental and physical limits that separate spaces and places within Markoni and Polykarpou to explore what it means to be on the ‘inside’ or on the ‘outside’ of these spaces from a social perspective but also from that of land-use and activities. In this sense, this chapter is less about the raw description of information and more about the narratives that emerge from the data, the literature, the interviews and the maps.

To effectively transition from the scale of the municipality (i.e. Chapter 5) to that of the neighbourhood I first compare the aims and strategies of the official 1995 plan (stemming from the related PD) to the existing situation. Then, I return to the updated ‘typology of voids’ and use it as a conceptual guide to navigate seven sites in Markoni and Polykarpou that exemplify the idea of ‘voidness’ as a driver of urban

38 See Chapter 4: Methodology for an extended description of the rationale of selection
transformation and a key feature of urban voids. By means of semi-structured in-depth interviews, walking interviews, photography and participant observation I bring to the fore specific examples that illustrate the discrepancies between the subjective perceptions of policy makers and locals. Through this first-person empirical exploration, the spatial and perceptual fragmentation of the area is illuminated and fuels a discussion about the extent to which these differing perceptions affect urban voids and their urban transformation. Using accounts from locals, I delve into the non-physical aspects of exclusion and the consequences of labelling areas ‘backyards’, ‘urban voids’ and ‘wastelands’. Here, I look at how the political ecology of Eleonas changes at the local scale based on the social background and question whether it is owed exclusively to the secluded urban form or whether social constructs play a role as well.

Lastly, this Chapter returns to the institutional landscape of Eleonas and the lack of synchronisation between media, policy frameworks and academic research. This misalignment handicaps the planned physical and social transformation of the area which on the contrary is evidently guided by political shifts of interest towards particular areas at particular times. I close the chapter with a rather conceptual turn, correlating Eleonas to a paradox which exemplifies the negative effects of the spatial and social conflicts presented throughout this chapter. Indeed, it is concluded that urban voids such as Eleonas have the capacity to work as agents for change and are inseparably interwoven with the emergence and transformation of the city, and modern urban society. A role that is not to be taken lightly and an idea which fuels a discussion continued and further developed in Chapter 7.

6.2 Neighbourhoods of Eleonas: Markoni and Polykarpou

One of the gaps unveiled in the frame of this thesis, revealed that research is considerably limited in constructing narratives that would comprehensively link the urban form, the flows that traverse it and the local socio-economic contexts. In that regard, the research framework developed for this study highlighted the importance to go beyond the superficiality of the intermediate scale and percolate into the finer grain that constructs the urban environment. Yet, navigating post-industrial urban areas through the lens of the ‘void’ means looking for and acknowledging the tensions that appear at the intersection of the above morphological, metabolic and social
conditions in areas where the differential degree of planning and political attention towards urban areas generates a division between privileged and residual spaces (Castells, 2010; Boyer, 1994 in De Meyer et al., 1999). Hence, in this section I move towards the last 'downscaling' which involves looking in closer detail at the form, activities and people that construct the urban environment of Eleonas, using observations, maps and interviews gathered during the closer investigation of Markoni and Polykarpou. Table 6.1 summarises and contrasts the key features of both areas.

Table 6.1 Table summarising the urban condition, number of permanent residents and main activities of the Markoni and Polykarpou units of analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation and size</th>
<th>Markoni</th>
<th>Polykarpou</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Markoni Total area: 0.79 km² – Wider area around the oldest residential enclave of bearing the same name. It includes an extremely high variety of uses from large productive industries, to retail, moving companies, a semi-operational military base, and the Agricultural University of Athens.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polykarpou Total area: 0.84 km² – Core area in Eleonas between the major transportation axes of Iera Street, Orfeos Street, Agias Annis Street. It encloses several large industries, the Double Regeneration construction site and the refugee camp. It is also of interest due to the existence of the water stream of Profitis Daniil, the only natural element remaining from the old olive grove.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Number of residents | Markoni 243 7.7% of Eleonas' total | Polykarpou 28 (plus ~ 2000 refugees living in Eleonas Camp) 0.9% of Eleonas' total |

| Main type of activity | Markoni Food and drink manufacturing, machinery, moving companies, car repair, car dealerships |
|-----------------------| Polykarpou Building related manufacturing, clothes and textiles, food and drink manufacturing, machinery, metal, paper, plastic, moving companies, other manufacturing |
Maps of both areas show – perhaps as expected – a predominance of open spaces either punctuated by constructions of various sizes or totally unbuilt. Included as open spaces are also several larger green patches. These open spaces clearly evidence the morphological contrast between Markoni and Polykarpou and the densely urbanised environment that surrounds them (Figure 6.1). Yet, my personal visits to these areas revealed a high diversity of activities ranging from education, housing, car repairs, manufactures and storage telling the story of a very dynamic daily life.

Facing what appeared to be at first glance a disconnected and contradictory multi-layered urban tissue, I set out to explore personally the study areas. In this section, I lay out the knowledge generated from interviews with locals and the observations I gathered as I navigated the two areas alone or during walking interviews with a portable audio recorder.
Reiterating the conclusions of the location of activity in Eleonas, once on site it becomes instantly clear that commercial businesses elect to locate primarily around residential areas and along major streets while manufacturing and storage is pulled back towards the inner parts of the tissue (see Figure 6.2). At this scale it also becomes clear that companies are not clustered based on sector but instead are spread throughout the territory creating sequences of animation and inactivity. Indeed, the lack of clustering and the predominance of larger units in the inner areas is a factor contributing not only to the porous landscape of Eleonas but also to the legal divergence from the binding 1995 land use plan, which intended to minimise this sprawl – a situation that is very difficult to bridge according to both business owners and policy makers.

Figure 6.2 Map locating the active businesses of Markoni and Polykarpo. A clear pattern is visible as businesses elect to locate close or along major transportation axes - commercial in blue, services in red, manufacturing in green (Source of the GIS data: ACCI).
According to a recent report from the Regional Development Institute of Panteion University (Karaganis, 2013), there are strong discrepancies between current reality and the feasibility of the 1995 land use plan. Using a randomised sample throughout Eleonas, they found that substantially more industries exist today in the area than what the plan offers to accommodate (44% versus 14% respectively) and, conversely, a lot less offices and retail than the foreseen (40% instead of 75% respectively), showcasing a clear will to reduce productive activity while increasing the service and commercial sectors.

6.2.1 Urban form, land use and activities

Zooming in on Markoni and Polykarpou, these observations stand true. As the map overlaying existing buildings to the 1995 Presidential Decree plan shows (Figure 6.3), the plan broadly transforms patches of existing activity into land uses (visible both from Figure 6.3 and mentioned by Mr ELW3 (Owner of industry formerly located in Eleonas) during our interview). For instance, areas with predominant manufacturing activity were turned into purple industrial zones, or red mixed business zones as we gravitate towards major streets. Therefore, despite the re-organisation, business owners (i.e. Mr ELW3 and Mr ELW4) complain that the area still lacks the clustering and arrangement a proper industrial zone requires. According to Mr ELW1 (Owner of major car dealership in Eleonas), this generalisation goes against the current use of the area which, as the owner of a garage and a car dealership on Iera Street – the major street crossing East to West and separating Markoni and Polykarpou – he finds himself incapable to legally build storage units or expand his business. Truly, the plan shows a very strong commercial and service-based façade on Iera Street (yellow areas of Figure 6.3), reminding very much of the existing segregating typo-morphology of Eleonas’ main roads (see Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2).
Yet, this is not very far from the current status of Iera Street; a very strong commercial and productive axis which already integrates a wide range of activities specialised in the automotive and transportation equipment sectors. Mr ELW2, an employee of a large car dealership on the Polykarpou side of Iera Street, described the area as a running production line where one “could start with a driving wheel and exit with a functioning car.” According to him cars and logistics are the only reasons someone
would visit the area as the large buildings of Iera Street preventing any connection with the inner areas of Polykarpou (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4 Map of actual land uses in the Markoni and Polykarpou areas. Commercial uses border the main roads and transportation arteries while productive activities (industries and manufactures) and storage are ‘hidden’ in the inner parts of the tissue away from the ‘shiny facades’. (Source: Author).

They are a large display. And behind that, dust, mud and migrants; and all that in the centre of Athens – Mr ELW2 (Sales consultant at second-hand car dealership)

In that regard, reinforcing the role of large avenues as structural axes bears questions concerning the plan’s aims for urban cohesion if we consider the large breadth of academic and practice-based research emphasising the negative and divisive impacts of such strategies (i.e. Castells, 2010; Graham & Marvin, 2001; Levy, 1999). Effectively, roads in Eleonas have a profound double meaning, that of an axis and that of a barrier. Important roads such as Athinon Avenue, Iera Street, Orfeos Street, Petrou Ralli Street, or Polykarpou Street work in fact as borders were ‘cleaner’ activity
is ongoing, a façade behind which all the ‘dirt’ of the industrial and marginalised activity is hidden.

On the smaller scale, the extremely high number of dead ends and fences become another type of physical border. A border that has a certain thickness and includes entire neighbourhoods where movement is inhibited. To this situation, the plan proposes a substantially transformed internal road network. Several new roads are designed to connect the current dead-ends and provide a certain structure to the environment. Markoni is an exemplar case of this, as there are currently no transversal connections between Iera Street and Athinon avenue for almost 1.5km creating an impermeable block of 0.78 km². An issue that is present also in the southern parts of Polykarpou, bordering Orfeos Street. There, according to Mr ELW4 (Owner of bespoke furniture manufacture) and Mr MOR1 (Employee of the Municipality of A. I. Rentis), the logistics and moving companies are multiplying despite the relocation of many larger ones to the North of Attica. Those that have remained in the area are not large international firms, but rather smaller companies that transport cargo to various islands and the Peloponnese in the South of Greece. Mr ELW4 described them as *sui generis* in the sense that they possess their unique features and cannot fit into one specific category. They range from organised and legitimate businesses to single containers with an office that move goods around Greece. There are therefore categories of sizes and of legality that share on a daily basis the rundown inner road network of the area. In this case, although the literal application of the plan would require the demolition of various existing structures, all interviewees agreed with the necessity of building an improved road network to remedy to the current disjointed urban fabric and notably also the lack of essential urban infrastructure such as stormwater and wastewater drainage. While it does not show through the land use map, the condition of basic stormwater and wastewater infrastructure in Eleonas and by extension, Markoni and Polykarpou is indeed inexistent (see Figure 5.29 Photographs illustrating the lack of draining infrastructure along the smaller roads of Eleonas and the recurrent flooding of the area due to this situation.) – 35 to 40 years overdue as Ms ELR2 (Markoni resident) says.

6.2.2 Networks and infrastructure

Residents are not the only ones complaining of the suboptimal infrastructure; businesses are also constrained, and investors pushed away as the lack of basic networks makes it impossible for investment to take place. Mr ELW1 (Owner of major
car dealership in Eleonas) told the story of a failed project from a British-American private investor who wanted to build a privately funded hospital. “How can you build a hospital or a hotel without drains? How incredible is that? Just 3km from Syntagma Square [the central square of Athens].” he lamented.³⁹ Existing businesses are also forced to leave in order to expand. Mr ELW³ (Owner of industry formerly located in Eleonas) who relocated in Oinofyta⁴⁰ in 2012 after 25 years of activity in Polykarpou despite the strategic location for his business of exporting technical machinery. He mentioned first and foremost that space was too small but also that it was impossible for him to obtain permits for any architectural modification nor the correct electrical voltage. Yet, he conceded that if the infrastructure and space existed, they would not have moved and that would have reduced the transportation flows and costs they must withstand now. Mr ELW⁴’s furniture manufacture business is another example of an industry located in a building of the late 70s – that used to make parts for airplanes such as doors – in the southern part of Polykarpou, which to this day is not served by wastewater drainage.

The up-and-running drainage, electricity and gas networks only run along major axes such as Iera Street but, as the majority of manufacturers are located in the inner parts of the area, they have very limited access to them and thus this deficiency extends also to the way companies operate. Taking waste management and recycling as a prime example, where it is done, it is done privately or behind-the-scenes. Mr ELW¹ sells batteries and oils to a private recycling company and according to him, due to the lack of a structured framework, they are incapable of storing and recycling cardboard. Although a paper recycling company exists nearby, the lack of incentive and promotion makes that neither parts invest in the necessary machinery and the link between the two never materialises. “There is no way for us to cooperate” he adds, because “[the recycling company] cannot invest in the machinery to bring it to me and there is no actor to promote him or incentivize him to take over the area”. A case that is intrinsically related to the lack of political and planning will and coordination. Indeed, it is apparently an issue that runs very deep and across sectors.

³⁹ The project of the hospital in itself did not fail only because of the lack of basic infrastructure as Ms HMEE³ explained, other considerations were at stake as well, and eventually the planning agency of the time “Agency of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens” (now dissolved) did not approve it; certainly however, the lack of infrastructure did not help.
⁴⁰ Oinofyta (Οινόφυτα) is a municipality located at the North of Athens. It is a sort of unofficial industrial park where a lot of manufacturing companies are now located. Just like in Eleonas, the environmental condition of the area is dreadful. In 2007, official tests concluded that the region’s drinking water was heavily contaminated due the discharge of untreated industrial waste into nearby river Asopos “whose waters run from red to black and ripple with bubbling sludge” (Kyvrikosaios, Kyriakidou, & Ledewith, 2007).
“Here in Greece” Mr ELW1 stresses “we are the only country that recycles cars and instead of scrapping them, we are cutting them up and selling them as spare parts”.

As far as infrastructure goes, the Metro Station is an interesting case. Accounts from Ms ELR2 (Markoni resident), Ms ELE1 (Employee at the refugee camp Eleonas), and Mr ELW2 (Sales consultant at second-hand car dealership) confirmed that it is heavily used both by commuters who work in the area and surrounding streets, especially Athinon Avenue, but also by tourists – Greek and international – who visit the area. Yet, as Ms ELR2 illustrated, conforming to the overall condition of the area, walking towards and from it “is a battle in itself”. Sidewalks and pedestrian crossings are non-existent, light poles seldom punctuate the streets and insecurity creeps after dark (Figure 6.5). Hence, in both Markoni and Polykarpou a much more implied type of border is found. One that relates to the perception of the urban environment rather than its physicality. Interestingly this ‘boundary effect’ seems to be common to post-industrial infrastructural spaces. Rosa (2014) in his research conducted in the city of Manchester observed that transportation infrastructure such as ring roads, viaducts and railway lines divide, not only the administrative boundaries, but also the perception and socio-economic context of the surrounding areas. In Eleonas it is certain physical landmarks that establish a change in the perceptions of people towards negative and dangerous imaginaries describing the areas beyond as “chaos”, “the rest”, “the underworld”, “the unknown”.41 In Markoni, the Agricultural University of Athens is one such site and in Polykarpou the eastern residential pocket of Athens’ municipality is another one. Once these are overlapped to the standard map of Eleonas, it comes to little surprise that these coincide with an abrupt change from a permeable to an impermeable urban morphology, from a rule governed to a disorganised street network, and from a very compact urban tissue to one that is dominated by unbuilt sites.

41 Such characterisations were mentioned by Ms ELE1, Mr ELW2, Mr ELR1, and Mr ELW4. See in Appendix 9 the mind map on borders and verbal accounts of interviewees.
6.2.3 Greenery as the filler of space

The 1995 plan, in addition to modifying the street grid, shows a deliberate will to fill all voids. By converting all open areas to communal green – built or unbuilt – as well as several larger patches of buildings, it proposes a landscape punctuated by islet of green spaces amongst a sea of businesses, manufactures and industries. Residents once dreamed of such transformations perhaps out of naivety, as Mr ELR1 (President of Markoni’s Resident Association) said during one of our meetings.

We used to think of big changes ourselves, that Eleonas should become green. But how would that be possible? 9km² to become greenery? Of course, Athens needs a large “green lung” but converting 9km² of houses, manufacturers, etc. to greenery? It’s just lip service. – Mr ELR1 (President of Markoni’s Resident Association)

Unfortunately, several past and present members of the Ministry (Mr HMEE1, Ms HMEE2 and Ms HMEE3) supported Mr ELR1’s view and disclosed that the absurdity of this proposition is one of the main reasons this plan has to this day not been applied. While walking through the area it was unclear how this transition from a heavily industrial area to a large park could occur and, in reverse, it is increasingly certain that the application of the Presidential Decree would heavily disrupt the local ecosystem of businesses and industries without necessarily improving it. This view of the plan was shared by Mr ELW2 (Sales consultant at second-hand car dealership) for whom greenery would constitute a disaster. He almost shouted in despair “greenery for whom? Nobody comes here to go to the park”. Interestingly, Mr ELW2 was the person who mentioned tourist groups sporadically flocking to the area. Still,
his perception of the place and the biases that follow Eleonas overshadow his knowledge and affect both his judgement and his relationship with his work environment. As for the ill-suited 1995 plan, he argued for the urgency to make better roads, bike paths, modernise the infrastructure, sanitise the area, or plant trees to help the existing companies rather than pushing for retail and leisure. This was echoed to some extent by Mr ELW1 (Owner of major car dealership in Eleonas), in that the operation of the area must indeed be rethought, but it must include a dialogue with local businesses – something that was apparently never the case for this iteration of the plan. From his side, the greenery is a utopia but, most importantly, also a sedative for innovation. “We cannot start anything [i.e. new projects and expansions]”, he remarks, “because of the imminent threat that all our land will become greenery.”42

6.3 Voids of Markoni and Polykarpou

You know, Eleonas is not simple, it is very large and very complex, and its peculiarity is that it incorporates a lot of voids. But voids that are not empty. They are mostly weird differentiations of uses. – Mr ELW4 (Owner of bespoke furniture manufacture)

In this section I survey seven key “not empty voids” located within Markoni and Polykarpou. I believe they strongly contribute to the idea of Eleonas as an urban void and a backyard and are great windows through which the physical and perceptual fragmentation of space can be understood. Selected based on attributes of space, activity and social relevance, I relate these seven sites to the ‘typology of urban voids’ to tell their story based on personal experiences and through the eyes and accounts of locals. From North to South (Figure 6.6), the seven sites include (1) large unbuilt plots including the site planned to become a crematorium in Markoni, (2) the residential cluster of Markoni, (3) the military (naval) base, (4) SOFTEX’s industrial shells in Polykarpou, (5) the Double Regeneration site, (6) the recent refugee camp and, finally, (7) the last remainder of the historical network of natural streams: the stream of Profitis Daniil. At this scale, it is possible to decipher the distinct characteristics that push towards the conceptualisation of these areas as urban voids. As I try to convey through the following descriptions, the interest of looking in detail

42 He disclosed that since his company exists in the area since long before any planning regulation, they are now operating on a special permit while being officially located on green space.
at the history, the social context and the current state of these cases lies in the opportunity it gives to uncover certain patterns and agents that drive the transformation of urban voids from within and from without.

Figure 6.6 Map highlighting the seven ‘voids’ of Markoni and Polykarpou explored in more detail: 1. large unbuilt plots projected to become a crematorium; 2. Markoni residential cluster; 3. Military Naval Base of Markoni; 4. Abandoned industrial shells of SOFTEX; 5. Double Regeneration plot; 6. Refugee camp; 7. Stream of Profitis Daniil. (Source of base map: Google Maps).

6.3.1 Suspended, transgressive and designed: The physical voids of large tracts of land in Markoni and Polykarpou and the crematorium site

In the physical sense of the void, within Markoni and Polykarpou are found vast empty lots. Usually the remnants of the long-gone agricultural activity, open industrial yards or the result of land divisions of the last century, these spaces are essentially unbuilt by design. Most of these areas are unused because of physical borders that confine them within fences or buildings, while others are simply covered by unruly vegetation. Yet, significant amounts of such voids are used for various ephemeral and
unregulated uses. Some of the observed ongoing activities include parking, squatting, repairing, waste disposal, flea markets, informality and other unregulated and illegal activities. However, in the frame of this research one plot specifically stands out and is of great interest because of its significance for the local population and to planning officers.

Located at the centre of the Markoni area, the site remained for years empty until it passed to the possession of the municipality of Athens during the years leading up to the 2004 Olympic Games. The then mayor wanted to regenerate it and turn it into a park. Eventually they did so but since then it remains fenced and closed to the public. For what reason? Neither Mr ELR1 (President of Markoni’s Resident Association) nor Ms ELR2 (Markoni resident) could say. It sits however next to the site planned for the first crematorium of Athens which according to Mr MOA2, the planning consultant for the municipality of Athens, will be followed by large landscaping works that will swallow the park (Protagon Team, 2017). Yet another project planned for Eleonas (i.e. stadium, mosque and recycling plant) that has attracted large amounts of complaints and controversies although still in its infancy.

From a planning perspective Mr MOA2 confessed that these projects, including the crematorium, find their place easily in Eleonas thanks to the possible amendment of the policies and regulations. But from the viewpoint of locals it is a space dying a slow death and which for 15 years has remained abandoned, occasionally illegally squatted and used, and to the incredulity of the residents still inaccessible. It is a case that exemplifies the peculiar identity of such spaces that are suspended spaces in time, locked from public reach and yet, through their conceptualisation as backyards for unwanted or incompatible uses, are eventually rediscovered by planners and transformed.

6.3.2 Accidental and designed: The residential cluster of Markoni

We here don’t know where to walk. [...] We don’t have sidewalks. Walking on the sidewalks here is like doing reflexology on gravel stones. – Ms ELR2 (Markoni resident).

The residential cluster of Markoni was created during the first wave of migration in the decades after WWII. In a landscape still dominated by horticulture, gardens and olive groves, during the 1950s illegal shanties started appearing followed by garages in the 1960s including the house of Mr ELR1. As such it is dominated by low-rise
residential buildings with courtyards, front porches and gardens. Streets are paved and large enough to allow on street parking and the public space is punctuated by patches of greenery and trees. This urban form however ends at the borders of the enclave as fences, walls and large industrial buildings create very thick physical borders that entirely hide the houses from the main streets (Figure 6.7).

![Figure 6.7 Photographs of Markoni and its 'hard' boundaries](image)

The Markoni settlement is today the last of five residential neighbourhoods remaining in that part of Eleonas. Four other urban villages existed in the vicinity but slowly disappeared following the attrition of the landscape and the despair of residents who saw their houses gradually being surrounded by large manufactories and polluting industries, while living in inappropriate conditions as streets were not laid out and drinking water was not accessible. According to Mr ELR1 and Ms ELR2, drinking water arrived in the neighbourhood in 1983 after the initiative and personal investment of Ms ELR2 (Markoni resident)’s father. However, the lack of amenities goes beyond the physical infrastructure as in and around the area, shops, schools, and vital institutions did not survive the transformation of the landscape (i.e. Ms HMEE2 and Mr ELR1 interviews). Currently, in the settlement remain around 200 residents of which, according to the conducted interviews, around half are new immigrant populations including Pakistanis, Albanians, Romani and other nationalities (not to be confused with the refugees sheltered in Eleonas Camp located on the site of the Double Regeneration Project). Unfortunately, young generations have left to live in other parts of Athens except for a few couples that have returned to their family homes following the 2008 economic crisis.
Looking back at the history and transformation of areas, it is generally easier to understand the reasons why specific events occurred rather than deciphering why some did not happen. As such, trying to understand why the residential cluster of Markoni did not dissolve just like its counterparts is not thoroughly clear and open to much speculation and debate. One factor however is certain and shared amongst all residents; that the feeling of the neighbourhood remains strong and works as the binding agent of the residential cluster. Both Ms ELR2 and Mr ELR1, who have lived through all the changes the area has incurred, argued that while there are no social services, technical equipment, infrastructure, etc., the neighbourhood has its own positive aspects. In the words of Mr ELR1, “you have your tranquillity here, and if you have grown up here you don't give it up”. Furthermore, residents feel safe and praise the fact that they retain the feeling of the neighbourhood and have enough space to move and park their vehicles – a strong contrast to the overall feeling of insecurity that was reported for the Polykarpou area and the cramped and crowded streets of Eleonas.

Walking through the area is indeed an experience. The chaos, dust and noise so characteristic of Eleonas are gone and the industrial landscape gives way literally – albeit momentarily – to the morphology and the sense of a small village of the Greek countryside. During my interview with Ms ELR2 (Markoni resident) in May of 2017, we were drinking orange juice in her courtyard where no cars were heard, and her canaries were chirping while the sun was shining on our table. An impressive change of perception as I was appreciating a calmness to be found only in the distant suburbs of Athens and rural parts of Greece. The fact we were sitting just 2km (i.e. 15 to 20 minutes’ walk) from one of the busiest city centres of Europe seemed to be more of a well-crafted lie. No, at that moment I was sitting in some rural village somewhere very far from any urban area.

The residential cluster of Markoni is an enclave within an industrial zone. A void and yet the opposite as well. It is a place that has remained to some extent unchanged; yet, it internalises notions of the void in the sense that it has been forgotten by its municipality and the policy makers as to this day it is not served by drainage and is essentially managed by its residents. Arguably, it is a void in the imaginary of policy makers but the opposite in the imaginary of its users. This contradiction in how areas are perceived by outsiders and insiders is very common in Eleonas (i.e. the refugee
camp) and one that I explore in much more depth in the following sections and chapters when discussing the peculiar Political Ecology of Eleonas.

6.3.3 Decaying and suspended: The naval base in Markoni

The naval base of Votanikos expands over 25 hectares (0.25 km²) – 1.5 times the size of the National Garden which is also the largest public park in the centre of Athens – and the site in which the newly built Votanikos Mosque (initiated in 2017 and operational in 2019) is located. The construction date of the base is unknown to us, but Mr ELR1 who was born in the late 1950s says that it predated him. It used to emit radio signals for the Navy and employed roughly 300 employees. But gradually, the need of a telecommunication base faded and was eventually relocated and incorporated in the largest Greek Naval base Nafstathmos northeast of the island of Salamis off-coast from Piraeus.

Given its status as military base it is restricted to its staff; its single entrance is guarded; and the entire field is cut from its surroundings by thick and high walls creating a very long stretch of inaccessible land starting from Markoni street and reaching very deep into the urban tissue. Currently the base employs perhaps 25 or 30 employees according to Mr ELR1. It encloses several buildings of architectural interest from the Neoclassical period, which are for about two decades unused and left to decay. Both Mr ELR1 and Ms ELR2 lament the state of the space and dream of a day it might be converted into an extra-local pole of activity full of cultural and sporting facilities, schools, museums and parks to give back to the area some of its past glory and to the residents some respite.

6.3.4 Decaying, suspended, transgressive and designed: the SOFTEX industrial shells in Polykarpou

Briefly mentioned in Chapter 5, SOFTEX, was the largest Greek paper manufacturer and was located at the north-western part of the Polykarpou. As the company grew, it ended owning almost all the northern plots between Iera Street and Polykarpou Street. However, the industry seems to have only one main gate on Iera Street, and all other access is done from Polykarpou Street. That is to say that the industry was very much turned towards the inside of Polykarpou conforming with the overall reading of Eleonas. The closure of the company in 2016 however left behind massive industrial shells that mark the territory physically and perceptually as historic
landmarks. Except for the area of the Agricultural University of Athens, SOFTEX’s industrial cluster is the largest continuous bloc (see Figure 6.6). Like most industrial sites in Polykarpou, it is fenced and for the most part inaccessible while crossing it to reach Iera Street from Polykarpou Street is impossible. Although certain gates are open, and access is not specifically restricted, it is not encouraged either. Furthermore, once within the industrial complex there are no other ways out. As such the site could be described as a dense and totally impermeable configuration of deteriorating buildings, reminding of the naval base of Markoni.

Yet, the observational work done in the area tells a very different story. Although most buildings are truly empty, some other enjoy a new life showcasing the ability of such structures to include a mix of uses. Several businesses such as transport companies, printers, and manufacturers appear to be based in the old warehouses while open spaces and yards serve as parking space and storage. Notably, given the good sheltering capability of such buildings, squatting and temporary use of the empty buildings was observed as well as the following photographs of Figure 6.8 illustrate.

![Figure 6.8 Photographs of Polykarpou Street and the SOFTEX industrial buildings. Parts of which are derelict and other are reinvested with a variety of uses predominantly moving and transportation companies.](image)

6.3.5 Decaying and designed: The Double Regeneration lot and project in Polykarpou

Just opposite the SOFTEX complex, the story of a very large plot of land is also of great interest for this thesis. It started as part of some industrial complex, was abandoned for several years, then was put back into the spotlight as part of the Double Regeneration development which included a massive complex made of a football stadium for Panathinaikos F.C. and a mall (Figure 6.9). Construction began only to stop a few years later and see the project being abandoned leaving behind a half-started construction site made of massive foundations and concrete works (Figure 6.10). Several years later, while nature has grown in and around the stadium’s foundations, the refugee crisis revived an interest for this zone. Today, one half of the
plot remains abandoned and ruined while on the other half ‘Eleonas Camp’ was assembled: a refugee camp built in 2015 to shelter refugees coming mainly from Syria.

Figure 6.9 Official masterplan and artist’s impression of the projected development for the Panathinaikos F.C. stadium and mall in Eleonas (Source: The Region of Attica)

Figure 6.10 Photographs of the halted Panathinaikos F.C. stadium’s construction site on the lot of the Double Regeneration.

In 2006, a proposal was made to put in motion an operation of land exchange that would legitimise building a new stadium on a plot in Eleonas defined “greenery” by the 1995 PD and transfer this land use at the location of the former stadium (see Figure 6.11). Therefore, on paper, a very central and busy location in Athens would become a “green public space” alleviating some pressure from the urban system while part of the transportation flows generated during the football matches would be redirected towards an “unused” part of the city (Karagiannis, 2014). The project would be a private investment, built on a site composed partially of private land and partially of public land. As such, it was bordering the model of a public-private partnership even though this type of alliances is not common in Greece due to the lack of a legal framework that would allow them. Given the lack of precedent it was, therefore, unclear whether it was a project for the public good or a private investment. According to Prof Markou, a planning professor at the National Technical University of Athens, the project materialised without much transparency adding to the overall discontent
of locals as it showcased how easily public land – and in fact greenery – can serve private interests. Complaints followed regarding the proposed scheme and the feasibility of the project. Citizen committees were created and claimed that the Master Plan creates a built mix of malls, stadiums, commercial activities and motorways that would destroy rather than enhance the area. The “Double Regeneration” began in 2010 (Balis, 2013) only to be put on hold in 2013 following the bankruptcy of the main investor Vovos AE and several complications in the public-private agreement (Blog GR, 2012; Ypodomes, 2016).

The project therefore constitutes a promise that was never fulfilled but one that despite the apparent dissatisfaction had in fact filled the locals with hope, as they imagined that with the stadium several basic amenities would reappear in the area. Mr ELR1 (President of Markoni’s Resident Association) firmly stated that while indeed the region would be burdened with more cement, it would have been an incentive to construct shops, drains and roads. Mr ELW2 (Sales consultant at second-hand car dealership) saw in the project the possibility for added publicity for his company, and Ms ELR2 (Markoni resident) looked forward to the coming of basic amenities and a certain civic life. The polarising and conflicting nature of this project is linked to the potential benefits that are supposed to follow after its completion and is very much the platform on which investors and policy makers stepped to legitimise it. This project constitutes the epitome of a ‘syringe-like’ development whereby a totally new and unrelated land use is injected in the urban fabric. It is branded as capable of ‘fixing’
current spatial and civic issues – reminding very much of Harvey’s “spatial fix” (Charney, 2010) – despite its narrow and localised character.43 Instead, the site remains in a total state of neglect and the only built structures are the massive foundations and first floors of what would have been the mall. Since the halt of the construction, nothing has changed as even the cranes have remained on site (Figure 6.10). Access however is strictly unauthorised and beyond the tall metal fences unruly vegetation has grown reminding of Edensor’s descriptions of ruins (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2012; Edensor, 2005, 2007, 2011). A ruin since its conception, indeed.

Still, uncertainty looms. To this day the future of the area is unknown and lost in the convoluted drains of planning offices. Mr MOA2 (Planning consultant at the Municipality of Athens) mentioned new complications regarding the future of the area which are a bureaucratic nightmare and one that he foresees can only be solved through more amendments to the existing plan, because it is essentially perpetuating a system designed to fail. A political and planning void of tremendous dimensions.

6.3.6 Suspended, transgressive and designed: The refugee camp in Polykarpou

The refugee camp of Eleonas (officially called Eleonas Open Structure of Refugee Housing – Ελαιώνας Ανοιχτή Δομή Φιλοξενίας Προσφύγων in Greek) is located on the eastern half of the Double Regeneration site, an area that has seen various uses in the last decade. It is unclear if it was used and to what purpose before 2006, when the project for the stadium started, and until 2013 when construction halted. In 2014 however, year of my first visit to the area, it was officially used as a flea market which attracted large crowds on weekends. After the refugee crisis of 2015, the space was arranged to provide shelter to the waves of refugees that arrived in Greece during that period and is managed by the Ministry of Migration Policy. At the time of investigation in spring 2018, it housed around 2000 legal and illegal residents in stacked container-houses forming essentially a small village including families and kids.44 Accordingly, the flea market moved to the streets surrounding the camp and, as the photographs of Figure 6.12 are showing, is thriving. According to Ms ELE1

43 I come back to this very important theme in a later section discussing the important double-edged sword that large development projects are, the limitation of syringe-like projects and the impact of their radiation.
44 Data from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) set the number of residents at 1,470 for August-September 2018, but Ms ELE1 suggested that the number of official and unofficial residents was closer to 2000 at the time of the interview in April 2018.
(Employee at the refugee camp Eleonas) who at the time of the interview had been working there for 9 months, Eleonas camp is one of the most organised of its kind although the condition of housing is not ideal, and the containers are rarely maintained (see Appendix 12 outlining the full site profile of Eleonas Camp and its amenities as published from the UNHCR in 2018). However, the continuous waiting of either receiving asylum in Greece or leaving for another European country creates sentiment of suspension between the past and a potential future. This is a different type of problem not proper to urban voids per se. A palpable tension never really dissipates and sometimes heightens in verbal or physical confrontations. As Ms ELE1 jokingly adds: “it is a little village with its little problems”.

Figure 6.12 Photographs of the weekly flea market around the refugee camp of Eleonas

On the social side, residents are generally active and incentivised to socialise, find work and eventually move to proper lettings in other parts of Athens; kids and adolescents are obliged to attend to nearby schools; as for the toddlers the camp includes a kindergarten. Ms ELE1 also shared that a large proportion of refugees are employed or actively look for work in Athens something that is rendered much easier given the proximity of the camp to the city centre and a key aspect for the great success of the camp. Simultaneously, within the camp, activities of a more transgressive type take place, such as a lady that has set up a makeshift shop and sells falafels to activities of informal trading and some cases of drug trafficking. Still, life in the camp remains regulated, residents commute daily towards central Athens by bus and are also involved in activities in and around Polykarpou and commute either by foot, bicycle or the local bus line connecting the area to Omonoia Square –
a central square in Athens. Additionally, two flea markets are held during weekends and attract vast amounts of people from the surrounding neighbourhoods but also beyond Eleonas.

All these flows of movement and activity create during daylight hours a very lively and vibrant neighbourhood among the industrial shells of SOFTEX and the stadium’s construction site in quite an unexpected way for someone exploring the area. Yet, although this activity is ongoing for the best part of 4 years at the writing of this thesis, the camp is still considered temporary. Something that is made clear from a planning standpoint as the land use is not changed to accommodate residential activity but also from the way it is embedded in the area. The camp is fenced, and when it was first set up in 2015, armed forces were guarding the entrance. Today access is free although a very strong psychological, mental and cultural barrier is instantly felt. As I explore towards the end of this chapter in more detail, the temporariness and the segregating urban form ‘ghettoises’ the situation of the camp and opens the way to cases of racism, social segregation and occasionally hostile sentiments against its residents. This was reinforced during my discussion with Ms HMEE2 (Employee at HMEE for the management of Eleonas) from the Ministry who recognised that the matters related to the camp are eluding the reach of the Ministry and have become a “black hole” as far as policies are concerned. Anecdotally, many politicians, influential figures and celebrities have visited the camp, among them actress and Special Envoy to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Angelina Jolie and all the Prime Ministers that have governed the country since the inception of the camp. To that, Ms ELE1 expressed a certain indifference as nothing substantial has ever followed these visits repeating and emphasising the substantial lack of infrastructure, trees and shade during summer and a strong feeling of fear after dark.

6.3.7 Decaying, designed and transgressive: The stream of Profitis Daniil in Polykarpou

The stream of Profitis Daniil is not mentioned much in this thesis but its role is vital for the biodiversity and flood protection of Polykarpou and is worth mentioning at this stage as it does embody certain elements of voidness. Profitis Daniil is the last natural stream remaining from the era when Eleonas was flooded by the alluvial plain of river Kifissos. In the era of industrialisation, it served as a core infrastructure to the development of manufacturing in the area as it provided tanneries with water and later was used as a discharge of industrial waste. Since then, the larger part of the stream
has been covered and serves as sewerage overflow that discharges in river Kifissos and then into the sea (Refer to Figure 5.8 for the location, condition and structure of Kifissos river and Profitis Daniil). The condition therefore of the stream is an environmental catastrophe (ENVECO S.A., 2011a, 2011b) and its open part is not maintained at all although it is one of the last natural elements of Eleonas (Figure 6.13).

Figure 6.13 Photographs of Profitis Daniil. The last remaining stream of River Kifissos today turned into a stormwater and wastewater overflow.

The interest lies on the first part of the stream that is still uncovered and fully vegetated. Constructions are scarce along the stream but are of a certain historical value as they consist of old tanneries built with stone emphasising the industrial past of the area and its legacy. Although it could be argued that these buildings and natural areas do not hold any value within the chaotic industrial environment of Polykarpou, I defend the opposite. In the same way that Foster (2014) found in Paris’ petite ceinture a sort of terrain vague, on the few patches of greenery along the stream and around the old industrial buildings traces of life appear. Fire pits, semi-standing tents, toys and caddies convey the existence of a certain nomad life. Although I have not
found the chance to document such life, it would seem that the decayed natural environment becomes, perhaps momentarily, a space allowing transgression of norms in the form of squatting and transitory residency.

6.3.8 Summary

Table 6.2 summarises the seven ‘voids’ investigated in the areas of Markoni and Polykarpou classified according to the five types of urban voids (designed, accidental, decaying, suspended and transgressive) and deconstructed based on their form, borders, networks, activity, socio-economic profile and potential tensions and conflicts. Reading this table horizontally gives a deep overview of each area while reading it vertically allows to compare each of the 7 ‘units of analysis’ based on specific attributes and aspects of urban voids. This comparison informs the large discrepancy that exists between these neighbourhoods even though they are broadly categorised by people less familiar with the area (including administrations, politicians and policy makers) under the single urban entity “Eleonas”. This reinforces the conclusion that general knowledge of Eleonas is strikingly over-generalised and does not confront the minutiae of the place and by extension its actual reality.
Table 6.2 Table (over the next 2 pages) summarising the seven 'voids' investigated in Markoni and Polykarpou

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>TYPE OF VOID</th>
<th>BUILT FORM</th>
<th>BORDERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Markoni Residential Enclave</td>
<td>Accidental and suspended</td>
<td>Essentially low-rise residential buildings (1-3 storeys) with courtyards and gardens resembling more the typo-morphology of a village than that of a city centre. Served by paved small streets and surrounded by large industrial buildings (3 storeys +). Streets are small but wide enough to allow parking cars. In the open space, greenery is allowed to grow.</td>
<td>Borders are strong and take the form of tall fences or high buildings. Arguably, borders &quot;made of buildings&quot; are softer than fences but also more abrupt. In the sense that fences are impenetrable but the incompatibility of existing buildings shapes the built environment in such ways that it becomes unwelcoming for non-workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Base</td>
<td>Decaying and suspended</td>
<td>Relatively unknown but from what we have gathered, the site contains various military buildings and whereshouses but also a large amount of old neo-classica buildings that are falling in disrepair and abandonment. Large open spaces and greenery through the site. It is an enormous area (2 time the national garden)</td>
<td>The naval base is cut from its surroundings by large and high walls. There's only one entrance from Markoni Street which is guarded as it can be expected from any military area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large tracts of unbuilt land throughout Eleonas</td>
<td>Suspended, transgressive and designed</td>
<td>Large unbuilt spaces exist throughout Eleonas and also Markoni and Polykarpou. These are usually just that: unbuilt. The remnants of a long formgoten agricultural activity, open spaces within businesses or the result of land divisions that occurred in the last century. Some of these areas see unruly vegetation grow, others are paved and worsen the already bad floodable condition of Eleonas</td>
<td>The borders of these spaces vary as much as the spaces themselves. 5 categories stand out: - streets - buildings - fences - nature - courtyards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Regeneration Site</td>
<td>Decaying and suspended</td>
<td>The site is currently in a state of neglect. The only buildings are the foundations and first floors of the planned mall. Nothing has changed since the shut down of the project. Cranes remain on site and unruly vegetation has started to grow. All constructions are of massive size A ruin, close to the descriptions of Edensor but a ruin before it even became an operational building.</td>
<td>The site is fenced off from all sides that have a front to the roads/streets. Actual impenetrable borders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Camp</td>
<td>Designed</td>
<td>The camp, built on a part of the DR site, is built entirely with container houses. These are 2 stories high and made of metal. Inside there is a small football pitch but no vegetation whatsoever rendering the working conditions very difficult under the sun</td>
<td>The camp is fenced and closes with metallic doors for security reasons. When the refugees first arrived police was guarding the entrance. Now access is free and anyone could potentially enter although a non-physical barier is instantly felt. On the western side of the camp flows the stream of profits Danill. Although no connection between the two seems to exist it is nevertheless a natural border.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOFTEX Industrial Shells</td>
<td>Decaying, suspended, transgressive and designed</td>
<td>Enormous industrial buildings left to decay. The area is one of the biggest lots of Polykarpou together with the Athens University of Agriculture.</td>
<td>The industrial estate is fenced for the most part yet open at various locations. Access is not denied but not welcomed either. Once inside there is nowhere else to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stream of Profitis Danill</td>
<td>Designed, decaying, transgressive and accidental</td>
<td>Constructions are scarce along the stream. The only existing ones are related to a long gone tanning industry that used the running water for its manufacturing processes. These buildings are made of stone and could hold a certain historical value. They are however all left to decay</td>
<td>Only indirect borders frame the stream: - streets - fences - buildings - vegetation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NETWORKS</td>
<td>CURRENT USE</td>
<td>SOCIAL PROFILE</td>
<td>TENSIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure is heavily lacking and so are the networks of the area. Transportation is served mainly by personal car and public transportation. Pedestrian ways end at the borders of the enclave.</td>
<td>The base is still used for certain military purposes although it is reportedly inactive or the most part since there is no need for a naval base in that location. According to Kotopoulis, around 25 people operate it (vs 300 at some point). The actual naval base has moved to Naftalithmos and in Elenas remain only some last administrative services and &quot;computers&quot;.</td>
<td>Essentially Greek natives but the last years have seen a strong influx of non-Greek populations.</td>
<td>Surprisingly low, except some disagreements and a disdain towards politicians and their inactivity. Some residents and employees express an aversion towards the increasing immigrant populations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basically linked to current activities located there. Generally inexistant. Unknown</td>
<td>The base is still used for certain military purposes although it is reportedly inactive or the most part since there is no need for a naval base in that location. According to Kotopoulis, around 25 people operate it (vs 300 at some point). The actual naval base has moved to Naftalithmos and in Elenas remain only some last administrative services and &quot;computers&quot;.</td>
<td>Not relevant in the sense that it is inaccessible to all except military.</td>
<td>Markori residents would love to see it open and become a leisure, tourism and cultural area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>With the exception of the industrial open space, the users of these saces are usually squatters and nomad populations. It is not known to what extent refugees use these areas. In any case it is not used by locals.</td>
<td>At the edge of the area the new Mosque was built and has attracted very mixed reactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unused and decaying. The construction site of the stadium stopped in 2016 and since then has been abandoned as overgrown vegetation has taken over.</td>
<td>Not relevant in the sense that it does not play an active social role.</td>
<td>The unknown future of the site has been the focus of discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure is lacklustre. Running water and electricity exists. Transportation is served by bicycles and very heavily by the bus network connecting the area to Omonoia Square</td>
<td>It is predominantly and officially residential although the official land-use was not set to that.</td>
<td>A very peculiar situation as only refugees essentially from the middle-east stay there and strongly contrast with the otherwise predominantly Greek population of the area.</td>
<td>Tensions do exist in the form of violence inside and outside of the camp. Other than that no incidents have been reported. The area is however stigmatised and seen by many as a blight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Mostly empty. Some new businesses have located in the old buildings but not that many. Some of there have also shut down. This means that somehow new activities has been allowed to take place. It is unclear to what extent the buildings are used for squatting.</td>
<td>Squatting has been documented as a first person observation but only in glimpses</td>
<td>None as far as this research understood except the sadness that is shared among all interviewees that the closure of SOFTEX was a blow to Greek industry and economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The stream is not running on the surface any more. It has been covered and runs underground. The stream's bed is paved and seves today as an overflow discharge in case of strong rainfalls. It ends into Kifissos River further down the road.</td>
<td>The stream is converted to a sewage overflow backup. The sides are full of waste and squats have been seen before the arrival of the refugee camp. Squatters seemed to have stay along the river but appear to have moved in recent years.</td>
<td>Squatting remains and temporary shelters were found at the early parts of the stream in the Polykarpou area.</td>
<td>Environmental more than anything. The stream as all the land of Elenas is extremely poluted and considered an environmental issue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.4 The political ecology of Eleonas

Moving away from the rather objective study of Markoni’s and Polykarpou’s urban environments, in this section I treat the idea of the backyard and the urban void from the more subjective standpoint of experience to cover the non-physical aspect of the presence / absence nexus. In this section I aim to explore the knowledge produced so far towards a richer understanding of the political ecology of Eleonas to reflect upon the politics of space, current policies and more generally the planning of urban voids. By exploring the drivers behind the evolution of specific areas in Markoni and Polykarpou I investigate how the void transcends physical reality to enter a political discourse that eventually objectifies and labels these areas. Finally, I explore how perception is modified based on the relation one entertains with the area, but also the social background and the interests of those in charge and describe how it leads to cases of social exclusion and uneven development that research on UPE has revealed (i.e. among others the works of Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw).

6.4.1 Planning, economics, politics and development patterns

Zooming out of Markoni and Polykarpou for a short moment, it is worth returning to the policy landscape and the waves of interest and disinterest that have shaped Eleonas so far. Searching for patterns in the timeline of events and mentions in academia and the media (Figure 6.14 and Figure 6.15), it becomes evident that these are to some extent related.

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45 See Appendix 14 for a full list of the literature taken into account
The first accounts of Eleonas appeared in the press in 1988 – 1989 with a series of lengthy articles discussing the inconceivably bad condition in which residents of the area were living in. These were mostly influenced and based on bottom-up initiatives of residents and conveyed their attempts to be heard by local and regional authorities (Koultsinioti, n.d.; Papoutsakis, 1989). This was just before the Presidential Decree of 1991 and before the important research of the NTUA (Wassenhoven & Markatos, 1992) which gave the basis for the final Presidential Decree in 1995. Could these articles have stirred the start of the broader thinking around the case of Eleonas? I believe it might have been the case. Following NTUA’s research, 1993 saw the first surge of academic papers being published in the NTUA’s journal Pyrforos (Markatos, 1993). Yet after the Presidential Decree of 1995 and until 2005 only 7 research papers
and articles were published, mostly related to issues such as water, archaeology, and less about the condition of Eleonas in itself.

In 2006 the first important increase in more than 10 years appears, led essentially by research being published in the journal Architectones, and it is the first time that Eleonas is linked to ideas such as those of the ‘urban void’, ‘naked zone’, etc. (Hari, 2006; Pagonis, 2006; Polychronopoulos, 2006; Polyzou, et al., 2006). Incidentally, 2006 is also the year when talks for the Double Regeneration project started. Until 2008 a steady flow of research was done at the NTUA, and Eleonas was also mentioned in the media several times. After that media coverage stopped completely until 2012 and the general relevance of Eleonas in research dwindled as well slightly. 2012 however, saw a growth in both research and news articles which peaked in 2014 with 11 mentions or more than 10% of the all-time mentions since 1988 in one year. In fact, between 2012 and 2014 Eleonas was mentioned 27 times or 28% (almost a third) of the all-time high coinciding very much with the start of the works of the Double Regeneration project. After that, it appears that media coverage has overtaken the number of research projects being made in 2016, 2017 and 2018, as Eleonas became once again the centre of attention due to several big projects and events. These include the immigrant populations being sheltered there, the plan for a mosque and a crematorium, the BlackRock mall, and more recently the announcement that the project of the international bus terminal (IBT) is being discussed once again.

To summarise, the major periods of attention of the late 20th and early 21st centuries are as follows (see Appendix 14 for more details):

- **1988**: The first general discussion around Eleonas begins following articles of worsening spatial and living conditions
- **1992 - 2005**: Major academic research from the NTUA followed by the publication of the Presidential Decree and a somewhat passive discussion around its potential and opportunities. Eleonas is baptised the “cesspool of Attica” (Argyri et al., 1998, p. 2).
- **2006 - 2012**: Beginning of talks for the Double Regeneration project and heated debates regarding its legitimacy and purpose. First accounts of Eleonas being described directly as a backyard and an urban void.
- **2012 - 2014**: The halt of the Double Regeneration is followed by an intense period of research regarding the potential use these spaces ending with the development of the Regional Plan in 2014.
- **2015 - Onwards**: Despair with the condition and the stagnation of the area. Strong criticism of political will as several controversial large developments are heating up the debate. Among those BlackRock’s mall, the Muslim mosque and the plan for a crematorium.

Noteworthy is that academic research and news articles do not tend to be written during the same periods but instead alternate seemingly every 3 to 4 years. Eleonas was only mentioned once by news agencies between 1992 and 2005 as opposed to being the subject of 9 academic publications. 2008 to 2014 was the boom for academic research with 30 research projects/studies being conducted (more than half) while in the media Eleonas came up only 12 times, counting the 5 of 2014 following the Double Regeneration occurrence. Similarly, from 2015 onwards – perhaps because media is more concerned with drama – Eleonas has been mentioned 17 times against 4 in academia.

I would argue therefore that interest in the area is characterised by various ‘ups and downs’ in the attention that depend exclusively on external factors related to the market, important national events (i.e. refugee crisis), news reports and various other interests. Although this might be expected from news agencies that mostly react to ongoing events, it is surprising to perceive a similar alternating behaviour from the academic and research bodies. The big difference however lies in that while the press follows events, research papers seem to be constantly predating those. However, this attention translates consistently into major plans and promises of regeneration raising the question of who is in charge of the area at specific moments in this timeline and how does the presence of multiple actors align with the political transformation of the area.

### 6.4.2 Plans, projects and movements: dissonance of top-down and bottom-up actions

I concentrate on major events in and around Markoni and Polykarpou (summarised in Table 6.3) and study the decision-making that lead to them, how were they received and how they’ve impacted the local setting (actual or foreseen impact). Succinctly, major urban developments in the area can be categorised under two visions: that of a backyard or a potential for regeneration. A second category separates these projects based on the type of action underpinning them: either top-down ‘syringe-like’ large developments or grassroots movements linked to bottom-up initiatives.
Table 6.3 List of recent top-down and bottom-up plans and action is Eleonas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projects, plans and collective actions</th>
<th>Backyard</th>
<th>Potential or opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top-down regional planning</td>
<td>Refugee camp, crematorium, mosque, water treatment plant, recycling plant</td>
<td>Double Regeneration stadium and mall, International Bus Terminal (IBT), BlackRock mall (failed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom-up local initiatives</td>
<td>Maintenance of the Markoni residential cluster</td>
<td>Design and building of public space with therapeutic community “Paremvasi”, preservation of cultural and archaeological sites in Akadimia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From a planning perspective the difficulty for a holistic development of Eleonas comes down to four major factors. Firstly, the rigidity of the official land use plan due to its incompatibility with the current state of the area and its legally binding status makes any change a bureaucratic nightmare. Secondly, as Prof Markou explained, the mechanisms and laws regarding expropriation and planning are inadequate for Eleonas’ particular morphology of unusually large plot sizes since they are conceived to deal with much smaller residential lots. Thirdly, the lack of regulation allowing public-private partnerships and thus a certain inability to advance to larger redevelopment projects given the financial tightening of the public sector. And lastly, the division of decision making into five administrative authorities corresponding to the municipalities that share the area creates an environment that does not favour collaboration nor a holistic vision for the area. Hence, planning action is on the one hand divided and unsynchronised and, on the other, applied only through amendments to the plan. This has resulted in localised and self-contained propositions – dubbed by Mr ELR1 (President of Markoni’s Residents’ Association) “syringe-like” projects – with very narrow objectives which ultimately led to the uneven development of the city (i.e. projects listed in Table 6.3).

Research done within the scope of Urban Political Ecology has shown repeatedly that these processes of uneven development and deterioration – which often follow socio-economic restructuring – ultimately transforms the ‘ecology’ of urban areas. Although the social and environmental qualities might be enhanced through these developments they often negatively impact and deteriorate social and physical conditions elsewhere (Heynen et al., 2006). This is prominent in Eleonas and was exemplified with the type of projects planned for the area and the rationale behind...
their selection. The discourses that are used are those of urban, social and environmental renewal however, the actual outcome is foreseen to enhance a very narrow geographical area surrounding them while the rest of the network (transportation, water, sewage, etc) is arguably going to be further saturated.

Without repeating what was written earlier in this chapter, the proposal for the Double Regeneration is the epitome of this condition. A massive project planned under opaque negotiations between the private and public sectors and imposed in the landscape regardless of the land use plan’s binding rules.

Of similar size, the new International Bus Terminal is an ongoing massive Transit Oriented Development (TOD) on Iera Street (see Figure 5.19) planned to concentrate the flows of the two most important bus terminals of Athens and host 16,000,000 passengers per year (Table 6.4). While the location makes sense at first sight due to its connection to the subway, the interview with Ms AM1 (Employee of Attiko Metro) showed that added load to the already extremely busy Iera Street were at the time of the interview superficially considered. As access to the station was still being studied, it is noteworthy that the project includes mixed use activities such as a hotel, restaurants and shops which theoretically will again put additional weight on the surrounding tissue which is not ready to withstand them as it is already crumbling under the weight of the current transportation flows.

46 The regional buses are a major mode of transportation in Greece. Due to the harsh topography of the country trainlines are very difficult to implement. This results in an extended network of buses covering the entirety of the Greek territory. In Athens there are currently two major bus stations: KTEL Kifissou located in the northern part of Eleonas and KTEL Liosion located further north in Attica. Both these stations are despised for their bad conditions, lack of proper infrastructure, impracticality, and their inaccessibility (or at least difficult access). Nevertheless, they are heavily used for both national and international travels heavily impacting the transportation flows of Athens. Over the last 20 years, there have been attempts and talks to begin a project which would consolidate the two stations into one large TOD in Eleonas just opposite of Eleonas Metro. The new development is planned on the western part of Iera Street and includes a big shopping area and a hotel. The start date of the works is presumed to be 2021.
The last project of interest in that view is the failed attempt of a massive mall led by BlackRock, an American global investment management corporation. Located on the North-West corner of Eleonas, a large empty plot adjacent to Kifissou Avenue was set to become one of the larger malls of Athens. As explored through the various examples drawn from the literature review, building such massive poles along major transportation axes is a very common trajectory (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Young & Keil, 2014). However, these actions are usually found in the outskirts of cities rather than close to the city centre. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 5, the project neighbours the residential neighbourhood of Plato’s Academy and attracted much debate, and local protests. The local blog headlined in 2018 “Government - municipality of Athens: They leave Platonos Academy degraded to deliver it for ‘growth’ in speculative interests” in an article encapsulating the locals’ actions and involvement in talks against the realisation of the project. “Our lives and the lives of our children, the history and culture of our country are not [to be] sold to any multinational [company]” the blog reads (Akadimia Platonos, 2018). Several actions and messages of discontent delayed the necessary planning permissions which eventually led to the company withdrawing its investment in 2018 (Koukoutsas, 2018).

Aside from the legislative disarray of these projects, a more serious topic of debate arises that of whether it makes sense to have such infrastructures and venues in Eleonas. The most obvious answer is that stadiums, TODs and malls require a lot of land for movement, flows, safety, etc. and in that regard out-of-plan areas with large

Table 6.4 Comparison between the current transportation flows linked to the international bus network (weekly and daily) and the projected loads the new International Bus Terminal planned in Eleonas will manage. (Source: Attiko Metro).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main destinations of international bus</th>
<th>Number of buses leaving weekly</th>
<th>Current number of passengers on international bus lines daily</th>
<th>Projected passenger loads of new IBT (inbound and outbound)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Departures 3.350</td>
<td>Arrivals 3.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>310</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>373</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
plots are ideal. But these projects create their own finalities and should require a proper study of the market and the social impacts. As Prof Markou reflected, this would mean a switch in the process of planning from serving investors to including a perspective of public utility. Unfortunately, according to her, as long as the interests at play are not forced away from quick profits taking advantage of planning loopholes, they have no incentive to be reconciled with the public benefit. Through the interviews it became clear that these projects appear to be, on the one hand, a curse due to their invasive character and, on the other, the harbingers of hope for better infrastructure and a potentially better quality of life.

As for the other listed projects (i.e. the refugee camp, the crematorium, the mosque, and the waste water treatment plants) they are worth to be mentioned separately because, while they follow the same patterns of development (i.e. syringe-like projects), they are not followed by a narrative of urban renewal. Instead, they are very much associated with the idea of Eleonas as the backyard for unwanted uses. Policy makers do not hide that the area serves that purpose and some go as far as to argue that it is the only fitting use of Eleonas. But at the same time, locals acknowledge it as well and, as Mr ELR1 (President of Markoni’s Resident Association) and Ms ELR2 (Markoni resident), argue it is not so much the nature of these projects that is disturbing – although none were keen on the idea of having a crematorium next to their houses. Understandably these facilities need to be part of the city and even more so in an era when Athens has become a global multicultural capital. To them, what is disconcerting is the ease that all of them are planned in and around their neighbourhoods.

Yet, since large-scale proposals either take decades to be completed, get stuck in bureaucracy or fail due to various complications, bottom-up initiatives emerge, so far, as the only effective strategies for urban renewal. In the Akadimia area, some resident-led organisations are investing into the cultural legacy of the archaeological site of Plato’s Academy and its park. Several attempts and works have been made towards its preservation and the creation of a museum/cultural centre. During the spring and summer months, a local cultural organisation of residents organises walks, events and workshops to advertise and raise awareness about the site. In Markoni, residents are often found to rebuild the urban furniture that the heavy industrial flows have deteriorated, but their interventions have gone beyond the mere maintenance of the urban environment. The residents’ association partnered in 2000 with a therapeutic community called Paremvasi (Παρέμβαση) – which is appropriately
translates to Intervention – to give work to recovering drug addicts during the three months of summer. Using materials given by the municipality, these people would work every day to pave streets, build a small public square and a playground which according to Mr ELR1 were for several families a reason to remain in the area.

Studying the top-down and bottom-up actions implemented in and around Markoni and Polykarpou reveals that both locals and policy makers acknowledge the double reality of Eleonas, as a backyard and as an opportunity. Yet, depending on who is in charge this perception materialises differently. This diverging judgement stems less from the physical condition of the area – which is an undeniable reality – and more from its envisioned purpose. The perception of this area as a backyard from policy makers and developers translates into the planning of very specific projects that, although necessary, are incompatible with the overall Athenian urban fabric and thus undesirable anywhere else in the city, such as the refugee camp, the crematorium and waste treatment plants. As a result of this tendency, local populations feel that their neighbourhood serves the purpose of an ‘urban depot’ to which they react through self-organised bottom-up initiatives aiming to preserve as much as possible a decent quality of life and enhance and maintain their local urban environment. Ironically, the same public actors and investors that reject Eleonas as useless, problematic and inoperable, look at the area also as a profitable opportunity primarily due to the availability of space. In that regard, their approach consists of proposing – as illustrated in the sections above – large projects expected to yield very large economic returns such as malls, TODs, and stadiums. In contrast to the previous type of actions, the main activities of these projects are not incompatible with the rest of the city, but their considerable size is much easier to fit in the large tracts of undeveloped, unbuilt and decaying sites of Eleonas. In parallel, locals who also recognise in their environment the potential to embellish and better the city, initiate various bottom-up initiatives and grassroot movements that aim to elevate the status of their locales and to advocate that they also have a place in society (i.e. Platonos Academy resistance). These actions include DIY construction of public spaces, collaborations with external bodies to raise awareness of their condition, and coordination of events to try to attract people towards places of archaeological heritage and cultural interest. Thus, there are two visions both shared by ‘internal’ and ‘external’ agents that drive the transformation of the areas studied in this thesis that are local populations and decision-makers respectively. Both groups acknowledge these two aspects of either backyard, opportunity, or both, but with very different outcomes. And most importantly, with different consequences, that impact
very much local populations and local activities while they are not felt as much, if at all, in the rest of the city.

6.4.3 Labels, stigma and social exclusion

According to Mr ELR1, political will has purposefully divided Athens between a poor East and a wealthy West. Although I have not been able to prove or disprove this assumption during this research, maps from the Hellenic Statistical Authority showing the distribution of demographics throughout Athens indeed depict the divided picture of a poorer western Attica against wealthier eastern suburbs (see Appendix 13). Whether it happened due to the organic evolution of the city or to a specific political will is not something that I have pursued to investigate as part of this thesis, but the history of Attica’s urbanisation would support that this contrast is due rather to the simultaneous evolution of the port of Piraeus (i.e. poorer working-class populations linked to the port activity) and Athens (i.e. wealthier neighbourhoods with predominantly commercial and activities of higher standing). That being said, it could be argued that in addition to this organic evolution, political will was concentrated on the richer parts of the city rather than on the poorer ones exacerbating the differences. Interestingly, Eleonas is clearly located at the precise edge between these two distinct demographic zones working almost as a buffer or indeed a demographic void.

However, what became clear during the in-depth investigation is that Eleonas as an entity is labelled based on its industrial and supposedly non-urban activity. Its condition is generalised, and the area is quickly labelled a backyard, a void and a ghetto. As a result, the area in its entirety is administratively excluded from the other ‘normal’ areas of Athens and looked upon as a problem and not as a region with its own character, challenges and potentials. The complexity of the region coupled to its exclusion translates, as Prof Polyzos said, to stagnating processes and the perpetuation of a segregating climate between matters of the city on the one side and Eleonas on the other. In dealing with this type of spatial segregation – i.e. uneven development – the work of Heynen et al. (2006) offers great insight:

Urban political ecology research has begun to show that because of the underlying economic, political, and cultural processes inherent in the production of urban landscapes, urban change tends to be spatially differentiated, and highly uneven. Thus, in the context of urban environmental change, it is likely that urban areas populated by marginalized residents will
bear the brunt of negative environmental change, whereas other, affluent parts of cities enjoy growth in or increased quality of environmental resources. While this is in no way new, urban political ecology is starting to contribute to a better understanding of the interconnected processes that lead to uneven urban environments. (Heynen et al., 2006, p. 10)

Essentially what is argued is that urban transformations – or metabolisms – generate conditions that are enabling for some social groups (mostly powerful individuals and groups) and disabling for marginalised ones, essentially perpetuating uneven relations of power through empowerment and disempowerment.

What could be described as planning bias does not stop at the level of governance but instead trickles down to the local scale where feelings of exclusion are present and increasingly felt due to the meagre infrastructure. Markoni residents even though they might describe their neighbourhood as “our little village”, they clearly insinuate “our little village in the middle of all this chaos that is Eleonas”. They also feel excluded from any decision concerning the area and are physically separated from all networks and amenities of the city. To that regard, the refugee camp is an incredible example of social exclusion. Refugees are in fact excluded from appropriate living conditions and to some extent from the city’s daily life. They live in a sort of bubble that functions on a side socio-economy that they have created to fulfil their needs through improvised markets, new social bonds, and a very peculiar ephemeral relation to their living context. Outsiders see the camp as a ghetto, a problem and a dangerous condition – which is in fact unfounded.

Ms HMEE3 (Retired member of the Agency of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens) attributed the planning and infrastructural failure to the high degree of functional segregation between Eleonas and the rest of Athens and the relatively low number of residents compared to the adjacent residential neighbourhoods. Hence, since Eleonas and its problems do not affect the rest of the city in an obvious way, nor have the weight to sway electoral outcomes, then there is no reason to treat them. As politicians hardly obtain any votes from the area, there is hardly any pressure to fulfil any political promises as the votes coming from Eleonas’ residents do not alter their chances of re-election. Still, political attention to these areas fluctuates and, under the correct circumstances, urban voids such as Eleonas and its inner neighbourhoods appear in the political and planning agendas. One might even discern sub-areas of attention depending on the status and potential of the sub-area.
From a discursive point of view, however, these distinctions further complicate matters in Eleonas. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the segregation between areas of interest and indifference, perpetuates vicious cycles of exclusion that direct the development patterns towards ‘favoured’ and better-connected areas that are usually found along major transportation axes. This legitimises once more the idea of the road acting as a border and the various developments along these roads acting as barriers and façades to the inner parts of the area effectively segregating it even more.

6.5 Conclusion – Both active and inert, the paradox of urban voids

In this chapter I set out to articulate a narrative of Eleonas through the lens of the ‘void’. This comprised of describing and reflecting upon what I found in this place while trying to apprehend why Eleonas is commonly conceptualised as an ‘urban void’ and a ‘backyard’ from citizens, policy makers, locals, news agencies and academia. I walked through the area almost entirely but the areas of Markoni and Polykarpou were especially poignant, where I found different interesting situations that related to the typology of voids I have used as a fil rouge since the literature review.

It appeared that situations of ‘voidness’ existed because of specific elements found at the local scale, such as, the porosity and impermeability of the landscape, the physical and mental borders, or the cultural and affective significance of neighbourhoods. These elements are rooted in the morphological, metabolic and social landscape of Eleonas, and affect the subjective perception of people depending on whether they live and work in the area or whether they are external observers. Essentially there was a certain hidden or very peculiar political ecology proper to Eleonas to unveil and understand. This political ecology I realised seemed to give to Eleonas a certain sense of agency that transformed the area from a standalone part of the urban fabric to one internalising the purpose of a backyard. Consequently, the existence of this purpose made clear that Eleonas was becoming an active agent in the transformation of the city. An agent in the sense of an instrument for achieving urban change and the medium through which political will could be ushered through. Yet, from the analysis presented in the Chapters 5 and 6 it appears that amongst all the drivers of urban transformation, certain agents operate across scales and can be
specifically targeted for renewal. These include the interruption of urban form, the mismatch of infrastructure and networks, and the incompatibility of socio-economic structures. As I unpack in the next chapter, these can become the starting points to reverse the negative and restrictive assumptions that follow urban voids and in particular Eleonas.
Chapter 7: The ‘urban void’ as a mode of urbanisation

7.1 Introduction

Thus far, this thesis has suggested that there are multiple ways of seeing, living, working, and traversing urban voids such as Eleonas. Under this light, Chapter 6 was my first-hand exploration of Eleonas and a depiction of reality from the inside through interviews mainly with locals. I started with the void as an analytical category to approach the epistemological question of ‘what is’. This approach however was evidently insufficient because the minutiae of the urban environment, the impact of the morphology, the social and planning tensions operating at different scales and urban life in general constantly push and transform the perception of the urban void. Hence, I entertained the idea that urban voids induce change and investigated the question of ‘what does the urban void do’ looking at the void as a typology, or a category of spaces that induce specific transformations at different scales. I argued that depending on subjective perceptions, urban voids effectively morph into positive or negative agents of urban transformation aiming to fulfil specific objectives and agendas. However, without opening a judgemental debate of positive versus negative, I explored Eleonas as a particular occurrence, part of the broader urban environment and discussed its embeddedness within the very core, the being of the city. Consequently, urban voids are not neutral, they are on the contrary highly political constructions. On this base, I concluded Chapter 6 describing the urban void as an event with the ability to induce transformative change that transcends the local, municipal and regional scales; a condition that I termed ‘voidness’.

There is therefore a necessary shift from an epistemological concept of the void to an ontological concept of the voidness and from the static understanding of urban voids to the awareness of their dynamic nature. In this chapter, I argue that this transition needs to occur also in the real-life context of planning. For this shift, the medium is constructed knowledge and more specifically a trans-scalar understanding of urban space and reality. Hence, Chapter 7 is a turn to the ‘outside’ of Eleonas and a more theoretical and practical discussion drawing on the views and arguments of external bodies and an observer’s perspective. It builds upon the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 and the understanding that the interruption of urban form, the mismatch of infrastructure networks, and the incompatibility of distinct socio-economic context affect the evolution of Eleonas as well as its current and projected
condition. In this Chapter, I use these themes, or drivers, to explore why and how they are indeed crucial towards relational understanding of space.

In the following sections I discuss the significance of these analytical themes under four different lights. First, I discuss the importance of acknowledging the polar perception of Eleonas as either a backyard or an opportunity and investigate to what extent over-generalising Eleonas impacts current strategies and decision-making. It becomes quickly clear that the planning of Eleonas lacks structure, phasing and most importantly purpose. Then, looking back at the strategic plan and the 1995 plan, I examine why the issuance of a coherent purpose for the future of Eleonas has eluded Greek planning. Thirdly, based on the empirical knowledge developed in Chapters 5 and 6 I provide a tentative list of ‘anchors’ on which planning could rely on to create a holistic and context-aware vision for the future of Eleonas. These are consistent with the three-pronged framework that the research has followed throughout and thus logically focus on accessibility, networks and infrastructure; activities and circular reorganisation; and the social and economic importance of the natural element. Although they are presented in succession, their mutual interdependencies clearly emerge, and I put forward the benefits of thinking about these elements in a relational way. Lastly, I return to the potential Eleonas holds as an agent for change and argue that the trajectory set for the area needs to coincide with its particular urban political ecology. Towards that, I suggest several avenues that could drive urban transformation but also address foreseeable challenges and pitfalls associated with this process.

Returning to the conceptual apparatus developed and adopted at the beginning of this research, I argue that under this relational framework it is necessary to reconceptualise the notion of the urban void from an ontological and physical standpoint. Pushing it further, I conclude that post-industrial urban voids, such as Eleonas, need to be acknowledged realistically for what they are and recognised for their current place in the urban environment instead of being idealised or conversely dismissed as residues.
7.2 Purpose of Eleonas and critique of the current planning strategies

Throughout this thesis, a recurrent theme has been the capacity of urban voids to induce urban transformations either through their deliberate design or unintentionally, as active agents in the evolution of cities. Public practice and academic research alike have broadly regarded this state from two polar viewpoints, one arguing that urban voids are in desperate need of control and design, and the other wishing for a looser management of these areas going as far as suggesting that ruined landscapes within cities are worth preserving for their character. Yet, the research conducted in Eleonas has showed that total absence of supervision has so far resulted in creating unfavourable living and working conditions for both locals and the surrounding neighbourhoods, possibly exacerbated by the colossal size of the area. It also showed that most ongoing activities and their interaction with space are not such that would fit a romantic vision of ruins, but instead hard industrial processes hindered by the conditions. Yet, several elements in Eleonas do fit into this category, such as the few remaining patches of nature and several historical and archaeological sites. It would therefore be up to the central administration to decide first what it wants from it, then set the grounds to negotiate the terms of these aims and, ultimately, find a balance on the parts outside of its competence, how to intervene or engage with the existing activities. And it should start from a desire to exploit the enormity and diversity of Eleonas for the greater good of the city.

Eleonas is indeed a trans-scalar entity within the Athenian urban environment. As described in Chapter 5 the area has from antiquity functioned as an extra-local node and housed extra-local activities from the city’s main agricultural land to absorbing waves of immigration and later the region’s industrial and logistical capacity. That is why it is able to hold activities that no other area of Athens can, returning to Ms HMEE4’s (Former town planner and secretary-general at HMEE) concept of ‘planning suitability’. Taking for example the case of the Islamic Mosque, there is a compelling argument for such extra-local projects to be implanted in Eleonas, but what is lacking are the infrastructures to support it. Hence, this explains why rivalries and clashes emerge between locals and central administration as Eleonas functions more and more as a ‘backyard’.

Refer to Chapters 2 and 3 for the extensive unpacking of this dual nature of urban voids.
Could then the reductive conceptualisation of Eleonas be erased? The strategic plan indeed recognises to some extent the character of Eleonas, as it treats it as a business centre with low to medium polluting activities, such as workshops, manufactories, professional buildings, warehouses and urban infrastructures while simultaneously safeguarding education and cultural venues along Iera Street and Piraeus Avenue. Therefore, the basis for a framework arguably exists but the land use plan does not reflect these objectives and the planning instruments do not facilitate its application. The discrepancies in land uses has been extensively analysed in Chapter 6 through the cases of Markoni and Polykarpou, thus it is worth at this point to focus on the difficulties present in the expropriation mechanisms. In order to open roads, the public sector (i.e. the Region of Attica) is required to expropriate the entire plot affected by the passage of the road against a set percentage of the value of the land and its constructions.\footnote{See Article 1 of Law No 2882/2001, ΦΕΚ 17/Α/6-2-2001 “Code of Compulsory Expropriations” (Κώδικας Αναγκαστικών Απαλλοτριώσεων Ακινήτων in Greek)} In Eleonas difficulties in that process emanate from the extraordinary large plots and size of buildings which equates to equally extraordinary sums of money to be repaid to landowners. Thus, reflecting on the state of Eleonas, all its ‘components’ work against its development. It is expansive, land ownerships are extremely convoluted and would require longer processes for expropriation, very few residents live in the area hence voters’ pressures are minimal, and lastly, there is no legislative requirement to act.

Reflecting on her many years of experience as one of the leaders for the development of Eleonas, Ms HMEE2 (Employee at HMEE for the management of Eleonas) explained that the combination of this complex mechanism and the lack of ‘holistic’ planning meant that the only proposals that would see some evolution are random private interests developed on private land which can only be operationalised through ad-hoc additions to the plan since there is no framework in place for private-public partnerships. Such projects include the Double Regeneration project and the Panathinaikos F.C. stadium or the crematorium that were analysed in Chapter 6. In disbelief she would criticise the slowness and inertia that characterises the state mechanism which, in 14 years since the publication of the Presidential Decree (Government Gazette (ΦΕΚ - Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως της Ελληνικής Δημοκρατίας in Greek), 1995), has done nothing but ad-hoc interventions. In a sense, when it comes to Eleonas, planning seems to follow reality rather than direct it. Yet, reality is built and transformed constantly and perpetually and as planning gets stuck...
in preserving a reality that is no more, never was, or could never be (as in the case of greenery), then indeed the approach to urban areas is not based on their current situation but rather, as Mr ELW4 (Owner of bespoke furniture manufacture) very nicely put, on an “envisioned purpose”.

Setting aside the lack of political intention, policy makers and academics broadly agree that the 1995 plan is in strong need of an update. Following the trends of interest and disinterest analysed in Chapter 6, we are now on a wave of initiatives that have built a certain momentum and discussions have been rekindled. Ms HMEE2, however, remained sceptical and argued that so far discussions revolve not around what should happen but “who will throw the [hot potato] to the other; who will do nothing?”. On that note then, what can indeed be done?

7.3 Planning anchors towards contextual changes in Eleonas

When in Chapters 5 and 6 I was discussing and presenting a typology of urban voids it was more to propose a mode or a model of analysis that would create the basis for a more contextual approach to urban voids and Eleonas. I also argued that if anything was to happen it would necessarily need to be related to managing the distinct morphology of Eleonas, integrating, connecting and upgrading the existing infrastructure and, finally, recognise and work with the different socio-economic situations present throughout the area. I also discussed how the multiple and over-generalised conceptualisations of urban voids overshadow the significance and potential these areas hold within dense urban centres. Thus, before advancing to planning it is necessary to unclutter the conceptual obstacles that have been piling for decades. Get rid of the preconceptions that ‘nothing is ongoing in Eleonas’, that ‘planning will always be delayed’, that ‘industries have to leave’, that ‘everything is rundown’, etc. Go beyond the past and encourage something “beyond the old-fashioned way of thinking and the misery that torments planners” as Ms HMEE2 wished. To this point, I would like to add that getting rid of the ankylosis of planning requires looking past administrative borders, if not for trans-scalar implementation at least for setting a strategic framework. Eleonas undeniably possesses its own character and, to some extent, a certain degree of cohesion that clearly goes beyond the limits of the five municipalities. At the larger scale, seeing the area as one entity, it would constitute, in my opinion, a success of planning. Medium and small-scale integration could then be pursued gradually following daily life and the operation of
the market. This vision is also not farfetched. As Mr HMEE1 (Director of the Department of Urban Planning at HMEE) argued, conditions have changed, and the problems of 1985 (year of the first talks about Eleonas) have either been solved or are today obsolete. Back then, improving the urban environment meant suburbanisation, today the unparalleled sprawl of the city calls for a return of people and productive functions back into the urban core; and Eleonas is a pivotal node in that transition.

The Presidential Decree of 1995 attempted to foresee this trend but did so solely through land uses. It did not discuss the modernisation of activities, neither how they could blend nor coexist; it did not build any clear steps towards those goals neither predicted implementation, financing nor pace. Whether this is the role of legislation or not is arguable, but the essence is that the 1995 plan was too distant from the reality of the then activities, context and economic feasibilities. As Prof Markou explained this was due primarily to a planning strategy that was foreign to the central administration. It had never been done, let alone at the enormous scale of Eleonas. Thus, the government did not have any pattern to follow nor the appropriate tools to set up financing mechanisms, reach out to partners and investors. Yet, the current land use plan defines some industrial areas and opens some avenues for services and the tertiary sector to bloom. The lack of focus, however, foreshadows that this coexistence can be treacherous, as productive activities are not necessarily compatible to health centres (see example given by ELW1 in Section 6.2.2) for instance and the economic incentive to allow clinics over workshops would be very strong.

In a sense, this relates to the role of Eleonas in relation to Athens. But perhaps when it comes to urban voids and spaces like Eleonas, the discussion revolves too much around what can these areas do for their cities and much less about what can the areas do for themselves. I have argued that Eleonas is an extra-local node whose influence radiates well beyond its limits, and that the related inter-regional activities and trends should be strengthened both through the physical infrastructure and the image of the area. This, however, should not mean to forget the richness of what composes it but rather to elevate these aspects and manage them as treasure instead of detritus. That is to say that the approach of the world towards Eleonas and urban voids need to change before its urban environment. But to do so the development goals must be expanded to include more innovative uses. The question therefore becomes how much flexibility should a plan allow to manage the transformation of
Eleonas in a way that would fit with the overarching strategies? Although there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ answer to this question, specific goals must be set, and their value needs to be evaluated against the market dynamics and trends for the role of the studied area to emerge more clearly (Gielen & Tasan-Kok, 2010). Based on the empirical analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6, the next sections outline and develop several possible avenues towards defining this role.

7.3.1 Accessibility, networks and infrastructure

The biggest obstacle to the area’s development is the inexistence of a road network adequate to the area’s land use. Although it was designed, the expropriation complications meant that four out of five municipalities have not started the process of opening the roads.\textsuperscript{49} The most poignant example is Agias Annis Street: the only continuous north-south axis and a street whose path can be traced back to the early first maps of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century (Figure 7.1). Despite its importance, Agias Annis Street is a dirt road used mostly by trucks and lorries and its structural status is thus totally erased. The opening and paving of the street could work as a spine on which the subsequent capillary road network could be attached. This would remedy to the incongruent maze of private roads and dead-ends and would allow investment and development works to be turned towards the inner parts of Eleonas, building appropriate infrastructure for industry.

\textsuperscript{49} The municipality of Rentis being the only administration that has completed most of the necessary expropriations and is the only municipality that has taken steps towards the completion of the plan
As long as the inner road network is not corrected, projects will continue to focus on the only existing infrastructure that are the east-west transversal axes perpetuating the segregating role of these roads. Furthermore, this would alleviate the perceived disastrous effects of the remaining haulage companies. It was a common opinion amongst planners that these companies are the primary disturbance causing disorder and disruption in Eleonas. I would like to argue that this observation would not stand if the proper network to accommodate that type of traffic existed. Furthermore, the

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50 Refer to Chapter 5 for a closer look onto how the current road network works as a segregating agent that concentrates activity on the major transversal roads. The biggest impact being that these roads and the buildings located there work as impenetrable walls effectively 'hiding' the inner parts of Eleonas.
majority of these companies are considerably constrained by the inefficiency of space resulting in many of them loading and unloading on the side of the miniscule streets serving the inner parts of Eleonas, creating extraordinary congestion problems that reverberate in the local road network (Figure 7.2). On this matter, Mr MOR1 (Employee of the Municipality of A. I. Rentis) jokingly added that if “anyone gets stuck in there during rush hour, they ought to sell their car and call a taxi”, truly illustrating the dreadful conditions.

Figure 7.2 Photographs of the condition of the inner parts of Eleonas dominated by heavy traffic and large hauling companies

Enhanced accessibility via public transportation could then follow due to an improved road network. Already the area is well connected to the port, the airport and the city centre, as it is served quite well by bus and subway. Transforming the road network would be an opportunity to expand the system and pave proper access to the stations. For the past two decades, the idea of creating an International Bus Terminal (IBT) has been in the works and, today, it appears to be on the verge of becoming reality. This would be a project that would take full advantage of the great connectivity of the area, but which will also considerably increase the inflow and outflow of vehicles. Without a road network capable to absorb these additional flows there is danger the IBT might cause as much congestion as the dreaded haulage companies.

Finally, the strong façade created by the main transportation axes means that the inner parts can relatively easily be ignored, and this is reflected beyond the transportation network as all other infrastructures are lacking or absent with the flow of water being the most disturbed. As discussed in Chapter 5, the main issues are related to waste and rainwater discharge and treatment due to the inexistence of drainage causing pollution of the natural environment, surface flooding, and during extreme events flash floods and overflow of wastewater onto the road network.
Currently, the lack of drainage results in all surface water being directed towards Kifissos River but via very few discharge points. Wastewater and stormwater discharge could then easily be included in an updated road network, which should necessarily be accompanied by the appropriate drainage infrastructure thus relieving the overall network.

In conclusion, infrastructure, in addition to facilitating the various urban flows, possesses a second role, perhaps hidden, related to the quality of environment it creates as it defines the type and size of activities an area can hold. Indeed, successful ‘hubs’ or ‘industrial parks’ base their success on the quality of the urban environment and the type of accessible infrastructure (Domenech, et al., 2018). This was especially clear in the case of Mr ELW3 (Owner of industry formerly located in Eleonas) who had to relocate not only because of size issues but also because the area did not support high enough voltage to power his machines. Therefore, if infrastructure and the physical urban environment dictates the attractiveness of an area, then, planning for Eleonas should include a reflection on the type of activities that would be suited for the area based on the existing infrastructure and the degree to which it can be realistically modernised.

7.3.2 Activities & circular reorganisation

In the conceptual framework constructed for this thesis I argued that, by studying the urban metabolism of an area, it would be possible to come up with a comprehensive list of material flows entering and exiting the studied area. Although tracking the material flows resulted to be much more difficult than expected due to unavailability of related data, the tools and conceptual apparatus of Urban Metabolism gave the opportunity to get a clear understanding of the diversity, reach and impact of the activity in Eleonas. As developed in Chapter 5 the list of ongoing activities can be boiled down to four major categories: productive, logistics, retail and storage, and ‘other’ as presented in Table 7.1.
Table 7.1 Summary of professional activities in Eleonas: productive, commercial, logistics and transportation, and ‘other’ activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of activities in Eleonas</th>
<th>Included activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Productive activities</td>
<td>Any professional activity related to manufacturing and industry (i.e. workshops, garages, food-related manufacturing, textiles, recycling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-productive commercial activities</td>
<td>Any professional activity related to commerce and exchange of goods (i.e. retail, wholesale, storage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics and transportation</td>
<td>Any professional activity related to the transportation of goods and people (i.e. haulage companies, IBT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities</td>
<td>Any other professional and non-professional activity (i.e. services, education, culture, worship, hotels, healthcare, military)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coupled to the ongoing narrative that productive and ‘employment-intensive’ activities should be attracted back to cities (Casabella & Bouillot, 2017; Ferm & Jones, 2017; Moritz et al., 2013), this list helps in narrowing down the spectrum of optimal activities Eleonas may accommodate. It is one core position of this thesis that modernised new technologies, and less polluting businesses could thrive in a marketplace that is looking to occupy people of lower education which matches the demographics of the neighbourhoods in and around Eleonas (i.e. Chapter 5). The current industrial character of the area, the proximity to residential areas and the high level of connectivity to the regional and national networks are all additional factors in favour of that argument. Ideally, through a finer grained study of Eleonas’ urban metabolism, it would be possible to select the most prominent material flows (i.e. wood, stone, mechanical parts, electronics, plastics, etc.) entering Eleonas as supplies and exiting as waste in order to propose synergies that could increase reuse and reduce waste – the so-called cycling of flows. This research has not gone as far as to be able target specific flows but is able to provide avenues towards that goal by suggesting avenues for clustering and cooperation of families of businesses that could enter circular patterns of operation that can benefit Eleonas as much as the broader region as depicted in the following diagram (Figure 7.3).
Figure 7.3 Diagram showcasing the possible industrial synergies between companies based on the predominant types of industrial and manufacturing activities in Eleonas. The graph is a variation of the ACCI data on companies in Eleonas, and shows a count of existing companies by type of activity. The bottom part of the diagram shows a colour-coded grouping of the potential synergies that could be fostered between clusters of industries and manufacturers towards reducing waste and increasing efficiency through re-use.

- Building-related Manufacturing - 38 (21%)
- Chemicals - 4 (2%)
- Clothes and textiles - 12 (7%)
- Electronics - 3 (2%)
- Energy - 5 (3%)
- Food and drink - 13 (7%)
- Furniture - 1 (1%)
- Machinery - 16 (9%)
- Metal Manufacturing - 13 (7%)
- Paper and pulp - 6 (3%)
- Plastics (packaging) - 8 (4%)
- Printing and Paint - 23 (13%)
- Transportation equipment - 17 (9%)
- Wood Manufacturing - 4 (2%)
- Other Manufacturing - 17 (9%)

(179 total)
Ms Balaoura, a doctoral researcher working on the state of industry in the Region of Attica, explained during our interview that over the later years of the economic crisis a large proportion of the industries that remained operational in Eleonas were either the ones that had invested in technologies or the ones that were more conservative in their spending. A sort of ‘natural selection’ were the most resilient companies were the only ones to get through the years of crisis. More traditional businesses seemed to be able to cope with the hardships despite their smaller size and she suggested that in Eleonas one factor to that survival might have been a certain diffuse organisation of the existing industries in what she called “diffuse industry constellation”. Taking advantage of the proximity, companies within this constellation would thus be able to rely on one another for services effectively creating active synergies that allowed them to multiply their individual workforce. What Ms Balaoura described is a fully operational, self-made, circular economy of businesses and a potential that should be harnessed towards the future development of Eleonas.

Increasingly, research on urban manufacturing shows that cities not only still contain industries, manufactures and crafts but present conditions that allow them to thrive (Casabella & Bouillot, 2017; Ferm & Jones, 2015, 2016, 2017; Greater London Authority, 2019; Grulois et al., 2015; Moritz et al., 2013; OPDC, 2016). Coming back to Eleonas, all examined datasets confirm this observation and suggest that the businesses present in the area could play an important role for the socio-economic recovery of Athens by providing jobs and opening to a wider national and international market. Given the current geographical scattering of these businesses the first step could be the creation of a cohesive network of small, medium and large-scale industries that would work in conjunction. Interestingly, beyond the theoretical model, discussions with business owners showed that they are not against cooperation – even though it is currently virtually non-existent – and instead believe that they could greatly benefit from a controlled re-organisation or clustering. From a planning and regulatory point of view however, this would require going beyond the broad-brush categories of the current land use plan. It is necessary to provide with clear – yet flexible – guidelines regarding the location and type of developments allowed. Instead of leaving the development trajectories to be decided solely by the market, the state through its planning agency could indeed specify and direct investment. Currently, the existing mechanisms do not allow this type of decision-making and the implications of this were seen in both projects of the “Double Regeneration” and the “BlackRock mall” which started on the wrong foot, were highly controversial and
ended prematurely. It would also need to bring forth a strategy to protect companies regardless of size and safeguard the existing professional networks.

Lastly, while there has been a downward trend observed for productive activities, logistics and transportation have been on the rise, without however a clear legislative framework according to the policy makers interviewed in the frame of this research. My encounter with Mr MOA2 (Planning consultant at the Municipality of Athens) was especially illustrative on the situation in the Municipality of Athens as we discussed the current laws and he described the chaotic conditions of loading, unloading and delivery in the centre of Athens. He argued that, while there is a European Program for Logistics, the main issues are the lack of communication and cooperation between haulage and logistics companies and the lack of legal restrictions. Ideally, planning authorities should aim towards urban consolidation centres which can in turn make urban logistics more efficient. Unfortunately, the inadequacy of current legislations has not made this move possible. He concluded, therefore, that the idea of organising urban logistics without a regulatory framework that would set clear rules is impossible. The example he gave was that for instance it cannot be allowed for 1 tonne trucks to enter the centre at 25% capacity or deliver at random times in the day. Thus, even if it is appealing to develop in Eleonas an enhanced organised logistics node it is practically unthinkable. Besides the public sector, there have been in the last years according to Mr MOA2 certain private interests towards logistics centres independent of what the Municipalities do. The argument is that there is a need of logistics in Athens, not so much to serve the centre but rather because some intermediate logistics centres would offer a much-enhanced service. To this I would add that in the contemporary era of the Internet of Things (IOT), organised urban logistics centres are increasingly crucial to the operation of cities. These centres, also called logistics hubs or consolidation centres, essentially work as mediators where goods arrive before being sent to their final destination. They not only facilitate the transportation flows, but they also attract investment as large corporations elect to locate based on the degree of enhanced connectivity that areas offer and function especially well in conjunction with industrial activity (ARUP, 2017; OPDC, 2016). Undeniably Eleonas...
would be fit to accommodate such uses given its extra-local nature. This could be a new general trajectory guiding the future development of Eleonas – or parts of it such as Orfeos – that would be focused and with clear aims as opposed to the disjointed and inadequate proposals currently projected.

At the other side of the spectrum of urban scales, the fieldwork conducted in the frame of this research picked-up an important range of local-scale activities that are equally important for the general operation of the area and are also vital for locals. Activities including cultural centres, education, parks, sites of archaeological interest and places of worship create a vibrant environment that fosters strong communal bonds and is one of the main reasons the few remaining residents of Eleonas have not left as well. Such points of interest are present primarily close to residential areas in and around the Akadimia and Markoni areas and in the municipality of Agios Ioannis Rentis. Earlier chapters demonstrated how the parks, the archaeological site of Plato’s academy, the Agricultural University of Athens, the pop-up theatres and other more established cultural venues not only enhanced the quality of the urban environment but had become part of the locals’ daily life, gave purpose and drove their ambitions for change. Conversely, it was clear how the lack of such institutions (i.e. schools, healthcare centres, sport facilities) negatively impacted their opinion of the area, generated a feeling of not belonging and increased the perception of social segregation. It is, therefore, crucial to plan for these uses in addition to the more lucrative commercial and industrial ones.

The 1995 plan includes such uses (i.e. culture, recreation and education) within the zones of communal green. Not constrained by size, as much as in the city centre, they could therefore accommodate cultural buildings and sites for leisure that could combine the trans-scalar nature of Eleonas by attracting larger events while accommodating the needs of their surrounding neighbourhoods. Still, as with everything discussed so far, an overarching planning strategy should be put in place in order to avoid the syringe-like interventions that currently dominate. These new spaces of life should be included in the vision for the renewal of infrastructure to truly integrate them in the urban fabric and in an urban environment of quality. Ms HMEE3 (Retired member of the Agency of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens), who worked on the development of the plan, remembers that there was a vision to
turn Iera Street into a cultural axis evoking the historical significance of the street. There were ideas of extended pedestrian zones which, as Ms HMEE3 reflected, were absurd given the nature of the area and the size of the plots. However, a plan to reduce traffic could be imagined especially if the necessary road network of Eleonas’ inner parts is constructed. Furthermore, the idea of the cultural axis should not be dismissed in its entirety. Given the increasing trends of tourism in Athens, there is a great potential in connecting several archaeological sites in close proximity; these include the Academy of Plato, Iera Street, and the archaeological site of Kerameikos (Figure 7.4). Soft modes of mobility (i.e. pedestrians, bikes, any non-motorised type of transportation) should be encouraged and enabled via appropriate infrastructure.

Figure 7.4 Archaeological sites and sites of historical importance in and around Eleonas: Academy of Plato, Iera Street, Archaeological site of Kerameikos and Stream of Profitis Daniil (Source of base map: Google Maps).

Iera Street, literally translated to Holy Street, was in antiquity a road that connected the city of Athens with Eleusis and the Triassic Field, where once a year the famous ‘Eleusinian mysteries’ were celebrated (to this day the precise nature of these ceremonies remains unclear). During that period, Iera Street used to be a very important road where tombs of important military officers and commanders were raised. According to Mr ELW4, archaeological research in the area would be extremely interesting and important. Part of the ancient street was uncovered during the works for the subway and is now on display as an archaeological site right at the entrance of the subway station ‘Eleonas’.

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7.3.3 Natural element

Greenery, and in general the natural element, is the last ‘anchor’ in the potential future development of Eleonas but it cannot only be parks or an idealised version of public space. It needs to be related to the character of the area and needs to be connected to its activity, legacy and its people. As an industrial zone, Eleonas has no reason to include as many disjointed green spaces as the 1995 land use plan comprises (Figure 7.5). If it is to retain its productive character – an idea this thesis strongly favours given the history, the character and the geographical position of the area – then the vision for Eleonas should avoid romanticising the area as a centre for leisure and “enhanced civic life” (Argyri et al., 1998). Not all parts of the contemporary city need to be the “next big thing”. Creating extensive ‘communal green’ spaces in Eleonas is not realistic from a practical standpoint either. In order to provide greenery, the 1995 plan proposes to combine individual plots to generate larger patches of “communal green”. With hindsight and knowledge of the defective expropriation mechanism, this aim is even more arduous to set in motion. According to Mr MOR1 (Employee of the Municipality of A. I. Rentis), the Municipality of Rentis – the only municipality that has applied the plan to a certain extent – was fortunate in that the designed green areas were concentrated on large individual land and thus were easier to acquire. In other municipalities however this was not the case and were less fortunate in that regard, exhibiting the dissociation of the plan from reality (Figure 7.5).
Figure 7.5 Comparison of existing green spaces in Eleonas (left) and the ‘communal green’ as planned in the 1995 PD (right). While additional green space in cities is generally welcome, the way it was designed for Eleonas presents a disjointed network of unrelated green patches of enormous proportions. Given the industrial character of the area, such proposition is unrealistic both from a planning and a functional perspective. (Source: Author).

Yet, nature, parks, greenery and accessible urban ‘blue systems’ are all powerful and necessary components of cities and should be sought after (Tjallingii, 2012, 2015). The conclusions that stem from this research however indicate that there needs to be a realistic narrative to match and support the transformation of land into greenery. Educational, historical and environmental arguments are some in favour of that narrative but should be in balance with the industrial aspect of the area. ‘Eleonas’ means ‘olive grove’ and while there are still some ancient olive trees surviving in the area, the current character of the area is not to be forgotten either. Absurdly, the 1995 Presidential Decree despite proposing enormous stretches of greenery, does not legally protect centenary olive trees in the sense that there is no regulatory process prohibiting cutting them down. Hence, when discussing Eleonas or the ‘olive grove’ it is one thing to try and preserve the historical olive trees and another to aim to recreate the ‘ancient olive grove’. As far as reserves of ancient trees go, legislation should aim to protect and preserve the existing legacy which could be tied to the above proposals for community-based functions. As for open communal spaces to function appropriately, they must be located and designed appropriately to blend with daily life
and avoid becoming spaces that have the appearance but lack the substance of publicness (Franck & Stevens, 2007; Lindner & Meissner, 2016).

In Eleonas, the park of Plato's Academy, the large unused ‘green void’ in Markoni and the Military Base of the Navy hold great potential in that regard if they were enhanced and made accessible. Unfortunately, even though public space in Eleonas is heavily used by locals, it is also rapidly deteriorating. Given the proximity of these three landmarks to residential clusters, public transportation hubs and commercial areas, the conclusions drawn from this research suggest that it would be more beneficial to invest in these spaces first before attempting to generate new ones.

7.4 Planning challenges and pitfalls associated with the political ecology of Eleonas

So far, I have brought forth a non-exhaustive list of main anchors on which planning could attach itself to go forward regarding the future of Eleonas; grouped under the broader categories of infrastructure, activities and nature. Although the conclusions and propositions that are expressed hereafter stem directly from the empirical research, they remain to some extent speculative and suggestive. Undeniably, Eleonas is bound by its problems but, while trying to ‘fix’ them, we should aim to also highlight its positive aspects and its rich urban environment comprised of an astonishingly diverse urban form, set of activities and people (Table 7.2). In this regard, the pitfalls of past and current planning must be avoided, and the trajectory set for the area needs to coincide with its particular urban political ecology as I will develop in the last section of this chapter.
Towards the end of Chapter 6 it became clear that the differential perception of Eleonas between that of a backyard or an opportunity influences planning and affects the outcome of projects, plans and actions projected onto the area. We saw also how top-down and bottom-up initiatives shape and transform the area independently from one another. In parallel, the ‘typology of urban voids’ was instrumental in dissecting the urban tissue and bringing to the fore the distinct characteristics that contribute in labelling areas urban voids. In this Chapter, I developed arguments towards an integrated planning approach capable of juggling multiple scales at once and, most importantly, about the vital need for a phased strategic plan with clear aims and objectives. Still, how to circumvent the convoluted planning bureaucracy and how to deal with the distinct nature of the different types is unclear. Without pretending to bring solutions to all problems, in the following two sections are presented some possible avenues towards a more all-encompassing, contextual and socially driven approach to Eleonas and by extension urban voids.

First and foremost, a respect for both the broader regional aims (i.e. 2014 strategic plan for Athens) and the local context is necessary. As much as private interests need to be considered, they cannot drive the overarching aims and strategies of planning.
For this, an objective understanding of the site is key. Too often, it was reported that policy makers are unaware of the reality of Eleonas, very few have personally visited the area, and many are still confused by the literal etymology of Eleonas as ‘olive grove’.

Following the modernisation of the current land use plan and perhaps the publication of a new Presidential Decree could aim to modernise the current land use plan and create a framework that will accommodate a larger mix of uses and provide a structure to how private investment should be directed. Specifically, industrial zones (Zone A – purple on the 1995 plan) should be protected from the tertiary sector, more flexible, and allow mixed uses and should reflect in their size the current and projected workforce of Eleonas. However, as the implementation of any plan falls back to the will of each Municipality, intra-municipality cooperation could be considered through incentivisation. As Ms HMEE2 (Employee at HMEE for the management of Eleonas) pointed out, the strict municipal borders are stiffening the planning procedures and should not exist. Eleonas is an area with a certain cohesion and of clearly a distinct character and the limit of each municipality should not be of consequence. Still, the closer look at Eleonas' neighbourhoods revealed that all areas are not identical in terms of morphology, activity or social structure. Therefore, Eleonas should not be treated as one massive 9km² unit either. Instead, a process of compartmentalisation – very much like the one done for this thesis – should take place to subdivide the area in manageable units based on their contextual attributes. Certainly, this would necessitate cooperation between municipalities towards a shared goal.

For this, a legal body overseeing the development of the area could prove immensely beneficial. Such an agency existed until 2014 (Greek Government, 2014) called the ‘Agency of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens’ (Οργανισμός Ρυθμιστικού Σχεδίου Αθηνών – ΟΡΣΑ in Greek) which oversaw Eleonas and considered it as one planning entity. The dissolution of this agency meant not only the interruption of official research and debate about the future of Eleonas but also the loss of the knowledge generated during its years of operation. Ms HMEE3 (Retired member of the Agency of Planning and Environmental Protection of Athens), who worked on Eleonas as part of that agency since the early 1990s and co-authored the official report on Eleonas (Argyri et al., 1998), explained that following her retirement her team’s decades of work were eventually lost.
In May 2018, however, a new agency called Athens Anaplasis S.A. (translated to Regeneration of Athens S.A.) was unexpectedly announced as a central decision-maker for small- and large-scale developments in the Municipality of Athens. Although its jurisdiction would be limited only to the Municipality of Athens it is an important shift of power and planning responsibility away from the local government towards a broader, all-encompassing agency (Karagiannis, 2018). It is noteworthy that the Municipality of Athens expressed its deep discontent regarding the way Athens Anaplasis S.A. is interfering with its responsibilities by trying to manage in a top-down way projects to be implemented within the municipality’s borders (Kladis, 2019). So far there has been no mention of Eleonas, but a few noteworthy plans are the redevelopment of a large outdated housing complex dating back to 1922; the uncovering of river Ylissos (see how river Ylissos was progressively covered simultaneously to river Kifissos by referring to Figure 5.1, Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3) and the creation of a scenic urban environment along its banks; the construction of planned pedestrian zones in the city centre; and several architectural and planning competitions for future developments (Athens Anaplasis SA, 2019).

Such a ‘gesture’ could be an attempt to imitate and bring to Greece public-private partnership models that exist in other countries. If empowered it could in fact become a public interest development company that promotes investments via regeneration packages that do not solely focus on speculation. This would also mean a distancing from the Greek planning model which segregates regulation and implementation between state and local administrations. Athens Anaplasis S.A. could become the first agency that marries these aspects and go beyond the limited regulatory responsibilities of Greek planning. This could pave the path towards context specific interventions and plans instead of the controversial ‘syringe-like’ actions. Urban areas are much more than a set of rules hence regeneration proposals should exceed the level of legislation. In order to build buildings, infrastructure or public spaces, and thereafter manage them and improve them, a coordinated effort is required. In the case of Eleonas this means that implementation should be thought in conjunction to drawing plans. Existing businesses must be included in this process to aim for consolidation and cohesion. Regardless of size, they can play an important role, almost as they do now, in creating a strong and cohesive network of small- to large-scale producers. As for residents and local workers, although under-represented,

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they are the vibrant core of the area. As explored in Chapter 6, local communities are so far the only organisations that have worked towards the bettering of their neighbourhoods through self-organised bottom-up processes. Such grassroots initiatives need to be encouraged, promoted and included in the design and planning processes of the area’s potential transformation.

Finally, the ephemeral life of the refugee camp currently present in Eleonas should be carefully considered. ‘Eleonas camp’ resembles very much the container camp that Katz (2017) found in Calais, France. As she observes, these types of camps are very often located, arbitrarily, near rural fields, urban voids, abandoned institutions, and other “non-places” such as airports, prisons, industries, and military barracks (Katz, 2016, 2017). The most interesting observation however lies in the purpose of such refugee camps which Katz describes as “bottleneck spaces where migrants are managed in an ongoing state of suspended temporariness” (Katz, 2017, p. 3). So far, the future of the camp is very rarely discussed and a certain distancing from the issue seems to be shared amongst policy makers. It is a “story” that is not well known and the stigma that follows the camp translates into total disregard from news agencies and planning departments. The result is an important disinformation and lack of information all together. Yet, as the on-site fieldwork showed, these people have already created their personal relationship with Eleonas and Athens and are embedded in the local and regional networks joining, in that regard too, Katz in her observations (2017). Disregarding these populations their habits and needs and closing the eyes on the conditions they live in should not to be acceptable. Camps were built to serve the basic human biological needs and protect the refugees’ lives, but without considering the social needs of these populations. Therefore, as Ms ELE1 (Employee at the refugee camp Eleonas) explained, the basic acts of cooking, selling, or playing fall under labels of illegality and are suppressed. Joining Katz (2015, 2016), there is I believe a strong argument for a change of perspective towards camps and their management to enable these marginalised people to move away from their current spatial, administrative and social suspension.

Still, in addition to all the changes in planning, there needs to be a considerable shift in the political narrative and discourse related to Eleonas. As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, the morphology of Eleonas might provide with the planning adequacy to include uses and activities that cannot fit in the extremely dense residential fabric of Athens. That does not mean that Eleonas is the ‘backyard’ or the ‘rear balcony’ for which nobody else except their owners’ care. In fact, Eleonas as a place is not owned
and thus should not be treated as the receptacle for ‘urban garbage’ (Lindner & Meissner, 2016). For this, planning, in the literal sense, must be forward-looking and innovative. As Mr MOR1 (Employee of the Municipality of A. I. Rentis) expressed, “if we don’t try pioneering ideas when they are cutting edge, even to realise later that they included these and these shortcomings, if we don’t try anything then nothing ever gets done. And yes, some of the things will be wrong but some will be good. And so, you stick to the good and change the bad. But in Greece nothing gets done so we don’t keep the good nor change the bad”.

7.5 The influence of academic research and planning education

Aside from planning, Eleonas is a topic that interests researchers and higher education, notably within the architecture and planning studios of the Department of Architecture at the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA).54 Exploring the academic and educational landscape is of great interest as it gives a phenomenal insight on the way future professionals are trained to think and work with these areas. During my interview with Prof Markou, we discussed the reach of the University, the main academic trends and approaches to Eleonas as well as how it is included in the students’ education.

First, it is noteworthy that the NTUA does not formally cooperate with any non-academic administrations or private firms. In Greece, as Universities are publicly funded it is assumed that all research conducted is then available to the public to use and institutionalise. Some studies come as direct requests from municipalities or other administrations, but it appears that it is rather tricky to legitimise because the University as a public-funded body is not allowed to take the place of a professional, as this would be considered illegitimate interference with the planning profession. According to Prof Markou, this means that all academic research is considered public and freely available to all, but on the flip side it also means that it is rarely considered for application. Still, there are ways to bypass this constraint by starting explorative studies that will morph into full-fledged researches; but it remains rather rare. As for education, cooperation with private practices is mostly avoided, to prevent the

54 The NTUA is the leading University in Athens covering Architecture and Planning both in research and teaching where planning is part of the Department of Architecture.
potential offices’ finalities to trickle into the modules and interfere with the teaching process and influence students with the commercial aims of the office.

Nevertheless, the NTUA is heavily involved in planning research and is considered by many as being at the cutting edge of Greek architecture and city planning. Within the Department of Architecture four teams/research groups are currently working on Eleonas or have included it in their research at some point (three of those are currently active); these are Prof Parmenides’ and Prof Marda’s team, Prof Polyzos’ unit, Prof Markou’s studio and the now inactive studio of Prof Papalexopoulos. In the frame of this thesis, this is only relevant as it offers a window into the domain of cutting-edge research surrounding Eleonas. Although academia is not directly involved nor linked to the policy-making process it is of interest to discuss current research as it shows the main trajectories of thought. As it will become apparent, the relatively abstract and project-centred education presents several critical flaws for the development of planning ideas.

7.5.1 Current academic research

At the NTUA, four ‘research teams’ are concerned with Eleonas. They come from with very distinct backgrounds and thus follow separate schools of thought:

1. Architecture and urban design
2. Green belts, mobility and transportation
3. The ‘productive city’ including increased mix of uses
4. The ‘smart city’ including creative clusters and experimentation

Prof Parmenides and Prof Marda’s team is heavily invested in architectural design and composition. They place great importance in re-arranging the units of Eleonas and are driven by the environmental potential of the area specifically through the utilisation of the remaining network of streams. Their approach is very much in line with the 1995 plan and focuses on ways to encourage the development of greenery although with a modernised trajectory. A parallel trajectory is followed by Prof Polyzos. In his research he focuses on greenery and mobility and argues in favour of green belts and an increase of natural light in the city. To that end he considers the transformation of the major transportation axes into friendlier “urban arteries”. The aim is to lower the existing interchanges, reduce traffic speed and enhance the urban environment through urban design. Along these “urban arteries” one would therefore find trees and planted areas, large sidewalks as well as several pedestrian zones.
The third team is that of Prof Markou which is investigating the capacity of the city to contain productive activities. Their approach to Eleonas argues in favour of a functional mix of uses and a careful re-organisation of the urban in which productive activities, manufacturing and light industries have their place. They are arguing that it is necessary for manufacturing to return to the city and especially close to the centre. Finally, the studio of Prof Papalexopoulos’ saw in Eleonas the potential of creative clusters, new modes of businesses such as fab-labs (small scale and often independent workshops offering digital fabrication) and a push for experimentation on smart cities. He also considered a return of the productive activities to the urban core but through high tech manufacturing. He believed that because of NTUA’s central location and through its numerous research facilities it could become a key actor in this transition and work as instigator for this type of initiatives. He was confident that high tech in the form of open software, logistics and informatic commons would greatly benefit the city. According to Prof Markou this was a very robust research and the only that proposed a specific plan for Eleonas. Unfortunately, it was abruptly interrupted as Prof Papalexopoulos passed and thus far has not been rekindled.

The NTUA, therefore, produces a very rich discussion although not without conflicting opinions. Nevertheless, they are all arguments that raise crucial questions regarding the future of an area that has been disregarded for decades. Unfortunately, these debates rarely reach outside the academic world to stimulate public administrations and planning professionals. Thus, one suggestion stemming from this thesis would be to strengthen the ties between academia and practice and to create and encourage opportunities for dialogue.

7.5.2 Education of future planning professionals

Besides academic research, Eleonas has trickled down to education. It is included in several teaching modules, has become the subject of many dissertation projects and most importantly is a recurrent subject in the ‘big design project’ during the students’ final year. This project is worth looking into more detail as it is exemplar of the educational strategy of the NTUA and by extension the conditioning of many future Greek planners.

55 This project takes place during the 9th semester which is the start of the fifth and last academic year and would correspond to the two first terms of the 2nd year of a postgraduate degree.
The final project of the 9th semester (i.e. the first Term of the last year of study) is a concept-driven architectural project which pursues a "comprehensive understanding of architecture in the urban environment". According to Prof Markou, when an area as Eleonas becomes the subject of investigation the enormity of the case allows to imagine unrealistically large and symbolic interventions – reminding very much of current planning decisions indeed. Still, she explains, even though these proposals might be out of the ordinary, they are not absurd. The broader education framework of the NTUA stresses the importance of respecting the contextual attributes of the urban environment and as such students remain very sensitive to it. Prof Markou however blamed the strong architectural mindset that dominates the School of Architecture as it does not give students the tools to understand and learn how to respect the particular context of places such as Eleonas. Hence, their attempts to respect the industrial legacy and the now derelict environment of Eleonas, results very often in an exaggerated romantic approach to the ruined landscape of Eleonas. To this, Prof Markou gave the following example:

Students are fascinated by the maze-like street network of inner-Eleonas, which they see as an extraordinary pattern instead of the consequence of the opportunistic implantation of industry, or because some landowner decided to build a fence. They refrain from proposing important alterations to the built mass and instead plan interventions in the remaining open spaces. That is, they respect the private properties and activity but rarely consider the implications of their proposals. – Prof Markou, Professor of Planning at the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA).

She conceded that it is very difficult for the students to come to terms and understand this reality. But the biggest issue lies in that they are not taught to think in a way that encompass not only built form but the local people and processes too. Arguably it is very uncommon for planners to grasp these nuances it too, and it is something that is very much reflected in professional practice and strongly criticised by citizens. In the School, only a minority considers that it is necessary to think and plan for housing, services and productive activities simultaneously. Thus, when students are brought in front of Eleonas they are reluctant to think in a way that encompasses its current reality. Hence, when they work with the area they design as they would on any given plot. Interestingly, the investigation of the most current project planned for Eleonas follows exactly the same path. As Mr ELR1 (President of Markoni’s Resident Association) put it, the predominance of ‘syringe-like’ projects could very well be
transposed anywhere else in the city, the country, or the world. One possible explanation for the difficulty that students – and planners – face in dealing with Eleonas is that the goal of their education – and practice – remains focused on the design of a “pure architectural concept”. This does not allow to solve wider problems and questions as the aims are overshadowed by the self-fulfilling idea.

One main question, therefore, remains. Could the ambition of students – and by of extension planners – for physical design be directed towards working with urban elements that are generated through absence, transgression and obsolescence as in Eleonas? I believe it is not farfetched to suggest that there seems to be a very strong correlation between the educational models and those followed by planners. If we wish to change planning perhaps it might be worth considering recalibrating the education of future planners as a first step.

7.6 Conclusion

In this Chapter I introduced what I saw as the potentials and challenges of the normative transformation of Eleonas that was analysed so far. Rooted in the conclusions that emerged from the scalar perspective of the wider and the particular views of Eleonas (i.e. Chapters 5 and 6), this chapter picked up on what the potential next phase for Eleonas could be given the political ecology outlined at the end of Chapter 6. I tried to expand in as much detail as possible on the planning pitfalls and challenges that are associated with studying and planning such a vast and multi-faceted area and attempted for each of those to come up with possible directions for research and actions. Drawing on the multi-disciplinary nature of this research, through this Chapter, I tried to convey the necessity of a relational planning framework. By targeting specific drivers of urban transformation, such as infrastructure, activities, and the natural element, I argued against the simplification of Eleonas as a ‘backyard’ and in favour of a trans-scalar and multi-dimensional grasp of reality. Interestingly, this investigation showed that the manner these ‘drivers’ are conceptualised is the primary factor influencing the type of project, development or action planned for the area by local administrations, planners and investors.

De Solà-Morales (1995), while writing about the ‘Terrain Vague’; was concerned that the simple action of shedding light upon those areas would immediately strip them of
their very own essence. In Eleonas, however, the lack of ‘light’ is hurting that very essence by founding uninformed assumptions. In the case of post-industrial urban voids such as Eleonas these assumptions legitimise hasty and irrational decision-making and a way of planning that is inconsiderate of the physical and urban contexts (i.e. the incompatibility of the 1995 plan with reality). Discussing these thoughts with Ms HMEE2 (Employee at HMEE for the management of Eleonas) she wished planners would be able to say, “we tried something, but it didn’t work, let’s turn the page and try something new”.

This Chapter was an attempt to provide a step-by-step process towards a more considerate and contextual planning approach, starting from reconceptualising the ‘urban void’, from the negative vocabulary used to describe it, towards a neutral and objective one. Lynch (1990) recognised that conceptions of waste are linked to a specific time, place and culture. Hence, because waste is culturally constructed, modifying our views of it is difficult and argues that we must rethink who we are before we rethink waste (Neuman, 2012). Following the research done as part of this thesis and the conclusions that were reached, the same can be said for urban voids. Because the perception and conceptualisation of what these spaces represent is deeply rooted in our societies and cultural and socio-spatial environments, to change the way we perceive and treat them, we must change first our views and approach towards them.

This new understanding of place could therefore become the base on which to construct a rational narrative surrounding the foreseen purpose of Eleonas as an entity embedded in the tissue and networks – physical and social – of Athens. Only then can aims and objectives emerge with clear spatial and time targets. For all this however to be achievable, the way these areas are managed and planned needs to evolve from a very narrow and restricted focus to a more influential expansive one. I argued that the creation of an all-encompassing public administration, such as the newly founded Athens Anaplassis S.A., could be one solution but a wider dialogue with academia is also necessary. Academics and experts need to be included into the decision-making structure of any organisation to ensure that decisions are not only based on political or economic gains. The current COVID-19 crisis despite its tragic and devastating effects is an excellent example as scientists and experts are called to share their views, knowledge and expertise on topics that affect everybody yet transcend the larger part of the population. Equally, in Eleonas, planning with only partial knowledge of the issues at stake is wrong. This could lead for example to
thinking that by dealing with the issues that make the news headlines (i.e. the situation of Eleonas Camp and its residents or the remains of the Double Regeneration) then the problem of Eleonas would be completely solved too. However, this is not the case. Eleonas is much more than the narratives that trickle down to news agencies and is much broader than narrow political agendas. To circumvent this, cooperation between Universities, municipalities and locals should be encouraged and promoted aiming at creating small pilot projects that may attract academic and media attention and evolve into much larger and impactful projects.56 Most certainly however, the education of future planners and architects needs to be thought through to channel the students’ imagination towards reconciling concept and practical reality.

The questions raised in this Chapter are certainly not easy nor straightforward to answer. Still, it might be worth considering them since when decisions are taken, they impact on the reality and experiences of thousands of people, especially when these outcomes are primarily based on the subjective perceptions and assumptions of planners and decision-makers. As it has been argued repeatedly throughout this thesis, now more than ever, there is a need to understand the intricate ways placemaking, space configuration and social dynamics are interwoven to add new perspectives in the understanding of ‘urban voids’ as decidedly urban areas.

56 An example of such a project is an initiative called Hydrousa focusing on water management and water treatment solutions (www.hydrousa.org). It started from a pilot study working on three Greek Islands: Lesvos, Mykonos and Tinos and has now evolved to an international cooperation between 27 partners and numerous “transferability cases” in Europe, Asia, North and South America and Australia.
Chapter 8: From void to voidness

8.1 Introduction

When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.'

‘The question is,' said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’

‘The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master — that's all.’

– Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass: And What Alice Found There (Caroll, 1872)

The above exchange between Alice and Humpty Dumpty, even though imaginary, raises a profound question about the meaning of words in language. Essentially, it does not matter what words in themselves mean but rather the context in which they are used and, especially, who has the power to decide their meaning. This understanding is absolutely core in the investigation of the urban void. Indeed, the most complex challenge this thesis had to address was very much that of the meaning of the ‘void’ in the urban. It needed to ‘master’ the abstract notion of the ‘void’ to mean what it needed to mean to embody and explain the complex reality that was found in the ‘urban void’ of Eleonas. Notwithstanding the baggage that this word carries of an entity devoid of physical attributes and purpose,57 this thesis challenged the idea that urban voids are functionless or empty and instead argued that they represent the politics of ‘what’s possible’; that they are idea-generating; that they are adaptive place-making; and most importantly, that they are repositories of stories and countless layers of urban transformations. All of which were concealed under the idea of the ‘voidness’.

In this Chapter I return to Eleonas and look at how failing to consider its ‘voidness’ has resulted in the multiple challenges, deadlocks and planning failures which Greek planning is facing in dealing with the area. Alluding on the empirical research of this thesis I stress why the deeper examination, beyond the physical and visual character

of the area, is necessary to inform planning and decision-making from the scale of
the neighbourhood to that of the region.

As Chapters 5, 6 and 7 zoomed in and out of Eleonas, it could be argued that the use
of the term *void* understood as defined in the Oxford Dictionaries is irrational as a
description for this area given the amalgamation of forms, activities and people found
there. The regions, sub-regions, neighbourhoods, and spaces of Eleonas are
arguably *not* urban voids within Eleonas itself. They possess however certain
attributes that, when added together, contribute to the formation of an urban void at
the scale of the city. Arguably, if each of the six analysed units were transferred
elsewhere in the urban setting, they would constitute urban voids in themselves. But
they do not in relation to Eleonas as it is what Eleonas is made of, and nothing can
be made of its own essence (i.e. a bottle is not made of bottles). However, zooming
in on the neighbourhoods of Markoni and Polykarpou (cf. Chapter 6, Section 6.3)
allowed me to challenge the generalised conceptualisation of Eleonas as a void and
a backyard by looking at its constituent parts. Specifically, there was a case to be
made for the importance of relative scale. If an observer was to look at Eleonas from
a plane, the overwhelming contrast between the urban forms of Eleonas and Athens
stands out clearly. Immediately, Eleonas can be characterised as a spatial ‘void’
within Athens but without considering its constituent elements such as the residents
of Markoni, the controversy of the Double Regeneration site, or the dynamics
surrounding the refugee camp. Zooming past the major morphological divisions, if
one was to understand why industries exist alongside residential clusters; how is the
area accessed; or why is industrial activity dispersed throughout the territory instead
of clustered it is necessary to investigate the patterns of operation and the various
dynamics that emerge under the spatial decaying conditions. Finally, when the
underlying structure of how the area functions is understood, the spotlight falls onto
the subtler tensions that appear between a large factory and a house, in the daily life
of a commuter, and in the cogs of bureaucracy and the politics of planning. This scalar
understanding opens a more extensive practical discussion about the convoluted and
unclear ‘meaning’ of Eleonas which leads to the incapacity of Greek planning to
acknowledge its trans-scalar nature and, therefore, plan the area appropriately.

Drawing on recent literature, in this chapter I will then discuss the value of unpacking
‘voidness’ as an ongoing process rather than a static condition and why it is core in
understanding the role of urban voids in the processes of urban transformations; why
planners should acknowledge it; and why it is to the detriment of planning not to do
so. In the latter parts of this Chapter I question whether the urban void is just another Terrain Vague (De Solà-Morales, 1995) and conclude that it is in fact not. Although the Terrain Vague served as a key starting point in the exploration of the urban void, it fails to include the complexity of the ‘voidness’ and consider urban voids not as problems but as the outcomes of broader trends of urban and systemic transformations.

8.2 Dangers of over-generalising Eleonas as a void and a backyard

Coming back to the dialogue between Alice and Humpty Dumpty, words have a meaning and a purpose that depends very much on who uses them and, therefore, can conceal, hide or distort reality. In post-industrial Athens, Eleonas has repeatedly been depicted by policy makers, planners and researchers as a problem to be solved and as the handy “storage room, the back balcony where we all put plastic closets”; i.e. backyard.58 Yet, this conceptualisation is not only theoretical. The Greek state constantly affirms the idea that Eleonas is an obsolete area with nothing of value. Through its actions – and inaction – it demonstrates that Eleonas is “sold” to the idea of an insignificant area that can be used to relieve other parts of Athens by accommodating “non-urban” uses. Yet, as the empirical work outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated, while Eleonas shows a high degree of dereliction, it is far from obsolete.

In Chapter 6, I mentioned and discussed several urban and socio-political challenges that have arisen throughout the evolution of Eleonas. The empirical work also unveiled how they relate to the specific political ecology of the area and its generalised conceptualisation as an urban void, which, as I argued, influences negatively the way the area is perceived, and ultimately produced and transformed. Yet, overgeneralising the condition of Eleonas not only affects public opinion but more importantly manipulates the direction of research and planning towards Eleonas.

58 A powerful comparison for anyone having lived in a Greek city. The most common housing typology in Greek cities – the ‘polykatikia’ mentioned in Chapter 5 – is a multi-storey building with balconies at the front and the back. In the imaginary of every Greek urban dweller, the rear balcony serves as storage space for various sorts of domestic items from broomsticks to potatoes due to being hidden from the street and usually visible only from other rear balconies. The plastic closets Ms HMEE2 mentions were the storage choice of virtually every household and a very vibrant image for all Greeks.
most prominent examples of this, emerged during the analysis of the periods of heightened interest in the area. As Eleonas became increasingly depicted as “a backyard” or “Athens’ garbage dump” projects and research gravitate towards strategies for revitalisation. Conversely, when the area was described as a haven for wildlife, an improbable discourse emerged arguing that Eleonas should either remain untouched or be turned into a protected ecosystem. Although both trajectories contain valid arguments, because they focus on very narrow and specific narratives and imaginaries, they are equally unrealistic and out-of-context. Failing to acknowledge the variations present in the area is a serious planning mistake that deepens the chasm between Eleonas and Athens on political, social and physical fronts and leads to further bureaucratic and planning complications and deadlocks.

8.2.1 Current challenges

It is undeniable that Eleonas is an extremely complex and convoluted puzzle. Embracing this analogy, in order to solve a puzzle, one shall work piece by piece potentially on distanced parts of the puzzle but ought to simultaneously keep the final composition in view. Working only on separate parts or thoughtlessly aiming for a completed pattern cannot grant desired results. In a similar way, dealing with the planning of an area as extensive as Eleonas requires to follow both strategies. Considering only the overarching question (i.e. conceptualising Eleonas as one problematic entity) or conversely working in a very localised manner (i.e. non-contextual ad-hoc additions to the plan) leads to the perpetuation of an unsolvable puzzle and an endless mix of incompatible planning mechanisms that complicate things further. The intention behind this analogy is not to imply that Eleonas needs a ‘fix’ in the sense that the ‘puzzle needs solving’. Neither it is indicating that planning should find ‘success’ in fulfilling a ‘vision’ or ‘end point’ as there is indeed no such thing since the transformation of the urban is a continuously ongoing process. Instead, the argument presented here is linked to the overall disrupted condition of Eleonas. That some chaos and messiness is essential to Eleonas being Eleonas and planning can learn from this and evolve accordingly.

The first and most apparent consequence of the difficulty in acknowledging the ‘messiness’ of Eleonas is the incapacity of the current planning system to deal with what Ms HMEE4 (Former town planner and secretary-general at HMEE) coined “planning suitability”. Namely, the capacity to plan according to the carrying capacity of the studied area on the one hand and with a contextual approach on the other.
Coming back to Eleonas, this equates to bringing in uses and development projects without going through the relevant implementation procedures nor supporting the local governments. A prime example was a proposal to displace the Central Vegetable Market currently located at the southern part of Eleonas due to the increased local transportation flows. As Ms HMEE4 explained, however, there is a certain naivety in the way planning is ‘done’ in Greece. The discussion never revolved around considering whether it would actually be right for the market to leave its current location. In fact, both planners and academics argue that it would be a mistake as it currently facilitates the transportation of goods and reduces travel time to and from Athens.

If over-generalising leads to considering planning questions as insurmountable challenges, avoiding discussing specificities has equally strong drawbacks. Unfortunately, the incapacity of devising operational plans runs deep into Greek planning and was illustrated phenomenally during the hygienist mania of the 1980s. It was the period when news outlets were dominated by Athens’ smog and a narrative about how the city had become unliveable. That is, the centre of Athens in the late 80s was just a horror that needed to be corrected, it was infected, it was a deadly threat and it was so congested that every businessman’s dream is an ‘off-ring’ office. Yet, as Prof Markou reflected, no transportation plan was ever proposed or discussed and, hence, the only solution to a narrative that the city is a nightmare was to run away from it instead of concentrating on untangling the underlying issues.

Both weaknesses above are strongly reflected in the Presidential Decree of 1985 that worked towards the ‘cleansing’ of Athens (Law N1515/1985). The PD speaks of the transfer of administrative and governmental agencies to Eleonas in order to discharge the city centre from central activities. It also states that housing must be brought back in the centre of Athens even though the administrative centre of a city is not exactly a residential area. But the planning panic was such that the centre was labelled ‘not liveable’ and thus the only solution was to overhaul it, relieve it from anything that attracts traffic (i.e. administrations and businesses). As for the productive activities they were rejected out of the city centre in defined industrial areas (part of Eleonas is such an area, Oinofyta is a second one). Eventually, this legislation created generations of urban planners who believed that this should indeed be the future of Athens. Since, research and planning have had to deal with a narrative that industry

59 See Chapter 5 section 5.2

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and manufacturing are harmful and need to be kept away from the pristine environment the city is supposed to be. Hence to think and plan for Eleonas means also dealing with endless narratives that idealise the area. The most prominent being countless proposals to turn the entirety or large parts of Eleonas into a park (ANA, 2017; Biskos, 2012; Llop Torné et al., 2012). According to Prof Markou, some went as far as to suggest how many Central Parks fit in Eleonas (for the sake of comparison, Central Park fits 2.6 times in Eleonas); if New York has a park why shouldn’t Athens? At last the solution has been found, 9km² of park within walking distance of the Acropolis and the problem of pollution and congestion in the centre of Athens is solved. This was the common research opinion during the second half of the 1980s and through the 1990s. Fast forward to today, the implications of those legislations are massive for Eleonas as new productive activities are still not allowed, but, it is possible to relocate there if the main company is still based in the centre of Athens – because of the laws asserting that all industries must leave the centre. Therefore, the most ambiguous question emerges. Why allow an old factory to relocate in Eleonas but not allow the creation of a modern industry that will pollute less, provide jobs and could turn into a dynamic entity?

The core insights to take from these facts and anecdotes are twofold. Firstly, overgeneralising the condition of an urban area eventually means that the issue at stake becomes too big to deal with in a holistic manner. In the case of Eleonas, as ad-hoc strategies proved logistically practical, incentive for a truly integrated thinking dissolved completely allowing the politicisation of planning to fully emerge and dominate. Secondly, without a clear thought-through framework and precise aims, planning stalls and its function is reversed in the sense that instead of aiming to improve the built environment the objective becomes to find ways to circumvent the legislation in order to give development permits. This was observed both from private business owners and from planning administrations. Private companies constrained from the limiting land uses of the 1995 plan (i.e. new communal green spaces) are unable to build new spaces and expand their activities. Mr ELW1, Mr ELW2 and Mr ELW3 (Owners and employee of companies located in Eleonas) explained that between neighbours they informally exchange and rent space (i.e. for storage or parking) and land uses (i.e. servicing or industrial cleaning) that the current plan does not allow them to include on their own sites. Planning administrations, on the other hand, appear to have skewed legislations or navigated legal loopholes to give the green light to large investments and projects through ad-hoc additions to the statutory plan (including the Double Regeneration project and the BlackRock mall). Although
these actions are announced to improve the concerned areas, the actual result has been extensively documented to be for the most part negative towards local communities, businesses and the urban tissue as the developments are not embedded contextually nor followed by improvement works for the adjacent neighbourhoods (i.e. the projects of the Double Regeneration, the Islamic Mosque and the International Bus Terminal). Hence, a truly trans-scalar and contextual approach is necessary to integrate the smaller scale specificities – currently managed via ad-hoc additions – and the broader status and vision for the area – currently dealt with political idealism and lip-service.

8.2.2 Trans-scalar planning and vision

Focusing on Eleonas, the ‘specificities’ of the area are in reality no different than the three trans-scalar key aspects uncovered during the empirical analysis; that are the urban form, the infrastructure and networks, and the various socio-economic contexts. Failing to consider these features leads back to the idealistic proposals of late 20th century where Eleonas is dominated by greenery inconsiderate of its heavy industrial reality. Three decades later, policy makers and academics interviewed in the frame of this research agree that this plan was poorly designed and essentially inapplicable in any timeframe. With hindsight, design was certainly one aspect that failed the implementation of the plan. I would however like to argue that first and foremost, the strategy going into design was flawed as it never considered nor aimed to integrate the existing tissue, activities and people to the proposed vision. A major cause of that is that the discussion for Eleonas starts very late, when de-industrialisation is already visible “to the naked eye”, when the high rates of unemployment have sky-rocketed, when massive industries such as SOFTEX have already shut down, and when the idea of an area that is no longer operating correctly has settled in. That is to say that the problems are known, the development prospects are clear, but everything gets dismantled when it comes to organising land uses and defining the essence of the area. Ms HMEE2 (Employee at HMEE for the management of Eleonas) described it as a “profound crisis of character” in the sense that the proposed plan is rightly coloured according to the different land uses – which

60 Examples in Eleonas include various projects and planning permissions which have been extensively presented in Chapters 5 and 6.
61 This opinion was shared to various degrees by Mr HMEE1, Ms HMEE3, Prof Markou, Ms HMEE4, Ms HMEE2, Prof Polyzos and Mr MOA2.
may work somewhere else – but which in Eleonas, in combination with all its additional features, simply do not.

Hence, cohesion or integration with Athens is seldom discussed or revolves only around the most obvious element: the public transportation network – which as the empirical work showed remains very limited. In effect, even the 2014 recent strategic plan fails to propose a clear strategy that would connect the area to layers and networks of the city from the region to that of the neighbourhood. Despite positioning Eleonas as a key area in the future development of Athens, including it within the broader trends and aims, and acknowledging the importance and potential of the area to induce qualitative urban transformations, does so rather vaguely and misses the minutiae of local reality. As Mr HMEE1 (Director of the Department of Urban Planning at HMEE) expressed during our discussion, the important dichotomies between Athens and Eleonas might mean that cohesion could not have so much to do with the physical integration of Eleonas into the overarching urban tissue. Instead it should attempt to “bring the area’s components (i.e. infrastructures, urban tissue and amenities) to speed with those of modern Athens”. Without a clear timeline or phased plan, however, any projection into the future will remain vain.

8.3 Is the urban void another *Terrain Vague*?

The difficulty in dealing with urban voids lies very much in their uncertain and ambiguous nature, and the difficulty to be clearly defined. In Chapter 3, I argued that the notion of the *Terrain Vague* as defined by Solà-Morales (1995) was very appealing as a generative concept for the investigation of the urban void due to the indeterminacy and vagueness of the term. There was however an important limitation as the *terrain vague* as a descriptor for urban areas fell short of encompassing spaces of various scales and go beyond Architecture and Urban Design. Now, following the investigation of the case of Eleonas, it has become clear that there is an additional layer in the manifestation of such spaces directly linked to the subjective perceptions of individuals. Furthermore, time and temporality are two notions that evaded to some extent the *terrain vague* which, rooted in Photography, seemed to freeze places in space and time. Under this light, the notions of the ‘urban void’ and the ‘voidness’ go beyond these conceptualisations and in fact fill the gaps left by theorists of the turn of the twenty-first century.
Solà-Morales wrote about the Terrain Vague that in these places it is the past that seems to give the meaning rather than the present as these areas exist outside the effective networks and productive structures of the city (De Solà-Morales, 1995). This definition already sets the tone to “write-off” these places as wasted lands, as failures to fulfil their own role and destiny (Meades, 2019). Indeed, at various occasions during my interviews, I have found that urban voids are very quickly reckoned to be wasted; spaces in suspension, that are constantly awaiting recognition and remain in a sort of limbo, lingering to become something else.

In their book Global Garbage, Lindner and Meissner (2016) use not the ‘void’ but the notion of ‘garbage’ as entry point to examine culture and modernity. They observe that the designation of something as “garbage”, “rubbish”, “filth”, “shit” and so on is subjective and appears when something loses its value or its meaning for that specific person (Scanlan, 2005 in Lindner & Meissner, 2016, p. 5). Very much like urban voids. As we saw in the case of Eleonas, depending on who the subject was, the area was treated either as a residue or a haven. Joining Lindner and Meissner, I would argue that similarly to ‘urban garbage’, understanding ‘urban voids’ offers a window to the underlying spatial, social and political processes of urban production and transformation. It is an opportunity to shed light onto key urban issues from health (i.e. abysmal living conditions in Markoni and the non-existent sewerage network), social inclusion and segregation (i.e. the refugee camp and the Islamic Mosque), to uneven territorial development (i.e. the idea of Eleonas as a backyard for unwanted uses), environmental constraints (i.e. cases of industrial dumping and destruction of the natural environment), neo-liberal politics (i.e. controversial development projects), governance and agendas (i.e. political stalemate around key projects and plans). Conversely, in order to understand these spaces, it is primordial to acknowledge that urban voids and their voidness can affect all of the above.

Hence, through the concepts of the ‘urban void’ and the ‘voidness’ I wish to include all the complexity that the Terrain Vague overlooks. The ‘voidness’ especially pushes further the conceptualisation of these ‘edgelands’, ‘wastelands’, ‘non-places’, because it goes beyond the physical and static condition of urban space and includes the intricated and intertwined dynamics that construct cities. Coming back to the conceptual framework initially developed for this thesis, understanding urban voids in post-industrial cities requires, indeed, a deep relational and multi-disciplinary approach; one that ‘urban voids’ and their ‘voidness’ compel to include.
8.4 Vicious cycles of urban voids

Looking at transformation in the ‘spaces of uncertainty’ in Berlin, Mogilevich writes:

The marginal spaces not only hold the potential to be transformed for collective use; they can be the basis for building power to transform something bigger – the structures and processes that marginalize some spaces and some people to begin with. (Mogilevich, 2018, p. 58)

Academics, news outlets, articles and official plans periodically depict Eleonas as an area of potential, as an opportunity to embellish and improve the urban environment and, by extension, the living and working conditions of marginalised populations and citizens of lower income. Yet, since the last Presidential Decree of 1995, nothing in the area has changed. Therefore, a fundamental observation emerges related to the alignment of this purpose with political will and the actors in charge of Eleonas and its inner areas at a particular time. Essentially, as power shifts hands, it has not been possible, so far, to ensure that the aim of reforming the marginalising “structures and processes” of Eleonas remains on track and is instead reset each time the governing bodies – and thus their interests – change. The reasons for this are multiple, complex and reach deep into the roots of Greek planning. To approach this, it is helpful to come back to the core observations outlined in Chapter 6 following the empirical analysis of the six specific units within Eleonas and the timeline of interest by the media, the press and academic research:

1. Eleonas and its inner parts are historically, physically and socially disconnected from the city of Athens.
2. The unplanned history of the area has left a policy vacuum that can attract any proposal for renewal.
3. The derelict built form leads to further neglect by the locals and the authorities but also presents an environment where marginalised populations are less so.
4. The lack of interest and of active connections with the rest of the city has erased the existence of the area from the Athenian collective consciousness.
5. Political and planning interest in Eleonas is characterised by ‘ups and downs’ prompted by triggers such as the availability of capital, news reports, or academic interest.
This unveils a very interesting life cycle. The derelict urban fabric and the pejorative narratives linked to its socio-economic status (i.e. refugees, poorer populations, manufactures and dirty activities), create a particular political ecology proper to the Eleonas which reifies it as an 'urban void' and a 'backyard'. Being part of the city of Athens, this different conceptualisation of the area is swiftly contrasted to the 'pristine' condition of residential Athens and mark the area with degrading labels. In turn, this understanding impacts decisions and developments which are used as narratives for the public eye by 'fighting' the area's condition and hide either unclear interests and investments (i.e. the Double Regeneration project, the BlackRock mall proposal) or treat it as a repository for uses that are necessary for the city's operation, yet are wanted out of sight (i.e. the refugee camp, the International Bus Terminal, the crematorium). However, as far as Eleonas is concerned, very often incidents and circumstances cause the delay and abandonment of these projects which eventually precipitate the neglect of urban form, flows and people feeding the area’s depreciatory meaning leading back to the start of the cycle. Extrapolating outside of Eleonas, the components of urban space – as defined through the UPE+ framework – that are the urban form, the urban flows and the people are the only points of reference based on which popular opinion is created. In urban voids, the degraded and marginalised condition of these components are the only aspects that are engraved in the imaginaries of citizens and policy makers and, therefore, perpetuate the negative and pejorative perception of these spaces and their degradation.

Potentially there could be a further generalisation to be found, whereby as the particular political ecology of these spaces change, so does the type of urban void they are mostly related to. The investigation of the 7 ‘voided’ cases of Eleonas in Chapter 6 hinted at such moments of transition as the use and nature of each site switched between designed and used, abandoned, degrading, suspended and re-appropriated in a transgressive manner or for potential redevelopment.

Table 8.1 summarises these findings. In Eleonas three patterns were observed:

1. From intense use to abandonment
2. From abandonment to renewed interest for development
3. From abandonment to a transgressive reuse of space
Table 8.1 Table summarising the relation between types of urban voids and the processes of evolution from one type to another that were found in Eleonas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern of evolution</th>
<th>Process behind this pattern</th>
<th>Spatial and temporal link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From intense use (designed type) to abandonment (decaying and suspended types)</td>
<td>De-industrialisation and transition towards an ideal of a neo-liberal post-industrial city</td>
<td>Widespread decay over decades of attempts to abandon industrial operations and manufacturing in cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From abandonment or inactivity (accidental, decaying and suspended types) to interest for development (designed type)</td>
<td>Narratives of renewal and growth</td>
<td>Along preferred routes of movement and major transportation axes. Interest towards these spaces tends to be temporary or until fulfilment of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From abandonment or inactivity (accidental, decaying and suspended types) to a transgressive reuse of space (transgressive type)</td>
<td>Long-term disuse and inactivity leading towards an ephemeral use of space drive</td>
<td>Areas hidden away from major infrastructure and centres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As far as this research went, the above patterns of transformation that were explored, were very much contextual and investigated through the Greek context and the specificities of Greek planning. However, the spatial and temporal link that was found to support these processes of change seem indeed to be generalisable to a much broader set of cities that focus or attempt to transition from an industrial to a post-industrial city following ideals of neo-liberal planning.

8.5 Urban voids, voidness, and Neo-liberal Planning

Understanding an urban wasteland means interpreting the changes in capital flows and shifting power geometries (Massey, 2005) at global and local scales: rather than circulation of waste, this shifts attention to waste as a result of changing patterns and scales of circulation. (Rosa, 2016, p. 182)

In the frame of this research, Rosa’s suggested shift is essential because the conceptualisation of post-industrial urban voids, such as Eleonas, then switches from being the problem (i.e. the producer of waste) to become the outcome of a much larger urban problematic that includes the neo-liberal patterns of urban change from the industrial to the post-industrial city. In that regard, in his investigation of the case of Pomona, Rosa (2016) wrote that the designation of spaces as ‘urban voids’ occurs
“as these sites generally go overlooked and unmentioned [and] often […] at the moment when development pressure makes reconfiguration profitable” (Rosa, 2016, p. 182).

In Eleonas this was clearly demonstrated through the waves of ‘syringe-like’ development projects (i.e. the Double Regeneration proposal, the BlackRock mall, the crematorium and the new International Bus Terminal) as they all followed an act of bringing to the spotlight areas that were otherwise overlooked. Through his case of Manchester, Rosa (2016) offers some insights in the investigation of the urban void and the process of voidness. He argues that the ambiguous state of “waste” in wastelands contains a dual meaning similar to that of the void in urban voids: “an evaluation of the physical condition of a particular site coupled with the economic value it generates” (Rosa, 2016, p. 203). In this dual nature however, Rosa found that the economically “un(der)productive” and informal uses are often downplayed or ignored completely against the attractiveness of profit making. This reflects the contemporary image of the new post-industrial city connected to global models of urbanization and describes a pattern of rampant neo-liberalisation and development driven solely by profit and foreign investment. In the same vein, in Eleonas large developments and multi-purpose complexes are planned to replace empty lots and neglected infrastructure while local needs and priorities, especially of the most deprived, are neglected in the race to attract investment.

However, the zoomed-in investigation of Eleonas complicates this narrative. It was documented that a surprising number of ‘voids’ are left untouched. Decades-long derelict buildings, greenery and overgrown nature, or improvised piazzas and markets suggest that urban voids have their own temporality echoing what Crawford writes for the undeveloped ‘voids’ of Berlin:

Their persistence demonstrates the erratic pace of urban change, full of gaps and delays. But it also suggests that even neoliberal processes of development are patchy and incomplete rather than totalizing, adding just another layer to the city’s strata. (Crawford, 2018, p. 21)

Here, the temporal dimension of the urban void resurfaces demonstrating the lack of overarching vision or focus as spaces are developed not only based on their condition but also based on the timing of particular interests. However, the unfolding of events of transformation in Eleonas, from the multiple proposed regeneration projects to the
emergency refugee camp and the growing informal life, showed that understanding the present is as crucial – if not more – as it is to have knowledge of the past and foresight of the future.

Planners, policy makers and developers, however, tend to concentrate primarily on the future identity of urban voids such as Eleonas by following the patterns of the neoliberal production of the city that aim to protect and maximise financially profitable developments such as malls, transit-oriented developments (TODs) such as the IBT, or stadiums. In the same essay on Berlin, Crawford adds that planning, in order to provide certainty in the post-industrial city, tends to point only to “knowable futures” in the sense of assured, previously approved narratives (Crawford, 2018, p. 22). In a neo-liberal system, “previously approved narratives” refer primarily to financial interests and the active forces of the market. Preserving or bettering the urban void would therefore require an economic justification (Hall, 2013) and, in that sense, urban transformation would be legitimised only through a well-defined economic trajectory. But, to what extent can economic instruments effectively deal with the complexity of urban voids?

Turning back to Eleonas, the fieldwork conducted in the frame of this thesis showed that while economic tools and actions may eventually mitigate some of the social and spatial problems, these mechanisms are unable to achieve the aims defined in the binding Presidential Decrees. It is undeniable that in contemporary Athens, Eleonas is an active area whose economic activity and impact reaches far beyond its limits due, among others, to its active transport companies, manufactures, electric power plants. Still, there is no official suggestion that the current ‘voided’ condition of Eleonas inflicts pressure on the country’s financial situation. Although the area is considered a problem of enormous proportions, the city has evolved to operate around it, effectively leaving Eleonas in a ‘financial void’.

Rosa (2016) in his investigation of the ‘urban wasteland’ found that spaces were defined as such when they are considered as barriers to investment and gentrification. It is in this context, he argues, that, within official discourses, sites “become” wastelands to legitimise their reconfiguration and eventual gentrification. The very same narrative can be applied to urban voids and Eleonas. As it was

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62 See Chapter 5 and 6 for various accounts of locals from Eleonas expressing their disdain towards the large planned projects, yet, also their hope that these may bring collaterally some improvements to their daily lives.
explored in Chapters 5 and 6, the rampant dereliction of the area is deliberately used to justify massive projects supposed to also embellish their surrounding neighbourhoods. However, a second pattern emerges too. Interestingly, the degrading narratives surrounding Eleonas as a ‘void’ or a ‘backyard’ do not focus on its economic impairment; in the sense that Eleonas is not considered as a barrier to investment or a failed opportunity for development. Instead, it is the spatial and social strain that define the ‘voidness’ of the area and ushers Eleonas into the spotlight. There is therefore a mismatch between the reality of the place and its perceived purpose. One the one hand, a complex socio-spatial void that lacks very basic civic infrastructure and, on the other, a fictional tale of economic growth and endless possibilities that is unrelated to the context of the area and could be transposed in any neo-liberal post-industrial site and city. The very approach to Eleonas is, thus, misguided and it does not come as a surprise that none of the prospective projects have succeeded in “bettering” or “embellishing” Eleonas.

Urban voids however are not “blank spaces” (Rosa, 2016), they are pieces of cities containing strong morphological, metabolic, political and ecological values that go beyond the logics of capital accumulation. They enclose a richness rarely found in urban cores and in this context, Di Palma’s statement on the nature of the “wasteland” can be aptly transposed for the ‘urban void’ as well.

As a space of resistance, of challenge, and, ultimately, of possibility of change, [the urban void] has the potential to be the landscape paradigm for our uncertain and troubling times. (Di Palma, 2014, p. 4)

Planning the ‘urban void’ and ‘voidness’ requires questioning the universal necessity to clarify the trajectory of urban transformation which Crawford (2018) was outlining. There is also a need to switch from the current financially-based narratives towards socio-spatial ones so that urban voids cease being perceived as barriers to redevelopment or being used as justification for spatial reconfiguration (Rosa, 2016) but instead, serve as stepping stones towards a form of urban transformation that transcends the logics of neo-liberal market-oriented planning.
8.6 Conclusion

This chapter was an extrapolation of the empirical work towards a broader universal discussion and the more normative part of this research. In effect, it linked the importance of acknowledging the importance of scale, context and time to the factual pitfalls, complications and paradoxes that are created when these notions are not actively incorporated in the planning vision and discourses.

Having thus discussed the meaning but also the factual significance of the ‘voidness’ across empirical research and recent literature, several elements have become clear. Firstly, the way planning is currently formalised and applied to urban voids is not appropriate to their condition. Secondly, according to the literature, but also to the case of Eleonas, planning as a discipline and a profession perpetuates a pejorative understanding of urban voids. It is a subject that goes beyond the specificities of Eleonas, or any urban void, and opens a much deeper and broader debate of planning’s ideals and aspirations in the post-industrial city. Finally, the case of Eleonas has shown that the aspirations and aims set by the planning system are seldom fulfilled as the tools in place are not capable of dealing with the complexity of Eleonas and considering simultaneously the temporal, social and physical dimension of the area or, what I have described in this thesis as, the ‘voidness’ of the place.

Lindner and Meissner (2016) put great emphasis on the affective and personal relation one entertains with urban voids. They argued that through various “social, symbolic and affective ‘afterlives’” sites of abandonment are reimagined and (re)introduced into daily urban life and the broader networks and systems of production of value (Lindner & Meissner, 2016, p. 13). Using garbage as exploratory lens they show that ‘urban garbage’ has social, political and artistic implications in transforming the trends and debates about globalisation and the urban environment. For this research, I have used a very similar entry point albeit through the lens of the ‘urban void’ and via the case of Eleonas I have argued that the differing conceptualisations of space impact the present and the future of urban voids – and by extension urban spaces in general. Indeed, neo-liberal planning tends to overlook the social and spatial needs of the places it aims to ‘embellish’ and develop. The case of Eleonas made clear that a comprehensive understanding of such spaces can only be obtained through the investigation of the regional, intermediate and local scales. Something that policy makers and developers rarely have the time or the will to do.
And I would like to argue that the incapacity of policy makers and planners to look at this area in a trans-scalar way is holding back progress. Unless neo-liberal planning stops concentrating on singular and localised aspects, the outcome will remain an impossibility to advance into action.

During my observations, investigative walks in Eleonas and my interviews with residents, employees and actors overseeing the development and the future of the area, it became clear that there is a tension between an idea of the area as being inert and the reality of it being used in different ways; active in a more oppositional and ecological manner. Through this chapter, I aimed to demonstrate the importance of understanding this ambivalence; the influence that reinforcing biased meanings can have; and the relevance of ‘relative scale’ as something that is conceptualised as an urban void at the regional or the metropolitan scales may not be so at that of the neighbourhood. This chapter discussed in detail what are the implications of this multiple understanding of Eleonas, why I moved beyond the notion of the *Terrain Vague* and what are the dangers of overgeneralising the reality of urban voids. I concluded that discarding them as ‘backyards for unwanted uses’ undermines the significance and potential they hold to influence urban change. In fact, for dense post-industrial cities like Athens it is key to grasp the potential urban voids like Eleonas have to offer. Considering them not as a ‘residues’ or ‘waste’, is one of the challenges planners should aim for.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 The urban void polarised between a conceptual construct and a physical entity

Silences are as interesting as utterances (Rennie-Short, 2004, p. 47).

This research began with the desire to explore how the notion of the ‘urban void’ is conceptualised and materialised in post-industrial cities. As introduced in Chapter 1 and then developed throughout the thesis (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4), post-industrialism was conceptualised as a process defined through the spaces of de-industrialisation. A condition of the urban whereby its decaying spaces are forgotten until deemed financially profitable. In that respect, the post-industrial city is the result of this process and is linked to and exemplified via the neo-liberal planning ideal that the city needs to continuously evolve in order to remain relevant. This post-industrial framework has therefore discursive value. It is there to signify both a period and a conceptualisation of the city that is common to an international spectrum of cities emerging from an industrial past such as Athens, London, or Brussels. Interestingly these cities vary not only geographically but also in terms of size, population, management, planning systems and the post-industrial ideology is a factor that links them together in a very direct and tight way allowing for interesting parallels to be eventually drawn and comparisons to be made.63

The broad and multi-disciplinary literature that was explored, unveiled that in today’s global, capitalist and post-industrial urban systems, ‘urban voids’ are inseparably interwoven with the evolution of cities through events of urban transformation that usually aim at ‘filling’ them. Furthermore, it revealed that these processes of filling were not only related to the act of building up unbuilt urban space but also to a conceptual anxiety towards vacancy. Hence, I argued that the urban void possessed a double nature. On the one hand as the physical absence of built space and, on the other, as a conceptual construct that evidences absence of use or practices that stand outside of the mainstream and prescribed norms. Ontologically, however, it became evident that the ‘urban void’ had become a sort of ‘umbrella term’ for marginal spaces that sit outside the mainstream urban networks such as ‘derelict lands’, ‘nameless

63 Such comparative study is not present in this thesis because it exceeded the scope of the research. However, there is value in entertaining such ideas for future research.
spaces’, or ‘dead zones’ to name a few. Throughout this thesis, being ‘outside of the mainstream’ is understood as being disconnected from what is shared by most people, with mainstream urban flows and networks being the basic commodities such as water, electricity, shelter. Therefore, under a utilitarian light, urban voids are niche spaces disconnected from cities to the extent of being considered non-urban (Berger, 2006). Conversely, from a more socially orientated perspective, they are refuges, escapes and open to alternative processes and practices hidden from direct sight (Foster, 2014; Talocci, 2011). Whether urban voids are considered positive or harmful, filled or empty, useful or useless, etc. depends very much on scholars, disciplines and timeframe. The term ‘void’ morphs, therefore, into an etymological register used to categorise spaces subjectively, as for some they are a nuisance while for others an opportunity.

Although the understanding of these spaces is changing towards a more diversified and contextualised one, planning research and practice still recognise them primarily as unhealthy urban entities that are either hastily developed or disregarded (Doron, 2000; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996). Furthermore, it appeared that this negative undertone was the root of a political and planning carelessness that locks urban voids into a certain planning limbo (Doron, 2000; Kamvasinou, 2011). This negative connotation is in fact linked to a form of uncertainty as the void is seen in an ambivalent manner according to discourses, changes, interests and values. In this, what is problematic is that to the core of the ‘urban void’ a negation of the urban persists, irrespective of their context and status. However, the main argument emerging from this thesis is that urban voids actually belong to the urban through the multiple relations that they entertain with their context. Not acknowledging their urban character would, in a sense, be equal to rebutting the very essence of cities. Through this research I wanted to confront this ‘non-urban’ status and argued that urban voids are in fact shaped by the same forces and actors that transform the urban landscape. I challenged the idea of static and alienated urban spaces to explore and reconceptualise their very nature and positioned urban voids as dynamic entities deeply entangled with the flows of urban transformation.
9.2 The void and the voidness as lenses beyond morphology, metabolism and political ecology

I adopted a single case study approach to anchor this story of urban voids in a specific context and hence illuminate in much more detail the mechanisms that influence the essence of this area that I called ‘voidness’. As I thoroughly developed in Chapter 3, the selected case was an area known as Eleonas in Athens, Greece. Its selection was influenced by a personal interest to the area and by its growing significance in Greek planning debates surrounding deindustrialisation and the post-industrial age that Athens is trying to transition towards. Currently, landfills, squats, industries, manufacturers, and other ‘non-compatible’ uses label the area in pejorative and disparaging titles such as the “cesspool of Athens” or a “backyard for unwanted uses”. The particular interest for this site was that it offered the opportunity to investigate whether these labels and biases have the power to influence planning decisions and interventions; indeed, they do.

To confront simultaneously the morphological, operational and social aspects of urban voids, I constructed a research framework that allowed me to investigate the links between urban form, activities and people. This three-pronged relational framework was built combining theories and methods stemming from the disciplines of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology. Using a mixed-methods approach that included archival desktop research, mappings, first-person observations, quantitative data analysis and semi-structured interviews; this three-pronged approach gave the opportunity to investigate the research subject from three disciplinary exploratory lenses, which once combined, achieved a balance between space, function and polity.

Under this framework, the notion of the void in the urban environment evolved from the base conceptual apparatus and dictated the methodology of research. This research, I would argue, not only investigated the urban void but used at first the ‘void’ and later the ‘voidness’ as lenses to look at urban transformations through morphological, functional and socio-economic absences. And so, traversing the ‘urban void’ was the opportunity to collect narratives of relations in places that are transitional and liminal. Spaces that are ‘in between’ but that are also places of becoming, of opportunity. And the complexity of these spaces pushed to explore discourses from a very wide spectrum of disciplines ranging from planning,
architecture, urban design and urban morphology, to urban metabolism, sociology, anthropology and political ecology. Post-structuralist urban theory reconceptualised the understanding of Eleonas by acknowledging its rich and heterogenous nature. Post-structuralist thought allowed me to argue that the urban environment exceeds its physical boundaries and is not a mere container for uses (Murdoch, 2005). Society and urban environment are therefore not exclusive systems but entertain symbiotic relations that need to be recognised and accounted for both in research and practice. And through this specific epistemological framework I proceeded to study the interactions between the urban environment, the function and the people of Eleonas.

Urban theory, archival documentation, maps and first-person observations were key to identify the conceptual and physical attributes of the ‘void’ and describe the urban void – here Eleonas – as a phenomenon within the evolution of the urban environment of Athens and the entities that compose it (i.e. buildings, infrastructure, activities, and socio-economic contexts). Through the investigation of the urban morphology it became clear that because voids are ‘planned’ and because of the way the urban fabric is stitched together, ‘geographical voids’ call to a spatial problem, yet, not necessarily with a spatial reference. Therefore, raising the need to explore what is the situation that makes ‘that place’ different from ‘any other place’ in that urban morphology or its history. Back to Eleonas, this meant understanding why the ‘urban void Eleonas’ is so different from any other area of Athens.

The mapping of the urban metabolism demonstrated that morphology is not enough to describe this phenomenon and that, in fact, once all urban areas are considered parts of the wider metropolitan connections, it is correct to also talk about ‘functional voids’ and indeed look at the real – as opposed to the planned – land uses. Hence, it becomes a question of processes. The core outcome of this part of the research was that these processes are not linear but instead cyclic. In the sense that at a particular point in time, spaces represent a particular function and fuel a particular discourse. Because these functions and discourses are based on negative assumptions, they follow harmful feedback loops that perpetuate inaction, dereliction and abandonment. Hence, because urban environments are laden with uneven power relations, analysing metabolic processes, clarifies the ever-changing relations between people, cities and things. As Heynen (Nik Heynen, 2014) expressed: “this legibility not only helps to clarify the sorts of motivations at play within these interconnected and interrelated dynamics, but also helps to imagine where political points for intervention exist.” In this thesis these points of intervention were thought of as ‘anchors’ on which
planning as a discipline and a profession could hinge to promote a more ‘even’
development of urban voids through timely, relevant, context-specific and socially
driven strategies.
To that end, the analysis of the political ecology of Eleonas filled the more intricate
gaps related to the minutiae of daily life and the conflicts between planning and reality.
Through multiple interviews with residents, locals, policy makers and academics I
illustrated the different narratives and experiences people have of the area which
unveiled deep conflicts between politicians, policy makers and residents, and an even
deeper administrative deadlock in planning. One obvious reason was that places in
Eleonas lack the imagination or the voice of a dedicated constituency. Partly what
appeared to be so troublesome was that people living and working in Eleonas are not
represented publicly nor heard. Said differently, urban voids represent
communication gaps. Why is it that spaces empty of people and structures are seen
as troublesome or threatening? Why is planning discourse moulded to repeat that
they require filling? Why is it that they rupture our sense of expectations? Why is
unused land often described as a liability? The answer to these very complex
questions goes back to the root of neo-liberalism and economic geography, which is
exchange value and use value. Even though the power of exchange value is
recognised, the neo-liberal post-industrial city is fuelled with use value. As some
interviewees let it be understood, “public parks don’t pay”. What then can be
‘harnessed’ from urban voids, for urban voids?

9.3 Questions of scale, perception and meaning

Through this thesis I wished to investigate the roles of urban voids in post-industrial
cities looking at their delicate and hidden aspects; the conflicts between local reality
and regional planning; and by critically addressing their dismissal as urban backyards
for unwanted processes. The search of meaning for the ‘void’ in cities forced to
construct a classification, a typology – that could make sense of all the forces that led
to their creation and influence their future – planned or not. The aim of this typology
was at first to condense the conclusions stemming from the Literature Review and,
subsequently, to be used as an entry point to the exploration and analysis of Eleonas.

This typology of urban voids became the roadmap or ‘fil rouge’ that guided the
research from its conceptual roots towards the empirical on-site fieldwork and
analysis. This classification emerged from the necessity to transcend the simplified empty/filled duality that seemed to dominate academic scholarship and planning discourse, and instead, consider not only their physical condition but also the processes, populations and actions that influenced their creation and evolution (see Table 9.1, Section 2.4 Towards a typological classification of urban voids and Table 2.1 Typological classification of the ‘urban voids’ that emerged from the review of literature). Working towards the completion of this ‘typology of urban voids’ revealed that the ‘voidness’ of space is born either or through a combination of the following processes:

1. via the **design** of the physical and spatial attributes
2. by **accident** where development patterns and projects meet incongruently
3. due to the **decay** of its built environment and of its intended use
4. due to a temporal and legal **suspension** of policies and of planned developments
5. due to the **transgression** of its built environment by marginalised populations, the abandonment of formal activities and their replacement by alternative ones

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**Table 9.1** This table summarises the 5 types of urban voids and discusses if, how and when two types combine. It takes into account the temporal succession of types and the spatial implications of their combination and gives examples that are found in Eleonas and in the reviewed literature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designed</th>
<th>Decaying</th>
<th>Suspended</th>
<th>Transgressive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>Designed spaces that have fallen to disuse. This transition occurs essentially in places that become outdated and see their use value diminished (<strong>i.e. in Eleonas: industrial shells; in literature: “drosscape” (Berger, 2006)</strong>)</td>
<td>This direct combination of types is rarer as designed and active spaces do not tend to enter a state of suspension without having passed through a period of decay or abandonment. Designed and suspended voids however unveil that a new use value has been projected to a site that had instantly lost its intended value before even being used (<strong>i.e. in Eleonas: the designed park that was directly fenced in Markoni; in literature: N/A</strong>))</td>
<td>Transgression in designed spaces that have not gone through a period of disuse, abandonment or suspension is ephemeral and occurs in a very limited time span before it is chased away by “outside forces”. (<strong>i.e. in Eleonas: Roma squats in parking lots; in literature “transgressive zones” (Doron, 2000, 2007)</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental urban voids only follow design as it is the architectural or urban design that generates collateral voids which are, in the end, inherent to the design process (<strong>i.e. in Eleonas: sites along major roads; in literature: “switched-off” territories (Castells, 2010)</strong>)</td>
<td>Designed spaces that have fallen to disuse. This transition occurs essentially in places that become outdated and see their use value diminished (<strong>i.e. in Eleonas: industrial shells; in literature: “drosscape” (Berger, 2006)</strong>)</td>
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### Accidental

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designed</td>
<td>When design follows any of the other four types it is either a matter of re-development or of bottom-up initiatives. <em>(i.e. in Eleonas, the self-made construction of communal areas (bottom-up) or the large projects intended for the area (re-development); in literature: “vacant land” (Bowman &amp; Pagano, 2004; Northam, 1971))</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decaying</td>
<td>Accidental voids that fall into decay are very common and decay is almost always an expected evolution of accidental urban voids. Indeed, as accidental voids are from their ‘creation’ of no use they are also not cared for or managed. <em>(i.e. in Eleonas: sites of various sizes along infrastructure; in literature: “unintentional landscapes” (Gandy, 2016))</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspended</td>
<td>Accidental voids that are suspended require for ‘decaying accidental voids’ to have somehow entered the spotlight and been projected some type of potential future use. The complexity of dealing with accidental voids due to ownerships or legal and bureaucratic deadlocks leave these spaces in limbo. <em>(i.e. in Eleonas: the projected but never implemented “communal green”; in literature: “no-man’s land” (Leong, 1998))</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgressive</td>
<td>Transgression in accidental voids is very common as the lack of clear ownership or management allows for transgression to occur for longer periods of time before being confronted. <em>(i.e. in Eleonas: Roma camps; in literature: Petite Ceinture, Paris (Foster, 2013))</em></td>
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### Decaying

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>The accidental type of urban void as defined in this thesis is inherently linked to the design process and therefore does not follow decaying, suspended or transgressive urban voids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspended</td>
<td>Suspension is almost an expected evolution of decaying urban voids. Decaying areas are often considered for re-development and investment due to their very low use value. Suspension therefore occurs when the projected development halts. Reasons for this halt are numerous. <em>(i.e. in Eleonas: The Double Regeneration Site; in literature: “left-over” spaces (Talocci, 2011))</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgressive</td>
<td>Transgression takes the same form in decaying or suspended urban voids. The more ‘relaxed’ legal and social frameworks bound to these spaces allow for hidden, non-mainstream activities to occur for extended periods of time. <em>(i.e. in Eleonas: prostitution, drug dealing and trafficking; in literature: “shadowed spaces” (Wood, 2007))</em></td>
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### Suspended

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accidental | The accidental type of urban void as defined in this thesis is inherently linked to the design process and therefore does not follow decaying, suspended or transgressive urban voids

Decaying | Decay is a natural phenomenon in suspended spaces and an expected evolution of this type of urban voids. Suspension accentuates disuse and therefore also decay. *(i.e. in Eleonas: fenced and locked greenery in Markoni; in literature: “SLOAPs” (Spaces Left Over After Planning) (Doron, 2000, 2007))*

Transgressive | Transgression takes the same form in decaying or suspended urban voids. The more ‘relaxed’ legal and social frameworks bound to these spaces allow for hidden, non-mainstream activities to occur for extended periods of time. *(i.e. in Eleonas: prostitution, drug dealing and trafficking; in literature: “shadowed spaces” (Wood, 2007))*

Transgressive

Designed | When design follows any of the other four types it is either a matter of re-development or of bottom-up initiatives. *(i.e. in Eleonas, the self-made construction of communal areas (bottom-up) or the large projects intended for the area (re-development); in literature: “vacant land” (Bowman & Pagano, 2004; Northam, 1971))*

Accidental | The accidental type of urban void as defined in this thesis is inherently linked to the design process and therefore does not follow decaying, suspended or transgressive urban voids

Decaying | Decay after transgression is related to the transgressive activity and the impact it may have on the urban or architectural environment. *(i.e. in Eleonas: fire pits, burned yards and trash found in natural spaces; in literature: N/A)*

Suspension | Suspension was never found to be following transgression. However, one could imagine a scenario whereby a space where transgression has occurred, is legally “suspended” to stop the transgressive activity from happening. *(in Eleonas: N/A; in literature: “taken outside” spaces (Talocci, 2011))*

Instinctively, this typology of five types of spaces metamorphosed into a typology of five types of processes of urban transformation exposing the core assertion of this thesis that urban voids are not merely empty spaces but in fact core aspects of urban transformation. These five types of urban change offered a robust structure to then interpret the morphology, urban flows and political ecology of the empirical case study of Eleonas and explore to what extent they also drive transformative urban change (see Table 5.2 Updated ‘typology of urban voids’ following the overview of Eleonas’ evolution. As Eleonas increasingly became associated to an urban void, the ‘typology’ that emerged from the review of the literature is here updated to include notions of urban transformation, planning, activity and land use.). Following this thread, I wanted to understand how the elements constituting Eleonas’ built environment (i.e. the open spaces, the transportation network, the movement of people and goods, the various land uses and activities, and the particular demographics of the case study) are
entangled with the dominating narrative that Eleonas is an ‘urban void’ and a ‘backyard for unwanted uses’ and, essentially, answer the main research question of this thesis: **What is (are) the role(s) of urban voids in contemporary post-industrial settings?** The suggestion that the role of urban voids might be multifaceted or hybridised (instead of singular) prompted to formulate a series of four sub-questions to get gradually closer in answering the overarching research question.

**SUB Q1. To what extent is the term ‘urban void’ an appropriate characterisation for the phenomena it describes? Is the urban void, urban?** questioned the validity of the term ‘urban void’ for the spaces it referred to.

**SUB Q2. Is the urban void induced by specific events in the evolution of the urban environment?** explored the origins of urban voids and the way they evolve.

**SUB Q3. Do the perceptions and understandings of the urban void differ for person to person?** investigated the implications of subjective perceptions and biases in planning practice and the daily life of residents and local workers of Eleonas.

**SUB Q4. To what extent can the complexity of urban voids be harnessed to promote qualitative urban change?** returned to the planning roots of this thesis and sought out in which ways the characteristics of urban voids could be best utilised within post-industrial environments.

Thus, the way I have answered this thesis’ main research question is by going through the four sub-questions presented above. This does not imply that this research came up with four individual answers nor that there are only four answers to be found. In answering each sub-question various facets of urban voids are discussed and multiple ‘roles’ are highlighted. In fact, conducting this research I found that the roles of urban voids are so multifaceted depending on the research approach that there was no possibility to unpack them all with one research. As a matter of fact, a different research will have certainly highlighted other or additional aspects. In that sense these answers are not exhaustive, they are, however, those that emerged following the epistemological framework devised in Chapters 3 and 4 (see Sections 3.2 and 4.2). This epistemological framework was very much influenced by the literature on urban voids but also the morphological, metabolic and socio-economic situation that was encountered in Eleonas and Athens. Therefore, the answers that this research
brought forth are inevitably linked to the context of research too. However, that is not to say that no learnings can be extrapolated further than Eleonas. On the contrary, although the situation of deep decay and dereliction, the seemingly unbridgeable chasm between local populations and government, and the massive size of Eleonas are perhaps proper to Eleonas and Athens, the way that this space is perceived, conceptualised and treated is not. Urban spaces categorised as ‘voids’ are commonly considered blights and backyards regardless of geographical location and, in that regard, the findings linked to the opportunistic, non-contextual and dismissive handling of urban voids by planners, politicians and private investors are generalisable to many if not all contemporary post-industrial settings. Thus, in the global debate surrounding post-industrial urban settings, this research is valuable as – by investigating Eleonas to such depths – it brings a new trajectory to look at these spaces. To return to the research questions, the next section answers in succession the four above sub-questions. Taken as a whole, these seemingly separate observations are the answer to the overarching research question of this thesis.

9.4 Beyond Eleonas. Reconceptualising the idea that the urban void equates to urban failure

Attempting to grasp the meaning of the term ‘void’ when applied to the urban setting – and therefore elucidating the first sub-question (SUB Q1) – was something that went beyond desktop research and was in fact always present during every stage of the research. The reason for that is that no definition would be satisfactory at any point as each new understanding of Eleonas uncovered a new facet of the notion. As discussed extensively in Chapter 8, the main reason for this fluidity lies in the semantics of the term itself. It is so all-encompassing that it is unable to point at one precise situation. Instead, the labels ‘void’ and ‘urban void’ are used by governments, policy makers, academics but also the general population as a last resort to describe a condition which in other terms is indescribable. Hence, is ‘void’ an appropriate characterisation of urban spaces? It is, if its meaning is clear when used it in a casual conversation. However, from an epistemological point of view it is not. It is a purely subjective notion that leads to the over-generalisation of an extremely complex urban phenomenon. Behind the ‘urban void’ a tough reality of irregularity, deficiency, abandonment and carelessness is concealed. Using such filters allows the responsible authorities to cast out parts of the urban environment as of lesser
importance, and hence, in less need of consideration. This research, however, showed through the exploration of Eleonas that reality is very far from that.

If this thesis was to reach one conclusion, it would be that urban voids are laden with perpetual failures and endings – providing in this way also an answer to the second sub-question (SUB Q2). This was made clear through the investigation of 7 ‘voided’ places in the Markoni and Polykarpou areas of Eleonas. Projects such as the Double Regeneration, the BlackRock mall, the abandonment of the largest Greek paper manufacture SOFTEX, the refugee camp, and the continuous decay of the natural environment are all instances of failure and the transition from one state to the next. Therefore, planning urban voids needs to consider what follows endings; what follows failure. The current cycle is new beginnings and, then, more failure. A cycle that is broken only when sites are loaded with expectations and used as leverage to fulfil private interests on a grand scale. Unfortunately, urban voids are very often not serviced and real estate speculators and developers try as much as possible to avoid paying for infrastructure such as roads, sewerage, or water, and would rather transfer this responsibility to the local communities. So, completion could mean a shift in governance. To aim for completed projects would mean that the city has taken possession of a very powerful asset and pressure tool in conversations going forwards towards urban renewal. But predominantly what follows endings is conversations about the physical, functional and social implications of these areas.

So far, these conversations have led essentially to experiments on different scales. These include either wider metropolitan transformations (i.e. the International Bus Terminal on Iera Street) or on the contrary small grassroot interventions (i.e. the construction of paved sidewalks and streets from the local community). But the question is: where do these ideas come from, where do they germinate from? When there is not enough of public opinion to push them or to scale them up, how relevant are they? The answer found in Eleonas was that they are very relevant as they embody some basic ‘urban rights’: the right to use, the right to explore, the right to exclude, etc. Urban voids, therefore, encourage explorations of space, of scale but also of time. But this also means that voids are unavoidable. And not just from a morphology perspective but from a metabolism perspective, a social perspective and a planning perspective too. Essentially, to “not have urban voids” would mean not having the city itself. What is then left for urban voids and their ‘voidness’?
Exploring Eleonas’ built form and unbuilt spaces, infrastructure, activities and demographics, determined that the built form and activity of Eleonas push towards conceptualisations of disuse, rejection and obsolescence even though these might not fully reflect reality. To understand what triggers this conceptualisation – and to deal with the third questioning of this thesis (SUB Q3) – I investigated the existing network of companies and their physical imprint. The main observation was that the disorganised nature of the current activity plays an important role in the gradual deterioration of the area and, by extension, to the creation of residual spaces conceptualised as urban voids. Eventually, as all these separate urban voids add up to create a well-defined area with clear psychological and physical boundaries and borders (i.e. Eleonas), they inadvertently contribute to over-generalising the entire area as an urban void of massive proportions. Interestingly, these individual leftover spaces seemed to float in a temporal and political suspension that gave the freedom to transgress. From the perspective of the urban form, unregulated buildings and structures have dominated the area, as construction remains to this day largely unsupervised by the Greek planning authorities. On the metabolism front, the activities and processes present in the area operate without framework and hence are scattered, disorganised, and untraceable as some fall into illegality. The poor and often missing infrastructure contributes to the degraded image of the area and to environmental and health-related hazards. Lastly, from a political ecology perspective, this obscure environment favours marginalised populations, the transgression of the prevailing codes of ownership, and the emergence of non-mainstream uses. Hence, in the diminished sense of the void as vacancy, the urban void of Eleonas is arguably both void and not. When one interacts with the area it is far from ‘void’, yet, in the way it is broadly conceptualised, it is.

The fieldwork exposed that this dual conceptualisation of Eleonas was linked not to its physical condition but to its function as part of the Athenian urban environment. The empirical work unveiled a strong polarised view of the area between an idea of the area being inert and paralysed and the reality of an extremely busy and active entity. In Chapter 6, the analysis of the various top-down and bottom-up initiatives implemented in and around the Markoni and Polykarpou areas unveiled that this dual perception generated, accordingly, two separate visions of Eleonas as either an opportunity or a handicap. Most importantly, this political ecology proper to Eleonas gives the urban void a sense of agency and transforms it into a leverage tool or a ‘playground’ used to propel various agendas – either hidden or more transparent. Addressing the fourth and last research objective (SUB Q4), I argued that by
purposefully targeting infrastructure, current activities and the natural element the developments and actions planned for these areas could be influenced positively. In Chapter 7, I determined several drivers and strategies that could embed Eleonas within the physical and social networks of Athens while remaining true to its own nature. Turning to the Greek context, for this to be implemented, planning must move from its narrow and ‘syringe-like’ focus.

The metaphor of the syringe to refer to developments and large regeneration projects is an important conceptual and discursive contribution of this thesis as it refers to said projects not so much through their design and form but instead it alludes to the processes that underpin their creation (see also the metaphor of the “spatial fix” (Harvey, 2001)). Alluding to plans and developments as ‘syringe-like’ infers a specific type of non-contextual and localised development that is inconsiderate of the actual morphology, metabolism, and political ecology of space. At various points in this thesis examples of such projects were discussed in depth unveiling a series of limitations that were linked essentially to the current planning landscape of Greece. I also concluded that aiming at transforming the urban through these types of developments is not sustainable in the long term and that solutions need to be found towards broader and more expansive strategies.

A public body with broader oversight such as the newly founded Anaplassis S.A., could be one avenue towards that but, most certainly, a wider spectrum of experts and academics need to be included in the board and throughout the decision-making process. Rethinking the education of future planners is also proposed towards reconciling the conceptual and practical aspects of Urban Planning. Joining Hillier (1996), the conclusions of this thesis support that urban form changes very slowly whereas function, on the contrary, changes very fast. Hence, to plan urban voids such as Eleonas means to consider paths that would promote a future built environment that is flexible enough to adapt to the changes of use and the ‘voidness’ of these places.

9.5 Contributions to planning research and practice

The contributions of this thesis are four-fold and could be distinguished into theoretical (points 1 and 2) and practical (points 3 and 4).
1. Intellectual and disciplinary contribution to multi-disciplinary research and the fields of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology.

2. Conceptual contribution regarding the notion of the ‘void’ in post-industrial cities and the need for a reconceptualisation of the ‘urban void’.

3. Practical and methodological contribution based on the original combination of tools and methods for more effective trans-scalar and multidisciplinary research.

4. Practice oriented contribution recommending a new approach to urban voids and Eleonas in particular.

Firstly, the intellectual and disciplinary contribution to the fields of Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology was made through the creation of a broad ‘UPE+ framework’ that combines methods and theories of these disciplines towards a more holistic understanding of urban space. Additionally, one of the core aims of this UPE+ framework was to address one limitation expressed by Heynen et al. (2006): that issues of uneven urban socio-ecological change which emerge from spatial considerations such as the urban form or the uneven distribution of amenities and networks are rarely considered yet are key to understand how social process, material metabolism, and spatial form interact and shape the contemporary urban landscapes.

Secondly, the reconceptualisation of the ‘urban void’ implied that these spaces should be understood as dynamic entities and active components of urban transformation. It suggested a major conceptual shift from the epistemological concept of the ‘void’ to the ontological notion of the ‘voidness’; that is the capacity of urban voids to act as agents for transformative urban change (Figure 9.1). This shift began as a speculative observation in Chapter 1. It was exemplified by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 which led to the relational, trans-scalar and multi-disciplinary conceptual framework constructed in Chapter 3. The dynamism that the ‘voidness’ encloses was further explored through specific empirical examples in Chapter 5, 6 and 7 which demonstrated that urban voids transcend physical space to become agents of change within the patterns of urban transformation. This trajectory was concluded in Chapter 8 where I returned to this reconceptualisation and connected it to broader planning debates and other terminologies and types akin to urban voids.

Thirdly, the practical and methodological contribution includes the application of an original and replicable approach for trans-scalar and multi-disciplinary research
stemming from the aforementioned UPE+ framework. Lastly, the contribution to planning practice relates to the significance of urban voids within post-industrial urban settings. To Greek planning more specifically, this thesis recommends several potential avenues towards the future development of Eleonas.

**DEFINITION OF THE ‘VOID’ IN THE URBAN SETTING**
Through the exploration of Eleonas in Athens as a case study from the perspectives of Planning, Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology

**TYPOLOGY OF URBAN VOIDS**
Provided an understanding of "what does the urban void do?"

**AGENCY OF URBAN VOIDS**
Conceptualisation of the urban void as a being changing according to time, scales and contexts

**ANALYSIS**

**MAJOR CONCEPTUAL SHIFT**
from
the epistemological concept of the **VOID**
to
the ontological notion of the **VOIDNESS**

**OUTCOMES**

**RECONCEPTUALISATION OF ‘URBAN VOIDS’**
As entities capable of inducing transformative urban change influencing urban form, activity, and socio-economic contexts in a trans-scalar and impactful way

**FURTHER PROJECTIONS**
Planning recommendations towards urban voids & pathways for future planning of Eleonas and for planning in the Greek context

*Figure 9.1 Diagrammatic summary of contributions of this thesis to planning theory and practice regarding the notion of the ‘urban void’ and its conceptualisation.*
9.5.1 Theoretical contributions

Based on the complexity unveiled during the Literature Review, I argued that a monodimensional framework would be very limiting and would not be able to reach the desired degree of detail, nor uncover with clarity the different aspects that construct urban voids. Hence, in this new framework dubbed ‘UPE+’ I used Urban Political Ecology as the umbrella discipline that would be complemented with learnings derived from Urban Morphology and Urban Metabolism. Thus, the interest of this three-pronged conceptual framework lies in that it exceeds the reach of each individual discipline while simultaneously enriching each of them with new understandings of space and expanded research horizons.

This research framework exemplified the fragmented municipal governance of Eleonas and brought to light how urban spaces are dismissed and categorised according to their state of design, planning, decay, obsolescence and suspension (see various adaptations of the ‘typology of urban voids’ in Chapters 2, 5 and 6). Through this categorisation, I was able to explore the diversity of urban settings present in Eleonas and argue for a reconceptualisation of the notion of the urban void. One that would recognise the finer grain of valuable relations between people and their working and living environments. In that the notion of ‘voidness’ was constructed to convey the active status urban voids have had in processes of urban transformation since the emergence of the first cities. There is therefore at this point an important switch in understanding spaces from static objects to active processes and modes of urban transformation. An ontological contribution that could be used as a new theoretical approach to urban areas and which is in line with recent cutting-edge research in Urban Political Ecology (Cook & Swyngedouw, 2012; Gandy, 2014; Nik Heynen et al., 2006; Kaika, 2005; Latham & Wood, 2015; E. Swyngedouw, 2006) and Urban Geography (Crawford, 2018; Cupers & Miessen, 2018; Di Palma, 2014; Lindner & Meissner, 2016; Misselwitz, 2018; Rosa, 2013, 2016).

9.5.2 Practical contributions

Through this reconceptualisation, the ‘void’ transformed from an object of study to a methodology in itself. It was the deliberate will to look at Eleonas ‘through the lens of the void’ not in the sense of vacancy and emptiness but as a notion embodying the complexity that was discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapters 3 and 4 I designed the UPE+ multi-disciplinary research framework with the desire to combine desktop
research, interviews, statistical data, mappings and observation in a single study. As fully outlined in Chapter 4, this framework used the lens of Urban Morphology to uncover the various stages of change and transformation occurring in space while Urban Political Ecology unpacked the socio-economic complexity of Eleonas and a finer understanding of the dynamics and politics of space. In this disciplinary mix, Urban Metabolism worked as a binding agent linking urban form and people through the analysis of urban flows (i.e. water, transportation, activities) their presence in space and the degree to which they are accessible. This framing was exceptionally helpful in providing with a truly trans-scalar, contextual and relational reading of space, and is expected to be valuable and constructive in the research of urban settings beyond urban voids.

Finally, in Chapter 7, the outcomes of this analysis were used as anchors to examine strategies for a relational and inclusive planning of Eleonas. I considered several pitfalls and challenges associated with planning a complex and expansive area such as Eleonas and presented various tentative paths for its ‘next phase’. These included three main points:

1. An urgent need to enhance accessibility, networks and infrastructures
2. Plan in accordance to the existing activities and provide firm ground for technological, logistic and industrial progress, as well as the cycling of urban flows
3. An attentive consideration of the natural environment and its potential in providing an improved urban environment for residents and workers.

These suggestions are proposed to be of help to planners in Greece and provide some assistance in deciding the future of the area. Furthermore, from a broader planning point of view, the difficulties and hurdles faced in planning Eleonas may serve as additional insights to the existing body of knowledge and practices related to urban voids and similar spaces.
9.6 Limitations of research

During the analysis stage of the research limitations were encountered which, within the given timeframe, didn’t allow to achieve the degree of detail intended in some respects.

The first limitation is associated with the quality of quantitative data made available regarding the current condition of the area. The obtained demographic data for the HSA was built upon the most recent census dating back to 2011 hence leaving undocumented a period of seven to eight years at the date of research (2017-2018). As developed in Chapter 4 however, this limitation was overcome to a large extent via the empirical study and fieldwork. Nevertheless, a more recent census would obviously present a situation closer to today’s reality. Additionally, the lack of clarity within the HSA and ACCI datasets constrained this research to rely onto some approximations regarding the actual number of companies present in the area, the number of buildings and the distribution of uses. Where possible, data was cross-referenced with first-person observations and additional desktop research. In all cases a satisfactory amount of overlap was found and thus the obtained datasets were considered correct and sufficiently precise for the objectives of this thesis.

The second is linked to the total inexistence of material flow data from companies which, therefore, made the complete analysis of the area’s urban metabolism unachievable. Through observations and interviews, fieldwork filled some gaps but was unable to cover the total extent of the area. As such, the suggestions and findings related to Urban Metabolism remain indicative and are presented as witnesses to the complex ongoing activity instead of presenting a comprehensive list of urban flows and patterns to be cycled. In that respect the outcomes of the metabolic analysis remain suggestive in Chapters 5 and 7 rather than normative as hoped. Still, it is a personal belief and a core position of this thesis that a clear understanding of the urban metabolism of areas can lead towards the enhancement of the quality of the built environment and its operation tackling major issues of unemployment, sustainability and social equality. Where this research felt short, a subsequent one should aim to provide a more complete metabolic profile of Eleonas and come up with clear and attainable aims of circularity and prospects of urban redevelopment that are context dependent and socially oriented.
On a personal level, as a researcher living away from the context of research, the first limitation was my limited network of people I could approach to kick start the investigation. Thankfully, acquaintances, personal research, and Prof Markou connected me to several key people which were key in growing a robust network which eventually snowballed quickly during the months of fieldwork. Secondly, being Greek but based abroad, I was, in some cases, initially seen as an outsider. Although all interviews and exchanges occurred in Greek mentioning a foreign university instead of a renowned Greek one, surprised some people. However, as mentioned in the Research Ethics (see Section 4.5) I was in the majority of cases able to fully explain the research project and reassure them of the legitimacy of this research.

Although I tried as much as possible to include recent changes regarding Eleonas, many of the minor updates that have emerged after the period of fieldwork and more specifically after October 2019 (a moment when the gathering and analysis of new information stopped) have been omitted. These included, for example, debates about the new IBT terminal (FOS, 2020), or the stalling and re-ignition of the crematorium project (Ant1news, 2020). Conversely, big news and new developments such as the termination of the BlackRock mall project or the construction of the first crematorium in the Attica Region, in Ritsona, have been added in the thesis and the arguments surrounding them have been updated to consider their impact.

9.7 Future research avenues and outputs

I used Eleonas as a vessel to explore the ‘urban void’ both as an object – in the sense of a physical entity of urban space – and a process – in the sense of a conceptual idea that affects one’s understanding of space. Following the investigation of Eleonas it became clear that these two aspects merge and interlock. Urban voids physically exist and are visible to all in the same way, yet they are lived and conceptualised differently becoming for some ‘safe havens’ while for others ‘backyards’. Grasping the importance and richness of this reality is vital for the sound evolution of Eleonas, urban voids and cities in general. The conceptual and methodological frameworks proposed for exploring Eleonas and the outcomes of the empirical analysis presented in this thesis open various paths for additional research avenues in multi-disciplinary research for the study of the urban environment. Although this research was conducted primarily within the field of Planning, the research horizons emerging from this research could benefit also a broader array of Urban Studies disciplines such as
Geography, Architecture, Urban Ecology and to some extent Economics. Subsequent routes of investigation are divided into four themes that match the four categories of contributions.

Firstly, from a methodological standpoint, the benefit of an inter-disciplinary framework was evident. Combining Urban Morphology, Urban Metabolism and Urban Political Ecology allowed me to go beyond the preconceptions projected onto the urban void and Eleonas by the citizens but also, perhaps most importantly, by me. As a researcher it allowed me to navigate the urban void in an attached but objective way. It pushed me to constantly revisit the assumptions and biases I had coming into fieldwork as more and more divergent opinions and observations emerged. In that regard, this thesis will hopefully inspire more inter-disciplinary research to be conducted to uncover and interpret the complex and relational nature of cities. Secondly, although this research was based on a wide spectrum of literature, the reconceptualisation of the notion of the urban void stemmed primarily from the reality of the studied case of Eleonas. In order to add and enhance the understanding of urban voids and the impact of voidness in processes of urban transformation, additional cases could be investigated. A comparative study could be envisioned as well, to add insights and richness to this reconceptualisation. Finally, regarding the planning of urban voids, this thesis provided with suggestions and avenues for development. Implementation of these, however, would require a much closer investigation into the politics and laws of planning and governance. A deeper investigation of this sort could allow to pave a clearer road for the stepwise implementation of planning models from theory to practice.

The first foreseeable output of this thesis would include publications in selected journals that would stress the impact I wanted this research to make. Two main papers are planned, whose main ideas have already been presented in conferences, and a third one is envisioned. The first, titled “Scale and Perceptions of Urban Voids in Post-Industrial Cities. Learnings from Eleonas in Athens, Greece” distils two main arguments of this thesis. It argues, on the one hand, that urban voids are not ‘waste’ or ‘residual’ entities in the urban environment but instead active components of it that bear an important role in the evolution of the post-industrial city. On the other hand, it stresses the significance of acknowledging, as planners, that spaces mean different things for different people. And further to that, that these subjective perceptions are not simply “opinions” but instead shape and steer governance, planning decisions and eventually urban transformation. The second paper, titled “The Morphology of
Urban Voids: A Metabolic Approach to Cohesion” covers the necessity to build bridges between the physical urban environment and the metabolism of urban voids and cities. This paper puts great emphasis on the methodological side and draws a lot from the research approach employed in the frame of this thesis to bring to the fore not only the importance of considering a relational approach to urban spaces but also the way to do so. Finally, the third potential paper considered would be aimed towards the Greek public and cover essentially Eleonas as a space. Drawing mostly from the empirical work done in the frame of this thesis, I would like to compose a sort of comprehensive profile of Eleonas which is something that has not been done since the research of the NTUA of 1992 (Wassenhoven & Markatos, 1992). In that same direction, I am planning to redact this thesis into a monograph that will be translated in Greek and made available to a much broader audience in Greece that would otherwise not engage with the original English text.

Future research opportunities include first and foremost a post-doctoral project that would aim to fill in some of the gaps left open. The most important one being to test the validity of the arguments raised from Eleonas in other international post-industrial contexts. The interest would be to select cities with similar industrial patterns to that of Athens yet with different approaches towards deindustrialisation and the transition towards the post-industrial city. The comparative aspect of this study will be extremely relevant to determine whether regardless of differences the same conclusions can be reached regarding the role of urban voids in the patterns of development (i.e. are they used as leverage everywhere or is it only a feature of Greek planning?) and their perception from locals and policy makers (i.e. are ‘urban voids’ always attracting dual positive/negative attitudes towards them and what are the consequences?).

Opportunities can also be found in teaching graduate students studying in the fields of the built environment. Interdisciplinary research-by-design teaching should be promoted not only in Planning but should be extended to several disciplines covering the built environment and most specifically Architecture, Urban Design and Geography. Using a multi-disciplinary approach, the aim would be for students to learn to dissect the urban setting objectively, go past subjective assumptions and biases, and learn to be able to acknowledge and consider divergent viewpoints in the same light that this thesis acknowledged the opinions of residents, workers, policy makers and academics before reaching its conclusions.
9.8 Concluding remarks

This thesis was a personal journey into the forgotten, decayed, suspended and transgressive spaces of cities. The overgeneralisation of areas as urban voids systematically overshadows the diversity and complexity of these spaces and reduces them conceptually as problematic non-urban entities or as opportunities for large development projects with high economic returns. The impacts of such polar categorisation were made apparent through this research with devastating effect on both urban and social fronts. In this thesis I raised the question “what is the role of urban voids in processes of urban transformation?”. In answering this question, this thesis shed light on multiple viewpoints and investigated the tension and paradoxical understanding of the ‘voidness’: a creative and generative state proper to urban voids which encapsulates the capacity of these areas to induce transformative urban change; that is trans-scalar, impactful transformation whose ripples influence the form, the activity and the socio-economic context of cities and their locales. From the exploration of Eleonas it emerged that urban voids are effectively unavoidable from a morphological, metabolic and socio-economic perspective. They exist not in spite of the city but because of the city and to avoid them would require not having the city in the first place. Therefore, through the lens of the ‘void’ I had the opportunity to navigate these spaces, understand them as part of the urban networks and share their story as spaces of rejection and abandonment but also of becoming and change. Exploring the design, decay, suspension and transgression of urban voids gave the opportunity to go beyond the first threshold of the built environment and reach deep into their important functional and social roles. This thesis opened as many questions as it answered and in doing so exposed several avenues for the understanding of ‘urban voids’ to evolve towards a relational and comprehensive ontology of their ‘voidness’.
Afterword

The current global events linked to the COVID-19 pandemic have shaken every social and economic aspect of daily life. Cities and dense urban centres have been, for obvious reasons of social closeness, more deeply affected than less densely populated areas and inevitably, urban voids and Eleonas are also affected. At the time of writing (19 May 2020) Greece has avoided the exponential tragic consequences of the virus, yet, there is relevance in briefly discussing how this type of crisis can affect urban voids such as Eleonas today, and in the future. Two main lines of inquiry seem clear at this stage. Firstly, the dangers and risks associated with the situation and secondly, the question whether urban voids could be even more of an opportunity in this context of crisis.

Starting with the first, urban voids (Eleonas and globally) have been reported to house marginalised populations and simultaneously to lack basic infrastructure. Hence, it is perhaps of no surprise that the UN Refugee Agency mentions them as vulnerable areas with very high economic, health and social risk of meltdown (Staikos, 2020). In these areas, directives of social distancing and confinement are not necessarily effective due, on the one hand, to the very tight social structure of more vulnerable populations and, on the other, to the physical lack of available space. The best example in Eleonas being Eleonas Camp, the refugee camp which houses around 2,000 residents in around 3ha (0.03 km²). Under these circumstances of density and lack of basic amenities, one uncontrolled outbreak of the disease could possibly kill entire sectors and local economies. Pleasantly, regarding specifically Eleonas, the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant & Refugee issues has set up an online interactive map locating key services and activities for vulnerable groups in the municipality of Athens (where Eleonas Camp is also located): "COVID-19: a useful tool mapping services and good practices aimed at vulnerable groups (including migrants and refugees)". This tool is available for all to use and, as stated on their website, made “to provide the actors involved in the protection and integration of vulnerable groups - including refugees and migrants - with the necessary information so that they can cooperate more effectively" (ACCMR, 2020).

Such a positive development, sparks thoughts that urban voids could potentially be opportunities towards innovative initiatives and towards a substantive change in the way cities are planned and managed. Did urban voids inadvertently just obtain a new ‘role’? Perhaps. Living in times of crisis requires heightened social, urban and
environmental resilience and the flexibility that urban voids possess could indeed be more relevant than ever. Already, social habits are forecasted to change, people are choosing alternative modes of transportation and entertainment. In the conclusion of this thesis I argued that urban voids encourage experiments (see Section 9.4) and perhaps this could be very much the time to experiment towards alternative planning strategies and projects. The ‘voidness’ of these spaces could become the catalysts of change and the driver towards more resilient urban and environmental structures. It could be the time to give more power to local populations and consider their actions more substantially to go beyond statistics and understand the real challenges that are bound to spaces such as Eleonas. At the same time, top-down decision making, administrations and planners need to re-evaluate their strategies towards these spaces. If anything, the current situation reinforces the main point of this thesis for a shift towards a relational and contextual planning.

I began this research arguing that urban voids are intrinsic to the processes of urban transformation. I believe that this observation not only still stands, but, that the transformative function of urban voids is now more relevant than ever.
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Blackwell.


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### Appendices

#### Appendix 1. Table of interviewees with rationale for selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Technical University of Athens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Code: NTUA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof Maria Markou</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Associate Professor. Study of the city and design, in conjunction with the social, economic and cultural dimensions of urban space</td>
<td>Prof Markou is the major pillar of the study’s network of interviewees. My first contact with Prof Markou dates from my MA years. Prof Markou oversees several research projects and graduate studios at NTUA focusing on Eleonas and has been studying the area for over a decade. Her knowledge of the area is therefore extensive. Her input was of great importance from a factual perspective about Eleonas and her contribution in the snowballing of interviews was of the highest significance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof Sofia Avgerinou</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Associate Professor. Director of Planning at NTUA. Transformations, cultural heritage management &amp; sustainable development of the site.</td>
<td>Prof Avgerinou being the director of the Planning Department at NTUA had naturally a very deep knowledge about planning procedures and trends in Athens and was invited to fill in the gaps my understanding of planning in Athens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof Ioannis Polyzos</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Emeritus Professor. Urban planning &amp; analysis with an emphasis on the construction of modern Greek urban space.</td>
<td>Suggested by Prof Markou, Prof Polyzos was involved in the development of the Presidential Decree of 1991 and has followed the evolution of Eleonas from a very close standpoint. He was invited to discuss the evolution of the planning policies that were applied in Eleonas, the degree to which they were applied, the reason for their development, the intended outcomes and the actual outcomes.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Olga Balaoura</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Doctoral researcher. PhD thesis: The Geography of Industry in Athens</td>
<td>Suggested by Prof Markou, Ms Olga Balaoura was a former NTUA student. Her PhD thesis explore the geography of industry in Athens. As such, she was invited to accelerate my understanding of the wider industrial and manufacture trends of the city.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Sofia Tsadari</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Doctoral researcher. PhD thesis: Urban</td>
<td>Suggested by Prof Markou, I met Ms Tsadari during the preliminary pilot study. Ms Tsadari is a PhD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code: EL</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>transformations in Eleonas.</td>
<td>researcher at NTUA and a professional in planning practice in Athens. Her PhD explored the various stages of transformation specific areas of Eleonas had underwent. She was invited to discuss the dynamics of the area as well as its evolution. She was instrumental in growing the network of interviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residents, employees, workers, or local business owners of Eleonas</td>
<td>Mr ELR1</td>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>President of the Markoni Residents' Association and resident of the Markoni enclave in Eleonas</td>
<td>Suggested by Ms Tsadari, I met Mr ELR1 during the preliminary pilot study. Mr ELR1 is a life-long resident of Eleonas and an active figure in the politics of the area. He was invited to share his experience and knowledge of Eleonas (which was undeniably the richest of all participants), to cover in great detail the evolution of Eleonas from the late 60s to today, and the pros and cons of living in the area. Two individual interviews and two walking interviews were organised.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>Ms ELR2</td>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>Resident of the Markoni enclave in Eleonas.</td>
<td>Suggested by Mr ELR1, Ms ELR2 is a second generation and life-long resident of Eleonas and an active figure in the cultural scene of the area. She was invited to share her experiences, discuss both the evolution of the area and the current daily dynamics, and the pros and cons of living in the area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>Ms ELE1</td>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>Employee of the Ministry of Immigration Policy working in Eleonas’ refugee camp</td>
<td>Suggested by Prof Markou, Ms ELE1 is a young social worker at Eleonas Refugee Camp. At the time of the interview she had worked there for 2 years and was invited to provide rare insights on the operation and daily life of the camp and its residents, and the pros and cons of living and working in the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Mr ELW1</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Owner of major car dealership and repair in Eleonas</td>
<td>Personal acquaintance, Mr ELW1 is the owner of a major car dealership and repair centre in Eleonas. He was invited to share his daily experiences with the area, the pros and cons of working there, and his prospects for his business and industry in Eleonas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Mr ELW2</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Sales consultant</td>
<td>Mr ELW2 is a young employee of a major second-hand car dealership in Eleonas. He was invited to share his daily experience with the area,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr ELW3</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Owner of large industry formerly located in Eleonas</td>
<td>Suggested by Mr ELW1, Mr ELW3 is the owner of a major industry specialising in creating waving machines. His business was initially located in Eleonas before they relocated to a larger industrial complex in the outskirts of Athens. He was invited to contribute to the research about the metabolism of Eleonas by offering insights about the industrial flows within the area, to share his experience/conflicts with policy makers, and to explore the reasons for his relocation away from Eleonas.</td>
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<td>Mr ELW4</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Architect. Owner of bespoke and furniture company.</td>
<td>Suggested by Ms HMEE4, Mr ELW4 is the owner of an active furniture manufacture in Eleonas. He was invited to share his daily experience with the area, the pros and cons of working there, and his prospects for his business and industry in Eleonas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr HMEE1</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Director of the Department of Urban Planning at the HMEE</td>
<td>Mr HMEE1 is the current Director of the Department of Urban Planning at the Ministry of Environment and Energy. He was invited to discuss the current strategies of the ministry towards the area and fill in several gaps my understanding of the multitude of policies affecting the area. He was also invited to share his opinion on the characterisation and use of Eleonas as a backyard and an urban void.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms HMEE2</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>HMEE employee appointed for the management of Eleonas</td>
<td>Suggested by Mr HMEE1, Ms HMEE2 is dealing with all demands, complains and projects that pass through the Ministry of Environment and Energy and are related to Eleonas. She was invited to provide insights on the status of ongoing projects and the current difficulties policy makers face in managing the area, to share her opinion on the current state and the future of the area, and on the characterisation of Eleonas as a backyard and an urban void.</td>
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<td>Ms HMEE3</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Member of the now dissolved “Agency of</td>
<td>Ms HMEE3 is a former member of the Ministry of Environment and Energy and was involved in</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Background and Invited Topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms HMEE4</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Ms HMEE4 is a very well-known figure in the Athens’ planning department, has been heavily involved in the media and in the political stage of Greece. She was invited to discuss her critical view of the planned, implemented and projected policies related to Eleonas, the pros and cons of such an entity within the landscape of Athens, and her opinion on the characterisation of Eleonas as a backyard and an urban void.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATTIKO METRO</td>
<td>Ms AM1 Policy</td>
<td>Suggested by Ms HMEE4, Ms AM1 is the head of one of the major ongoing developments in Eleonas: the international bus terminal (IBT). She was invited to discuss the stage of the project, the specific architectural plans, the impact of the project, the precautions taken in view of its implementation, the viability of such a development in the area and the prospects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Municipality of Athens</td>
<td>Ms MOA1 Policy</td>
<td>Ms MOA1, was invited to discuss the current policies and projects for the area but due to time constraints sent me towards the municipality’s Planning Consultant Mr MOA2.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr MOA2</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Suggested by Ms MOA1, Mr MOA2 was invited to discuss the current policies and projects the municipality of Athens has planned for the area, opportunities and cases of inter-municipality cooperation, and his opinion on the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Municipality of Agios Ioannis Rentis</td>
<td>Mr MOR1</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Topographer. He had been dealing with Eleonas with Ms HMEE3</td>
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Suggested by Ms HMEE3, Mr MOR1 was invited to discuss the history of the area, the way his municipality implemented the various policies and recommendations (Rentis is the most advanced municipality in that regard), opportunities and cases of inter-municipality cooperation, and his opinion on the characterisation and use of Eleonas as a backyard and an urban void.
## Appendix 2. List of thematic analysis codes

### Nodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Current policy is holding back the area</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Elements holding back investment and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Various interests are holding back any change</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Big developments are bad but they would do good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Borders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bottom-Up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bureaucracy</td>
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<td>Cohesion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Daily life is a nightmare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decay</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Distance from local socio-economy</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Eleonas as a backyard</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Eleonas as a problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Eleonas as opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Exclusion - social divide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
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<td>Hope</td>
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<td>- Identity of the area</td>
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<td>- Illegality</td>
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<td>- Inconsistency between plan and use</td>
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<td>- Insecurity</td>
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<td>Lack of infrastructure</td>
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<td>- Services</td>
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<td>- Urban infrastructure</td>
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<td>Lack of long term vision</td>
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<td>Markoni_politics of place</td>
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Appendix 3. Detailed description of analytical themes

*Theory-driven deductive themes*

"**Physical urban components**" came directly from the theory of Urban Morphology. The proper understanding of what constitutes the urban allowed to obtain a strong basis on which to build the trans-scalar aspect of this research and ultimately the theory of the urban void. Under this theme was classified any information associated with the morphological condition of Eleonas. Including, but not limited to, the types of buildings, the types of roads and streets as well as the available public amenities and infrastructure.

The theme of “**axes, sub-axes, regions and sub-regions**” is inseparably related to the previous theme and specifically to the particular arrangements of buildings and roads. It included investigating how land use in conjunction to the size and arrangement of buildings and roads divided intentionally or not the case study.

The “**activity**” theme stemmed from Urban Metabolism which states that in order to fully understand the structure of a structure of a city one must understand first its operation in terms of inflows and outflows. As such, this theme involved searching and understanding the role of all major activities occurring in Eleonas. From mainstream activities such as commerce, retail or wholesale, light or heavy industries, manufacturing, logistics, cultural activities, and corporate to as non-mainstream and unregulated activities such as squats, trafficking and non-listed businesses. However, as it has been developed more extensively in Chapter 2, it must be noted that the analysis focused essentially to activities related to industry, manufacturing and logistics as it appeared that these were the most impactful in the area.

Associated to some extent with the activity of the area, “**movements**” in Eleonas sought to understand the way the transportation network is used and the potential issues. The theme was divided into two sub-themes: (1) goods and vehicles, and (2) people movements to differentiate these as two separate flows.

The theme “**people**” articulates the social component and the demographics of Eleonas. It focuses exclusively on the residents and the people working in the area and encompasses, their intentions, aspirations, issues, hopes, tensions, etc.
“Policy and place-making” sought to gather all existing information about policies and governance related to Eleonas throughout the years. Therefore, the data that was put under this theme came from interviews, media articles, academic papers and theses and official policy documents with the objective to trace the evolution of the political attitude towards Eleonas and search for tangible mentions that relate it to the notion of the urban void.

The theme of “perceptions” originated from the theory of Urban Political Ecology but was developed essentially during fieldwork while conducting interviews. It sought to compare the perceptions that different people have of Eleonas to contrast the varying narratives and arguments.

Fieldwork-driven inductive themes

The theme of “borders” emerged from the analysis of urban components of Eleonas. It became clear that in many cases buildings, roads and infrastructure isolated areas from one another morphing into hard or soft physical borders. This theme is fundamentally linked to the ‘physical urban components’ and the ‘axes, sub-axes, regions and sub-regions’ and explores the impermeability of Eleonas’ tissue.

“Radiation of big developments” is related to the expected diffusion of benefits and amenities that are supposed to follow after the construction of large developments. This appeared multiple times and in various discourses either as a marketing tool, justification or hope. Under this theme were analysed all past and current big development projects along with their capability to alter Eleonas’ landscape.

“Bottom up initiatives” was first raised as a theme during two interviews and was later incorporated to search for local, resident-led initiatives to enhance their living environment.

The theme “political distance from local socio-economy and political proximity” refers to implication of policy makers and of the public sector with the area. This theme was raised through a feeling of let-down that people were expressing. It was voiced as a severe problem in most interviews with residents and workers and acknowledged by most policy makers.
The “opportunities of contextual planning”, in other words the benefits that a contextual approach to planning would yield, was a recurring theme that was explored during several interviews. Three categories of opportunities stood out: the great accessibility and geographic location of Eleonas, the activity of the area and the existence of nature.

“Syringe-like actions” refers to large developments planned for the area that are inconsiderate to their surrounding context and the current nature of the area.

Lastly, the “social exclusion and stigma” theme encompasses the several layers and levels of exclusion in Eleonas ranging from regional exclusion to specific occurrences of localised discrimination and exclusion.
Appendix 4. Flowcharts of main themes emerging from interviews based on the accounts of interviewees
Appendix 5. ACCI maps showing the location of new companies per decade in and around Eleonas
Appendix 6. ACCI maps showing the location of companies that closed between 2000 and 2015 in and around Eleonas.
Appendix 7. Timeline of Eleonas

**Antiquity (561-527 BC)**
- Eleonas remains unchanged and untouched

**17th c.**
- Ruler Peisistratos plants the area and protects it from being built

**1821-1828 (to the end of 19th c.)**
- Economic growth brings small manufactures and working class housing clusters in Eleonas

**20th c.**
- Smyrna Catastrophe brought an influx of migrant populations who were relocated in Eleonas

**1923**
- New massive waves of immigrant populations

**1930 to 1950 after WWII**
- Horticulture dominated the area and supported the city during WWII

**1950 to mid 1970s**
- Explosion of industrial sector. New industries locate along the river Kifissos heavily polluting the environment. Immigrants are seen as part of the "underworld".

**1967-1974 Hunda Dictatorship**
- The dictatorship build large infrastructure projects to "look good". Some of these traverse Eleonas

**mid-1970s to 1980**
- Recession and industrial decline. Land ownerships shift to banks and real estate

**1984**
- Discourse of an overly polluted Athens begins and is followed by strong political action to hygienise the city and push industries in the periphery

**1988**
- People's movements emerge in Eleonas

**1991 to 1995**
- Talk about a new International Bus Terminal in Eleonas begin

**1990s**
- Publication of "Eleonas 1994-1996" from the Ministry of Environment describing and acknowledging Eleonas as the "cesspool of Athens".

**1998**
- Olympic Games bring new infrastructure such as the subway and Kifissou Avenue

**2004**
- Big controversial projects are planned in Eleonas such as a Mosque, a crematorium, a recycling facility and a TOD

**2006**
- Marks a period of renewed despair about the area

**2013**
- 2nd half of 2020s

**2015**
- Double Regeneration project begins

**2013**
- Double Regeneration project fails

**2015**
- Refugee crisis and construction of Eleonas Camp
Appendix 8. Map of motorized vehicle flows traversing Eleonas
Appendix 9. Eleven “Mind Maps” produced based on the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis
The impracticality of the prove is another one but not mapped here. More of this. Further:

Another border to enter the municipalities.

The meaning of the road as axis & border is present.

Types of borders: physical (i.e., made ok).

Perceptual (i.e., change of identity as we cross different neighborhoods).
Policy makers have not even set foot in the area.
OCCUPATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

PLAN CONTEXTUALLY

- ACCESS TO THE AREA
- ACCESSIBILITY (PROFESSIONAL)

# CHECK IMPORTANT DIRECTIONS
through transport hubs.

ACTIVITIES: LOCAL
EXTRA-LOCAL
- CHECK IF THEY ARE
SOMewhat CLUSTERED
IN SPACE

Cluster them by size & type.

NATURAL ELEMENT AS
a source for LEASE &
PRODUCTION (Ton)
DUE OF EXISTING AREA
NOT CREATING NEW
ONE.
SPECIAL - LIKE ACTIONS

* TO BE UPDATED.
& SET ON A TIMELINE
Appendix 10. Maps and photographs of the Akadimia, Markoni, Polykarpou, Orfeos, Kifissou and Rentis neighbourhoods. Maps show the location of industries, commerce and service in each area as well as the size of each of them.

Akadimia (0.72km²)
Polykarpou (0.84km²)
Orfeos (1.22km²)
Kifissou (1.31km²)
Appendix 11. Aerial view of the land owned by SOFTEX and the companies that are currently using the area
Appendix 12. UNHCR Profile of Eleonas Camp

The site profile highlights the site management support (SMS) provided by the Danish Refugee Council and IOM. The site is a UNHCR site located in Athens, Greece. The accommodation is established on a greenfield basis, and the site is managed by the UNHCR. The site has a check-in and check-out mechanism in place, but the fire safety is partially ensured. The site has an insufficient provision of electricity.

**Population & Capacity**
- Estimated # of PoCs located: 1,470
- Number of disaggregated PoCs: 297
- Number of separated PoCs: 0

**WASH**
- Communal WASH facilities: Not applicable
- Provision of hot water: Yes - adequate
- # of functional/operating latrines: Not applicable
- # of functional/operating showers: Not applicable
- Toilets available in a separate area for women: Not applicable
- Showers available in a separate area for women: Not applicable
- WASH facilities designed for people with physical disabilities: Not applicable
- Access to potable water: Yes - sufficient
- Sewage system in place: Yes - efficient
- Laundry facilities: Yes
- Opening of WASH facilities: Not applicable
- Garbage disposal is available: Yes - efficient

**NIH**
- Non-food items: Not applicable
  - Distribution of water to newly arrived PoCs: Yes
  - Other NIH distribution during this month: No

**Emergency Kit**
  - Distribution of emergency kit: No
  - Provision of first aid kit: Yes

**Food**
- Food is distributed: No
- How many times?: Not applicable
- Food is cooked: Not applicable
- Specific nutritional needs considered: No
- Ready-to-eat personal food rations available: No
- What type?: Not applicable
- Facilities for breastfeeding mothers: Not applicable

**Cash**
- Distance to supermarkets, pharmacies, or other types of stores: Less than 2km and up to 5km with public transportation
- Distance to ATMs (automatic teller machines) and post office branches: Less than 2km and up to 5km with public transportation
- Are there commercial banking facilities?: No

**Transport**
- Public transportation available: Yes - regular service
- Transport to RAsA, Embassies etc.: Not applicable
- Transport to schools provided: Not applicable
- Estimated distance to Athens (km): 10
- Estimated distance to Thessaloniki (km): 30

**Health**
- Primary health care is available on site: Yes
- MIOPS available on site: Yes
- Referral system in place: Not applicable
- Distance to the nearest Public Health facility: Less than 5km
- Distance to the closest General Public Hospital: Less than 5km

**Protection**
- UNHCR Safe Zone: Yes - appropriate space
- Referral mechanism(s): PRSN, UNHCR
- ROPs in place for PRSN: Yes
- ROPs in place for UABC: Yes
- Private rooms for housing: Yes - not room is appropriate
- Illumination is ensured on site: Yes - adequate
- Refuge community structures: No

**Education**
- Non-formal education activities: Yes - regularly
- Remedial activities: Yes - sometimes based on availability of staff
- Appropriate space available for non-formal education/learning activities: Yes
- Children also attend formal education: Yes
- Proportion - children attending formal education: More than 65%

**CeVeC**
- Internet connection: Yes - insufficient capacity
- Feedback mechanisms in place: Yes - insufficient capacity
- Access to health services in main language system: Regularly for main languages used on site
- Main channels of delivering information to PoCs: Bulletin boards, information and advice desk
- Other: No
Appendix 13. Maps from the Hellenic Statistical Authority showing the divide between western less educated and eastern more educated populations (in support of arguments that the western populations of Athens are poorer than the eastern).

1. Illiterate
2. Finished primary school
3. Finished only three years of high-school
4. Finished technical high-school
5. Obtained a technical bachelor
6. Bachelor of higher technical university
Appendix 14. Table including the bibliography considered for the analysis of patterns in the interest of Eleonas from academia and the media

**Academic research**

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<tr>
<td>NTUA Wassenhoven &amp; Mardas</td>
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<td>Δελλαδέτσιμας, Π. (1993). Μορφές ζήτησης και επιλογές σχεδιασμού για την περιοχή του Ελαιώνα. ΠΥΡΟΦΟΡΟΣ. (May-June).</td>
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<td>Δελλαδέτσιμας, Π. (1993). Μορφές ζήτησης και επιλογές σχεδιασμού για την περιοχή του Ελαιώνα. ΠΥΡΟΦΟΡΟΣ. (May-June).</td>
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<td>Kallimani, C. (2010).</td>
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<td>Επιτροπή Πολιτών για την Διάσωση του Ελαιώνα. (n.d.). Ο Ελαιώνας της Αθήνας: «ανάπλαση » ή τσιμεντοποίηση;</td>
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<td>Μάρδα, Ν. (n.d.). Ιερά Οδός και ευρύτερη περιοχή. Athens.</td>
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### Media mentions

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<tr>
<td>Να Ανθίσει ο Ελαιώνας!</td>
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<td>Πρόταση και μελέτη για πάρκο βιομηχανικό</td>
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