TOWN PLANNING FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE. TURNING THE HISTORICAL PAST INTO AN ADVANTAGE. THE CASE OF DIDIMOTEICHO IN THRACE.

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ABSTRACT 1
For a very long time, urban planning and heritage management were considered to be opposed terms. The interrelation between them was not made clear until recent decades. By now, it is widely acknowledged that monuments of the past can contribute to the development of a city both in environmental and commercial ways. Therefore, there is a necessity to include the factor “monuments” in modern town planning, both in order to protect them but also in order to achieve sustainability of the city that contains them.

Our case study here, the city of Didimoteicho, presents further interest. The city's wealth of monumental buildings from the Ottoman period also raises the question of the modern evaluation of a past that was for a long time considered by Greeks as a heritage of “the other” in sociological terms, as well as the question of reestablishing a new connection between the city’s present inhabitants and their communal past. That problematic relation perfectly reflects on the fact that those monuments are practically ignored by all relevant planning for Didimoteicho. In this paper we provide the overview of this situation as well as proposals about how sustainability can be achieved for the city of Didimoteicho through its rich architectural heritage, or in other words how monuments of the past can be turned into an advantage for the city’s future development.

INTRODUCTION
For a very long time urban planning was not considered to be related to antiquities and other kinds of monuments that a city might contain. In the best of cases, tourism appeared to be the main reason for their maintenance within the urban fabric. In the worst, monuments were considered to be an obstacle for the development and the modernization of a city. In this case the results are well-known: The monuments were either demolished, not necessarily within legitimate procedures, or were maintained for symbolic reasons in poor condition, subject to hostile feelings by the local inhabitants. For those people, monuments were representing not a state ideology but the loss of a “development” opportunity for their city and perhaps themselves as individuals. In this case, those who fought for

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1 The present paper and particularly the urban rehabilitation proposals, is largely based on the Msc Thesis of the writer under the title “The Urban development of Didimoteixo in the course or time” (In Greek) that was conducted during his studies (2004-2006) in the Interdisciplinary Master Program of the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens, under the supervision of Dr Karidis D. and Dr. Maistrou E.
the preservation of the monuments – archaeologists and architects among them – were seen as the instruments of annoying interference by the central government into local development efforts. The decision-making processes concerning the planning of major infrastructure works usually failed to include any institutionalized monument preservation policy. The final decision was usually taken by the Central Archaeological Council, which was called upon to decide on already completed construction proposals. Its decisions were usually for the preservation of the monuments but the changes to the already submitted plans were costly and the blame for that was put again on the only institutionalized state body responsible for the protection of monuments.

It is only the last decades that this kind of monument treatment has started to change. There are mostly three new conditions that have led to the change of the conservation mentality for the monuments. The first was the need to establish sustainability and economical development for European cities that were facing problems of urban segregation, social inequalities, and funding [1]. The term sustainability in relation to cities was mostly understood as an effort to maintain the qualities of a city that have contributed to its development and at the same time put on the agenda the future perspective in terms of development of the city. Those qualities had to be in accordance with new ideas about ecology and the right of a citizen to live in an urban environment that guarantees his quality of life.

Within the frame of sustainability, the planning for the future development of the centres of European cities has incorporated special protection status for central historical neighborhoods, including of course the monumental heritage [2]. From this perspective, monuments not only incorporate and represent communal memory but also function as a means to rehabilitate formerly run-down parts of the city and upgrade the quality of life in those regions [3]. Generally, old urban structures maintain the values of another relation with urban space. They compose the less modern part of the city, which allows people still to build communities on a neighbourhood level but also, by being located in the centre of a city, they offer their inhabitants an opportunity to replace their private car with reliable public transport. The monuments themselves, apart from reinforcing the communal identity, can return public space back to the city, in the form of squares or open areas in front of historical buildings, or in the form of a new use being accommodated in the shell of an old structure, which makes monuments not only decorative elements for an urban cityscape but also useful on a regional or supra-regional level. Taking those factors into consideration, monuments soon became a very important part of city planning, not as isolated entities within the modern urban net, but as integrated parts of the city’s life and functions.

The second condition which leads to a change in the role of monuments is the changing of the touristic experience. The growing popularity of so-called “city breaks” has encouraged urban tourism and has provided opportunities for commercial development [4]. The difference from older touristic practices is that a modern tourist will not limit him- or herself into a sightseeing visit but wishes to experience the life and the vibe of the city that he or she visits. In this new framework, monuments are not only appreciated as picturesque elements in a city but are also seen as an opportunity for information, education and entertainment. In this sense, activities taking place within a monument, if they are in accordance with its nature and character, attract the interest of the informed visitor who wishes not only to be the passive receiver of standard touristic information but also to interact with the (for him/her) new environment. Besides, it is also widely accepted that a tourist will enjoy the visit to a city only if its inhabitants also enjoy the same urban
experience. From this perspective, the maintenance of the monumental heritage of a city provides a unique opportunity for quality tourism and financial support for the city.

The third condition that has radically changed in recent years is the prevailing thought about modern urban planning. The endless expansion of a town is not only not recommended but also replaced by the so-called “compound city”, which implies that the inner areas of a city cover its residential needs. The rehabilitation of a city center also means that it should be able to host several non-conflicting uses in a harmonious way [5]. It is therefore clear to us that historic city centers need to function again like they did for many centuries: Being the residential, commercial and cultural centers of the city and also being visitor-friendly. From this perspective, the monuments of a city can function through multiple uses that serve primarily the permanent residents and to some extent the visitors to the city. At the same time, casual life is provided for historical neighborhoods by making them accessible and attractive for the permanent inhabitants of the town.

Finally, major changes have taken place the last decades concerning the perception of the common historical past. The nationalistic view on cultural heritage is replaced by the acknowledgement and promotion of cultural variety [6]. In the past, whatever did not fit into the national historical narrative remained neglected [7]. The result of this perception was that some monuments “of the other” - according to nationalistic historical narrative - never received the attention they deserved. Modern views on multicultural European societies have made clear that monuments from all different cultures, European or otherwise, deserve the attention of the state and ought to be considered when a development plan is put into practice. We do not have the right to erase the memory of a place, whatever it might include. From this perspective the variety of monuments in a city is considered to be a major advantage for its future development as it significantly enriches its cultural profile and promotes tolerance and intercultural understanding. The respect for “the other” is clearly reflected in the way cultural heritage of the past (that is attributed to another cultural entity or another religion) is managed. Usually it is directly connected with the respect for human rights and has therefore a very political significance. Every town planning effort as well as any cultural management plan ought to promote the multicultural character of the European past, especially in the Mediterranean countries.

Taking the above changes into consideration we will in the following present our thoughts on the urban recreation of Didimoteicho’s historical center.

AN INDICATIVE CASE STUDY: DIDIMOTEICHO IN THRACE.

Didimoteicho is located in the northeastern part of Greece, in the region of Thrace, in the northernmost part of the prefecture of Evros. Although far away from the state’s capital, Didimoteicho finds itself in a very crucial part of the Eastern Balkans: It is located exactly where three states meet (Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey), and in an environmentally very interesting part of the country. The river Evros to the East and the surrounding forests make for an interesting landscape. The greater part of the city is built between two hills that predominate the local landscape, right to the North of a local river. Its very strategic location and easy access to water were first appreciated by the Romans who erected the city of Plotinopolis on the summit of the eastern hill, probably at the beginning of the 2nd century AD [8]. Until the 5th and 6th centuries AD, the city retained its location, the western hill was then also fortified for the first time for better protection. For the next 2-3 centuries both hilltops were in
use but gradually the urban focus shifted to the western eminence, which now hosted the town’s castle. The sack of the city in 813 AD made it evident that for increased safety, the city needed to completely move to the western hill. That site developed and prospered as an important Byzantine stronghold until approximately the 14th century, when its lower town was completely erased during the Byzantine “civil war” [9]. A few decades later, the Ottomans were to build their new quarter of the town in this exact location, which remains the center of the city’s social life to this day. The city today is gradually expanding towards the East, partially due to topographic obstacles elsewhere (the river to the south and the hill to the West), but also because the main approach to the city is from the East. Its inhabitants are mostly active in services and agriculture; during recent years, efforts are being made to attract local-scale tourism.

**The cultural heritage of the city and its importance.**

This long history endowed the city with a great number of monuments from all periods that can be found in almost every neighborhood. The Eastern hill which once used to be ancient Plotinopolis, is now an archaeological site that is being increasingly uncovered year by year, revealing impressive finds and astonishing technical works of the Roman period. The Western hill of the city has the privilege of hosting one of the best-preserved Byzantine castles in the country, together with the copious remains of Late Byzantine settlement. On the same hill, the visitor can also explore two Greek Orthodox churches and an Armenian Monastery. The walled enclosure also contains the most picturesque neighborhood of the town, consisting mostly of traditional houses in the Thracian style. But what the city is mostly known for are its remarkable Ottoman monuments that date from the earlier periods of the development of the Ottoman Empire in the region (14th-15th centuries AD). One of

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2 Unpublished Dissertation in the University of Utah under the title the title “The timer system in the eyalet of Rumeli and the nahiye of Dimetoka in the late 15th and 16th century”
those monuments is the Mosque of Bayezit II, probably the earliest surviving mosque in the Balkans [10]. Apart from this, the impressive number of Ottoman baths in various states of preservation are also noteworthy [11], as are a monumental mausoleum and some poorer ruins of secular buildings excavated in the center of the city.

It is very important to note that all of these exceptional Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman monuments in this rather small Greek town mark the significance of the city for various cultures. Taking into consideration that Didimoteicho is the only town in the prefecture that can boast of such a rich cultural heritage, it is remarkable that no urban rehabilitation plan has so far been imposed on the town,

![General view of the city and the castle](image)

*Figure 2: General view of the city and the castle*

especially in view of the rich local architectural heritage and its touristic potential. The monuments are not perceived as part of the daily life of the town, as most of them remain closed to the public and are largely unknown even to the locals. The visitor has the feeling that the modern town develops in parallel with its heritage but not in relation to it. The past of the city is not integrated into the present, due to various reasons.

**The causes of the present situation.**

Taking as a fact that the preservation of monuments has many political aspects and reflects the level of historical awareness of a society, one has to start evaluating as a factor for a monument’s decline the ideology of that given society [12]. For the Greek national identity, as interpreted from the nationalistic ideology the Ottoman period was a period of conquest that separated Greeks from European cultural developments, holding them back, especially after the 17th century. From this perspective, the Ottoman heritage symbolizing to Greeks a backward culture very far from the European ideals that the new established Greek state claimed to represent. Furthermore, the fact that some of those monuments were connected to Islam was seen with great prejudice by a state with a population of 97 per cent self-declared Greek Orthodox Christians. Such monuments soon became the symbols of a religious “other” that did not match the hard core of the Greek cultural self-image. Ignoring those monuments is a rather psychological reaction that expresses the insecurity that a large part of the Greek society felt against them and the culture they represent. It is therefore natural for local society to consider those monuments as an indication of lack of “greekness”, according to the nationalistic view on the matter.
This is the source of the problem and consequently the reason why this community has a disturbed connection with its past, as reflected by the treatment of monuments. It is evident that for some people in the city of Didimoteicho, those monuments were perceived as a disadvantage. Thankfully, this image has largely changed lately. The last decade witnessed a great effort in restoring and promoting Ottoman heritage in Greece, with the cities of Giannitsa and Kavala in Northern Greece as the pioneers in this field, followed by other municipalities all over the country. A more objective evaluation of those buildings has acknowledged their importance and their potential contribution to the improvement of urban environments and the touristic appeal of the cities that contain them. Didimoteicho could adopt this new perspective and benefit from it, by turning them into an advantage.

Apart from prejudice, the lack of tourism is another factor that holds back urban rehabilitation projects. The city’s economy basically relies on state-funded services and agriculture with the sector of tourism making only a very limited contribution. The main motivation for monument conservation is therefore absent from the city, although it has plenty of sightseeing opportunities to offer. The various monuments ought to be right at the the centre of any efforts for touristic promotion. In his context, it is necessary to introduce new uses for the monuments that would be both useful for the public and attractive to visitors. Through the reuse of old buildings, one could increase public space within the city and host new activities in the small provincial town of Didimoteicho. Unfortunately the present situation is rather disappointing in this regard.

Present problems concerning the city’s monuments.

Conflicting land use is the key to understanding most of the problems that the monuments of Didimoteicho face at present. This problem has two main expressions. First, the conflict between the nature of a monument/archaeological site and a residential area, and second the totally inappropriate uses of land immediately adjacent to monumental buildings of various periods. A striking example for the former is the western hill of the city. This area contains the oldest still inhabited neighborhood of the town, but also the monumental walls of the Byzantine period and the remains of the medieval settlement. The two uses lead to different needs: The modern part of the city needs to be accessible by car but the rest of the site cannot really support that. The archaeological remains need to be conserved and secured, while the inhabitants of the city wish that the area remains a park. In this case, a compromise between the needs of neighborhood and site will have to be found, by forming an archaeological park. Another aspect of the same land use problem can be seen by the river, where one of the most ancient hammams in the Balkans is so closely neighboured by an industrial site that is not only aesthetically harmful, but also bears risks for the future stability of the monument. One could of course elaborate more on the issue with many further examples, but the main idea remains the same. Conflicting uses are observed in almost every part of the city, and most of the monuments are lacking the protective A or B zoning.

3 The very recent selective work “Ottoman Architecture in Greece” published by the Ministry of Culture just last year, summarizes in the best way the result of the restoration efforts made in Greece the last Decade, concerning Ottoman monuments.
Another issue affecting the monuments is the status of their immediate environment. The most obvious example for this is the main square of the town, spreading to the Northwest of the mosque of Bayezit. The formation of this public space not only ignored the presence of the huge monument, but has also to some extent blocked its entrance by making a monument that was already closed to the public practically inaccessible from its front side. Moreover, the placement of various irrelevant structures in front of it renders it even less visible to the visitor.

**Figure 3:** The Uruc Pasa Bath between industrial and other land uses

Furthermore, a major part of the harm caused to the city is due to the unregulated traffic that the historical part of the city is forced to bear, with almost all kinds of vehicles traversing it day-in day-out. This is aggravated by the scarcity of available parking space. For that reason, cars are taking over public space – legally or otherwise - from the citizens and make the city center more hostile still to permanent residents.

**Figure 4:** The mosque of Bayezit blocked by the square.
Another very common problem is the lack of new uses for old buildings. Apart from the Ottoman monumental buildings, the old residential ones also need to be reused. The problem is more frequently seen in houses of traditional type that are sometimes difficult or expensive to maintain. Those buildings, being an integrated part of the city’s heritage, need to be reused in a way that would endow the city center with a new atmosphere. The old Turkish Cavalry School Building is one example, representing the very elegant urban house type developed in Thrace and the Marmara region in the 19th century, very distinct because of the excellent use of wooden ornaments and its multi-storey structure. Houses like this but also more humble ones could play a key role in changing the character of the city centre. Such buildings need to be restored and put to new uses according to a general master plan that takes special care for the historical centre of the city.

Finally, the ultimate problem for the monuments is, as in many other places, land speculation. Some of those monuments are devoid of legal protection and others lack strict protection zones that could discourage their abuse. It is obvious that without a clear system of legal protection, monuments of more recent periods cannot be efficiently protected. The pressures of the property market are a direct threat to them, because they tend to occupy prominent positions in the urban network. Therefore if

![Figure 5: The Old Turkish Cavalry School building](image)

the social memory of this city is to be saved, legal action must be taken. Furthermore, legal protection is also needed for the entire zone of the historical centre which remains unspecified even today. For the oldest monuments, there is legal protection arising from the relevant Greek legislation, but for some of them specific legal acts that would specify the reason for and nature of their conservation have not yet been issued. Land speculation might not be the main problem for the older monuments, but it does affect their surroundings and the general townscape. Another problem related to land speculation is the status of conservation of the archaeological sites within and immediately around the city. The very few sites of the town that were subject to rescue excavations need to be properly presented to the public, and all relevant information needs to be made available. Furthermore, there is no plan for the expansion of the excavation taking place now to the East of the city, while it is
evident that the zone of archaeological interest extends further. The relation between the archaeological site and the built-up urban area is not yet specified and a potential land use conflict might occur in the near future. Meanwhile, the archaeological wealth of the area is gradually becoming known and begins to attract plenty of visitors who would also be willing to see the site of Plotinopolis, raising new issues for the city of Didimoteicho regarding visitor management.

TURNING THE PAST INTO A COMMERCIAL AND SOCIAL ADVANTAGE. SOME PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY.

Didimoteicho needs to realize that its cultural heritage is of supra-regional importance and therefore represents great potential “capital” for the city. Actions in order to reverse and improve the situation have to be discussed. Here, we need to stress two main points. The first one is quite abstract: the core issue for the entire problem is the relation of the city’s inhabitants with their past. Most of the monuments have for a long time been seen as those of our national “other”, and therefore not been appreciated as part of the local identity. Every future measure has to take this fact into consideration and plan accordingly. There are ways to establish new connections and revitalize public historic memory, by using monuments in new ways. We need to try and create a new relation between present inhabitants and their heritage and make them feel that they represent something to be proud about but also to care for. State or municipal initiatives in this direction could be very helpful. The second and more practical issue that needs to be underlined here is that every and any action needs to be part of a comprehensive master plan that would offer new perspectives to the city. The initiatives taken so far by the local authorities as regards monument conservation have been rather disconnected and their effectiveness has been questioned. Didimoteicho needs a new stated aim for development that needs to join culture and economic growth in a balanced way in order to gain the sustainability needed for the city. If used in the right way, monuments can play a major part in this effort.

Our proposals for the future of the town are based on exactly the above two statements. We need to develop a modern discourse in regard to the monuments and plan the town’s future development by placing them at the top of our priorities. We believe that the future model for the city of Didimoteicho is the one that combines tourism and culture, together perhaps with whatever other economic activities are relevant to the city today. But the kind of tourism that we consider desirable to attract is one that wishes to experience the place rather than use it. Therefore, we propose a number of measures which could improve the quality of services and the efficiency of the city for its inhabitants and its visitors alike. It is obvious that a general master plan has to coordinate all various actions and measures, giving them all the same direction, as described above. Measures can be divided in five categories: legislation, infrastructure, urban environment, land uses, restoration and use of historical buildings.

4 The municipality has being very active in renovating old buildings and turning them into museums, like for example the military museum of the city, or giving them new functions like guest houses. It is also very positive the fact that they preserved the memory of the synagogue of the town by making a public square on the spot where it stood. But those efforts were rather spontaneously planned and never placed in a general frame that would serve the total rehabilitation of the historical center.
In terms of legislation, the boundaries of the historical centre need to be clearly defined and protection for the delineated area will have to be put in practice. All monuments of the town will have to be studied, registered and placed under specified state protection, in order to avoid their alteration. At the same time protection zones will have to be established to ensure visibility and safe access to the monuments. Laws and rules will also have to specify land uses and traffic regulations for the historical centre.

Figure 6: The historical development of the city’s layout. The proposed limits of the historical centre are marked in brown.

In terms of infrastructure, the city needs to be secured more consistently against flooding. Making sure that access to Didimoteicho will not be disrupted by any meteorological conditions would be a major step towards improving the otherwise quite good accessibility of the place by land. General works for water management need to be implemented for the area, mostly for those locations that border the river Evros. A new intercity bus terminal will also have to be placed in a location to the East or Southeast of the town, so that this type of traffic would entirely cease to enter the city. At the same time, a renewed infrastructure should also include a new museum that would exhibit the history and tradition of the city. This could be placed near the excavation site at the eastern entrance to the town and it could function as an introduction to the city’s history and sightseeing opportunities.

5 In our view the limits of the historical center extend as much as the city did right after the First World War.

6 Our proposal for the location of the museum foresees that the military camp in the east part of the city will be removed and its land will be used among others for the erection of the new museum of the town.
Figure 7: Map of a proposal for the city’s traffic circulation. Marked in red and brown are places of historic interest, in green the proposed absolute pedestrian streets, in blue streets with enlarged sidewalks.

For the urban environment of the city, the necessity of creating a pedestrianized zone that would connect all the monuments of the city and that would give the visitor the opportunity to stroll between them while having access to proper information the same time cannot be overstressed\(^7\). In the same context, two further aspects would be central. A complete re-planning of the central square, reducing its traffic and providing more public space to the residents is a key priority. The new plan would have to give visitors the opportunity to walk around the main mosque and also see and visit all neighboring monuments that currently remain hidden from other structures. In the same manner, the path by the river to the South of the city should be transformed into an ideal opportunity for walking and recreation; land uses around it should take this into consideration. In the same area, the Ottoman baths by the river should be restored and made accessible together with their surrounding area, after the removal of the industrial silo. Thus, a new square would emerge to the South of the city. The area of the castle should be considered separately. Residence here should be encouraged, but the surrounding hill will have to be investigated archaeologically and large parts of it transformed into an archaeological park, accessible only to pedestrians. The walls should have to be made safely accessible to visitors. All installations on the castle hill will have to be planned with respect to the place and its memories, and be a result of an architectural competition that would improve the status of the antiquities found on the hill and the function of the park.

As to the use of land, we believe that in the historical center of the town the predominant land use should be residence and cultural venues, with limited zones for services and commercial facilities, in truly central locations, such as the main commercial street of the town. Industry and goods storage should be removed to the East, while at the same time car access ought to be discouraged by removing the parking lots near the main square and turning them into public space. Administrative uses not related to education or culture should be moved towards the new Town Hall or the eastern entrance of the town. At the same time, uses related to education, culture or similar aspects would have to be placed centrally, in close

\(^7\) An analytical proposal for the pedestrianization in the city was submitted as part of the writer's MSc thesis.
relationship with the reuse of monuments included within the historical centre of the town.

The reuse of those monuments will have to take into consideration the current shortages within the city’s facilities and the potential of each individual building. According to this, we propose residential use for almost all traditional houses that can be restored and inhabited, whereas for the great mosque we hope that one day will it can house the town’s venue for musical and cultural festivities. It is a very large covered space and the city could definitely profit from finding new uses for it. The remains of the hammam near the main square, of which only the main domed hall remains, could be used as an exhibition space after careful restoration. The old Turkish Cavalry School building could be used as municipal offices dealing with the city centre rehabilitation project. Concurrently, the neoclassical building opposite the mosque could house the city library and the after-class center for young students. Finally, all historical Ottoman buildings should be restored and made visible to visitors, providing accurate information on the city’s past, especially where they signify a former use that no longer continues, as e.g. for the Ottoman cemetery.

CONCLUSIONS

We hope that in this paper we managed to give a brief overview of the city’s great potential and of how cultural heritage, combined with a proper city management plan and public land reclamation, can improve the life of the inhabitants and create economical growth as well as sustainability. We believe that the monumental heritage of Didimoteicho has a great role to play in the city’s cultural and economical development and that future planned initiatives will utilise at least part of the city’s potentials towards this direction.

REFERENCES