

Conclusion

Lena Greinke, Nora Mehnen, Jonas Lamberg, Loukas Triantis

Leibniz University Hanover, Institute of Environmental Planning and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of Architecture

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The Thessaloniki Summer School 2023 on „The future of central urban areas of Thessaloniki“ has been a particularly creative and fruitful experience as part of the university partnership “Centre of the Future – Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development” between AUTH (Faculty of Engineering and School of Architecture) and LUH (Faculty of Architecture and Landscape, Institute of Environmental Planning).

By focusing on central areas of Thessaloniki – in particular the Vardaris-Xirokri area next to the city’s Central Train Station –, the Summer School provided the opportunity for the students of both academic institutions to jointly reflect on a wide variety of urban issues through urban planning and design approaches. Among others, these are issues of historical and spatial path dependencies, liveability and equity, economic vibrancy and social cohesion, enhancing public spaces, expanding green spaces, making cities more walkable and less car-dependent, and engaging civil society through inclusive participation. At the same time, the Summer School formed the ground for experimenting on novel ideas, concepts, strategies, design and planning solutions to meet important urban challenges.

The focus on the particularities of Thessaloniki’s central areas was enriched by wider discussions about current challenges and opportunities for European cities in general, and the ways urban planning and design can positively contribute. These brought to the fore some questions of critical significance: How can urban planning and design respond to the ongoing social, economic, and environmental transformations in times of various crises like pandemics or climate risks and hazards? How can we move beyond existing restrictions towards sustainable patterns of urban development, urban mobility, and urban co-existence and well-being, paying attention to diversified human needs?

Conclusion

As part of an ongoing partnership to be continued, the Summer School 2023 served as a two-way street between LUH and AUTh, Hanover and Thessaloniki, to identify similarities and particularities, to share and exchange experiences, ideas, and practices, and to explore the future of European cities.