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## **“Urban Landscape Transformation”. Religious Places that also Function as Secular Squares: an Ethnographic Example from Greek Urban Space**

In this study, we deal with all aspects of the topic of church courtyards of Orthodox churches in urban Greece. As an ethnographic example of this phenomenon, we examine the courtyard of the church of St. Antonios, in the municipality of Peristeri, in Athens. We will focus in the multilevel functions that these spaces have. In addition to their ecclesiastical use, these also function as parks and squares, particularly in towns, where there is little open space and areas of greenery are very limited. As a consequence, church courtyards are frequently used both as parks and as multifunctional spaces that host a multitude of social, cultural and recreational activities. In addition to examining how the space is used, we also look at the feelings experienced by those visiting the area, that is, what they experience when they visit the courtyard and what they feel about the metamorphosis, as it were, that the area undergoes, as manifested by the various activities taking place there during the late afternoon and evening.

*Key words:* religiosity, urban space, street, square, street ethnography

## „Трансформација урбаног пејзажа“. Религијски простори који функционишу и као секуларни тргови: етнографски пример из грчког урбаног простора

У овој студији се бавимо свим аспектима теме црквених дворишта православних цркава у урбаној Грчкој. Као етнографски пример овог феномена, разматрамо двориште Цркве Светог Антонија, у општини Перистерии у Атини. Фокусираћемо се на више нивоа функција које ови простори имају. Поред своје верске употребе, ови простори функционишу и као паркови и тргови, посебно у градовима, где има мало простора и мало јавних зелених површина. Последица овога је да црквена дворишта често бивају употребљавана и као паркови и као вишенаменски простори где се одвијају различите друштвене, културне и рекреативне активности. Поред разматрања тога како се простор користи, размотрићемо и осећања оних који посећују простор, то јест, оно што осећају када посете двориште и како се осећају у вези са метаморфозом коју простор пролази а која се види кроз различите активности које се тамо одвијају после подне и увече.

*Кључне речи:* религиозност, урбани простор, улица, трг, улична етнографија

### INTRODUCTION

In this study, we deal with all aspects of the topic of church courtyards of Orthodox churches in urban Greece. In addition to their ecclesiastical use, these also function as parks and squares, particularly in towns, where there is little open space and areas of greenery are very limited. As a consequence, church courtyards are frequently used both as parks and as multifunctional spaces that host a multitude of social, cultural and recreational activities.

As an ethnographic example of this phenomenon, we examine the courtyard of the church of St. Antonios, in the municipality of Peristeri, in Athens. Thus the research, which took place in December of 2020, centred on the two boulevards, the Kyprou and Panagi Tsaldari Boulevard and on the courtyard of the church of St. Antonios, whose feast is celebrated on January 17. This was thus the most recent public celebration of the feast (at the time of writing). The memory of St. Antonios

was not celebrated in 2020 nor did the accompanying celebration take place, thanks to the pandemic. I relied on participant observation and on my experience gained during time spent in the field in the past. Besides being the church courtyard, it also functions at the same time as park and pedestrian precinct. It is connected in terms of space and urban planning both with the neighbouring group of workers' flats made up of hundreds of apartments and with metro station, some 200 yards away. We look at such matters as the co-existence in the same place of both secular and ecclesiastical activities, the changes in use of the church courtyard, which in the morning, during the Holy Service, is a religious space, from 10.00 a.m. becomes a park-like area for exercise and recreation and in the evening becomes a space for recreation, since then it becomes above all a place where the young gather and an area for the holding of parties and other outdoor events. Totally, I took 15 interviews with informants.

In addition to examining how the space is used, we also look at the feelings experienced by those visiting the area, that is, what they experience when they visit the courtyard and what they feel about the metamorphosis, as it were, that the area undergoes, as manifested by the various activities taking place there during the late afternoon and evening. Lastly, we examine the di-polar schema of 'courtyard/park' placed in contrast to the concept of 'city', that is, of a densely built-up urban environment. That is, we also concentrate upon how the inhabitants of the area regard the courtyard positively, because they identify it both with recreation and free time and with open space in an urban environment.

## CHURCH COURTYARDS IN TOWNS AND CITIES: MULTIFUNCTIONAL SPACES

A fair number of scholars have studied church courtyards from a purely religious perspective. They have therefore focussed upon on the religious functions, such as folk religion, rather than upon social and cultural aspects, in contrast to more recent studies on folk religion and religious sensibility. This distinction is worth looking at in detail. The study of religion and religious sensibility can be contrasted with older studies of folk religion that were more oriented towards the study of religion and history and deal with matters of faith and worship on the part of the faithful directed towards some transcendental entity (Dubisch 1995, 33-34). By contrast, the folklore of religion and the anthropology of religion are both concerned with religion and religious sensibility from the point of view of the social reading of religious actions and conceptions held by individuals. This is a very different approach from anything preceding.

In this intellectual context, the role of a church in today's city or town and the importance of the church courtyard and of auxiliary spaces associated with churches for religious and social life can be examined in many ways. In the view of Dubisch (1995, 11), the church can be studied in multifaceted fashion, rather than merely as a church building hosting various religious ceremonies. Indeed, one can undertake a social reading of activities in churches located in towns and cities both from the point of view of the laity and of the priests. This means that in addition to the importance of the church itself, the multifunctional nature of the courtyard and of the auxiliary spaces associated with the church also become important. In contrast to the prevailing perspective which in dealing with religious life focusses upon what is performed within the church itself, one can locate a whole series of functions that, rather than taking place in the central building, occur in the areas in front of the church building or next to it and attract a large number of events and activities, some of them not religious. Such activities involve the organization of excursions centred on pilgrimage, meals and festivals, confirmation class lessons, soup-kitchens and other forms of practical support (Turner 1969). Church courtyards also function above all as green spaces, areas for relaxation associated with entertainment and free time. Thus there are two large differences in the scholarly approaches employed today in contrast with the past. First, research today has decoupled the study of the church courtyard from a consideration of strictly circumscribed religious functions and, second, it tends to concentrate upon the purely social functions of the church courtyards, so revealing the dynamics that inform such places.

Yet another series of sociological and anthropological studies on churches concentrates on public ritual and religious ceremonies and activities in the courtyards of churches in towns and cities (Turner 1969, 30). This aspect is connected with politics and with the communication processes involved in the promotion of certain ceremonies that stress Greek national homogeneity. How can we briefly define public ritual, especially when performed in a public space? It mainly involves activities that are located on the border between ritual and ceremony that delimit a form of transition from one state to another, from one ritual to another (Van Gennep 1960, 111-115). One should be careful to note that public ritual is not always associated with religious ritual. It may consist of four basic categories: (a) religious rituals (e.g. the consecration of churches), (b) political rituals, (c) national festivals, such as (in Greece) the 25<sup>th</sup> of March (the anniversary of the outbreak of the Greek revolution in 1821)

or the 28<sup>th</sup> of October (the anniversary of Metaxas' rejection in 1940 of Mussolini's ultimatum to Greece to surrender) (d) school or otherwise educational festivals or athletic festivals.

In such rituals, what interests one is not so much the matter of religion and religious sensibility as the concepts of 'public' and of performance and how they are tightly linked to the concept of protocol and etiquette during the performance of this public ritual, as is the case, for example, with parades by school children or the military.

Other research focusses on the relationship between the courtyard and the roads in the area and on how the church in question becomes something secular and how the sacramental aspect of religious ritual becomes something public. Such studies show the direct influence of the work of Abrahams (1970), which he produced as part of his study of the folklore of urban space and, more particularly, of the 'folklore of the streets'. He regards the street not merely a space, hosting everyday activity, but as something more, as a socially defined area, in which social, economic and social functions occur which decisively influence the life of the inhabitants of towns and cities (Varvounis 2014). The point of departure for studies that examine how the church courtyard connects with the streets in the area is the acceptance that the courtyard, a multifunctional space, indeed has a social dimension. Such studies are not limited to investigating purely religious functions. Instead, they focus on the intertwining of sacred and secular. In the view of Dubish (1995), sacred space, via the urban fabric, is directly connected with the various activities, religious and social, on the part of the town or city. In the view of Bronner, church courtyards in urban areas possess three basic functions, namely, first, recreation, which is linked to urban church festivals with all their religious, social and financial connotations, second, religion itself, in the form of processions, when icons are carried in procession starting and terminating in the courtyard during the religious festivals of the church in question, and, lastly, the delineation of sacred space in an urban environment by means of the structure and disposition of streets in the area.

Lastly, some published work focusses on another aspect of the use of space in churches that we will look at here. This is the use of courtyards as green spaces and areas for relaxation and recreation (Kweon et al. 1998). This research takes as its point of departure two points that it accepts. First, since in cities and towns there is growing long-term tendency towards secularization and desacralization of religious life itself, so in similar fashion urban religious spaces are relinquishing their

purely religious character and becoming mainly areas for various social functions. Secondly, space in towns and cities is subject to pressure in various ways. Urban environments lack areas of green and are densely built up. City dwellers therefore quite naturally seek solutions to their problems of recreation in the urban environment itself and so make use of public spaces, such as the courtyards of churches, but do so in ways for which the courtyards were not originally intended. For example, church courtyards were originally intended to host activities associated with religious life. Today, however, city dwellers use the church courtyard to satisfy their need for recreation and contact with nature.

### FROM SACRED COURTYARDS TO THE SECULAR PARK: DEGREES OF CHANGE IN THE USE OF SACRED SPACE

My work here is part of a larger project that I carried out in the neighbourhood of Peristeri, a large municipality of Athens, over the past decade as part of my doctoral research. In the doctorate I dealt with beggars active in Peristeri and concentrated above all on church courtyards, which are areas in which mendicants congregate to beg. The courtyard was thus an excellent choice of subject for study, since it displayed in one place so many aspects, sacred and secular. It was the courtyard area of the central and oldest church in the area. It communicates with a central square. There is a metro station of the same name and stops for all types of public transport. It is also a commercial space and is surrounded by numerous shops. Yet, it is also a place of entertainment and recreation, since there is this small park in the form of the courtyard offering some green space, where many local inhabitants meet and relax. There are also many from Peristeri who are passing through, passengers on the various forms of public transport who are on their way elsewhere.

The fundamental research tools I employed were the semi-structured questionnaire, unstructured interviews with my informants and my own long-term observer participation of the area (Marcus 1995). These tools allowed me to create an atmosphere of familiarity with my informants and to understand their own views regarding the changes in use of this sacred space (Tonkin 2003, 233-234).

This alteration in use, rather than being a simple matter of change, involves a real metamorphosis, from sacred space to a space concerned with commerce and certainly with recreation and entertainment. We will look at these changes over the space of a day from morning to evening and, of course, in the light of the views of the inhabitants on the area.

## A.) Morning Hours

From the very start of my work, I was particularly interested in the use of the space during morning hours which were connected with the pilgrimage. My main aim was to examine the meaning of the change in the St. Antonios pilgrimage to what is ultimately a commercial process. I will therefore look at the following matters: Initially, I focus upon the social importance of the space involved, which is a multi-faceted area that starts from the main boulevard of the municipality and ends at the church of St. Antonios. This constitutes a transition or passage from the secular to the sacred, which however, becomes desanctified and secularized in urban space. This space, which bears the faithful towards the church, is a commercial space and above all the space in which the festival is conducted. Secondly, I examined how emotions are created in the participants and how such emotions structure the predisposition and inclinations of the participants and their actions. I am particularly interested in how people interpret this passage from the sacred to the secular and why the very same people participate in commercial activity at the fair accompanying the religious festival (Vozikas, 2009, Varvounis 2017). Lastly, in regard to the multi-faceted significance of urban religious pilgrimage: The urban area in which the pilgrimage activity takes place does not possess a merely religious significance. It also functions as an area in which inter-personal relations are strengthened, as a space in which items are bought and as a recreational process, given that the festival, which is annual, is not a frequent phenomenon.

Also, we must underline the fact that this period of the day is totally identified with the sacred aspect of the church courtyard. There are two sets of sacred times. On weekdays and Saturdays, from 7.00 to 9.00 am, the *Orthros* (the service in the Orthodox church, equivalent to Mattins in the west) and the early liturgy is performed, and on Sundays, from 7.15 to 10.15 am, the regular Sunday liturgy, the basic Orthodox liturgy, is held. During these two periods, the courtyard of the church of Aghios Antonios finds its true self, as it were, in the sense that it is at these points a completely religious space and a spot where one moves from the secular to the sacred. The area acquires this purely religious character, because its worldly functions and aspects lessen, although do not disappear. For example, during morning hours, there are no children playing anywhere outside the square. Those working in the area do not linger in the church courtyard. They hurriedly cross it on their way to work or to reach the metro station. During morning hours, the courtyard thus becomes a transitory space for those on their way to work. That is to say, the space

is not truly in use and the courtyard serves simply to speed passersby on their way to work. Since such hurried passersby use the area merely to cross from one place to another on their way to their ultimate destination, which could be office, shop, bus-stop or metro station, the courtyard becomes a 'non-space', if one is to define it in the terms of Augé (1995, 20), in that the space lacks any function for such people at such times of day. Instead, it becomes a neutral zone, to be traversed by passers-by and lacking in any social or cultural aspects, and so becomes a neutral space to be simply to crossed and no more, devoid of any cultural or social aspects.

Many local inhabitants do not use the area in any real or systematic fashion during the morning either for play, entertainment or recreation, the courtyard. For other inhabitants who attend church to pray or to take part in the morning liturgy, the courtyard acquires more and more a sacred character (Ortner 1973). Most of my informants were elderly. In my interviews with them, their faith in God became clear. It also became clear that they regarded the church courtyard, not as a species of park or area with greenery for recreation and entertainment, but as an intermediate space that led to the most important place for the worship of God, that is, the church itself (Hall 1969, 96). Although the believers whom I interviewed did not regard the courtyard as a park-like area, they did regard it as an area set at the border between many worlds. It was for them an area with a religious character, albeit not exclusively a place of worship, unlike the church itself. It was an intermediary space, through which one journeyed from the secular to the sacred, something that is clear from the words of Marina, 68, a local inhabitant.

*When I go up the stairs to Aghios Antonios, I realise that I am crossing over into another, religious world. I leave behind me the noisy town and I enter a sacred area. For me, this a psychological preparation that I start with the icon in the church that I see and then with the staircase. Then I become aware that I am leaving the city and entering sacred space. Anyway, the church door marks the crossing. Then I really feel a tranquility and reverence, as soon as I enter. I am in another world. The incense and the psalms help. And just the opposite happens, as soon as I leave the church, when I return to reality.*

I collected many other such testimonies and all of them point in the same direction. The church courtyard is a space to be traversed by the individual, who moves from the secular to the sacred. In the view of (Van Gennep 1960, 78), in our daily life there are small 'rites of passage', which,



although they lack any official ritual character, in contrast, say, to the wedding ceremony or to funerals, nevertheless propel us from one state to another. But how does this occur in a church courtyard next to a noisy street? In Sperber's opinion (1975, 78-80), even in mundane everyday urban life, there are entities that structure rituals of transition. In the case of the courtyard of the church of Aghios Antonios, many of these are non-material, albeit still possessing an important function. They are the sound of bells and of the psalms, the scent of the incense and religious images, such as the ritual acts that take place in the church (Garrioch 2003). In the view of Sperber (1975, 78), all this forms symbols that the inhabitants of a particular area will recognize and creates a recognizable cultural landscape. Such a landscape, which lies between two worlds, the sacred and the secular, nudges individuals towards a focus on the religious aspect of an area, rather than on other, secular facets. In fact, there is something further involved here, which Linda Degh (1995) has touched on, namely faith in divine power, even in the midst of today's urban environment. In the view of Degh (1995), religious believers cannot avoid seeing the sanctity of an area, such as a church courtyard, which in our case leads them to the steps of the church, while their powerful faith means that they ignore other aspects of these places, such as commercial, recreational and in general social activities. In Degh's opinion, faith tends to overemphasise aspects of social life that are connected with religion and which the religious would like to separate from the rest of life. By the same token, those who possess powerful belief tend to underestimate the other functions of religious space, which, however, are just as real.

#### B.) Midday to Late Afternoon

The period from midday to late afternoon also marks the change in the social use of the space. During this phase, the use of the space changes from the religious to the purely recreational. Here one should stress two points. First, from midday to late afternoon school students and workers finish their respective occupations for the day. They are therefore in search of areas for recreation and exercise. Second, there is also the matter of urban space. That is, urban dwellers, particularly in built-up areas, such as Peristeri, desire very much some contact with nature. In an urban environment, of course, this is possible only in parks and squares. In the municipality of Peristeri, precisely because there are so few such spaces, the courtyards of churches assume this role.

During my fieldwork in the area, this became obvious to me. It was clear how much children and adults who live in the area wished to frequent

the church courtyard, either because they wanted to relax for a while or to chat with friends and neighbours. I offer here one of the many pieces of evidence I gathered in support of this, from Martha, 72, a pensioner, which seems to me to make very clear the recreational role played by church courtyards also for individuals who do not enjoy easy physical mobility.

*For me and my grandchildren, here in the church courtyard it's an oasis. Now, you'll say, why do we think that this place is something special? Well, that's because it satisfies various needs that otherwise we wouldn't be able to do anything about. For example, I'm an elderly female and I don't drive. So this place here is something to enjoy, to come to and sit and chat with the neighbours. For my grandchildren, it's a solution, because they can meet their friends here and talk and play ball. For us here, because we generally don't have as many parks and squares as they do in the northern suburbs [of Athens], the place is a real oasis.*

The role of the church courtyard as a space of greenery, recreation and games does not conflict with its religious character, because no church services, except for a very brief vespers, are performed during midday and the late afternoon. Thus the space, far from being merely neutral, is one that is, in terms of modern sociological theory, socially active, in that it is linked to the movements, emotions and social life of individuals (Davidson 2005). Just as the demands of social life change in the course of daily life, so the use to which the square is put follows this and itself changes. Two themes from anthropological research on the matter that touch upon the change in use of the church courtyard interest us here, free time and the presence of nature in an urban environment.

In the view of most of my informants, the late afternoon in the church courtyard is to be associated with leisure time (Kouzas 2017). Free time is, of course, a concept freighted with various meanings and, to a certain extent, is not clearly understood. In the view of Chick (1986, 1998), free time is not time devoid of any content whatsoever. Sociological and anthropological work makes it immediately clear that free time is not to be regarded separately from work nor from the work environment (Chick 1998). Free time may also be working time and similarly the work place may become a space associated with free time. In the case of the church courtyard, this aspect is very clear. The children who play there do so during a break from teaching or immediately after lessons.

Likewise, the adults who frequented the courtyard and chatted with their neighbours had also left their work for the day. The free time that

they spent in the courtyard therefore stood in an ancillary relationship to their work, in that their time in the courtyard refreshed them and gave them the means to work more effectively. There is another important aspect. Free time does not include just entertainment and a respite from the more intensive activity of work. It also includes many other matters, such as the exchange of ideas, exercise and care for one's health, the cultivation of social relations and general encouragement conveyed by conversation. All these various positive aspects I came across during the course of my work. My informants did not frequent the courtyard simply to exercise or to gossip. Instead, for them it was a more holistic process that included aspects that make it clear that free time spent in the church courtyard was different in nature and broke the monotony of the daily routine, so making a positive contribution to life. This overall change for the better which time spent in the courtyard gives is clear from the words of Chrysoula, 65.

*My stroll to this place is not just to have a little chat. Every afternoon, when I come here, I feel as if my day is changing for the better. I relax and above all I can let my soul relax a bit. I don't do anything. I just find my friends from the neighbourhood. All the same, the background here, with the park, the trees, the open space and familiar faces makes me relax.*

Chrysoula's words allow us to move on to the other main aspect of the matter, that is, the question of greenery and contact with nature in the midst of the city. In fact, the courtyard of the church does not contain many trees, although there are a fair number of bushes, flower beds and pot plants. Nevertheless, for the inhabitants of Peristeri the place offers a solution and is a source of pleasure in an area of Athens that is particularly built-up. The matter of contact with nature and how beneficial it is comes up again and again in the words of my informants. Two main points recur. The first is how much contact with nature and open space helps them psychologically (Dwyer et al. 1992). Second, they make clear that contact with nature is beneficial for their physical health, even if nature in this case is very limited (Balram 2005).

The replies concerning the church courtyard that my informants offered me do not differ much from the opinions of inhabitants of urban space on the topic of greenery and nature in general. In the view of Sanesi and Chiarello (2006), areas of green in urban environments are distinguished by polysemy and multiple functions. In so far as they are open spaces, they permit the presence of nature in densely inhabited

areas. At the same time, they are areas for physical movement, activities and recreation, while also functioning as spaces for the creation of bonds among individuals and with the natural environment (Lohr at al. 2006). This latter function has indeed exploded in the urban environment. Access to any sort of natural environment is indeed a basic human necessity. Thus, in the view of Sanesi and Chiarello (2006), contact on the part of inhabitants of urban space with the nature provided by the park or square restores them physically and psychologically, in that it brings them closer both to their own, human nature and to the physical environment.

Lastly, if one looks at the whole matter in terms of environmental psychology, it is clear that a bond is created between the greenery and nature and the inhabitants of the area (Parrott 2001, 55-56). This bond is constantly renewed and restructured, since open space in an urban environment functions as a refuge for urban inhabitants who live under the pressures imposed by an urban environment. Yet, at the same time this interactive relationship is beneficial to the environment itself, in the sense that humans here indulge in activities that are positive towards the environment, while interest in the protection and maintenance of the environment increases in the heart of today's urban space.

### C.) The Evening

Lastly, during the hours of the evening, there is a complete change in the use of the space. This new use has nothing to do with either religion or nature in an urban environment or with free time. In fact, it concerns entertainment whose nature dependent upon age and upon the financial status of those entertaining themselves in the courtyard (Vozikas 2009, 79-86). To be more precise, my observations led me to conclude that the church courtyard, especially after 10.00 p.m., because rowdy and bustling. Teenagers crowd and pack the space. They either listen to music and chat to each other or consume various drinks, including beer or skateboard. This entertainment, of course, is cheap in that it has little to do with the recreation offered by professionals, since in the church courtyard there are, for example, no bars or cafes. The extract from my interview with Kostas, 17, touches on most of what goes on outside the church of Aghios Antonios every evening.

*Every evening me and my friends come here. We get something from the kiosk and eat and we drink beer. For me, this is cheap entertainment, but it's also a chance for social contact. If we went to a café, we'd pay 15 or 20 euros. Here we spend only five euros and, even better, we see our all*

*our friends. All of Peristeri passes through this yard. Usually we talk, drink beer, skateboard and we often stay up all night until dawn, when the church service starts.*

I examined the question of why young people congregated in the courtyard and, secondly, how far it affected them that they were indulging in recreation in a religious space which, functionally speaking, belonged to the church. The reasons were not as complex as one might imagine and were basically financial and social. My informants sought cheap entertainment in an area that was familiar to them and in which they had long had social relations with other individuals.

There is another interesting point. It is fascinating during these evening hours to examine the fluidity of the place, as it passes through various phases (Lefebvre 1991b, 17). It moves from the sacred to the secular and from simple recreation to positive entertainment. This continuous change also embodies the polysemy of a public space that displays various aspects, that is, a material aspect, social functions and emotional value. In the view of Lefebvre (1991a, 33-35), this fluidity is to be directly associated with the evolution of urban space. The landscape of urban space is typified by its pluralism, polyphony and continuous change. In Lefebvre's view (1991a, 1991b), it is not too much to talk of a mosaic of multiple landscapes in the middle of today's urban space. A typical example of this pluralism of space lies in the use of the church courtyard that is to be linked with the identities of the inhabitants, with the multiple, continuously changing identities of the spaces themselves, and, lastly, with the social and symbolic identities that are to be attributed to the spaces. Thus the church courtyard, from being a religious space in the morning, becomes an area for exercise and in the evening changes into an area for socializing, so become an arena for meetings (Kraus 1997, 132). Unlikely as it may seem, these multiple identities of the space do not actually clash with each other. In fact, they are tied to each other in creative fashion, depending on the needs of the inhabitants of the area. This fluidity, then, is not something hitherto unknown and so a problem in an urban environment. Rather it is a tried and tested aspect of such space.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the foregoing, we are now in a position to offer some basic conclusions regarding the role of the church courtyard. In this short piece I have attempted to show the polysemy of this place and the dialectical relationship between sacred and secular that resides in this process in

terms of the use of space. In particular, I make use above all of a particular ethnographic example to make clear the significance of space and more especially of the road involved, as a cross-over point from the secular world of the city to the sacred space and time of the religious fair. This transition occurs in both material and non-material terms, through a combination of feelings, sentiments and movement.

These aspects of the courtyard make it clear that the place is not purely religious. It is, much more, a totally social place, with social, economic and entertainment aspects, in addition to the religious sides, these, of course, being a given. As a total place -and finally social event-, it is related to various aspects of daily life, to human feelings and certainly to sacred and secular time and space. Characteristic of this is the fact that sacred and secular space and time here, rather than conflicting with each other, actually complement each other.

Above all, the courtyard of the church of Aghios Antonios in Peristeri, like every such space, clearly has a religious character. This character, however, possesses several peculiarities. It is not a wholly religious area, unlike, for example, the sanctuary of the church itself. Rather, it is an intermediate space, in which one crosses from a secular to a religious environment and vice-versa. This transitional aspect of the courtyard, whereby it is simultaneously both secular and religious, is what gives impetus to the evolution of other functions, such as recreational, environmental, social and, of course, cultural. Of particular interest, so it seems to me, is the fact that these functions are not all present at once in the courtyard. Rather they change and succeed each other, not only because of the passage of time itself from morning to midday to evening but because what the inhabitants are doing changes from hour to hour.

The courtyard is thus a religious space during the morning hours. Usually after 12.00, when schools close, the space acquires a secular character and until the evening it is area for recreation in multiple forms. Thus the courtyard passes from being simply a courtyard that surrounds a church to being a park or square that is a space rich in nature and an area that serves to break up the monotony of the daily life of the inhabitants of this urban environment.

Notably, it is the inhabitants of the area who further the recreational and in general the social functions of the courtyard. These individuals endow the space with its social and cultural features and do indeed transform the space from a religious environment to one that plays the role of a park or square. This is related to the fact that the area is open on all sides, unhindered by other building. For Athens, this is something rare,

in that there are few such free spaces in the Athenian urban environment and the inhabitants of the area are quick to label such an area a 'park'.

Lastly, there is another criterion associated with age that is to be connected with the use of the space by certain groups, who in engage in particular activities. In the morning and during the midday hours, the space is used mainly by individuals of the third age, who have either been to church or sit and drink their coffee. By contrast, during the late afternoon and chiefly during the evening, the area is used mainly by younger persons. In particular, after 9.00 or 10.00 in the evening, teenagers and students predominate. How is this to be explained? In my view, older individuals adhere to the classic use of the space, as a place for worship or simply as a place for relaxation, while younger inhabitants use it for different ends. Such uses are frequently to be connected with social and financial changes.

In particular, in regard to the church courtyard, this religious space is an area of financial significance for the young during the evening. This is not necessarily something negative. Indeed, I would say that it is something natural and to be expected, since the church courtyard is not absolute and unchanging in terms of use. In fact, the space has an interactive relationship with the inhabitants and is restructured and redefined on the basis of their needs. And the inhabitants certainly plan their life on the basis of the space in which they life. Consequently, this is not merely some formal relationship between man and space in the midst of the urban environment. Rather, it is a matter of dynamic and interactive co-existence.

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