

PRESS RELEASE

Athens, 27.02.13

Presentation of the results of the “Re-think Athens”

European Architectural Competition for the creation of a new city center

Today, February 27th 2013, the Onassis Foundation announced the winner of the “Re-think Athens” European Architectural Competition for the creation of a new city centre, during an event that took place at the Onassis Cultural Centre, in the presence of government officials and members of the Greek Parliament.

The “Re-think Athens” 2nd Stage Jury comprising (in alphabetical order) of: Spiro Amorgis (President of the Athens School of Fine Arts), Joan Busquets (Prof. of Urban Planning & Design, Harvard University), Andrej Hrausky (Director of Dessau Architectural Gallery in Ljubljana), George Kaminis (Mayor of Athens), George Panetsos (Prof. of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Patras), Anthony Papadimitriou (President of the Onassis Foundation), Peter Cachola Schmal, Chairman of the Jury (Director of the German Architecture Museum), Yvette Masson Zanussi (Director of the European Forum for Architectural Policies), Mirko Zardini (Director of the Centre for Architecture in Canada), after several days of meetings for the evaluation of all 2nd stage shortlisted proposals, unanimously decided to award the 1st prize to the joint proposal of:

- OKRA LANDSCHAPSARCHITECTEN BV (Knuijt Martin)
- MIXST URBANISME (Thoral Ingeborg)
- WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY, Department of Environmental Sciences, Landscape Architecture Group (Klemm Wiebke, Steenbruggen Arian, Heusinkveld Bert)
- STUDIO 75 (Pantos-Kikkos Stefanos)
- WSGreenTechnologies GmbH (Peretti Guilia, Bruse Michael, Winterstetter Thomas)

The Dutch architectural practice, OKRA, is among the most important offices specializing in the design of open air public spaces on an international level. OKRA are based in Utrecht, were founded in 1994 and are directed by Martin Knuijt, Wim Voogt and Boudewijn Almekinders. Some of their most recent designs are the center of Basel in Switzerland, London’s “third center” at Croydon, the metropolitan center of Copenhagen, the programmatic design for the future center of Rotterdam, the Cutty Sark Gardens in London and the Flemish Exposition space in Ghent. Aiming towards the middle ground of architecture, urbanism and landscape, their designs combine the visionary and the strategic approach in order to create environments endowed with character, scale, atmosphere and function, capable of assigning an identity to the space of social coexistence.

The Jury considered the winning proposal extremely successful, in terms of consideration all of the project's requirements and of meeting all of the evaluation criteria as described in the Competition Notice.

As explicitly stated in the minutes of the Jury Meetings, the winning proposal "manages to integrate a clear design for Panepistimiou Avenue and the city squares into the broader system of the urban spaces and landscapes constituting the center of Athens. By developing a wider conception, this design may also be expanded to include other neighboring spaces in the near future, thereby showing the potential for restructuring the entire city center".

In a comprehensive, functional, visionary and, at the same time, realistic manner, this particular study ingeniously deals with all of the issues prescribed for handling the problems of the city center. Mainly, however, the study focuses on the creation of the necessary conditions that will allow the citizens of Athens to develop a friendly relationship with their city, turning the Amalias avenue – Panepistimiou street - Omonia Square and Patission street axis into a destination point instead of a mere place of transit.

The aim of the winning proposal at the Rethink Athens architectural competition is the creation of a vibrant, green and accessible heart of the city. The study is not merely confined to applying contemporary ideas on the control of environmental conditions, the reduction of car traffic and the reprogramming of the public space. It aspires to get "one step beyond" in order to reach a comprehensive proposal for a flexible, accessible city bustling with life, connecting the adjacent area in the center, acting as catalyst for the revitalization of entire Athens. At the same time it advocates the restitution of the social fabric bringing together Patissia and the Archaeological Museum to the Trilogy and the Acropolis Museum, thanks to the substantial role of public transport and to the reinvigorated usage of public space. All of these, through the perpetual dialog and the restitution of the relation between the center and its surrounding green hills, its neighborhoods, its unique history.

Furthermore, the Onassis Foundation, as designated, will uptake the sponsoring of the study of environmental impact which will not only be confined to the project's area of intervention but will encompass its broader environment, in order to provide documentation for all the repercussions that may emerge from implementation and result in a comprehensive proposal for dealing with all the related issues.

At the same time, the Onassis Foundation wishes to assist in the efforts undertaken by the public sector in crucial domains for the successful revitalization of the city center and the optimization of the intervention benefits. For that reason, in collaboration with the ministries responsible, the Foundation will sponsor the urban and economic study that will provide and prescribe the strategic institutional regulations and measures for the urban and commercial revitalization of the center of Athens. The objective is to promote the collaboration between the public and private sector which will contribute to the emergence of development measures and focused actions capable of gradually inciting tangible results. Particular emphasis will be placed on attracting innovative and competitive uses, on enhancing social cohesion and on sustaining economic and commercial activities in the city center.

For the completion of the studies and the implementation of the project, the Onassis Foundation closely collaborates with the Municipality of Athens and the Prefecture of Attica, as well as with the Ministry of Environment, Regional Planning and Climate Change, the Ministry of Development, Competitiveness Infrastructures and Networks and the Attiko Metro S.A.

All 71 proposals submitted at the Rethink Athens competition will be on display at the Onassis Foundation Cultural Center from Thursday, February 28th to Wednesday, March 6th, in an exhibition curated by the architect Panos Dragonas.

The Onassis Foundation delivers this important project at a time which is critical, both for Athens as well as for Greece as a whole, by funding all the studies necessary for its implementation and tendering. It is now the time for the authorities to honor their commitments, it is the time for all the citizens to exercise pressure and mostly to protect the new Athens. The Onassis Foundation will always keep responding to the major needs of the country, as it has done in the field of health care (Onassis Cardiovascular Hospital), education (scholarship program for Greeks and foreigners, support of Hellenic Studies worldwide, publications, financial aid for schools), Culture (Onassis Foundation Cultural Center, sponsorship of cultural organizations), continuing its activities that began in 1975.

With the Rethink Athens competition, the Onassis Foundation, faithful to its character of a public benefit institution, wishes to assist in the improvement of everyday life for all citizens, the restoration of the image of the country and mostly, to contribute in the big effort for economic development and social peace. This challenge is a goal of national importance and requires the participation of all.

The winning proposal:

The winning proposal provides the basis for the elaboration of the study to be finally implemented, following the debate with the government and the city authorities. Its main features, according to the laureates, are :

An accessible city: The study area includes four characteristic places. Syntagma and Omonia square will be the two green urban squares, lush in prominent water features. Dikaiosynis square will be transformed into a green urban room that will include a water source and will accommodate activities inside a shaded courtyard. In the middle of Panepistimiou, a green ensemble will ascribe the area a character of urban park. Vegetation will be used as a coherent network which will unite public spaces in all directions and will connect adjacent neighborhoods culminating upon Panepistimiou. The new tram line will be designed in such a way that it will be prominent and will constitute a basic element of the image of the area, contributing to its cohesion.

A city resilient to climate change: Panepistimiou will be transformed into a green spine of a broader green network that will provide shade and shelter. The overall strategy includes reduction of the urban heat, improved conditions of environmental comfort (natural cooling through planting and shading in the public space, green roofs and facades, cool paving materials), reduction of air pollution, reduction of energy cons

umption, optimal water treatment (water collection from rain and irrigation). The new green triangle of the city will connect to the surrounding hills and this will result in temperature reduction in the whole metropolitan center. The green strategy for Athens includes the provisions for correct irrigation since the good condition of the plants is of crucial importance to heat reduction. Rainwater will be collected in underground deposits, on terraces or elsewhere, if it is considered necessary and feasible. Furthermore, water will be treated in a poetic manner, alluding to the underground Iridanos River.

A vibrant city: The refurbishment of Panepistimiou includes the creation of accommodating spaces along the street. The proposal introduces the idea of the Theater of rooms in the vacant buildings where cultural events take place and new points of interest are created for the enhancement of a vibrant atmosphere. The program of those activities is related to Greek philosophy, science, theater and art. The objective is to create active street fronts that will induce connections between buildings and the public sphere. On a smaller scale, light architectural installations will focus not only upon commercial activities but will as well provide other services, like water pavilions and a toy library. Finally, the interactive ornamental light will endow public space with the proper atmosphere during the night hours.

The authors of the winning proposal declare that the restitution of anonymous space in the heart of Athens is feasible and are certain that the combination of the urban vibrancy of the area with the creation of a green, pedestrian-friendly spine which will contribute to the improvement of the quality of life in Athens, is possible.

The other proposals that were awarded a distinction at the Rethink Athens competition are :

Second Prize:

Ilousi Kyriaki, Kerexeta Iturritxa Oihana, Gourdoukis Dimitrios, Tryfonidou Aikaterini, Vassilakis Fotios, Christoforidou Theodora.

Special Mention (Ex Aequo)

Nikiforidis Prodromos, Cuomo Bernard

Special Mention (Ex Aequo)

Anagnostakis Georgios, Koumantou Chryssoula, Socci Gianmaria, Thomidou Alkistis-Athanassia.

Commendation:

Antonias Aristide, Koutsogianni Katerina, Issaias Platon

First Runner-up:

VOLKERT SILKE / SIMA ARCHITECTURE + URBANISM, WEIGHTMAN MAGNUS, GAROFALO FRANCESCO / OPENFABRIC, CONSTANTINO BARBARA

Second Runner-up:

Harry K. Bougadellis and associate architects, AETEP Architects, Batzios Georgios, Martha Schwartz Partners Ltd.

Third Runner-up:

Zomas Alexanfros, Moyssiadis Demos, Papavassiliou Maria

Fourth Runner-up:

ABM ARQUITECTOS, ALVAREZ BLANCO – MORUGAN ARCHITECTOS SLP

Utopian Proposal Award (First Stage):

Tsiambaos Konstantinos, Kiourti Myrto

Redemption (First Stage ex Aequo):

Matrakidou Anna, Foukas Georgios, Fouka Aggeliki Eleni, Vassilaki Marianthi, Sfyra Maria, Aggeletou Margarita, Siogou-Theodorakopoulou Myrsini, Mantoussi Spyridoula

Redemption (First Stage ex Aequo):

AGENCE TER ARCHITECTURES, MXARCHITECTURE, AGENCETER.DE

Redemption (First Stage ex Aequo):

SUH YEHR, SHIN YEUNG, BABEL JEREMY, Kasabalis Kyriaki