

## **THE TOBACCO WAREHOUSES OF XANTHI**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The content of this paper concerns the heritage sites of tobacco warehouses in Xanthi, a town in the northern part of Greece, and furthermore, the attempt to incorporate the warehouses towards strengthening a kind of cultural tourism which will be supported by the local government and the local community.*

*The institutional protection of the old city of Xanthi, which performs a linking role between the urban space and the history and present time, as well as the emergence of the city to a production site of cultural tourism, were two points that contributed positively to the urban development and reconstruction, in contrast to the usual official practices that local authorities used to adapt. The city consciously promotes its culture and history as a leverage for tourism development, by means of the established and constantly popular annual events*

*of the carnival and the Thracian folklore festival (taking place during the last week of Carnival), and the old city festival.*

*Unfortunately, other pieces of cultural identity, namely the tobacco warehouses that have survived, scattered in the urban net, despite the recognition of their importance, suffer the destructive pressure of reconstruction process and have been abandoned to the usual fate of non-protected monuments, institutionally and practically; devastation, destruction, demolition, reconstruction.*

*The area of tobacco warehouses is so far a key element to the reminding of the historical process that includes shaping and formation of the morphology and the scale of the city. Their preservation, distinction, and in particular, their incorporation into an integrated program to deal with them, represent a challenge that needs to be overcome, in order to reach the goal of creating options regarding the tourist development of the city, and a tribute ought to be paid to its history.*

### **KEYWORDS**

*Cultural identity; Cultural recycling; Tobacco warehouses; Xanthi; Urban reconstruction; Cultural network.*

## INTRODUCTION

During the last years, and especially from 1980, the development of Greek middle size urban centers was based upon modern consuming models, following the general direction of the European social policy (Bianchini F., Parkinson M. 1993).

The development that is based on consumption strengthened the role of the urban cultural life as a factor of the producing procedure (Hall 2001, Harvey 1996). The potential of turning the cultural elements into sources of employment vacancy and income for the local citizens has become widely approved and incorporated in a continuous improved everyday life.

As cultural capital of the town can be considered an individual characteristic (building, monument), a spatial unity (traditional cores, Old Town) or the whole experience, enriched with traditional or/and historical parts provided for consumption, in addition to the rest of reformation potentials. Simultaneously with this reformation and in the same concept, new consumption unities are developed (malls, cinemas, museums, amusing entertainments), while the space becomes much more pedestrian friendly (Dear 1999).

The reformation of the cultural capital is succeeded through individual or organized in unities- renovations that aim to the amelioration of the tourist product and the investments inflow, as the quality environment becomes main criterion of business spatial reference. The renovations concern buildings or relegated spatial unities with problematic urban planning environment and buildings with great lack of services and amenities, which have to be preserved or replaced. These areas, with their pre-reformation form, are considered by middle or upper social groups, as obstacle to the economical function and the environmental and social improvement of their town. Their re-incorporation in the urban body with upgraded image and quality, is supported by the increased productivity of the activities of a new form of economy, that are capable of producing

much more income per area unit in comparison with the traditional production procedures (Visco 2000). Due to this fact, the traditional cores are recognized as important poles for future investments in amusement and tourism, and their renovation is considered as essential development intervention (Richards 1996).

Same way, the individual examples of representative architecture, can become main keys, not only for individual interventions but also for the whole urban planning organizing of the town. Buildings of special architecture or symbolic value, that refer to the cultural and historical tradition of the town, and also several modern buildings play an important role in the attempt of promoting the image of the urban center, which is improved in terms of quality, function, tourism and productivity (Russo and Borg 2002).

The examples of such interventions are numerous and furthermore refer to cities that are already traditionally recognized as hyper-topic centers of services and culture. .

The renovations in Docklands - Millennium Dome area in London, La Defense in Paris, the business center of City Nord in Hamburg and Donau City in Vienna, and the city of Glasgow are only several of the most well-known such examples worldwide (Aravantinos 2007).

In a local scale, from the early 1990's in Athens, various activities of night entertainment take place in warehouse or warehouse areas in Psiri and Gazi square. A similar case in Thessaloniki is the area of Ladadika that used to be a traditional trade market of olive, oil and cereal until the end of 1980 decade. Another very popular entertainment space in Thessaloniki is "Mylos", which has been renovated and ever since accommodates bars, restaurants, exhibitions and other events. Likewise, the ex-textile factory named "Vilka", a group of buildings that was built in 1908, has been offering such functions since 1993 (Asprogerakas 2004).

## THE CULTURAL VALUE OF XANTHI – DEVELOPING LOCAL ECONOMIC DYNAMISM

The development of the urban network of Northern Greece just before World War II created towns rich in elements that promote a balanced urban environment both economically and culturally. The rapid growth after the war came on the heels of abrupt changes in the region's demographic productive patterns, resulting in the radical restructuring of settlement patterns. Public policy in most cases failed to meet the new needs, whether for urban growth regulation or for infrastructure provision. Vast areas of distinctive cityscape literally vanished as new, mostly unplanned, construction of questionable value supplanted important public buildings and open spaces (Kloutsinioti 2004).

Xanthi, a medium – sized urban centre of about 50.000 citizens, capital of the homonymous Prefecture, was fortunate to escape this fate. Right in the heart of modern city an old town is preserved and protected, one of the most important examples of 19th century urban civilization, a unique pole of attraction within a region surrounded by places of exceptional cultural, historic and ecological value. The Nestos river estuary, the Rhodopi mountain range, the numerous archaeological sites, as well as several coastal lagoons, comprise a complex of landmarks with strong interest (Take in Plate 1).

Xanthi itself was incorporated in its present location in the mid 19th century and became known round the world for its tobacco production and manufacturing. Today the town can be considered as an entity of an interesting series of cultural elements, rhythms and impressions, and also as a fascinating mix of old and new, and consciously promotes its culture and history as a leverage for tourism development, by means of the established and constantly popular annual events of the carnival and the Thracian folklore festival (taking place during the last week of Carnival), and the old city festival (Take in Plate 2).

Old Xanthi's urban indexes such as lot size, property pattern, street and block configuration, buildings heights and volumes, provide a successful preservation. Unfortunately, other pieces of cultural identity, namely the tobacco warehouses that have survived, scattered in the urban net, despite the recognition of their importance, suffer the destructive pressure of reconstruction process and have been abandoned to the usual fate of non-protected monuments, institutionally and practically.

### PLATE 1.

#### General view of the city of Xanthi



## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Xanthi was founded in the third decade of the 19th century, after the ruinous earthquakes of 1829 following a former existed settlement. Between 1870 and 1910 the town became the major commercial, administrative and military centre of a region whose economy was shaped by tobacco production and manufacturing; its history mirrored the economic rise and fall connected with this single industry. During the period of economic growth, tobacco merchants, builders and technicians settled in the town from all over Northern Greece. A complex urban fabric evolved, rich in community buildings and imposing private mansions erected by the emerging wealthy class.

The dawn of the 20th century found the centre of Xanthi unable to support further growth. New housing and manufacturing sectors sprang up further south and, along with the influx of refugees fleeing Asia Minor in 1924, created a new town, double in population, while the centre gradually shifted southward.

After World War II, the drastic decline of the tobacco industry combined with weak regional economic policies forced most tobacco entrepreneurs to relocate to Thessaloniki and Athens and a large portion of the workforce to emigrate to the industrial centers of Europe. In 1970s, a relative recovery in the city's economic life took place determined by emergence of new economic activities.

Today its total dynamics are substantiated mainly by its population growth, employment standards (constant decrease of the primary sector in favor of the other two), and also by a series of urban (commercial, manufacturing, and cultural and traditional center) as well as environmental (massifs, wetlands, coasts) development resources (Xanthi Prefecture 1993).

As a result of the above raised the need of the functional restructuring of the city of Xanthi in a short time period. The redistribution of the city functions left empty and useless several

constructed traditional cells and secluded a wide building store, significant part of which (in terms of both volume and quality) are the tobacco warehouses.

PLATE 2.

### The carnival parade



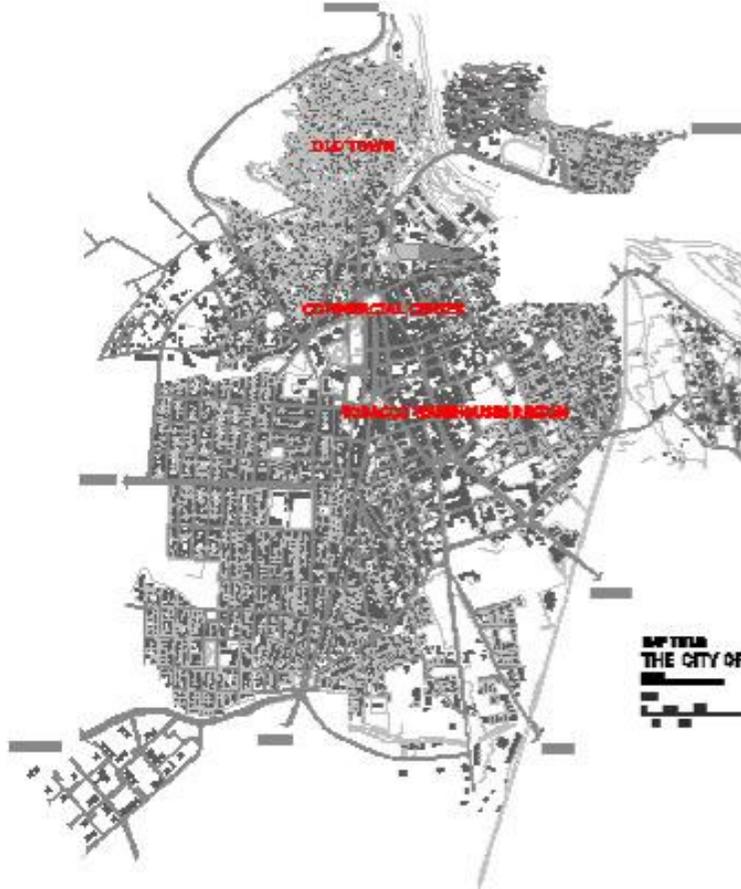
## URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF THE TOBACCO WAREHOUSE REGION

The tobacco warehouses, where tobacco was being manufactured and stored, were lying in the fields in the southeastern part of the Old Town and formed a special neighborhood, separated clearly from the central commercial area and the houses of the wealthy class (Take in Figure 1). This neighborhood, completely inappropriate for staying due to the floods and the humidity, but ideal for tobacco storing and manufacturing, was close to road and railway (from 1891) intercity axis. The quar-

ters around the tobacco warehouses were exclusively for the working class (Giannopoulou 2000).

FIGURE 1.

**Contemporary map of the city of Xanthi**



Today the region is a part of the centre of the new town and, after a long time of no construction activity, is now in a transitional stage of reconstruction. The pressure for taking advantage of the area, which is really strong during the last years, created conditions for the invasion of new multi-storey build-

ings that have been spread around the blocks and co-exist really close to the tobacco warehouses (Take in Figure 3). The contrast between the not organised reconstruction and the historical net that is still preserved is the main key for the search of the proper policy base and relevant arrangements.

Two separated spatial unities are situated in the area, which are directly related to its land use. In the first one, residence dominates, while in the second one, which is connected with the centre and the activities poles of the town, a complicated urban environment is shaped where not only residence, but also other principal land use (malls, office and service departments, but also amusement uses) have replaced facilities of the former stage of town development.

Nowadays 40 warehouse buildings remain in the region (it is worth mentioning that in 1995 there were 57 buildings) (Take in Figure 2). The majority of the tobacco warehouses (26 from the 40 warehouses) belongs to private civilians, 4 belong to the Department of Public Land, 2 to the Municipality of Xanthi and 8 to companies and organizations. Unfortunately only 10 warehouses are scheduled buildings (by the Greek Ministry of Culture). Furthermore, a great number of buildings (18 warehouses) are abandoned while the rest have new uses (13 buildings accommodate workshops and small industries, 7 buildings store rooms, 2 buildings amusement activities and 4 cultural and welfare activities).

The cultural and historical value of the region strengthens the aesthetic quality of its cell. The buildings of the tobacco warehouses, unique as an entirety in Europe, are great examples of the industrial architecture of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Take in Figure 5).

FIGURE 2.

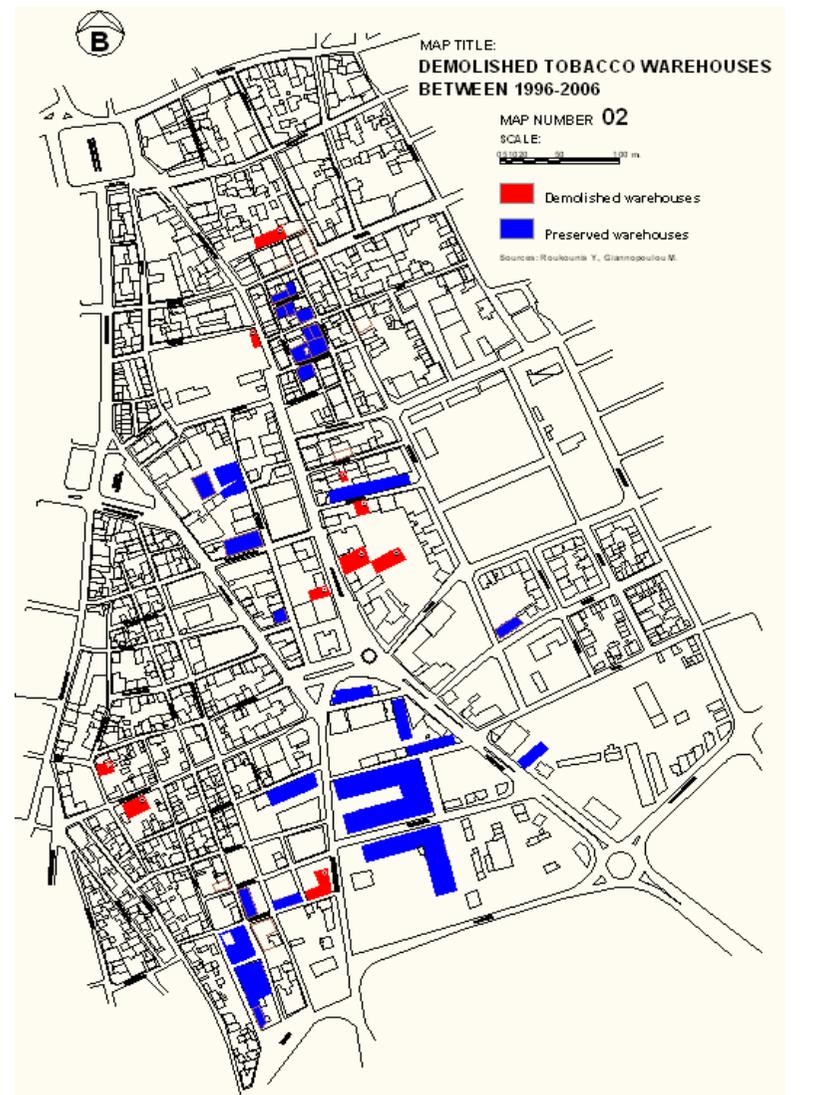
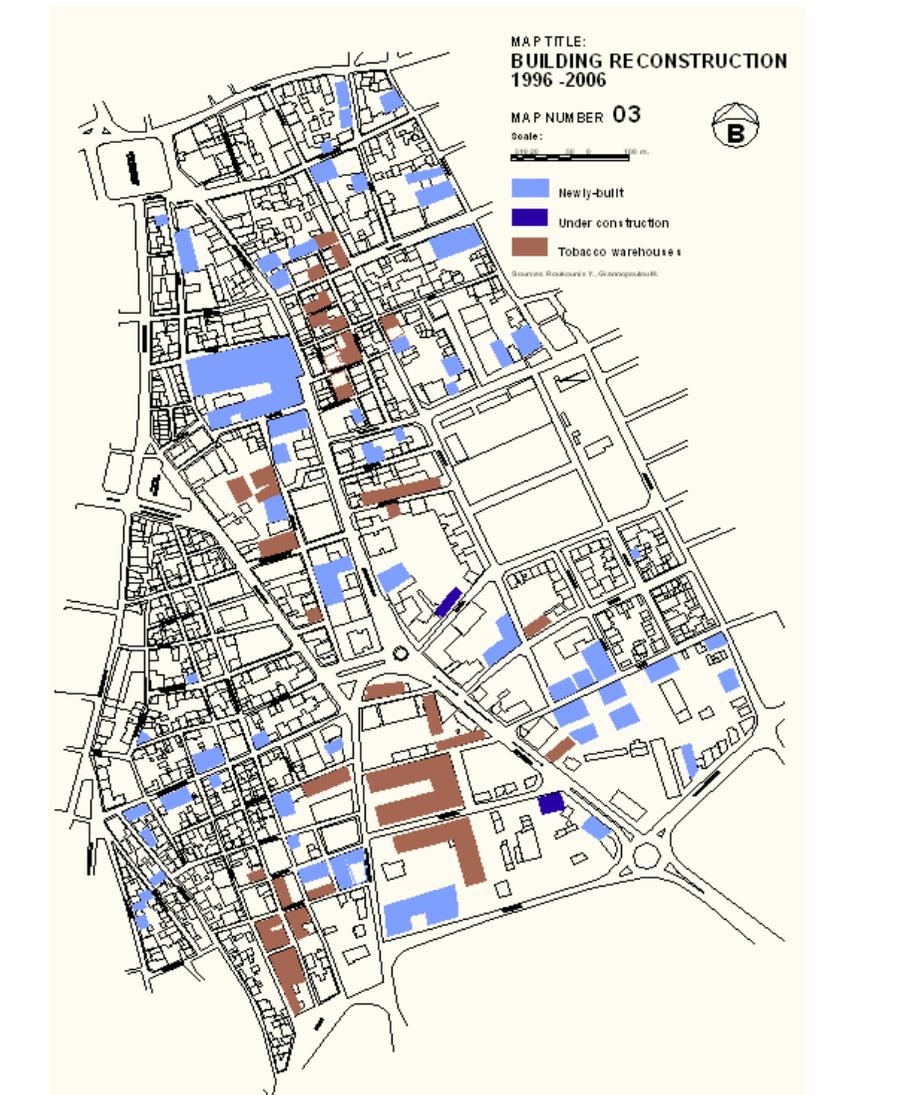
**Preserved and Demolished Tobacco Warehouses (2006)**

FIGURE 3.

**Building Reconstruction (1996-2006)**

The first one-story tobacco warehouses were built after 1860 with traditional methods and materials based on the local morphological elements. The structure was simple, orthogonal, with flat facets riddled by lined windows and covered with a simple hipped roof.

PLATE 3.

**Maintained Warehouses**



At the end of the 19th century, bigger tobacco warehouses were built. Their main morphological characteristics are symmetry of the facades and plans, axial access, distinctive main entrance and dominant main facet, strict geometrical outline and lucid building volume. The structure of the buildings was based on transfer, usage and alteration of a monumental character that derived from industrial architecture in Europe and indicated architecture of solemnity and prestige, where the morpho-

logical characteristics are as important as function and economy. The building or building entirety is imposing, due to its volume or morphology that is has many motives, elaborated details and symbolical allusions. All buildings had a semi-basement, an attic and two to three floors.

The buildings are landmarks of the urban net, play an important role in the continuity and completeness of the urban space and also have considerable architectural quality and historical importance (Margariti 1991). Their large scale makes them suitable for new urban uses, which, in parallel to a network of free spaces which they also ensure, could – among other things – constitute a great “opportunity” for an urban reform (Take to Plate 3).

PLATE 4.

**Preserved Warehouses**



PLATE 5.

**Extention of uncontrolled modernization**

This construction heritage that forms an aesthetic and cultural supply of the city, should not be destroyed by the extension of its uncontrolled modernization, but it should be incorporated by carefully planned policy in the new demands (Gianpoulou and all 1997) and help Xanthi to strengthen its identity and its unique cast of features (Take to Plates 4 and 5).

**TOWARDS A UNIFIED CULTURAL AND ENTERTAINING NETWORK**

The area of tobacco warehouses indicates, in terms of morphology, the composition of a unified entertaining and cultural network in which the warehouses could play the role of distinguished urban nodes. The formation of this network is a part of

the general idea of using the cultural policy as a fundamental factor for the revitalization and the attractiveness of the city. Considering that Xanthi promotes consciously its culture and history as development motivations, such interventions are considered imperative and urgent and create a challenge for that has already started by the Old Town Festival.

The network will be defined by choices which will upgrade the condition of the already existing buildings and enrich with new kind of land use the public services and the social equipment of the city. The main idea of the planning of these interventions is the creation of basic substructure and the organizing of the grid of public areas. The above, will provoke interest and attract functions that will follow the primary planning.

In this context, the following could be considered as guidelines:

- The organizing of a network of pedestrian streets and the creation of walk zones and stopping poles.
- The recognition, conservation and establishment of several selected tobacco warehouses that have building material of high quality, as reference points of the city (urban landmarks).
- The encouragement of incorporating new kind of cultural, entertaining and educational land use in the old urban cells.
- The formation of a network of cultural marking and providing information about both historical and cultural past.
- The removal/arrangement of the stuff that deforms and distorts the buildings and the public area (removal of huge posters, control of signs and advertising plates, diligence of the visible side of buildings, undergroundation of the electricity and telephone network etc.)

- The re-design and upgrade of the urban planning equipment (enrichment and reforming of the green areas, paving, selected lighting, outdoor constructions and sitting areas, entrance gates, limits etc.)
- The hierarchy and organizing of the road network and the definition of traffic regulations.
- The maintenance of the old buildings scale.

## CONCLUSIONS

Beyond its technical / urbanistic aspects, this network is a definite and valuable expression of public cultural tourism and environmental policy.

The connection of the network with the existed municipal program of unification of the free space of the urban center, is going to unite the area of tobacco warehouses with the Old Town and contribute practically to the creation of a hyper-topic pole of culture and amusement (a place of recreation and culture, between the mountains, the Nestos estuary, the various archaeological sites and the coastal resorts).

This unique pole could become a wider zone of social and environmental coherence, with cultural identity, character and life and activate not only the public authorities but also the individual initiative. The spatial and cultural characteristics contain enormous potential for economic growth and vitality since the town itself can become a major link of tourist attractions in the region.

The attraction of private capitals that will promote investments in associated business activities and the creative contribution of the numerous social and scientific organizations of the city, will play a positive role in the creation of appropriate conditions for the reception of several activities of cultural tourism.,

The incorporation of the tobacco warehouses that will be enriched with new functions could be a great chance for introducing public or private areas that would lighten, extend and improve the urban network. Furthermore, they could have an active role, in combination with the Old Town, in the cultural recycling, as factors of constant research and carriers of the collective memory.

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