

**Why cinemas in Athens should remain cinemas: preserving our city's
cultural character**

**Policy paper by the Local Working Group in Athens in the framework of
the FILMINTS project**



Inter Alia
1st edition in English language | September 2023

Intellectual property rights:
Copyright © 2023 Inter Alia
50-52 Valtetsiou str., 10681, Athens, Greece
telephone: +30 21 5545 1174 | email: info@interaliaproject.com
website: <https://interaliaproject.com/>

License:
This guide is published under the terms of:
Creative Commons Attribution - ShareAlike 4.0 license.
To read a summary of this license, visit the website:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>



Project Reference Number:
2021-1-EL01-KA210-ADU-000035082

Project Title:
Filming at Intersections

Funding Programme:
Erasmus+ KA2, Small-scale partnerships in adult education

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Executive Summary

Cinemas are not only cradles of culture and a fundamental part of Athens' cultural heritage. They are also places of social interactions, of forming meaningful connections, and of belonging. Gentrification and commercialisation have created a shift from traditional city-centre venues to shopping malls, impacting the cinemagoing experience and the related social interactions. Three historic cinema theatres in Athens city centre are under threat: “Ideal” and “Astor” are threatened by plans to convert their buildings into hospitality units, while “Iris” faces potential closure due to the abolition of student clubs.

This paper presents specific policy recommendations for policymakers and policy officials within the Ministry of Environment and Energy, the Central Council of Architecture, and the Ministry of Culture, as well as the Municipality of Athens and University of Athens. With this paper, we aim to provide them with relevant and data-driven information, together with possible solutions to the current crisis situation facing cinemas in Athens.

We propose the institutional protection of these cinemas as cultural spaces, mirroring the standards established by the 1997 Merkouri Law for open cinemas in Athens. The Central Council of Architecture, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Environment, should issue a clear decision preserving the buildings and mandating their exclusive use as cinemas, eliminating any potential for alternative commercial activities. The Ministry of Culture should actively engage in this process, providing clear guidance and support to the preservation effort.

We urge the Municipality of Athens and the Ministry of Culture to implement and promote activities, screenings, and campaigns that highlight the central role of cinemas and traditional theatres in shaping and advancing culture within the city.

Recognising the impact of tourism-driven policies on residents' access to cultural spaces, the Municipality of Athens and the Ministry of Culture should prioritise the interests and rights of citizens and locals. To address this issue, public authorities should initiate a comprehensive public consultation, involving all stakeholders, to gather feedback and insights regarding access to culture and cultural spaces in Athens.

In the case of Iris cinema, the University of Athens (EKPA) should formally commit to undertaking its maintenance and ensure that the hall remains a cultural space managed by the students' Cultural Club.

Recognising the pivotal role of cultural education in empowering citizens to actively engage in cultural spaces, cultural institutions and venues should develop and sustain specific programmes for education and cultural communication. Such programmes are essential not only for fostering cultural awareness but also for ensuring the long-term sustainability of these cultural spaces.

In conclusion, these recommendations aim to preserve and celebrate Athens' historic cinemas as vital components of its cultural heritage and ensure that locals continue to have access to vibrant and meaningful cultural experiences within their city.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	7
Aim of the document.....	7
Background.....	7
Framework.....	8
Definition of the terms used.....	9
<i>Preserved use, “διατηρητέα χρήση” in Greek</i>	9
<i>Cultural heritage</i>	9
<i>Gentrification</i>	9
<i>Audiovisual heritage</i>	9
Cinemas as cultural heritage.....	10
Cinemagoing as a part of cultural heritage.....	10
Cinemas in Athens as cultural spaces.....	11
Ideal, Astor and Iris.....	11
<i>Ideal</i>	11
<i>Astor</i>	12
<i>Iris</i>	12
Keeping cinema alive in Athens.....	12
Why are Athenian cinemas in danger.....	13
Athens Municipality’s policies on the management of Ideal, Astor and Iris cinemas.....	15
EU guidelines on culture and heritage.....	18
Recommendations.....	20
Bibliography.....	22
Bibliography in Greek.....	22
Bibliography in English.....	24

Introduction

Aim of the document

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of the cultural connection between cinemas and citizens, as well as how the cinemagoing experience can create and shape feelings of belonging and having a place in the city of Athens, in an era where gentrification and commercialisation keep on rising, affecting among others the purpose of cultural places.

More specifically, we will analyse why the cinemas Ideal, Astor and Iris in Athens play a crucial part in the cultural identity of the city and we will present the reasons why their use exclusively as cinemas must be preserved, for the wellbeing of Athens' citizens.

For this reason, we propose specific policy recommendations for policymakers and officials in the Ministry of Environment and Energy, the Central Council of Architecture, the Ministry of Culture, as well as the Municipality of Athens and University of Athens. The aim is to provide them with relevant and data-driven information, together with possible solutions to the current crisis situation which cinemas in Athens are undergoing.

Background

The meaning of “cultural heritage” is connected to a set of elements of particular importance to future generations that must be carefully preserved (Grammatikaki - Alexiou, 2002). Heritage is claimed for different uses and with different purposes by individuals, groups, communities, nations, and states. It is about identities expressed in a society's symbolic landscape. This landscape consists of cultural practices, expressions, and enactments, as well as of objects. As it gives a clear message about who belongs to society and who doesn't, it reveals identity politics and politics of acceptance and rejection. Cultural expressions are vital to a group's identity. In and of themselves, they are meaningless, but it is groups in society who attribute meaning to them by constructing and articulating narratives (Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2018).

There are two sets of heritage practices: those focused on management and conservation of heritage sites, places and objects, and those tied to the visitation of sites and institutions within tourism and leisure activities. Cultural heritage management and the acts of visiting heritage sites as a tourist or other visitor become acts directly implicated in the occasional construction or reconstruction, but most certainly the maintenance, or more precisely conservation and preservation, of social and cultural meanings (Smith, 2006).

In this framework, economic considerations and the daily practical use of heritage can cause dissonance. As soon as feelings of not belonging become too strong and are articulated in public debates, symbols can become focal points in processes of ‘cultural contestation’ (Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2018).

Cultural heritage is one of the main identities of a nation, and can be managed and preserved through several ways. One way that is commonly used is preserving cultural heritage through creative industry (Azzadina et al., 2012)

Cinemagoing as an intangible cultural heritage characterised by rituals, practices, representations, as well as cultural spaces, and connected to the creative industry, it plays an important part in maintaining the cultural history of a place alive (Ravazzoli, 2016).

Historically, Athens has been a city of cinema lovers, with a number of cinema theatres, both in the city centre and in every neighbourhood. Some of these have been remarkable examples not only for what they offer to the public in terms of functioning, but also as architectural achievements, catching the eye of both locals and visitors. In the last decade Athenians are facing new political strategies concerning the infrastructure and use of their city: heavy investments in the tourist industry, the benefits of which are not always channelled to the city residents and locals. Among the buildings under threat within the current circumstances are three cinemas - Ideal, Astor and Iris.

Framework

This document is a part of an ongoing advocacy campaign that takes place in the framework of the project Filming at Intersections (FILMINTS), funded by the Erasmus+ KA2, Small-scale

partnerships is adult education. FILMINTS aims to provide high quality educational programs as a vehicle for social inclusion through the art of cinema (Inter Alia, 2022). One of the three local working groups, and more specifically the one based in Athens, Greece and consisting of the members Olga Lyra and Ifigeneia Beli, proceeded to create a campaign in support of the recent mobilisation to protect and preserve the 3 cinemas of Athens city centre Ideal, Astor and Iris by collecting citizens' experience in Athens' cinemas and drafting specific policy recommendations.

Definition of the terms used

Preserved use, “διατηρητέα χρήση” in Greek

In the framework of this document, the term “preserved use” refers to maintaining the original use of the buildings of Ideal, Astor and Iris in Athens, which is their exclusive function as cinema theatres.

Cultural heritage

“Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible heritage (movable, immobile and underwater), intangible cultural heritage (ICH) embedded into cultural, and natural heritage artefacts, sites or monuments. The definition excludes ICH related to other cultural domains such as festivals, celebration etc. It covers industrial heritage and cave paintings.” (UNESCO)

Gentrification

Gentrification is the process of changing the character of a [neighbourhood](#) through the influx of more [affluent](#) residents and businesses. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentrification>)

Audiovisual heritage

Audiovisual heritage are the archives that tell stories about people's lives and cultures from all over the world. It is an affirmation of our collective memory and a valuable source of

knowledge since these archives reflect the cultural, social and linguistic diversity of our communities. (UNESCO)

Cinemas as cultural heritage

Cinemagoing as a part of cultural heritage

Cultural heritage does not refer only to monuments or pieces of art, but it includes a wider sense of collective practices that form a part of history, either for a place or a community.

In fact, Koen Van Balen (2014) argues for a holistic approach to cultural heritage: “Cultural heritage exists in tangible, intangible and digital forms. Tangible heritage includes artefacts (objects, paintings, archaeological finds etc.), buildings, structures, landscapes, cities. Intangible heritage includes the practices, representations, expressions, memories, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and individuals construct, use and transmit from generation to generation.” (Dibeltulo et al., 2016)

When it comes to cinema, and the concept of cinema heritage, all the above come together, since it entails tangible forms, which apply to cinema theatre buildings, as well as intangible forms, such as oral history related to cinemagoing experience (Dibeltulo et al, 2016). According to Elisa Ravazzoli (2016), cinemagoing is linked to the relation between audience, film, cinema theatre and the space of the city and neighbourhood in which the cinema theatre is located. In addition to that, it relates to the meaning attached to the act of going to the cinema as a western cultural habit and a social experience, as well as to the sensations, feelings, reactions and memories that this practice generates.

As Ravazzoli (2016) states, going to the cinema has always been considered a discrete component of culture, while at the same time a solid field for social interaction, but the experience of cinemagoing has encompassed much more than watching the film. As the years were passing by and cinemas became a renowned form of entertainment, what began to matter for people was not only the film itself, but also the venue and what happened before and after the screening of the film. In this context, cinema theatres are not only places designed for the

purpose of watching films; on the contrary, they are places for people to gather, for social encounters and relationship building (Ravazzoli, 2016).

Cinemas in Athens as cultural spaces

Cinema with its expressive, and not only, means has the ability to approach millions of people with different origins, habits and cultures, and make them feel the same, creating a new social reality. As mentioned above, a place can take on different descriptions and meanings. The approach of a tourist will be different from that of a demanding researcher. However, each time, depending on the purpose of each of them, the aspects of the importance of this space will be emphasised with the common parameter being the lived experience. Not simply as a personal adventure, but as a situation where “life - human or not - and place are interrelated elements”, completely interwoven so that the existence of the human quality characterises and at the same time is characterised by each place (Papavasileiou, 2013).

Ideal, Astor and Iris

The three cinema theatres, focus of the present policy proposal, are among the emblematic examples of cultural spaces in the city that live up to this day combining their historic character with modern practices, like using state-of-the-art technology for their screenings and hosting festivals and events.

Ideal

It is the oldest cinema in Athens that is currently operating. It started in 1921 as the "Salon Ideal" and over the years it has hosted movie screenings, as well as performances. “Ideal” was the second Athenian cinema to become completely talky with ultra-modern RCA sound systems at the time, but also the first one to install stereo sound, according to testimonies of the time (Ideal).

Astor

The “Astor” cinema is located on 28 Stadiou Str., in a building with a long history, inextricably linked to the seventh art, as it has been operating since 1947 and the same location has been housing movie theatres as early as 1908. Its programme includes films from all over the world, from established creators as well as debuting directors, all of them diligently selected from the biggest festivals internationally (Fyssas, 2019).

Iris

The historic “Iris”, located at 15 Ippokratous Str., is the theatre that hosts the activities of the Cinematographic Department of POFPA (Club of the University of Athens) which aims to cultivate cinematographic education but also to inspire and equip with skills its members to create. Today, the Cinematographic Department has a full weekly program of seminars and screenings on 35mm film and video projector, which is daily improved and enriched. It also encourages and supports its members for their independent film creations (CINEMA DEPARTMENT P.O.F.P.A.).

Keeping cinema alive in Athens

In addition to the citizens’ right to practice culture in their city, these cinemas have been functioning for years as cradles of culture by hosting not only screenings, but also famous festivals and events. Film festivals and the international film festival circuit are key elements of film historiography that have contributed to the promotion and creation of genres, national cinemas, film schools or new waves (Sifaki, 2022). For example, Astor hosts the annual Athens’ Ethnographic Film Festival, an international festival which every year is an important international meeting place for documentary and ethnographic film makers. Through numerous local side-events, such as seminars, workshops, masterclasses, Q&A's and exhibitions, the festival constitutes an important intervention in the cultural and social life of the city, while at the same time participating in the contemporary international debates about its present and future documentary (Ethnofest). Moreover, both Ideal and Astor (among other cinema theatres) host annually the Athens International Film Festival called “Nychtes Premieras” (eng. “Premiere Nights”) (AIFF). The festival was launched in 1995 and until today it offers the local

public the opportunity to get to know independent American, European and world cinema up close. The films shown have an audience of more than 60,000 cinemagoers eager to keep up to date with all new trends in world cinema and be the first to see the big films that are set to become hits in the later months (AIFF). Last but not least, “Irida Visions” is a series of events hosted by the Film, Photography, Theatrical and Dance Sections of the Student Cultural Club of the University of Athens, which take place in Iris and where all events have free entrance to the public. Those events include among others screenings of recognized films, photo exhibitions, masterclasses and musical events, while all the participants offer their work voluntarily (Irida Visions).

Why are Athenian cinemas in danger

In general, the concept of place tends to be related to a specific and unique location, which has distinct qualities, while it refers to a particular experience and serves as a reference point in people’s lives, stimulating a sense of belonging. It is a product of social actions and interactions generated by people, who are directly involved in the construction of space (Ravazzoli, 2016).

In the last decade in Athens, as well as in other European cities, there has been a rising tendency by the state to alter cinema’s image in order to satisfy investment opportunities and tourist needs. The development of tourism, after a long phase of devaluation of real estate in the years of the latest economic crisis in Greece, as well as other political decisions that preceded it, shaped the conditions for rising land prices and rents, and thus changed the economic and civil functions of the city and the daily life of the locals (Balaoura, 2023). Georgia Alexandri (2018) mentions that, since 2013, the Municipality of Athens has promoted several projects seeking to ‘restart’ Athens, focusing on the gentrification of ‘downgraded’ inner-city areas. This is further supported by the observation that “planning in Greece is characterised by spontaneity, fragmentation and tolerance of speculation, specifically favouring the gentrification process. In many cases, the state’s ‘absence’ after promulgation of regeneration projects acts as a clear strategy for inner-city gentrification.” A glaring example of the above is the construction of the “Megalos Peripatos” (eng. “Great Walk”), a set of uninspired interventions in the historical centre of Athens, for which the current public authority stated: *“Athens is a city with international influence and a unique cultural heritage and personality. Especially today, when*

there is an increased tourist interest, a project to unify the important points of the city that attract a very large number of visitors is more necessary than ever.” (AKEA, 2020). It is therefore extremely clear that the target of the intervention was about the gentrification of an area, the boundaries of which were chosen in a way that includes the most important tourist resources of the centre, with the aim of expanding tourist investments (AKEA, 2020), while the planning of that project was based on many small interventions activating older tenders (Lialos, 2023) and selectively implementing certain aspects of the overlying planning layer, such as the applicable Regulatory Plan, while at the same time not implementing others (AKEA, 2020).

Making Athens an independent tourist destination is not in itself negative. It increases income levels and, for that reason, has been a planning goal for many years. The problem is the one-dimensional development of the tourist industry, namely the great dependence of the local economy on it (AKEA, 2020). We can't ignore the fact that gentrification can cause two forms of displacement: physical displacement of residents and businesses, and symbolic displacement. This new phase of development of the Athenian landscape through processes and transformations has a strong impact on the daily lives of the residents in the aforementioned ways. Athens has always been a diverse, in terms of social and economic classes, city centre with a great amount of small and medium enterprises and family businesses (Balaoura, 2023), but with the steady touristification and gentrification, one can see that this conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city area to middle-class residential use (Zukin, 1987) is distorting its identity with financial, as well as psychological consequences for its people (Atkinson, 2002).

With regard to the case that concerns the future of the three cinema theatres in question, Ideal, Astor and Iris, two of them (Astor and Ideal) are housed in buildings owned by the National Social Security Fund (EFKA). Public authorities' plans for transforming a big part of the city centre buildings into hospitality units have been supported by the announcement of a Greek tourist company that the building where the Ideal cinema is located will become a 5-star hotel. Similarly, the building hosting the Astor cinema is intended for corporate use (Smith, 2023). Regarding the issue of Iris, the cinema where the Cultural Association of Students of the University of Athens (POFPA) operates, it is threatened on the one hand due to the abolition of student clubs and on the other hand as no one remains to guarantee that "Iris" will continue

to operate as a cultural space. After the concern about the fate of the cinemas spread, EFKA reassured for their continued operation, and the Ministry of Environment and Energy, in its relevant explanatory report (Ministry of Environment and Energy, 2023), proposed the issuance of a Ministerial Decision for the classification of the two cinemas as subjects to preservation. But along the way, suddenly, EFKA changed its stance and objected to this positive decision of the Ministry of Environment and Energy, on the grounds that this "will be a brake on the expression of interest in the utilisation of the building".

Taking all the above into consideration, it is evident that gentrification in Athens transforms the overall image of the city, including its cultural spaces, and in this case its historic cinemas.

In addition, regarding the cinemagoing experience, changes to the geography of cinema, from traditional city-centre theatres to cinemas located in shopping malls, have affected the routines of cinemagoers. Not only cinema theatres in the Western culture and in urban areas have become more impersonal, but they also no longer offer the range of get-together opportunities that cinema theatres offered in the past (Ravazzoli, 2016).

Furthermore, it is important to note that cinemas have already suffered a collapse in revenues (with losses estimated at 100,000 euros per screen per month) during the Covid-19 pandemic, while online platforms strengthened their market position, launched new services and attracted new audiences during the lockdowns. New online social media platforms – largely based on audiovisual content – have also hit records in downloads, particularly among young users, consequently affecting the attendance in cinema theatres (European Commission, 2020).

Therefore, it is clear that in the case where those three cinemas in Athens lose their solid cultural character, their contribution to the development of social interaction and cultural exchange in the heart of the city will be lost, which in result will seriously undermine Athens' cultural heritage.

Athens Municipality's policies on the management of Ideal, Astor and Iris cinemas

In Greece, cultural policy objectives are constrained by the statutory obligation for the protection of cultural heritage, a field that maintains absolute priority in state funding, organisational support and effort. Among others, the principle of equal access and participation in cultural life is asserted in the Greek Constitution, and manifested in the investments previously made in infrastructure for the arts, both in the regions and metropolitan centres (Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends, 2019).

As stated in an announcement of the Press Office of the Ministry of Culture regarding "the characterization of uses of cinemas", published in March 2023: "In response to a question from journalists regarding the characterization of the uses of cinema halls in the centre of Athens, and more specifically the "Ideal" and "Astor" cinemas, the Press Office of the Ministry of Culture and Sports clarifies the following: "According to Law 4858/2021 (on the protection of antiquities and cultural heritage in general), the Ministry of Culture and Sports is only responsible for characterising the use of a property, exclusively in case the latter has been characterised as a monument, archaeological site or historical site, according to the provisions of the aforementioned law. The specific cinemas, "Ideal" and "Astor", do not meet the conditions set by law 4858/2021, in order to be classified as monuments and fall under the increased protection of this law. In December 2022, the Ministry of Culture sent the resolutions and letters of the cinema operators to the Ministry of Environment and Energy in order to handle them competently" (Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2023). A month earlier, the Ministry also published another statement where it is mentioned that the same applies to Iris, while the Minister herself expressed the following: "It is the desire of all of us, those of us who grew up and live here, that Athens preserve its historical character and its intangible cultural stock, of which the cinema theatres are a part. We don't want them to be cut off from the living reality of our city" (Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2023).

It is important to mention that back in 1997, the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works declared definitively that 47 open air cinemas are protected and remain cinemas, assuring of their preserved use.

In May 2023, both Ministries of Environment and Culture (2023) published a press release claiming that the use of Ideal and Astor has been declared preservable, without the Central Council of Architecture (that belongs to the Ministry of Environment and has the competence

over this issue) publishing the decision officially. At the same time, according to the aforementioned press release, Ideal is not going to be used only as a cinema but “other cultural uses as well as the use of the Conference Center will be allowed”, which basically aligns to the investor’s plan, while as for Astor it is mentioned that the use of the building is “designated as preserved (Government Gazette 314/D/21-05-84) and a work of art (Government Gazette 331/B/9-06-81)”, without referring to their preserved use as cinemas.

It is also highlighted that the “Central Council of Architecture” assessed that the preservation of cultural uses in the city's historic buildings offers added value to the development of each property and considers that the investment plans for the utilisation of the historical building stock of Athens should go hand in hand with the promotion of historical memory and artistic value, as mutual financial benefits arise”, which means that the investment on these theatres is definite, while for Iris there is nothing to be mentioned (Ministry of Environment and Energy, 2023).

On the part of the Municipality of Athens, the unanimous position of the municipal council of Athens, expressed with a respective resolution, for the declaration of historic cinemas Ideal and Astor as preserved - in terms of use - was reiterated by the Mayor of Athens, Kostas Bakoyannis, in his intervention at an open press conference, organised in April 2023, in the Astor hall by the theatre managers with the participation of journalists, directors, producers and representatives of organisations and parties (Municipality of Athens, 2023). For the Mayor preservation orders should be placed on the cinemas saying that: “Yes, we want economic growth and yes, we want investments and visitors. What we don’t want is Athens losing its soul. We don't want to turn it into an ancient Greek Disneyland. Quite the opposite. Our strength is our authenticity and mixed uses. We are not competing with Dubai, nor do we want a demoralised and deserted city. We want a city made for the permanent residents and that is why we are here today.”

The current public authority has also launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture & Sports and the Prefecture of Attica, the “Culture is Athens” project, a three-year project aiming to upgrade, enhance and integrate the cultural fabric of the city. As stated in the vision section on the project website: “Our goal is to make culture accessible to everyone, younger people and adults, in every neighbourhood of Athens. We embrace artists, cultural workers, creative

professionals, and cultural institutions. Together, we create a canvas, a field of networking, exchange and meaningful interaction among them while exploiting cultural synergies with other sectors, opening new possibilities for the city.” (Culture is Athens), however, the project does not include cinemas.

To sum up, in spite of the fact that the historical and cultural importance of the three cinemas Ideal, Astor and Iris has been highlighted and those theatres meet up the criteria for being faced as cultural spaces of the city, all the aforementioned tactics and policies have not secured their preserved use.

EU guidelines on culture and heritage

Cultural policy and care for cultural heritage are the sole responsibility of the Member States. However, [Article 3\(3\)](#) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) states that the Union shall ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced. The importance of cultural heritage is also clearly recognised in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). [Article 167 TFEU](#) defines the EU's role in this domain as one of encouraging cooperation between Member States and supporting the improvement of the 'knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples' and the 'conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance' (European Parliament, 2018).

In particular, it is recognised that cultural heritage “has the potential to contribute positively to people’s lives and to European societies as a whole” and that “engagement with cultural heritage also fosters a sense of belonging to a European community, based on common cultural legacies, historical experiences and shared values”. That is why, to make the most of this potential, there has to be an effort by EU Member States to **guarantee the widest possible access to cultural heritage, in all its forms and for all people**. (Communication: European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage, 2019, p. 10).

Also the Council of the EU sets as an objective to **enhance cultural participation** and to **value the role of culture in society, as it is a tool to promote democracy and favour social**

cohesion ([European Parliamentary Research Service, 2018](#)). The Council states, in fact, that “it is necessary to intensify and broaden citizen participation, particularly younger generations, and to legitimise decision-making processes, engaging the whole community in decision-making, creation, production, communication, mediation and fruition” (Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026).

The New European Agenda for Culture, adopted in 2018, encourages Member States to act in this direction, promoting culture and education and their role in **building cohesive societies and well-being**. One of the specific objectives, in fact, is to foster cultural capability of all Europeans by **making available a wide range of cultural activities and providing opportunities to participate actively**. In particular, cultural heritage raises the attractiveness of both urban and rural areas, contributing to their development; contributes to the quality of life of the inhabitants and to improving the atmosphere in neighbourhoods; enhances the uniqueness of such places and provides narratives for cultural tourism; generates revenues from ticket sales, tourist activities and increases property value; helps build social capital and the feeling of belonging ([Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe, 2015](#)).

Culture, in all its forms, is therefore a transformative force for community regeneration, improving quality of life. However, when cultural participation and access to culture are reduced or hindered, links need to be strengthened between culture and education, social affairs, urban policy, research and innovation ([King’s College London, 2017](#)). Cultural and creative industries are also important assets for the economy. The New European Agenda for Culture underlines how both rural and urban communities increasingly rely on culture to attract employers, students and tourists. “Cities that invest in culture can reap substantial reward, attracting more jobs and human capital”. However, “planning is necessary” and “innovation must be allowed through bottom-up processes”.

Pro-gentrification policies, coupled with the State’s absent intervention in the “regeneration projects” of the three cinemas previously mentioned is, therefore, favouring a gentrification process that **will hinder the achievement of EU objectives** in the field of culture and cultural heritage protection - objectives collectively agreed upon by all Member States within the Council of the EU, including Greece. Public intervention in the case of Astor, Iris and Ideal to render these spaces more profitable, is facilitating a **privately-led conversion of use values**

into exchange values. This can, in turn, lead to a decline in the use of these spaces for cultural scopes, **de facto denying an opportunity for social cohesion, cultural participation and creation of well-being for Athens' citizens.**

Recommendations

- a) Taking into account our analysis of cinemagoing as part of cultural heritage;
- b) Considering the importance of cinemas in Athens as cultural spaces;
- c) Underlining their precarious conditions due to policies that are undermining their existence;
- d) Considering EU guidelines and objectives on preservation of cultural heritage and the role of the latter for strengthening democracy and citizens' participation

We recommend the following actions with the aim to value and protect Athens' cinemas Ideal, Astor and Iris:

1. Institutional protection of the theatres as places of culture is necessary, following the standards of protection, ensured by a ministerial decision in 1997 (Merkouri Law) for the open summer cinemas of Athens. More specifically, the final decision by the Central Council of Architecture (and therefore the Ministry of Environment since the Council subjects to it), should refer to the **preservation of the buildings and their exclusive use as cinemas**, eliminating any allusions to the possibility for which their use may include any kind of other commercial activity. It is also important that the Ministry of Culture **takes a stance towards the situation clearly**, as it declared its lack of competency in the subject, and yet it participated in the press release held in May 2023 both by the Ministries of Environment and Culture .
2. We call on the **Municipality of Athens and the Ministry of Culture to implement and disseminate activities, screenings and campaigns in order to promote the active role of cinemas** and traditional theatres in general in shaping and promoting culture.

3. As the city of Athens is being transformed by policies, put in place by the Greek State and by the Municipality of Athens, aimed at promoting tourism, residents are losing their access to vital spaces for cultural expression. The Municipality of Athens, as well as the Ministry of Culture should draw their **attention to citizens** themselves and take appropriate measures to **protect their right to live in the city**, as well as their interests. Public authorities should engage in opening, as a first step, **a public consultation involving all stakeholders concerned** in order to receive feedback, **on the specific theme of access to culture and cultural spaces in the city of Athens**.
4. As far as the Iris cinema is concerned, the **EKPA should formally engage in undertaking its maintenance**, and commit to the maintenance of the hall as a place of culture managed by the students' Cultural Club.
5. **Cultural education** plays a major role in raising awareness on the active position citizens can have when participating in cultural spaces. **Cultural institutions and places should be sustained in developing specific programmes for education and cultural communication**, as this is also vital for their own sustainability.

Bibliography

Bibliography in Greek

Ideal (χ.χ.) Ανακτήθηκε από <https://cineideal.gr/#about-us>.

Ανακοίνωση του Γραφείου Τύπου ΥΠΠΟΑ για τον χαρακτηρισμό χρήσεων κινηματογράφων (30 Μαρτίου 2023). Ανακτήθηκε από <https://www.culture.gov.gr/el/Information/SitePages/view.aspx?nID=4541>.

Απάντηση της Υπουργού Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού Λίνας Μενδώνη σε ερώτηση για τους κινηματογράφους του κέντρου της Αθήνας. (7 Απριλίου 2023). Ανακτήθηκε από <https://www.culture.gov.gr/el/Information/SitePages/view.aspx?nID=4545>.

Γραμματικάκη-Αλεξίου, Α. (2002). Διεθνής διακίνηση πολιτιστικών αγαθών και ιδιωτικό διεθνές δίκαιο. Τόπος Έκδοσης: Αθήνα, Εκδόσεις Σάκκουλα.

Διατηρητέα η χρήση των κινηματογράφων IDEAL και ΑΣΤΟΡ. (4 Μαΐου 2023). Ανακτήθηκε από <https://ypen.gov.gr/diatiritea-i-chrisi-ton-kinimatografon-ideal-kai-astor/>.

Τριδα Visions. (χ.χ.). Ανακτήθηκε από <https://iridavisions.gr/>.

Κ. Μπακογιάννης: “Το ΑΣΤΟΡ και το ΙΝΤΕΑΛ είναι μέρος του DNA της Αθήνας-Θέλουμε μια πόλη για τον μόνιμο κάτοικο”. (4 Απριλίου 2023). Ανακτήθηκε από <https://www.cityofathens.gr/k-mpakogiannis-to-astor-to-intea/>.

Λιάλιος, Γ. (21 Ιουνίου 2023). Το τέλος των μεγάλων αστικών αναπλάσεων. Ανακτήθηκε από <https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/562479124/to-telos-ton-megalon-astikon-anaplasteon/>.

Ματσούκα, Δ. (23 Ιανουαρίου 2023). Διαβίβαση αιτιολογικής έκθεσης σχετικά με τον χαρακτηρισμό ως διατηρητέας της χρήσης «κινηματογράφου-θεάτρου» με την επωνυμία

«ΑΣΤΟΡ», στο διατηρητέο κτίριο Σταδίου 28 στο Δήμο Αθηναίων, φερόμενης ιδιοκτησίας ΕΦΚΑ. Ανακτήθηκε από

https://media.interactive.netuse.gr/pegasus/Multimedia/pdf/yphen.aitiologiki_astor_id42994190.pdf.

Μεγάλος Περίπατος: Εξευγενισμός, τουριστικοποίηση και το δικαίωμα στην πόλη. (15 Ιουλίου 2020.) Ανακτήθηκε από

<https://akea2011.com/2020/07/15/megalosperipatosgentrification/#more-7776>.

Μπαλαούρα Ο. (2023), «Gentrification στην Αθήνα και επιδράσεις στις ΜΜΕ», Ερευνητικά Κείμενα ΙΜΕ ΓΣΕΒΕΕ 2/2023, Αθήνα: ΙΜΕ ΓΣΕΒΕΕ, σσ. 36.

Παπαβασιλείου, Χ. (2013). *Επανάχρηση του θερινού κινηματογράφου και προσθήκη χώρων πολλαπλών χρήσεων στο νησί της Αλοννήσου* (Διδακτορική Διατριβή). Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλίας, Βόλος. Ανακτήθηκε από <https://ir.lib.uth.gr/xmlui/handle/11615/13131;jsessionid=994ABEE2FA62DC1402B973E537D4CFE3>.

Ποιοι είμαστε. (χ.χ.). Ανακτήθηκε από <https://kinimatografiko.gr/%CE%BF-%CF%84%CE%BF%CE%BC%CE%AD%CE%B1%CF%82/>.

Σηφάκη Ε. (2022). Ο κινηματογράφος ως πολιτισμική κατασκευή και ως κοινωνική πρακτική. *Θέατρο Πόλις. Διεπιστημονικό περιοδικό για το θέατρο και τις τέχνες*, 234–246. <https://doi.org/10.12681/.30787>.

Το φεστιβάλ (χ.χ.), Ανακτήθηκε από <https://www.ethnofest.gr/el/festival/>.

Φεστιβάλ: Προφίλ. (26 Αυγούστου 2019.) Ανακτήθηκε από <https://www.aiff.gr/profil/>.

Φεστιβάλ: Χώροι (22 Σεπτεμβρίου 2022.) Ανακτήθηκε από <https://www.aiff.gr/xoroi/>.

Φύσσης, Δ. (2019). Τα Σινεμά της Αθήνας 1896-2013. Ιστορίες ενός Αστικού Τοπίου. Έκδοση ebook: Ebooks4Greeks. Ανακτήθηκε από <https://www.ebooks4greeks.gr/ta-sinema-tis-athinas-1896-2013>.

Bibliography in English

Alexandri, G. (2018). Planning Gentrification and the 'Absent' State in Athens, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 42(1):36-50. Accessed from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322814918_Planning_Gentrification_and_the_'Absent'_State_in_Athens.

Atkinson, R. (2002) 'Does gentrification help or harm urban neighbourhoods? An assessment of the evidence-base in the context of the new urban agenda'. ESRC Centre for Neighbourhood Research, University of Glasgow, Paper 5.

Azzadina, I., Hani, U., &... (2012). Preserving Cultural Heritage through Creative Industry: A Lesson from Saung Angklung Udjo. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, pp. 193-200. Accessed from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212567112003346>.

Council conclusions on the Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022. (2018). 2018/C 460/10. Accessed from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018XG1221%2801%29>.

Culture in cities and regions. (n.d.) Accessed from <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions>.

Dibeltulo, S., Ercole, P., &... (2016). Cinema heritage in Europe: Preserving and sharing culture by engaging with film exhibition and audience. *Alphaville Journal of Film and Screen Media*. Pp. 1-12. Accessed from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353671894_Cinema_heritage_in_Europe_Preserving_and_sharing_culture_by_engaging_with_film_exhibition_and_audiences_Editorial.

European Commission, (2020, December 3.) Europe's Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan to Support Recovery and Transformation. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0784>.

FILMINTS – OPEN CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE LOCAL WORKING GROUP (LWG) OF THE PROJECT. (2022, October 10). Accessed from <https://interaliaproject.com/el/participation/filmints-open-call-for-participants-in-the-local-working-group-lwg-of-the-project/>.

gentrification. (n.d.) Accessed from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gentrification>.

Greece 1.1. (August 4, 2019.) Accessed from https://www.culturalpolicies.net/country_profile/greece-1-1/.

Pasikowska-Schnass, M. (2018). Cultural heritage in Europe. *Linking past and future*. Plenary chamber of the European Parliament, Brussels. Accessed from chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20180622RES06410/20180622RES06410.pdf>.

Ravazzoli, E. (2016) 'Cinemagoing as spatially contextualised cultural and social practice', *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, 11, pp. 33–44. <https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.11.02>.

Rodenberg, J. & Wagenaar, P. Cultural Contestation. (2018). *Heritage, Identity and the Role of the Government*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Smith, H. (2023, April 10), 'An attack on culture': Athens film fans fight threat to historic cinemas. Accessed from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/10/athens-film-fans-fight-save-astor-ideal-cinemas-development-greece>.

The Concept and History of Cultural Heritage. (n.d.) Accessed from <https://culturalheritagestudies.ceu.edu/concept-and-history-cultural-heritage>.

Vision and Mission. (n.d.) Accessed from <https://cultureisathens.gr/en/orama-apostoli/>.

Van Balen, K. (2014). Creating the Strategic Research Agenda, *JPI Cultural Heritage and Global Change*. 2014/06. Ανακτήθηκε από

chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/<http://jpi-ch.eu/wp-content/uploads/SRA-2014-06.pdf>.

Smith, L. (2007). *The Uses of Heritage*, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Zukin, S. (1987). Gentrification: Culture and Capital in the Urban Core. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 13, 129–147. Accessed from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2083243>.