

ECOWEEK 2011 WORKSHOP

Energy, Climate, and Culture in EcoUrban Design: Towards a Greek Sustainable Urban Quarter in Thessaloniki's Harbour.

(Workshop in collaboration with the Municipality of Thessaloniki)

The reality of global environmental degradation, depletion of natural resources, climate change and the upcoming energy crisis triggered by future scarcity of inexpensive oil demands a radical reorganization of the way we live in, and design, cities. However, the scale of intervention in such urban restructuring is still unclear. Although we know that all scales, from the regional to the individual building, must be re-thought, it seems that the first unit of intervention at the urban design scale is the *urban quarter* (or '*urban block*').

The first premise of this rationale is the assumption that if the urban quarter is environmentally sustainable --i.e. it is medium-density, has mixed-land uses, produces its own energy and food, and recycles and reuses its own wastewaters and organic waste-- it is easier to 'reproduce' to form a sustainable neighbourhood, then a sustainable urban district and, eventually, a sustainable city. The second premise is that older European quarters also need to be retrofitted to form part of a sustainable city. However, while the programmatic requirements of the quarter (systems to grow food, to recycle water, to produce energy, etc.) may be similar across different geographical contexts, the cultural and climatic dimensions must respond to the local conditions.

To test the above premises, the TU Berlin/EcoCityLab ECOWEEK 2011 Workshop will aim to develop an urban quarter in the seafront of Thessaloniki as a self-sufficient urban unit in terms of energy, food, drinking water, and management of organic waste, but reflecting the architectural/urbanistic heritage, social traditions, and cultural mores of Thessaloniki's society. And, of course, embodying the highest aesthetic principles or architectural, landscape, and urban design.

This is a workshop that on one hand responds to the wish of the Municipality of Thessaloniki to develop its seafront in a sustainable way, and on the other urges visionary ideas! Harbours and seafronts have always been some of the most interesting sites for urban projects. They represent the loci of external/international exchanges offering an opportunity for the designer to devise a project that would reflect such interactions. On the other hand, however, given the high real estate value of urban waterfronts, they usually become highly sought development sites by international developers whose ideas about urbanistic and architectonic styles are more about attracting international investors that responding to local architectonic, urbanistic and cultural traditions. Dealing with these two aspects of the site and merging them with sustainable design strategies will be the challenge for the students in this workshop.

The students, guided by four tutors specialized in urban design, climate and the cultural dimension of urban environments, will probe their creativity to produce images, plans and sketches of an EcoUrban Quarter in Thessaloniki's waterfront. The project will be a test of combining the rich cultural architectonic and urban tradition in Thessaloniki and the nascent theory of ecocities. The ideas will be communicated to the Municipality of Thessaloniki and the Municipality will decide how to develop all or some of those ideas. Some of these them may eventually be implemented or, at least, form the basis of a future project.