The perception of children for the limits of neighborhood

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1 INTRODUCTION

The localisation of neighbourhood limits of a city and consequently of its territorial size takes place in a different way depending on who and why performs this action. Intellectual maps through which routes, roads, the segmentation of the city in sub-areas with natural or artificial limits such as bridges, walls or buildings are recognized, act upon this process in multiple ways. The age of the individual is a factor that plays an essential role in recognition as it is connected to time, one of the dimensions of "being". The acquaintance with and consequently the learning of space is acquired through action within specified time. That is, the limits of neighbourhood as a material and intellectual unit of structured space entail the rhetoric and the matter, the history that requires apprenticeship, the familiarization that has need of the effective movement. The children, as a separate age group, conceive the sizes of their neighbourhood in relation to their psychosomatic scale. The present essay makes an effort to detect the limits and the size of neighbourhood in an intensely urbanised environment as conceived by children aged 11-12, in the city of Athens.

Tuan1 names as neighbourhood the place where the individual has the sense that he is at home while Holahan and Wandersman2 define it as the intermediary level between home and city, within the limits of which the residents have the awareness that they belong to the same community. The word neighbourhood refers directly to the word adjacency explaining the basic criterion of classification of place in this category. Most definitions of neighbourhood are based on the concept of proximity stressing that neighbourhood is the people who live next door3.

The quantitative and social data of the area play an important role in the discrimination of neighbourhood from the other forms of man-made space. A. Lagopoylos4 gives his own version by saying that: "In urbanised or non-urbanised settlements, the concurrence of their social and territorial units leads to the unitary elements of place of residence called neighbourhoods". The existence of neighbourhood is greatly attributed to the social isolation of certain groups and their low mobility within its limits. The resident of the neighbourhood has the following characteristics:

- It is closely connected to its residents
- It uses - exclusively or not - the services of its urban infrastructures
- It conceives the neighbourhood as having limits defined by the total of people that reside there
- It is sentimentally connected with the area of the neighbourhood, creating a sense of vital space that he owes, is named and identified after and provides safety.

The limits that determine the inner "being" from the outer "other" can be geographic limits, hills, rivers, swamps etc, cultural and national, functional like commercial, educational or recreational and finally psychological which arise from the feeling of members that there is a mental bond between them. The personal limits of neighbourhood often do not coincide with the geographic ones and with those that one would normally understand while the four constitutive elements of that were previously reported are rarely found all together in the neighbourhoods of the modern cities of the western world.

The people in their everyday routine move with easy from one region to another or much further from the place of residence. Thus the limits of neighbourhood are easily confused giving the sense of an interminable urban landscape especially in the demographically sensitive categories as old people and children. Fellin P. and Litwak E5 claim that the increased mobility in the neighbourhood disrupts and destroys the cohesion of neighbourhood. The degree to which the individuals incorporate in the environment of the neighbourhood depends on personal and community characteristics that most likely decrease due to their mobility. When these characteristics are lost because of the urbanisation then the previous cohesion with space breaks down and the limits become vague for the individuals. In the work of Glass6 only in 5 out of the 26 neighbourhoods is the identification between the natural and symbolic limits obvious. This shows that the operation of shops, schools and every local organisation do not always constitute a neighbourhood. The fundamental relation that forms that, in every case study, is the personal relationship between the residents

which however refers to a small scale area of the city. However, while conducting the already mentioned researches, the people asked determined the neighbourhood as a wider area. Taub[7] recorded also the importance of the name by which the region is known to its residents but also to the rest of the world. In the process of defining the area of the neighbourhood, the natural factors of the place acquire importance when they are included along with the social data of the groups that reside there. The natural elements minimize their force as limits of the neighbourhood while at the definition of the area the sociological characteristics of each street stand out. In order to define the limits of the neighbourhood, four factors are taken into consideration:

- neighbourhood as a place or unit of urban space
- as a set of social relationships
- neighbourhood that is defined from the institutions located there
- neighbourhood as a symbolic unit, with a name and an acknowledgeable identity[8]

In terms of the four dimensions reported, the individual determines the size of the neighbourhood.

Hancey and Knowles[9] confirmed that the residents of urban regions tend to define smaller regions as their neighbourhood, while as one moves away from the urban core to the suburbs and the regional communities, the area becomes bigger in size. Also women, the long-lasting residents of place, the parents of young children, tend to define neighbourhood as a small area. What is more, there is a significant group of residents that when asked about the limits of their neighbourhood, they give vague answers and mainly refer to the wider area using some geographic orientation such as "my neighbourhood is at the east of the river and the north of the avenue". The name of the neighbourhood is also of decisive importance to the identification of the limits of the region as the change of name beyond a point in the area signals in a symbolic way the beginning of another territorial unit. The name as a verbal symbol that corresponds to the aesthetic reality composes and it to a large extent supports the perception of limits and the intellectual outline of the neighbourhood in the intellectual map of the individuals. Relevant studies show that the residents with high income use more often the name of their neighbourhood compared to the low income ones[10]. The residents of the city are members of many groups at the same time, living inside the hierarchical structure of spaces. The activity of an adult resident coincides with and penetrates locality in many levels[11]. That is why at certain times a place is identified as neighbourhood with more than one name.

The limits of neighbourhoods are even set by organisations and institutions that have their headquarters in an urban area. It could be shops, construction companies, banks, hospitals, educational institutions etc. In this case we have the subjective intellectual mapping of "internal" people who live there but also "exterior" users that understand the area of operation of the organisations as the limits of a neighbourhood. The organisations For action and existence planning reasons, the organisations proceed to their own mapping of the neighbourhood. The limits of two different sources seldom coincide.

The localisation of neighbourhood limits happens differently depending on who and why does it. It is presented in a subjective way regarding the individuals - internal and external residents - as well as the official way of organisations and institutions that offer their services and develop their action in the particular area. Respectively, it is possible to make reference to the existence of two categories of neighbourhood in relation to the source of determination of limits: The subjective neighbourhood and the institutional or official neighbourhood.

The individuals subjectively determine a total of neighbourhood limits as identified by their movements. The intellectual maps act upon this process which guides the choices and directs movement and social contacts12. With the maps they are identify, as Kevin Lynch proved, the routes, the roads, the routes of means of transport, the pedestrians crossings, the segmentation of city in sub-areas which are realised with natural or artificial limits such as bridges, walls, rivers[13]. Also the social, functional and official limits are identified, including demographic elements, important institutions and the way safety in the region is perceived. Due to the development in the geographic technology of information systems (GIS), it is now possible to make neighbourhood maps based on data given by the residents. Another approach is the identification of crossroads which the pedestrians cross in the neighbourhood and are considered as area of social interaction. Grannis[14] suggested using the crossroads where the social interaction is less as limits of the neighbourhood. Using the GIS, he examined territorial and social organisation assumptions in order to

define the limits. With GIS the geographic characteristics, the economic and social elements relate with the local beliefs producing results of satisfactory clarity.

2 METHOD

The research was carried out with the help of a questionnaire. The individuals were students of the fifth and sixth grade of the 19th municipal school of Ionia (48 students) examining the sense of space with the density of structure and common appearance of urban landscape with the blocks of flats that is so typical in the neighbourhoods of Athens. The children answer the question "Where do you live? What are the limits of your neighbourhood?" They were asked to define the outline of their neighbourhood in a descriptive way. From each individual description a neighbourhood outline would emerge with subjective criteria. Through the answers it was attempted to show the current perception for the neighbourhood limits in the densely-populated and over-populated surroundings of the city where two to five storey buildings play a dominant role. The urban space having as its centre and starting point the family house extends to the limits that the children place. Expecting the projection of the effect that the children's psychosomatic scale has on the perception of neighbourhood sizes when family houses have been structured vertically in blocks of flats changing the relation of inside with outside, private and public space as also and the sense of ground possession. The processing of elements and maps with GIS (Geographic Information System) which develops geographic information systems with aerial photos as a background, making possible the direct recording of distances between specific points as well as the estimation of surface covered.

3 DISCUSSION

After identifying the limits of each neighbourhood as described by the student, it is spotted on the map with the elliptic form that represents the ground that it actually occupies. Within the outline, a number is written which has been given in each individual since the beginning of the research. On the map all the neighbourhoods appear with the exception of the 6th one which is located in a different area and the child for some reasons has to move to the school unit that is under examination. Additionally, the 10th is at a distance but is still present.

Through children reports it appears that the elements of structured space that serve as landmarks and limits of their neighbourhood are churches, schools, streets, shops and means of transport terminals. They are reference points in an area where a great number of people gather throughout the day or at certain times for the local society. From the 17 neighbourhoods near the school, the neighbouring church of St. Anastasia is mentioned as a limit in ten of them. In three cases, the school where the individuals of the research study is the limit while in one case another school of the area is the limit. Streets are reported in two cases and the metro terminal that forms the physiognomy of this part of urban space is reported once.

The children set the limits of their neighbourhood way beyond the end of street that goes past their house. The calculation of distance of the furthest neighbourhood is approximate based on the limits that each student reports. The average distance from 18 reports – with the exception of the 6th which is not included in the map – is roughly 355 metres from one end to the other, with 796 m being the longest (1st distance) and 115 m being the shortest (10th distance) (map 1)

The relatively big surface of structured space that children identify as their neighbourhood includes the relationship with the material elements as well as the relationship with people that live in that place. That is to say, a familiar area where children of age we study move, having the feeling of possessing of the area and belong to an area they own.

The area of city that the 19th municipal school of Ionia serves covers roughly 769.000 sq.m. of structured space while the greatest distance between the most distanced limits of this region is 1204 metres. These sizes refer to the territorial scale of the town or the prosperous demographic village. The wider frame is composed by their individual areas of neighbourhoods as identified by means of their limits by children. It is a quite familiar to the students area as it is approachable in a daily base due to the route to school, playing, shopping and the social contact with peers with who they meet on the common ground of school. (map 2)

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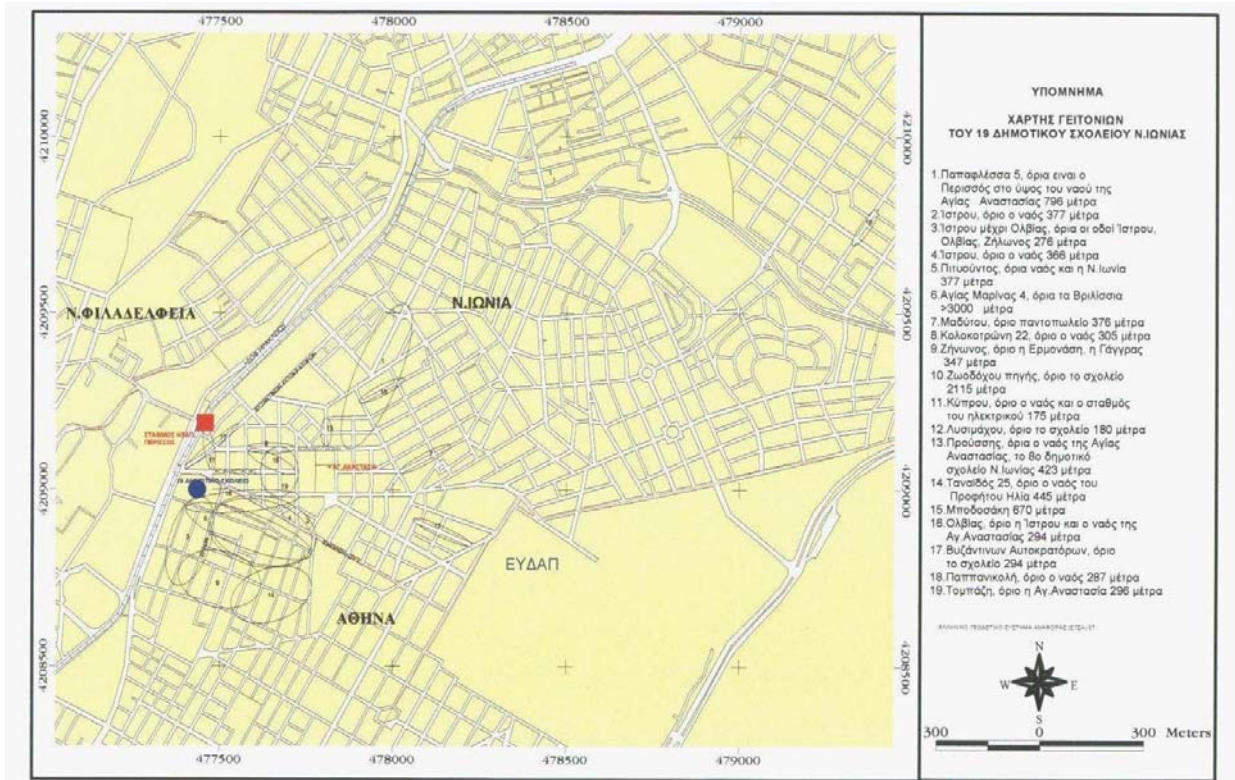Urban and Regional Planning | www.corp.at

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4 RESULTS

The children of the region of Athens consider a wide area of structured space as their neighbourhood. Its limits extend to a considerable distance from the family house, which shows that children in a city are prepared for equivalent movement in a rich in stimuli framework during the later stages of their growth. The cultural factors that compose the significance of neighbourhood make a catalytic appearance in the reports of the individuals of the research, with the church naming and defining the identity of the area. In recently developed and structured surroundings – during the last hundred and fifty years – where the residents are immigrants from various other regions of the same country, the school along with the church are points of reference and identification of the limits of neighbourhood.

In relation to the scale of the neighbourhood, the school and the schoolyard both occupy a small space in the neighbourhood. In the densely-populated areas of Athens there is a problem regarding finding appropriate establishments for a school, since school units are of a small scale and also they serve a lot of neighbourhoods with a large population, so they face the problem of overpopulation.
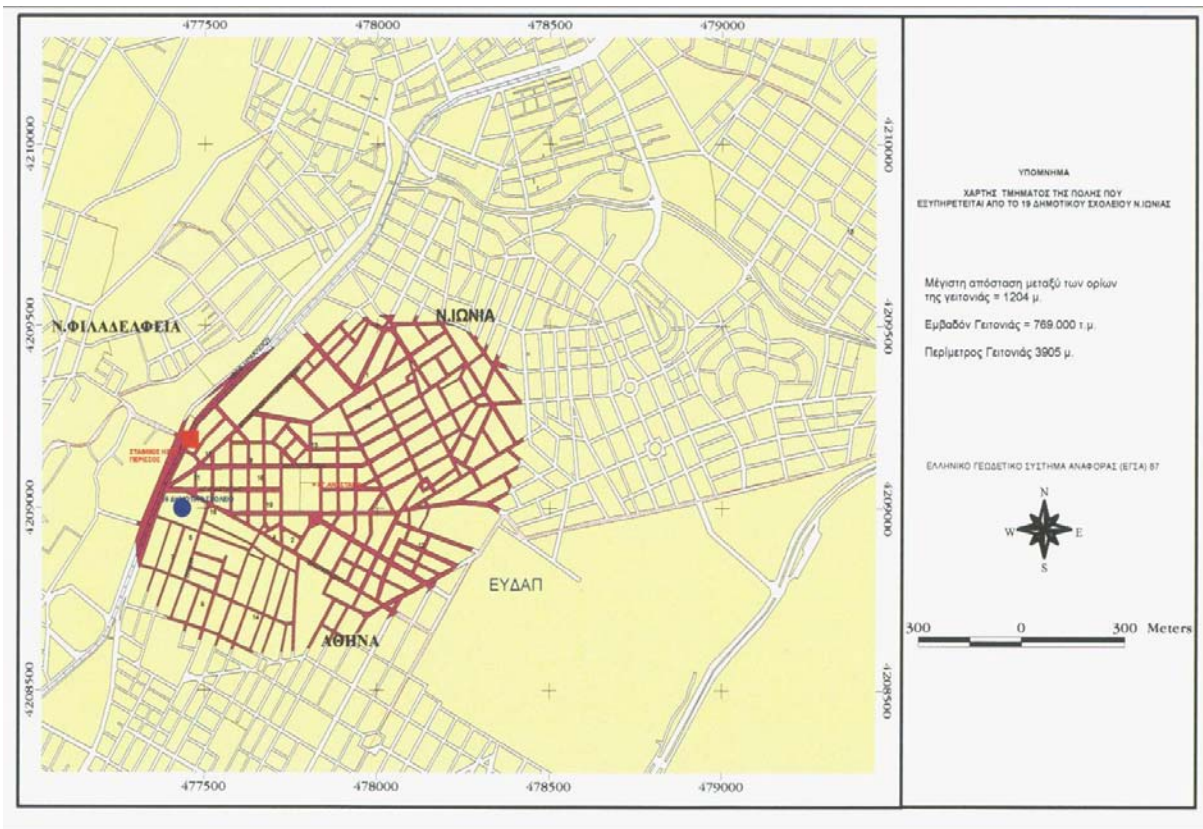
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6   MAPS

Map 1: Mitoulas N. "The child's scale, the school building and the neighbourhood", Doctorial thesis, N.T.U. Athens 2005

Map 2. Mitoulas N. "The child's scale, the school building and the neighbourhood", Doctorial thesis, N.T.U. Athens 2005

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