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**The Thessaloniki Biennale: The agendas and alternative potential(s)
of a newly-founded biennial in the context of Greek governance**

Volume 1

Aikaterini Karavida

This thesis is submitted
as part of the requirements for the award of the
PhD in
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CITY UNIVERSITY
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Declaration

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Abstract

Aikaterini Karavida

The Thessaloniki Biennale: The agendas and alternative potential(s) of a newly-founded biennial in the context of Greek governance

This thesis explores two main hypotheses: the first is that the Thessaloniki Biennale fulfils an instrumental role linked to financial and political interests, particularly tourism and cultural diplomacy. The second hypothesis concerns the possibility that the Thessaloniki Biennale may have alternative potential(s), and explores to what extent and in what ways this was realised.

This thesis draws on the debates raised in the literature on art and culture's instrumentalisation for 'non-artistic' purposes, art and culture's potential for 'subversion', and the burgeoning literature on the biennial exhibitions of contemporary art. The analysis is interdisciplinary, applying a broad range of methodologies and theories: semiotics, social history of art, social theory of art and culture, the analysis of cultural policy formulation, and discourse analysis. The aim of this thesis is to synthesise these different methodologies to provide a rich, multi-faceted account of the Thessaloniki Biennale.

In this thesis, I contend that the Thessaloniki Biennale attempted to 're-brand' Thessaloniki as historical and multicultural, as well as a centre of contemporary art. In this way, it contributed to enhancing the city's competitiveness and attractiveness as well as its influence in the broader area. Thus, the art event became entangled to official Greek cultural policy, and the agenda of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

At the same time, the Thessaloniki Biennale challenged stereotypical interpretative frameworks as regards art practice in regions outside the so-called West, and avoided exhibition practices which commercialise 'cultural difference'. Also, certain artworks undermined the privileged narrative on the city's identity, by highlighting aspects of the city and its history which were largely ignored in the official written texts of the art event. The 'subversive' potential of the art event could be deepened and expanded by democratising the processes of selection of participating artists, and by working more closely with independent artistic groups, citizen and activist groups.

(Word Count: 305)

List of Abbreviations

AUTH: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

CACT: Contemporary Art Centre of Thessaloniki

CSF: Community Support Framework

EFTA: European Free Trade Area

ERDF: European Regional Development Fund

ESCG: Economic and Social Council of Greece

EU: European Union

FYROM: Former Yugoslavic Republic of Macedonia

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

MMCA: Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NSRF: National Strategic Reference Framework

OCCE: Organisation of the Cultural Capital of Europe

OPC: Operational Programme 'Culture'

ROP: Regional Operational Programme

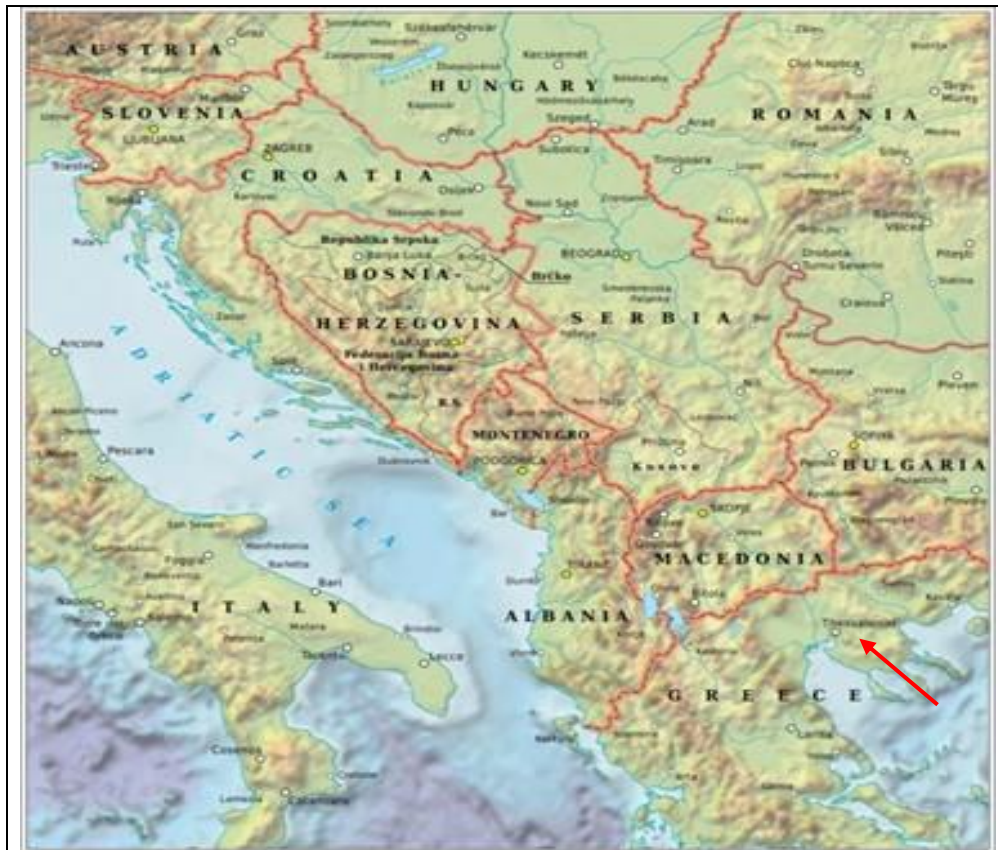
SMCA: State Museum of Contemporary Art

TB: Thessaloniki Biennale

WWW: World Wide Web

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis examines in depth the Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art, which was founded in the second largest city of Greece in 2007¹ [1]. This project addresses the Thessaloniki Biennale as an institution and exhibition format, and aims to simultaneously explore the biennial exhibition-format in the contemporary Greek cultural context and to highlight the particularities which the Thessaloniki Biennale exhibits. In doing so, it relates the Thessaloniki Biennale to relevant debates raised in and surrounding the literature on art and culture's instrumentalisation for 'non-artistic' purposes and to art and culture's potential for 'subversion', as well as situating it in relation to the burgeoning literature on the biennial exhibitions of contemporary art.



1. The Balkans: Topography. Map showing the location of Thessaloniki in the Thermaikos Bay, Northern Greece.

¹ The English word 'biennial' is often used to address exhibitions of contemporary art which take place every two years typically in the same city. However, some of these events, such as the Venice Biennale, the Moscow Biennale and the Thessaloniki Biennale, use the Italian adjective 'biennale' instead. In this thesis, I address the art event under examination as 'Thessaloniki Biennale', as this is the title chosen by its organisers.

This thesis explores whether art itself can potentially evade *total* instrumentalisation even when it is exhibited within the context of art biennials which can have an instrumental function and may be inscribed in an array of financial and political interests. This hypothesis is explored through a close examination of the Thessaloniki Biennale which demonstrates that this art event had not only an instrumental role but also alternative potentials, and the extent these were realised. As regards the art event's instrumental role, I argue that the Thessaloniki Biennale was carefully designed to convey particular connotations in terms of the city's past and present identity. More specifically, the Thessaloniki Biennale initiated a signification process which constructed and projected the host city as a multicultural art centre with a leading role in the Balkan area.

The thesis deploys a twofold structure to explore this hypothesis and construct its argument. Firstly, an analysis of the art event deploys semiotics to show how a series of choices such as the selection of curators, artists, geographical focus, and venues, as well as the official written texts of the event (exhibition catalogues and press releases) contributed to the construction of Thessaloniki as 'multicultural', 'historical' and as a 'metropolis of contemporary art and culture'. Through such symbolism, the Thessaloniki Biennale embraced the official Greek cultural policy and Greek governance agendas of raising the city's international profile and influence and increasing tourism in the area. My argument regarding the instrumental function of the Thessaloniki Biennale is informed by the critical concerns raised in relation to biennials as regards their connection to neo-liberal values and global capitalism (León, 2001; Stallabrass, 2004; Hardt, 2009) as well as to the analysis of processes of instrumentalisation of art and culture from a 'social theory of culture' perspective (Yúdice, 2003; Zukin, 1995).

The second part of this thesis considers whether there is also 'alternative' potential in the Thessaloniki Biennale. 'Alternative', here, is understood in a dual way. The first aspect of the Thessaloniki Biennale's 'alternative' potential which is explored is the question of how artistic practices from 'outside' the so-called West were represented in the three editions of the art event. More specifically, this thesis asks whether the Thessaloniki Biennale confronted or resisted the Western, neoliberal tendency to

market cultural difference in contemporary art exhibitions taking place in the West. This issue is an integral part of how this particular art event was constructed: the Thessaloniki Biennale clearly emphasised particular geographical and cultural areas outside the so-called West (in particular Africa, South America, the Middle East and the former Soviet States).

Here, I argue that in part the Thessaloniki Biennale's critical potential lies in its reflection upon the conditions under which art from outside Europe can be included in European art events without being reduced to essentialist stereotypes about the cultures of the regions in question nor fixed notions of identity which exclude alternative representations or discourses (David, 2007; Koleif, 2010; Santacattarina and Steyn, 2013); also without abiding by the levelling rules of a capitalist-driven contemporary art market, which exoticises and commodifies the cultural particularities of participating artists (Araeen, 2000; 2005; Conover, 2006). This thesis explores whether the Thessaloniki Biennale - although not unique in this respect, and sometimes with limited and uneven success across its three editions - offered an alternative to exhibition practices which reinforce such stereotypes and rules.

The second aspect of the art event's 'alternative' potential, as understood in this thesis, involves the potential of artistic and curatorial practices put forward by the Thessaloniki Biennale to offer an alternative narrative to the profit-oriented official written texts of the art event itself as well as to the Greek governance narratives of the commercial city, as mentioned above. This thesis explores where and to what extent some of the artworks presented in the three editions of the art event challenged and undermined those official narratives, by bringing forward issues which the official texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale and the governmental discourse concealed or diluted, such as immigration.

The Thessaloniki Biennale in the broader Biennial context

Since the art event under study in this thesis is a biennial of contemporary art and, therefore, belongs to the large network of biennial exhibitions, it is worth outlining the structure of this particular exhibition-format. Biennials of contemporary art are large-scale exhibitions which take place every two years (although researchers often

group biennials and triennials, which take place every three years, together), and usually present international art. These events tend to be very much connected to the city or region which hosts them; they usually bear the name of the host city, and their ‘concept’ may also be relevant to the host city or region, while elements relevant to the host city may be reflected in the biennial’s logo or promotional material.

The oldest biennial is the Venice Biennale, established in 1895, organised around national pavilions. It has changed greatly over the 20th century and is still regarded a prestigious but contested, and at times much criticised, art institution. Since the 1950s a wealth of art biennials emerged in several parts of the globe; some examples include the Sao Paulo Biennial, (1951), which also mobilised the national representation format, the Documenta in Kassel (1955) - which takes place every five years - the Biennale de la Méditerranée in Alexandria, Egypt (1955), the Biennale of Sydney (1973), the Biennale of Asian Art in Dhaka, Bangladesh (1981), and a spate of biennials in South America from the late 1960s to early 1970s - including, the Havana Biennial (1984) which aimed at bringing together and forward artists and intellectuals from the southern hemisphere, who had been largely excluded from the Venice Biennale and Documenta, and, thus, challenged the hierarchical positioning of the so-called West and the notion of its assumed intellectual supremacy (Gardner and Green, 2013, 444-450)².

Since the 1990s onwards, there has been a proliferation of biennials across the globe anew. The Biennial Foundation, an online platform intending to connect people and institutions involved in the organisation of biennials, provides a comprehensive list of 150 biennial art exhibitions, including triennial exhibitions, and the Documenta of Kassel (Biennial Foundation, 2014a; 2014b). The Thessaloniki Biennale which my research focuses on is one of the recently founded biennials, and took place for the first time in 2007. It consists of four editions so far; my thesis studies the first three which took place in 2007, 2009 and 2011 respectively. The 4th edition is not analysed in depth due to inevitable time constraints; however, a brief reference is made here to its funding and theme.

² Anthony Gardner and Charles Green present an overview of the so-called ‘biennials of the South’, that is biennials organised ‘outside the so-called West, namely in Africa, South America and South Asia – from 1950s onwards (Gardner and Green, 2013).

Organising the Thessaloniki Biennale: Some aspects

The Greek State Museum of Contemporary Art (SMCA), based in Thessaloniki and funded by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, was the main organiser of the Thessaloniki Biennale. The SMCA assumed the leading role in the event's organisation, although in the 3rd and 4th editions, the participation of the city's largest museums through the *5 Museums Movement* was more pronounced³. As regards its funding, from 2007 to 2013 the Thessaloniki Biennale was financed initially by the Operational Programme 'Culture' (which was part of the Community Support Framework III, 2000-2006), and subsequently by the National Strategic Reference Framework (2007-2013). Both the Community Support Framework III as well as the National Strategic Reference Framework were related to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and essentially involved EU money. According to the main press release of the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale, the cost of the event was covered by the ERDF (80%), and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture (20%) (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007). According to the OPC report on the projects funded under its auspices, the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale was allocated 765,322 Euros from the ERDF (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme 'Culture', 2009). The 2011 edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale was put under the auspices of the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* programme initiated by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011; Ioannou, 2013), and secured funding for the next two editions of the art event as well - 3,000,000 Euros, in total (Intermediate Managing Authority of Central Macedonia, 2013).

The 1st edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale was designed and coordinated by George Tsaras, President of the SMCA at the time, and Maria Tsantsanoglou, Director of the SMCA at the time and co-curator of the biennial's 1st edition. Katerina Koskina, the current SMCA's President, has been the Director of both the 3rd and the 4th edition. For all 4 editions, international curators were invited to work along local ones, often members of the SMCA staff. More specifically, the 2007 edition was curated by Catherine David, Jean-Eric Lundström, and the Director of the SMCA at the time,

³ The *5 Museums Movement* is the collaboration between 5 major museums of Thessaloniki: the SMCA, the Archaeological Museum, the Byzantine Museum, the Macedonian Museum and Teloglion Art Foundation.

Maria Tsantsanoglou. The 2009 edition was curated by Gabriella Salgado, Bibi Silva, and Syrago Tsiara, the Director of the Centre of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki, which is affiliated to the SMCA. Finally, Paolo Colombo, Mahita El Bacha Urieta and Marina Fokidis, a Greek curator, native of Thessaloniki, curated the 2011 edition. The 4th edition differed from all previous editions, as it was curated by only one curator, Adelina von Fürstenberg.

The organisers of the Thessaloniki Biennale took pride in the large number of participating artists: In 2007, eighty one artists and artist groups participated in the main programme of the Thessaloniki Biennale (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007a), fifty seven artists and artist groups in 2009 (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009); seventy three artists and artist groups in 2011 (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011a); finally, fifty artists and artist groups in 2014 (State



2. Third Thessaloniki Biennale, Opening, Alatza Imaret.

Museum of Contemporary Art, 2014). All editions included an extensive parallel programme of exhibitions by local and international artists curated mainly by local independent curators as well as curators employed by the SMCA. Finally, all editions used consistently the city's historic monuments as venues for the biennial's exhibitions, which, as explained in Chapter 4, contributed to the construction of a multicultural profile for the city [2].



3. Main banner on the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale website.

Each edition has been loosely themed around a particular philosophical or theoretical concept:

the 2007 edition, entitled *Heterotopias*, drew on Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias, as explored in his essay 'Of Other Spaces' (Foucault, 1984, 46-49). The 2009 edition, entitled *Praxis, Art In Times of Uncertainty* [3], set as its aim to explore art's potential for social intervention as well as the relationship between theory and practice in contemporary art. Both the exhibition catalogue and the press release of the event referenced Terry Eagleton's *After Theory* (Eagleton, 2003) as the starting point of the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale's concept.

The 3rd edition, under the title *A Rock and a Hard Place*, avoided any direct reference to a particular theorist and differed in relation to the previous editions in terms of its clear focus on the cultures of the Mediterranean as well as Thessaloniki's histories. The 3rd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale was incorporated in the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* Programme, which was initiated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and more specifically under the *Old Intersections- Make it New* project. It was proclaimed that the following two editions would also be incorporated into and funded by this programme. Indeed the 4th edition (2013), *Everywhere But Now*, was also part of the *Old Intersections- Make it New* project, was funded by the Ministry and focused on the Mediterranean. In short, as the Thessaloniki Biennale evolves with time, it gradually becomes more and more focused on the theme of the Mediterranean cultures.

Reasons for studying the Thessaloniki Biennale

A significant reason why the Thessaloniki Biennale attracted my interest was the fact that, although the official Greek cultural policy has placed great emphasis on classical and byzantine heritage for the most part of the 20th century, in 2007, the Hellenic Ministry of Culture became the main sponsor of the Thessaloniki Biennale. The Hellenic Ministry of Culture has continued its support towards the art event throughout its four editions, despite the severe economic crisis the country is facing. It is, therefore, an interesting and pressing issue to explore why the government has supported a relatively large-scale contemporary art institution at this moment.

In the early twentieth century, directly after the Balkan wars, Thessaloniki was contested by Greece and the neighbouring nations. The issue of national identity therefore has for a long time been a sensitive issue in the region and this is reflected

in the nationalistic discourse often expressed by local politicians and intellectuals even today (Pentzopoulou-Valala, 2005; Papatthemelis, 2005). At the same time, nationalism and xenophobia are expanding in the city and the country, as the rise of the right-wing extremist political party, Golden Dawn indicates. The Thessaloniki Biennale did not embrace the nationalist discourse, and this is to the art event's credit. However, as I explore in this thesis, the way it addressed the city's 'multicultural character' often obscured the issue of present-day immigrants in Thessaloniki, and their harsh realities, raising the question of whether the art event did actually take a powerful stance in relation to racism, and whether its potential for subversion was fully realised.

Further reasons led me to study the Thessaloniki Biennale, relating to the literature on art biennials. The first relates to the proliferation of writing on biennials, which includes numerous journal articles and essay contributions to edited collection and anthologies⁴, as well as fewer and more detailed and in-depth analyses of biennial exhibitions of contemporary art⁵. As the majority of texts which bring forward often contrasting views and perspectives on biennials are either journal articles or essays in edited anthologies, they are restricted in terms of size and breadth of research, and are not always able to provide much empirical evidence as regards, for instance, the processes through which an art biennial may contribute to city-branding, or how their subversive potential can be realised. My aim for this thesis was to test the arguments proposed in relation to the Thessaloniki Biennale in particular, in the process, relating the analysis of the event to creative industries discourses, art history and cultural analysis.

⁴ For example *The Manifesta Decade* (Vanderlinden and Filipovic, 2005), *The Biennial Reader* (Filipovic, van Hal and Øvstebø, 2010) and *Shifting Gravity* (Bauer and Hanru, 2013), as well as special issues in art journals, for example, the 'Biennials' special issue by the *Manifest Journal* (Misiano and Zabel, 2003), and 'Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon' by *Open* (Sejdel, 2009).

⁵ For instance, Yacouba Konate's *La Biennale de Dakar: Pour Une Esthetique de La Creation Africaine Contemporaine: Tête à Tête Avec Adorno* (Konate, 2009), which gives an overview of the history of the Dak'Art Biennial and how it has functioned as a mechanism for creating an alternative history of art and Pan-Africanism, *The Global Art World, Inc: On The Globalisation of Contemporary Art* (Bydler, 2004), *The Rise of The Contemporary Biennial 1984-2009* (Niemojewski, 2009), *Fórum Permanente Series - Modes of Representation of the São Paulo Biennial: The Passage from Artistic Internationalism to Cultural Globalisation* (Spricigo, 2009), and *Biennials. Art on a Global Scale* (Vogel, 2010).

The second reason pertains to the observations Anthony Gardner and Charles Green made in relation to the literature on biennials in their article titled *Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global* (Gardner and Green, 2013). Their first point was that the two interpretative frameworks which dominate the discourse on biennials, are, to a large extent, antithetical, and involve the ‘biennials are bad’ model ‘in which biennials are perceived as little more than handmaidens to globalized neoliberalism’ (Gardner and Green, 2013, 442) and the ‘biennials bring hope’ model in which ‘biennials are positioned as sites for social dialogue and cross-disciplinary exchange’ (Gardner and Green, 2013, 443). The review of the literature on biennials which this thesis attempted confirms to some extent Gardner and Green’s observation. For instance, the analyses put forward by Julian Stallabrass and Okwui Enwezor - two influential writers on biennials - are indicative of this binary opposition: the first sees biennials merely as neo-liberal tools (Stallabrass, 2004), while the latter constructs them as sites for resistance without explicitly acknowledging their limitations (Enwezor, 2004). However, it has to be noted that some writers who put forward arguments in favour of the potential of art biennials have also begun to accept some of the criticisms addressed towards these events (Gioni, 2005, 227; Hanru, 2005, 57-58; Muller, 2005, 221; Sheikh, 2009/2010, 78). This thesis contributes further towards the latter direction, and the effort to transcend the conception of these two lines of thought as distinct, oppositional or antagonistic, as the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale shows that a more complex comprehension of both is necessary to more capaciously understand biennials.

Furthermore, Gardner and Green pointed out that the dominant version of the biennials’ historical account is firmly rooted in a Eurocentric and North-American perspective (Gardner and Green, 2013, 443). What the dominant interpretative framework of biennials currently lacks, according to Gardner and Green, is a consideration of the viewpoints and aspirations of the ‘South’ (Gardner and Green, 2013, 443)⁶. Greece, where the Thessaloniki Biennale takes place, in many ways is often considered to be part of the Global North, as a key formative component of the

⁶ For Gardner and Green, the concept of ‘the South’, takes into account the common experiences of colonialism, which is not limited to early modern colonialism but also refers to the more recent colonial incursions of neoliberal economics. Moreover, it involves a constructive potential across the cultures of the South, which designates ‘South’ as a zone of agency and creation, and not simply poverty and exploitation (Connell, 2007; Murray, 2008; Gardner and Green, 2013).

dominant identity of ‘Western civilisation’. However, in this thesis, Greece is considered as potentially having some connection with the model which Gardner and Green describe on the basis of the country’s peripheral status in relation to the dominant (art) centres of Western Europe, and the neo-colonial incursions of neoliberal policies which have taken place due to the recent crisis the country has experienced. Following Anne Ring Petersen’s conceptualisation of ‘internal peripheries’ within European and American art worlds (Petersen, 2012, 201-202), Greece, although a European country, could be said to belong to an internal periphery within Europe due to its geographical position at the South of Europe, its frail economy (even before the financial crisis of the 2007), its ambivalent cultural identity as regards the so-called West, and its largely overlooked ‘modernism’ in Western art historical discourse. Moreover, it could also be said that the country has experienced neo-colonial incursions of neoliberal economics, especially since the direct involvement of the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Commission in Greek economy, pressing for extensive privatisations and policies which diminish social welfare. By analysing the Thessaloniki Biennale, therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to the body of work which, as regards (historical) analyses and accounts of art biennials, brings forward the perspectives and experiences of countries and art worlds - such as Greece – which have experienced, to an extent, marginalisation and neo-colonial incursions.

The following chapter (Chapter 2) reviews the relevant literature, and identifies the key theoretical frameworks which informed my analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale. It embraces an interdisciplinary approach, and its structure corresponds to the two main hypothesis of this thesis: its first part discusses the issue of appropriating art for non-artistic purposes, such as economic and regional development, drawing on the social theory of art and culture (Yúdice, 2003; Zukin, 1995), creative industries and city development discourses (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Leadbeater, 1999; Florida 2002), as well as on criticisms of them (Miller, Govil, McMurria and Maxwell, 2001; McRobbie, 2002; Garnham, 2005; Pratt, 2009; 2011; 2012; Indegaard, Pratt and Hutton, 2013), and cultural policy analyses (McGuigan, 2005; Gary, 2007). The second part consists of a review on the literature on art’s potential on subversion, drawing on critical art theory (Benjamin, 1936/1970; Debord, 1967/1983; Rancière, 2004; 2006; 2007), and the theory of

institutional critique and art activism (Milohnic, 2003; BAVO, 2008; Leger, 2008; Holmes, 2009; Raunig, 2009). Finally, Chapter 2 highlights the relevance of these discussions to contemporary art biennials, and explores the literature on the biennials' involvement with 'non-artistic' interests and agendas as well as their 'alternative' potential(s).

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology applied in the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale. This thesis addresses the art event as text in a semiotic sense (consisting of both written and visual elements); as an art institution; and as exhibition practice. This thesis applies an interdisciplinary approach, which draws on a broad range of methodologies and theories: semiotics, social history of art (analysis of art institutions, museums and exhibition practices), social theory of art and culture (namely, creative industries and city development discourses), the analysis of cultural policy formulation, and discourse analysis. The aim of this thesis is to synthesise these different methodologies to provide a rich, multi-faceted account of this art event. This chapter explains and justifies the relevance of each of these areas to the thesis and their application in the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale, and indicates how they complement (or contradict) each other.

Underpinned by work in the social history of art (Clark, 1973; 1999) and institutional critique (Alberro and Simson, 2009 6-8, 15 – 17), Chapter 4 addresses three interrelated research questions: a) what are the broader social, cultural, political and ideological practices to which the Thessaloniki Biennale can be related? b) What are the reasons that the Thessaloniki Biennale is supported by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, and has become part of its official policy? c) To what extent and in what ways did the Thessaloniki Biennale responded to interests and agendas related to official Greek cultural policy? In order to respond to these questions, Chapter 4 analyses the Thessaloniki Biennale taking into account its context, namely the context of Greek governance and official Greek cultural policy. Chapter 5 explores the second key research question of this thesis: whether, besides its instrumental role, the Thessaloniki Biennale had any subversive or 'alternative' potential, which is understood as explained earlier. In order to address this question, Chapter 5 focuses on the artworks which were presented in the three editions of the art event, and analyses them using the framework of semiotics and cultural analysis.

Chapter 2: Art Biennials, Instrumentalisation and Subversion: A Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This thesis mobilises an interdisciplinary approach. It addresses the Thessaloniki Biennale from multiple perspectives: as a text in the semiotic sense, as an art institution, and as cultural practice. Therefore, this thesis draws on a range of theories (social theory of art and culture, semiotics, social history of art), and situates this particular art event in relation to various discourses (creative industries discourse, city development discourses, and discourse on contemporary art biennials). In this chapter, I outline the theoretical frameworks which inform my analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale.

This thesis argues that the Thessaloniki Biennale has both an instrumental, governmental role and alternative potentials. As regards its instrumental role, specifically, I argue that the Thessaloniki Biennale could be related to the Greek government's agendas as regards raising the city's international profile, increasing tourism in the area, and promoting cultural diplomacy related interests. Furthermore, this thesis argues that the Thessaloniki Biennale fulfilled its instrumental role by constructing and projecting particular connotations in terms of the city's past and present identity.

In order to analyse in depth the instrumental function of the Thessaloniki Biennale, we can draw from a number of perspectives, namely the social theory of art and culture, the creative industries and city development discourses, and the discussion on contemporary art biennials. This chapter therefore relates the Thessaloniki Biennale to the process of appropriating art for non-artistic purposes, such as economic and regional development. This process is associated with the so-called 'post-industrial' or 'immaterial' model of capitalism (Rifkin, 2000; Hardt, 2009), and this chapter outlines those concepts. Cultural clusters and museum districts (Mommaas, 2004), as well as landmarks (Zukin, 1995) are addressed as examples of using art and culture in relation to public space for non-artistic purposes. This chapter outlines, also, how the issue of addressing art and culture as resource has

been taken up by writers associated with the social theory of art and culture (Yúdice, 2003; Zukin, 1995); creative industries and city development discourses (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Leadbeater, 1999; Florida 2002), as well as by criticisms of them (Miller, Govil, McMurria and Maxwell, 2001; McRobbie, 2002; Garnham, 2005; Pratt, 2009; 2011; 2012; Indegaard, Pratt and Hutton, 2013), and cultural policy analyses (McGuigan, 2005; Gary, 2007). The choice of the arguments presented, as well as their relevance to this thesis, is explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

This thesis embraces the viewpoint that contemporary art biennials may function as tools in relation to economic, political and other purposes, and situates the Thessaloniki Biennale within this framework. This is why this chapter outlines the literature on the instrumental function of biennials, which tend to link them to neo-liberal values, and to ‘non-artistic’ interests, such as tourism, city-branding, and political agendas (Léon, 2001; Basualdo, 2003; Stallabrass, 2004; Hardt, 2009). The key points raised in the discussion on addressing art and culture as resource, from all three perspectives (social theory of art and culture, creative industries and city development discourses, and cultural policy), as well as the discussion on the instrumental role of biennials, as outlined in this chapter, are subsequently referred to in Chapter 4, where the instrumental role of the Thessaloniki Biennale, in particular, is analysed in depth.

The second aspect of the argument put forward by this thesis relates to the subversive potential contemporary art biennials may have. In particular, the second research question of this project explores whether the Thessaloniki Biennale had subversive potential from two perspectives. First, as regards the art event’s own official narrative about the host city’s multicultural character, this thesis argues that, in certain instances, the art works presented and the way they are displayed subtly contradict aspects of the official narrative projected by the Thessaloniki Biennale in its official texts. In this way, they constitute disruptions in the body of the Thessaloniki Biennale’s official discourse. Semiotics is applied in the analysis of this aspect of the art event, and the reasons for this as well as an outline of the theoretical tools used are explained in Chapter 3 (the methodology chapter). Second, the official texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale (catalogue texts, press releases) exclaim the art

event's aspiration to raise issues pertinent to the framework of the post-colonial critique and challenge the established hierarchies which reproduce exclusion practices and the supremacy of the so-called West in contemporary art exhibitions. This thesis explores to what extent and in what ways the Thessaloniki Biennale pursued those aspirations. This chapter is a sketchy outline of the key issues raised in the discussion on art's potential for critical reflection and oppositional discourse, including the potential of contemporary art biennials, in order to establish the broader theoretical framework which informs the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale's alternative potential in Chapter 5.

2.2 The instrumental role of art and culture

This section of the literature review begins by outlining the concept of the so-called 'post-industrial' (Rifkin, 2000) and 'immaterial' (Hardt, 2009) model of production, as well as the concept of the 'cultural economy' (Yúdice, 2003) and the concept of the 'symbolic economy' (Zukin, 1995), which encourage an instrumental function for art and culture. These arguments are useful for this thesis, because they connect the tendency to address art and culture as resources with the present models of economy and production, as well as with cities' development strategies, which do not rely on conventional industries. Moreover, they bring forward, and also elucidate the role of art institutions in these models of production and development.

What follows is the detailed exploration of the instrumental role of art and culture: what it means and involves (Yúdice, 1999; 2003;), how it implicates the city's public space (Zukin, 1995), how it is reflected in cultural policy trends (Gray, 2007; McGuigan, 2005) and how it is addressed in creative industries and city development discourses (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Leadbeater, 1999; Miller, Govil, McMurria and Maxwell, 2001; Florida 2002; McRobbie, 2002; Garnham, 2005; Pratt, 2009; 2011;2012). The framework which emerges from these perspectives allows me to associate the Thessaloniki Biennale with local and national policies aspiring to the city's growth. It also enables me to demonstrate that the Thessaloniki Biennale could be seen as part of the broader process of redefining the city's development strategy as well as an effort to reinforce Thessaloniki's economy in the context of a 'post-

industrial' mode of production from the part both of the Ministry as well as the local administration and agents.

A key feature of the late capitalist model Rifkin (2000) describes is that the commodification of experience as well as human time becomes far more central to contemporary capitalism than the commodification of goods, services or places. Rifkin goes as far as to argue that the first tier of production will increasingly be made up of the selling and buying of human experiences and that it is human attention rather than physical resources that becomes scarce and will be contested (Rifkin, 2000, 138, 167). In this context, capitalism is increasingly becoming 'immaterial', in fact, a temporal affair, as it is transformed from a system based on exchanging goods to one based on accessing segments of experience. His arguments raise concerns regarding the commercialisation of art as practice and experience, as well as regarding labour power relations, exclusion and exploitation within this model of 'immaterial', experience-based capitalism. According to Rifkin, cultural industries - including the arts - commodify, package and market cultural experiences and thus acquire a central role in the model of the immaterial capitalism he describes. His analysis is relevant for the examination of the Thessaloniki Biennale, because it helps to further illuminate the links between this art event, and the strategies aiming at boosting the city's economy and growth.

In a related vein, Hardt (2009) argues that the dominant form of economic production is no longer the industrial but the 'immaterial' or 'biopolitical' model. This model includes various sectors of the economy which produce immaterial goods such as information, ideas, knowledge, languages, communication, images and codes. In Hardt's own words: 'Industry is becoming increasingly informationalised and image-oriented' (Hardt, 2009, 24). However, he clarifies that the term 'immaterial' refers to the products primarily rather than the labour processes and that even the products in question can sometimes have some material aspects. Moreover, the forms of immaterial production are becoming hegemonic in the economy, in the sense that their qualities are progressively imposed over other forms of production rather than that they are most numerous (Hardt, 2009, 24).

Hardt uses the concept of ‘the common’, drawing on Rancière (2006) to refer to the equitable or shared creation of social relations and forms of life, culture, art and artistic practice⁷. In the immaterial/biopolitical model of production, economy and its interests can penetrate the ‘common’ in an even more implicit and subtle way than in the industrial model of production. In the model Hardt describes, artistic practice becomes more closely linked to economic production. As cities and regional governments recognise the decline of their industrial base, they attempt to brand themselves as ‘creative’. To a great extent, this refers to the existence of artists in a city or region and the demonstration of the social conditions that facilitate artistic and cultural activity (Hardt, 2009, 25-27). The potential risk involved, according to Hardt, is that although this increasingly economic centrality of art and artistic practice can be beneficial to artists, it can also involve them in unintended ways in capitalist development projects.

Even if one disputes the use of the term ‘immaterial’ for the mode of production which Hardt describes, the importance of his analysis lies in the fact that it highlights the connection between art practice and economic production, and the process by which capitalism embraces art and culture. George Yúdice has a related perspective, using the concept of the ‘cultural economy’, which for him is the fusion of artistic trends that emphasise social justice with initiatives which aim to promote socio-political and economic utility. Yúdice points out that this concept is very closely related to UK Prime Minister Tony Blair’s rhetoric on ‘creative economy’ and reminds his readership that it has been a widespread term in the official national rhetoric on culture and economy (Yúdice, 2003, 16).

⁷ The common (le commun) is a technical term for Rancière that is foundational of his conception of both the political and the aesthetic, although hard to translate in English. G. Rockhill explains that since the ‘common’ is awkward in English he substitutes for it various noun phrases, such as ‘something in common’ and ‘what is common to the community’, and adjectives such as ‘shared’ and ‘communal’. Hardt uses Jacques Rancière’s conceptualisation of the relation between aesthetics and politics as the starting point of his thinking, as exemplified in Rancière’s book, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2006). Rancière is not primarily concerned with political art or aestheticised politics, but rather with the ways in which a distribution or sharing of the common operates in parallel at an abstract level activity in the two separate domains. For Rancière the link between aesthetics and politics resides specifically in what he calls ‘the distribution of the sensible’ (le partage du sensible). He explains that he calls the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of the common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it ‘the distribution of the sensible’. (Rancière, 2006, 102 – 103).

For Yúdice, the rhetoric bringing together culture and other agendas is not limited to culture being invoked as an engine of capital development. It is rather the manifestation of a more profound culturalisation of the economy, carefully coordinated via agreements on trade and intellectual property, controlling the movement of mental and manual labour and managing populations. His analysis highlights the fact that the model of the ‘cultural economy’ he describes draws on subordinate or minoritised groups as resources for content creation without challenging the patterns which perpetuate their deprivation and disadvantage. More specifically, even though the turn to the ‘creative economy’ trades on the rhetoric of multicultural inclusion, he argues that in fact it favours the professional-managerial class, while subordinate or minoritised groups have a place in this scheme as low-level service workers and as providers of ‘life-giving’ ethnic and cultural experiences (Yúdice, 2003, 20). Yúdice critically addresses the rapprochement of culture and other agendas, as he admits that the reciprocal permeation of culture and economy, not just as commodity, but as a mode of cognition, results in attempts at social emancipation which ultimately support the system they resist (Yúdice, 2003, 28). His analysis is relevant, because, as this thesis argues, the attempt at city-branding traced in the Thessaloniki Biennale’s official written texts capitalises on the multicultural character of the city, in a way that obscures the harsh realities of the present-day immigrants who live and work in Thessaloniki.

From a sociological perspective, Sharon Zukin introduces the concept of the ‘symbolic economy’ of cities which may deepen the analysis of the instrumental function of the Thessaloniki Biennale in relation to the processes of the particular model of economy, production and culture, as explained by the writers mentioned above. This dimension involves the symbolic function of cultural practices and art institutions, which implicate the city’s public space in the production of signs, meanings and particular representations of the city. According to Zukin, the ‘symbolic economy’ consists of three levels. The first is the manipulation of symbolic languages of exclusion and entitlement. In other words, the look and feel of cities reflects decisions about what – and who – should be visible and who should not, concepts of order and disorder, and uses of aesthetic power. The second level is devised by officials and investors whose ability to deal with the symbols of growth yields ‘real’ results in real estate development, new businesses and jobs. Finally,

advocates and business elites through a combination of philanthropy, civic pride, and desire to establish their identity as a patrician class, build art museums, parks, and architectural complexes that represent a 'world-class' city (Zukin, 1995, 7). Two parallel production systems operate in the symbolic economy model and shape the city's material life: the production of space is the first and is effected through bringing together capital investment and cultural meanings. The second entails the production of symbols through which social identity is constructed. Plus, the production of symbols functions as a currency of commercial exchange (Zukin, 1995, 24). The importance of Zukin's argument for my thesis is the fact that it highlights the symbolic function of artistic and cultural practices in representing the city through selling images both on national and global level, and through enacting symbolic languages of exclusion and entitlement.

Zukin indicates that culture industries and institutions can be seen as significant factors in consolidating the role of a city as a centre of symbolic economy, based on finance, business services, and property development. Museums, in particular, by capitalising on their visual holdings and marketing cultural consumption, render art a public treasure, a tourist attraction and a representation of public culture (Zukin, 1995, 14). Zukin is very critical of the synergies between art, finance and politics which emerge in the symbolic economy model she described, because, as she argues, this rapprochement benefits high culture institutions and the tourist industry while creating only sporadic gains for independent cultural producers (Zukin, 1995, 111). Her arguments are relevant in the case of the Thessaloniki Biennale, as they raise the question of who has benefited from this large-scale cultural event.

In an attempt to define what the instrumental role of art and culture means and involves, I refer to Yúdice's concept of the expediency of culture (1999; 2003), as well as remarks made by Zukin (1995), and observations regarding how this tendency is traced in cultural policy (McGuigan, 2005; Gray, 2007). Yúdice introduces the concept of the expediency of culture (Yúdice, 1999; 2003), in order to address the fact that the role of culture has expanded in the political and economic realms over the past few decades. Yúdice highlights that a utilitarian perspective on culture has become hegemonic, according to which culture serves society, whether for example, to help implement urban development projects, or to alleviate social

problems (Yúdice, 2003, 9). Culture is no longer understood as transcendent, but rather as a resource for socio-political and economic ends. According to Yúdice, this is evident in the rhetoric of local culture and development projects, UNESCO, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, international foundations and NGOs as well as the guidelines on culture proposed by EU, where the concept of culture is clearly approached under a utilitarian light (Yúdice, 1999, 17; 2003, 10-11, 13).

Yúdice lists several instances of the expediency of culture-as-resource: the use of high culture (e.g., museums and other high-culture venues) for the purpose of urban development; the promotion of native cultures and national patrimonies to be consumed in tourism; historical sites that are turned into Disneyfied theme parks; and the creation of transnational culture industries as complements of supranational integration, as in the case of the EU (Yúdice, 2003, 25). From a city development agenda, in particular, heritage as well as contemporary cultural activity is used in marketing and city-image enhancing strategies with the hope of attracting tourists and investors, while art and culture are often appropriated in the discourses which aspire to project cities as centres of cultural innovation (Zukin, 1995, 110). The rhetoric, which acknowledges the economic importance of culture, can transcend political party differences (Zukin, 1995, 110), which is exactly the case with the Greek cultural policy, as regards contemporary culture and the funding / support of the Thessaloniki Biennale. What is relevant for this project is the use of culture - in Thessaloniki's case, the city's museums and the Thessaloniki Biennale - as a means for urban development, as well as a means to assert the country's and the region's European and Western identity, through embracing and implementing the guidelines of EU policies as well as echoing the official EU rhetoric on culture.

The pragmatist and utilitarian perception of art and culture, which Yúdice describes, means that only what is considered to be socially, politically, and even economically 'expedient' will be able to lend legitimacy to funding and support towards art and culture (Yúdice, 1999, 17). This is clearly delineated in Elcior Santana's remark at 'Trans-nationalisation of Support for Culture in a Globalising World', Belagio, Italy, 6 - 10 Dec 1999 that Multilateral Development Banks are likely to invest in cultural development projects, as long as these cultural projects provide indirect forms of

return, such as fiscal incentives, institutional marketing or publicity value, and the conversion of non-market activity to market activity (Yúdice, 2003, 14).

Although Yúdice writes about cultural projects which are evaluated in terms of funding on the basis of whether they are socially politically and economically expedient, his remarks coincide with the conclusions drawn by writers who address cultural policies rather than projects (Gray, 2007; McGuigan, 2005). For instance, Gray pinpoints the increasing emphasis placed upon the 'need' for arts and cultural policies to demonstrate that they generate a benefit over and above the aesthetic (Gray, 2007). The lack of political interest and power associated with the art and cultural sectors, particularly at the local level, leads to the development of policy 'attachment' strategies whereby funding for those sector can be gained by demonstrating the role that it can play in the fulfilment of the goals of other policy sectors (Gary 2007, 206).

More specifically, Gray links the increasingly instrumental character of arts and cultural policies to an ideological re-orientation which he terms as the commodification of public policy (Gray, 2007, 205). The latter involves a shift of focus from use-value to exchange-value as regards the creation, implementation and evaluation of policies (Gray 2000; 2007)⁸. In effect, governmental attitudes towards cultural and artistic resources within society change, and the focus is increasingly moving from the cultural and artistic component of policies towards the secondary, purely instrumental aims that can be associated with them (Gray 2007, 205).

Moreover, the rapprochement of art and cultural polices with developmental and economic agendas is, sometimes, seen as a manifestation of the fact that the ideology of neo-liberalism pervades the world of art and culture, in the sense that the predominant rationale for cultural policy becomes economic, and focuses on competitiveness and regeneration. Large-scale cultural events, in particular, are

⁸ This is not necessarily to imply that there is an absolute increase in the strict economic commodification of goods and services but that goods and services are re-defined in terms of how they are to be understood, their social role is re-designed, and the management of them requires change for the most efficient and effective realisation of their exchange status (Gray 2007, 205).

inscribed in this framework, with the institution of the European Capital of Culture as a case *par excellence* (McGuigan 2005, 238).

The arguments outlined above are useful for this thesis, because they inform my analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale in relation to the official Greek Cultural Policy namely the texts issued by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture in the late 2000s. More specifically, they help highlight the fact that those texts reflected a utilitarian perception of culture, and an interest in the potential benefit, and especially financial returns, which investment in culture might bring. As regards my analysis, this opens up the possibility to associate the decision to hold and fund the Thessaloniki Biennale with the Hellenic Ministry's hope to promote its own agendas.

Art as a resource in the creative industries discourse.

The tendency to appropriate art and culture for non-artistic purposes is, perhaps, best reflected in the rhetoric on the presumed benefits of the so-called new economy, knowledge-based economy or 'creative economy'. The literature on cities as well as the cultural and creative industries clearly address culture as an engine for economic growth and constitute further evidence of the tendency to appropriate arts and cultural policies for non-artistic goals. It is, thus, necessary to address this kind of discourse as well as its critique, as the ideas of writers such as Florida (2002), Leadbeater (1999; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999), and Landry and Bianchini (1995) are embraced in the official texts of the Greek government regarding economic growth, education and culture, which express the aspiration from the Greek part for a transition to a knowledge-based or creative economy. These views from the late 1990s and early 2000s, more than ten years later, are very much reflected in the official discourse of the Greek government of both the early 2000s as well as towards the end of the decade. The transition to a 'new economy' model, in which culture has a crucial role to play in economic growth, will hopefully help the country overcome the challenges set by post-industrial capitalism, strengthen its vulnerable economy and help it 'keep up' within the EU. In the effort to promote such a model and use the country's cultural assets accordingly, the official Greek discourse embraces an entirely positive, optimistic and unproblematic view regarding the new economy model and the incorporation of culture in this process and overlooks the critical concerns raised.

In his book *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy*, Charles Leadbeater, a UK-based cultural policy analyst and consultant, propounds the importance of knowledge to economic growth (Leadbeater, 1999, 28-36). More specifically, he suggests that, while knowledge has played a crucial role in economic development from the mid nineteenth century to today, at the end of the 20th century (he writes in 1999), knowledge became the critical factor in how modern economies compete. Software, digital codes and genetic information are all, for example, the products of the knowledge economy. Leadbeater explains that the character of consumption has changed radically in the new economy model: consumers have to be involved and complete the production of knowledge-intensive products in the sense that they have to tailor them to their needs. Consumption becomes, thus, ‘additive’, as the consumer adds to the product’s qualities. Knowledge and exchange will flow both ways and successful companies will engage the intelligence of their consumer in improving their products. Leadbeater’s outlook is positive and slightly idealised, as he maintains that an economy which becomes more knowledge-intensive has the potential to become more inclusive and meritocratic. He ignores, however, issues of exclusion which underline much of this process, as not everybody has equal access to information, education or technology. Such concerns have been raised by writers who critically address the discourse which advocates appropriating art and culture for non-artistic purposes, such as Angela McRobbie (2002) and Andy Pratt (2011).

Leadbeater’s joint work for the UK think tank DEMOS with Kate Oakley, *The Independents: Britain’s New Cultural Entrepreneurs* is equally positive and optimistic as regards culture’s potential for urban growth and regeneration. The writers advocate that cultural industries are increasingly important to the generation of new jobs and economic growth and that cultural industries and entrepreneurs will be vital in reviving large cities that have suffered economic decline. They also point out the role culture could potentially play in city-branding with the aim of attracting students, investments and tourists (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999, 10-15, 24-25, 29-30).

In a similar vein, although perhaps less profit-oriented, Landry and Bianchini pointed out that as old industries are disappearing, value-added is created through the

application of new knowledge to products, processes and services. The industries of the 21st century, they argue, will depend on the generation of knowledge through creativity and innovation, while the ability to develop attractive images and symbols and project these effectively will determine competition between nations and cities more than natural resources (Landry and Bianchini, 1995, 11, 12). The writers went on to review a series of projects in cities in the UK, Europe, the USA and Australia, which, according to the writers, was representative of creative ways to promote heritage, green the city, encourage people to stay in the centre and achieve urban regeneration (Landry and Bianchini, 1995, 32-55). They even proposed a toolbox, a set of guidelines for cities as regards how to become creative (Landry and Bianchini, 1995, 25-32).

Richard Florida has suggested that this ‘creative industries’ economic model is more people-driven, as new ideas and innovation are paramount (Florida, 2002, 6), while Bilton and Leary have pointed out the significance which ‘symbolic goods’ (ideas, experiences, image) bear (Bilton and Leary, 2002, 50). Terry Flew clarifies that the existence of a new economy is not derived from the existence of new technologies alone, but from the growing importance of ideas and intangibles, and the role played by knowledge and creativity that can be subsequently applied through ICTs and networked media (Flew, 2005, 344-345).

The concept of the creative economy and the cultural and creative industries very soon penetrated the discourse on the development of cities, (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Florida, 2002; Landry, 2006). This is relevant to my thesis because the rhetoric put forward by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture as regards its cultural policy throughout the 2000s - analysed in Chapter 4 - echoes, and almost repeats the arguments of the proponents of appropriating art, culture, creativity and innovation in city development strategies.

Other, more critical writers seriously challenge the rhetoric of art and culture as engines for economic development as outlined above and critically analyse aspects of labour within the creative industries, which often promote inequalities and discrimination. Nicolas Garnham, using as his starting point the shift of terminology in the arts policy documents of the British Labour Party from ‘cultural industries’ to

‘creative industries’ in 1997, argues that cultural policy has embraced the information society argument and has selectively but unreflectively applied certain aspects of the information society tradition of thinking to the policy making for art and culture (Garnham, 2005, 15, 16). The reason for this was the wish from the part of the cultural policy sector to participate in the prestige attached to the information society as well as the government policies pertaining to the latter (Garnham, 2005, 20). Garnham unpacks the information society argument by analysing the sources which underpin and sustain it: Daniel Bell’s theory of post-industrialism (Bell, 1973), Schumpeter’s idea of technological innovation as the central driving force of capitalist growth (Schumpeter 1934, 1939), Information Economics and Theories of the Firm, theories of the service economy and post-Fordism (Garnham, 2005, 21-25).

Garnham pinpoints the shortcomings of the application of these analyses to cultural policy discourse. More specifically, he critically analyses the claim put forward by the mobilisation of the term ‘creative industries’ that the creative industries could be considered as the key new growth sector of the economy and the key source of future employment growth and export earnings (Garnham, 2005, 26). He also addresses the implications of the association of cultural policy with the information society argument: the shift from cultural to creative industries marks a return to an artist-centred, supply-side cultural support policy and away from that policy direction, which the use of the term “cultural industries” originally signalled, that focused on distribution and consumption. This shift of terminology obscures dilemmas and contradictions in policy; for example, the desire not to give up on either traditional support for the artist or a hierarchy of quality, and the fact that the claims on public funds are justified not in terms of arts policy, but in terms of information society policy (Garnham, 2005, 27-28).

From a more cultural studies-oriented perspective, Angela McRobbie too adopts a critical stance towards the hype over the potential of creative industries, drawing our attention to the high scope for exploitation for those working in these sectors (McRobbie, 2002). Contrary to John Hartley’s belief in the potential of the creative industries to be inclusive by broadening participation in the possibilities offered by new interactive media in the so-called new economy (Hartley, 2005, 21) and contrary to Leadbeater’s conviction that a knowledge-intensive economy has the potential to

become more inclusive and meritocratic (Leadbeater, 1999, 28-36), McRobbie instead focuses on the issue of exclusion involved in the cultural and creative industries. She observes that the groups least able to participate in the 'club culture sociality' which the creative economy model creates, are those most likely to be disadvantaged in capitalist labour markets: women with young children; racial and ethnic minorities; people with disabilities; older workers; the long-term unemployed; and people living outside of major metropolitan centres (McRobbie, 2002, 385-388).

A similar point regarding employment issues in creative/cultural industries which pertain to exclusion and discrimination has been made by Andy Pratt (2011). Pratt argues that the role of creative industries in urban economics is significant; culture is not replacing finance and manufacture in the urban economy, but is becoming a more significant part of the urban mix (Pratt, 2012). Pratt offers a more nuanced and complex conceptualisation of both 'cultural economy' and 'creative cities' (Indegaard, Pratt and Hutton, 2013; Pratt, 2009; 2011; 2012). Pratt points out that 'cultural economy' could be perceived in a dual way: first, as the cultural dimensions of economic activity (the design or marketing of any product or service, for instance); second, as the particular subsection of economic activity which is concerned with cultural products and activities (such as music, film, and fine art) as opposed to say transportation or mining (Pratt, 2009, 407-408). As regards 'creative cities', Pratt identifies a number of preconceptions about them as well as the negative and regressive elements of policies that currently promote them (Pratt, 2011). In particular, he rejects the universalist notion of creativity and the creative city which pervades much of the creative industries/cities discourse, and argues in favour of a socially, cultural and economically embedded and situated conceptualisation of creativity (Pratt, 2011, 123-130). Also, Pratt rejects normative conceptions of cities and culture which conceptualise culture as dependent on finance and firmly positioned in consumption, as well as the assumption that creative cities have to be necessarily neo-liberal, which underpins Florida's arguments (Pratt, 2012, 1-4, 8-9).

Furthermore, Pratt identifies in cultural/creative industries-related discourse and policy-making an excessive focus on consumption. In fact, he criticises urban cultural initiatives which are consumption-focused, especially in the form of tourism,

and aim to trade on the city's heritage. These initiatives are infrastructure-based capital projects, and essentially consumption hubs, which are not unsustainable without huge, consistent and periodical re-investment. Furthermore, they are external market-focused, and thus, they may alienate local audiences (Pratt, 2012, 3-4). He proposes instead, a shift of focus towards cultural production in cities, and calls for policies which support production (Pratt, 2008, 2011). The importance of Pratt's analysis is that it clearly differentiates cultural/creative industries from hard city-branding strategies. Thus, he offers the possibility to consider the creative/cultural economy as not necessarily subordinate to the processes of neo-liberalism, and explore its potential, while at the same time maintaining a critical stance towards more profit-orientated perspectives such as those put forward by Florida (2002) and Leadbeater (1999).

Finally, the issue of the character of consumption which radically changes within the so-called creative or knowledge-based economy and the cultural and creative industries is raised in the body of relevant literature (Leadbeater 1999, Bilton and Leary 2002, Hartley 2005). It has, for instance, been suggested that every act of consumption is an act of authorship, drawing attention to consumer niche markets and feedback (Miller, Govil, McMurria and Maxwell, 2001, 201-210). Work that audiences and fans do (reading, rewriting) adds value to the creative commodity, and that cultural politics, policy and law should recognise the authorial practices of the consumer, and do away with recycling ownership ideals rooted in property and focus on consumer rights (Miller, Govil, McMurria and Maxwell, 2001, 202-210). Greek cultural policy does not seem to take into consideration the issues raised regarding the transformative character of contemporary consumption. As regards the Thessaloniki Biennale in particular, it was designed top-down and, over its three editions, there was very little interest in taking account the visitors' experience of the event. For example, there was no tool or survey to get the visitors' feedback or opinions on their experience of the Thessaloniki Biennale (Ioannou, 2013). In this way, assessing the visitors' experience and compiling a pool of ideas to draw on for future enhancement and further development was more or less impossible, missing

out on an important opportunity to engage with and use the experiences and ideas of the visitors attracted to each edition⁹.

Public space, landmarks, heritage.

The tendency to appropriate art and cultural policies for non-artistic purposes, especially development strategies for cities, addresses the city's public space, which becomes involved in urban development and economic growth schemes as well as city-branding processes in a number of ways. Developing cultural clusters and museum districts is part of this process. It is necessary to address this practice, as the Thessaloniki Biennale housed exhibitions and projects of all 3 three editions in venues at Pier 1, Old Port in which, this thesis argues, an attempt is made at creating a 'museum district'. Moreover, the Thessaloniki Biennale undertook the restoration of two more derelict buildings of the city's Old Port (the Ice Chambers, Warehouse 13), and, thus, it has contributed to further supporting and promoting the area as a hub of artistic and cultural activity. The analysis of the role which the Thessaloniki Biennale played in the museum concentration/district in Pier 1, Old Port, Thessaloniki, is informed by the insights offered by Hans Mommaas, Professor of Leisure Studies and Urban Development, as regards clustering strategies in the Netherlands from a sociological and urban studies-perspective (Mommaas, 2004).

Mommaas discerned 4 prototype models, although highlighting the fact that there is tremendous variation in cluster formation and organisation, and distinguished between production-oriented and consumption-oriented clusters (Mommaas, 2004, 515). A comparison with the cases which Mommaas described enlightens the character of the museum concentration in Pier 1 Thessaloniki. Pier 1 is probably closer to the museum quarters in Rotterdam, where a consciously developed cultural cluster emerged during the 1990s in the eastern fringe of the inner city.

The museum quarter in Rotterdam involves four museums: the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum, the Netherlands Architecture Institute, the Kunsthal and the Nature Museum. The park in which the museums are situated is used for a variety of

⁹ According to the Thessaloniki Biennale's official press releases, the 1st edition of event had attracted 20,000 people by the end of July 2007, that is during the first two months on its duration (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007b). The 3rd edition of the event attracted 40,000 people (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011b). As regards the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale, 60,000 visitors are mentioned in the national press (Dimitriou, 2009).

open-air theatre programmes, especially during the summer. The project was inspired by developments in Baltimore, a city well-known in the Netherlands for the use of culture and consumption in the revitalisation of its inner-city harbour front. The museum quarter in Rotterdam, too, was inscribed in a wider plan, cautiously designed by the local government to strengthen the urban profile of the city. A broader inner-city renewal and re-imaging strategy was set out with the intention of achieving higher tourist visits and increased shopping and cultural consumption. The creation of a museum quarter was seen as a key element in this strategy. The museum quarter that emerged is clearly defined and demarcated but it is at the same time experiencing difficulties in relating itself to the wider urban field (Mommaas, 2004, 510, 515). The Utrecht museum quarter involves the Municipal Museum (ancient and modern art), the Catharijne Covent (Catholic art), the University Museum (science-related exhibitions), and aims at improving the quality of public space and of residential living conditions, as well as strengthening the tourist-recreational and cultural functions of the area (Mommaas, 2004, 513) .

Further examples of cultural clusters mentioned by Mommas include the Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam and the Veemarktkwartier in Tilburg. The Westergasfabriek has developed into a distinctive cultural site, housing a broad and vivid mixture of short and long-term cultural activities. It includes a stylish café-cum- restaurant, a movie theatre, rehearsal, production and performing spaces for theatre companies, visual artists, a small film production company, designers and spatial planners; spaces for dance parties and festivals, conferences, fashion shows, company parties etc. The Veemarktkwartier too includes a collection of small-scale cultural enterprises, managed working spaces for arts and new media producers (Mommaas, 2004, 511, 512).

Although Mommaas' analysis is useful, it is inevitably limited, as it focuses on cultural clusters and museums districts only. However, the relationship between public space, culture and capital is more intricate, and involves constructing social identities, and practices of establishing entitlement and inclusion for some groups, while exclusion for others (Zukin, 1995). Zukin establishes the connection between public culture and public space by pointing out that public culture is produced on the micro-level, through the many social encounters which take place in the spaces

where we experience public life in cities (streets, shops, parks and so on). Although public space is democratic, the question of who can occupy public space and so define the image of a city is open-ended. There is no equal participation in shaping public culture, as those who have economic and political power can control the building of the city's public space and thus shape public culture (Zukin, 1995, 11).

In the context of the 'symbolic economy' of cities which Zukin examines, culture functions in a dual way: as an economic base and as a source of images and memories, which can symbolise 'who belongs' in specific places. In this latter sense, culture is used to control and regulate the city. More specifically, Zukin argues that strategies of redevelopment which bring together culture and economy, essentially promote the interests of real estate developers, politicians, and expansion-minded cultural institutions, ignoring the grassroots movements and pressures. In this way, for Zukin, social, financial and power inequalities are reproduced, although often masked and obscured (Zukin, 1995, 2).

The importance of Zukin's argument lies in the fact that it highlights the inclusion and exclusion mechanisms inherent in the processes of a city's symbolic economy as well as the management of public space which the latter entails. Both these concepts are relevant in my research: the former, along with Ham and Hill's analysis explained below, helps me trace the interests of the elites in the agendas attached to the Thessaloniki Biennale, such as increasing tourism in the area, as well as the interests of elite art professionals and the marginalisation of the city's grassroots and citizens' groups in policy formulation. The latter, is also relevant because it helps me analyse the ways in which the Thessaloniki Biennale engaged with the public space of the city, especially the port and the historical centre, districts contested by the policy-makers, the local administration and the city's residents.

Another use of culture in relation to public space is the framing of urban space with the aim to project images of growth (Zukin, 1995, 15-24). In this process, the material landscape of the city itself - the buildings, parks and streets - is enacted and becomes the city's visual representation. Zukin mentions the use of the modern urban landscape in *BladeRunner* as a visual backdrop for a new high-tech, global society, and the effort to reanimate Times Square through an extended, site-specific art

installation during the 1990s, which resulted in attracting corporate cultural industries in the district (Zukin, 1995, 16, 17). Zukin also points out that making a place for art in the city contributes to establishing a marketable identity for the city as a whole. These mechanisms, also, create qualitative benefits for the service economy as a whole, such as increasing tourist spending, raising property values, and the appropriation of space into the 'clean' entertainment, commercial, and gentrified residential zones (Zukin, 1995, 23).

In Zukin's model, historic preservation and landmark designation are tools for framing urban space (Zukin, 1995, 17, 122). She refers to the 1960s New York preservation movement which facilitated increases in property values and was associated with establishing community identity. Upon reviewing the New York's Commission landmark designation policies during the 1980s, when important historical sites of African – American settlements were included, Zukin points out that historic preservation made the city more aware of how symbols can be used in the production of space. More specifically, Zukin addresses the argument that Non-European ethnic and racial groups could use the cultural power of landmark designation to change the social class base of their communities. For Zukin, this conceptualisation of landmark designation indicates a shift in how the concept of landmark is perceived, from aesthetic category to public good. Moreover, Zukin points out that the history embedded in sites is not just the history of architecture but also political history. Defining the cultural significance of a building, through designating it as a landmark, constructs narratives of political history. Therefore, the choice of landmarks matters. Zukin raises the question which cultural heritage will be preserved and whose culture will control the designation (Zukin, 1995, 126 -127).

Although Zukin writes about processes which took place during the 1990s in several U.S cities, her analysis applies to the case of Thessaloniki and the ongoing effort to promote the city from the late 1990s onwards and during the 2000s. Zukin's analysis of public space and its contribution to shaping public culture, as well as the role land marking has to play in this process, underpins my analysis of the ways the Thessaloniki Biennale addressed the city's public space, namely Pier 1, Port and the historic centre. My argument is that the Thessaloniki Biennale aligned itself to the pre-existing agenda of preserving and promoting these areas. The Thessaloniki

Biennale used historical landmarks and monuments of the city as venues, and, thus, further highlighted these buildings. Following Zukin's argument that the choice of buildings and the entire process of historical preservation and land marking is ideologically and politically charged, I argue that the Thessaloniki Biennale is embedded in a series of initiatives regarding historical preservation in Thessaloniki, which is an ideological use of the public space of the city.

More specifically, based on Zukin's insights, I argue that the use of monuments, landmarks and earmarked districts of the city for the projects of the Thessaloniki Biennale, contributed to constructing the city's visual representation through its material landscape, as well as facilitated the branding of the city as 'historical' and 'multicultural'. Historic importance and character are the dominant criteria in the Greek policies for earmarking areas in which development is prohibited, and this is indicative of the over-reliance on the city's history in order to construct its contemporary identity. The Thessaloniki Biennale became part of this process through the choice of venues and the restoration of Warehouse 13 and Old Ice Chambers at Pier 1, Port, which was realised under the auspices of the art event.

2.3 The instrumental role of art biennials

Art biennials are linked to the model of the immaterial capitalistic economy and production as a tool for city branding (Hardt, 2009, 27) as well as cultural tourism (León, 2001, 71). This thesis embraces the viewpoint that contemporary art biennials, too, may function as tools in relation to economic, political and other purposes, and situates the Thessaloniki Biennale within this framework. This section narrows its focus down to contemporary art biennials, and explores the literature on their instrumental function, linking them to neo-liberal values, and non-artistic interests, such as tourism, city-branding, and political agendas (Léon, 2001; Basualdo, 2003; Stallabrass, 2004; Hardt, 2009).

In his book *Art Incorporated*, Julian Stallabrass clearly inscribes biennials within a neo-liberal project and argues that through the interests of all the bodies - private and public - which make up the alliances around which the biennials are formed - they produce art that speaks to international concerns and reinforce neoliberal values,

especially those of the mobility of labour and the virtues of multiculturalism (Stallabrass, 2004, 42). He also traces uses of the biennials which are related to non-artistic agendas. More specifically, he links biennials directly to tourism, agendas for city development, inter-city competition for investment and resources on a global scale, and the effort to enhance the city's image:

...[the biennial] performs the same function for a city – with all its crude jostling for position in the global market – as a Picasso above the fireplace does for a tobacco executive (Stallabrass, 2004, 37).

Stallabrass also draws attention to the synergies that a biennale produces in order to advance an array of interests from corporate branding to regional regeneration and sees further uses of biennials, related to political concerns. For example, the Istanbul Biennial is inscribed in the broader effort orchestrated by the Turkish government to assure the European Union that the nation conforms closely enough to secular and neo-liberal standards in order to warrant membership. Stallabrass addresses the Havana Biennial as well, and although he does not mention the biennial's potential links to economic benefits, he does see an instrumental function for the event, as it serves to give the Cuban government a more lenient and culturally open-minded image (Stallabrass, 2004, 32-33, 37). Although the argument proposed by Stallabrass - that biennials often serve political and financial interests - inform my analysis of the instrumental role of the Thessaloniki Biennale, my use of a mixed methodology also questions it. This approach is limited, as it tends to conflate these art events with the 'non-artistic' interests they admittedly serve to a greater or lesser extent, ignoring the possibility of an alternative potential for them.

Basualdo (2003) reflects on the function of biennials beyond aesthetics and argues that in these shows diplomacy, politics, and commerce converge. More specifically, he writes that biennials instrumentalise the symbolic capital of modern art, in order to promote agendas relating to the promotion of the artistic and cultural potential of the host city/country. As the conceptual framework charged with giving these events legibility is often expected to be related to local issues, in effect, biennials promote the contexts in which they take place. He also raises the issue of the instrumentalisation of art biennials on an ideological level and mentions the Havana

Biennial as an example of a biennial with a pronounced ideological function, as it aimed at empowering artists and intellectuals of the southern hemisphere and challenging the hegemonic role of the centres of economic power in the distribution of contemporary art (Basualdo, 2003, 128).

Basualdo sees biennials as the manifestation, in the area of contemporary art, of the process of progressive integration - but not decentralisation - on a world level, associated with late capitalism. This process, he writes, has been facilitated by the information revolution, brought about by the Internet and the development of communications in general. A key feature of this process is the contrast between the tendency toward centralisation, typical of the integration of markets on a global scale, and the increasing dissemination of information, which provides growing visibility for local situations and problems. For Basualdo, the biennials that have emerged in the last two decades are completely in tune with these transformations (Basualdo, 2003, 130). They contribute to greater international visibility and supply a patina of prestige to the host city, thus, putting it on the map of 'modern culture'. As the latter is intricately linked to the process of economic integration associated with late capitalism, the biennials serve to ratify the supposed commitment of the host city/ country/region to this scheme (Basualdo, 2003, 128, 130).

The Havana Biennial could be considered as a case in point of what Basualdo describes, as the event's character and aims have largely shifted since the 1980s (León, 2001). Although it started out as a highly political and critical institution - an alternative to the so-called First World biennials with the intention to showcase the marginalised artistic production of the so-called Third World countries - the Havana Biennial turned into a tourist attraction itself. León argues that it gradually embraced 'the cultural tourism agenda', featuring well known artists recycled at the other international art events, engaging more districts of the city and charging entrance fees (León, 2001, 71).

Mosquera, one of the founders of the Havana Biennial, writes about the first editions of that particular biennial, explaining the political backdrop against which the biennial took place and exploring the reasons why the Cuban regime supported the biennial. Mosquera (2010) sees an expedient use of art and art institutions, including

the biennial, to pursue ideological and political agendas. He pinpoints the contradiction between the idealism which pervades the discourse articulated by the majority of biennials and the functional approach to art and culture which pervades the biennials' practical goals. He himself considers the proliferation of the biennials as a manifestation of the 'use' of art (Mosquera, 2010, 199).

The fact that the Cuban regime - which, at the time, was subsidized by the USSR - supported and funded the Havana Biennial is an example of using art and culture to pursue non-artistic goals, in particular political ones, and his analysis brings forward the importance of examining the origin of the biennials' funding. According to Mosquera, the Havana Biennial was part of Cuba's strategy of organising international events of various kinds as a way of publicizing its political 'messianism' and crafting a positive image of itself. The reason for the Cuban regime's intense spending on cultural activity, he argues, has always been ideological and involved strong international activity. Mosquera's analysis also highlights the political significance of the geographical focus of the Havana Biennial, which focused on Caribbean, Latin American, and Third World cultures. Cuba had an inclination towards these regions and cultures for historical, political, and cultural reasons. However, the Soviet bloc exploited and supported this inclination as a means of gaining political influence over other Third World countries (Mosquera, 2010, 202).

The contribution of the Havana Biennial was, according to Mosquera, at the same time its most important and utopian aspect: the fact that it provided a platform for contemporary artists, critics, curators, and scholars from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Middle East – largely excluded from Venice Biennial and Documenta - in order for them to meet and exchange ideas. It, thus, created a platform for research and promotion at a time when artists from the so-called 'peripheries', the regions outside Western Europe and North America, were unknown beyond their local contexts (Mosquera, 2010, 202). The Havana Biennial created a new, international 'other' space while acting at the same time as a gigantic 'Salon de Refusees' which involved under-presented art from great parts of the world (Mosquera, 2010, 203). In doing so, however, and although it wasn't in its immediate goals, the Havana Biennial enabled the regime to fulfil its aspiration of becoming a

Third World leader. In effect, an unnerving convergence took place under the auspices of the Biennial, that of governmental politics with the subversive intellectual and artistic venture to transform the circulation, knowledge and legitimation of contemporary art on a global scale.

Art theorist, Simon Sheikh connects biennials with the experience economy and the aim to generate cultural capital as well as increase revenues through (art) tourism. Biennials mediate between the discourse of the international art world and the local political and economic demands for cultural significance and supremacy and the need to highlight the uniqueness of the particular place and culture. Contrary to art fairs, where the individual art works on display become commodities, in biennials, it is the experience of the exhibition and the city which is commodified. In this process, the uniqueness of a particular place and culture is vital for establishing a niche market and attracting an international audience (Sheikh, 2009, 71, 72).

Sheikh applies David Harvey's concept of 'monopoly rent' to the analysis of biennials (Harvey, 2001, 405). Exclusivity and branding are crucial in generating monopoly rent, as the latter is achieved when a producer can generate a steady increase of surplus and income either by being the only producer of a certain commodity in a regional economy, or through the uniqueness of the brand in a more global economy. Harvey refers to the wine trade as an example; an exclusive vineyard can sell its wines as commodities, but also itself - the land, resources, and location - which has to achieve a symbolic quality besides its actual taste in order to generate revenues. Factors such as specialist publications and international competition also affect the wine market and can often add further value (Harvey, 2001).

Sheikh traces the parallels between the wine market and the art world and its market. Branding matters for biennials, as competition on uniqueness in terms of locality is crucial for attracting visitors, media attention and prestige. Biennials have to brand themselves as different (from the rest) and specific, in order to achieve cultural hegemony and extract monopoly rent, in terms of both symbolic and real capital. They have to comply with a certain exhibition format and, thus, be recognisable as such. At the same time, however, they have to be specific, have specific properties

and attributions and be linked to a specific location. In other words, as Sheikh puts it, each such event has to achieve recognition as *this* biennial, not *that* one. The process of the biennial branding is dual: on the one hand, it gives context and value to the biennial by alluding to the city's attraction and allure. On the other hand, the glamour and prestige of the biennial contributes to branding the host city itself, upgrading its image, which may be unremarkable or even negative (Sheikh, 2009, 73).

The 2009 edition of the Istanbul Biennial is, according to Harutyunyan, Ozgu, and Goodfield (2011), a typical case of a biennial caught up in the interests and agendas of its corporate sponsors. The writers consider the event as an easily consumable product promising to fulfil the exoticized expectations of the touristic gaze (Harutyunyan, Ozgu and Goodfield, 2011, 478). They highlight the contradictions between the biennial's ideological commitments and the actually existing economic conditions. They pinpoint a problematic over-identification of the event with its sponsors and render the biennial's claims to a radical emancipatory politics unsuccessful (Harutyunyan, Ozgu and Goodfield, 2011, 479).

More specifically, the writers see a purely economic function of the Istanbul Biennial in a post-Fordist context. Not only does it bring income to the city through tourism and service profit but it also involves a branding operation that elevates the public image of its sponsors and the global image of Istanbul (Harutyunyan, Ozgu and Goodfield, 2011, 480, 481). An ideological operation functions at the same time and underpins this economic function; the media event associates the social event with certain lifestyles and social types, and constructs a semantic bridge between the brand and society through an appeal to lifestyle. Identity is connected to lifestyle and social subjects have to learn how to participate in this signification process and consume meaning; in this process they are addressed as 'modern individuals' and 'contemporary world citizens' and they have to learn to respond accordingly (Harutyunyan, Ozgu and Goodfield, 2011, 482).

The writers explore how the social and psychological value attached to the event can be translated into purely economic terms. They build their argument on the premise that a disconnection between the exhibit as an event and the objects of exhibition (i.e., the art itself) takes place. They refer to Braembussche's concept of the

‘experience of the sublime’ (Braembussche, 1996, 40), and argue that this process of disconnection is responsible for the fact that, in the context of the Istanbul Biennial, it is the experience of the work of art – and not just the work of art itself – which becomes the commodity. Moreover, it is the ‘event’, not the artwork that carries this effect (Harutyunyan, Ozgu and Goodfield, 2011, 482).

Their argument is further supported by the critical analysis of the way the concept of contemporaneity is addressed in the publicity around the Istanbul Biennial as well as the discourse of the exhibition itself. Contemporaneity is addressed as a statement of the politics of the aesthetic, which implies that the political aesthetics of art resides in the mere fact that a particular work has been produced recently. In this line of thought, contemporaneity stands for a formal understanding of art defined through its medium (video art, installation, etc.) as well as the transnational character of the event. According to the writers, art is, thus, outstripped of its own politics of aesthetics and its potentially radical emancipatory effects (Harutyunyan, Ozgu and Goodfield, 2011, 483, 484).

Sheikh’s association of biennials with Harvey’s concept of ‘monopoly rent’ and Harutyunyan, Ozgu and Goodfield’s analysis of the process of commodification of both the art event and the art work within the context of the Istanbul Biennial, as explained above, are crucial for this thesis. This is because they provide a starting point from which to analyse the instrumental role of the Thessaloniki Biennale, namely as regards tourism and city-branding, as examined in Chapter 4.

2.4 The potential of art for critical practice and resistance

The following paragraphs review some theoretical reflections upon the conditions under which the potential of art for criticality and oppositional discourse can be realised. Art activism and the so-called ‘new phase’ institutional critique call for art practices to be socially engaged; to expand beyond the constraints of the art institution; to align with social movements and to deploy tactic media strategies. On the other hand, writers such as Claire Bishop and T.J. Demos, influenced by Jacques Rancière’s theoretical exploration of the relationship between art and politics (Rancière 2006; 2007), contend that powerful, multivalent art does not have to be directly activist (Bishop, 2008; 2012; Demos, 2008). The review of the literature as

regards art's potential for criticality and subversion is pertinent to the second research question of this thesis, and informs the in depth analysis of the relevant evidence in Chapter 5: did the Thessaloniki Biennale had any 'alternative' potential(s), and to what extent were those realised?

In his seminal essay, *The Author as Producer*, Walter Benjamin proposed the radicalisation of artistic practice, which is primarily dependent on the artists' conscious positioning of themselves in the process of production and the class struggle (Benjamin, 1936). Benjamin envisaged artists who would change from reproducers of the apparatus of production into engineers who adapt that apparatus to the aims of the proletarian revolution (Benjamin, 1936, 89-90, 95). Revolutionary themes may be easily co-opted and subdued by the bourgeoisie:

...The bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate an astonishing number of revolutionary themes, and can even propagate them without seriously placing its own existence or the existence of the class that possesses them into question (Benjamin, 1936, 90).

For Benjamin, the transformation of the apparatus of cultural production was the answer to this danger as well as the essential requirement for art to be able to assume a critical role. In particular, Benjamin called for an apparatus of cultural production which would lead consumers to production, turning readers and spectators into co-workers (Benjamin, 1936, 93).

The issue of spectatorship was also taken up by Guy Debord, co-founder of the Situationist International, when he analysed the alienating and divisive effects of capitalism in *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1967). Like Benjamin, Debord as well sought direct engagement of art with the forces of production. However, while Benjamin addressed the role of both the intellectual/artist/author and the audience in critical art - the former through their alignment with the proletariat and their responsibility of radicalising the artistic practice, and the latter through their involvement as co-workers rather than consumers - Debord focused and elaborated more on the role of the audience, and introduced the concept of collectively produced 'situations' (Debord, 1957). More specifically, situations can break the

spectators' psychological identification with the hero so as to draw them into activity and provoke their capacities to revolutionise their own life (Debord, 1957, 703).

Debord argued that the spectacle - as a social relationship between people mediated by images - is pacifying and divisive. Society is thus rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production (Debord, 1960). For Debord, the answer lay in an art of action, which would interface with reality, in order to repair the social bond:

Revolutionary artists are those who call for intervention; and who have themselves intervened in the spectacle to disrupt and destroy it (Debord, 1960, 706).

Revolutionary art, for Debord, would also instigate the audience's participation; in particular, through collectively constructed 'situations', the audience function could disappear altogether. Rather than simply awakening critical consciousness 'constructed situations' were performative, as they had the potential to modify social realities and produce new social relationships:

...The role played by the passive or merely bit-part playing 'public' must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors but rather, in a new sense of the term, 'livers', must steadily increase (Debord, 1957, 703).

Although Benjamin and Debord's propositions regarding more active engagement from the part of the spectator were groundbreaking at the time when they were made, have exerted enormous influence on artistic practice, and are still pertinent today, they tend to dismiss art practices which are less participatory as less capable of critical reflection and oppositional discourse. Moreover, the call for artists, authors and intellectuals to explicitly engage in the class struggle and align themselves with the proletariat, which pervades Benjamin's argument as explained above, raises a question regarding art's autonomy; isn't what Benjamin proposes another form of art's instrumentalisation? Where does the balance between art's 'independence' and art's social responsibility and role lie? My own position on the matter is that the

radicalisation of artistic practice, as proposed by Benjamin, Debord, and the writers discussed below, may be necessary in certain instances, and may indeed involve activism or, at least, the democratisation of selection processes to ensure broader participation; however, art's potential for subversion lies in its ability to create space for critical reflection and oppositional discourse, even if it does not always border 'direct' activism.

Jacques Rancière, who has explored the relationship between art and politics through his concept of 'the distribution of the sensible' (Rancière, 2006)¹⁰, seems to offer another perspective from which to explore this issue. Political action for Rancière involves rejecting the spaces and times one is expected to inhabit, contesting the spatial-temporal allocations of the dominant order, and defining new capacities within the distribution of the sensible:

Politics consists of reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible that defines the common of a community, by introducing into it subjects and new objects, in rendering visible those who were not, and of making understood as speakers those who were only understood as noisy animals (Rancière, 2004, 38 cited in Tanke, 2011, 26).

The concept of dissensus is crucial in Rancière's understanding of political action as well as emancipation. Dissensus allows that which was previously invisible to become visible. This movement is not simply the negation of an existing state of affairs; it entails constructing a counterworld, and placing it in a polemical relationship with the existing world, so to challenge and possibly overturn the customary distribution of the sensible. In this way, dissensus does not simply allow us to see the world differently, it actually modifies the sensible world.

¹⁰According to Rancière the sensible world is created, distributed, contested and redistributed by practices which include philosophy, politics, art and aesthetics. As Tanke explains the French word 'partage' describes how partitions or divisions of the sensible structure what is seen and unseen, audible and inaudible, how certain objects and phenomena can be related or not, and also who, at the level of subjectivity, can appear in certain times and places. The same word indicates that these distributions are shared (Tanke, 2011, 1-2). For Rancière, the distinctions and distributions within the sensible anticipate what becomes thinkable and possible. The distribution of the sensible thus ultimately defines, for Rancière, the field of possibility and impossibility. The key question with respect to any distribution of the sensible is to know whether it is founded upon equality or inequality (Rancière, 2006).

Art is political as well as emancipatory because it introduces dissensus into the world of shared appearances and meanings¹¹. Art practices, even those which are considered far-removed from the political concerns of the day, can play a role in transforming the world, because they can create dissensus in the sense that they can challenge what is sensible, thinkable, and hence possible. In particular, art has the ability to challenge the representative regime's rules for pairing a given subject with a specific mode of presentation:

Godard said ironically that the epic was for Israelis and the documentary for Palestinians. Which is to say that the distribution of genres – for example the division between the freedom of fiction and the reality of the news – is always already a distribution of possibilities and capacities....the world is divided between those who can and those who cannot afford the luxury of playing with words and images. Subversion begins when this division is contested (Carnevale and Kelsey, 2007, 263).

Rancière's point about the subversion which is effected when representational regimes are challenged and modified is particularly useful in my exploration of the Thessaloniki Biennale's subversive potential, especially in relation to the analysis of the representation of art outside the so-called West in the context of the art event, examined in Chapter 5.

Rancière's approach to the issue of the relationship between art and the socio-political sphere is different from that of Benjamin and Debord's explained above in the sense that Rancière considers art to be inherently political, and thus, challenges clear-cut boundaries dividing art from life, politics or the social:

We no longer think of art as one independent sphere and politics as another, necessitating a privileged mediation between the two - a 'critical awakening' or 'raised consciousness'. Instead, an artistic intervention can

¹¹ Tanke proposes treating aesthetic dissensus as containing three levels: aesthetic dissensus means that works of art fashion and sustain new subjects; they create new objects and new forms of perception; and, finally, they offer experiences fundamentally dissimilar from the everyday ordering of sense (Tanke, 2011, 103).

be political by modifying the visible, the ways of perceiving it and expressing it, of experiencing it as tolerable or intolerable (Carnevale and Kelsey, 2007, 258).

This means that for him, it is not necessary, as it is for Benjamin and Debord, to call for an establishment of a link between art and (social) action, since this link is already there. Moreover, Rancière rejects the presupposition that the spectator is necessarily passive – a notion which pervades both Benjamin’s and Debord’s thinking, as indicated above (Carnevale and Kelsey, 2007). For Rancière, to look and to listen requires the work of attention, selection, re-appropriation, a way of making one’s own film, one’s own text, one’s own installation out of what the artist has presented (Rancière, 2007; Carnevale and Kelsey, 2007).

For political theorist, Chantal Mouffe, artistic practices can still play a role in the struggle against capitalist domination. In a similar line of thought to Rancière, Mouffe argues that one should not see the relation between art and politics in terms of two separately constituted fields, art on one side and politics on the other, between which a relation would need to be established. There is an aesthetic dimension in the political and there is a political dimension in art (Mouffe, 2008, 11). As regards the potential of art to be critical and political, in particular, this does not necessarily involve offering a radical critique. For Mouffe, artistic practices are critical when they are agonistic interventions in the public space, by contesting the concept of consensus which liberal thought promotes as an essential characteristic of democracy; also, by disrupting the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread revealing its repressive character, and allowing for new subjectivities to emerge (Mouffe, 2008, 13)¹².

¹² According to Mouffe, every social order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices, which exclude other possibilities. What is at a given moment considered to be the ‘natural’ order is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices, and not the manifestation of a deeper objectivity outside the practices that bring it into being. Every order is therefore political and based on some form of exclusion. Every hegemonic order is susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices – practices that will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony. For Mouffe, democracy involves an agonistic struggle as regards the power relations around which a given society is structured. The hegemonic politico-economic articulations which determine the specific configuration of a society at a given moment are contingent and the agonistic conception of democracy acknowledges that. In fact, the agonistic conception of democracy denies the possibility of a non-adversarial democratic politics, and contends that it is impossible to achieve consensus without exclusion (Mouffe, 2008, 9).

Rancière's theory on art and politics has provoked various responses in artistic discourse. For some theorists, his propositions allow discussion to be generated and offer a way out of the nihilistic declaration that there is no way out of the spectacle (Funcke, 2007, 285), and an alternative to the pessimism generated by the political resignation in the face of the all-consuming nature of the commodity and the market (Ross, 2007, 255). For art historian Claire Bishop, Rancière challenged the conceptualisation of aesthetics as masking inequalities, oppressions and exclusions, and its equation with formalism and depoliticisation by disputing the binary oppositions upon which the discourse of politicised art has relied (individual/collective, author/spectator, active/passive, real life/art) (Bishop, 2012, 18); thus, he has opened the way towards the development of a new artistic terminology by which to discuss and analyse spectatorship, which was until that point dominated by Benjamin and Debord's ideas (Bishop, 2012, 18).

The artist collective BAVO, however, sees Rancière's theory under a different light (BAVO, 2008, 114-117). Although they acknowledge that it manages to reconcile the tension between art's autonomy and art's social responsibility and role, they find it excessively marked by the trauma that art suffered in the 20th century, when some authoritarian regimes, such as Fascism in Italy and Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, attempted to use art as a means of propaganda. BAVO believe that, for Rancière, maintaining the tension between autonomy and heteronomy could then be seen as a defence mechanism to prevent its political enthusiasm leading to another catastrophe.

On these grounds, BAVO criticise Rancière's theory as being partly motivated by a defensive reaction to the various experimental hybrids of art and emancipatory, utopian politics in the 20th century (BAVO, 2008). Embracing the propositions put forward by Benjamin and Debord, BAVO call for a more radical questioning of the established definitions of what art is as well as greater experimentation with new hybrids of art and politics. In particular, they propose to establish a closer link between radical artistic practices and radical political activism (BAVO, 2008).

Similarly, many artists address pressing socio-political issues as well as the interests of corporate capitalism involved in the cultural apparatus, by turning to practices which border activism. Such practices usually have a strong social and political agenda, and consider art as an effective tool to intervene in political debates (Leger, 2008). They are almost invariably hybrid, in the sense that they make use of modes and forms of culture which go beyond what has so far been conventionally considered as the field of art. In this sense, they are transversal, and this is considered to facilitate quick passages from the predominantly artistic into the predominantly political sphere and back (Milohnic, 2005). They, also, call for a need to work outside of conventional art institutions, namely museums and galleries, and turn to public space (Dufou, 2002; Grindon, 2010). In fact, artists involved in activist practices believe that as long as art remains confined in conventional institutional sites, it is robbed off of its critical potential, and is considered politically ineffective and easy to co-opt (Leger, 2008; Grindon, 2010).

Practices which could be considered as activist are often employed by what has been termed as ‘the new phase of institutional critique’, which has developed since the 2000s, and involves art projects and writings which stem from international collectives with radical agendas and cultural politics, such as RepoHistory, the Yes Men, subRosa, Raqs Media Collective, the Electronic Disturbance Theatre (Alberro and Stimson, 2009, 15-19; Raunig and Ray, 2009, xviii-xvi)¹³. The second generation of institutional critique, in particular, which involved names such as Renee Green, Christian Philipp Müller, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser, under the influence of feminism and postcolonial historiography pursued the systematic exploration of museological representation, exposing its links to economic power and

¹³ The ‘first wave’ of institutional critique was initiated in the 1960s and 1970s by artists such as Michael Asher, Robert Smithson, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke and Marcel Broodthaers, among others. (xvi) They investigated the conditions of the museum and art field, aiming to oppose, subvert or break out of rigid institutional frameworks. In the late 1980s and 1990s, in a changed context, these practices were developed into diverse artistic projects by new protagonists like Renee Green, Christian Philipp Müller, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser. To the economic and political discourse of their predecessors, the practices of this ‘second generation’ added a growing awareness of the forms of subjectivity and the modes of its formation. Second wave practices continued however to circulate under the name of institutional critique. Following the two phases of institutional critique in the 1970s and 1990s, now a new phase of critique is emerging, which goes beyond the two earlier phases, particularly as a combination of social critique, institutional critique and self-critique (Raunig and Ray, 2009, xiv).

addressing its essentially colonial view of and gaze towards the Other (Holmes, 2009, 57). The main problem that this kind of institutional critique has faced is the fact that it often addressed the artistic institution as an unsurpassable, all-defining frame, which utterly absorbs everyone and is internalised in the practice of even the most fervent of its critics (Fraser, 2005). This approach has attracted criticism from artists and theorists associated with the new phase of institutional critique (Holmes, 2009, 57; Raunig, 2009, 6).

Gerald Raunig and Brian Holmes, key figures in theorising the new phase of institutional critique, both argue that the emancipatory and subversive potential of institutional critique – and more broadly art – lies in its expansion beyond the strict boundaries of the field, and the encounter with social movements (Holmes, 2009; Raunig, 2009). Other writers addressing the issue of whether institutional critique as critical practice is obsolete, advocate too the need for institutional critique to expand beyond art institution and become embedded to the social movements outside the art field (Kastner, 2009, 46; Nowotny, 2009, 26-27; Sheikh, 2009b, 32). More specifically, Raunig draws on Foucault's exploration of alternative ways of governance, as exemplified in his lecture under the title *What is Critique?* (Foucault, 1978), and Foucault's proposition of a shift from a fundamental negation of government toward a manoeuvre to avoid this kind of dualism: from not to be governed at all to not to be governed like that. Raunig expands Foucault's argument by suggesting that transforming governance does not consist simply of any arbitrary transformation processes in the most general sense; it is more a matter of specifically emancipatory transformations, which also have a transversal quality, i.e. their effects extend beyond the bounds of particular fields (Raunig, 2009, 5).

Furthermore, according to Raunig:

critique, and especially institutional critique, is not exhausted in denouncing abuses nor in withdrawing into more or less radical self-questioning... (Raunig, 2009, 10).

Drawing on Foucault, Raunig calls for practices that conduct radical social criticism and draw on social movements without shedding artistic competences and strategies.

In this way, the new phase of institutional critique which Raunig envisions relies on social criticism, institutional critique and self-criticism being intricately connected; it does not imagine itself as distanced to institutions nor does it cling to its own involvement and complicity with the institution (Raunig, 2009, 11).

In a similar line of thought, Holmes introduces the concept of 'extradisciplinary investigations' (Holmes, 2009, 55), which is underpinned by Felix Guattari's notion of transversality (Guattari, 2003). Extradisciplinary investigations – which can no longer be unambiguously defined as art - involve cross-discipline investigations on areas as far away from art as finance, biotech, geography, urbanism, psychiatry, the electromagnetic spectrum, and so on. Actors and resources from the art circuit are linked to projects and experiments that don't exhaust themselves inside it, but rather, extend elsewhere. These projects are often collective or network-based and are underlined by some political engagement, making use of the critical reserve of marginal or counter-cultural positions (Holmes, 2009, 58-59).

Although, not identical, the practices and goals of art activism and the 2000s phase of institutional critique overlap to a great extent. It is difficult, and, perhaps, futile to attempt to classify and label such artistic practices as either art activism or as institutional critique, as most of the times, they are both. A key tenet of institutional critique since the 2000s as well as of activist artistic practices is their belief that contained localised activity does not affect general policy construction and deployment. Therefore, resistance should involve tactical media strategies which are 'transversal' and not 'purely or exclusively artistic' (Raunig and Ray, 2009, xiv), 'are grounded in a sense of community', and will not' [solidify] into a structure of authority' (Critical Art Ensemble, 1996, 432-438). Also, for both art activism and institutional critique, art should expand far beyond the limits of the art institution, and the confines of the museum and art market (Alberro and Stimson, 2009, 15-19; Raunig and Ray, 2009, xviii-xvi); it 'should deal with reality, grapple with political circumstances, and work out proposals for improving human coexistence' (WochenKlausur, 2005, 462-470). Finally, another key aspect of these practices is their belief in the potential of the Internet as a tool and site for the circulation of oppositional material, and the construction of a broad counter-hegemonic view

within contemporary art (Bureau d' Edutes, 2004, 452-459; Critical Art Ensemble, 2008, 31-32; Fletcher, 2008, 51; Stallabrass, 2008, 163; Stallabrass, 2012).

Some telling examples of such groups and interventions involve the Paris-based Bureau d' Edutes collective, which considers the creation of data maps that connect the structures of capitalism with media concentration, the prison industry, and new military technologies, as the most effective way to challenge capitalism. These 'maps' take the form of websites that are continuously maintained and updated, thus providing anyone with access to the Internet the possibility of manoeuvring tactically (Bureau d' Edutes, 2004). The Institute for Applied Autonomy (2005, 470-474) has attempted to deconstruct the visual and rhetorical devices of sanctioned research organisations in elaborate performances, during which members of the collective pose as engineers and present their work under the guise of scientific neutrality and expertise. On the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal gas tragedy, during which tons of lethal gases leaked from a Union Carbide pesticide factory in the city of Bhopal, India. Killing thousands of people, the Yes Men collective organised an intervention with the aim to confront Dow Chemical with their responsibility for the tragedy and put pressure on them to compensate the victims' families. BBC World Satellite television channel broadcast an interview with a man identified as Jude Finisterra, who claimed to represent Dow Chemical. In the interview, Finisterra said Dow accepted the responsibility and had set-up a multimillion dollar compensation package. The aim of the hoax was to attract more media attention to the issue which may have gone unnoticed otherwise, and to get Dow, by denouncing the interview and the claims made by their so-called representative during the BBC interview, to publicly and explicitly admit everything that they were unwilling to do: compensate the victims of their industrial disaster (The Yes Men, 2004, 478-484)

An example of an artistic initiative with an explicit political orientation is the 2007 *Holy Damn It: 50,000 Poster against G8*, which assembled ten artists and artist groups who produced posters to be distributed for free among groups mobilizing against the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany (June 6-8, 2007), and at lead-up demonstrations in Rostock (Leger, 2008). Proceeds from the sale of a limited number of copies were reserved for legal aid to arrested demonstrators. The fifty thousand *Holy Damn It* posters were presented and distributed for free in a variety of different

places, like museums, non-profit art spaces, cultural centres, youth centres, universities, bookshops, bars, and at political events in several European cities. Where it was possible someone from the team gave a presentation, and when it was not possible the posters were simply presented with an invitation to the audience to take them away for free (Leger, 2008, 103). At the same time, the people involved in the project refused to take part in the *Art Goes Heiligendamm, Art Goes Public* exhibition organized by Adrienne Goehler for the city of Rostock (May 24—June 9, 2007), because it was perceived to aim at the de-escalation of antagonism between protesters and police and ultimately the legitimization of G8 politics (Leger, 2008, 100-114)¹⁴.

In 2008, the art journal *October* issued a questionnaire asking a number of writers, artists and curators to comment on the opposition to the Iraq War among U.S. based artists and intellectuals. Although the questionnaire itself and its underlying assumptions were criticised by some of the participants (Bishop, 2008; Demos, 2008; Enwezor, 2008; Leung, 2008), the reason why the *October* discussion is particularly relevant to this project is because it raises some broader points regarding art's potential for critical engagement and efficacy as regards pressing social and political issues.

Many writers disputed the force as well as the effectiveness of the artistic and academic opposition towards the Iraq War (Zegher, 2008, 180; Fusco, 2008, 53; Enwezor, 2008, 41; Haacke, 2008, 79; Stallabrass, 2008, 161; Sholette, 2008, 135), and attributed this to reasons such as lack of sustainable, extra-parliamentary organizing, and a broader conservatism and suppression towards critical expression, which often results in lack of exposure, and (self-)censorship (Fletcher, 2008, 51; Sholette, 2008, 136; Zegher, 2008, 181). However, all provided several instances of artistic and cultural groups which engaged in direct activism, as well as artworks and exhibitions, which put the legitimacy of the Iraq War under critical scrutiny (Bishop, 2008, 25; Cuoni, 2008, 94; Demos, 2008, 33-34; Enwezor, 2008, 41; Fletcher, 2008,

¹⁴For further art activist projects as well analysis of their aims and rationale see BAVO, 2007; Raunig, 2007, Klanten and Hubner, 2011; Cauter, Roo and Vanhaesebrouck, 2011; Herbert, and Karlsen, 2013; Jenilek, 2013.

52; Fusco, 2008, 53, 55-56, 58; Haacke, 2008, 79-80; Lambert-Beatty, 2008, 95-96; Lippard, 2008, 105; Stallabrass, 2008, 161; Sholette, 2008, 138).

More specifically, for Gregory Sholette, the problem lies in the fact that the bias that significant cultural activity only takes place within the sanctioned institutions of high culture still holds sway; thus, cultural production of alternative groups remains marginal in relation to the official art establishment¹⁵. One solution to the problem would be if scholars, artists, and historians supported ongoing political resistance through a consistent, critical engagement with creative practices external to the established art world and its economy (Sholette, 1998; 2008). Feldman, too, argues in favour of expanding artistic and academic practice beyond official institutions, such as the gallery, the museum, and the university (Feldman, 2008, 48).

In a similar vein, Enwezor, sees a possibility for a more profound and meaningful engagement of the arts with pressing socio-political issues through coalition-building and the alignment of the arts with the civil rights movement and civil society organizations (Enwezor, 2008, 42-43)¹⁶. Embracing Benjamin's arguments as unfolded in *The Author as Producer* (Benjamin, 1936/1970), Stallabrass argues that radical content is not sufficient unless the production of art itself is transformed. He distinguishes between what he calls 'the committed, specific, and propagandistic art of the antiwar movement' and the '*political-documentary* work that has come into fashion on the global art circuit', and is sceptical as regards the effectiveness of the latter (Stallabrass, 2008, 161-162).

On the other hand, Coco Fusco felt uncomfortable with the notion of measuring art's efficacy. In particular, Fusco rejected judging art in terms of immediate and quantifiable effects, as there is more at stake in the making of art that addresses social and political issues than immediate gratification, and this involves maintaining

¹⁵ There are cultural U.S.-based groups, such as Code Pink, Billionaires for Bush, Center for Urban Pedagogy, the Change You Want to See, Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping, as well as global collectives like 6Plus in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine, or the HIJOS group in Argentina who focus on justice for the disappeared, or the Independent Media Center of Cape Town, South Africa, but they do not show up on the art world's radar screen (Sholette, 2008, 137-138).

¹⁶ According to Enwezor, instances of such art practice include Hans Haacke, Gavin Jantjes, Adrian Piper, and Issa Samb's work, which was associated with the anti-apartheid movements of the 1980s, as well as the work of ACT UP, Group Material, and Gran Fury around AIDS (Enwezor, 2008, 42-43).

the possibility of oppositional thought and discourse (Fusco, 2008, 54-55). Demos, too, was sceptical towards asking whether or not art could be effective on the level of national and international politics; for Demos, posing the question as such entails the danger of reducing art to politics, and submitting art to a sociological, bureaucratic assessment, 'which privileges reified sloganeering at the service of communicative action' (Demos, 2008, 34). Instead, Demos embraces Rancière's reconceptualization of art's autonomy as a potential zone of the political beyond the determinations of governmental policy or activist tactics, and perceives art's potential for resistance as its ability to engender a political space, apart from politics, to be oppositional without rationalist determinism, to modify aesthetic-political space and thereby engender unconventional desires, expose social exclusion, and imagine political equality (Demos, 2008, 35-36).

In the *October* journal discussion, Claire Bishop highlighted that both artists and writers are, often, torn between a respect for direct activism and a desire for complex, multivalent art (Bishop, 2008, 26). The writer addressed what she terms as 'participatory art' and elaborated on her critical assessment on the discourse pertaining it in two further books, *Participation* (Bishop, 2006) and *Artificial Hells and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Bishop, 2012). She identifies a surge of artistic interest in participation and collaboration that has taken place since the early 1990s. These projects are usually collective and socially-oriented; although with a weak profile in the commercial art world, they occupy a prominent place in the public sector: in public commissions, biennials and politically themed exhibitions (Bishop, 2012, 1).

Participatory artistic practices have challenged and re-imagined a set of traditional relationships between the art object, the artist and the audience: the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant. These shifts aim to place pressure on conventional modes of artistic production and consumption under capitalism (Bishop, 2006, 12; 2012, 2).

Bishop, however, points out the need to critically address the discourse pertaining participatory art. Her critique revolves around two main points: first, the fact that currently the discourse on participatory artistic practices revolves around the unhelpful binary of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ spectatorship, and ‘bad’ singular/‘good’ collective authorship. This binary implies that singular authorship serves primarily to glorify the artist’s career and fame (Bishop, 2012, 8). The discourse in favour of participatory art often denigrates the individual, who becomes synonymous with the values of Cold War liberalism and neo-liberalism (Bishop, 2012, 12). In the contrary, participatory art, instead of supplying the market with commodities, is perceived to contribute to constructive social change.

The problem with this tendency, according to Bishop, is that there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of participatory art, because all are equally essential to the task of repairing the social bond. Bishop, instead reminds that it is also crucial to discuss, analyse and compare this work critically as art (Bishop, 2012, 13). Moreover, the writings of numerous artists and curators on participatory art often use criteria for the work’s assessment which are essentially sociological and driven by demonstrable outcomes. This reflects a certain degree of conflation between the discourses of art and creativity, which, increasingly leads to participatory and socially engaged art to becoming exempt from art criticism (Bishop, 2012, 23).

The second aspect of Bishop’s argument identifies a negative perception of both the term and the concept of aesthetics as masking inequalities, oppressions and exclusions. This has tended to promote an equation between aesthetics and the triple enemy of formalism, decontextualisation and depoliticisation; the result is that aesthetics became synonymous with the market and conservative cultural hierarchy. Bishop argues that although these arguments were extremely incisive in the 1970s, today they have hardened into critical orthodoxy (Bishop, 2012, 18); as a result, a more nuanced language is needed in order to address the artistic status of participatory projects; otherwise, we risk discussing these practices solely in positivist terms, that is, by focusing on demonstrable impact.

The points raised by Demos and Bishop are particularly useful to the analysis of the ‘alternative’ potential of the Thessaloniki Biennale, because they highlight the critical potential which art might have without being directly activist. In effect, they challenge the underlying assumption pervading much of the discourse pertaining to art activism and the so-called ‘new phase’ of institutional critique which dismisses non-activist art practices as not critical or political. This is relevant to my analysis, as the Thessaloniki Biennale does not include radicalised practices. Demos and Bishop’s approach, underlined by Rancière’s thought, allows me to raise the question whether the Thessaloniki Biennale has critical potential even though it does not deploy ‘activist’ strategies.

2.5 Alternative potential(s) of art biennials

The following paragraphs narrow down the exploration of theory on art’s potential for critical reflection and subversion, by focusing on the alternative potential of contemporary art biennials in particular. The exploration of the literature on this issue is crucial for my thesis, as it enables me to relate the Thessaloniki Biennale to these propositions, and explore the second research question which this thesis raises: whether the Thessaloniki Biennale had any potential for criticality and oppositional or alternative discourse, even though it has been, at the same time, instrumentalised for agendas of official Greek cultural policy. Moreover, addressing the proposition that art biennials may have potential which contradicts their instrumentalisation for ‘non-artistic’ purposes counterbalances the extended literature which brings forward especially this aspect of these events, and condemns them as fully incorporated into capitalism. This is important because it can help towards a more balanced and rounded assessment of biennials in general, and the Thessaloniki Biennale in particular; also, because it challenges the discourse against biennials which often conflates these events with the interests and the aspirations of their sponsors resulting in reductive accounts of them.

In their response to Camiel van Winkel’s critical analysis of Manifesta, the so-called European Biennial, on the basis of its official rhetorics (Winkel, 2005), curators Vanessa Joan Muller and Massimiliano Gioni stress Manifesta’s potential to question established politics of representation. More specifically, Winkel explores

the self-image Manifesta through its written texts in the catalogues of the first 5 editions (1996 – 2004). Overall, Winkel dismisses Manifesta's written discourse as empty rhetoric, and argues that the practice of Manifesta is contradictory and inconsistent in relation to its officially proclaimed ideals of 'openness and use of democratic procedures' (Winkel, 2005). Manifesta became institutionalized itself in the sense that curators merely followed the agenda established by the advisory board, which reflected the institution's priorities (Winkel, 2005, 223). Moreover, according to Winkel, Manifesta reproduced practices of privilege and exclusion, particularly through its process of selecting artists (Winkel, 2005, 226).

Muller, however, is skeptical of the methodology Winkel employed, because, as she points out, on selecting a sampling of rhetorics for examination, one runs the risk of missing the contradiction which is dealt with, in the project those rhetorics accompany. She also reminds that although rhetorics play an important part in Manifesta's profile, they do not necessarily guarantee reflection regarding the institution's own presuppositions. She instead draws attention to the fact that questioning the politics of representation as well as 'thinking differently' - issues Manifesta very much connected itself with, successfully or not - remain always important (Muller, 2005, 221). Gioni also shifts the focus of attention from the texts to the aesthetic experiences and visual revelations effected by the works of art themselves and highlights the importance of Manifesta as a space which potentially enables art and aesthetic experiences to flourish (Gioni, 2005, 227).

A similar point is made by Sheikh, who believes that although biennials are spaces of capital, they are also spaces of hope. Their potential lies in the fact that they - as all art institutions, according to Sheikh - can become public platforms that relate not only to a centralised art world, but also create several public, semi-public, and even counter-public spheres within the existing ones. Biennials are not so much to be considered as utopias, but rather as heterotopias, capable of maintaining several contradictory representations within a single space. Although Sheikh cannot but acknowledge the fact that biennials are part of (inter) national cultural hegemonies as well as capital accumulation, through city branding and the creation of monopoly rents, he asks the question if they have the potential to do something else, to become something beyond that. His view is that biennials do not necessarily always affirm

the features of capital accumulation, as they can also question these features by highlighting them, as well as by creating other possible connections, and senses of place and placement (Sheikh, 2009/2010, 78, 79).

The importance of the short debate on Manifesta as well as Sheikh's analysis for my project lies in the fact that they bring forward the argument that the potential for critical reflection of an art institution or art event exists, even though it is not always fully realised. This argument legitimizes my attempt to trace any critical potential the Thessaloniki Biennale might have, although the event is officially supported by the Ministry of Culture and, to an extent, partakes of some of the Ministry's agendas, as argued in Chapter 4. Namely, it allows me to ask whether, through the aesthetic experience offered and the art shown, the Thessaloniki Biennale challenged the processes and features of capitalist production by undermining the official attempts to brand the city in particular ways in the governmental discourse as well as in its own written texts.

The discussion of biennials' constructive potential has touched upon their contribution to developing or enriching the host city's cultural infrastructure (Jee-sook, 2013, 131; Örer, 2013, 133; Prudnikova, 2013, 134); also, their potential to present opportunities for artistic and cultural communication (Huangsheng, 2013, 135), to supposedly allow artists some independence from museums and the art market (Block, 2013, 108), and reach a wider audience (Block, 2013, 109). This thesis focuses on two key aspects of the 'alternative' potential of contemporary art biennials: their engagement with local contexts, and their potential for subversion. The reason for this choice is that these aspects are the most relevant to the Thessaloniki Biennale's own potential, as explored in Chapter 5.

Engagement with local contexts has been hailed as a significant aspect of art biennials' alternative potential (Marschall, 1999; Filipovic, 2005; Hanru, 2005; Sheikh, 2009a; Ferguson and Hoesberg, 2010). Curator and writer, Gerardo Mosquera, brings forward the performative potential of biennials as regards issues of art activity and official arts and cultural policy (Mosquera, 2010). More specifically, he argues that the Havana Biennial had an impact on the art and cultural scene of Cuba, which was radically renovated by the generation of visual artists and critics

that had emerged at the end of the 1970s and were involved in the Biennial. Moreover, it contributed to transforming the homogeneous ideology of the official culture and pushed the Ministry of Culture, to which the Biennial reported, to cultivate a more open policy (Mosquera, 2010, 202). The performative or even emancipatory potential of biennials could be heightened by engaging independent agents in these events, such as independent collectives and artist-run organisations (Filipovic 2005, 340) as well as small or medium-scale art centres (Hlavajova, 2010, 298).

Sheikh (2009a) addresses the issue of the global/local relation and the widespread complaint about contemporary biennials that they lack connection with the 'local' audience. He argues that this argument assumes that social relations and identities in a specific context are given and whole, and that the local audience is a singular group with essential qualities and shared agencies. Instead, he suggests investigating how a biennial produces, or attempts to produce, its public(s). One must ask what assumptions of place and participation are at work, and what notions of subjectivity, territoriality, and citizenship are invoked. His fundamental disagreement with the argument, that biennials lack connection with local audiences, is that it overlooks the potential biennials offer for reflection on the double notion of publicness: the local audience and the international one. According to Sheikh, biennials have the potential not only to address presumed existing audiences, both locally and in terms of art-world credibility and circulation, but also to create new public formations that are not bound to the nation-state or the art-world. By being recurrent events, both locally placed and as part of a circuit, they have the potential to create a more transnational public sphere (Sheikh, 2009a, 74).

The issue of the global/local relation within the context of art biennials was also touched upon by curator and writer, Hou Hanru (2005). He suggested that art biennials are able to bring forward local characteristics and can facilitate the negotiation between local features and global trends. Although concepts like locality, globality, multiculturalism and hybridity can be commodified, according to Hanru, there is still some space for art to be critical and to transform society, and biennials which show art created from and for different localities can be a form of resistance towards global capitalism (Hanru, 2005, 61-62).

Another aspect of art biennials' subversive potential lies in what Ferguson and Hoegsberg call the 'discursive biennial', which involves a profound exhibition-format shift (Ferguson and Hoegsberg, 2010, 365-367). According to Ferguson and Hoegsberg, the discursive biennial is less about display and more about dialogue, and conceptualises the biennial as an ongoing process. The discursive biennial takes a deep and committed interest in local contexts, and gives emphasis on local educational initiatives. In this way, it may become an alternative platform for the production of knowledge and discourse, and can, thus, fill a gap in the local (artistic) community. For instance, in places outside the established art centres, biennials can become major points of access and exposure of the local audiences to international art; they can also function as platforms for the dissemination of existing local practices and ideas which may not be discussed or promoted within more official contexts (Ferguson and Hoegsberg, 2010, 366-367).

The arguments raised by the writers above are important for my project, as they allow me to explore the Thessaloniki Biennale's relationship to its local contexts; the extent and the way the art event highlighted, intervened or modified aspects of these contexts, and how the art event addressed its audiences (the local and the international one). These arguments serve not only to appreciate the Thessaloniki Biennale's potential to highlight and/or reinforce its local context but also to reveal the limits of this particular biennial in intervening to the local art scene and activity, the official Greek cultural policy, local audiences and independent artistic groups and collectives.

A further aspect of art biennials' subversive potential relates to their contribution to establishing or modifying 'canons' as regards works and exhibition-paradigms (Clark, 2010, 165; Sheikh 2010/2011, 17). In particular, biennials have been linked to the possibility of challenging Eurocentrism and exclusion practices in the art world. For instance, in his in depth analysis of the Sao Paulo Biennial, researcher and curator, Vinicius Spricigo, pointed out that the 22nd edition of the biennial played a crucial role in the promotion of local artists, by displaying their work on the same level as that of the more renowned representatives of other nations. In this way, the

biennial offered the possibility of including ‘modernism’ produced outside the legitimising centres of Western modern art (Spricigo, 2010, 355-357).

A similar point was made by Sabine Marschall regarding the impact of the two Johannesburg Biennials (Marschall, 1999). Both events attempted to present a diverse selection of visual art forms which reflected the demographic prolife of the South African population: many participants were black, self-taught, informally trained and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds. The event also included art from community centres and workshops, and all these were presented alongside works by established, academically-trained, white artists. Marschall argues that the Johannesburg Biennial gave credibility and international status to a new paradigm and brought forward the need for more democratic structures and more representative selection procedures (Marschall, 1999, 455-457).

Oliver Marchart argues that Documenta 11 curated by Okwui Enwezor constituted a ‘progressive canon shift at the centre of the art field’ (Marchart, 2008, 489)¹⁷. By spreading across five different platforms in five different locations, Documenta 11 was temporally, spatially and thematically expanded and deterritorialised. Marchart considers this strategy ‘as a thorough deconstruction of an institution that has historically laid the groundwork for Eurocentrism and Occidentalism’ (Marchart, 2008, 480). However, Marchart acknowledges that this canon shift was not due entirely to Documenta, but credits it as well to the so-called ‘peripheral biennials’ in Havana, Dakar, Johannesburg, Istanbul and elsewhere outside the so-called West (Marchart, 2008). Finally, although Marchart believes in the potential of the biennial-format to challenge paradigms and create canon shifts, he warns that the ‘bourgeois dominant culture will at once seek to neutralise it’ (Marchart, 2008, 489).

The potential of the biennial format to challenge established canons and offer a paradigm shift is also explored, and expounded more forcefully, by curator and writer Okwui Enwezor (Enwezor, 2004, 427). Enwezor points out that institutions of contemporary art located outside the large industrial centres of the West (including

¹⁷ However, Chin-tao Wu has critically addressed the claims to postcolonial openness and inclusiveness made about Documenta 11 (Wu, 2009).

biennials) are not mimicked copies of what is happening in the West. The periphery, according to Enwezor, does not absorb what it does not need (Enwezor, 2004, 438). Enwezor focuses on the biennials of the so-called peripheries, and contends that they should not be considered, necessarily, as readymade examples of the biennials in the West. In particular, he proposes their association with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1929/1984), which involves the emergence of normally suppressed voices which subvert and overturn hierarchies, dominant ideologies, official discourse, knowledge and notions of 'truth' (Bakhtin, 1929/1984). In doing so, Enwezor argues that they could serve as models of resistance against global capitalism:

The gap between the spectacle and the carnivalesque is the space, I believe, where certain exhibition practices, as models of resistance against the deep de-personalisation and acculturation of global capitalism, recapture a new logic for the dissemination and reception of contemporary visual culture today (Enwezor, 2004, 444).

Although Enwezor's proposition offers a significant standpoint from which to view biennials and explore their potential for resistance, it raises certain objections, encapsulated in George Baker's response to Enwezor's text (2004). Baker considers the proposed link between biennials and the diasporic, the counter-hegemonic and Bakhtin's carnivalesque as purely hypothetical, and therefore weak (Baker, 2004, 452). Moreover, he criticises Enwezor's argument for not taking into account the profound instrumentalisation of biennials for 'non-artistic' purposes, as well as their use in certain instances as tools to cover up social ruptures and spread amnesia (Baker, 2004, 448-450). Indeed, the somewhat partial approach Enwezor's text takes on biennials as well as the lack of concrete suggestions on curatorial strategies on how to actually achieve the carnivalesque within the context of biennials undermines his argument. However, the importance of his work for this thesis lies in the fact that he, too, highlights the biennials of the so-called periphery.

Anthony Gardner and Charles Green elaborate on this theme from a more historical perspective (Gardner and Green, 2013) by exploring what they term the 'biennials of the South' - that is biennials organised outside the so-called West, namely in Africa,

South America and South Asia - from 1950s onwards (Gardner and Green, 2013, 453). In a similar vein, but focusing on biennials of the 1980s and 1990s, Thomas McEvilley (1993) and Gerardo Mosquera (1992) highlight the potential of biennials held outside the so-called West to construct a post-colonial discourse and challenge Eurocentric paradigms. Mosquera, in particular, highlight the need to intensify horizontal communication across the cultures of the Southern hemisphere (Mosquera, 1992, 422).

For Gardner and Green, the meaning of the term ‘South’ is by no means restricted to the geographical mappings of the southern hemisphere or the geo-economic contours of the ‘global South’ as a category of economic deprivation. It also takes into account the common experiences of colonialism, which is not limited to early modern colonialism but also refers to the more recent colonial incursions of neoliberal economics (Gardner and Green, 2013, 443-444). Gardner and Green’s conceptualisation of the ‘biennials of the South’ also draws on the concept of the so-called ‘Third World’ as consolidated in the 1955 Bandung Asia-Africa Conference¹⁸. In effect, the concept of the ‘South’ also involves a constructive potential across the cultures of the South, which designates ‘South’ as a zone of agency and creation, and not simply poverty and exploitation (Connell, 2007; Murray, 2008; Gardner and Green, 2013).

As ‘biennials of the South’ had a clearly regional focus, Gardner and Green argue that they undertook a critical and reconstructive project by problematising the Cold War binaries of East and West, capitalism and communism (Gardner and Green, 2013, 452-453). At the same time, they contributed towards a shift from vertical axes of influence from one (economically developed) region to another (less developed) to more horizontal axes of dialogue and engagement across a region. Gardner and Green clarify that this was achieved not so much through the formal presentation and official structures of the biennials in question as through the informal modes of

¹⁸ In this sense, the ‘Third World’ should not be seen as a racialized category of poverty or under-development, but as a critical geopolitical entity, based on shared experiences of decolonization and an insistence on independence from the Russian-American binary of the Cold War (Gardner and Green, 2013, 446).

discourse and discussion fostered within their contexts (Gardner and Green, 2013, 453).

The writers' appraisal of these biennials is more well-rounded and balanced than Enwezor's argument mentioned above. This is because Gardner and Green acknowledge the possibility that the biennials they refer to could at the same time be instrumentalised - as was the case with the first Alexandrian Biennial and the politics of Egypt's President at the time, Gamal Abdel Nasser (Gardner and Green, 2013, 444, 455) - and also because they leave the question of whether and to what extent 'biennials of the South' were successful in their critical and reconstructive project open (Gardner and Green, 2013, 455). Their contribution is important to this thesis because of the fact that they highlight the importance of the so-called 'peripheral biennials' as sites to re-imagine the binary opposition of centre-periphery from a perspective other than that of the dominant West, and to explore the potential of a regional focus. Thus, Gardner and Green offer a well-researched and balanced alternative viewpoint on biennials, one which does not condemn them *a priori* as neoliberal symptoms, since the biennials which the writers addressed were internationalist in ambition, but still connected to a critical, socialist, or at least socialist inspired, perspective (Gardner and Green, 2013, 455).

An important aspect of the literature on biennials includes writings by art professionals who are directly involved in organising such art events. As discussed below, these writings often explore the constructive potential biennials may have. For instance, the 1st World Biennial Forum organised in 2012¹⁹ - an occasion for curators and art professionals working with biennials to liaise and discuss the roles challenges and potential of biennials - issued four questionnaires, one of which was titled *Are Biennials Alternative Sites for Experimentation and Resistance?* (Bauer and Hanru, 2013, 145-148). The vast majority of participants responded positively (Chikukwa, 2013, 145; Hoskote, 2013, 145; Moore, 2013, 145; Le Sourd, 2013,

¹⁹ The 1st World Biennial Forum, an initiative by Biennial Foundation, was held in Gwangju and Seoul by the Gwangju Biennale Foundation, ifa (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, Germany) and Biennial Foundation, and aimed at exploring the benefits of creating a stronger professional alliance among the various biennials and triennials around the world. It included presentations by representatives of approximately seventy biennials, four Questionnaires themed around the role and the potential of biennials as well as the challenges they face, and evidence on the financing of some of the best-known of them (Bauer and Hanru, 2013).

2013, 146; Petroni, 2013, 146; Hal, 2013; 148). However, perhaps due to the vague phrasing of the questionnaire – for example, it did not clarify to what and to whom biennials could resist – and the space constraints imposed by it, some answers were vague, in the sense that they did not suggest concrete organisational strategies or curatorial suggestions which could reinforce a biennial's potential for resistance. Still, these responses were indicative of the optimism and, often idealism, which pervades the thought of art professionals who are directly involved in the organisation and production of biennials. Although one might dispute the impartiality of their positions, owing to the fact that their careers are to some extent intertwined with biennials, their perspective is imbued with insider knowledge and hands-on experience, and, therefore, should not be dismissed.

One of the most convincing examples of subversive biennials presented at the 1st World Biennial Forum was the Emergency Biennale which was first established in 2005. According to one of the founders and key organisers of the Emergency Biennale, Evelyn Jouanno, the event has the uncommon format of a double exhibition, as it takes place in Chechnya and at the same time tours in other countries. It has no funding and relies on artists' donating portable and easy to exhibit works to the project. In each stop, the project is enriched with the contribution of further artists who also send their works to the exhibition's site in Chechnya. The organisation of this event was also plighted not only with the lack of funding, but also with the lack of access to the territory in 2005 (Jouanno, 2013, 78-81)²⁰.

Jouanno highlights that the Emergency Biennale has a clear political focus, as it has been conceived as a counterpart to the officially funded and supported Moscow Biennale, and specifically aimed at raising awareness about the plight of Chechnya which at the time of the biennials inception was in conflict with Russia. In fact, the initiative was partly a response to the contradiction underlying the Russian authorities' attempt to promote Russian culture while at the same time obscuring the increasingly alarming situation in Chechnya (Jouanno, 2013, 78).

²⁰ In 2005, access to Chechnya's frontiers by foreigners, including journalists and humanitarians, was forbidden (Jouanno, 2013, 79).

The Emergency Biennale could be a case in point of an art event, namely a biennial, which reflects the principles of art activism and institutional critique - as explained above and underpinned by Benjamin and Debord's theoretical propositions on art's social role (Benjamin, 1936/1970; Debord, 1957/2003), in terms of the event's direct engagement with the socio-political issue of Chechnya's plight, the collaboration with social movements, and the deployment of activist strategies. One of its most striking features, perhaps, is that it is completely independent of funding from a government, official body, or corporate organisation; instead, it relies on strategies which reinforce communal practices and artistic solidarity (Jouanno, 2013, 78-81). Therefore, it offers an alternative model of biennial practice, one which makes a strong political statement, defies the capitalist grasp of the art institution, and ignores the demands of the art market.

Moreover, curators Marc Schmitz and Wato Tsereteli have further explored other examples of biennials with limited budget and with subversive agendas. More specifically, Schmitz, organiser of Land Art Mongolia 360°, has explained how this art biennial, which tours across Mongolia, has an environmental focus, highlights issues pertinent to Mongolia's diverse landscapes, environment and fauna, and focuses on Land Art, with pieces which remain permanently in situ (Schmitz, 2013, 82-83). Tsereteli, curator of the Tbilisi Triennial, has expounded on how the event brings together informal, unaccredited, alternative and experimental art education initiatives in order to resist the bureaucracy of official education and the academy (Tsereteli, 2013, 83-84).

Finally, Shahidul Alam has discussed how Chobi Mela, first established in 1999, aimed at challenging the dominant tendency in the official art institution in Bangladesh, which dismissed photography and new media. Although the biennial's organisers continue to work with the government and sometimes with corporate agents, they strive to maintain their independence: they opt for in-kind support when possible and allow the sponsors zero editorial control. Another interesting aspect of this biennial's alternative practice is the fact that the process of selecting the theme of the biennial actively involves the public, which makes suggestions through a community forum. An online debate is hosted, and the theme chosen is based on the outcome of this debate. Finally, the event took a keen interest in expanding beyond

the spatial restrictions of the museum or gallery, and reach out to more diverse audiences, by organising mobile exhibitions in vans and boats which travelled across the city (Alam, 2013, 84-85, 86).

The brief review of the literature on these biennials mentioned above serves to highlight some examples of alternative practice in terms of organising a contemporary art biennial, which involves limited budget and official/governmental support. I do not argue that these examples are able to completely escape the constraints of the art market, instrumentalisation, or governmental influence; however, they still attest to the fact that a discussion on an 'alternative' or subversive potential of biennials - as this thesis attempts through the example of the Thessaloniki Biennale - is not futile. Although the Thessaloniki Biennale is not as radicalised in content or practice as the biennials mentioned above, these examples serve as points of reference to which the Thessaloniki Biennale could be related or juxtaposed in order to trace and analyse its own potential for critical reflection.

Chapter 3: Social History of Art, Semiotics and Discourse Analysis: A Research Methodology for the Thessaloniki Biennale

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored debates over art and culture as resources for economic and social growth, as well as the ‘subversive’ potential of art and culture, as discussed in both social theories of art and culture, and creative industries discourse. Moreover, the previous chapter highlighted the relevance of this discussion to contemporary art biennials, and explored the literature on the biennials’ involvement with ‘non-artistic’ interests and agendas as well as their alternative potential(s).

The review of the literature, as presented in the previous chapter, has influenced the formulation of the two main hypotheses which this thesis examines. The first hypothesis explores the argument that the Thessaloniki Biennale fulfils an instrumental role, linked to financial and political interests such as tourism and cultural diplomacy. As this thesis argues, the Thessaloniki Biennale fulfils this role by initiating a signification process through its choice of venues and its catalogue texts, which construct and project the host city as a multicultural art project with a leading role in the Balkan area.

The second hypothesis concerns the possibility that the Thessaloniki Biennale may have subversive potential, and my thesis also explores how and to what extent this potential is realised. More specifically, this thesis considers how the Thessaloniki Biennale may bear subversive potential, first, as regards its own official narrative about the host city’s multicultural character, and second, as regards practices of exclusion in contemporary art exhibitions, which tend to reproduce established hierarchies and the supremacy of the so-called West.

In order to explore the two main hypotheses outlined above, this thesis analyses the Thessaloniki Biennale in depth from a range of different perspectives: as text in a

semiotic sense (consisting of both written and visual elements); as an art institution inscribed in the creative industries and city developments discourses; and as exhibition practice. To do this, my analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale applies an interdisciplinary approach, and draws on a broad range of methodologies and theories with the aim to synthesise them, and provide a rich, multi-faceted account of the art event under examination. The methodologies and theories applied include semiotics, social history of art (analysis of art institutions, museums and exhibition practices), social theory of art and culture (namely, creative industries and city development discourses), the analysis of cultural policy formulation, and discourse analysis. This chapter explains and justifies the relevance of each of these areas to the thesis, and their application in the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale, and indicates how they complement (or contradict) each other.

This chapter consists of four sections; the first section outlines the fundamental theoretical premise which underpins this thesis, and explains the key perspectives which the research design of this thesis draws on. The remaining three sections correspond to the three central axes around which the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale is organised throughout this thesis: the art event's context(s), its instrumental role, and the possibility of a subversive potential. The respective sections in this chapter explain in more detail the specific methods employed as regards theoretical approach, data collection and analysis, and the reasons for those choices.

3.2 The general theoretical approach

This section explains why the Thessaloniki Biennale is studied as text in a semiotic sense as well as art institution and exhibition practice. This decision was determined by the fundamental premise which underpins this thesis: that meanings, signs and artistic practices - although not passively reflecting social formations and ideologies - are culturally, socially, and ideologically embedded. This premise has been explored by the social constructionist paradigm (Gergen, K., J., 1999; Gergen, K., J. and Gergen, M., 2000; Gergen, K., J. and Gergen, M., 2008)²¹, the framework of semiotics (Saussure,

²¹ According to the social constructionist paradigm, knowledge, meaning and perceptions of reality are dependent on processes generated within human relationships. Ideas about what is true as opposed to false, objective as opposed to subjective, and so on are essentially assumptions which are forged not in the individual mind but through historically and culturally situated social processes. Thus, social constructionism challenges two key tenets of the Western intellectual and cultural tradition:

1974; Vološinov, 1930; Belsey, 1980; Culler, 1986; Hall, 1997), and the social history of art (Clark, 1973; 2001; 1999) as well as museum and exhibition studies (Karp and Levine, 1991; Bennett, 1995; Duncan and Wallace, 1993; Duncan, 1995; Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne, 1996; Barker, 1999; Preziosi, 2003; 2004). These approaches are useful for my thesis because they highlight how meanings constructed within the Thessaloniki Biennale are contingent and provisional, and draw attention to the broader social, cultural, and ideological practices the Thessaloniki Biennale could be related to.

As this thesis embraces the proposition that ideologies are implicated in systems of signification and representation, and considers the Thessaloniki Biennale as ideologically embedded, it is necessary to explain how ideology is understood in this thesis. This thesis embraces an understanding of ideology informed by Althusser's concept of ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) (Althusser, 2008)²². His theory highlights the discursive and semiotic character of ideologies as well as their constitutive role in social and cultural practices. Although they cannot be considered as ideology only, social and cultural practices are all embedded in ideology (Hall, 1985, 103). By stressing the semiotic character of ideologies, Althusser's theory complements the social constructionist as well as the semiotic approach, which relates meanings and signs to cultural, social and ideological practices.

Moreover, Althusser's propositions enable one to trace the ideological function of art and cultural institutions and practices, especially in the case of the Thessaloniki Biennale, which is the main focus of this thesis. Althusser's approach influenced much of the theoretical backdrop of the model of social history of art, whose tools I apply in this thesis. In particular, it can be discerned in Clark's preoccupation with ideologies

first, the idea of the individual knower, the rational, self-directing, and knowledgeable agent of action, and, second, the idea that an objective, absolute truth is possible (Gergen, K., J., 1999; Gergen, K., J. and Gergen, M., 2000; Gergen, K., J. and Gergen, M., 2008).

²² According to Althusser, ideologies are systems of representation, composed of concepts, ideas, myths, or images, which represent the imaginary relations of individuals to the real conditions of existence; (Althusser, 2008, 32, 36). Contrary to the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), ISAs - among them the cultural ISAs, which include, literature and the arts - function not by repression but by ideology (Althusser, 2008, 17-19). Their goal is to help reproduce the relations of production, which in a capitalist society are the capitalist relations of exploitation; this is achieved by interpellating individuals into acting as docile subjects and 'work on their own' (Althusser, 2008, 44-51). For an exposition as well as a critical discussion of Althusser's theory on ideology see Hirst (1979), Belsey (1980), and Hall (1985).

(Clark, 1973; 2001; 1999) as well as in the critical analysis of museums and exhibitions as ideological engines (Bennett, 1995; Duncan, 1995).

The Thessaloniki Biennale studied as text in a semiotic sense.²³

This section addresses the question whether the Thessaloniki Biennale can be analysed as text in a semiotic sense (consisting of both written and visual elements), and justifies the decision to do so. It explains the implications involved in this decision as regards the art event's analysis.

This thesis considers the Thessaloniki Biennale as a text in a semiotic sense, including not only the art event's official written texts, but also its buildings and visual elements, namely the exhibitions presented. In a semiotic sense, words, images, sounds, gestures and objects can all be signs and can be studied as part of semiotic 'sign-systems' (Barthes, 1964; 1967; Eco, 1976; Chandler, 2007, 2). Barthes, in particular, has contributed greatly to the expansion of semiotics beyond the narrow linguistic level to a wider, cultural level, including popular culture, advertisements and fashion (Barthes, 1957; 1967). The underlying argument of the semiotic approach is that, all cultural objects and cultural practices make use of signs, convey meaning, and can be subject to an analysis which makes use of Saussure's theory of the sign and the study of language as a system of signs (Hall, 1997, 36). Thus, semiotics enables us to think of our social and cultural world as a series of sign systems, and stresses the role of symbolic systems in human experience (Culler, 1981, 26). In this way, cultural practices, cultural events,

²³ The model of semiotics which this thesis embraces combines insights from the framework of structuralism as well as post-structuralism, and is largely underpinned by Saussure's theory of the sign and his study of language as a system of signs (Saussure, 1916/1983). Furthermore, it is informed by the insights provided by writers whose work drew on, and often critically addressed Saussure's theory, using his principles to produce more elaborate propositions for the study of signs, such as Jakobson (1971a; 1972), Lévi- Strauss (1958; 1962; 1964), and Barthes (1957/1972; 1964/1977; 1967/1990; 1977). Moreover, more recent readings of Saussure's theory were taken into account; in particular, the reading offered by Culler (1976), Belsey (1980), and Hall (1997), who stress the radical elements in Saussure's theory of the sign, and credit Saussure with a contribution to the social constructionist paradigm. Finally, the model of semiotics applied in this thesis takes into consideration the criticisms expressed towards Saussure's theory, namely Derrida's concept of 'difference' (Derrida, 1967a, 20; 1967b, 247-249, 255, 265-266; Nancy, 1992, 39) and his profound critique of binary oppositions (Derrida, 1967a, 1967b), as well as Vološinov's argument that signs are socially embedded and ideologically imbued (1930).

and exhibitions, and not just actual, written discourse, can be considered as texts consisting of signs.

Considering the Thessaloniki Biennale as text consisting of both written and visual elements, and relating it to the framework of semiotics involves crucial implications regarding its analysis. First, the Thessaloniki Biennale is considered socially, culturally, and ideologically embedded, as all signs and meanings are. Therefore, the ways the art event is connected to and negotiates the context(s) to which it is embedded should be addressed and explored. Second, issues are raised regarding its autonomy as text as well as its relations to other texts. Both these implications will be explained in detail below.

Semiotics considers the relationship between the signifier and the signified as conventional and determined by collective behaviour and convention (Saussure, 1974, 67, 68). The sign is totally subject to history, as the combination at the particular moment of a given signifier and signified is a contingent result of the historical process (Culler, 1986, 46; Hall, 1997, 33). Moreover, the sign is a construct between socially organised persons in the process of their interaction, and is determined by the social purview of the given time period and the given social group (Vološinov, 1930, 21). Finally, the signifying system, which produces meanings, is socially constructed, and, therefore, directly linked to the social formation itself (Belsey, 1980, 42).

Semiotics also stresses ideology as a parameter in the study of signs, and argues that signs are not only socially and culturally but also ideologically embedded. Barthes addressed the concept of 'myth' and argued that, through the processes of connotation and metalanguage, 'myth' produces elaborate and ideologically framed meanings, and naturalises ideology (Barthes, 1957, 124-126; 1964, 89-94)²⁴. Although the possibility of

²⁴ Barthes addressed the concept of denotation and connotation initially in his *Mythologies* (1957, 124-126) as well as in the *Elements of Semiology* (1964, 89-94). In these works, Barthes adopts Hjelmslev's notion of different orders of signification (Hjelmslev, 1961, 114), and argues that denotation is the first order of signification, in which a sign consists of a signifier and a signified. Connotation, in contrast, is the second order of signification, in which the completed signs of the previous stage (of the denoted system) become signifiers themselves, and they are linked to additional signifieds. The signified of connotation is, as Barthes puts it, 'a fragment of ideology' (Barthes, 1964, 91); it is connected to the wider realms of the ideology of a particular society, and bears a very close relation to culture, knowledge and history. It is through the signifieds of connotation that the environmental world of culture is able to invade the system of representation (Barthes, 1964, 92).

a clear-cut separation of denotation from connotation has been challenged²⁵, Barthes' analysis of 'myth' is important because it lays bare the ideological function of signification systems, and foregrounds the fact that signification systems can reaffirm dominant cultural and historical attitudes, by presenting them as natural, timeless and self-evident. This proposition, that signs and signification systems have ideological functions, has been further argued for and explored by Belsey (1980, 40-44), and Hall (1973, 134).

This thesis embraces the semiotics insights outlined above, and acknowledges that the meanings produced in the Thessaloniki Biennale are provisional and contingent. This thesis considers the meanings involved in the Thessaloniki Biennale as embedded in the dominant ideologies about the use of art and culture as engines for economic growth, (traced in the official policy documents under examination in Chapter 4) as well as the social and cultural practices of the particular historical moment in which the art event took place. It traces those practices and ideologies through examining discourse on the instrumental role of art and culture, and discourse on biennials of contemporary art, as outlined in the literature review chapter, alongside official Greek cultural policy agendas.

Moreover, the argument that signification systems are ideologically imbued underpins my analysis of the identity which the Thessaloniki Biennale constructs for the city as a multicultural artistic 'metropolis' in the Balkan area. More specifically, it helps me analyse certain aspects of the process through which this particular identity is constructed, and through which the city's multicultural character is presented as a given, through a safe and sanitised reading of its past, and through the omission of reference to the harsh realities of present-day immigrants.

The second implication of the decision to address the Thessaloniki Biennale as a text in a semiotic sense is that it raises a series of helpful questions about its autonomy, and its

Barthes further distinguishes connotation from metalanguage, in which the sign of the denoted system becomes not the signifier, as in connotation, but the signified (1964, 90). Both connotation and metalanguage are processes of signification, which Barthes terms as the 'myth' (1957, 109). 'Myth' is by no means confined to oral speech or written discourse, but can consist of a great variety of artistic and cultural practices (photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, and publicity).

²⁵ The very distinction between denotation and connotation, and the perception of denotation as a natural or primary meaning, with no ideological associations has been challenged (Vološinov, 1930, 105; Hall, 1973, 133). Even Barthes himself, in his later writings, denounced the possibility of separating the ideological from the literal (1977, 166).

relation to other 'texts'. These issues have been touched upon in the discussion around the concept of intertextuality (Kristeva, 1969; 1974; Barthes, 1977; Foucault, 1969; Culler, 1981). Intertextuality could be described as the analytical framework which draws our attention to the importance of prior texts, and attacks the notion of the autonomy of texts. 'Intertextuality' traces the relationship between a text and the various signifying practices of a culture, and specifies other discourses behind a discourse (Culler, 1981, 103, 106).

Writing from a literary theory perspective, Bakhtin defined the 'literary word' as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context. For Bakhtin, a text is a mosaic of quotations; the absorption and transformation of another (Kristeva, 1969, 36). Kristeva proposed to analyse texts in relation to two axes, the horizontal and the vertical one. The horizontal axis indicates that the word in the text belongs to both the writing subject and the addressee, and thus, it connects the author and the reader of a text. The vertical axis indicates that the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus (Kristeva, 1969, 37).

Barthes proclaimed that a text is a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings blend and clash. For Barthes, the text is firmly rooted into its social and cultural context, as it is a 'tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture' (Barthes, 1977, 146). Moreover, Foucault suggested that discourse always involves more than one statement, one text, one action or one source and that the same discourse appears across several texts, and within several different institutions within society (Foucault, 1969).

Finally, Genette (1982) introduced the term 'transtextuality' to address the relationships of texts to each other, which consists of five sub-types of activity. Two of these sub-types are relevant in this thesis: a) 'architextuality', which refers to the types of discourse, modes of enunciation, and genres from which a text emerges, and b) 'paratextuality', which refers to the relation between a text and its 'paratext' – that which surrounds the main body of the text, such as titles, headings, prefaces, epigraphs,

dedications, acknowledgements, footnotes, illustrations, and so on (Genette, 1982, 1-7)²⁶.

The concept of intertextuality enables me to address the Thessaloniki Biennale as a text related to an intricate body of other ‘texts’ (meaning written texts as well as exhibitions and cultural initiatives) as well as broader discourses. More specifically, the Thessaloniki Biennale, both through its official written texts as well as its exhibitions, refers to and negotiates themes and narratives addressed in other anterior or synchronic texts and discourses, including: a) written texts of the official Greek governance b) previous SMCA’s exhibitions with a similar geographical focus; c) texts produced by other cultural organisations of Thessaloniki (museums, festivals and cultural events), and articles by local writers, academics and politicians, which address and contribute to the construction of an identity for Thessaloniki d) the discourse on creative industries and the appropriation of art and culture in city development strategies, and the discourse on contemporary art biennials, as described in Chapter 2 (Literature Review).

The examination of the relationship between the Thessaloniki Biennale and wider discourses on contemporary art biennials, in particular, is necessary, also, as the Thessaloniki Biennale can be considered as part of a genre. Genre’s potential to shape and restrict meanings, and, thus, to enable and guide interpretation has been highlighted (Genette, 1982, 1-7; Frow, 2006, 10; Chandler, 2007, 150). Derrida, although accepts that every text participates in a genre, rejects the notion that texts actually belong to genres. Thus, he stresses the open-endedness of genres and the irreducibility of texts to a single interpretive framework (Derrida, 1980, 227-230). Following these insights this thesis considers the Thessaloniki Biennale as part of a contemporary art biennial genre, and interprets it taking into consideration the particular framework that this genre involves.

The Thessaloniki Biennale studied as art institution, and exhibition practice.

²⁶ The rest include ‘intertextuality’ which is the relationship of co-presence between two or among several texts. ‘Intertextuality’ involves quoting, plagiarism and allusion, , d. ‘metatextuality’, which involves the explicit or implicit critical commentary of one text on another text, and, finally, e. ‘hypertextuality’, which is the relation between a text and a preceding text or genre on which it is based but which it transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends (including parody, translation) (Genette, 1982/1997, 1-7).

There are limits to considering the Thessaloniki Biennale as a ‘text’, however, and therefore, at the same time, this thesis addresses the Thessaloniki Biennale as art institution, and exhibition practice. In doing so, this thesis applies insights from a combination of approaches; mainly social history of art (Clark, 1973; 2001; 1999) with a special focus on the analysis of exhibitions and museums (Karp and Levine, 1991; Bennett, 1995; Duncan and Wallace, 1993; Duncan, 1995; Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne, 1996; Barker, 1999; Preziosi, 2003; 2004), and institutional critique (Alberro and Stimson, 2009, 6-8, 15 – 17).

Social history of art draws attention to the context(s) of the object of study (Clark, 1973; 1999), and sets ideology at the centre of its enquiry (Clark, 2001; Duncan and Wallach, 1978/2004; Duncan, 1995). Clark highlights the need to explore the network of concrete transactions and complex relations between the social, economic and political circumstances of the production of an artwork, and the artwork itself as well as its formal qualities. Clark proposes examining the relations between artists, art practices, artworks, institutions, available traditions of representation, and the broader political and historical circumstances at specific historical moments (Clark, 1999, 9-20; Harris, 2001, 65-67)²⁷.

The importance of Clark’s approach for my thesis lies in the fact that it argues for a contextual study of an artwork, addressing the variety of issues which could be regarded as the art work’s context(s). Although this thesis does not address a single artwork but rather an art event, Clark’s insights as regards the importance of studying the various context(s) of the object under study are remain applicable to the study of an art event itself and its production.

This thesis also draws on particular insights offered by institutional critique, which is fundamentally committed to exposing the institution of art as a deeply problematical

²⁷ In his study of the 1865 painting ‘Olympia’ by Edward Manet, Clark compiles a solid and well-documented body of empirical evidence, ranging from artists’ personal correspondence to critical reviews. In particular, he focuses on the critical reviews of the artwork, addressing the critics’ background, which papers and journals they wrote for, and how they wrote reviews of the paintings of the salon. He also traces and addresses the scarcities and silences in the critics’ discourse. Furthermore, consistent with his investigation of how artists situate themselves in relation to available traditions of representation, Clark traces how prostitution and the prostitute were represented in the official / dominant discourse/ ideology of the time through analysing contemporary sociological and medical articles on the subject, newspaper articles, reports, extracts from literature and plays, the legislation on prostitution and memoirs (Clark, 1984/1999, 79-146).

field, in which political, economic, and ideological interests intersect and directly intervene and interfere in the production of public culture. The more recent strand of institutional critique, which includes the radical agendas of groups, such as the RepoHistory, the Yes Men, subRosa, Raqs Media Collective, and the Electronic Disturbance Theatre to mention but a few, suggests ‘getting out of the frame’ altogether, evading the official art world and the attendant professions and institutions that legitimate it, and developing practices capable of operating outside the confines of the museum and art market (Alberro and Simson, 2009 6-8, 15 – 17).

Similarly, according to Harris, ‘social history of art’, ‘radical history of art’, and ‘critical history of art’ refer to the forms of description, analysis, and evaluation rooted in, and inseparable from social and political activism (Harris, 2001, 9, 35). The intellectual currents pervading the social history of art include Marxism, feminism, post-colonialism and queer theory, while the analytic methods used are often drawn from a variety of sources including sociology, semiotics, structuralism, critical theory, and post-structuralism (Harris, 2001, 46).

Although there has been considerable disciplinary disagreement regarding the ‘proper object of art historical attention’ (Preziosi, 2003, 10), the social history of art has expanded the scope of art historical study to include elements and factors beyond art works themselves. More specifically, what can be considered as the ‘empirical objects’ of art history includes not only visual representations (paintings, sculptures, films, photographs), but also patronage, art dealing (Clark, 1973; 2001; 1983), government funding bodies, and other kinds of organisations that are involved in art’s production, dissemination, and consumption (Harris, 2001, 16-18), as well as museum and gallery displays of art works (Duncan and Wallach, 1978; Bann, 1984; Duncan, 1995; Wallach, 1998; Preziosi, 2003), and exhibitions (Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne, 1996). In this respect, the social history of art has bordered museum and exhibition studies, which since the 1980s and 1990s have addressed similar issues, often drawing on Foucault’s analyses of power in order to address processes of governmentality within and through art museums (Bennett, 1988; Vergo, 1989; Bennett, 1995). This thesis embraces the viewpoint which considers displays and exhibitions as objects of art historical study, and argues that the Thessaloniki Biennale can be studied by simultaneously applying insights from the framework of social history of art, and museum and exhibition studies.

The analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale from the point of view of its funding and connections with the agendas of its major sponsor - the Hellenic Ministry of Culture - as well as the models of display it employed fits into the social history of art and the institutional critique projects, as described above. Both these perspectives enable me to address the Thessaloniki Biennale as an art institution related to a range of 'non-artistic interests', and explore the nature of those interests and the ways in which they engage with the Thessaloniki Biennale. This involves the critical analysis of certain aspects of Greek governance and the complex network of relations between the art event, the SMCA, and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

In addressing the Thessaloniki Biennale's context, this thesis takes into consideration the ways in which context has been theorised by post-structuralist semiotics. More specifically, post-structuralist semiotics argues against a clear-cut separation of 'context' from 'text', and challenges the assumption that text and context are independent terms (Bal and Bryson, 1991, 177). In particular, Bal and Bryson reject the tendency to address 'context' and 'text' as clearly separated, on the grounds that this assumption (that 'context' and 'text' are independent) considers 'context' as the firm ground upon which to base the interpretation of the 'text'. This means that 'context' generates 'text', in the same way that a cause gives rise to an effect. However, it is sometimes the case that the sequence (from context to text) is actually inferred from its end-point²⁸. This rhetorical operation addresses the work as having been solely produced by its context, and ignores the fact that the work or 'text' also affects its 'context' (Bal and Bryson, 1991, 179).

In response to the points raised by Bal and Bryson regarding how 'text' and 'context' are interdependent (Bal and Bryson, 1991, 179), this thesis takes into consideration the interplay of the Thessaloniki Biennale as an event, and its context during the process of the former's interpretation. In particular, the Thessaloniki Biennale is considered as part of a broader network of initiatives reflecting similar interests and agendas, including, for instance, Greek governance and creative cities and industries discourse. Nonetheless, this broader network is not privileged in my analysis as determining the Thessaloniki Biennale, but as a milieu affecting - and being affected by - the Thessaloniki Biennale.

²⁸ Nietzsche called this process 'chronological reversal', see Culler (1982, 86).

3.3 Defining the context of the Thessaloniki Biennale

The analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale in this thesis relates the art event to its context. This section explains what this thesis selects as the Thessaloniki Biennale's context, justifies this choice, demonstrates in what ways the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale's context contributes to the study of the art event, and indicates the research methods used in order to collect and analyse the relevant material.

This thesis examines the Thessaloniki Biennale in relation to what is selected as being a particularly important context: Greek governance as regards art and culture and the official Greek cultural policy. In particular, this thesis analyses the Thessaloniki Biennale in relation to the complex network of the agendas, priorities and interests pursued by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, local cultural and urban planning initiatives, the Municipality, and the State Museum of Contemporary Art (SMCA), which is the main organiser of the Thessaloniki Biennale.

The analysis of the context of the Thessaloniki Biennale, as defined above, contributes to an understanding of the Thessaloniki Biennale, as it addresses two interrelated research questions posed in this thesis: a) what are the broader social, cultural, political and ideological practices to which the Thessaloniki Biennale can be related? b) What are the reasons that the Thessaloniki Biennale is funded and supported by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, and thus has become part of its official policy? Situating the Thessaloniki Biennale, therefore, in the context of Greek governance and Greek cultural policy enables me to explore the first hypothesis of this thesis, which concerns the instrumental role of the art event. Exploring the context of the Thessaloniki Biennale helps identify the agendas and interests of the official Greek cultural policy, to which the Thessaloniki Biennale is a response and symptom. Moreover, the analysis of the art event's context is useful in exploring the thesis' second hypothesis concerning the subversive potential which the Thessaloniki Biennale may have in relation to the official narratives, agendas and interests of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

However, it is useful to mention here that there are important issues raised by post-structuralism regarding what could be conceptualised as 'context'. The post-structuralist

approach radically redefines the concept of context and its relationship to text. It proposes that context, is not the simple or natural ground upon which to base the interpretation of the text but it is, instead, perceived as interminable as the 'text' itself. In other words, context can always be extended, and cannot be established in the form of a totality; it is impossible to determine all the circumstances that constitute a particular context. Therefore, one is able to present only a partial and incomplete formulation of context, which if presented as standing for the totality of contexts, constitutes a synecdochical approach to context and is misleading (Bal and Bryson, 1991, 179)²⁹.

Although the interminability of context might initially lead one to abandon the effort to study 'context', this is by no means what the post structuralist semiotics project proposes. Instead, it advocates that the concepts of context and determination should remain as working concepts of analysis, as long as the misleading notion that a total determination of context is feasible is abandoned. As Derrida puts it: 'No meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation' (Derrida, 1979, 81).

Taking into consideration the insights outlined above, this thesis by no means claims to offer an exhaustive account of what could be regarded as the Thessaloniki Biennale's context. It does not make the claim that the event's context could be determined as a totality nor that this context could fix in advance the outcome of any of its encounters with contextual plurality. Instead, my thesis embraces the notion that context is interminable and can always be extended. Taking into account the risk of a misleading synecdochical approach to context as pointed out earlier by Bal and Bryson (Bal and Bryson, 1991, 179), I acknowledge the fact that I selected certain elements and analyse them as the Thessaloniki Biennale's context, and left other elements out of my analysis.

²⁹ It is useful, here, to briefly outline the overall approach to semiosis which post-structuralism proposes. It rejects the structuralist semiotics principle that the meanings of signs are determined by sets of internal oppositions and differences mapped out within a static system, which essentially theorises sign systems as enclosed and immobile. Instead, post-structuralist semiotics brings forward the system's aspects of ongoing semiosis and dynamism and think of semiosis as unfolding in time. Derrida, in particular, insisted that the meaning of any particular sign could not be located in a signified fixed by the internal operations of a synchronic system; rather meaning arose exactly from the movement from one sign or signifier to the next, in a *perpetuum mobile* where there could be found neither a starting point for semiosis, nor a concluding moment in which semiosis terminated and the meanings of signs fully 'arrived', for a discussion of Derrida's theory of signification, see Melville (1986) and for his concept of 'différance' in particular, see Nancy (1992). Umberto Eco, warns against a confusion between theoretical polysemy and actual interpretation, and points out that socially and politically motivated limits exist, putting a practical stop to a theoretical polysemy. Thus the very thesis of polysemy provides clearer insight into the limits of interpretation and their motivations (Eco, 1994).

In doing so, I do not consider the elements I selected and analysed as constituting the art event's context in its totality.

It is, also, important to state that the particular aspects of Greek governance and Greek cultural policy addressed as the 'Thessaloniki Biennale's context' in this thesis were chosen on specific grounds. They were selected on the grounds that those aspects elucidate the first hypothesis of this thesis: that the Thessaloniki Biennale assumed an instrumental role by responding to 'non-artistic' agendas and interests related to Greek governance. Those agendas and interests constitute precisely what this thesis defines as the Thessaloniki Biennale's context, and my thesis represents that it is essential to study the Thessaloniki Biennale's context in order to understand firstly, the reason why it was embraced and funded by the Ministry of Culture; and secondly, certain aspects of its production.

Finally, the post-structuralist approach to semiotics draws attention to the fact that context refers both to the context of the production of works of art as well as the context of their commentary. This means that the present context should be included within the analysis of 'context' and that we should locate ourselves in the accounts we produce instead of bracketing out our positionalities. In an effort to locate myself as researcher in the account of the Thessaloniki Biennale I produce in this thesis, I need to make reference to my Greek identity. Both my Greek origin as well as the very fact that I studied and lived for years in Thessaloniki, the host city of the biennial under examination, determined my decision to address the Thessaloniki Biennale, in particular, in my thesis.

Moreover, the decision to explore the context of the Thessaloniki Biennale as well as the elements which I chose to address as the context of the art event (as explained in the relevant section of this chapter below), was determined by my own position as a researcher in the account I am producing in this thesis. In other words, the selection of the particular elements which I considered as the Thessaloniki Biennale's context was affected by certain attitudes of mine as a researcher, which had to do with the fact that my background is in art history, and I have an affiliation to the social history of art methods, especially institutional critique. This affected, also, my belief that certain aspects of the social history of art methodological framework could be transferred and

applied in the study of biennials, such as the importance of funding, the patrons' motives for commissioning a work, and the relevance of socio-political factors in the production of an art work. At the same time, under the influence of post-structuralism, this thesis does not consider the Thessaloniki Biennale as a singular text, where all the various causal lines detected converge. It is, rather, subject to all of the variations and shifts entailed in an unpredictable reception. My account of it, therefore, is not exhaustive, and it is just one account among potentially various others³⁰.

The material collected and analysed as part of the Thessaloniki Biennale's context.

Outlining the context of the Thessaloniki Biennale, as described above, involves: a) identifying key features of Greek governance and administration as regards art and culture (the highly centralised nature of the official Greek arts and culture administration; the exclusivist and elitist character of the formulation process of the official Greek cultural policy; the intensified support towards contemporary art and culture rather than ancient and Byzantine heritage), b) analysing the way in which art and culture are conceptualised in the official discourse of Greek cultural policy, especially in comparison to the official European guidelines, c) tracing key initiatives of the official Greek cultural policy as regards tourism and cultural diplomacy in particular, which, as this thesis argues, influenced and were negotiated by the Thessaloniki Biennale. All three aspects, as outlined above, are interconnected.

In order to analyse aspects of the official Greek cultural policy, since the latter is defined as a key part of the Thessaloniki Biennale's context in this thesis, insights from policy analysis methodology are applied. Ham and Hill summarise the different types of policy analysis as comprising seven key varieties: Study of policy content, policy process, policy outputs, evaluation, information for policy making, process advocacy, policy advocacy (Ham and Hill, 1993, 9). As this thesis explores the reasons why the Thessaloniki Biennale was embraced and supported by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, and in what ways the Thessaloniki Biennale negotiated the agendas of the Ministry, a

³⁰ According to the post-structuralist perspective, the text or artwork cannot exist outside the circumstances in which the reader reads the text or the viewer views the image, and that the work of art cannot fix in advance the outcome of any of its encounters with contextual plurality. This is the reason why, the idea of convergence should be supplemented by the idea of the diffraction of reception: not only causal chains moving toward the work of art but also lines of signification opening out from the work of art (Bal and Bryson, 1991, 180).

combination of policy content and policy process analysis is the most appropriate approach.

Moreover, this thesis embraces the conceptualisation of policy as a web of decisions or a course of action rather than a single decision (Ham and Hill, 1993: 11, 12). This approach to policy indicates that the decision to support the Thessaloniki Biennale cannot be understood in isolation, and that it would be fruitful to explore its relation to the array of decisions which comprise official Greek cultural policy, especially as regards the conceptualisation of art and culture as engines for economic growth.

Policy content focuses on the emergence and development of particular policies, and usually, one or more cases are investigated in order to explain how a particular policy emerged and how it was implemented (Ham and Hill, 1993, 9). Analysing the selected documents of Greek cultural policy from a content point of view is useful, as attention is drawn to the increasing interest from the part of the state in the support and promotion of contemporary art as well as the conceptualisation of art and culture as engines for economic growth and tools for ‘non-artistic’ purposes. Moreover, policy content analysis enables me to explore how investment of relatively large funds, more specifically European funds, in culture is justified. On the other hand, policy process analysis seeks to reveal the various influences on policy formulation; it, therefore, focuses on the stages through which issues pass and traces the various factors which influence the development of particular policies (Ham and Hill, 1993, 10). Policy process analysis is useful in exploring the highly centralised character of the official Greek art and culture administration as well as the exclusivist character of the Greek cultural policy formulation process.

Below, I explain how I analysed the material which constitutes the Thessaloniki Biennale’s context as defined in this thesis. This material is organised around 3 key axes: a) key features of Greek governance and administration as regards art and culture; b) how art and culture are conceptualised in official Greek cultural policy documents during the 2000s, especially in relation to the official EU guidelines; c) key initiatives of the official Greek cultural policy as regards tourism and cultural diplomacy in particular.

a) The first aspect of what is defined as the Thessaloniki Biennale's context in this thesis involves key features of Greek governance and administration as regards art and culture. One such feature is the highly centralised character of the official Greek art and culture administration, and it is crucial to my study of the Thessaloniki Biennale. This is because it further reinforces the hypothesis that the Thessaloniki Biennale, which is funded by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, is linked to the Ministry's agendas and priorities. In other words, it promotes the exploration of this thesis' hypothesis regarding the Thessaloniki Biennale's instrumental role.

In order to trace the centralised character of the official Greek art and culture administration, I analysed pieces of legislation, namely Act 2257, which, in 1997 established the SMCA, the main organiser of the Thessaloniki Biennale, as well as the Museum of Photography and the Cinema Museum in Thessaloniki (these three museums are the only museums of contemporary art in Thessaloniki). Act 2257 demonstrates the dominant role of the Ministry in the operation and administration of the three museums. As regards the SMCA, in particular, the Ministry's role is crucial in the biennial's funding, as well as the appointment of the Director and President of the SMCA.

Also, I reviewed analyses of local writers on Greek cultural policy (Konsola, 2006; Kousobinas, 2007; Andreou, 2010), because they highlight the central role of the state in Greek art and culture policies and administration. I reviewed the report of Greek cultural policy for the Council of Europe/ ERICarts 'Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe' (Dallas, 2010), as it highlights the over-dependence of large scale art and culture projects on state funding.

Another key feature of Greek governance as regards art and culture, which, as this thesis argues, is relevant to the Thessaloniki Biennale, is the fact that the formulation process of official Greek cultural policy is exclusivist and elitist. The implication of this for the Thessaloniki Biennale is that the interests of the Greek art professional elite affected certain organisational aspects of the Thessaloniki Biennale, namely the process of artists and curators selection, and that the Thessaloniki Biennale adopted overall a hierarchical and top-down approach. Ham and Hill's concept of the influence of elites on policy formation is particularly useful in the analysis of the formulation process of official Greek cultural policy, especially, their insights on the power exercised by a small

number of well-organised societal interests, and their ability to achieve their goals based on a variety of sources, such as the occupation of formal office, wealth, technical expertise and knowledge (Ham and Hill, 1993).

In my analysis, I addressed who and in what capacity participated in the committees responsible for submitting cultural policy related proposals, namely the *Culture in Greece. Financial, Artistic, and Social Dimensions and Prospects* report (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007), and the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* (Giannopoulos et al, 2012). I also traced if and to what extent grassroots movements and independent groups of art professionals were involved in the formulation process of those proposals. Moreover, in order to explore to what extent and in what ways the exclusivist character of the official Greek cultural policy affected the Thessaloniki Biennale, I compared the Thessaloniki Biennale to the *Thessaloniki Otherwise* Festival, which was a more open and participatory initiative. This comparison focused on certain organisational aspects, namely the selection process of participants.

Finally, the shift in Greek cultural policy since the late 1990s, which includes wider support towards contemporary culture, is a crucial feature of Greek governance as regards art and culture and is relevant to the Thessaloniki Biennale. This is because it helps situate and explain the decision to establish a state funded, contemporary art biennial in Thessaloniki, even though official Greek cultural policy was mainly concerned with classical and Byzantine heritage for the most part of the 20th century. This shift is traced through the analysis of official Greek cultural policy documents, namely the report on the operational Programme *Culture 2000* (2000-2006, funded by the 3rd Community Support Framework), and the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* (Giannopoulos et al, 2012).

b) The second aspect of the Thessaloniki Biennale's context, as defined in this thesis, involves the ways in which art and culture are conceptualised in the official discourse on cultural policy in Greece during the 2000s. More specifically, the fact that culture, especially contemporary art and culture, is addressed as a resource for economic development and a means for the country's promotion abroad is relevant to the examination of the Thessaloniki Biennale, because it outlines the grounds upon which the decision to establish the event was based. In order to explore and document the

conceptualisation of art and culture as resources for ‘non-artistic purposes’, I analysed official Greek cultural policy documents, namely:

- The report on the operational Programme *Culture 2000-2006* (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme ‘Culture’, 2007).
- The *Culture in Greece. Financial, Artistic, and Social Dimensions and Prospects* report (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007).
- The *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* (Giannopoulos et al, 2012).

The tendency to address art and culture as ‘resources’ is not limited to the official Greek cultural policy documents examined above. It is also manifest in the official EU guidelines on culture, which influence official Greek cultural policy. In order to explore further the relationship between official Greek cultural policy documents and EU guidelines on culture as regards the ways in which they conceptualise culture, I examined official EU cultural policy documents and compared them with the official Greek cultural policy documents analysed earlier.

The way ‘culture’ is addressed in the official EU discourse was traced in 4 key official documents, issued by the EU. With the exception of the Lisbon Strategy, the EU documents under examination were issued towards the end of the decade, and coincided with the decision made by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture to fund and support the Thessaloniki Biennale. The documents under examination include:

- *The Lisbon Strategy* (23-24 / 5/ 2000).
- *The Council Communication on A European Agenda for Culture* (10/5/2007).
- *The Council Conclusions on Culture As A Catalyst for Creativity and Innovation* (12-5-2009).
- *The Council Conclusions on the Contribution of the Cultural and Creative Sectors to the Achievement of the Lisbon Objectives* (24-25/5/ 2007).

The examination of the aforementioned documents is useful for this thesis because it demonstrates that both official Greek cultural policy and EU discourse address culture as potentially an ‘engine for economic growth’. This analysis highlights the fact that

official Greek cultural policy uncritically embraces the EU discourse on culture. This is relevant to my thesis, as it indicates a further ‘non-artistic’ purpose, for which culture is used as a means in the context of Greek governance: the desire to assert the country’s European identity. This is, in turn, related to the study of the Thessaloniki Biennale, because, as this thesis argues, the latter is considered as a tool in the country’s broader effort for an effective cultural diplomacy. My analysis of both official Greek cultural policy documents and EU guidelines on culture draws on the creative industries and creative cities discourses (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Leadbeater, 1999; Miller, Govil, McMurria and Maxwell, 2001; Florida 2002; McRobbie, 2002; Garnham, 2005; Pratt, 2008; 2011; 2012;), as well as on social theories on the instrumentalisation of art and culture (Zukin, 1995; Rifkin, 2000; Yúdice, 2003; Hardt, 2009), as they were outlined in Chapter 2’s literature review.

c) The third aspect of the context of the Thessaloniki Biennale, as defined in this thesis, involves tracing key initiatives of the official Greek cultural policy as regards tourism and cultural diplomacy in particular. The examination of those initiatives contributes to the exploration of the first hypothesis proposed by this thesis (that the Thessaloniki Biennale fulfils an instrumental role) because it outlines the interests to which the art event arguably responded. The Thessaloniki Biennale was a promising tool in order for the Ministry to advance its agendas, namely as regards increasing tourism and projecting a positive image for the country abroad. The analysis of those interests and agendas is related to the creative industries and creative cities discourses (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Leadbeater, 1999; Miller, Govil, McMurria and Maxwell, 2001; Florida 2002; McRobbie, 2002; Garnham, 2005; Pratt, 2009; 2011; 2012), as well as on social theories on the instrumentalisation of art and culture (Zukin, 1995; Rifkin, 2000; Yúdice, 2003; Hardt, 2009), as they were outlined in Chapter 2’s literature review.

In order to trace those interests, I examine a number of relevant initiatives, namely the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* Programme initiated by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture in 2010, which the 3rd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale was included in and funded by. The analysis of the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* Programme helps elucidate the decision of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture to fund and support the Thessaloniki, as well as the Ministry’s expectations from this particular art event. Moreover, I explore the Ministry’s agendas on cultural diplomacy through cultural

organisations, by looking at two initiatives - the Hellenic Foundation for Culture (established in 1992) and the European Cultural Centre of Delphi (established in 1977), both supervised by the Ministry of Culture. I, subsequently, compare the Thessaloniki Biennale with those initiatives.

Finally, two previous exhibitions organised by the SMCA are addressed, and compared with the Thessaloniki Biennale: *the Cosmopolis1: Microcosmos X Macrocosmos exhibition* (2005) and the *Contemporary European Art. The Art of the Balkan Countries* exhibition (2002). These exhibitions were chosen as they were both organised by the SMCA, as the Thessaloniki Biennale, shared a similar geographical focus, especially with the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale, and could therefore in many ways be considered as predecessors of the Thessaloniki Biennale in terms of aims and mission.

3.4 Methods used to analyse the material and evidence

Exploring the instrumental role of the Thessaloniki Biennale

Informed by the review of the literature on the instrumental role of art and culture, and contemporary art biennials, in particular, this thesis explores the hypothesis that the Thessaloniki Biennale crucially has an instrumental role, namely as regards tourism and cultural diplomacy, and expounds upon how this instrumentality works. The previous section regarding the context of the Thessaloniki Biennale outlined the methods used in order to outline some key ‘non-artistic’ agendas and interests of Greek governance and official Greek cultural policy, which the Thessaloniki Biennale relates to. This section addresses two further research questions: a) to what extent and in what ways did the Thessaloniki Biennale assume an instrumental role by responding to these agendas and interests? b) Why were specific choices about the art event’s production made over others, especially as regards the choice of the city’s historical monuments as venues for the Thessaloniki Biennale’s projects? This section explains and justifies the material addressed, and the methods used in order to analyse it.

In order to source evidence regarding the agendas of the Thessaloniki Biennale and its links to the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, I analyse the exhibition catalogue texts written by politicians (e.g. the Minister of Culture, and the Mayor of Thessaloniki) as well as the SMCA’s officials (Director and President). Also, I draw on the five interviews which I

conducted with members of the SMCA's staff, namely Maria Tsantsanoglou (Director of SMCA at the time and co-curator of the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale), Syrago Tsiara (Director of the Centre of Contemporary Art, which is affiliated to the SMCA, and co-curator of the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale), Anna Mykoniati (Assistant Curator of the SMCA and of the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale), Theodoros Markoglou (Assistant Curator of the SMCA and of the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale), and Chryssa Zarkali (PR Officer of the SMCA).

These interviews were semi-structured (Morton-Williams, 1993; Walliman, 2005, 284-286; Fielding and Thomas, 2008, 245-265; Silverman, 2010, 44-48), and their purpose was to provide more evidence as regards the aims and agendas of the Thessaloniki Biennale, and the decision of the SMCA to organise it. Both the questions posed and the answers provided were tape-recorded, and I have evidence - email correspondence - that the interviewees gave me their permission to mention their name and job title in this thesis. What I found during the course of the interviews as well as their analysis was that the interviewees repeated much of what had already been written and published in the exhibitions' catalogue texts. In this sense, the interviewees repeated the official narrative of the Thessaloniki Biennale as presented in the exhibition catalogue texts. Finally, I analyse interviews by high-rank officials of the SMCA about the Thessaloniki Biennale published in the national press.

This thesis argues that the Thessaloniki Biennale responded to the agendas traced in the material mentioned above as well as the broader agendas of the official Greek cultural policy outlined in the previous section. The art event responded to those agendas through a signification process which branded the city in particular ways, namely as historical, multicultural and a potential centre for contemporary art in the Balkan area. I examine this signification process, which essentially constitutes the Thessaloniki Biennale's instrumental role, by analysing the:

- Exhibition catalogue texts and press releases of the three editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale³¹.

³¹ It should be noted that a close examination of the press releases shows that the latter largely repeated what was already written in the exhibition catalogue texts as regards the key theme on which the analysis of the official written texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale focused (the traits attributed to the city of

- Interviews and articles by politicians and high-ranking officials of the SMCA about the city of Thessaloniki, and/or the Thessaloniki Biennale published in the national press.
- The structure of the exhibition catalogues, the choice of writers, and sequence of texts, drawing on concepts from the framework of semiotics.
- The choice of venues for the exhibitions presented in the Thessaloniki Biennale: which historical monuments and other significant buildings were chosen, and why.
- The dispersion of the projects and exhibitions across the city, through examining the maps provided by the Thessaloniki Biennale. Both the choice of venues as well as the maps of the art event are addressed as essential parts of the signification process involved in the Thessaloniki Biennale, and are analysed drawing on the framework of semiotics.

Why does analysing the official written texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale matter?

The analysis of the exhibition catalogue texts of the three editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale, as presented in Chapter 4), is more extended in relation to the analysis of the rest of the material (structure of catalogues, venues, press articles and interviews). The reasons for this are the same as the reason which determined the decision to address the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogues, in the first place; it was partly influenced by the fact that, although biennials present exhibitions, they also invest considerable money and effort in producing catalogues. However, the art events' catalogue texts as well as other official texts, such as press releases and website material, have not attracted, to a great extent, the interest of writers who deal with biennials³². This thesis argues that the

Thessaloniki). Therefore, although this thesis acknowledges the importance and involvement of press releases in the signification process initiated in the Thessaloniki Biennale, it presents and analyses samples from the exhibition catalogue texts only.

³² Although many essays, articles and book chapters on biennials make limited references to a biennials' official written texts, they do not analyse these texts extensively (Ok. Enwezor, 2005, 183; Th. Boutoux, 2005, 205; Mosquera, 2010; Harutyunyan, Ozgu and Goodfield, 2011). Winkel's essay 'The Rhetorics of Manifesta' (Camiel van Winkel, 2005, 219-230), however, is a detailed analysis of

analysis of a biennial's written discourse can contribute to the understanding of a particular biennial as event and practice, because, these texts may reflect and negotiate local interests and concerns and address broader and pre-existing discourses, which in turn relate to organisational aspects as well as the agenda of the biennial.

As regards the Thessaloniki Biennale, in particular, this thesis argues that the art event fulfils an instrumental role as regards tourism and cultural diplomacy by constructing the host city as a multicultural art centre with a leading role in the Balkan area. The analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts traces the signification process, through which the branding of the city is achieved, and provides evidence regarding the ways in which the identity of Thessaloniki is constructed. In this way, the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts contributes to the exploration of the first core hypothesis of this thesis concerning the instrumental role of the art event, and therefore, is deemed necessary.

Moreover, the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts is particularly useful, because it addresses further crucial questions regarding the signification process involved in the Thessaloniki Biennale: under which codes the Thessaloniki Biennale was meaningful, and which prior knowledge was necessary for the audience to decipher the signs constructed within the Thessaloniki Biennale. The analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts addresses precisely this question, as those texts outline some key codes of signification involved in the art event.

Codes provide the framework within which signs make sense; codes are culturally specific, and have to be fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and the addressee (Saussure, 1974, 9; Jakobson, 1960; Hall, 1973, 132; Culler, 1976, 29; Barthes, 1977, 27-28; Chandler, 2007, 147). Barthes' analysis of the Panzani advertisement, a brand of Italian pasta, is an example of how codes can operate in the

the official written texts of Manifesta, the European Biennial. The writer critically addresses the introductions and statements which were written by the Manifesta advisory board, the project office and the curatorial teams in the catalogues of the first 5 editions of Manifesta (1996 – 2004). Winkel, thus, explored the official self-image Manifesta constructed through these texts and the way Manifesta positioned itself through these texts in relation to major issues in the debates on art at the time. Although Winkel's remarks as well as methodology are subject to criticism (Muller, 2005; Gioni, 2005), his analysis is important in bringing forward the analysis of official written texts as a useful tool in the study of art institutions.

signification process involved in a visual text (Barthes, 1977, 33-35). Barthes identified a series of kinds of knowledge the viewer should already be familiar with in order to interpret the signs involved in the Panzani ad: a straightforward, evident knowledge, the knowledge of a particular language, knowledge implanted as a part of a habit of a culture, knowledge based on a familiarity with tourist stereotypes and heavily cultural knowledge of the still life genre in painting (Barthes, 1977, 33-35).

In the case of the Thessaloniki Biennale, the analysis of the catalogue texts identified three key codes which framed the meanings constructed in the Thessaloniki Biennale: a) Thessaloniki's past (in order for the reader/viewer to perceive the construction of the city's multicultural character), b) the discourse on biennials of contemporary art, namely the emergence of this particular exhibition-format and their relatively recent proliferation (in order for the reader/viewer to grasp the distinct identity of the Thessaloniki Biennale as well as the need and effort from the part of the organisers to establish the art event's identity as such), c) the debates on contemporary art practice, especially the framework of post-colonial critique (in order for the reader/viewer to appreciate the Thessaloniki Biennale's aspiration to challenge art practices which reproduce hierarchies and exclusion within the international art world).

The decision to analyse the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts was also determined by the fact that this thesis accepts the concept that it is possible to constrain semiosis, to an extent, and direct the reader / viewer towards particular meanings. The art event's catalogue texts are considered as having the potential to function as anchoring tools for the meanings constructed in the Thessaloniki Biennale. Barthes introduced the concept of anchorage, which is a means of control of interpretation, and has primarily an ideological function (Barthes, 1977, 40). According to Barthes, a written text can have an anchoring function, as they help fix the floating chain of signifieds involved in a visual text; the written text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, and remote-controls him or her towards a meaning chosen in advance (Barthes, 1977, 39).

Moreover, Stuart Hall argued that, although there is no necessary correspondence between encoding and decoding, encoding can construct some of the limits and parameters within which decoding will operate (Hall, 1973, 135). This can be achieved

through three hypothetical positions or codes³³: a. the ‘dominant-hegemonic position’, b. the ‘negotiated code or position’ and c. the ‘oppositional code’ (Hall, 1973, 136-138). According to Hall, when the reader or viewer decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded, then the reader or viewer operates inside the ‘dominant code’. This is the ideal, typical case of ‘perfectly transparent communication’. The ‘dominant code’ is further sustained by the ‘professional code’, which although relatively independent from the ‘dominant code’, it nevertheless reproduces its hegemony, and is defined, to a large extent, by the interests of elites (Hall, 1973, 137). Hall’s schema is useful in my analysis of the signification process of the Thessaloniki Biennale, as regards the preferred reader positions offered in the catalogue texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale.

Poststructuralist perspectives extend this idea that reading positions are multiple, dynamic and contradictory (Chandler, 2007, 195). In particular, Bal and Bryson (1991) address the issue of codes and readers/viewers from a poststructuralist point of view and within a visual arts context. The writers distinguish between ‘ideal’ and ‘empirical’ spectators; empirical spectators are the actual living and breathing viewers, walking through the exhibition space and looking at the pictures and discussing what they see. The ideal spectator is a more abstract figure; broadly speaking the term refers to the various roles ascribed to viewers by the paintings they see, the set of positions or functions proposed and assumed by the images on display (1991, 184).

Bal and Bryson stress the fact that access to codes is uneven for different groups as well as for the members within each group (1991, 184). The importance of Bal and Bryson’s argument lies in the fact that it shifts the attention from code to the plurality and unpredictability of reception of a work of art or a sign, and the implications this bears for signification. Underpinned by Derrida’s concept of ‘differance’ (Derrida, 1967a, 20; 1967b, 247-249, 255, 265-266), their proposition attacks the assumption that meaning, codes or readers are fixed, stable entities, and that the ‘preferred readings’ of a text or their ‘dominant codes’ will remain unchallenged.

³³ Hall uses the terms ‘code’ and ‘position’ interchangeably.

Taking into consideration Bal and Bryson's insights, as outlined above, this thesis does not argue that all of the viewers would respond to the 'dominant codes' of the Thessaloniki Biennale. Nor does this thesis argue that the codes involved in the signification process of the Thessaloniki Biennale are exhausted in the three sets of discourses I mentioned above (city's histories, discourse on contemporary art biennials, post-colonial framework). Following Barthes' theory of the anchoring function of the linguistic message (1977) and Hall's concepts of the 'preferred reading' and the 'dominant code' (1973), I will explore my argument that the art event's catalogue texts aspire to direct the viewers to a 'preferred reading' of the Thessaloniki Biennale, which highlights the city's and the art event's desired attributes. However, there was no guarantee that all readers / viewers would interpret the Thessaloniki Biennale as the art event's organisers aspired.

Methods of analysing the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts

The selection of samples for the catalogue texts as well as their analysis is structured around three key themes pertaining to Thessaloniki's identity, as these themes emerge in the art event's official written texts: 1. The city's dominant history 2. The city's multicultural character and 3. The city's aspired role as a metropolitan / leading centre in the Balkan area and South- East Europe.

It was also deemed necessary to group the samples of the texts under each theme according to the capacity in which their author wrote them. Three sub-groups emerged: 1. the subgroup of public officials/politicians, which includes the texts written by the Ministers of Culture as well as Ministry officials and the city's Mayors, 2. the sub-group of SMCA officials, which involves the texts written by the SMCA Presidents and Directors, 3. the sub-group of the TB curators and writers who contributed to the exhibitions' catalogues. These three sub-groups cannot, nevertheless, be always clearly delimited, as in several instances, the author of the text examined is both a curator of TB and a SMCA's employee.

In order to analyse the catalogue texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale as regards what features they attached to the host city, I draw on the concept of discourse, learning from a combination of insights on discourse by Foucault (1969) and Fairclough (1993), as well as Belsey's distinction between the declarative and the interrogative text (1980).

Foucault's insights in particular contributed to shaping the understanding of discourse which this thesis embraces. Foucault draws our attention to larger units of analysis (narratives, statements and whole discourses which operate across a variety of texts and areas of knowledge about a subject). He argues that discourse determines how one can talk and reason about a certain topic. In this sense, discourse can exclude, restrict or repress alternative ways of constructing knowledge about a certain topic (Foucault, 1969; Mills, 1997, 43-67).

Following Foucault's model, the analysis of the written texts produced by the Thessaloniki Biennale does not focus on language units but explores broader narratives about the city. It clearly shows a strong link between the biennale and the attempt to construct a particular identity for the city of Thessaloniki. The Thessaloniki Biennale highlights Thessaloniki's multicultural past and its current supposedly cosmopolitan character in an attempt to forge a contemporary identity for the city in the era of globalization, intensified exchange with the so-called West and influx of immigrants.

Fairclough, on the other hand, introduces 'Critical Discourse Analysis' (CDA) as the practice of discourse analysis which aims to explore the often opaque relationships of causality and determination between a) discursive practices, events and texts and b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes (Fairclough, 2003). The underlying concept is that discursive practices, events and texts are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power, and CDA sets out to explore and make these relations explicit. According to Fairclough's analytical framework, each discursive event has 3 dimensions: a) it is a spoken or written language text b) it is an instance of discourse practice involving the production and interpretation of text, and c) it is a piece of social practice. As regards the social practice dimension specifically, the focus is political, as the discursive event is analysed in relation to relations of power and domination. (Fairclough, 1993, 135; Mills, 1997; 131).

Both Foucault's and Fairclough's approaches are useful for this thesis. In this thesis, I primarily examine discourse in the Foucauldian sense, by analysing, for instance, how the instrumentalisation of art and culture, as addressed by social theories of art and culture (Zukin, 1995; Rifkin, 2000; Yúdice, 2003; Hardt, 2009), and the creative industries and cities discourses (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Leadbeater, 1999; Miller,

Govil, McMurria and Maxwell, 2001; Florida 2002; McRobbie, 2002; Garnham, 2005), take shape in the context of the Thessaloniki Biennale. However, I also consider discourse under the influence of Fairclough, by addressing the linguistic tropes and features used in the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts under analysis.

It is noteworthy that Belsey, writing from a literary theory perspective, proposes a distinction between declarative and interrogative texts based on the subject positions offered in texts. The declarative text aims to impart knowledge to the readers, by stabilising their position with a privileged narrative. Moreover, narrative leading to closure, and a hierarchy of voices are vital features of classic realism, and therefore, of the declarative text. On the other hand, the interrogative text disrupts the unity of the reader by discouraging identification with a unified subject of the enunciation. The interrogative text differs from the classic realist text in the absence of a single privileged narrative which contains and places all the others (Belsey, 1980, 75-76).

In the case of the Thessaloniki Biennale, the catalogue texts on the identity of the Thessaloniki Biennale could be regarded as declarative texts, as they exhibit certain elements of what Belsey defines as the features of a declarative text. More specifically, the narration is impersonal, ensuring distance and authority. The voice of the author – who may also be the Director of the SMCA, or the Director of the Thessaloniki Biennale, or one of the art event's curators - is presented as the single, prevalent narrative in the text, with which the reader is identified. As the reader is identified with the author as the subject of a coherent narrative, the reader is led, as in classic realism, to a closure. In the case of the catalogue texts analysed in this thesis, this closure first, renders Thessaloniki as a multicultural city, and, second, it inscribes the Thessaloniki Biennale in the post-colonial project of showing at outside Europe and challenging hierarchies and dichotomies, such as 'centre/periphery'.

Finally, going back to Foucault, discourse consists of several statements, which constitute the raw material for the analyst to study. The analyst should fix the limits of each statement, trace the correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statements are excluded. The aim is to show why the statement could not be other than it was and in what respect it is exclusive of any other. The statements' co-existence, succession, mutual functioning, reciprocal determination,

and independent or correlative transformation are of great importance in the Foucauldian model. These relations between statements should be identified and analysed even if the author is unaware of them, even if the statements do not have the same author (Foucault, 1969, 16).

Foucault's approach to discourse is useful in the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale's official written texts, because it enables me to think of them as part of a broader discourse on the city's identity. In fact, the Thessaloniki Biennale's official written texts are related to other texts by cultural organisations on a regional as well as national level, with which they share a similar discourse on the city's identity. In particular, they conceptualise the city as historical and multicultural. In order to make this connection (but also any divergence) explicit, I compared the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts to a series of texts produced mainly by the city's cultural organisations, the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, local politicians and intellectuals on the character of the city of Thessaloniki.

The cultural organisations, whose textual discourse was chosen to be addressed, included the Organisation of Cultural Capital of Europe (OCCE), which was chosen to be examined, because Thessaloniki's service as the Cultural Capital of Europe in 1997 was a milestone in the city's cultural development and activity as regards funding, large scale projects and promotion both nationally and internationally. Another reason was the fact that there are striking similarities in the way the OCCE and the Thessaloniki Biennale talk about Thessaloniki³⁴. The website texts produced by the 'Dimitria' Festival and the International Book Fair were also examined, because these organisations are considered the oldest and the largest periodic cultural events of the city, and, therefore, bear some resemblance to TB, which is also large-scale and periodic³⁵.

³⁴ Thessaloniki was announced Cultural Capital of Europe in 1997, and this was hailed as a great opportunity for the city in terms of its development, promotion and the enhancement of its image. The organisation carried an extremely large budget by Greek standards, enhanced the city's cultural infrastructure significantly by opening up various cultural venues and is considered to have offered a very rich and high quality programme of cultural events to the city for the first time. For an elaborate analysis of the events included as well as the audience attendance, see Deffner and Labrianidis (2005).

³⁵ The Dimitria Festival was first founded in 1966. It is an annual cultural festival which takes place in October and is organised and funded by the Municipality of Thessaloniki. It comprises of dance, theatre, music and visual art events and activities which involve both local as well as international artists. The festival draws its name from the Byzantine large commercial fair which took place in Thessaloniki in honour of the city's Saint, St. Demetrius. The Thessaloniki Book Fair (TBF) has been organised since 2004. It is organised by the National Book Centre (EKEBI), the Hellenic Ministry of

The website texts of the International Fair of Thessaloniki were also included, because this event has an international scope, dates from the first half of the 20th century, and has been considered very important for the city, although not purely an arts event³⁶. The website texts produced by the Municipality of Thessaloniki were also included, as the Municipality has been involved in the three versions of the Thessaloniki Biennale, providing the venues for certain projects³⁷.

Finally, the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts were compared to a series of other texts as regards how the character of the city is conceptualised: the texts produced by the 2nd and 15th Biennale of Young Artists of Europe and the Mediterranean; the press release for the *Contemporary European Art. The Art of the Balkan Countries* exhibition organised by SMCA in 2002; the press release for the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads Programme* (initiated by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2012) was also examined, as it addresses directly the identity of Thessaloniki; the texts of the Regional Operational Programmes of the 1990s; and articles by writers, academics and politicians, which are regarded as samples of regional and national discourses. This kind of comparative discursive analysis is important because it highlights that the Thessaloniki Biennale was embedded in a broader cultural and ideological milieu, with which it shared some issues and agendas while it negotiated others.

Exploring the 'alternative' potential of the Thessaloniki Biennale

The second hypothesis of this thesis is informed by the literature on the possibility that art and culture, and especially contemporary art biennials, may have alternative potential(s), as outlined in Chapter 2. The second hypothesis of this thesis is closely related to the research question which this section addresses: are there alternative potentials in the Thessaloniki Biennale, and, if so, what are they and to what extent are they realised?

Culture and Tourism, Helexpo and the Panhellenic Federation of Publishers and Booksellers. The venue which hosts TBF is the Helexpo exhibition centre, which is located in the city centre

³⁶ The International Fair of Thessaloniki was founded in 1925 and the first fair took place in 1926. It is the biggest trade fair in the country and its facilities are located in the centre of the city.

³⁷ Municipalities constitute the local level of administration within the organizational structure of the country. They maintain some independence in the administration of local affairs but are ultimately supervised by the government, while part of their funding derives from the State budget. Apart from other activities and responsibilities, municipalities also contribute to the cultural development and enhancement of the community.

The exploration of ‘alternative’ potential(s) for the Thessaloniki Biennale in this thesis focuses on two particular aspects: first, it considers whether the Thessaloniki Biennale confronted or resisted the Western, neoliberal tendency to market cultural difference in contemporary art exhibitions taking place in the so-called West. This issue is not as directly related to the official narrative of Greek governance and cultural policy. However, it is necessary to address it, because it constitutes an integral part of how this particular art event was constructed: the Thessaloniki Biennale clearly emphasised particular geographical and cultural areas outside the so-called West (in particular Africa, South America, the Middle East and the former Soviet States).

The second aspect of the art event’s ‘alternative’ potential, as understood in this thesis, involves the potential of artistic and curatorial practices put forward by the Thessaloniki Biennale to offer an alternative narrative to the profit-oriented official written texts of the art event itself as well as the narrative of Greek governance. This thesis explores whether and to what extent some of the artworks presented in the three editions of the art event challenged and undermined the official narratives indicated above, by bringing forward issues which the official texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale and the governmental discourse concealed or diluted, such as immigration.

The material which is examined in order to address the question regarding the two aspects of the Thessaloniki Biennale’s subversive potential involves selected exhibitions presented in the three editions of the art event, and artworks. These exhibitions and artworks were analysed applying the framework of semiotics, namely the concepts of syntagm, paradigm, commutation test, and binary oppositions as well as the critical concerns regarding these concepts raised by post-structuralism (Saussure, 1974; Jakobson, 1960; Barthes, 1964; 1967; Lévi- Strauss, 1958; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; 1998; Derrida, 1967a; 1967b; 1979). Moreover, their analysis follows the model of applying semiotics to the analysis of exhibitions, as exemplified in the work of Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach (1978), Stephen Bann (1984), Carol Duncan (1995), Alan Wallach (1998), and Donald Preziosi (2003). The selected exhibitions and artworks were chosen on the basis of their relevance to the art event’s subversive potential as defined above, and corresponded to relevant key points raised in the catalogue texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale.

First, in order to provide evidence that the art event is interested in presenting itself as an open and inclusive institution, which challenges the established hierarchies of the so-called West in contemporary art practices, I analyse samples from the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts. The model of discourse analysis applied is similar to the one I use when analysing the construction of the city's identity.

Moreover, as the Thessaloniki Biennale pursued an association with the framework of post-colonial critiques through its official texts, semiotics enabled me to explore in what other ways the art event established this association, for instance, through the analysis of particular artworks as well as choices such as, the geographical focus of the art event, and its choice of artists, and curators. As regards the choice of artists, in particular, I indicate the proportion of the participating artists based on their country of origin and current location. Moreover, I analyse the choice to include particular artworks and projects, their content, and the way these works were arranged in the exhibition space, in order to explore how the Thessaloniki Biennale represented art practice from outside the so-called West.

I focus on the following exhibitions:

1st Thessaloniki Biennale (2007): *Beholders of Other Places*, curated by Maria Tsantsanoglou. The artists from post-Soviet States were the largest group of participants in the 2007 edition, and they were concentrated in Tsantsanoglou's exhibition.

2nd Thessaloniki Biennale (2009): *Praxis, Art in Times of Uncertainty*, curated by Gabriela Salgado, Bisi Silva, and Syrago Tsiara. The three curators worked collaborative to produce one large exhibition which spread across multiple venues, and chose not to present a separate project each. In the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale (2009) the emphasis shifted to Africa and Latin America. The projects and artworks analysed in this thesis were presented in various venues such as Bezesteni, Old Ice Chambers (Pier 1, Port), Warehouse C (Pier 1 Port), and Warehouse 13 (Pier 1, Port).

3rd Thessaloniki Biennale (2011): *A Rock and a Hard Place*, curated by Marina Fokidis, Paolo Colombo, Mahita El Bacha Urieta. The 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale was officially

themed around the city of Thessaloniki and the Mediterranean. It shifted its focus to Greek artists, West-European artists (26 out of 85), and artists from the Middle East (13 out of 85). This thesis focuses on the representation of art practice from the Middle East, as this edition of the art event presented the largest number of participations from the Middle East in relation to the two previous editions, with a clear emphasis on the Lebanese art scene.

The alternative representations of Thessaloniki's identity are explored through the analysis of particular artworks, which I chose on the basis of the fact that they undermined the profit-oriented official written texts of the art event itself as well as the narrative of Greek governance, as examined in Chapter 4. These artworks brought forward aspects of the city ignored in the written texts, and this is the reason why I chose to address them. The artworks analysed were exhibited in all three editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale, and I group them according to common themes, such as i) addressing overlooked aspects of the city's past and present, and ii) putting the city's 'multiculturalism' into the present tense.

Chapter 3 explains the research and analysis methodology used in order to explore the two main hypotheses of this thesis: a. that the Thessaloniki Biennale assumed an instrumental role and how this instrumentalisation worked in the context of the art event, and b) whether the Thessaloniki Biennale had alternative potentials, whether and how those were fulfilled. This chapter identifies the fundamental theoretical premise which underpins this thesis, and outlines the range of different perspectives from which the Thessaloniki Biennale is addressed.

Furthermore, it expounds on and argues in favour of the benefits of an interdisciplinary methodology in the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale, with particular references to semiotics, social history of art (analysis of art institutions, museums and exhibition practices), social theory of art and culture (namely, creative industries and city development discourses), the analysis of cultural policy formulation, and discourse analysis. Finally, it presents the specific research methods employed as regards theoretical approach, data collection and analysis, and the reasons for those choices. The following chapter, Chapter 4 focuses on the exploration of the first hypothesis of this thesis concerning how the instrumental role of the Thessaloniki Biennale is realised.

Chapter 4 analyses in depth the links of the Thessaloniki Biennale to the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, as well as the ways in which the Thessaloniki Biennale embraced and negotiated the agendas of official Greek cultural policy.

Chapter 4: The Thessaloniki Biennale in the Context of Greek Governance

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters outlined the theoretical framework of this thesis, situated the methodology it applies, and introduced the two main hypotheses that this thesis explores. More specifically, Chapter 2's Literature Review explored debates over art and culture as resources for economic and social growth, as well as its 'subversive' potential, as discussed in both social theories of art and culture, and creative industries discourse. It highlighted the relevance of this discussion to contemporary art biennials, and explored the literature on the biennials' involvement with 'non-artistic' interests and agendas as well as their alternative potential(s). The review of the literature, as presented in Chapter 2, has influenced the formulation of the two main hypotheses which this thesis examines. The first is that the Thessaloniki Biennale fulfils an instrumental role linked to financial and political interests, particularly tourism and cultural diplomacy. The second hypothesis concerns the possibility that the Thessaloniki Biennale may have alternative potential, and explores to what extent and in what ways this was realised.

Literature on biennials, as reviewed in Chapter 2, has connected the biennial to an array of social and political contexts, such as neo-liberalism (Stallabrass, 2004), capitalism (Bydler, 2004) and the transition to a post-Fordist and 'immaterial' production model of the economy (Gielen, 2009; Hardt, 2009). Biennials are also often addressed as part of the experience economy of cities (Sheikh, 2009). These accounts explore biennials' links with certain economic and political models, and inscribe biennials within the context of the cities' increasing competition against one another for investment and tourism. Biennials can enhance a city's image and make it more attractive as a tourist destination (Stallabrass, 2004, 34; Sheikh, 2009, 73; Groys, 2009, 64). Although these texts draw a clear and direct line connecting biennials and city image/tourism as well as financial interests, their analysis is often brief and does not trace in detail the way a biennial represents the host city, and how it contributes to the re-invention of an identity for that particular city, which is a vital part of the process of city branding. This chapter, therefore, sets out to do such work,

and in the process will provide detailed empirical evidence in relation to the Thessaloniki Biennale.

Underpinned by work in the social history of art (Clark, 1973; 1999) and institutional critique (Alberro and Simson, 2009 6-8, 15 – 17), Chapter 4 addresses three interrelated research questions: a) what are the broader social, cultural, political and ideological practices to which the Thessaloniki Biennale can be related? b) What are the reasons that the Thessaloniki Biennale is supported by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, and has become part of its official policy? c) To what extent and in what ways did the Thessaloniki Biennale responded to interests and agendas related to official Greek cultural policy?

In order to respond to these questions, Chapter 4 analyses the Thessaloniki Biennale taking into account its context, namely the context of Greek governance and official Greek cultural policy. This context is explored by: a) identifying key features of Greek governance as regards art and culture (the highly centralised nature of the official Greek arts and culture administration; the exclusivist and elitist character of the formulation process of the official Greek cultural policy; the intensified support towards contemporary art and culture rather than ancient and Byzantine heritage), b) tracing key priorities and agendas of official Greek cultural policy, which were negotiated by the Thessaloniki Biennale, c) analysing the way in which art and culture are conceptualised in the official discourses of Greek cultural policy as well as in official European guidelines, d) tracing urban planning initiatives as regards Thessaloniki.

As I explained in Chapter 3 (Methodology), these themes are not considered as the exhaustive context of the art event; instead, they constitute a selective understanding of that context. Their choice was based on the fact that they elucidate the connections between the Thessaloniki Biennale and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, and the latter's expectations of the art event. Moreover, it has to be noted that although the Hellenic Ministry of Culture supported the Thessaloniki Biennale, it did not directly intervene in choices pertaining to appointing curators, selecting concepts, and venues (Ioannou, 2013). Therefore, although this thesis argues that the Thessaloniki Biennale should be situated within the broader context of agendas set by Greek

governance and official Greek cultural policy, it also argues that it should not be solely or exclusively identified with those agendas.

This chapter argues that the Thessaloniki Biennale could be regarded as a case in point of the concept of the expedient uses of art and culture (Yudice, 1999, 17; 2003, 9), and more specifically, as an example of how art biennials are connected with tourism and city development agendas (León 2001, 71; Stallabrass 2004, 37; Sheikh 2009, 71, 72). The expedient use of the Thessaloniki Biennale was intricately linked to the context of the economic and cultural circumstances of Greece during the 2000s. In particular, it involved trying to solidify the country's Western identity (often through unconditional compliance with EU guidelines and policies), and enhancing its image abroad; also 're-branding' Thessaloniki in order to increase its influence in the region and boost tourism. This chapter also analyses the signification process which the Thessaloniki Biennale initiated in order to 're-brand' its host city.

4.2 The Thessaloniki Biennale in relation to Greek governance and Greek cultural policy³⁸

a) Key features of Greek governance and administration as regards art and culture

Highly centralised official Greek cultural administration

This section argues that the Thessaloniki Biennale, although autonomous in choosing artists, artworks, external curators and projects, recycles certain institutional patterns of the highly centralised official Greek cultural administration. This is relevant in the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale because it helps elucidate the connection of the art event with the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, and, therefore, with official Greek cultural policy.

The official review of Greek cultural policy for the Council of Europe/ERICarts indicates that, during the 1990s and 2000s, the state remained the primary sponsor of large scale artistic and cultural projects in Greece and relied largely on European Union funds (Dallas and Magkou, 2008)³⁹. Indeed the Thessaloniki Biennale (1st to

³⁸ My use of bold in all text extracts analysed in Chapter 4.

³⁹ The Council of Europe/ ERICarts, Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe' is a web-based information and monitoring system of national cultural policies in Europe, initiated by the

5th edition) was funded by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture through the Community Support Framework III and the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF), and was allocated approximately 4,000,000 Euros (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme ‘Culture’, 2009; Intermediate Managing Authority of Central Macedonia, 2013).

Some Greek academics are critical of the intervention of Greek state in the cultural sector, and point out that the official Greek cultural administration is characterised by centralism and statism. Giorgos Andreou argues that centralism, statism and a sense of aversion towards decentralisation are deeply embedded in contemporary Greek political tradition and culture (Andreou, 2010, 14). A similar point is made by Dora Konsola, who points out that the Ministry of Culture is dominant and controlling as regards the funding and organisation of museums, other public cultural institutions and events. Local authorities, although involved in the cultural scene and activity of each region, have limited autonomy, as they are essentially dependent on the Ministries for the funding of their projects (Konsola, 2006, 86, 195).

On the other hand, the domineering role of the Ministry, as well as the over-reliance of the cultural sector on the state, is embraced by some local writers on cultural policy issues. On analysing Greek cultural policy and state intervention in the aftermath of the 2004 Olympics, Theodoros Koutsobinas outlines the Hellenic Ministry of Culture as the key player in designing and implementing the leading national programs related to museums, libraries and other infrastructure as well as the promotion of art and culture (Koutsobinas, 2007, 166). Although he is critical of certain official Greek cultural policy patterns - for instance, he points out that the Ministry of Culture often manifests inflexibility and resistance to change, and refrains from extensive collaboration with other ministries - he does not criticise the domineering role of the Greek state as regards the cultural sector *per se*. Instead, he criticises it for being restricted to promoting the country, and for not ‘creating additional benefits for the cultural sector’ (Koutsobinas, 2007, 165), and argues for a more proactive and intensified involvement (Koutsobinas, 2007, 165, 169).

Steering Committee for Culture of the Council of Europe. In the years 2000-2008, European Union funds allocated through the Operational Programme ‘Culture’ of the Community Support Framework III amount to 647, 639, 624 Euros, see Dallas and Magkou (2010, 29, 30).

The dominant role of the Greek state, namely the Ministry of Culture, in the country's cultural administration becomes evident upon examining Act 2557 (Act 2557, 1997), through which the State Museum of Contemporary Art (SMCA) - the organiser of the Thessaloniki Biennale - was established in 1997 in Thessaloniki. Act 2557 also established the Cinema Museum and the Photography Museum in Thessaloniki, both of which are state funded and controlled, and involved in the Thessaloniki Biennale (Act 2557, 1997; Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2014)⁴⁰. Act 2557 clearly states that all policies pertaining to all state museums, from their administration to their role and targets are designed by the Ministry of Culture, with the assistance of a consulting 15-member Museum Policy Committee, also established in 1997. All the members including the President and vice President of this Committee are appointed by the Ministry for the period of 3 years, with the possibility of extension (Act 2557, 1997, 9381). This raises the question whether and to what extent the priorities set by the state's official cultural policy affect the strategic aims and choices of the cultural organisations mentioned above, and especially the State Museum of Contemporary Art (SMCA) and the Thessaloniki Biennale.

It is useful to elaborate on how the State Museum of Contemporary Art is supervised and funded by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture (Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2014). The SMCA was allocated its main collection - the Costakis collection of Russian Avant-garde art - after the Greek State had bought the collection in the early 2000s. The members of the museum's board of trustees, the President, vice-President and the Director are appointed by the Minister of Culture directly (Act 2557, 1997), and the board of trustees had to include a representative of the former Ministry of Macedonia-Thrace, based in Thessaloniki (Act 2557, 1997). The Director of the Centre of Contemporary Art (CACT), an organisation affiliated to the Museum and

⁴⁰ More specifically, the Director, President and vice- President of the Museum of Photography are appointed by the Minister of Culture. Plus, the President and the Director as well as the seven-member committee managing the Cinema Museum are appointed by the Minister of Culture. One member of the committee was also appointed by the former Minister of Macedonia and Thrace, until that Ministry was dispensed with. Finally, the President and the Director of another prominent cultural institution of Thessaloniki, the International Film Festival held annually, are also appointed by the Minister of Culture. Plus, the International Film Festival has to provide the Minister with a detailed report and assessment of its projects, whenever asked (Act 2557, 1997).

actively engaged in the Thessaloniki Biennale, is also appointed directly by the Minister of Culture (Act 2557, 1997).

The highly centralised administration of arts and culture in Greece has proved a tenacious and hard to break pattern. This is problematic as it ultimately restricts access to the formulation process of Greek cultural policy, and reproduces established hierarchies and power relations. The issue was addressed by the seven-member committee responsible for writing and submitting the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy*, which was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Giannopoulos et al, 2012, 23). They recommended the establishment of an independent Council for Contemporary Culture, responsible for consulting the Ministry on matters pertaining to contemporary art and culture. The more independent model recommended resembles the 'arm's length' bodies model in UK, which allows these bodies (including major museums) to operate with greater independence from the government although still funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. According to the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy*, such a Council would also bear certain responsibilities as regards the selection process of the members of the boards of trustees of the cultural institutions which are supervised by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture (Giannopoulos et al, 2012, 21-25).

In an effort to democratise the selection process and appointment of Directors of cultural institutions, the committee also proposed that a new model should be adopted, according to which the boards of trustees should be responsible for the selection criteria and process with the aim to eventually submit a short list to the Ministry and leave the final decision to the Minister himself (Giannopoulos et al, 2012, 50-54). Although some concern in changing the centralised pattern of the official cultural administration in Greece is evident in the points presented above, this is limited. According to the proposal, the Council for Contemporary Culture should consist of 10 members appointed by the Minister. Also, as the Director of the Ministry's Department of Contemporary Culture would be an ex officio member of the Council, the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* essentially ensured the Ministry's continued dominant presence and control as regards issues of contemporary art and culture (Giannopoulos et al, 2012, 25). Perhaps, a more effective path towards democratising the official Greek cultural administration would

be to involve grassroots movements and independent artistic and cultural groups, which are active in Greece, but largely ignored when it comes to official art and culture policies.

The link between the Thessaloniki Biennale and the Ministry of Culture needs to be explored in more detail in terms of how it affected the art event. This is owing to the fact that the Thessaloniki Biennale was consistently supported by the Ministry - which was addressed as the 'organiser' of the Thessaloniki Biennale along with the State Museum of Contemporary Art in all three exhibition catalogues of the art event - as well as to the authoritative role of the Ministry in official Greek cultural administration, and the SMCA's association with the Ministry.

The connection of the Thessaloniki Biennale to the Ministry is perhaps reflected in the fact that the exhibition catalogues of all three editions are prefaced by the Minister of Culture himself - the 2007 edition was prefaced by the General Secretary of the Ministry as well, while both the Minister and the Secretary attended the official opening of the first edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale. Unsurprisingly, all these texts stress the role of the Ministry in initiating, establishing and supporting the Thessaloniki Biennale (Voulgarakis, 2007; Zachopoulos, 2007; Samaras, 2009). More specifically, in the texts by George Voulgarakis, Minister of Culture at the time of the Thessaloniki Biennale 1 (Voulgarakis, 2007), and Christos Zachopoulos, General Secretary of the Ministry (Zachopoulos, 2007), the event is projected as the Ministry's 'brainchild' in a more pronounced way in relation to the following editions. The samples presented below are relevant to this project because they testify to the close connection between the Ministry and the Thessaloniki Biennale and shed light on the fact that the Ministry regarded the event as an opportunity to advance its agendas:

The Hellenic Ministry of culture **instituted** the Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art and **appointed** its organization to the State Museum of Contemporary Art.... (Zachopoulos, 2007, 13).

By organizing the Biennale of Contemporary art, **the Hellenic Ministry of Culture intends** for Greece to obtain a contemporary visual culture and to place it in the international art scene (Zachopoulos, 2007, 13).

In these extracts, the Ministry's role in the inception and realisation of the Thessaloniki Biennale is stressed and projected as dominant and authoritative, through the choice of the active voice, and the use of the Ministry as subject to the verbs 'instituted', 'appointed' and 'intends'. The Thessaloniki Biennale's syntactical function bears passive connotations, as it is the object of the verbs, the receiving end of the Ministry's actions.

The Ministry of Culture, in the framework of the broader development and support of our country's visual creation, **has institutionalised and supported** the '1st Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art', organised by the State Museum of Contemporary Art (Voulgarakis, 2007, 11).

In Voulgarakis' text, the active action verbs 'institutionalised' and 'supported' convey a similar message. This is also the case in Antonis Samaras, Minister of Culture at the time of the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale, although in a slightly more subdued tone (Samaras, 2009, 13).

Another instance is the text by Pavlos Geroulanos, Minister of Culture at the time of the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale:

The 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art, **part of the Ministry of Culture's new initiative** 'Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads', is entitled 'Old Intersections – Make it new' and therefore ideally suited to signal this change (Geroulanos, 2011, 8).

In this extract, Geroulanos explicitly connected the Thessaloniki Biennale with the Ministry's broader cultural agenda for Thessaloniki, by highlighting the fact that the 3rd edition of the event is part of the Ministry's 'Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads' Programme.

The exclusivist character of the Greek cultural policy formulation process

In their analysis of the process of public policy formulation, Ham and Hill address the issue of the power exercised by a small number of well-organised societal interests and focus on the ability of these elites to achieve their goals. They argue that there are different kinds of elites, not just those holding political power, and they achieve their position in a number of ways, including the command of economic resources, organisational control and institutional positioning. Elite power, in fact, may be based on a variety of sources, such as the occupation of formal office, wealth, technical expertise and knowledge (Ham and Hill, 1993, 31-32). This thesis focuses on the Greek art professional elite, which consists of already well-established art professionals who may hold office in the Ministry or official state-funded organisations, such as the State Museum of Contemporary Art, and most of the museums and cultural organisations involved in the Thessaloniki Biennale, which receive funding from the Ministry for their projects and events. Ham and Hill's observations regarding elite power are useful because they enable me to pinpoint the exclusivist character of the current Greek policies, which favour the well-established art professional elites of the Greek cultural scene.

The persistence of the dominant role of the Ministry in a highly centralised cultural administration pattern, and the shift in the official attitude about culture, which is often regarded as a potential source of profit, privileges the art professional elite in Greece. The exclusive and elitist character of the formulation process of the official Greek cultural policy becomes evident if one looks at the composition of the committees which issued key reports and proposals regarding official Greek cultural policy on contemporary art. The Economic and Social Council of Greece which issued the *Culture in Greece, Financial, Artistic and Social Dimensions and Prospects* report (2007) consists mainly of high-rank representatives of trade unions and professional bodies. Although the report was dealing with contemporary art and culture, not a single artist or art/museum professional was included in the working committee⁴¹.

⁴¹ The Economic and Social Council of Greece is made up of representatives – usually high-rank members - of the Greek Confederation of Labour, the Union of the Civil Servants of Greece, the Federation of Greek Industries, the Association of Greek Banks, the Union of Ship Owners, the Union

However, the Committee appointed by Minister P. Geroulanos to compile the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* (Giannopoulos et al, 2012)⁴² consisted almost exclusively of people with experience in the arts and the cultural field. But all the members of the committee were already well-established professionals with high-ranking positions in museums, art foundations, academia or the Ministry of Culture itself. The committee for the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* worked around the basic issues of concern raised by the Ministry of Culture. They also took into consideration issues raised by the Directors of the Division of Contemporary Culture and involved in the process the museums and organisations which were supervised by the Ministry, through sending out questionnaires (Giannopoulos et al, 2012, 14-15). Nevertheless, they did not consult directly with artists, artist groups, independent curators and art professionals, rendering the making of cultural policy an exclusive process with access rendered only to high-rank officials of the Ministry and the public museums. In other words, the people who have some influence over the formulation of the Ministry's policies regarding contemporary art represent the art professional status-quo of the country. At the same time, the complete lack of participation of independent artist groups, citizen groups and grassroots movements in the process is evident.

of Greek Farmers, the Technical Chamber of Greece, the Geotechnical Chamber of Greece, the Association of Greek Contracting Companies, the National Confederation of the Hellenic Commerce, and the Medical Association of Greece. The representatives of these institutions make up the plenary session of the Economic and Social Council of Greece which approved and authorised the issuing of the report *Culture in Greece. Financial, Artistic and Social Dimensions and Prospects* (March 2007). The report was compiled by a Working Committee which was made up by Rita Zoulovits, General Secretary of the Athens Trade Association, Nikos Skorinis (General Secretary of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants), Vasilis Xenakis (Vice President of the Union of Civil Servants of Greece), Georgios Koutsibogiorgos (representative of the Greek Confederation of Labour), Nikolaos Liolios and Theodoros Schinas (Member of the Hellenic Bar Association). The aforementioned members of the Working Committee were appointed by the ESC directly. There were also a number of specialists appointed: Chara Zervanou (Lawyer), Dr Maria Kouri (Lecturer of Cultural Management in the University of Peloponese), Dr. Emmanouel Alexandrakis (Economist and Visiting Professor in the University of Athens and Crete) and Dr Christos Ladias (Economist and Scientist of Regional Development).

⁴² The team consisted of Gerasimos Giannopoulos (Lawyer, Member of the Greek Advisory Committee of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation), Kostis Dallas (Professor of Cultural Policy, Panteion University), Denis Zacharopoulos (Director of the Macedonian Museum of Modern Art, Thessaloniki), Mirsini Zorba (Political Scientist, former Director of the National Centre of Book, former Consultant to the Ministry of Culture – 1993), Zoi Kazazaki (Director of the Department of Contemporary Culture at the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism), Christos Karras (Director of the Stegi Grammatwn kai Technwn, Onassis Foundation and former Director of the V. and M. Theocharakis Foundation of Visual Arts and Music), and Nikos Tsouchlos (artist and Artistic Director of the Athens Concert Hall).

It is important to note that grassroots movements and significant ‘voices from below’ are active in Greece but are excluded from the policy making process – cultural policy included. More specifically, Greek social movements whose action became prominent from the Athens December riots in 2008 onwards, evolved into longer-term collectivities and solidarities, such as the so-called ‘movement of the piazzas’. In the summer of 2011, collectivities, independent citizen organisations, arts and culture groups as well as ordinary citizens occupied the Syntagma Square in Athens peacefully in a counter-hegemonic gesture⁴³. They rejected political parties and traditional trade unions, challenged the ideals and policies of the EU and reflected upon the possibility of implementing the processes of direct democracy and representation (Leontidou, 2012, 304, 306, 309).

The AthensArtNetwork, for example, is a bottom-up initiative directly related to the arts. It is a collective and voluntary organisation, made up of independent art groups and individual artists based in Athens (AthensArtNetwork, 2012). With often large-scale, well co-ordinated free art and culture events, as part of annual cultural programmes which run throughout the year, AthensArtNetwork often draws inspiration from the urban space and creates opportunities for the public to experience art outside official institutions (AthensArtNetwork, 2012). Through advancing alternative and often radical practices in art display, art management and the art and public contact, AthensArtNetwork constitutes a significant independent voice in the artistic scene of Athens, and the fact that they were excluded from the cultural policy-making process – from the consulting committee to P. Geroulanos, for example - was certainly a missed opportunity to connect with their knowledge and hands-on experience.

The online *Thessaloniki Cultural and Touristic Guide* mentions 16 independent citizen groups which focus on the environment, art and culture, voluntary action, biking and the overall improvement of the quality of life in Thessaloniki. It is worth noting that some of these groups often undertake support and charity work towards vulnerable groups, especially since the economic crisis hit the country (Thessaloniki City Guide, 2013). It is, also, interesting to note that although these groups are

⁴³ Syntagma is a central square in Athens, Greece, where the Greek Parliament is located.

essentially excluded from official policy making, they are used in the online city guide in order to promote the city and enhance its image. This means that they receive selective attention when their mentioning may facilitate other interests, in this case interest related to city-branding.

The elitist and exclusivist character of Greek cultural policy, as well as the interests of the Greek art professional elite, affected certain organisational aspects of the Thessaloniki Biennale, namely the process of artists' selection and curators selection; the Thessaloniki Biennale adopted a hierarchical and top-down approach as the selection of participating artists and projects was the sole responsibility of the 3 curators in charge of each edition. The exclusivist character of this approach becomes more evident when the Thessaloniki Biennale is compared to more open and participatory initiatives, such as the *Thessaloniki Allios*⁴⁴, a yearly, two-day, low-budget festival with a cultural and environmental focus, which relies heavily on voluntary action (Dodou, 2014; Thessaloniki Allios, 2014b).



4. 'Thessaloniki Allios' Festival, Old Port, Pier 1, 2011.

⁴⁴'Allios' in Greek is an adverb and means 'alternatively'. The choice to name the festival *Thessaloniki Allios* gestures towards the aim of this event to intervene in and modify aspects of the everyday life in the city to the benefit of its residents.



5. 'Thessaloniki Allios' Festival, Old Port, Pier 1, 2011.

The numerous events and actions included in the *Thessaloniki Allios* [4, 5] are free, and most of them take place in public spaces - often marginalized neighborhoods (*Parallaxi*, 2014) - and engage the viewers and passer-bys. The festival is organised by *Parallaxi*, a free cinema magazine - which first organised the *Thessaloniki Allios* in 2010 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of its publication (*Thessaloniki Allios*, 2014b). The call for participation is completely open and constant, as the *Thessaloniki Allios* website invites anyone – individual or artistic/cultural/environmental/citizen group – to register their interest in actively participating in the project, or even contribute an idea for an intervention (*Thessaloniki Allios*, 2014b). In this sense, the festival is more inclusive than the Thessaloniki Biennale, where participation is only possible through selection by the curators, and invitation.

Among its many initiatives, *Thessaloniki Allios* organises the *Made in Thessaloniki* art and design festival, which shows exclusively the work of local artists and designers, again with an open call and across various, and often unconventional spaces in the city (*Thessaloniki Allios*, 2014a). As the festival is collective and open to all participations, *Parallaxi* has more the role of a coordinator rather than of a leader. This, in combination with the inclusive character of the event, reflects a bottom-up approach to the conceptualisation, design and organisation of the event, which is in contrast to the more hierarchical and top-down Thessaloniki Biennale. Moreover, with its environmental focus, its often participatory projects, and the active involvement of public spaces, the *Thessaloniki Alliose* project was more

oriented towards the city's citizens in contrast to the Thessaloniki Biennale, which promoted a more fixed image of the city with an emphasis on its monuments and its histories.

Emphasis on contemporary art and culture rather than ancient and Byzantine heritage

The decision to establish a state-funded, contemporary-art biennial in Thessaloniki is consistent with a significant broader shift that has been observed in Greek cultural policy since the late 1990s, which includes wider support towards contemporary culture on the whole. More specifically, for the most part of the 20th century, official Greek cultural policy was mainly concerned with classical and Byzantine heritage, giving much less attention and support to contemporary artistic production. For instance, the Act 4823/1930 regulating the construction, repair and maintenance of archaeological museums was passed as early as 1930, with a supplementary legislation passed in 1939, (Act 1620/1939). Also, the department (Ephorate) responsible for Byzantine monuments (Ephorate) was established as early as 1938 (Chastaoglou, 2006, 192). On the other hand, the department (Ephorate) for Recent Monuments was established just in 1979 (Chastaoglou, 2006, 192), and museums of contemporary art were founded in Greece for the first time only in 1997 (Act 2557/1997).

However, since the mid-1990s contemporary art and culture has increasingly attracted attention from the part of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. As already noted, the operational programme *Culture*, initiated and funded by the 2nd (1994-1999) and the 3rd CSF (2000-2006), consisted of two distinct central axes, contemporary art and culture, and heritage. The shift of the Ministry's interest towards contemporary art was also evident in its decision to establish the Department of General Administration in 2003, as part of the Ministry, with a sub-division exclusively devoted to the visual arts and museums. The 2012 *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* also focused almost exclusively on contemporary art and not historical heritage (Giannopoulos et al, 2012). Finally, a string of subsidies to several contemporary art and culture events and initiatives - such as The Institute of Contemporary Greek Art, the Video Art Festival Tour, the 3rd Athens Biennial, to mention but a few - also attests to the ignited interest from the part of the Ministry

towards contemporary art. The Thessaloniki Biennale, with its emphasis on contemporary art, can be situated in this context.

The state-support which certain contemporary art initiatives have enjoyed is closely linked with the Ministry's official discourse, as examined below, namely the issue that it has been emphasising culture as resource for economic development and tourism. More specifically, overcoming the over-reliance on the country's historical heritage and projecting an 'edgy', contemporary profile is positioned as potentially a mechanism to boost the country as an interesting tourist destination, and, thus, serves to increase tourism revenue. The fact that culture and tourism are firmly interconnected in the rationale of official Greek cultural policy is manifest in the merge of the Ministry of Culture with the Ministry of Tourism in 2009 (Presidential Decree, A 213/2009)⁴⁵. Yúdice's analysis of the expedient uses of culture for financial agendas (Yúdice, 2003) as well as Zukin's critical analysis of how contemporary cultural activity is used in marketing and city-image enhancing strategies (Zukin, 1995) are relevant to the Greek state's profit-oriented approach towards art and culture, and help elucidate the interests involved in the decision to support the Thessaloniki Biennale. As the Thessaloniki Biennale focuses on contemporary art, it fits very well into the broader pro-contemporary art scheme initiated by the Ministry, and this is why it has secured ongoing funding even at times of extreme financial hardship for the country.

b) How art and culture are conceptualised in official Greek and EU cultural policy documents during the 2000s

The ways art and culture are conceptualised in the documents of official Greek cultural policy roughly around the time when the Thessaloniki Biennale took place is the second aspect of the art event's context, as prioritised by this thesis. My analysis shows how, at the time when the three editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale took place, the official documents of Greek cultural policy addressed culture as a resource for economic and social development. This was also the case with the official EU guidelines on culture, as laid out in key official EU documents from the same period.

⁴⁵ In 2012, the Ministry of Culture was once again merged with other ministries to form the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports. Finally, in 2013, the Ministry was renamed yet another time as Ministry of Culture and Sports.

The fact that culture, especially contemporary art and culture, was addressed as a resource for ‘non-artistic’ purposes in both the official Greek and EU discourse is linked to the broader discussion on creative cities and industries, and the expectation from culture to increase revenue (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Leadbeater 1999; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999; Florida, 2002; Landry, 2006). It could also be considered as a typical case of the instrumentalisation of culture which Yúdice and Zukin describe (Yúdice, 1999; 2003; Zukin, 1995).

The comparison between the EU and the Greek official discourse on culture reveals that the official Greek cultural policy embraced the EU discourse - to a great extent, uncritically - partly in order to promote Greece abroad and boost tourism, and partly in order to assert the country’s European identity. My argument is that both the broader shift of interest from the part of the Greek state towards contemporary art and culture identified earlier as well as the decision to establish and fund the Thessaloniki Biennale were facilitated by the way art and culture have been conceptualised as resources for economic and social development in official Greek cultural policy and EU guidelines.

Key official documents which reflect the way in which art and culture are defined by official Greek cultural policy include the report compiled on the Operational Programme *Culture 2000* (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme ‘Culture’, 2007), the *Culture in Greece, Financial, Artistic and Social Dimensions and Prospects* report (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007)⁴⁶, and the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* (Giannopoulos et al, 2012).

These three documents are part of a relatively recent tradition whereby culture has been considered as an engine for economic growth in official Greek cultural policy since the 1990s. In the 2nd Community Support Framework (CSF) (1994-1999), culture was explicitly linked to tourism, and the enhancement and competitiveness of the Greek tourist product through its association with culture, and the development of

⁴⁶ The Economic and Social Council of Greece was first established in 1994, based on the model of the Economic and Social Councils of the EU. It is a tripartite division of the interests represented. It is responsible for issuing reports / opinions which are subsequently submitted to the European Parliament and the European Council. In 2001, the Economic and Social Council of Greece became a constitutionally recognised institution of the Greek state (Polyzogopoulos, 2009).

cultural tourism were set as key strategic targets (Konsola, 2006, 182). The 3rd CSF (2000-2006) continued working on roughly the same guidelines as the 2nd regarding culture's potential for economic growth (Konsola, 2006, 182). Finally, in the *Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe* produced for the Council of Europe 'the more effective financial planning and exploitation of cultural heritage assets through traditional channels and digital technologies' were set as a main priority of Greek cultural policy (Dallas, 2007). This Compendium advocates in favour of the adoption of private market methodologies and approaches to package and promote elements of the Greek arts and heritage in order to create revenue (Dallas, 2007).

The report on the Operational Programme *Culture 2000-2006* outlines how improving and reinforcing the tourist product as well as strengthening the financial activity through cultural infrastructure and activity was a clear objective of the operational programme in its initial stage (1994-1999):

The Operational programme 'Culture' of the 2nd CSF...aimed at the improvement and the reinforcement of the tourist product, as well as boosting economic activity through utilising, upgrading and rationally managing the cultural infrastructure and activity (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme 'Culture', 2007, 12)⁴⁷.

Culture 2000-2006 followed in those steps and advocated for new museums on the grounds of their assumed potential to contribute to the economic development of a region and the creation of employment opportunities. Needless to say, museums were explicitly linked to the objectives of the development strategy:

Museums can contribute to the financial and broader wellbeing of a region, to the development of the regions and their connection with metropolitan

⁴⁷ The samples of the Culture 2000-2006 text analysed here were translated by the researcher. The original text in Greek: 'Το Επιχειρησιακό Υποπρόγραμμα «Πολιτισμός» του Β' Κ.Π.Σ., είχε προγραμματικούς περιορισμούς δεδομένου ότι στόχευε κυρίως στην βελτίωση και ενίσχυση του τουριστικού προϊόντος και στην τόνωση της οικονομικής δραστηριότητας μέσω της αξιοποίησης, αναβάθμισης και ορθολογικής διαχείρισης των πολιτιστικών υποδομών και δραστηριοτήτων' (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme 'Culture', 2007, 12).

centres, to combating social exclusion and boosting employment...
(Managing Authority of the Operational Programme 'Culture', 2007, 8)⁴⁸.

This measure will contribute to hitting the targets of the tourism policy:

-The increase of visitor numbers and the average of stays, through the boost of the specialist interest tourist market (cultural tourism, educational programmes etc)and in combination with significant events, such as the Cultural Olympics and the Olympic Games.

- Increase of the number of wealthier tourists.

- Lengthening of the tourist period (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme 'Culture', 2007, 13)⁴⁹.

Contemporary art and culture is here addressed as a resource, a tool for the country's economic growth. This is evident in the fact that *Culture 2000-2006* included the *Development of Contemporary Culture* as its second central axis and presented the investment in culture made by other European countries (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme 'Culture', 2007, 41). Contemporary culture is closely linked to the concept of innovation and development in the discourse articulated by *Culture 2000-2006*:

The contribution of Contemporary Culture in the Development of Innovation is particularly important, as Contemporary Culture is original

⁴⁸ The original text in Greek: 'Παράλληλα, τα Μουσεία μπορούν να συνδράμουν στην οικονομική και γενικότερη ευημερία μιας περιοχής, στην ανάπτυξη των Περιφερειών και στη διασύνδεση τους με τα Μητροπολιτικά Κέντρα, στην άρση του κοινωνικού αποκλεισμού και στην τόνωση της απασχόλησης τόσο άμεσα, όσο και έμμεσα, με την ανάπτυξη και διάθεση του Πολιτιστικού Προϊόντος' (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme 'Culture', 2007, 8).

⁴⁹ The original text in Greek: 'Συνεπώς, το Μέτρο θα συμβάλει στην επίτευξη των παρακάτω στόχων της τουριστικής πολιτικής:

- Αύξηση του αριθμού των επισκεπτών και του μέσου αριθμού διανυκτερεύσεων, με την τόνωση της τουριστικής αγοράς ειδικών ενδιαφερόντων (πολιτιστικός τουρισμός, εκπαιδευτικά προγράμματα, κλπ) και σε συνδυασμό με σημαντικές διοργανώσεις, όπως είναι η Πολιτιστική Ολυμπιάδα και οι Ολυμπιακοί Αγώνες.
- Αύξηση του αριθμού των τουριστών υψηλότερης εισοδηματικής τάξης.
- Επιμήκυνση της τουριστικής περιόδου' (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme 'Culture', 2007, 21).

creation (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme ‘Culture’, 2007, 44)⁵⁰.

Moreover, contemporary culture is addressed as a dynamic field of the Greek economy with a great potential as regards creating added value and income:

Relating economic growth with the economy of leisure time is central in Contemporary Culture, which makes up a comparatively dynamic field of the Greek economy... The contribution of Contemporary Culture products to creating added value and income may prove particularly significant in the future (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme ‘Culture’, 2007, 46)⁵¹.

The *Culture in Greece: Financial, Artistic and Social Dimensions and Prospects*, Report (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007) is the second official document which is analysed in this thesis, because it provides evidence as regards how art and culture were conceptualised by official Greek cultural policy at the time when the Ministry decided to support the Thessaloniki Biennale. In its report, the Economic and Social Council of Greece (ESCG) sees multiple potential in culture, namely the potential for social cohesion, sustainable development and employment. The potential contribution of culture to economic growth is addressed in several instances throughout the report:

In a country like Greece, with heritage of particular historical significance, there is **the potential for culture to contribute to development** (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 8)⁵².

⁵⁰ The original text in Greek: ‘Μέσα σε αυτό το πλαίσιο η συμβολή του Σύγχρονου Πολιτισμού στην Ανάπτυξη της Καινοτομίας είναι ιδιαίτερα σημαντική, καθώς ο Σύγχρονος Πολιτισμός αποτελεί πρωτότυπη δημιουργία’ (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme ‘Culture’, 2007, 44)

⁵¹ The original text in Greek: ‘Η συσχέτιση της οικονομικής ανάπτυξης με την οικονομία του ελεύθερου χρόνου έχει ιδιαίτερη σημασία στο Σύγχρονο Πολιτισμό, ο οποίος αποτελεί ένα συγκριτικά δυναμικό κλάδο της ελληνικής οικονομίας... Η συμβολή των προϊόντων του Σύγχρονου Πολιτισμού στη δημιουργία ζήτησης προστιθέμενης αξίας και εισοδημάτων μπορεί να αποδειχθεί ιδιαίτερα σημαντική στο μέλλον’ (Managing Authority of the Operational Programme ‘Culture’, 2007, 46).

⁵² The original text in Greek: ‘Σε μία χώρα, όπως η Ελλάδα, με πολιτιστική κληρονομιά με ιδιαίτερη ιστορική σημασία, υπάρχουν επομένως δυνατότητες για μία αναπτυξιακή συμβολή του πολιτισμού’ (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 8).

The **current challenge to render Greek culture a vital mechanism of social and financial progress**, involves, according to ESCG, two distinct but equally important aspects: on the one hand, Greek regions, and on the other, the Balkan region, where Greece has the potential to contribute, as a pioneer, to developing international collaborations and cultural dialogue (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 9)⁵³.

A separate chapter deals with the economic dimension of culture, in which culture and tourism are explicitly connected:

The establishment, for example, of a cultural conference centre in a particular region in combination with developing various supplementary entrepreneurial ventures **could boost, among other things, conference tourism and cultural tourism** (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 2007, 8)⁵⁴.

ESCG also recommends that in order to take advantage of the full potential of culture as regards economic development, contemporary art and culture should also be promoted alongside the country's historical heritage, so a clear stress is put on the support of contemporary art:

...the ESCG points out the need for **the complete utilization** not only of Greece's rich cultural stock, but also **of the country's contemporary cultural creation** (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 37)⁵⁵.

⁵³ The original text in Greek: '...οι παρούσες προκλήσεις για την ανάδειξη του ελληνικού πολιτισμού σε βασικό μηχανισμό κοινωνικής και οικονομικής προόδου αφορούν, κατά την Ο.Κ.Ε., δυο διακριτά αλλά εξίσου σημαντικά επίπεδα: αφενός το τοπικό επίπεδο της ελληνικής περιφέρειας και, αφετέρου, το επίπεδο της βαλκανικής περιφέρειας, όπου η Ελλάδα έχει τη δυνατότητα να συμβάλλει ως πρωτοπόρος χώρα στην ανάπτυξη διεθνών συνεργασιών και πολιτιστικού διαλόγου' (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 9).

⁵⁴ The original text in Greek: 'Η ίδρυση, για παράδειγμα, ενός πολιτιστικού συνεδριακού κέντρου σε μία συγκεκριμένη περιοχή σε συνδυασμό με την ανάπτυξη διαφόρων επιχειρηματικών συμπληρωματικών δραστηριοτήτων μπορεί αν ενισχύσει, μεταξύ άλλων, το συνεδριακό τουρισμό ή τον τουρισμό των φίλομαθών' (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 8).

⁵⁵ The original text in Greek: '...η Ο.Κ.Ε. επισημαίνει την ανάγκη για την πλήρη αξιοποίηση τόσο του πλούσιου πολιτιστικού αποθέματος, όσο και της σύγχρονης πολιτιστικής δημιουργίας της χώρας μας' (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 37)

Finally, as with the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* (Giannopoulos et al, 2012), the ESCG report stresses the importance of promoting contemporary Greek culture abroad in order for the latter to fulfil its potential for economic development:

A vital parameter for the emergence of the positive effects of culture on the society and the economy is ...**the promotion of contemporary Greek production** within the country as well as abroad...(Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 37)⁵⁶.

It is important to note that the ESCG report links culture with technological innovation, and uses accounting/financial terms to talk about culture and heritage:

...ESCG would like to stress **the particular contribution which technological innovation could have as regards the field of culture**...the utilisation of technological evolution can prove a key tool in the management, and therefore, **the positive logistical balance of both the country's cultural heritage and its contemporary cultural creation** (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 7)⁵⁷.

Clearly, then, these policy documents address culture, especially contemporary art and culture, as resource both for economic benefits as well as for promoting Greece abroad. In this sense, they reflect the expedient approach to culture adopted by official Greek cultural policy.

This was also the case with the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* (Giannopoulos, 2012), which aimed to address the lack of a coherent and consistent cultural policy strategy from the part of the Ministry (Giannopoulos et al, 2012, 7). As was the case

⁵⁶ The original text in Greek: 'Βασικές συνιστώσες για την ανάδειξη των θετικών επιπτώσεων του πολιτισμού στην κοινωνία και την οικονομία, αποτελούν: Η ... προαγωγή της καλλιτεχνικής δημιουργίας, με στόχο, αφενός, την ενίσχυση των καλλιτεχνών και, αφετέρου, **την προώθηση και την προβολή της σύγχρονης ελληνικής παραγωγής στη χώρα μας και στο εξωτερικό...**' (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 37).

⁵⁷ The original text in Greek: '...η Ο.Κ.Ε., ως βασική παρατήρηση, επιθυμεί να υπογραμμίσει την ιδιαίτερη συμβολή που μπορεί να αναπτύξει στο πεδίο του πολιτισμού η τεχνολογική καινοτομία...η αξιοποίηση της τεχνολογικής εξέλιξης μπορεί να αποδειχθεί κεντρικό εργαλείο για τη διαχείριση και, κατ' επέκταση, για το θετικό λογιστικό ισοζύγιο τόσο της πολιτιστικής κληρονομιάς, όσο και της σύγχρονης πολιτιστικής δημιουργίας' (Economic and Social Council of Greece, 2007, 37).

with the ESCG Report, the *Proposal* too addressed culture as an engine for economic growth and a means for the promotion of Greece abroad:

The vision of the cultural policy by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism is to put the country's cultural resources into good use...and **increase the contribution of cultural production to the overall financial and social development of the country**, and for the country, **its institutions and creators to become part of the global cultural map** (Giannopoulos et al, 2012, 16)⁵⁸.

The same attitude pervaded the press release announcing the *Proposal*:

It is clear that for a country like Greece, culture can be, on the one hand, a means for international influence, on the other, **a source for wealth and an engine for economic growth** (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012, 2)⁵⁹.

The promotion of the cultural production of Greece abroad, in particular, was one of the key axes the Ministry asked the committee to work around for the New Cultural Policy proposal (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012, 5). This indicates that projecting a positive image for the country was a significant priority on the Ministry's agenda. In order to further explore this issue, the Ministry asked the committee responsible for compiling the proposal to focus on ways in which Greek cultural organisations could participate in European and international cultural networks (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012, 6)⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ The original text in Greek: 'Το όραμα της πολιτιστικής πολιτικής του ΥΠΠΟΤ είναι η αξιοποίηση των πολιτιστικών πόρων της χώρας, ... η αύξηση της συμμετοχής της πολιτιστικής παραγωγής στη συνολική οικονομική και κοινωνική ανάπτυξη της χώρας, και η ένταξη της χώρας, των θεσμών και των δημιουργών της στον παγκόσμιο πολιτιστικό χάρτη' (Giannopoulos et al, 2012, 16).

⁵⁹ The original text in Greek: 'Γιατί είναι σαφές ότι ο Πολιτισμός για μια χώρα σαν την Ελλάδα μπορεί αφενός να είναι μέσο διεθνούς επιρροής, αφετέρου πηγή πλούτου και μοχλός οικονομικής ανάπτυξης' (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012, 2).

⁶⁰ The original text in Greek: 'Τέλος, σε ό,τι αφορά την προώθηση και προβολή στο εξωτερικό, ζητήσαμε απ' την επιτροπή να προτείνει τρόπους για την ενίσχυση της συμμετοχής των ελληνικών πολιτιστικών φορέων σε ευρωπαϊκά και διεθνή δίκτυα, αλλά και την ενίσχυση της κινητικότητας των Ελλήνων καλλιτεχνών εκτός συνόρων' (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012, 6).

Following this lead, the committee suggested that Greek cultural institutions should create what the proposal text calls ‘platforms of contemporary culture’ (Giannopoulos et al, 2012, 13). The international profile of the Thessaloniki Biennale, strengthened through its involvement with international curators and artists as well as biennials such as the Istanbul Biennial and the Lyon Biennial, fits into the Ministry’s aspiration to promote the country’s cultural activity as well as raise international awareness regarding Greece’s contemporary cultural potential.

It is useful to compare the Greek documents examined above with official EU documents in order to indicate another dimension of the governance context, as they show an affinity in conceptualising culture as an engine for economic growth, and consequently this is what I will outline in the following paragraphs. Four key official documents issued by the EU are discussed: the *Lisbon Strategy* (3/3/2000), the *Commission Communication on A European Agenda for Culture* (10/5/2007), the *Council Conclusions on Culture As A Catalyst for Creativity and Innovation* (12/5/2009), and the *Council Conclusions on the Contribution of the Cultural and Creative Sectors to the Achievement of the Lisbon Objectives* (24-25/5/ 2007). With the exception of the *Lisbon Strategy*, these documents coincided with the first two editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale. They associate culture with the concepts of creativity and innovation, and consider it as a tool to generate employment. They also explicitly state that culture has the potential to enhance a city’s/region’s attractiveness as regards tourism and investments and revitalise declined cities’ economies.

The *Lisbon Strategy*, the action and development plan for the European Union from 2000 to 2010, clearly states the European Union’s desire to make a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy. This was thought to be the means to strengthen the European Union’s position in financial, social and political terms in relation to intense global competition. The Lisbon Strategy’s explicit aim was to enable the European Union to become:

...the **most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world** capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better

jobs and greater social cohesion (European Parliament, 2000, paragraph 6).

In the *Lisbon European Council of 3 March 2000* text, emphasis was put on IT, SMEs and the concept of innovation (European Parliament, 2000, paragraph 5). Member States were urged to support competitiveness and innovation and implement favourable policies as regards the information society (European Parliament, 2000, paragraph 5). The concept of the knowledge-based economy was, thus, closely associated with digitalisation and the reinforcement of the IT industries:

An information society for all: **The shift to a digital, knowledge-based economy**, prompted by new goods and services, **will be a powerful engine for growth, competitiveness and jobs**. In addition, it will be capable of improving citizens' quality of life and the environment (European Parliament, 2000, paragraph 8).

The subsequent documents issued by the Council of Europe and the Commission examined here address culture as a tool in achieving the targets set by the Lisbon Strategy. They associate culture with the concept of creativity and innovation, insist on culture's potential for economic growth and put great emphasis on cultural and creative industries. More specifically, the *Communication on A European Agenda for Culture in A Globalizing World* set the promotion and use of culture as a tool for growth and employment, as one of its three strategic objectives (Commission of the European Communities, 2007, 3) and considered culture into a key tool in the broader effort for growth and influence:

Culture is **an indispensable feature to achieve the EU's strategic objectives of prosperity, solidarity and security**, while ensuring a stronger presence on the international scene (Commission of the European Communities, 2007, 3).

Cultural industries and the creative sector are substantially contributing to European GDP, growth and employment. As an illustration, a recent independent study carried out for the Commission

estimated that **more than 5 million people worked in 2004 for the cultural sector**, equivalent to 3.1% of total employed population in EU-25. **The cultural sector contributed around 2.6% to the EU GDP in 2003**, with growth significantly higher than that of the economy in general between 1999 and 2003 (Commission of the European Communities, 2007, 9).

The extracts above address culture as an asset in a post-industrial, immaterial economy and emphasise the contribution which the cultural and the creative industries make to European GDP, growth and employment. In this respect, they exclaim culture's role as regards financial development.

The *Council Conclusions on Culture as a Catalyst for Creativity and Innovation* (2009), which essentially repeated much of what was stated in the *Council Conclusions on the Contribution of the Cultural and Creative Sectors to the Achievement of the Lisbon Objectives*' (Council of the European Union, 2007a), explicitly associated culture with the enhancement of a city's/region's attractiveness as regards tourism, and investments, as well as with revitalising declined cities' economies:

Culture and creativity are driving forces for the development of European regions and cities, as **they enhance local attractiveness** and **help revitalise local economies** (Council of the European Union, 2009, 3-4).

Another significant point in the way the official EU discourse addresses culture is the fact that it connects culture with the concepts of innovation and creativity:

Culture and creativity are inextricably linked... Culture, creativity and innovation are vital for the **competitiveness and development of our economies and our societies**... (Council of the European Union, 2009, 3).

The extracts above encourage a utilitarian conceptualisation of art and culture, and in particular, attest to what Garnham identified as the association of cultural policy with the information society argument (Garnham, 2005). This approach is controversial as it implies that claims on public funding should be justified not in terms of arts policy but in terms of information society policy (Garnham, 2005, 27-18). It is also problematic because it may result in a conflation of art and culture with financial and other 'non-artistic agendas, and, thus, lead to the complete incorporation of art and culture into the processes of the dominant production model, annihilating any potential for resistance or critical reflection.

Finally, it is interesting to look at the recommendations made towards the Member States as regards their cultural policies. Encouragement and support towards cultural industries is dictated very clearly. More specifically, the Member States are invited to:

...foster the **potential of cultural policies to promote creativity**, in particular **through the promotion of cultural diversity** and intercultural dialogue, access to and participation in culture, **the mobility of artists and other professionals in the cultural field and works of art**, the protection of cultural works and of creators, as well as the development of cultural and creative industries, especially by facilitating their access to financing and creating an appropriate **business** environment... (Council of the European Union, 2009, 5).

The analysis of European and Greek documents above indicates that Greek cultural policy embraced - to an extent, uncritically - the European rhetoric on culture and development, and clearly addressed culture as an engine for economic growth. It should also be noted that neither the European nor the Greek guidelines addressed issues of exclusion and discrimination in cultural and creative-industries employment (McRobbie, 2002; Pratt, 2011); nor did they take into consideration a more nuanced and complex conceptualisation of creativity as 'embedded and situated' rather than 'universal' (Pratt, 2011) or the criticisms of conventional understandings of consumption and ownership ideals (Miller, Govil, McMurria and Maxwell, 2001, 202-210).

The Ministry's decision to fund the Thessaloniki Biennale was in line with these guidelines, namely the 'mobility of artists and other professionals in the cultural field and works of art' (Council of the European Union, 2009, 5). The approval of the European Cultural Agenda in 2007 by Greece coincided with the establishment of the state-funded Thessaloniki Biennale, and the workshops and the artists' residencies programmes organised by the Thessaloniki Biennale were consistent with the EU guidelines.

Moreover, the Council urged the Member States to establish and strengthen synergies between culture and education, encouraging art education and facilitate wider participation in cultural activities (Council of the European Union, 2007b, 2). These priorities were also incorporated in the Thessaloniki Biennale's intense educational programmes and their visits to schools. Finally, the Council encouraged collaboration and networking between the various agents in the cultural sector. In particular, it invited the Member States to reinforce synergies between public authorities (ministries or other relevant authorities) and regional and local entities (Council of the European Union, 2009, 6-7). The Thessaloniki Biennale applied these guidelines by bringing together most of the city's cultural organisations. The European Council's recommendation regarding collaboration and networking were reflected in the *Proposal for a New Cultural Policy* too, as the latter explicitly encouraged participation in collaborations, networks, and 'platforms for contemporary culture' (Giannopoulos et al, 2012, 13).

c) Key initiatives of the official Greek cultural policy as regards tourism and cultural diplomacy

The third aspect of the Thessaloniki Biennale's context which this thesis explores involves the key initiatives of official Greek cultural policy, namely in relation to tourism, and cultural diplomacy. It is useful to examine those agendas in order first to explain the Ministry's decision to support the Thessaloniki Biennale, and, then, to explore in what ways the Thessaloniki Biennale negotiated the complex network of interests and expectations from the part of its main sponsor, and thus, trace its instrumental role. In this sense, the analysis of the key priorities of official Greek

cultural policy, as identified above, can make an important contribution to the study and understanding of the Thessaloniki Biennale.



In order to understand the agendas the Thessaloniki Biennale was expected to fulfil, it is considered helpful to review the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* programme [6] initiated by the

Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2011 (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010b). This is because the art event was closely linked to this programme, since the 3rd edition as well as the two consecutive editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale (the 2013 and 2015 editions) were placed under and were funded as part of the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* programme (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011a). Two key documents are useful to analyse here: the *Announcement of the Competition for the 'Thessaloniki: Cultural crossroads' Logo* press release (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010a), and the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* press release (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010b). Both texts express the Ministry's desire to boost tourism in the region of Thessaloniki, as well as increase its influence by projecting the city as a cultural metropolis in South-East Europe.

On mapping out the benefits for the city, the *Announcement of the Competition for the 'Thessaloniki: Cultural crossroads' Logo* press release (2010) highlights that tourism and cultural diplomacy agendas are interwoven. The text states that the programme's potential benefits for the city include:

- Highlighting the **inextricable link between tourism, culture and sports.**

- Highlighting the potential of **cultural diplomacy** (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010a)⁶¹.

The text, thus, stresses the importance of the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* programme as a means to approach new tourist target groups, reinforce the connection between culture and tourism, and make good use of the potential cultural diplomacy bears. In this extract, not only are the main objectives of the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* programme laid bare but it is also assumed that tourism and culture are closely connected, and that one cannot do without the other. This obviously indicates that the assumption underpinning the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* programme is that culture can be used as a means to increase tourism, which, as the previous section showed, constitutes one of the key themes of official Greek cultural policy in general. Moreover, the extract openly raises the issue of the expectations regarding cultural diplomacy, and thus, foregrounds a less frequently mentioned priority of the cultural activity initiated by the Greek Ministry of Culture.

As regards tourism, the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* press release mentions:

Through those actions, **the extrovert character of the city** will be strengthened and, at the same time, **Northern Greece will become a particularly attractive tourist destination, attracting new visitors and prolonging the tourist season** (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010b)⁶².

It is clearly stated that the aim of the programme is to make Northern Greece a popular tourist destination. This is also true in the case of the *Announcement of the Competition for the 'Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads' Logo* press release, which

⁶¹ The original text in Greek: 'Τα οφέλη για την πόλη από τον συντονισμό των δράσεων είναι πολλαπλά: Άνοιγμα σε νέα target group, ανάδειξη της άρρηκτης σχέσης του τουρισμού με τον πολιτισμό και τον αθλητισμό, ανάδειξη της δυναμικής της πολιτιστικής διπλωματίας' (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010a).

⁶² The original text in Greek: 'Μέσω των δράσεων αυτών θα ενισχυθεί η εξωστρέφεια της πόλης και θα καταστεί παράλληλα η Βόρειος Ελλάδα ιδιαίτερα ελκυστικός τουριστικός προορισμός προσελκύνοντας νέους επισκέπτες και επιμηκύνοντας την τουριστική περίοδο' (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010b).

sets tourism at the top of the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* agenda (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010a)⁶³.

The *Announcement of the Competition for the 'Thessaloniki: Cultural crossroads' Logo* also mentions:

The aim of the 'Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads' programme is to mark **out Thessaloniki as a cultural metropolis in South East Europe** and the broader area of the Mediterranean, **giving the city the chance to play the leading role again in the cultural activity of the broader region** (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010a)⁶⁴.

This clearly indicates that the programme aimed at projecting the city as a cultural metropolis in the Balkan area, South East Europe and the Mediterranean. It is important to note the use of 'again' and 'regain' which imply that Thessaloniki was a cultural metropolis in the Balkan and South East Europe area in the past, then lost that position, but is now regaining its leading status. The same is true in the case of the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* press release as well, which stresses the potential of Thessaloniki as an arts and culture centre and links it to its geographical position, which frames the city as a meeting point of cultures (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010b)⁶⁵.

⁶³ 'Parallel aims of this initiative are for the city **to regain its position as a prime tourist destination in the Balkans** and, at the same time, to host and co-ordinate cultural exchanges and activities... *With this initiative, we aim at creating the right circumstances for visitors from Greece, Europe and the rest of the world to increase*' (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010a). The original text in Greek: 'Παράλληλοι στόχοι της πρωτοβουλίας είναι να ξαναβρεί η πόλη τη θέση της στα Βαλκάνια ως πρωτεύων τουριστικός προορισμός, ενώ ταυτόχρονα να φιλοξενήσει και συντονίσει πολιτιστικές ανταλλαγές και δράσεις... Με την πρωτοβουλία αυτή φιλοδοξούμε να δημιουργήσουμε τις κατάλληλες συνθήκες για να αυξηθούν οι επισκέπτες από την Ελλάδα, την Ευρώπη και τον υπόλοιπο κόσμο'.

⁶⁴ The original text in Greek: 'Σκοπός της πρωτοβουλίας «Σταυροδρόμι Πολιτισμών» είναι να αναδείξει τη Θεσσαλονίκη ως πολιτιστική μητρόπολη της Νοτιοανατολικής Ευρώπης και της ευρύτερης περιοχής της Μεσογείου, δίνοντάς της την ευκαιρία να πρωταγωνιστήσει ξανά στα καλλιτεχνικά τεκταινόμενα της ευρύτερης περιοχής' (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010a).

⁶⁵ 'The aim is to...promote worldwide the identity of Thessaloniki, which is the **cultural 'generator'** of Greece, as well as the **city's significant position as the crossroads of cultures in the broader region of South-East Europe**' (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2010b). The extract in Greek: 'Στόχος είναι...να προβληθεί παγκοσμίως η ταυτότητα της Θεσσαλονίκης που είναι το πολιτιστικό «δυναμό» της Ελλάδας και η καθοριστική της θέση ως σταυροδρόμι πολιτισμών στην ευρύτερη Νοτιοανατολική Ευρώπη'.

The historical continuity established as regards the leading role of Thessaloniki in the area legitimises the claim that the city is or should become a metropolitan centre in the present. As a major, large-scale cultural event with an international focus, the Thessaloniki Biennale was deemed an effective tool to advance this city-branding agenda, and was expected to act upon it, as its inclusion in the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* programme indicates. This thesis will show how the art event responded to this agenda with a signifying process which branded Thessaloniki as historical and multicultural, as well as a centre of contemporary art.

Cultural Diplomacy, The Greek Context⁶⁶.

As cultural diplomacy was a key issue in the agenda of the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* programme, it is necessary to explore the connections of the art event itself with the agendas of Greek cultural diplomacy. The following paragraphs trace the key priorities and concerns of Greek cultural diplomacy, and relate the State Museum of Contemporary Art and the Thessaloniki Biennale to them.

Given the lack of an official document on Greek cultural diplomacy publicly available as well as a lack of explicitly relevant material on the website of the Ministry of Culture, the key areas of concern regarding Greek cultural diplomacy are traced from the mission statements of the Hellenic Foundation for Culture and the European Cultural Centre of Delphi, as well as from material drawn from the website of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In the Greek context, issues related to cultural diplomacy are officially under the jurisdiction of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture as well as the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008). Two organisations are

⁶⁶ Cultural diplomacy is understood here through the concept of ‘soft power’ as defined by Joseph Nye’s (2004). Nye distinguishes between hard and soft power: soft power involves co-optation rather than command or coercion, and relies on the attractiveness of one’s intangible assets, such as personality, values and culture (Nye, 2004). Kirsten Bound, Rachel Briggs, John Holden and Samuel Jones argue that culture has a vital role to play in international relations, and that it is an important part - although autonomous - of public diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy can be thought of as a ‘soft’ facet of international relations, rather than the ‘hard’ stuff of laws and treaties, multilateral organisations and military capability (Bound, Briggs, Holden and Jones, 2007, 12-15). According to Signitzer (2008), the goal of cultural diplomacy is to produce positive attitudes towards one’s own country with the hope that this may be beneficial to overall diplomatic goal achievement. In this process, the need for credibility is of vital importance, and a critical check which restricts the use of cultural diplomacy to construct bluntly flattering self-projections of particular countries (Signitzer, 2008). Finally, Martina Topić and Siniša Rodin point out that cultural diplomacy is often linked to cultural imperialism (Topić and Rodin, 2012).

considered to be key as regards cultural diplomacy in Greece; the Hellenic Foundation for Culture and the European Cultural Centre of Delphi⁶⁷. Both institutions are state funded and supervised by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, a fact which further attests to the fact that the Ministry of Culture is involved in cultural diplomacy issues.

It is perhaps worth highlighting an extract from the mission statement of the European Cultural Centre of Delphi:

[The European Cultural Centre of Delphi aims to] serve **international cultural interests**” and “develop common cultural principles that will unite **the peoples of Europe**” through the “publication of studies **on European culture**, the organization of cultural assemblies and other artistic activities... (European Cultural Centre of Delphi, 2009).

The Centre’s almost exclusively European orientation, also reflected in the Centre’s name, is evident in this extract. Since the Centre was established with the aim to promote cultural diplomacy, its exclusively European orientation is indicative of the importance attributed to Europe and to the country’s relation to Europe in the context of the broader pattern of Greek cultural diplomacy.

Material from the website of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs sheds light on the geographical areas which are considered of vital importance for Greek foreign policy and (cultural) diplomacy. These include the Western Balkans, the

⁶⁷ The Hellenic Foundation for Culture was established in 1992 and the intention to become the main agent in Greek cultural diplomacy. Its organisation and role followed the model of British Council, the French Institute and the Goethe Institute. Six branches were established in Odessa, Alexandria in Egypt, London, Berlin, New York and Paris. Since 2001, it has been supervised by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture (Tzoumaka, 2009). The European Cultural Centre of Delphi was first established in 1977 under the auspices of the Council of Europe, and has since been supervised by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture (European Cultural Centre of Delphi, “History”, 2009). The Hellenic Foundation for Culture focuses on promoting the ‘Hellenic culture’ mainly through teaching Greek abroad. The emphasis on the dissemination of the Greek language indicates that the Foundation’s vision and strategy is underpinned by the assumption that Greek culture is closely associated to the Greek language (Hellenic Foundation for Culture, 2007). In the contrary, the European Cultural Centre of Delphi takes a more holistic approach to culture, which extends beyond the promotion of the Greek language. This is reflected in the Centre’s programme of events, which include various activities from performing arts to visual arts exhibitions (European Cultural Centre of Delphi, 2009).

Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Middle East (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011b). Unsurprisingly, the geographical focus of the *Thessaloniki: Cultural Crossroads* programme, as well as that of the 3rd and partly of the 1st editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale, coincided with these regions.

As regards the Mediterranean, in particular, the website mentions that:

Greece is **an intrinsic part** of the Mediterranean and **since ancient times has maintained strong and unbroken bonds with the peoples and countries of the region**. As a European coastal country in the Eastern Mediterranean, Greece – which sees the Mediterranean as a sea of communication, trade and cooperation – plays an **active, substantial and leading role in the wider region**, pursuing the promotion of actions, programmes and synergies in all sectors (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011a).

The extract above establishes a link between Greece and the Mediterranean in the present, which also stresses across time. Moreover, Greece is projected as a leader in the region, a theme which is repeated both in the discourse of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about Balkans as well as the discourse articulated by certain cultural organisations of Thessaloniki, as discussed in the next section.

Regarding the Western Balkans, the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentions:

The **history of Greece is interwoven** with the history of the Balkans, an area in which Greece **has played a major role** down through the centuries...As a longstanding member of the EU, NATO and other Euroatlantic institutions, **Greece pursues** the consolidation of stability, security and development in the region through ... respect for the basic principles of international law and order ... as well as **through the full incorporation of all the Balkan countries into the European and Euroatlantic institutions** (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011c).

Greece is presented as very closely linked to the Balkans as well as playing a crucial role in the area. In the official discourse of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the 'leading role' of Greece in South East Europe emerges as a recurrent theme. Especially as regards the Balkan countries, the extract above indicates that Greece's 'leading role' in the area is based on its status as a Member State of the EU and involves facilitating the incorporation of the Balkan countries into the EU.

The theme of Greece having a leading role in the Balkan region and South East Europe is repeated in the speech given by Dora Bakogianni, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2006 to 2009:

Greece **must continue to be an important presence in the Balkans** and a **basic factor for the political stability**, European perspective, and economic, social **and general development** of the Balkans (Bakogianni, 2006).

As the financial crisis deepened in Greece, another theme was added to the country's assumed leading role in the Balkan region; the need to enhance the country's international image:

We have to promote our positive traits: our human resources, our infrastructure, our geopolitical position, the investment opportunities opening up, the fact that **Greece remains an anchor of stability in an unstable region** (Bakogianni, 2006).

In the extract above, the assumed leading role of Greece in the Balkan area is used as a positive trait in order to enhance the country's image. In this process, the Balkan countries are considered to be unstable and, consequently, not as safe or even as 'developed' as Greece. In effect, the assumed Greece's leading role in the area clearly suggests the superiority of Greece in relation to its Balkan neighboring countries.

But how does culture become involved in the concerns of the Greek diplomacy and foreign affairs and what is the role of cultural initiatives in the Greek diplomacy

agenda? Eleni Tzoumaka argues that significant development towards a consistent and state-organised strategy for a Greek cultural diplomacy took place during the 2000s, namely with the hosting of the Olympics Games in Athens in 2004 (Tzoumaka, 2005). Tzoumaka also considers museums of contemporary art and participation in international events such as biennials as the necessary institutions for an effective cultural diplomacy (Tzoumaka, 2009). The tendency which Tzoumaka describes also coincided with the greater emphasis and support given to contemporary art and culture by the Greek state, as well as the establishment of the Thessaloniki Biennale itself.

Following Tzoumaka's account (Tzoumaka, 2009), we can see how - to an extent - the Thessaloniki Biennale as well as the State Museum of Contemporary Art which organised it are similar examples of museums and cultural institutions' involvement in Greek cultural diplomacy. SMCA promoted cultural-diplomacy related issues mainly through its programming (exhibitions with a special focus on South East Europe) and its interest in international collaborations. Although cultural diplomacy as such is never mentioned in the SMCA's website or press releases, there is a clear interest from the part of the SMCA in participating in an international network of contacts:

Today, it is one of the most prominent foundations that hosts and projects works of modern and contemporary art, using planning tactics implemented in six basic thematic actions :.... **the substantial cooperation and netting with cultural institutions in Greece, Europe and abroad** (The State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007c).

International collaborations and networking are essential targets in the SMCA's strategy. This is also evident when President, Katerina Koskina talks about the Costakis Collection (the permanent collection of Russian Avant-garde art housed in the SMCA):

Through the Collection **we can negotiate collaborations**. We have an exceptionally important collection in our hands, which can **create references, open opportunities in major museums, institutions, and publications**. The recent exhibitions in Tate Modern, the Malliol Museum, or the propositions coming from the Reina Sofia Museum and the Royal Academy are indicative...The Collection can reversely become **a magnet for the country** (Koskina, 2009b)⁶⁸.

The reference to Tate Modern, Royal Academy, Reina Sofia Museum and Malliol Museum indicates that networking with famous art institutions located in major cities of Western Europe is important for the SMCA. It is implied that the acknowledgment of the importance of the SMCA and its collections partly depends on the connections and collaborations established with Western Europe.

However, the SMCA also takes a special interest in those geographical locations, which happen to be among the key areas of concern for official Greek foreign policy and (cultural) diplomacy, namely the Balkan region and South East Europe. The aspiration is for Thessaloniki to assume a leading role culturally in the Balkan area, by holding large-scale, art events which involve artists from those areas. This is evident in the SMCA programming of exhibitions. More specifically, the *Contemporary European Art: The Art of the Balkan Countries* (2002) and the *Cosmopolis I: Microcosmos X Macrocosmos* exhibitions (2004-2005) are cases in point.

The *Contemporary European Art. The Art of the Balkan Countries* exhibition, organised by the SMCA in 2002, was initiated by Prof Evangelos Venizelos, Minister of Culture at the time. The exhibition focused on contemporary art from nine Balkan countries: Greece, Turkey, Albania, Yugoslavia, FYROM, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to the exhibition's press release, the participating artists were selected by the Directors of the Museums of

⁶⁸ The original text in Greek: 'Μέσα από τη συλλογή μπορούμε να διαπραγματευτούμε συνεργασίες. Έχουμε στα χέρια μας μια εξαιρετικά σημαντική συλλογή που μπορεί να δημιουργήσει αναφορές, να μας ανοίξει πόρτες σε μεγάλα μουσεία, ιδρύματα και δημοσιεύσεις. Οι πρόσφατες εκθέσεις στην Tate Modern, στο Μουσείο ή οι προτάσεις που έρχονται από το και τη είναι ενδεικτικές. Η συλλογή μπορεί αντίστροφα να αποτελέσει μαγνήτη για τη χώρα' (Koskina, 2009b).

Contemporary Art of each country, and the SMCA (The State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008a). The fact that the participating artists were selected by the Heads of the participating museums indicates an exclusivist and top down approach to the organisation of the exhibition. Moreover, the press release as cited in the SMCA's online archive mentions:

It is a fact that the size and extent of this particular exhibition, together with the willing responsiveness and participation of a great number of artists has created the **preconditions for linking Thessaloniki to the broader Balkan area and also for promoting it as the Metropolis of the Balkans** (The State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008a).

The Thessaloniki Biennale's aspiration to promote the city as a cultural metropolis in the Balkan area therefore had significant precedents. The *Art of the Balkan Countries* project, thus, attests to how both the Ministry as well as the SMCA has had the tendency to see large-scale, international, contemporary art exhibitions as potentially efficient tools in order to create a specific image for the city and promote it abroad since the early 2000s. This thesis argues that this particular vision facilitated the inception and realisation of the Thessaloniki Biennale 5 years later.

The *Cosmopolis I* exhibition (2005), for instance, was jointly organised by the State Museum of Contemporary Art and the Macedonian Museum of Modern Art in Thessaloniki, and had a clear focus on art from South-East European countries. More specifically, the exhibition showcased art from Greece, Albania, FYROM, Serbia-Montenegro, Romania, Turkey, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. The exhibition was held under the auspices of the Hellenic Culture Organization S.A., an organisation intent on promoting Greece and its art and culture abroad, and linked to a Greek cultural diplomacy agenda (Tzoumaka, 2009). It could be argued that the exhibition was the forerunner of the Thessaloniki Biennale established in 2007, both in terms of format and geographical focus:

This original large-scale exhibition of high international interest, in the form of a **Biennale**, will provide a regular arena for the presentation of

contemporary art. Besides, **this is the will of the organizing committee, who wants *Cosmopolis* to become a new European art institution**' (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008b.)

That the idea to hold an art biennial in Thessaloniki has existed officially since 2005 was confirmed in a 2009 interview given by the President of the SMCA, Koskina:

This **biennial is the evolution of the 'Cosmopolis' exhibition**. It wasn't my decision, but I was convinced about its possibility to continue and the targets it has set regarding the **broader region of East Europe** (Koskina, 2009b)⁶⁹.

Koskina here essentially reaffirms how both the Thessaloniki Biennale and the *Cosmopolis* exhibition had a diplomatic agenda regarding South East Europe. Although, adopting a deterministic perspective on the connections between the priorities of the Greek Foreign Affairs policy and the SMCA would be reductive, these extracts show that the SMCA indeed takes a special interest in those geographical areas which are the key areas of concern for official Greek foreign affairs policy. Koskina also expresses an opinion regarding art biennials:

It is not bad to hold biennials, but **the geographical, geopolitical or cultural location which hosts a biennial must offer justification for the existence of yet another biennial...**If there isn't a specific aim, it is just another big exhibition (Koskina, 2009b)⁷⁰.

Such reasoning is consistent with the importance given to certain geographical areas from the part of the SMCA in its overall strategy as well as the Thessaloniki Biennale itself. Regarding the Thessaloniki Biennale, in particular, Koskina says:

⁶⁹ The original text in Greek: Αυτή η μπιενάλε είναι εξέλιξη μιας έκθεσης που λεγόταν «Κοσμόπολις». Δεν ήταν δική μου απόφαση, τη βρήκα. Όμως, πείστηκα για τη δυνατότητά της να συνεχίσει και για τους στόχους που έχει για την ευρύτερη περιοχή της ανατολικής Ευρώπης (Koskina, 2009).

⁷⁰ The original text in Greek: 'Δεν είναι κακό να γίνονται Μπιενάλε, πρέπει απλά ο γεωγραφικός, γεωπολιτικός ή ο πολιτισμικός χώρος που φιλοξενεί μια Μπιενάλε να δικαιολογεί την ύπαρξή της... Εάν δεν υπάρχει συγκεκριμένος στόχος είναι απλά και μόνο μια μεγάλη έκθεση' (Koskina, 2009b).

I believe that especially in Thessaloniki, if the museum's interests are those which I referred to earlier, in other words, if it covers the broader region, there is reason for the biennial to take place. Provided that there aren't many biennials in this region, with the exception of the Istanbul Biennial...the Thessaloniki Biennale could rise in prominence in the broader Balkan region (Koskina, 2009b)⁷¹.

Therefore, hosting a biennial in Thessaloniki is justified as long as it responds to the SMCA and the official Greek foreign affairs policy's geographical areas of concern. The use of cultural and art events could lead to enhancing the image of the country abroad and reinforce the discourse on its assumed leading role in South East Europe, and the decision to support the Thessaloniki Biennale was partly based on the fact that the Ministry saw it as an effective tool to these ends.

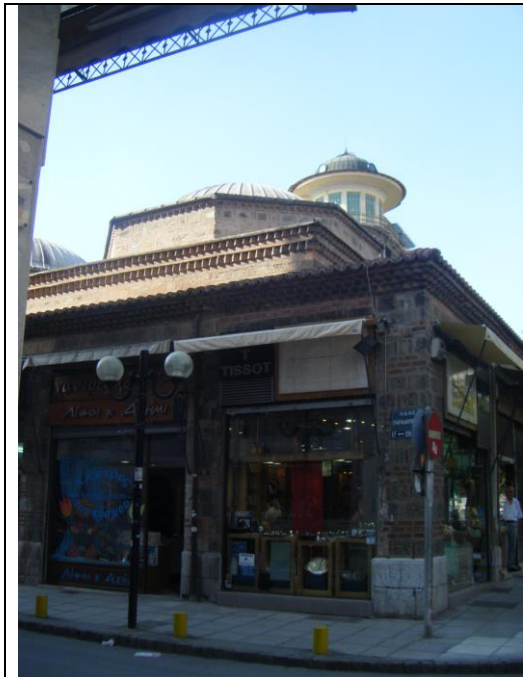
d) Local Urban Planning Initiatives

This section relates the Thessaloniki Biennale with major urban planning tendencies as regards Thessaloniki, namely the emphasis given on the restoration of Pier 1, Old Port, and the interest in promoting the historical centre of the city. These tendencies pre-existed the art event; however, the Thessaloniki Biennale negotiated and contributed to their agenda.

Preserving and highlighting the city's rich cultural heritage, and promoting its historic profile, with special emphasis given to the historic centre of the city as well as Pier 1, Old Port, has been at the top of local urban planning and development agenda at least since the mid 1980s in Thessaloniki. This is reflected in the establishment of the Regulatory Scheme of Thessaloniki in 1985, whose general and specific strategic targets focus on the preservation and promotion of the city's historic centre, monuments and Old Port⁷². Preserving cities' heritage has been

⁷¹ The original text in Greek: 'Θεωρώ πως στη Θεσσαλονίκη ειδικά, εαν τα ενδιαφέροντα του μουσείου είναι αυτά τα οποία προαναφέραμε, καλύπτει δηλαδή τη νευρύτερη περιοχή, θα είχε λόγο να γίνεται μια τέτοια Μπιενάλε. Εφόσον δε γίνονται πολλές σ' αυτή την περιοχή, αν εξαιρέσει κανείς αυτήν της Κωνσταντινούπολης, που στο μεταξύ έχει αποκτήσει μια ιστορία, θα μπορούσε η Μπιενάλε της Θεσσαλονίκης να αναδειχθεί στην ευρύτερη Βαλκανική περιοχή' (Koskina, 2009b).

⁷² The legislation regarding the zoning plan and urban planning of each Greek city is called Regulatory Scheme. The Regulatory Scheme of Thessaloniki was passed in 1985 (Act 1561/1985).



7. Bezesteni, Ottoman covered market still in use.

further favoured and supported by the national government as well; for instance, in 2000 the Act 2831/2000 on conservation of architecture and natural heritage was passed, and expressed a keen interest in preserving and promoting the architectural heritage in cities. Buildings or entire quarters could be earmarked as in need of preservation, in which case it would be forbidden to have them demolished. Moreover, there were special terms and constraints regarding construction in the surrounding area.



8. Bezesteni, Interior: View of the exhibition, 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale.

As regards Thessaloniki's historic centre and monuments, the Organisation of Thessaloniki, under the auspices of the Regulatory Scheme of Thessaloniki actively promoted the continual use for the city's historical markets, such as

Bezesteni (Lilibaki, 2004) - an Ottoman covered market, which was also used during

The implementation of Thessaloniki Regulatory Scheme was overseen by the Organisation of Thessaloniki, a public organisation set up under the same Act. This was supervised by the Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Climate Change. For example, in 16th April 2010, the newly elected Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Change directly appointed the new board of directors for the Organisation of Thessaloniki.

as a venue for the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale [7,8]. The Organisation of the Cultural Capital of Europe 1997 (OCCE) took an active interest in restoring and reintroducing Thessaloniki's Ottoman monuments into new use: Bezesteni, Alatza Imaret, Geni Tzami, Bey Hamam, Bazaar Hamam - all of which served as venues for the three editions of the biennale - were restored in 1997 as part of the Cultural Capital of Europe project and have been used ever since as cultural venues (Stefanidou, 2001, 328-329; Chastaoglou, 2006, 195). The decision to use all of those monuments as Thessaloniki Biennale venues 10 years later, indicates that the Thessaloniki Biennale followed in the steps of the OCCE 1997 project by further promoting the agenda on heritage promotion.

Similar concerns were expressed in the 2004 Symposium of the Technical Chamber of Greece, which pinpointed the need to join the archaeological sites at the centre of the city (Technical Chamber of Greece, 2004). The proposal was supported both by the Regulatory Scheme of Thessaloniki and the National Association of Architects. The 2004 Symposium also raised the issue of a closer connection between the historical sites/monuments and the present-day city. For instance, the President of the Technical Chamber at the time, Sakis Tzakopoulos, highlighted 'the need for the archaeological sites to attest to the unity of the multiple layers of the city's history by becoming more organically integrated in the body of the modern-day city' (Tzakopoulos, 2004). Architect, Georgia Katsavothnidou identified the problem of many monuments' isolation and lack of accessibility and called for their opening up and inclusion in the residents' everyday lives (Katsavothnidou, 2004).

An edited collection of essays, *New Cityscapes and the Greek City*, published in 2006, highlighted the trends and priorities of 21st century urban design in Greece and the development of Greek cities. The concept of a possible functional connection between the historic and the present-day Thessaloniki pervaded those texts. More specifically, architects V. Ioannou and K. Serraios, point out that the historical centres of cities determine their present image and add significant aesthetic value to it. They also underline the importance of connecting Thessaloniki's historic centre and monuments with its modern life and activity (Ioannou and Serraios, 2006, 137-138). Architecture Professor, Vilma Chastaoglou points out the lack of connection between the modern and the old city as regards Thessaloniki, as there is no functioning link

between the facilities of the modern city and its historical tokens. She suggests that the historic heritage of Thessaloniki should be emphasized with the purpose not only to highlight its past but also to indicate practical solutions for the future shape of the city (Chastaoglou, 2006, 193).



9. Old Port, Pier 1, Thessaloniki.

The Thessaloniki Biennale adopted such an agenda, as it addressed the concern to highlight the historical centre of the city and connect the present-day city with its history, though the choice of venues (Ottoman monuments, public squares, institutional and alternative spaces). Plus, it

created a guided tour for the visitor through the city's historic centre, and implicated it in the process of Thessaloniki's re-branding. It, thus, contributed to enhancing the city's competitiveness and attractiveness as an urban and cultural destination.

Thessaloniki's Old Port - namely Pier 1 [9] - was a key point of interest for urban planning and development initiatives, as well as the core of the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale and the place where numerous projects of the 1st and 3rd editions were held. Moreover, in 2000, Pier 1 at Thessaloniki's Port has been earmarked as a protected area in accordance with The Act 2831/2000. This meant that all the buildings in the premises should be preserved and eventually restored. However, prior to the 2000 law, Pier 1 was extensively renovated in 1997 under the auspices and funding of the Organisation of Cultural Capital of Europe (OCCE). In particular, 3 contemporary art related museums have been permanently housed in restored warehouses at Pier 1, the Museum of Photography, the Cinema Museum and the Centre for Contemporary Art. Moreover, numerous art exhibitions and other cultural events and conferences take place in the also renovated Warehouse C all year round. The large-scale Thessaloniki International Film Festival unfolds much of its programme in the venues of the Port.

The concentration of museums at Pier 1, Port reflects the broader concern to renew and revitalise the area and is itself inscribed in the wider effort to regenerate derelict areas of Thessaloniki. In fact, it could be seen as an attempt from the part of the government and Thessaloniki's local authorities to create a 'cultural cluster' in the area, following the paradigm of other European cities, where the creation or nourishment of clusters has become common practice as an instrument in the urban cultural planning toolbox (Mommaas, 2004, 508). The Thessaloniki Biennale shared the interest in supporting and promoting the area as a hub of artistic and cultural activity, and potentially a cultural cluster. The Thessaloniki Biennale actively engaged the area, in its programme of events and exhibitions, while owing to initiatives taken by the Thessaloniki Biennale three more venues were renovated and added to the infrastructure of the district, more specifically the Old Ice Chambers and Warehouse 13 (Zarkali, 2007).

If we follow Mommaas' distinction between four models of cultural clustering strategies in the Netherlands (Mommaas, 2004), Pier 1, Thessaloniki Old Port is closer to what Mommaas describes as the Rotterdam and Utrecht museum quarters⁷³. This is due to the concentration of museums in its premises. On the other hand, there is a marked difference between Pier 1, Thessaloniki and the Utrecht museum quarter; as the latter is involved in the creation of work spaces for artists and other cultural professions, a priority completely absent from Pier 1. This difference becomes even more evident if one compares Pier 1, Thessaloniki with Mommaas' two other examples of cultural clusters, the Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam and the Veemarktkwartier in Tilburg, which take a different approach to cultural activity.

⁷³ In Rotterdam, a consciously developed cultural cluster developed during the 1990s in the eastern fringe of the inner city. Four museums, the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum, the Netherlands Architecture Institute, the Kunsthall and the Nature Museum were all gathered in the area while the park in which the museums are situated is used for a variety of open-air theatre programmes, especially during the summer. The project was inspired by developments in Baltimore, a city well-known in the Netherlands for the use of culture and consumption in the revitalisation of its inner-city harbour front. The museum quarter in Rotterdam, too, was inscribed in a wider plan, cautiously designed by the local government to strengthen the urban profile of the city. A broader inner-city renewal and re-imaging strategy was set out with the intention of achieving higher tourist visits and increased shopping and cultural consumption. The creation of a museum quarter was seen as key element in this strategy. The museum quarter that emerged is clearly defined and demarcated and experiences difficulties in relating itself to the wider urban field. The Utrecht museum quarter involves the Municipal Museum (ancient and modern art), the Catharijne Covent (President of Katerina Koskina Catholic art), the University Museum (science-related exhibitions) and is aimed at improving the quality of public space and of residential living conditions, as well as strengthening the tourist –recreational and cultural functions of the area (Mommaas, 2004, 510, 513, 515).

Both the Westergasfabriek and the Veemarktkwartier focus on smaller-scale cultural enterprises, managed working spaces for arts and new media producers, and rehearsal, production and performing spaces (Mommaas, 2004, 511-512).

In the contrary, at Pier 1, Thessaloniki, there are no rehearsal spaces or studios for artists and musicians and no small cultural enterprises such as film production or design/architecture companies. There is no active art and cultural production nucleus involved in Pier 1, as in the cases of the Westergasfabriek, the Veemarktkwartier or even the Utrecht museum quarter; there are only official representations of art and culture, usually of grand scale and most often selected by the museums located there. Applying a further distinction proposed by Mommaas between production-oriented and consumption-oriented clusters (Mommaas, 2004, 516-517), the museum concentration at Pier 1, Thessaloniki belongs to the second category. Considered in this light, the Thessaloniki Biennale can be read as a way to reinforce visibility and intensify life and activity in the area, although, it ultimately reproduced a pattern of top-down planned cultural clustering.

This becomes clear, when Pier 1 museum concentration is compared to the Valaoritou Str. area in Thessaloniki, where a concentration of small-scale cultural enterprises has emerged more organically and could be argued to be a case of a bottom-up cluster creation⁷⁴. Although the Thessaloniki Biennale is mainly incorporated in the activity of Pier 1, it supported the activity of Valaoritou area. More specifically, the 2nd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale hosted a small exhibition in a restaurant situated in Fragon Str., very close to Valaoritou Str. area, and the 3rd edition used Dynamo Project Space, in Valaoritou Str., as one of its main venues. The aspiration which underpinned this choice was perhaps to make the Thessaloniki Biennale a less top-down-designed initiative, as well as to give it an alternative tone by implicating spaces which would not be addressed as

⁷⁴ Valaoritou Str is the heart of the old manufactory centre of the city, which was active during the 1960s and 1970s, but has severely declined since the 1990s. The area has been recently revitalised through the opening of numerous bars, cafes and restaurants in the area – approximately 30 – having both supporters and sceptics (Poulimeni, 2009; Kontogiannidis, 2010). It, also, includes cultural spaces, like Dynamo Project Space the Experiment group ('Peirama'), the 157-173designers, Art minds cultural production company, the dance group and school Flamenco Studio Pellizco. Also, the *Thessaloniki Otherwise* project hosted a great deal of its activities and events in exactly that part of the city.

conventionally artistic. However, this could have been achieved in a more meaningful and profound way if a more open and participatory approach had been adopted, and more independent artistic groups, citizen and activist initiatives had been involved in the art event.

4.3 The expediency of the Thessaloniki Biennale: Branding the city

The following section focuses on the signification process which the Thessaloniki Biennale initiated (through its choice of venues and its catalogue texts), and demonstrates how this signification process branded the host city as a multicultural art project with a leading role in the Balkan area. Although none of the editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale were officially themed around Thessaloniki itself, the written texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale explicitly and frequently addressed its identity. This process was also facilitated by the use of particular historical monuments as venues for its exhibitions.

Three themes pervade the identity of Thessaloniki as constructed by the Thessaloniki Biennale, and constitute the key codes which frame the re-branding of the city: 1. The city's dominant history 2. The city's multicultural character and 3. The city's aspired role as a metropolitan / leading centre in the Balkan area and South-East Europe. These themes were outlined in the art event's catalogue texts, and were also involved in the choice of its venues as well as the choice to disperse the event across the city. Therefore, as explained in Chapter 3 (Methodology), this chapter analyses the Thessaloniki Biennale as a text in a semiotic sense, which consists of both written and visual elements.

a) The choice of venues and the dispersion of the Thessaloniki Biennale across the city

Bal and Bryson's points on the uneven access to codes and the distinction between 'ideal' and 'empirical' spectators (Bal and Bryson, 1991, 184), draw attention to the Thessaloniki Biennale's audience⁷⁵. To pinpoint and analyse the reception of TB by

⁷⁵ According to the Thessaloniki Biennale's official press releases, the 1st edition of event had attracted 20,000 people by the end of July 2007, that is during the first two months on its duration (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007b). The 3rd edition of the event attracted 40,000 people (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011b). As regards the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale, 60,000 visitors are mentioned in the national press (Dimitriou, 2009).

its audience is beyond the breadth of this research. What this projects aims at is to identify and analyse the preferred reading of the Thessaloniki Biennale, as well as the contradictions and ruptures inherent in its narrative.

However, it should be noted here that the Thessaloniki Biennale audience was diverse: the locals, the foreign visitors who came specifically for the Biennale, the tourists who happened to be in Thessaloniki at the time of the biennale and decided to visit - those who had knowledge of contemporary art and those who did not, those who had knowledge of the city's history and those who lacked it, as well as all the in-between degrees of knowledge and familiarity. The codes which framed the signification process initiated by the Thessaloniki Biennale, as identified above, were sketched in a detailed way in the texts produced by the Thessaloniki Biennale. The press releases, catalogue and the venues themselves ensured that the city's history was not only highlighted but also explained for the viewer. For example, the catalogue of the 3rd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale was structured based on the historical monuments of the city/venues of the art event, and provided a description and account of their history. Also, it was distributed free of charge, and may have contributed to increasing the audience's familiarity with the city's history.

Applying semiotics (Barthes, 1957; 1964; 1967; Hall, 1973; Eco, 1976; Belsey, 1980), and Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and 'myth', in particular (Barthes, 1957, 124-126; 1964, 89-94), the venues of the Thessaloniki Biennale could be considered as signifiers. These signifiers were linked to the broader themes of the city's history and its present art activity, and constructed its 'multicultural' identity and its role as a cultural metropolis.

In all three editions, the Thessaloniki Biennale used as venues a) historical (mainly Ottoman) monuments, such as Alatzá Imaret, Yen Djami [10], Bazaar Hamam [11], Bey Hamam, b) 19th century monuments, (Casa Bianca, the buildings on Pier 1, at the Old Port, namely the Warehouses, the Old Ice Chambers, and the Old Pumping Station), c) the city's museums (the State Museum of Contemporary Art, the Macedonian Museum of Modern Art, Teloglion Art Foundation, the Archaeological Museum, the Museum of Byzantine Culture, the Jewish Museum) d) other cultural organisations (such as the French Institute of Thessaloniki, the Byzantine cultural



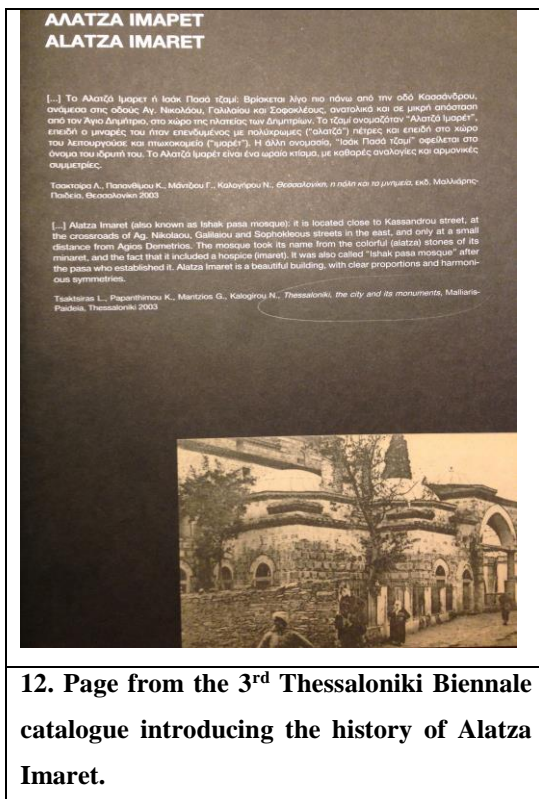
10. Yeni Djami, Venue of the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale.

centre of Mount Athos, the premises of various Municipalities), e) few non-artistic spaces (such as Bar –restaurant ES), and f) an independent artistic space, Dynamo Project Space (Appendix, 167-173).

The involvement of the city’s historical monuments was consistent with the construction of Thessaloniki as a historical city in the Thessaloniki Biennale’s catalogue texts. Moreover, the inclusion of numerous Ottoman monuments and the Jewish Museum signifies the city’s multicultural past, also highlighted in the catalogue texts. At the same time, this choice also promoted some of the most interesting and impressive sights of the city.



11. View of the exhibition in Bazaar Hamam. 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale: Oswaldo Macià, 2008. *Ten notes for a human Symphony*. Installation. Mixed media. Variable dimensions.



12. Page from the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale catalogue introducing the history of Alatzá Imaret.

The structure of the catalogue for the 3rd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale drew the reader’s attention to the historical monuments/venues of the art event. The presentation of each project was preceded by a short briefing on the history of each monument, invariably written by historians, architects or archaeologists, as well as an archive image of the venue in historical times [12]. In a way, these pages served as headlines to what was written subsequently, highlighted the city’s history, and strengthened the connection between the art event and those themes. The artists’ index also

reflected the venue-centred approach applied to the organisation of the 3rd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale, as the participating artists were grouped based on which venue their work was presented. Emphasis on the monuments was also put in Andreas Angelidakis’ text, who was the architect in charge of the 3rd edition’s overall design. His text consists of several paragraphs, each of which bears the name of one of the city’s historical monuments, and further emphasises the significance which the city’s history acquires for the art event (Angelidakis, 2011).

Moreover, the Thessaloniki Biennale involved numerous museums - apart from the State Museum of Contemporary Art, which was the main organiser - by allowing them to host events and exhibitions in the Thessaloniki Biennale’s parallel program. In fact, its was officially announced that the 3rd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale was organised by the so-called ‘5 Museum Movement’, (including the State Museum of Contemporary Art, The Archaeological Museum, the Museum of Byzantine Culture, the Macedonian Museum of Modern Art and the Teloglion Art Foundation), although the State Museum remained its key organiser. The museums involved were concerned with the cultures of different historical periods of the city from classical

antiquity (the Archaeological Museum) through Byzantine times (the Museum of Byzantine Culture) to 19th and early 20th Greek painting and sculpture (Teloglion Art Foundation), and contemporary art and cultural activity (State Contemporary Art Museum, Macedonian Museum of Modern Art, Thessaloniki Museum of Photography) without excluding the Ottoman dominance over the city from 1430 to 1912.

In this way, a diverse but uninterrupted continuity for the city through the centuries was established. At the same time, the involvement of all those museums attested to what had also been pronounced in the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts; the city's significant cultural infrastructure, especially as regards contemporary art and culture, which sustains the city's influence and role as a cultural metropolis in the region.



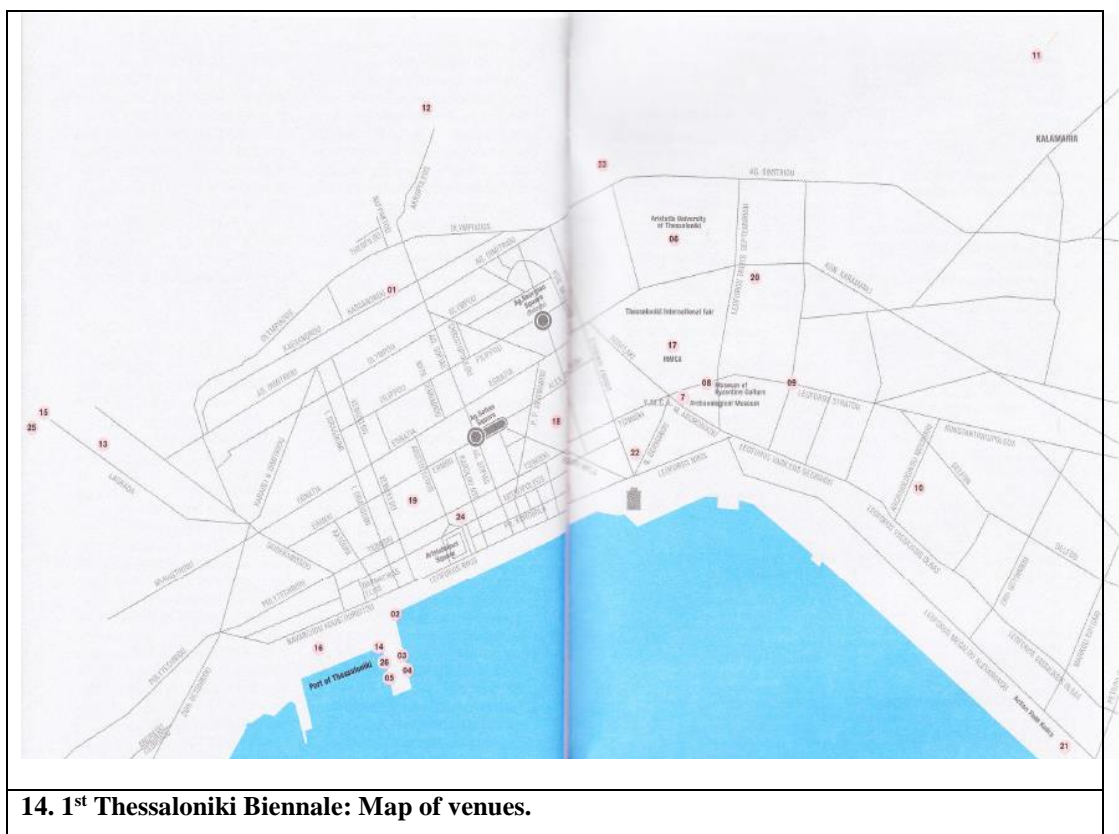
13. View of Aristotelous Square, located opposite Bay Hamam, which was a key venue in all three editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale.

Furthermore, as the Thessaloniki Biennale was a contemporary art event, the visitors experienced contemporary art works and projects in/through the city's historical monuments. This implicated the city's history in the experience, and connected the city's historical and contemporary aspects. The stroll through the city

centre and the port further facilitated the contact of the visitor with the city's past (there is a high concentration of Byzantine churches which were not involved in TB, but could be seen by the visitor during their stroll across the city), as well as with its present realities - from its transport system to its 20th century built blocks of flats and its residents [13]. Thus, Thessaloniki's past and present were powerfully joined to frame the city as historic(al), diverse and contemporary. In effect, through both its

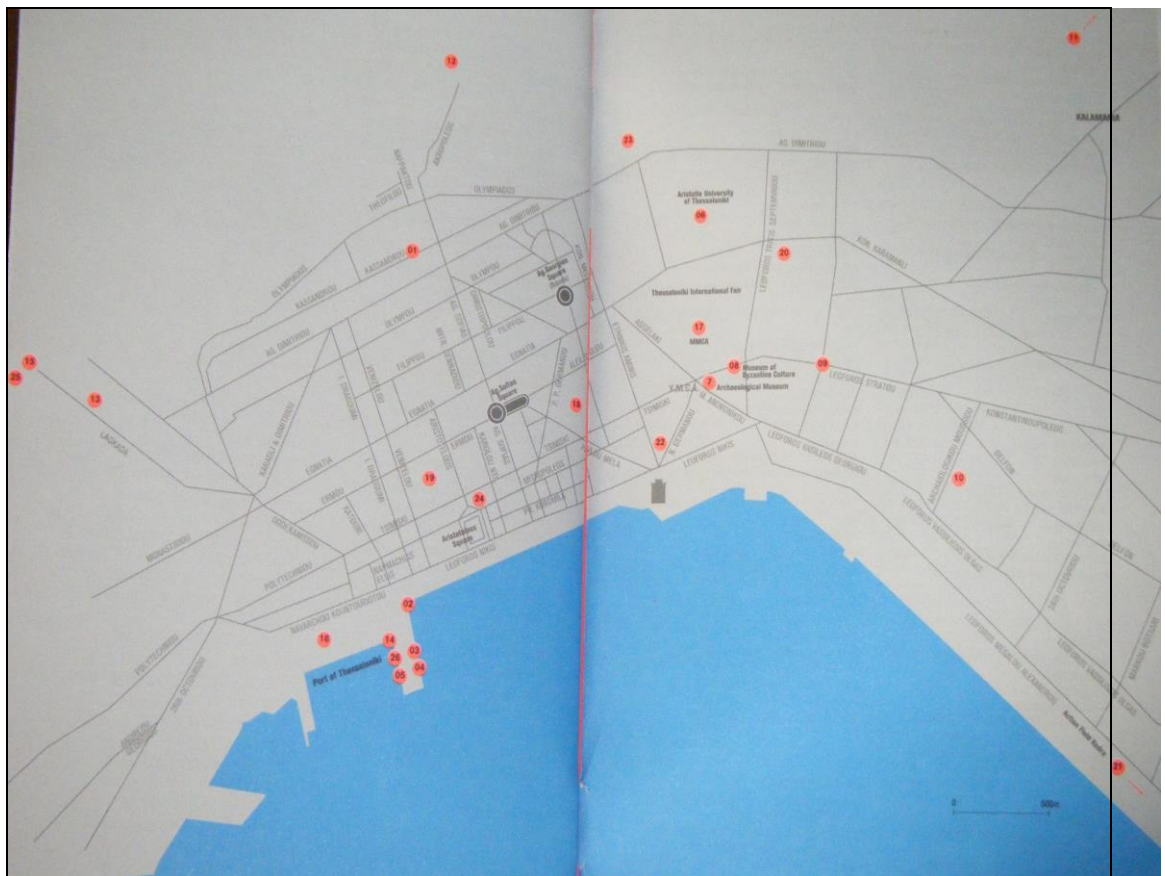
catalogue texts, the choice of venues and its spread across the city, the Thessaloniki Biennale became a sign for the city itself. The art event attempted to construct Thessaloniki as an open, inclusive and welcoming city, which drew power from its rich history, while facing its present circumstances with the confidence of a cosmopolitan, contemporary art centre and cultural leader in the area.

The construction of Thessaloniki, as described above, was further supported by the pattern according to which the Thessaloniki Biennale was spread over the city in its three editions. The maps of the art event offer an overall view of the location of the venues [14, 15, 16]. The 1st edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale was circumscribed within the city space by the State Museum of Contemporary Art to the West, Eptapyrgio (the city's byzantine castles) and Teloglion Foundation of the Arts to the North, the Municipality of Themi and Action Field Kodra (an ex-military camp, now used as a cultural venue) to the East, and a concentration of venues in Pier 1, Old Port (numbers 16, 14, 26, 05, 04, 03, 02).



A comparison with the map of the 2nd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale indicates that a different pattern was applied in 2009. A similar concentration of venues in the port was opted for (numbers 04, 03, 05, 07, 02, 01, 06, 05), but the limits of the 2nd

edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale excluded off-centre venues, such as the State Museum itself, and focused on the historical centre of Thessaloniki. Namely, greater emphasis was put on the district which spreads from Polytechniou Str to Aggelaki Str, where three major museums of the city are situated: The Archaeological Museum, The Museum of Byzantine Culture and the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art. In fact, although the 1st edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale included 5 venues in the area (numbers 19, 24, 01, 18, 22), the 2nd edition almost doubled the number, opening up 8 spaces for its purposes (numbers 20, 08, 12, 10, 09, 11, 22, 19).



15. 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale: Map of venues.

The 3rd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale offered a more balanced pattern which combined elements of both previous editions, involving the State Museum as the Western limit of the Thessaloniki Biennale in the city, and Eptapyrgio as its Northern limit, as well as the port and the historical centre. Yeni Djami (number 4) was also included in the 3rd edition, as it was in the 1st edition too, leading the visitor off the historical centre, towards the eastern part of the city and through its contemporary

urban fabric. The eastern limit of the 3rd edition consisted of Casa Bianca (number 6), used for the first time for the purpose of the Thessaloniki Biennale, and the newly-built, and prestigious, Thessaloniki Concert Hall (number 13).



16. 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale: Map of venues.

Goffman's concept of brackets and bracketing could be applied in the examination of the pattern according to which the Thessaloniki Biennale spread across the city. According to Goffman, activity framed in a particular way – especially collectively organised social activity – is often marked off from the ongoing flow of surrounding events by a special set of boundary markers or brackets. These occur before and after the activity in time and may be circumscriptive in space. Goffman distinguishes between temporal and spatial brackets, internal and external ones and he also suggests that external brackets could also be considered internal if seen as part of a continuous whole (as in theatre). Brackets have the power to reframe and recast whatever comes after them adding to the whole and additional lamination (Goffman, 1986, 253-257, 260). The spatial limits of the three editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale could be identified with the major opening and closing spatial brackets of the art event. The spatial brackets of the Thessaloniki Biennale highlighted the particular areas of the city which they enclosed, and, thus, further facilitated the signification process involved in the Thessaloniki Biennale, as explained above.

More specifically, special emphasis was put on certain parts of the city, which then served as signifiers for certain aspects of the city's character: the historical centre signified Thessaloniki as a historical city with rich and multicultural past. The port, which in the past served as a central point of the city's trade activity and symbol of its prosperous economy and of population migration, alludes, too, to the city's multicultural aspect, as well as its influence in the broader area. Moreover, as it is, currently, a cultural hub with a lot of art and culture venues in its premises (Thessaloniki Museum of Cinema, Thessaloniki Museum of Photography, Thessaloniki Centre of Contemporary Art, as well as Warehouse C, which hosts various temporary cultural events), it signifies Thessaloniki as a contemporary art and culture centre.

Moreover, as the limits of the Thessaloniki Biennale expanded to include venues situated relatively off-centre, namely Casa Bianca, Yeni Djami and Eptapyrgio (1st and 3rd editions), the visitors were led to a tour through the city, which further familiarised them with the city's history and aspects of its present identity. The bracketing of the Thessaloniki Biennale within the city space, thus, initiated a reciprocal process, which both supported the function of the venues as signs, and, at the same time, re-enacted the codes within which those signs acquired and conveyed meaning.

b) Conceptualising Thessaloniki in the Thessaloniki Biennale Exhibitions' Catalogue⁷⁶

This section focuses on the written texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale, namely its catalogue texts. The analysis of the catalogue texts focuses on the conceptualisations of the city constructed by the Thessaloniki Biennale, and maps out their relationship not from an exclusively economic impact point of view or primarily from a cultural policy perspective but from a perspective which considers the biennial as a meaning-making process revolving around its host city. The argument is that the catalogue texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale attempt to construct a particular identity for the city - historical, multicultural, and a cultural centre in the broader region - which

⁷⁶ The catalogue texts were already translated by the Thessaloniki Biennale itself, as the catalogue was both in Greek and English.

partly advance the priorities, set by official Greek cultural policy (namely, tourism and cultural diplomacy). Moreover, this chapter argues that the Thessaloniki Biennale's narrative on the city's identity is part of an ongoing, broader discourse on the subject, and this further confirms the aspirations of Greek governance as regards Thessaloniki's role in official regional and national developmental strategies.

As already explained in Chapter 3 (Methodology), the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts trace the key codes of signification involved in the art event. Drawing on the theory concerning codes from the point of view of semiotics (Saussure, 1974, 9; Jakobson, 1960; Hall, 1973, 132; Culler, 1976, 29; Barthes, 1977, 27-28; Chandler, 2007, 147), and post-structuralism (Bal and Bryson, 1991), this section addresses the catalogue texts in order to explore the codes under which the Thessaloniki Biennale was made meaningful, and to analyse the prior knowledge necessary for the audience to decipher the signs constructed within the Thessaloniki Biennale.

Following Barthes' theory of the anchoring function of the linguistic message (Barthes, 1977) and Hall's concepts of the 'preferred reading' and the 'dominant code' (Hall, 1973), I argue that the art event's catalogue texts aspired to direct the viewers to a 'preferred reading' of the Thessaloniki Biennale, which highlights the city's and the art event's desired attributes. However, this thesis, also, takes into account the points raised by Bal and Bryson regarding the uneven access to codes and the plurality and unpredictability of reception of a sign (Bal and Bryson, 1991), and, therefore, acknowledges that there was no guarantee that all readers/viewers would interpret the Thessaloniki Biennale as the art event's organisers aspired.

My analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts aims to trace the relation between the Thessaloniki Biennale's narratives and broader Greek governance. Therefore, my analysis follows Foucault's theory of discourse (Foucault, 1969; 1981), and does not focus on language units but explores broader narratives about the city. However, following Fairclough's method of discourse analysis (Fairclough 1993; 2003), I do highlight the importance of words choice and linguistic tropes. The selection of samples from the catalogue texts as well as their analysis is structured

around the three key themes pertaining to Thessaloniki's identity, as identified earlier.

An extract from the speech given by the President of the SMCA during the opening of the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale (2007) is used as a frontispiece to the following section, because it is exemplary in summarising, in very few lines, all the traits most commonly attributed to Thessaloniki in the discourse articulated by the Thessaloniki Biennale:

Thessalonica **has a long tradition in cultural institutions and art festivals**; it is a city **with a rich past** and a dynamic current presence in contemporary international trade fairs, **it is a point where different civilizations meet and co-exist**, it is a city which used to have an **extrovert character and now seeks to reclaim it** (Tsaras, 2007a)⁷⁷.

The extract above, which is representative of the way the city is conceptualised in the written texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale, echoes the way Thessaloniki was constructed almost a decade ago, in the interview by Evangelos Venizelos, Minister of Culture at the time and Director of the Organisation of Thessaloniki Cultural Capital of Europe (OCCE). His interview was published in the wide circulation Greek newspaper, *To Vima*⁷⁸ and encapsulated all the main traits attributed to the city by the OCCE texts:

Thessaloniki is an **extrovert city** and its **dynamism** is manifest in many areas, one of which is **culture**. **Thessaloniki is the West of the East and the East of the West; it is situated is the South of the European North but constitutes the North of the European South....**Hosting the institution of Cultural Capital of Europe in Thessaloniki is an opportunity to

⁷⁷ The original extract in Greek: 'Η Θεσσαλονίκη είναι μία πόλη με παράδοση στις θεσμικές διοργανώσεις, σε καλλιτεχνικά φεστιβάλ, μια πόλη με πλούσιο παρελθόν και δυναμικό παρόν στις διεθνείς εκθέσεις οικονομικού χαρακτήρα, ένα σημείο συνάντησης και συνύπαρξης πολιτισμών, μια πόλη που αναζητά και διεκδικεί εκ νέου τη χαμένη εξωστρέφειά της' (Tsaras, 2007a).

⁷⁸ *To Vima* is a prestigious newspaper, one of the oldest in Greece, and has a very wide circulation nationally.

promote **the complex face of the city, which has always been turned towards the Balkans and the Mediterranean** (Venizelos, 1997, 41)⁷⁹.

Explaining the particularity of Thessaloniki as a Cultural Capital of Europe, Venizelos emphasised the city's 'extrovert' character as well as its location. In this way, Thessaloniki was attributed a unique feature, as it geographically and culturally belongs to both the West and the East. The Minister, also, stressed the close ties of Thessaloniki with the Balkans and the Mediterranean. The comparison between Tsaras' opening speech for the Thessaloniki Biennale and Venizelos' interview for the Cultural Capital of Europe serves to show that the way the city was constructed in the texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale owed much to previous discourse by the city's official cultural organisations, and was influenced by the way the city was conceptualised by Greek governance. The following section further elaborates on this point.

i) Thessaloniki has 'a long and uninterrupted history'

The first key theme pertaining to Thessaloniki's identity, as constructed in the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts, is the city's history. In the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts, the dominant version of the city's history is rendered as long and uninterrupted. This particular attribute of the city's identity has become a vital element in the process of re-branding Thessaloniki. Being an 'historic city' implies that it boasts a great number of historical monuments, and thus its potential as an attractive tourist destination is highlighted. It relates to the second key trait attributed to the city - its multicultural character, and those traits work together.

In the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts written by public officials, the city's history is highlighted, and it is considered rich and 'substantial' (Samaras, 2009; Geroulanos, 2011). George Tsaras' opening speech for the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale highlights the city's long history:

⁷⁹ The original text in Greek: 'Η Θεσσαλονίκη είναι πόλη εξωστρεφής και ο δυναμισμός της εκδηλώνεται με πολλούς τρόπους, ένας από τους οποίους είναι ο πολιτισμός. Η Θεσσαλονίκη είναι η Δύση της Ανατολής και η Ανατολή της Δύσης· βρίσκεται στο Νότο του ευρωπαϊκού Βορρά όμως αποτελεί και τον Βορρά του ευρωπαϊκού Νότου. ... Η φιλοξενία του θεσμού της Πολιτιστικής Πρωτεύουσας στη Θεσσαλονίκη είναι μια ευκαιρία λοιπόν για την προβολή του πολύπλοκου προσώπου της πόλης, που ήταν πάντα στραμμένο προς τα Βαλκάνια αλλά και προς τη Μεσόγειο. Αυτή την ιδιοσυστασία της Θεσσαλονίκης θέλουμε να την αναξέσουμε και να την προβάλλουμε' (Venizelos, 1997, 41).

Throughout **its long history**, the city of Thessaloniki has been fortunate enough to maintain its urban character **despite the various adversities, and to respond to the challenges that every era has posed** (Tsaras, 2007a).

The extract above focuses on the city's resilience. Both the concepts of having a long history as well as being 'resilient' establish a sense of continuity for Thessaloniki over time. This is also the case with Koskina, President of the SMCA at the time of the 2nd and 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale, who repeatedly puts emphasis on the city's long and uninterrupted history (Koskina, 2011, 14).

The texts of the curators and the writers make more detailed but also contradictory references to the city's histories. For instance, Korovinis' text is unique in addressing the violence involved in the city's history and the multiple blood - shedding which took place over the years:

I stand in front of your White Tower, your celebrated historic symbol, once a tyrannical fort. 'Kanli Kule', 'the tower of blood'. **So many souls were delivered here for torture,** Janissaries, and Bulgarians, Donmeh Jews, and Romioi, even the Macedonian revolutionaries of 1921... **how could you put up with spilling so much innocent blood?** (Korovinis, 2011, 45).

Here, Korovinis reminds that the White Tower, the most famous landmark of the city, was in fact a site of violent acts and torture. The choice of the word 'innocent' introduces a critical perspective, and disputes the overall glorifying approach to the city's history which pervades the previous texts.

On the other hand, though, Korovinis concludes his text reminding the significance of the city's history:

You are tired, **but the strength of your history will sustain you,** my mother Thessaloniki. The descendants of those uprooted people who lived

here and loved you as no one ever has – since your ambience is similar to the one of our old homelands – will sustain you. **Your soil will always give birth to** beauty and wisdom, to **intellectuals, artists, and scientists, to people sworn to uphold your name, who will help you regenerate** (Korovinis, 2011, 46).

The city's history is what gives resilience. Moreover, the city's people, especially, the city's artists, intellectuals and scientists – the so-called creative professionals will achieve the city's regeneration. In this extract, the city is conceptualised as both historical and creative. In fact, the phrase: 'your soil will always give birth to...' links the feminised city with creative professionals in a deterministic way as one of its inherent features.

It is interesting, however, to follow how the painful aspects of the city's past are addressed in the catalogue texts. For instance, Salgado, co-curator of the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale, addresses the city's long history too (Salgado, 2009, 25). Salgado too raises a point about a distressing aspect of the city's past, the slave trade:

At the same time, **these issues [colonialism, slave trade] set up house in Thessaloniki** as the echo of a past populated by slave owning and trade – which in the Mediterranean lasted until the 19th century – and **the trauma of multiple exiles** (Salgado, 2009, 29)

In this way, Salgado uses the city's history as the medium through which she links Thessaloniki to the concept of the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale and some of its artworks, which were underpinned by post-colonial thinking, such as Sonya Boyce's *Crop Over*, Hew Locke's *The Kingdom of the Blind* and Alexandre Arrechea's videos.

As already noted, emphasising the city's history, and projecting it as long and continuous in the catalogue texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale, is a vital part of creating a brand for Thessaloniki, one created so as to enhance the city's image in order to boost tourism and influence. Following the concept of intertextuality (Kristeva, 1969; 1974; Barthes, 1977; Foucault, 1969; Culler, 1981), the following

paragraphs compare the way in which Thessaloniki is constructed as a historic city by the Thessaloniki Biennale with the texts of official, state-funded and Thessaloniki-based cultural organisations. The argument here is that the way the Thessaloniki Biennale re-imagined the city in its official texts is closely linked to the way Thessaloniki is constructed in the official narratives of Greek governance. This comparison serves to show to what extent the Thessaloniki Biennale complied with the narrative of Greek governance, and whether it negotiated the conceptualisation of the city in alternative ways.

The theme of Thessaloniki's long and uninterrupted history was exclaimed in the texts by the Organisation of Cultural Capital of Europe:

Thessaloniki is **a classical** city, a **Hellenistic** city, a **Roman** city, a **Byzantine** city, a **Balkan** city, a **city of the Orient**, a **city of Europe**, a **city with an outstanding presence through time** (Thessaloniki Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997b).

The choice of the adjectives 'classical', 'Hellenistic', 'Roman', and 'Byzantine', and their use in a chronological order serves to stress the city's continuous presence through time. Also, addressing the city as 'Balkan', 'city of the Orient', and 'a city of Europe', not only refers to its geographical locations, but also implies its multiple cultural identities. The continuous history of Thessaloniki is also stressed in the interview by Venizelos, Minister of Culture at the time, and Director of the OCCE (Venizelos, 1997, 41).

A significant difference, however, between the OCCE and the Thessaloniki Biennale narrative is the fact that Korovinis and Salgado touched upon distressing aspects of the city's history - violence and slave trade respectively – while no similar reference was made in the material posted by the OCCE. This shows that although there was a significant precedent for the narrative constructed by the Thessaloniki Biennale, the latter did not passively embrace it but modified it, albeit to a limited extent.

The Dimitria Annual Festival website is another instance in which the city's history is highlighted. The website presents an overview of the celebration of *Dimitria* back in the Byzantine times. This is complemented with a colourful account of the commercial and cultural activity which took place in Thessaloniki in the 10th century AD (Municipality of Thessaloniki, 2012a). The retrospective approach adopted stresses the fact that Thessaloniki has had a long and uninterrupted history, as in the texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale. Both organisations seek to establish historical continuity for certain aspects of the city's character. Nevertheless, they focus on different aspects of the city's history: whereas the Dimitria festival stresses the Byzantine heritage of Thessaloniki, and, thus, highlights the Orthodox aspect of the city, the Thessaloniki Biennale avoids identifying the city with a single historical period or religious/ethnic community.

The website of the Municipality of Thessaloniki repeats the theme of the continuous history of the city:

Thessaloniki has the **distinction of being a city of uninterrupted urban activity for more than 2,300 years** (Municipality of Thessaloniki, 2012b).

The city's continuous history is considered as an honor, and this implies that cities are evaluated on the basis of how long their history is supposed to be. Thessaloniki is constructed as the historic city *par excellence*; it is suggested that it is superior to many other, more recently founded cities.

The texts addressed above construct the city's history as single and homogeneous, and fail to address the different narratives which different perspectives would bring in as regards the interpretation of the histories of Thessaloniki. Although the catalogue texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale echo those by other official cultural organisations, they shape that discourse slightly differently. This is due to the Thessaloniki Biennale's more subdued and critical tone, as evident in Korovinis and Salgado texts examined above.

ii) Thessaloniki is multicultural/cosmopolitan

The second key theme pertaining to Thessaloniki's identity, as this is constructed in the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts, is the city's multicultural character. This is a vital element of the Thessaloniki 'brand', which aspires to make it an attractive tourist destination, and project a favourable image of an open and welcoming city abroad.

As the analysis below indicates, this theme is common in the narrative of other state-funded cultural organisations in Thessaloniki. Also, the discourse on Thessaloniki's multiculturalism is broader, involves texts by local writers, intellectuals, academics and politicians, and predates the texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale (Aggelopoulos, 2008, 203, 211)⁸⁰.

As social anthropologist Yiorgos Aggelopoulos points out, the discourse on Thessaloniki's multiculturalism is not homogeneous (Aggelopoulos, 2008, 203, 211): there are three distinct types, each addressing the city's 'multicultural character' in a different way: the first one establishes it by referring to the city's past, especially the Byzantine period; the second one perceives it as the result of the influx of immigrants in the present, and the third one attempts to dispute the multicultural character of Thessaloniki altogether (Aggelopoulos, 2008, 203, 211). The first and second types embrace the city's multicultural character and perceive it as positive for the city's development, while the third one considers the very concept of multiculturalism threatening for the city's Greek identity, and is imbued by conservatism and nationalism.

According to Pecheux, a given discourse is always in dialogue and in conflict with other positions/discourses, and words can change their meaning from one discourse to another, according to the positions from which they are used. These positions are always ideological and antagonistic, and therefore, the meanings of discourses are ultimately linked to 'class struggle in its various economic, political and ideological forms' (Pecheux, 1975/1982, 111-112, 153-154, 185-186). The three distinct

⁸⁰ Although, as noted above, the texts by OCCE officially established the city as multicultural, in the sense that the city was presented as such in the official texts of a state-run institution for the first time (Aggelopoulos, 2008, 203, 211).

discourses on Thessaloniki's 'multiculturalism' are in an antagonistic relation, reflecting conflicting ideologies, and endowing the adjective 'multicultural' with different meaning. In the following paragraphs, the narrative of the Thessaloniki Biennale on the city's 'multicultural' character is related to the one by other state-funded organisations, and is, also, compared to the three types of discourse on the city's multiculturalism traced by Aggelopoulos (2008).

In their written texts for the Thessaloniki Biennale, public officials explicitly address the city's ostensible multicultural/cosmopolitan character in a number of instances. It is sometimes implied that the city has lost its multicultural character, as in the extract by Mayor, Yiannis Boutaris presented below:

The 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art, through the '5 Museums' Movement' initiative, showcases this modern aspect of the city and **encourages us to rediscover the lost thread of its cosmopolitanism and broaden the city's horizons** (Boutaris, 2011).

In this case, the Thessaloniki Biennale is the medium through which the city might regain its former character and prosperity.

The multicultural aspect of the city's past is very often raised in the curators' texts as well. In fact, it constitutes a vital focal point as regards the concept of all three editions of the Thessaloniki Biennale, and it is often combined with the theme of the city's history:

Thessaloniki is one of the few European cities with such a long and ceaseless history. It's a multicultural metropolis that has lived through conquerors and disasters, glamour and economic robustness, **a city that has composed its historic identity through the diversity of its citizens....** (Mykoniati, 2009, 18-24).

In the extract above, the reference to the long and continuous history of the city is again pronounced, and is considered as almost unique to Thessaloniki. The phrases, 'multicultural metropolis' and 'diversity of its citizens', are key to conveying the

message of the city's aspired identity. Also, the use of present tenses links the portrayal of the city as such with the present, and not just the past.

Thessaloniki's 'multicultural past' emerges as the primary source of inspiration for the Thessaloniki Biennale and the main point of reference for the curators:

The main programme of the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art derives **its inspiration from the city, as a metaphor of the powerful multicultural character of its past history** (State Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011a).

In her catalogue contribution, Maria Tsantsanoglou - Director of the SMCA at the time of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale, and one of the 3 curators of the main programme of the TB1 - states that the Thessaloniki Biennale illuminates the city's character, drawing on its history (Tsantsanoglou, 2007b)

She repeats the same point, perhaps even more clearly, in her interview, where she states that the city's history was a vital focal point for her and her co-curators:

On commencing, **we had identified, along with the two other curators that we will emphasise the history of Thessaloniki, especially these multiple cultural and historical layers of the city, which are in one way or another still alive**, and perceivable, in other words, they are not something that exists in our imagination. It is something that in one way or another, we encounter it, either in the buildings or in the memory (memories) of the people (Tsantsanoglou, 2007a)⁸¹.

In this extract, continuity is claimed for the multicultural aspect of the city's history. In other words, Thessaloniki was, and still is, multicultural.

⁸¹ The extract in Greek: 'Είχαμε εντοπίσει ξεκινώντας με τους άλλους δύο επιμελητές ότι θα δώσουμε έμφαση στην ιστορία της Θεσσαλονίκης και ιδιαίτερα σ' αυτά τα πολλαπλά πολιτιστικά και ιστορικά επίπεδα της πόλης, τα οποία είναι με τον ένα ή με τον άλλο τρόπο ζωντανά ακόμη, αισθητά, δηλαδή δεν είναι κάτι που βρίσκεται στη φαντασία μας. Είναι κάτι που με τον ένα ή τον άλλο τρόπο το συναντούμε μπροστά μας, είτε στα κτήρια είτε στις μνήμες των ανθρώπων'.

In her catalogue contribution, Bisi Silva, director of the Centre of Contemporary Art in Lagos, Nigeria and co-curator of the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale, also links the art event to the city's history, and stresses the city's historical diversity, echoing the focus of Tsantsanoglou's text on the city's multicultural past (Silva, 2009, 35). Gabriela Salgado, too, focuses on the city's multicultural and multi-religious identity in the past and links it to the city's present (Salgado, 2009, 25).

Perhaps the most poetic and nostalgic portrayal of Thessaloniki's ostensible multiculturalism is expressed in Korovinis' contribution to the catalogue of the 3rd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale:

For centuries you were an amalgam of peoples and religions, an early version of New York of the southeast Balkan Europe, ... and this is what you should become once again; Balkan rhythms should mingle with sky-high chants, the old curses of the dockworkers should mix with Modiano market's Ladino, and Pontic grievances should intertwine with Turkish taunts at Kapani (Korovinis, 2011, 46).

Addressing Thessaloniki as 'the New York of the southeast Balkan Europe' hints to the city's aspired influential role and primacy in the area and links the narrative of Thessaloniki's multicultural character to the theme of its modern metropolitan role, as also expressed in the art event's catalogue texts, as well as the official discourse of Greek governance. Moreover, the repeated use of the modal verb 'should' indicates that the city's development and prosperity is associated with and expected to emanate from its multicultural element. It is aiming for a distinctively modern multiculturalism.

It could, also, be argued that it is not only the content of Korovini's text that contributes to the construction of Thessaloniki as 'multicultural', but also its very selection for the catalogue of the 3rd edition of the Thessaloniki Biennale. Korovinis does not have a visual arts background, therefore the inclusion of one of his texts in an art exhibition catalogue is not a self-evident choice. He is a writer and an active member of the intellectual scene of Thessaloniki with a diverse cultural activity. He

has published several books, often exploring Turkish and Greek culture, namely literature, folk culture and music, and the relationship between the two. Moreover, several of his narratives deal with the city of Thessaloniki and are inspired by his personal experiences as well as major culture and music figures, which lived and worked in the city⁸².

Through his inclusion in the exhibition catalogue of the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale, the close ties of his own work with Thessaloniki and his interest in exploring Greek and Turkish culture, music and literature, and their possible affinities, become signifiers connected to the broader themes articulated by the Thessaloniki Biennale narrative, particularly the city's multicultural character. The connotations which the writer's background and previous work bring into play make his text's inclusion a signifying act, and further reinforce the city's multicultural aspect⁸³.

The multicultural character of the city as anchored in its past and leading to its present is actively constructed in the narrative articulated by the *15th Biennale of Young Artists of Europe and the Mediterranean* which was also held in Thessaloniki in 2011. Thessaloniki is addressed as 'the Cosmopolis' in the art event's catalogue, entitled *Thessaloniki: A Visual, Verbal, Unusual and Wonderful Guide to the Cosmopolis* (Municipality of Thessaloniki, 2011). Furthermore, Deputy Mayor for Culture, Education and Tourism of Thessaloniki, Spiros Pengas, emphasised the multicultural character of Thessaloniki, as well as the long and continuous history of the city in a similar way as the Thessaloniki Biennale catalogue texts:

⁸² Thomas Korovinis is a Greek writer, born and raised in Thessaloniki, with a refugee background. He has been a teacher of Greek language in cross-cultural schools. He has written books on Istanbul, Smyrna and Thessaloniki and has translated Turkish poetry into Greek. A lot of his books focus on the city of Thessaloniki and are inspired by his personal experiences as well as major culture and music figures who lived and worked in the city. From 1988-1996, he lived in Istanbul, where he taught at the Zappeio and the Central Girls' School. In 2002, Dilek Koc, a Turkish singer, and Korovinis, joined forces to create 'Anatolikos Sevda' (Eastern love) which focuses on traditional Greek and Turkish music.

⁸³ Barthes has talked of denotation and connotation, two separate but linked operations, which complete the representation process and produce meaning. Denotation is the basic, descriptive level, where consensus is wide and most people would agree on the meaning (for example, 'dresses', 'jeans' in fashion). Connotation is the second level, in which the signifiers we decoded at the level of denotation become connected to broader themes and meanings, in other words, to the wider *semantic fields* of our culture (Barthes, 1964)

On a **historic course that spans over 23 centuries of continuous history, Thessaloniki was shaped by a variety of different ethnicities.** The city's architecture is an emblem of **its rich cultural diversity** (Pengas, 2011, 51).

This is also true in the case of the narrative constructed by the Organisation of Cultural Capital for Europe (OCCE):

Thessaloniki... **embodies into its own culture all kinds of religions, customs and traditions...A cosmopolitan centre, a crucible of peoples and traditions, cultures and religions, it will declare the cultural multiplicity,** the freedom for different opinions, the respect for the right to differ (Thessaloniki Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997b).

The extract above establishes Thessaloniki as 'multicultural' and 'cosmopolitan'. In fact, it was the official texts of the OCCE which established the conceptualisation of the city as multicultural on a more official level for the first time (Aggelopoulos, 2008, 203).

In a similar vein, OCCE emphasised Thessaloniki's tolerance and its role as the resort for the vulnerable:

Thessaloniki is a city of labourers, refugees, a city also known as the 'Second Jerusalem',...At the same time, it has always been a refuge for the oppressed, a city of tolerance, with the result that other communities, like the **Jewish**, the **Armenian**, the **Latin**, the **Turkish**, and others, have flourished side by side with the **Greeks**, and have greatly contributed to the development of its **multicultural character** (Thessaloniki Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997c).

The 'welcoming' and 'tolerant' feature is also present in the Thessaloniki Biennale narrative, namely in Tsaras opening speech for the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale, where

he exclaims that ‘in this city everyone is welcome’ (Tsaras, 2007a). Also, Korovinis, in his catalogue contribution for the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale, repeats exactly the same features, and reminds that Thessaloniki has been called ‘Mother of the Poor’, ‘Mother of the Refugees’ and ‘New Jerusalem’ (Korovinis, 2011, 47).

All the texts examined above take a synecdochical approach to the city’s past. The Thessaloniki Biennale’s narrative focuses on the fact that multiple communities of different cultural and religious backgrounds co-existed for centuries in the city up until the early 20th century, and identifies it with the whole of the city’s history. This synecdoche lies at the heart of the signification process initiated by the choice and use of venues as well, as indicated above.

Foucault challenged the concept of historical continuity; according to Foucault, continuity implies that there is a secret, yet elusive, origin to every phenomenon. In doing so, it links distinct phenomena and events and unites them in an artificial way, which obscures and suppresses alternative readings and interpretations of phenomena, events and discourses (Foucault, 1966, 357-358, 250; 1969, 12). Foucault’s deconstruction of the concept of historical continuity enables one to critically analyse the narrative constructed by the Thessaloniki Biennale as regards the city’s identity. The historical continuity which is claimed for the city’s multiculturalism serves to project this aspect of the city’s identity as authoritative and indisputable through the centuries.

In this respect, the narrative constructed by the Thessaloniki Biennale is similar to the first kind of discourse on the city’s presumed ‘multicultural character’, as identified by Aggelopoulos (2008). Aggelopoulos (2008, 200-202) highlights that the first kind of discourse traces Thessaloniki’s ‘multiculturalism’ to the city’s past, and has been largely strengthened by three literature works with great influence on the collective imagery about Thessaloniki, mostly at a local level: *Mother Thessaloniki* by N. G. Pentzikis (first published in 1970 and cited by Th. Korovinis in his catalogue text for the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale too), *Thessaloniki, Capital of the Refugees* by G. Ioannou (published in 1984), and the essay *The Fairytale of*

Thessaloniki by G. Vafopoulos (published in 1997)⁸⁴. These works reconstruct a supposedly past golden age for the city of Thessaloniki, during which groups of different ethnic and religious background co-existed in harmony. All three writers emphasise that this cultural plurality started in the Byzantine era, which is implied to be the most glorious period the city has experienced (Stavrakopoulou, 2010).

The insistence on highlighting the city's byzantine heritage in the works mentioned above often dilutes the presence and contribution of non-Greek groups and ultimately serves to reaffirm Thessaloniki's Orthodox Greek identity (Aggelopoulos, 2008, 204). Namely, Pentzikis and Ioannou avoid any reference to Thessaloniki's Ottoman past, and, thus, their work is imbued with the notion of a Greek national continuity through the centuries, from the Byzantine era to the present day, with Thessaloniki as both the reflection and the embodiment of this (Stavrakopoulou, 2010). In the contrary, the Thessaloniki Biennale narrative highlights the Ottoman presence in the city until the early 20th century.

The emphasis on the city's Byzantine, and more specifically Orthodox heritage has been widely reproduced in certain texts from the 1990s onwards. For example, as mentioned previously, the Dimitria Festival devoted an entire section of its website to its role during the Byzantine times. Moreover, the OCCE narrative, too, stressed the Orthodox heritage of Thessaloniki (both through its texts as well as its programming), and thus, sidelined the contribution of non-Greek communities to the history and culture of the city (Lambrianidis, 2008, 342). Indeed, OCCE's large-scale exhibition *Treasures From Mount Athos*, which showcased Byzantine Art from the Monasteries of Mount Athos, was very widely promoted as the highlight of the OCCE cultural programme (Thessaloniki Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997a)⁸⁵.

⁸⁴ N. G. Pentzikis (1908 – 1993) and G. Ioannou (1927 – 1985) were prominent Greek writers, who were born, raised and lived all or most of their life in Thessaloniki. They wrote extensively about Thessaloniki and their work has been linked with the city (Stavrakopoulou, 2010). G. Vafopoulos (1903-1996), although not originally from Thessaloniki, spent great part of his life in the city and developed a significant cultural activity, writing fiction and poetry. He founded the Municipal Library in 1938 and served as the Library's Director until 1963, and in 1983 he sponsored a large cultural centre in the city.

⁸⁵ In 1997, **the exhibition of the sacred treasures of the Holy Mountain**, shown for the first time outside the Holy Community of Athos, **will be a blessing for Thessaloniki and its inhabitants and will raise them to the position of ambassadors of the Faith and the Orthodox Church** (Thessaloniki Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997a).

OCCE texts, in particular, emphasised the Orthodox heritage of Thessaloniki in several instances:

A city of the Orthodox Faith, which saw, beside the Bible, the teaching of Moses and the Koran... In 1997, in Thessaloniki ... we shall undertake to... **seek out the contribution of the Orthodox Faith in the peaceful co- existence of the modern world** (Thessaloniki Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997b).

Putting the phrase ‘A city of Orthodox Faith’ at the beginning of the sentence, as well as the use of ‘beside’ imply the superiority of Orthodox Christian faith over other religions. In doing so, Thessaloniki is branded as primarily an Orthodox Christian city, which contradicts the simultaneous construction of the city as multicultural.

In the contrary, the narrative of the Thessaloniki Biennale is distinct both from the kind of discourse Aggelopoulos describes (2008) as well as from the narrative of the Dimitria Festival and the OCCE, as it does not make a single reference to the Orthodox aspect of Thessaloniki. The reason for this is that such a mention would have undermined the promotion of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious aspect of the city’s history. Moreover, the narrative of the Thessaloniki Biennale differs from the discourse outlined above, as it highlights the city’s Ottoman heritage though direct reference to it as well as the use of Ottoman monuments as exhibition venues. Following Foucault’s concept of epistemic breaks or ruptures taking place in discursive structures (Foucault, 1966, 357-358, 250; 1969, 12; Macdonell, 1986, 87; Mills, 1997, 52-53), it could be argued that the narrative of the Thessaloniki Biennale, by conceptualising the host city avoiding any reference to its current dominant religious identity, constitutes a rupture in the way the city had been conceptualised in the literature works mentioned above, as well as the narratives of official state cultural organisations, such as the OCCE.

Another instance, in which the narrative of the Thessaloniki Biennale subtly diverges from the dominant discourse on Thessaloniki's identity, is Nikos Papastergiadis's contribution to the catalogue of the Thessaloniki Biennale 3 (Papastergiadis, 2011). Although Papastergiadis, too, initially referred to the the city's location at the crossroads of East and West as well as the city's multicultural past (Papastergiadis, 2011, 39), later in his text, he maintained that there can not be a 'cosmopolitan city' as such:

I suggest that a closer look at the history that is already at the ground of this Biennale will reveal that the juxtaposition of cultural differences and the invitation for different people to come together is driven by a desire to gain **a glimpse at a cosmopolitan community that is always in the process of becoming** (Papastergiadis, 2011, 41).

In this extract, Papastergiadis essentially rejected the concept of the cosmopolitan city as static, fixed and capable of self-realisation, and substitutes it with the possibility of a cosmopolitan community which is never fulfilled but always in flux. In this way, he introduced a subversive tone as regards the city's framing as cosmopolitan, especially in relation to the texts by public officials and museum officials.

Finally, it is worth comparing the Thessaloniki Biennale's narrative on the city's identity with the way the identity of Greece itself is constructed in the official WWW server of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, *Odysseus*. In the *Odysseus* website, the identity of modern Greece is addressed by highlighting the country's classical and byzantine heritage (Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports, 2012). As Ruby Gropas, Hara Kouki and Anna Triantafyllidou remark in their report for the Hellenic Foundation For European and Foreign Policy, state actors opt for a narrative of Greek identity which links it with its ancient and Byzantine past overlooking contemporary aspects of Greek culture and assuming, thus, an inferior perspective towards current realities (Gropas, Kouki and Triantafyllidou, 2010). Indeed, the material on contemporary culture (art, events, institutions, museums) is scarce or totally absent in *Odysseus*, the official WWW

server of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture (Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports, 2012). Moreover, the website's section entitled 'Ottoman Monuments' is void. The decision to omit the Ottoman monuments surviving in Greece reflects the trauma of the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Ottomans and the long Ottoman occupation of the territories which today constitute the Modern Greek State. In the *Odysseus* website, this trauma turns into a taboo.

The Thessaloniki Biennale's approach to the host city's identity is different from the narrative constructed in the *Odysseus* website. In the Thessaloniki Biennale discourse, although the reference to the city's history is emphasised, it is counterbalanced by the city's projection as a contemporary art and culture centre, as the analysis below shows. In this way, the Thessaloniki Biennale draws attention to and includes contemporary art and culture. Moreover, the reference to Thessaloniki's history made by the Thessaloniki Biennale embraces the years under the Ottoman occupation and brings forward the Ottoman monuments of the city, through their use as exhibition venues for the Thessaloniki Biennale. In this respect, the Thessaloniki Biennale represents an utterance different from the official state narrative on the country's identity, as it diverges from the exclusive emphasis on the city's classical and byzantine heritage.

However, as the analysis above showed, the narrative constructed by the Thessaloniki Biennale does not frame the city's 'multicultural character' in the present. In this respect, it is very different from the second kind of discourse about Thessaloniki; the latter frames Thessaloniki as multicultural with regard to the present realities of the influx of immigrants rather than the city's past. This discourse involves texts by a group of human rights activists and intellectuals in Thessaloniki who, from the early 1990s onwards, have advocated the need to safeguard the rights of immigrants and minorities residing Thessaloniki. The texts of the Anti-racist Movement and the Immigrant Support Network of Thessaloniki serve as samples of this kind of discourse (Aggelopoulos, 2008, 203).

More recently, in his talk *Thessaloniki: Nationalism and Multiculturalism* at the 10th Anti-Racist Festival (2007), Michalis Tremopoulos⁸⁶ traced Thessaloniki's multicultural character back to the Ottoman past of the city – and not the Byzantine. Moreover, he linked it with the present as more and more immigrants choose Thessaloniki as their host city (Aggelopoulos, 2008, 207). Another instance of such discourse, is the work of geographers, Lois Labrianidis, and Panos Chatziprokopiou, which explores the changes effected in Thessaloniki's population, society and urban space as the result of the influx of immigrants in the city (Labrianidis and Chatziprokopiou, 2008). Although the writers address Thessaloniki as multicultural, any reference to the city's past is totally absent, and the multicultural aspect of Thessaloniki is founded purely on the presence of immigrants today (Labrianidis and Chatziprokopiou, 2008, 222, 253, 258). In the contrary, the Thessaloniki Biennale's official narrative constructs the city's 'multiculturalism' through a selective reading of its past, and by excluding any reference to the harsh realities of the present-day immigrants.

In this respect, the art event's official narrative is related to the discourse of corporate multiculturalism, which evokes multicultural diversity for profit-making purposes, while at the same time perpetuates structural and racialised inequalities (Littler, 2008, 97). Jo Littler explains that the discourse of corporate multiculturalism can be traced in the UK via corporate behaviour (such as Cadbury World's elision of its slave heritage) governmental actions (New Labour's evocation of creative British multiculturalism as a resource to generate economic profit) or popular sentiment (arguing for the 'free' global flows of goods and against the 'free' flows of people). In the case of the Thessaloniki Biennale's official narrative, the harsh realities of the approximately 45,000 immigrants who resided in the city at the time of the 3rd edition of the art event were completely obscured. This narrative, therefore, was to a large extent conservative, and politically 'sanitised' and, thus, allowed the possibility to become instrumentalised in relation to tourism and cultural diplomacy-related agendas.

⁸⁶ Environmentalist, member of the Ecologists Green party and member of the European Parliament in 2009.

The Thessaloniki Biennale should be credited, however, for not embracing a xenophobic, nationalistic perspective on the city's contemporary character, which considers the co-existence of Greek residents with immigrants from other countries as threatening and detrimental to the city's Greek identity. For instance, in her presentation for the 2003 National Conference themed around Thessaloniki, Professor of Philosophy, Theresa Pentzopoulou-Valala⁸⁷, stressed that Thessaloniki could only be conceived as a Greek city and warned about the possibility of letting the Greek population become a minority:

(Thessaloniki) **can only be conceived as a Greek city** and its cultural development as relevant to a Greek city. Open to visitors, of course, open to the ones who seek a better life, **but it can not be altered into a city of immigrants, where the Greek element would be only a part of the whole population...with the risk of turning the Greek population into a minority** (Pentzopoulou – Valala, 2005, 196)⁸⁸.

Similar views and fears were expressed in the presentation given by local politician and former Minister, Stelios Papathemelis in the same conference⁸⁹. Papathemelis stressed the need to ensure that Thessaloniki remains within the borders of the Greek State and that Greeks reside the city. He also advocated that Thessaloniki deserves and has the potential to be the metropolis of the Balkan area, without becoming multicultural:

⁸⁷ Professor of Philosophy in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (1973 – 2001), Member of the Academy of Athens and Vice President of the Heteria of Macedonian Studies, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the study of the history and culture of the region of Macedonia in Greece.

⁸⁸ The original text in Greek: 'Μόνο ως πόλη ελληνική νοείται και μόνο ως ελληνική πόλη μπορεί να αντιμετωπίζεται η πολιτισμική της ανάπτυξη. Ανοιχτή βέβαια σε επισκέπτες, ανοιχτή στους ζητούντες μια καλύτερη ζωή, δεν μπορεί όμως να μεταβληθεί σε πόλη μεταναστών, όπου το ελληνικό στοιχείο θα ήταν μέρος του όλου πληθυσμού...Δε γίνεται κατανοητό γιατί επιχειρείται ίσως να γίνει κάτι άλλο ή καλύτερα, γιατί θέλουν να αφήσουν την Θεσσαλονίκη να γίνει αυτό που δεν είναι: μία πόλη όπου δίπλα σε άλλους να ζούνε και Έλληνες, με διαφαίνοντα κίνδυνο να μεταβληθεί ο ελληνικός πληθυσμός σε μειονοτικό' (Pentzopoulou- Valala, 2005, 196).

⁸⁹ Lawyer and politician, originally from Thessaloniki. He has served as Minister of Northern Greece/ Macedonia and Thrace (1987-1989) and Minister of Public Order (1993 – 1995). In 2004, he founded a new political party which did not manage to enter the Greek Parliament. Today, he serves as one of the city's councillors (he is a member of the municipal government).

Thessaloniki deserves and has the ability to be the capital of the Balkan region **without becoming multi-ethnic or multicultural** (Papatthemelis, 2005, 190)⁹⁰.

In the contrary, the Thessaloniki Biennale's narrative opposed such xenophobic discourse by celebrating the city's 'multicultural character', and this contribution to anti-racism should be recognized.

iii) Thessaloniki is a centre for contemporary art and culture

The following section explores the third key theme pertaining to the way Thessaloniki's identity is constructed in the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts. In the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue texts by public officials, Thessaloniki is not addressed as a cultural centre in a direct way. Instead, the city's cultural infrastructure – museums and other cultural festivals and events – is highlighted:

For many years now, **Thessaloniki's museums have been housing remarkable collections of contemporary art** and the citizens of the city have been embracing their initiatives. The 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art, through the '5 Museums' Movement' initiative, **showcases this modern aspect of the city ...** (Boutaris, 2011).

...the Biennale showcases the extrovert, dynamic and **modern face of Thessaloniki.** (Geroulanos, 2011).

In these extracts, the city's cultural infrastructure is presented as an integral part of the city's modern aspect, and Thessaloniki's modern character is traced in the city's collections of contemporary art, the Thessaloniki Biennale itself and the '5 Museums Movement'.

⁹⁰ The original text in Greek: '...το ζητούμενο είναι διττό: πρώτον, η Θεσσαλονίκη να παραμείνει εις το διηνεκές εντός της ελληνικής επικράτειας και δεύτερον να κατοικείται από Έλληνες το γένος...Η Θ. δικαιούται και μπορεί να είναι η πρωτεύουσα των Βαλκανίων χωρίς να γίνει πολυεθνική ή πολυπολιτισμική' (Papatthemelis, 2005, 190).

In the Thessaloniki Biennale's catalogue text by the State Museum's officials, on the other hand, the aspiration for Thessaloniki to become a centre for contemporary art and culture is clearly articulated. The reference to the city's infrastructure serves as evidence to support the case made. In her catalogue contribution for the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale, M. Tsantsanoglou, provides a long list of the collaborating cultural organisations of the city, and concludes affirming Thessaloniki's potential to become a centre for contemporary art and culture (Tsantsanoglou, 2009).

The extracts from the interviews which I conducted with M. Tsantsanoglou in 2007 for the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale and S. Tsiara in 2009 for the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale are particularly telling of the hopes and aspirations regarding Thessaloniki's status as a contemporary art centre. M. Tsantsanoglou, who talked in her capacity as both the SMCA's Director and co-curator of the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale, considers Thessaloniki ideal for holding contemporary art events, in particular, because of the city's cultural infrastructure:

I believe that Thessaloniki **is an ideal city for the event** – if you wish, you may not call it biennale, or a festival, one is free to call it as they wish - **on contemporary art** for several reasons. Thessaloniki has a suitable size as a city. **Thessaloniki is freed from the burden of ancient heritage, which exists in Athens. This means that it is freer to create institutions relevant to contemporary culture....It is a city with very good infrastructure for contemporary culture** given the Greek standards. **It has two museums of contemporary art, a centre for contemporary art, another museum which is essentially devoted to arts, Teloglion Foundation for the Arts, the Museum of Photography, the Museum of Cinema....** Plus, it is a city which has proved that it can operate well as regards festivals or permanent institutions, e.g. **the Film Festival is ... the International Book Fair ...** (Tsantsanoglou, 2007a)⁹¹.

⁹¹ Interview conducted by the researcher with Maria Tsantsanoglou at the SMCA premises on The extract in Greek: Πιστεύω ότι η Θεσσαλονίκη είναι μια ιδανική πόλη για τη ...διοργάνωση - αν θέλετε μην το ονομάζετε Μπιενάλε, ενός φεστιβάλ , όπως θέλει κανένας το ονομάζει – για τη

In the extract above, clear emphasis was put on the city's contemporary art museums and cultural institutions, which were not only named one by one, but also referred to as proof for the city's suitability and effectiveness in organising cultural events. Similar points were raised by Tsiara, who highlighted the city's cultural infrastructure, its experience in organising other period cultural events, as well as the city's existing audience for visual arts⁹².

The narrative of the Organisation of Cultural Capital of Europe (OCCE) also raised the issue of Thessaloniki's international role and influence, but in a different way in relation to the Thessaloniki Biennale texts:

Thessaloniki must become the Economic Centre of South-Eastern Europe and the crossroads for **commerce** between East and West, North and South...In our days, Thessaloniki, as a modern European city, is once again **the central point of reference in South-eastern Europe and the Balkans** (Thessaloniki Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997a).

The OCCE texts clearly highlighted Thessaloniki's potential as a financial and commercial centre in the Balkan area and South-East Europe, rather than the city's

σύγχρονη τέχνη για πολλούς λόγους. Γιατί η Θεσσαλονίκη έχει μια καλή κλίμακα σαν πόλη... Η Θεσσαλονίκη είναι αρκετά απαλλαγμένη από το φορτίο της αρχαίας ελληνικής παράδοσης που υπάρχει στην Αθήνα. Που σημαίνει ότι πιο ελεύθερα μπορεί να δημιουργήσει θεσμούς που έχουν να κάνουν με το σύγχρονο πολιτισμό...Είναι πόλη που έχει πολύ καλές υποδομές για το σύγχρονο πολιτισμό σε σχέση με τα δεδομένα τα ελληνικά πάντα μιλάμε. Έχει δύο μουσεία σύγχρονης τέχνης, ένα κέντρο σύγχρονης τεχνης, ένα δεύτερο μουσείο, ουσιαστικά Τεχνών, που είναι το Τελλόγλειο, έχει Μουσείο Φωτογραφίας, Μουσείο Κινηματογράφου, όλα αυτά είναι θεσμοί σύγχρονου πολιτισμού και έχουν μια σχέση άμεση ή έμμεση με τα εικαστικά. Και επίσης είναι μια πόλη η οποία έχει αποδείξει ότι μπορεί να λειτουργήσει καλά σε ό,τι αφορά το θεσμό των φεστιβάλ ή τους μόνιμους θεσμούς, δηλαδή το Φεστιβάλ Κινηματογράφου η Διεθνής Έκθεση Βιβλίου ...'

⁹² 'Thessaloniki, **since serving as Cultural Capital of Europe, since 1997**,...has been endowed - apart from the most important thing, **the Costakis Collection**, which belongs to the SMCA – with very **important exhibition venues**...There are a lot of venues very well organised according to museum standards, there are new museums in operation, and this has created an audience which follows visual arts....In other words, **there are a lot of requirements met for Thessaloniki to become a significant pole of attraction for contemporary art**' (Tsiara, 2009a). The extract in Greek: '...η Θεσσαλονίκη, από την πολιτιστική πρωτεύουσα και μετά, από το 1997, ..., έχει προικιστεί, εκτός από το σημαντικότερο βέβαια, με τη υλλογή Κωστάκη, που ανήκει στο Κρατικό Μουσείο Σύγχρονης Τέχνης, με πολύ σημαντικούς εκθεσιακούς χώρους. Υπάρχουν λοιπόν χώροι αρκετά καλά οργανωμένοι με βάση τις μουσειακές προδιαγραφές, υπάρχουν καινούργια μουσεία, τα οποία λειτουργούν και αυτό έχει δημιουργήσει ένα κοινό, που παρακολουθεί συστηματικά τα εικαστικά. ... Υπάρχουν δηλαδή πολλές προϋποθέσεις ώστε να καταστεί ένας σημαντικός πόλος έλξης για τη σύγχρονη τέχνη η Θεσσαλονίκη.'

potential for arts and culture. A similar expectation for Thessaloniki to assume a leading and influential role in the Balkan area and South-East Europe was fervently expressed in the Municipality's website too:

The city is developing rapidly and **aims to continue to play a leading role in the Balkans** (Municipality of Thessaloniki, 2012b).

On the other hand, as the extracts from the Thessaloniki Biennale texts showed above, the Thessaloniki Biennale adopted a much more subdued and subtler approach, as it remained vague as far as the actual geographical locations were concerned. Moreover, it focused on the city's cultural aspect, and, although it foresaw a leading role for the city too, this role concerned art and culture, rather than finance and commerce.

The extracts above indicated that the projection of the city as the metropolis of the Balkan area and South-Eastern Europe was a recurrent theme in the narrative by the city's cultural organisations and the Municipality. This was consistent with the leading role Greece could assume in the region, as envisaged by the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bakogianni, 2006; Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Western Balkans", 2011c). The aspirations for a metropolitan role of Thessaloniki in the Balkan area were also expressed in official texts by the Hellenic Ministry of Finance. For instance, the programmatic texts of the Regional Operational Programmes (ROP) ⁹³, chartered by the Ministry of Finance from 1994 onwards, highlight Thessaloniki as the metropolitan centre of the Balkan area and South-Eastern Europe (Hellenic Ministry of National Economy, 1999; Thoidou, 2008; 2011). More specifically, the strategic goals set for the development of regional Greece under the auspices of the 2nd Community Support Framework (CSF) for 1994-1999 explicitly foresaw a central role for Thessaloniki in the development of the region of Central Macedonia, Greece, and at the same time projected the city as

⁹³ Regional Operational Programmes are part of the National Strategic Reference Frameworks. They are funded by the EU through the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and aim at the (primarily) economic growth of regional areas in order to combat financial and social disparities on a national level (Hellenic Ministry of National Economy, 1999).

the metropolis of the Balkans. One of the three strategic goals was to ‘strengthen Thessaloniki’s position as the metropolitan centre of the Balkans’ (cited in Thoidou, 2008, 613).

The Development Plan, as part of the 3rd Community Support Framework for 2000-2006, also saw Thessaloniki as vital for the Greek economy and the broader geopolitical influence of Greece, and stressed the city’s strategic position in relation to the Balkan area and South East Europe (Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2004). However, Thessaloniki’s influential role was conceived as broader and included South-Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean as well as the Balkans as potential areas of influence (Thoidou, 2008, 614). Finally, in the National Strategic Reference Framework for 2007 – 2013, Thessaloniki was addressed as ‘a metropolitan Balkan centre and pole of international collaboration and European realisation in the wider region of South East Europe’ (cited in Thoidou, 2008, 618).

The theme of Thessaloniki’s metropolitan role in the area is linked to the aspiration from the part of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a broader influential role of Greece in the South-East Europe, as was discussed in the context of Greek cultural diplomacy earlier. The same hope is shared by some Greek thinkers, such as Ioannis Koliopoulos, Professor of Modern Greek History. Koliopoulos advocated a leading role of Greece in the Balkan area, based on its supposed potential to promote the principles and rationale of the EU (2002). According to Koliopoulos, Greece, a member of the EU since 1981, could guide its Balkan neighbours into a potential European integration and use its own experience to set the tone (Koliopoulos, 2002, 26, 35, 37). In this vision - which echoes the official governmental discourse, as expressed in the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013) - Thessaloniki could serve as the buttress of the country’s leading role and influence over the Balkan area.

Although the texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale too present Thessaloniki as a cultural metropolis, they adopt a more subdued tone in relation to the statements of other cultural organisations, such as the OCCE, as well as those by Greek governance. In particular, the Thessaloniki Biennale avoids any reference to particular regions and

stresses the city's potentially central role as regards contemporary art rather than finance or commerce. Nevertheless, the Thessaloniki Biennale narrative, too, outlines a hegemonic role for Thessaloniki, even though in a softer way, and could be regarded as a subtler variation of the same aspiration, partly aligned with the cultural diplomacy agenda of Greek government.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter argues that the Thessaloniki Biennale was partly a manifestation of the broader shift of interest towards contemporary art from the part of the Greek state. This shift was linked to the official governmental discourse which, in line with the official EU guidelines, conceptualised art and culture as engines for economic growth and tools of cultural diplomacy. In particular, the Thessaloniki Biennale was intricately linked to official Greek cultural policy, and became more explicitly connected with the agenda of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, when in 2011, it was incorporated into the Ministry's *Thessaloniki Cultural Crossroads* programme. This agenda included boosting tourism in Northern Greece (especially cultural tourism) as well as issues related to cultural diplomacy, namely projecting Thessaloniki as a metropolitan centre with a leading role in Balkan area, and South-Europe.

The art event embraced, to an extent, the priorities of Greek cultural policy and the Ministry of Culture, and contributed to a broader effort to 're-brand' Thessaloniki as historical and multicultural, as well as a centre of contemporary art. In this way, it contributed to enhancing the city's competitiveness and attractiveness as an urban and cultural destination in order to boost its tourism and influence. In this process, the Thessaloniki Biennale recycled certain institutional patterns of the highly centralised official Greek cultural administration. More specifically, it adopted a hierarchical and top-down approach as regards the selection of participating artists and projects, and, thus, reproduced the exclusivist and elitist character of the formulation of Greek cultural policy. This, in combination with the fact that the Thessaloniki Biennale promoted a fixed image of the city with an emphasis on its monuments and its histories undermined the art event's potential for opposition and subversion in relation to the official governmental discourse which promoted the utilisation of contemporary art for profit-making purposes.

For instance, as regards local urban planning initiatives, the Thessaloniki Biennale addressed the concern to highlight the historical centre of the city, created a guided tour for the visitor through the city's historic centre, and used the city's historical port, namely Pier 1, to house numerous projects. These initiatives from the art event were in line with the policies promoted by the Regulatory Scheme of Thessaloniki, the Organisation of Thessaloniki, the Organisation of the Cultural Capital of Europe 1997, and the Technical Chamber of Greece as regards the preservation and promotion of the city's heritage. In relation to Pier 1, in particular, the Thessaloniki Biennale was a way to reinforce visibility and intensify life and activity in the area. However, it reproduced a pattern of top-down planned and consumption-oriented clusters (Mommaas, 2004, 516-517).

As regards the way the identity of the city was constructed by the official written texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale, it involved three key themes: 1. The city's dominant history 2. The city's multicultural character and 3. The city's aspired role as a metropolitan / leading centre in the Balkan area and South-East Europe. Through its catalogue texts, but also through the choice of venues and its spread across the city, the Thessaloniki Biennale became a sign for the city, and constructed it as open, inclusive and welcoming, multicultural, and as a cultural leader in the area.

This kind of conceptualisation of Thessaloniki was closely linked to previous texts by the city's official cultural organisations, and was also influenced by the way the city was conceptualised by Greek governance. The texts of the Thessaloniki Biennale echoed those by Greek governance and other official cultural organisations, especially as regards the historical continuity which was claimed for the city's multiculturalism in order to project this aspect of the city's identity as authoritative and indisputable through the centuries.

However, the narrative of the Thessaloniki Biennale had a more subdued and critical tone, and shaped the discourse on Thessaloniki in a slightly different way. More specifically, the art event's narrative did not make a single reference to the Orthodox aspect of the city, and highlighted the city's Ottoman heritage though direct reference to it as well as the use of Ottoman monuments as exhibition venues. On the other

hand, as the official texts of Greek governance outlined a hegemonic role for Thessaloniki, so did the Thessaloniki Biennale narrative, even though in a softer way. Therefore, it could be regarded as a subtler variation of the same aspiration, aligned with the cultural diplomacy agenda of Greek government.

On the other hand, the official narrative of the Thessaloniki Biennale constructed the city's 'multiculturalism' through a selective reading of its past, and excluded any reference to the harsh realities of the present-day immigrants - approximately 45,000 people in 2011. In this respect, it was related to the discourse of corporate multiculturalism, which evokes multicultural diversity for profit-making purposes, while at the same time perpetuates structural and racialised inequalities (Littler, 2008, 97). As a result, it remained conservative and politically 'sanitised' and, thus, further allowed the possibility to become instrumentalised in relation to the agendas mentioned above.

It should be noted, though, that the art event did not embrace the explicitly xenophobic perspective on the city's contemporary character (which considers the co-existence of Greek residents with immigrants from other countries as threatening and detrimental to the city's Greek identity). This is to its credit. Even so, it should have made a clearer and more powerful statement against racism. Such a gesture was and is still very urgent especially in the context of the force which neo-fascism is gaining in Greece, as the alarming rise of the neo-fascist Golden Dawn party shows.

For all these reasons, this chapter argues that the Thessaloniki Biennale could be regarded as a case in point of the concept of the expedient uses of art and culture, especially for socio-political and economic ends (Yúdice, 1999, 17; 2003, 9). In particular, the analysis of the Thessaloniki Biennale provides more empirical evidence to support the arguments put forward about the instrumental function of biennials, especially as regards their connection with tourism and city-development agendas (León 2001, 71; Stallabrass 2004, 37), their role in highlighting the uniqueness of a particular place and branding a city (Sheikh 2009, 71, 72), as well as their contribution to the advancement of cultural diplomacy agendas (Mosquera, 2010, 202).

This is important for two reasons: first, because although the accounts explored in Chapter 2's Literature Review draw a clear and direct line connecting biennials and city image/tourism as well as financial interests, their analysis is brief (probably due to size restrictions, as they often are relatively small essays, articles or sections within larger works). Consequently, they do not trace in detail, for example, the way a biennial can represent its host city, and how exactly it can contribute to the process of city-branding. The second reason why this analysis is useful to the broader discourse on biennials is because, by tracing the process through which an art biennial got entangled in the official discourse of a neo-liberal government on how to capitalise on art and culture, it relates this type of cultural practice to the discourse of creative economy and cultural and creative industries.