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New lovers for a defamed city

Young generations of Athenians defend hometown with great passion and sense of responsibility

It all depends on your point of view. Above: An attractive image of a square in pedestrian Plaka creates a positive feeling for the city as a whole.

By Dimitris Rigopoulos - Kathimerini



When you're in love and the object of your desire is neither Brad Pitt nor Angelina Jolie, people tend to leave you alone. Love is blind. Or crazy, according to Melina Tanagri's latest CD. Blind or crazy or both (which is the best-case scenario), love has nothing to do with looks and objective readings of beauty.

So what happens when the object of desire is a city which seems hardly seductive? When you have to explain the inexplicable? Take the above words, "hardly seductive," for instance. Perfectly sensible words, though I'm not sure they would be easily adopted by young lovers of the Greek capital, who spend their days and nights on the Internet, setting up blogs, worrying about broken pavements, organizing groups and standing up for their city with a crazy passion?

These young lovers of Athens despise all the unfavorable cliches which came about during some really suffocating times. Words are not always innocent and if you choose to refer to your city using negative terms (like "monstercity") you have, without realizing it, picked your team. Words reveal intention and behavior and it's almost certain that if you believe that fate landed you in the world's ugliest city you will find it hard to believe in the power of personal will and responsibility. And, of course, in the power of change.

It is precisely this faith in a better city which has changed in Athens in the last 20 years. Smaller or bigger improvements (from the metro and the unification of archaeological sites to the significant reduction of air pollution and some urban remodeling), have reared a new generation who are far more positive toward the city compared to the previous one. And that's not the whole story. As we move away chronologically (and psychologically) from unpleasant landmarks (such as the city's signature smog in the 1980s), and generations born and bred in Athens are released from the disappointments and nostalgia associated with domestic migration, Athens can hope for more conscious residents.

Members of the "Blanco" troupe surely belong to this last category. During their most recent event, their wish was to happily surprise even the most pessimistic of Athenians, by staging an outdoor photo exhibition outside the National Garden, featuring unexpected views of Athens and Attica, such as a lake on Mt Parnitha and a waterfall on Mt Pendeli. The way in which the troupe looks at the city is both positive and realistic. In a similar vein, the activities of "locus athens" display a more artistic character, though the subject remains the same: the city. They are currently participating in ReMap 2 with the "Amateur Bicyclism" exhibition, which showcases a novel way of mapping the city, through the use of bicycles that are at the same time works of art.

Meanwhile, the World Wide Web has become a great reservoir for the exchange of ideas and images and the best way to share your passion with others. The "athensville" blog (athensville.blogspot.com) is an online diary with kaleidoscopic coverage of the daily changes taking place in the city, while the most lively forum for city issues is the Athenian "room" of skyscrapercity.com.

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