

The Larissa Experiment Nella Golanda

Urban Landscape Sculptor

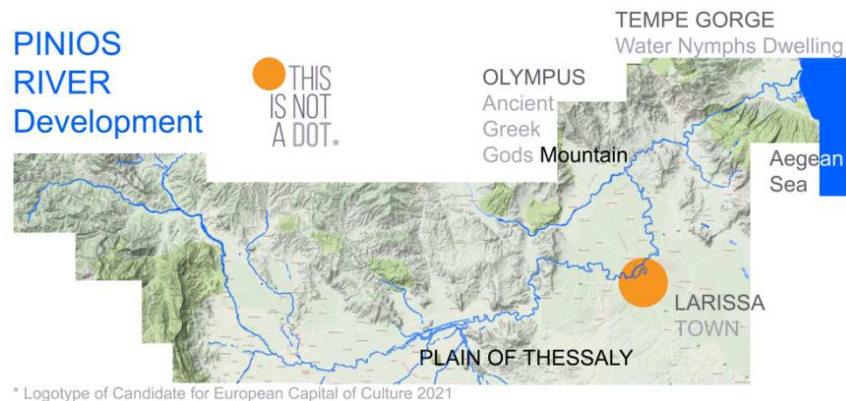
Total Art operations for the reestablishment in urban life of the wider natural and historical landscape 1992-98, 2005-06 Larissa (Town of Thessaly – Greece)

“When I designed a public space, my deep and instinctive desire was, this new space to emerge the emotion I had felt in architectural and structured spaces; spaces that reflect the landscape and the love for detail, spaces where I walked in my childhood. I believe that the most serious events that marked my life is that as a child I played, ran, saw the sky, the nearby mountain, the horizon of the sea, the beauty of Greek vegetation and the development of the rocks through the structural mirror, as the inhabitants of this place since ancient times up to some years ago. For thousands of years, from the classical temples to the most humble buildings, the inhabitants always felt the joy to experience the miracle of living in human-scale. I could say that as a child I lived in an **open-air museum: Greece**

Since 1970 my work was based on the qualities of the Greek landscape through holistic design - Total Art interventions. I believe that living inside of artworks we exploit the opportunity to become members of urban life.

The Total Art design of a new landscape includes the visitor’s experience; it is not isolated, it belongs to the whole world; it’s no longer kept in museums nor is the property of an individual. Art is completed in the shock of modern life in a subtle embracement that inspires people to participate in the values of the natural and historical surrounding, not realizing that they are living and breathing art.”*

*From N.Golanda’s presentation of her work, invited by the Council of Europe, in the European Conference of Prague, with title “**Culture dans la ville – Les politiques culturelles des villes européennes aujourd’hui**”, October 1993



Larissa is an ancient riverside town in the middle of the fertile plain of Thessaly. Its timeless habitation is lost in the mists of history. Major floods of the Pinios river led to its (90%) diversion in the 1930s, an action that had as a consequence the loss of the riverside – city character.

In addition, in the spring of 1941, after the bombing and the big earthquake which followed almost immediately, the city was destroyed and lost all her characteristics, becoming a sad city.

Living my childhood there, I heard people like my parents describing with great passion the city they knew and the landscapes they loved in their childhood as Larissa adjoins the Olympus mountain, the Pelion of the Centaurs and the vast famous fertile plain of Thessaly.

The lost link of the city with the mythical Pinios river which flows almost horizontally in Greece, almost from the Ionian Sea to the Aegean Sea where it empties, passing through the plains of Thessaly and the Tempe Gorge to the foothills of the Olympus, the ancient Greek Gods mountain, where, as they believed in ancient Greece, the water nymphs lived. This mythical element passed on stories and our childhood tales.

I remember its inhabitants strove for a creative emergence through the “ashes” of the city by learning with great passion its music, history and mythology through their contact

with its historical and natural landscapes. My father used to say that we live on an archaeological palimpsest. His words were engraved in my childhood memory.

In the 1980s the municipal authority, having at the head the great reformer city Mayor, Aristides Lambroulis, decided the archaeological excavation of the residential hill located in the city center in order to discover the magnificent ancient theater of the 3rd century BC, as big as the ancient theatre of Epidaurus.

In this fertile atmosphere of human resources, trying to shake off the designation of one of the ugliest-neutral cities in Greece, the Mayor asked me at the end of that decade "to design squares in my hometown as well." The emergence of the Ancient Theatre in the city center led me to suggest the reconnection of the city of Larissa with its lost natural and historical landscape and in particular with the flow of its great river, Pinios, which flows from remote mountain springs through the fertile plain and ravines of the Olympus mountain towards its end at the Aegean Sea. The central idea of the design would be the flow of the great river - the "Sculptured Larissa River", the three recurrences in the center with local recycling of large quantities of water leading to the excavated Ancient Theatre.

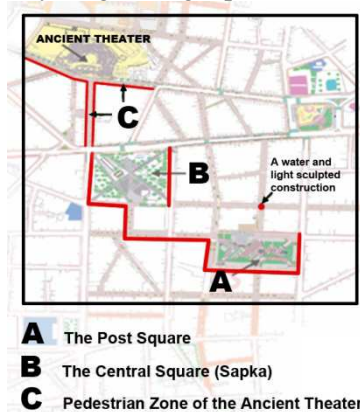


Photo from the beginning of the Ancient Theater excavation in the 80's

The two major central city squares (more than 13.000 m² each) are 150 meters apart and another 150 meters from excavation site of the Ancient Theater. They are characterized by a comprehensive urban landscape intervention, which enables the city of Larissa to welcome the revealed Ancient Theatre, by using a structured urban center, where various rhythms and qualities have the possibility to develop, "in the river's flow", through total design interventions, in a large-scale, a spatial natural and historical landscape.

Special emphasis in my Art Total interventions was given for the emergence of forgotten everyday experiences and relations of living in the riverside and the benefit of the waters through the line of time. On the other hand, the presence of the rhythms of the plantations and the agriculture procedures in the famous fertile Thessalian Plain help the awareness especially of children about their natural, geographical and historical position.

During the construction of the squares and the "sculpted river", a wide zymosis developed in the city, as the Pinios River reenters to city conscious life, many clubs are created, such as "Friends of mythological Pinios", "Women and the river" etc., and many annual riverside festivals with nominal tributes to the Nymphs of Pinios and the mythical surroundings take place. The reconstructing of the boundaries of Pinios River bed is completed within the last years and a new bridge is constructed in the place of the old one, destroyed by war. The city now recovers its riverside front where new interesting buildings are constructed and a new riverside green pedestrian route is created. In addition, due to the masses of waters in the "sculpted river", birds came back to the city. According to a poll, five years ago, in Greece, Larissa was found to be the most beloved city from its residents; a vision and a goal set by many worthy Mayors during the recent years. Now the city of Larissa is candidate for European Capital of Culture 2021!

*A line of the Nobel Prize awarded Greek poet George Seferis comes to mind:
"Let the children play with the ashes"*

GOOD PRACTICES IN IMPLEMENTATION OF LANDSCAPE POLICIES

(through landscape projects) **Greek case 2013**

Making European Policy Popular through Challenge, Learning, Innovation,

Cooperation: An experiment on the Landscape Convention / **E-CLIC****

“Total art operations for the reestablishment of the natural, historical and cultural landscape of the city of Larissa”.

1. Description and context: a brief introduction:

The project has been proposed by the landscape sculptor Nella Golanda and promoted by the Municipality of Larissa. The project aims to create a new landscape identity for the city of Larissa based on the enhancement of the ancient Theatre. It intends to do so by involving local communities and revealing the memories of a distinctive agricultural landscape such as the plain of Thessaly with Pinios river. The project achieves the implementation of the principles defined under the ELC (2010) through local urban planning.

7.2. Description of the concrete targets:

Nella Golanda aims to create a new identity for the city of Larissa based on the enhancement of the ancient Theatre of the city. The two main squares of the town, the central (Sapka) and the Post Office square (Tahidromiou), are included in a holistic design approach, in order to reveal the temporal historical character of Larissa. In order to achieve these goals, she proposes the design of *“the sculpted river”*, marking the lost relation of the city with its river (Pinios) and emphasizing the different landscape types of Thessaly (the uplands and the lowlands) along its route. The *“sculpted river”* flows towards the Ancient Theatre and enables the development of the mountainous and lowland flora of the region.

8. Implementing agents:

8.1. Main actors involved:

The Master plan was commissioned and supervised by the Municipality of Larissa, Technical Service Department (Ms Vayoula Tsopanoglou). The townscape project was developed by the Landscape Sculptor Ms Nella Golanda.

www.sculpted-architectural-landscapes.gr

8.2. Funding:

All funds for the master plan and the implementation of the project have been obtained from the Sectoral Operational Program about Thessaly and from local funding.

8.3. Public participation:

A public participation process was embedded through the development of the project, during the process of construction. Local craftsmen and art students from the Free Workshop of Fine and Applied Arts of Art Gallery of Larissa - Museum Katsigra- were involved during the construction of mosaic duplicates of the originals, which were found during the excavations of the center of Larissa.

10. The challenge:

The challenge is to enhance public awareness of the historical landscape of Larissa and to achieve sustainable development based on a balanced and harmonious relationship between social needs, economic activity, culture and the environment. It aims to alter the landscape character of big cities and to raise consciousness among the citizens of the local historical characteristics of their town. A further challenge is to educate people, especially children that the landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being and that its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone.

11. The solution:

11.1. Measures and actions proposed to address the project challenges;

The aim of N.Golanda’s Master Plan is to increase people’s awareness about the lost relationship of the city of Larissa with its historical and mythical Pinios River (due to floods, natural disasters and bombings) and to re-establish this connection. Also to “prepare” the city centre to accommodate the revealed ancient Theatre, which is located few meters away from the central squares.

i)Post office square represents the strong water flows from the mountains of Thessaly-guided by three sections of the *“sculpted river”* (local loops) to the Ancient

Theater-.It represents the landscape of the uplands of Thessaly. The plant species have been selected to create this atmosphere. N.Golanda has emphasized the archaeological value of the city's underground by incorporating 24 replicas of floor mosaics, from the Archaeological Museum, into areas of seating. Information points are placed close to the seatings, providing necessary details about the address (Name and number of the street), where these are found, and the year of their excavation.

ii) *Central (Sapka) square* represents the landscape of lowlands of Thessaly and is designed to create an impression of this type of landscape. The large scale urban-sculpted planting design has taken account of the choice of plant size, and here, the river appears with a strong water flow providing the potential of light refraction, during day and night.

The design of the features is to be consistent with the intended perspective, with benches designed in the form of bails of straw and lamp posts in form of countryside telegraph posts. The "*sculpted river*" is designed to convey a sense of the archaeological richness of the city, penetrating both the squares and giving the impression that the river crosses the city underground.

iii) *The ancient Theatre* was highlighted by the holistic design of N.Golanda's pedestrian improvements. The pavement design of the landscape sculptor represents the ground-plan of ancient buildings existing on the underground of the city of Larissa, originating from the Neolithic era, through the Classical Period and the Byzantine Periods, creating a palimpsest of the presence of different civilizations.

11.2. Degree of success in achieving the challenges;

The biggest success was that Larissa has become the most beloved city in Greece among its citizens, with a number of cultural thematic events along the Pinios river and new groupings for the protection of river's history and landscape were created. In 2008, the project of the pedestrianization of the *Ancient Theatre* was granted the first award of landscape architecture of archaeological sites, by the Greek Association of Planners. In 2011, SADAS (Panhellenic Union of Architects) organized in Larissa a congress under the title: "Water: an important design tool for the contemporary cities".

12. Methodology proposed to reach the expected solution:

12.1. Instruments used;

The landscape interventions of N.Golanda involved the following steps:

- Identify and evaluate the present situation of the landscape and the buildings
- Analyze the relationship of the historical centre with Pinios River in a broader geographical context.
- Assess the elements and characteristics of the landscape of Thessaly.
- Develop a master plan presenting the design concept based on total art.

The primary design key concepts are:

- Human scale and local's daily lifestyle are incorporated in the design
- Space is treated as habitable sculpture creating the sense of a total art
- The new landscape becomes a landmark
- Exploration through design of the natural phenomena and rhythms
- Dialogue between historical and natural environment
- Revealing of the lost way of life in Mediterranean public spaces
- The experience offered by living in the heart of the total art sculptured spaces, further to enhancing human relations among the inhabitants and especially among children, contributes to a daily communication with art.

The key proposals, as identified in her Master Plan, seek to promote the historical identity of the city of Larissa and to reestablish the connection of the city with its river by a selective number of redesigned public spaces. Within these proposals, three public spaces have been designed in relation to each other and to the Pinios river. These projects of "*art total*" create an art consciousness among the users and especially the children, increasing awareness of the value of landscapes.

13. Lessons learnt:

This is a good practice example of cooperation among the designer, the local authority and the citizens of Larissa. It illustrated that projects which obtain the participation of the general public, local and regional authorities can prove successful. Also, with the active participation of the interested parties, as advocated by the E.L.C., it was more viable to identify this particular landscape throughout its territory. People realized that after this project their life has been improved, environmental restoration has been achieved and tourism increased.

14. Key References:

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