

# Possibilities of Leftover Spaces in Thessaloniki

## The formation of Informal urbanization

Keywords: leftover spaces, temporary use, possibilities, informal urbanization

### **Abstract**

Thessaloniki is a city with a history of more than 2,300 years. After many regime changes, many buildings have been constructed, destroyed, reused, or abandoned. As a result, many interesting leftover spaces are created, and these spaces provide places where informal elements can be placed. In other words, leftover spaces are an important reason for the formation of Informal Urbanization. In this paper, the relationship between the leftover spaces and informal constructions of Thessaloniki will be discussed.

### **Introduction**

In Thessaloniki, many informal phenomena can be seen everywhere, such as the antennas on the roof, the Greek flags on the balconies, and the common graffiti on the outer wall. The existence of these elements does not follow government regulations but is produced independently by residents' living habits and culture. Moreover, these informal elements indirectly affect the way people use the surrounding space, for example, people's walking paths and the way travelers view the city. These elements can be called "informal constructions," and these "informal constructions" constitute the so-called "informal urbanization." Furthermore, most of those informal elements exist in abandoned and often unused spaces in cities, such as roofs, abandoned buildings, empty shops. This is how these two terms are linked. Therefore, the relationship between Leftover Spaces and Informal constructions is worthy of being explored.

### **Problem Statement**

In addition to unused land, due to economic recession and government policy factors, Thessaloniki has many more leftover spaces, such as buildings that have been half-built and suspended, buildings that have not been completely demolished, and empty shops that people no longer operate. Nevertheless, these seemingly useless spaces actually have many activities happening in them, which may be temporary or permanent. The main directions of this research are the reasons for the formation of these informal constructions/activities, the systems behind them, and the hidden rules. And then determine the advantages and disadvantages of these phenomena for the city and discover more possibilities for these leftover spaces to help have a beneficial impact on the city's future development.

But this article is not intended to fill the leftover spaces of the entire city because these blank spaces allow residents to have more possibilities for different activities, just like Barre claims:

“Surprise must remain possible, the eruption of the non-assigned, the force of diversion, sudden and then gradually accepted... Finally, the city must keep its blank pages, its waste areas, its pockets of adventure, zones and barriers that owners know how to use.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **The definition of Leftover Spaces**

The term “leftover space” was first addressed in 1977 by Venturi as an extra layer of space exists between the exterior and the interior.<sup>2</sup> In 2009, Dr. Alanyali Aral redefined leftover space as space that is not ‘possessed’ by people. The following is a more detailed description of her:

“Leftover spaces, accordingly, lack a specific care by people, through a certain period of time, observable in their physical properties. Leftover spaces are relatively unused, underused, but in some cases, even well-used spaces may be named as leftover, due to lack of maintenance and control, which is reflected in their appearance.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barre, F. & Academy. (1980). *Urbanity*. Academy Editions.

<sup>2</sup> Venturi, R., Scully, V., & Drexler, A. (1977). *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (2nd ed.). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<sup>3</sup> Alanyali Aral, E. (2009). *Redefining Leftover Space: Value and Potentiality for the City*. VDM Verlag.

In history, there have been many deformations related to leftover space, which were defined by different theorists. The following table is organized according to their usage quality and spatial quality:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Theorist</i>	<i>Term Used</i>	<i>Usage Quality</i>	<i>Spatial Quality</i>	<i>Example Forms</i>
1968	Whyte	The area of second chances	- Abandoned	- Mostly smaller in size - Wasted	
1978	Burrow	Vacant urban land	- Unused		- Derelict/ Spoiled areas - Demolition areas - Neglected wasteland
1986	Roger Trancik	Lost Space	- Abandoned - Underutilized - Potential Exploitable - Unproductive	- Need to be redesigned - Ill-defined boundaries - Invisible/ Unexposed - Deteriorating in appearance	- Leftover unstructured landscape - Abandoned waterfronts - Abandoned train yards - Vacated military sites - Vacated industrial complexes
1986	Rivlin	Found spaces	- Appropriated	- Uncertain/ Blurred - Indeterminate (Rule of usage) - Unplanned	- Street intersections and squares that were set off from surrounding space.
1995	Solà-Morales	Terrain vague	- Abandoned - Unproductive - Obsolete	- Undefined	- Unincorporated margins - Interior islands void of activities
1996	Loukaitou-Sideris	Cracks in the City	- Abandoned	- Unplanned - Undeveloped	- Decaying parks and playgrounds
2005	Groth & Corjin	Intermediate Spaces		- Indeterminate	
2007	Doron	Dead Zone/Edges	- Abandoned - Appropriated		- Train yards - Dysfunctional harbors - Vacated industrial sites - Dysfunctional barracks
2007	Stvens	Loose spaces	- Appropriated	- Unplanned	
2009	Ela Alanyali Aral	Leftover Spaces	- Abandoned - Appropriated - Underutilized - Potential Exploitable	- Uncertain/ Blurred - Ill-defined boundaries - Deteriorating in appearance (Ruined)	- Unbuildable areas - Abandoned sites - Vacant lots - Interstitial spaces - Sub-spaces - Neglected public parks and plazas
2011	Kamvasinou	Vacant Urban Lands	- Abandoned - Unproductive	- Unplanned - Undeveloped - Uncertain/ Blurred (land usage)	- Voids between spaces - Vacant land - Land pending development - derelict land

### The definition of Informal Urbanization

Informal urbanization is defined as the production of urbanization independent of formal frameworks and assistance, composed of informal construction. As for informal construction, each country has its own building regulations. Broadly speaking, buildings that do not follow the building regulations can be called informal construction. However, formal and informal cannot be understood as absolute duality because there are still transition zones with different degrees of formality in between.<sup>4</sup>

### The definition of spatial behavior

According to Mirilia Bonnes and Giuseppe Carrus, "The concept of spatial behavior relates to how individuals regulate and use (in terms of appropriation and defense) their spatial environments at different personal, interpersonal, and group levels."<sup>5</sup> The relevance of this term to this research is how different void spaces affect people's behavior.

### The Typologies of Leftover Spaces

- (1) Unbuildable areas: Areas that cannot be built due to natural environmental conditions.
- (2) Redundant Sites/infrastructures/Shops: The area or building which is not in use anymore.
- (3) Void Spaces: Large underutilized sites surrounding buildings.
- (4) Interstitial Spaces: The result after urban demolition or the gap area between buildings.
- (5) Space below: Spaces below elevated highway/railways.
- (6) Rooftops: Underutilized rooftop spaces of buildings.
- (7) Space around: The result of new development in old context, creates intermediary zones between public and private space.
- (8) Wedges: The result of intersection of conflicting urban grids or infrastructural lines.
- (9) Oversized Road: Overestimated spaces for traffic.
- (10) Neglected public parks & plazas: The designed urban spaces which remain disused or underused.

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<sup>4</sup> Werthmann, C. (n.d.). *Informal Urbanism – About – Habitat UNI*. Habitat UNI.  
<https://uni.unhabitat.org/informal-urbanism-about/>

<sup>5</sup> Bonnes, M., & Carrus, G. (2004). *Environmental Psychology, Overview*.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/medicine-and-dentistry/spatial-behavior>

According to the actual city survey in Thessaloniki, it is found that the following three categories of leftover space account for the majority of the areas with the most human activities in the city center: (1) Redundant Sites/infrastructures/Shops; (2) Interstitial Spaces; (3) Rooftops. They have different causes and ways of being used, so in this paper, I will focus on the status of these three categories in Thessaloniki.

#### (1) Redundant Sites/infrastructures/Shops:

##### Description

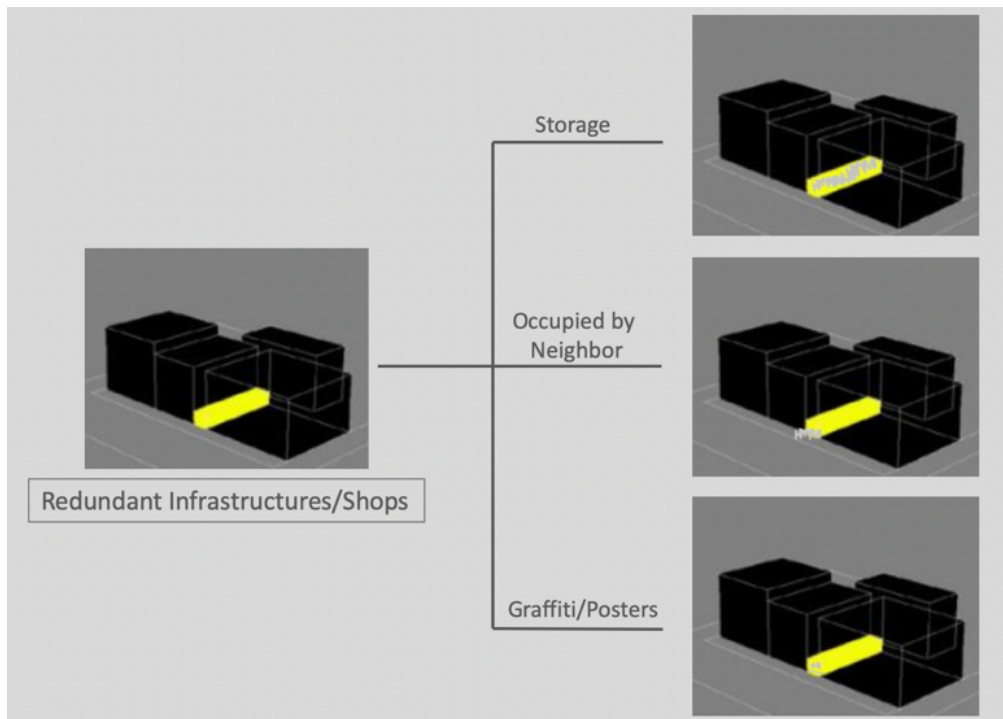
Broadly speaking, this category is defined as the area or building which is not in use anymore. There are two main reasons for this type of space. The first is that the original design does not meet the needs of users, and the second is that it is the acquired environment that makes people no longer need these spaces. For either of the above reasons, these spaces are now empty spaces where many different activities can take place.

##### The causes of formation in Thessaloniki

The reason for the existence of such leftover space is mainly because of the economic recession, especially after the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020, which made Thessaloniki's already poor financial situation even worse. According to research, a large part of Thessaloniki's revenue comes from foreign tourists visiting historical sites. The decline in tourists is undoubtedly a blow to the city. Redundant Sites/infrastructures are mostly half-built but stopped due to policy or financial difficulties. Most of them are located next to the main road, so they have become another unique scene. The redundant shops are mostly located on the inner ground floor of the block, with fewer people passing by. Due to the epidemic, a large number of tourists have been reduced, which indirectly caused the closure of these shops and restaurants, and released a lot of empty space.

##### Current state of use in Thessaloniki

According to the actual investigation, the redundant shops in the city center are effectively used by local residents. The interior is mostly the storage space of the landlord, and it can be seen that some of the interiors are full of cardboard boxes or furniture. The area in front of the shops is used by different neighbors nearby according to different times. For example, during the day, it is used as a space for product display; at night, it is used as a space for placing tables and chairs in the restaurant next door, and in the middle of the night, it is occupied by the opposite bar to allow customers to have more places to drink. Many graffiti and posters can be seen on the walls and windows of these empty shops. These seemingly empty spaces, upon closer inspection, are actually occupied by many activities.



## (2) Interstitial Spaces:

### Description

The definition I give to this category is the void area between buildings. In the 'Redefining Leftover Space,' Dr. Alanyali Aral gives a more detailed explanation: "These are spaces left over around (in the front, sides and back of) buildings, and within the boundaries of their parcels -so in their property."<sup>6</sup> Therefore it can be courtyards, alleys, or those spaces between buildings which you can't give a category.

### The causes of formation in Thessaloniki

I mainly found two reasons for the existence of this type of leftover space. First, Thessaloniki is a historical city; after some buildings have been destroyed due to historical damage, there are often small spaces between new and old buildings that cannot be integrated. Second, there was no complete block planning in the early days, so each building in most blocks was designed separately and independently. The relationship with the surrounding buildings was not fully considered. As a result, many distorted spaces are formed. These spaces are usually at the back of the building, narrow and winding, and there is not enough light to enter, so the narrowness and darkness have become the characteristics of these spaces.

<sup>6</sup> Alanyali Aral, E. (2009). *Redefining Leftover Space: Value and Potentiality for the City*. VDM Verlag.

### Current state of use in Thessaloniki

According to actual observation, four informal uses have been found in this type of leftover space: 1. Many residents use it as a space for drying clothes, so bamboo poles or iron poles are often seen standing. 2. As a parking space for motorcycles and bicycles. 3. The space where the homeless live, so it is often seen that a particular corner is particularly messy. 4. Cat's living space, you can often see a family of cats living in this type of space, and you can also see empty bowls and empty cans left by someone feeding these cats. These seemingly dark and quiet corners of the city actually have many activities quietly happening in them.

### (3) Rooftops:

#### Description

Most of the early houses had sloping roofs to facilitate drainage, but with the advancement of construction technology, flat-roofed buildings made of reinforced concrete are increasing day by day. Such structures are usually less expensive and therefore widely used. Give residents more space to use. Rooftops can be seen in the film "The Rooftops," directed by Algerian director Merzak Allouache, providing a lot of room for a busy capital facing housing problems. Rooftops can be seen in the film being used as practice spaces for bands, practice areas for boxers, shelters for the homeless, and prisons for the mentally ill. These informal events take place every day on rooftops in Algeria.<sup>7</sup> Let us understand that rooftops have many unknown possibilities.

#### The causes of formation in Thessaloniki

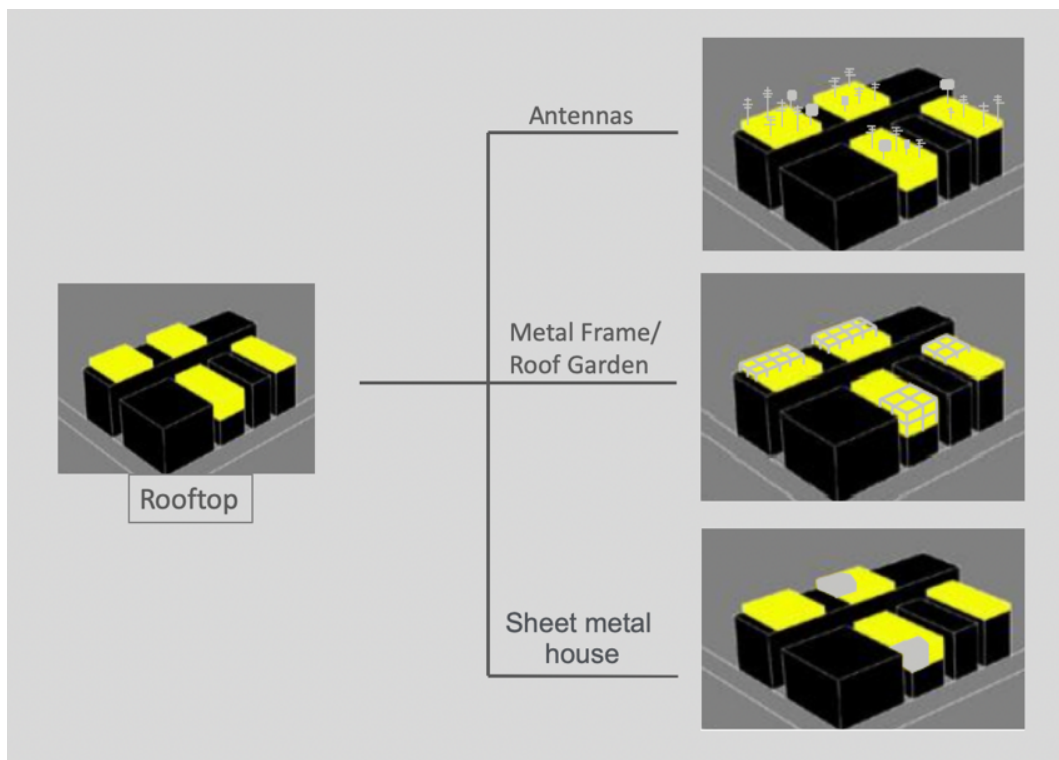
In Thessaloniki, we can see that the old town on the higher ground to the north is primarily orange-red sloping roofs, while the city center near the port is quite different. With the advancement of construction technology and the government's policy of saving money, the city center is mostly eight to nine-story flat-roofed concrete buildings, so the coastal city center roofs have many more possibilities for residents to use. These rooftops spaces, which the government usually ignores, have become one of the main spaces where informal activities of local residents take place. And the government turned a blind eye to these idiomatic constructions and tacitly allowed them to proceed, which is why the current situation has emerged.

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<sup>7</sup> Allouache, M. (Director). (2013). *The Rooftops* [Film]. JBA Production, Baya Films.

### Current state of use in Thessaloniki

In Thessaloniki, residents have three main informal ways of using these rooftops: The first is the space used to place the antenna, which is now characteristic of Thessaloniki. According to interviews with local residents, most people are unwilling to share their own antennas in order to keep their own signals from being affected, resulting in the situation that every household has its own antenna. This is the main reason why there are so many antennas. These antennas are usually attached to the outside walls of a stairwell or the inside of a parapet. And from time to time, you can see wires connecting different rooftops to form a colossal grid system. Second, residents will use iron sheets to build on rooftops to develop new storage spaces. The third is to use metal rods to create roof gardens on rooftops, sometimes like greenhouses, sometimes open for vines to climb. All of these make Thessaloniki unique even when viewed from above.





### **Conclusion**

This research aims to understand the past, present, and possibilities of thinking about the future of Thessaloniki leftover spaces. The "past" represents the reason and the history of the formation of the spaces; on the other hand, the "present" points out how these spaces are occupied by people, animals, plants or objects, through actual visits to Thessaloniki, interviews with residents and reading references on paper and the Internet and get the information you need. Integrating the above information with these understandings can be used as the basis and stepping stone for the future design and planning of these leftover spaces.

The study shows that most of the leftover spaces are not only used for a single purpose, nor are the entire area occupied at all times, but there are still many empty spaces and times, which may also be a kind of "less is more" interpretation. These spaces are like oxygen in water, allowing living things to breathe and survive. Especially in Thessaloniki, the second-largest city in Greece, these leftover spaces allow this busy city to breathe and have more interesting possibilities.

This article aims to let people understand the reason, meaning, and value of leftover spaces and reminds designers to remember appropriate white space when designing for this type of space in addition to thinking extensively about the possibilities brought by the space. Let users have more opportunities to paint their own possibilities on blank paper. It will also serve as the central concept for my subsequent stage design in the future.