

# The housing rehabilitation of the 1922 Asia Minor refugees in Athens and Piraeus

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research topic

The fragmented urban landscape of the metropolitan area of Athen and Piraeus with its local specificities is strongly related to demographic flows. The arrival of more than 220.000 refugees<sup>1</sup> in the metropolitan area of Athens and Piraeus after the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the population exchange that followed the Treaty of Lausanne posed the great challenge of refugee rehabilitation since the population of the area almost doubled in a period of limited financial resources due to the preceding two Balkan Wars and the First World War<sup>2</sup>. This led to a rapid expansion of the city, signified the beginning of the history of social housing in modern Greece,<sup>3</sup> and contributed to the acceleration of the procedures for planning legislation in Athens.

46 refugee settlements resulted from the imperative need to house this population<sup>4</sup>. Housing units ranging from unauthorized self-housing and almost slums to prefabricated wooden parapets, to single-family buildings, to organized apartment buildings influenced by the modernist movement, emerged. Nowadays, these morphological and typological forms have survived and constitute a considerable part of the city. There are cases of altered use, while some are occupied by the descendants of the refugee families or by other immigrants and refugees. Some are threatened by demolition, and others have become monuments of architectural heritage. Street and neighborhood names still attest to the refugee identity of these areas of the city<sup>5</sup>.

### 1.2 Literature review

Extensive research has been devoted to specific settlements, such as the disputed modernist apartment buildings in Leoforos Alexandras or the settlements of Nikaia and Germanika, which will be used in this thesis. Also, existing scientific reports compiling documentation of multiple settlements in a factual way, without analyzing their history will be used. These publications mostly take the form of extensive thesis papers and are very informative but focus on rather well-known settlements examined isolated. Most other settlements have only been documented in a non-academic context, unsystematically and based on fragmented personal views. Many studies related to this refugee wave focus rather on its political, financial, social, and anthropological trajectories rather than on the spatial manifestation of refugee presence. Often photographs of the settlements are instrumentalized to present a specific image of these historical events that fit the ideology each writer supports, encountered mostly in blogs and online newspapers but also in books. These non-academic sources are also used to understand the different perspectives and entanglements on the subject. This paper aims at synthetically providing information, showing relations between the different forms of housing rehabilitation and thus forming a comprehensive overview of the subject.

### 1.3 Research method

To achieve this goal and answer the question of how the refugee housing rehabilitation in Athens and Piraeus was realized and how it evolved historically this paper will analyze the urban footprint of these settlements by examining plans, maps, photographs, and through textual secondary sources, the criteria and policies that shaped them, giving an overview of the extent and influence of these areas to the contemporary image of the city. The focus will be sharpened on the architectural scale,

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<sup>1</sup> Giotsalitis, 'The Refugee Apartment Buildings of the '30s'.

<sup>2</sup> Myofa and Stavrianakis, 'Comparative Study of the Refugee Settlement Policies of 1922 and 2016 in the Metropolitan Area of Athens'.

<sup>3</sup> Giotsalitis, 'The Refugee Apartment Buildings of the '30s'.

<sup>4</sup> Tousi, 'The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Neighbourhoods of the Regional Unit of Piraeus. The Case of the Refugee Complexes.'

<sup>5</sup>Tousi, 'The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Neighbourhoods of the Regional Unit of Piraeus. The Case of the Refugee Complexes.'

by examining housing typologies, including self-housing and social housing, through archival material and photography. To illustrate the way, in which housing for the largest refugee wave the country has faced in modern times, was provided, the housing typologies, which emerged will be divided into categories and analyzed based on one representative example for each of them. These will be illustrated with consideration of the actors and policies involved in the creation of the housing, the location and organization of the settlements, within which the typologies are to be found, their architectural characteristics, their transformation throughout history, and the situation encountered today.

#### 1.4 Argument

By analyzing typological examples encountered in the refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus, this paper aims at providing a spherical architectural view of the issue of refugee housing provision. The thesis will shed light on the origins, historic development, and transformation of these settlements throughout their 100-year long history and argue on the arising topics, mainly the involvement of the state in contrast to the *lezzes faire*, the influence of the settlements on the city's urban structure, the architectural characteristics of the housing, the subsequent decline of the social housing sector in the city and the notion of sociability and neighborhood ties. The qualities and faults of these spaces and the policies that created them will be assessed. The derelict condition of the refugee housing still existing today poses a call for action. Therefore, the thesis will argue for the significance of these parts of the urban fabric for the collective historic memory and their preservation and adaptation, as well as an interpretation of their qualities as a countermodel to prevailing housing developments.

## 2. URBAN FOOTPRINT OF REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS

Facing a huge refugee wave, the first decision to be taken is usually “where” the refugees are going to be distributed and the “how” they are going to be hosted is resolved at a second stage. Therefore, the actors and factors shaping the choice of the location of the settlements will be examined first, and then the form of the settlements. This thesis will be restricted to the urban rehabilitation in Athens and Piraeus and not to the agricultural rehabilitation, that took place in other parts of the country, examining the issues of urban sprawl and urban architecture.

### 2.1 The scale of the refugee housing issue

The first decisive factor for the emergence of a spatial strategy towards the refugee issue is pure numbers, revealing the scale of the refugee wave arriving in a few stages over a short period, leading to rapid urban expansion. The number of refugees settled in the areas of Athens and Piraeus – because of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the genocide against the people of Pontos, and the forced population exchange – led to an increase in the population by 30.6%, according to the data of the 1928 census<sup>6</sup>. In Athens, refugees were accounting for 1/4 of the population, while in Piraeus for 1/3.<sup>7</sup> Their influx created an undeniable housing crisis<sup>8</sup> which added to the already existing crisis. In 1928, 244.929 refugees had settled in the metropolitan area of Athens, which triggered an explosive expansion and required the mobilization of multiple institutions and funds.

### 2.2 The actors involved in the housing rehabilitation

The main actors charged with the role of providing solutions to this colossal humanitarian crisis and organizing its spatial footprint were the Greek State and foreign charity organizations such as the Red Cross and the Near East Foundation<sup>9</sup>. Initially, the situation was perceived as temporary, so the refugees were housed in all kinds of public buildings and in private buildings which were either occupied or requisitioned for this purpose.<sup>10</sup> The vast need for immediate housing resulted in the creation of arbitrary slum-like structures in open spaces, in and around the urban fabric.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, and once the permanence of the situation was accepted, a series of legislative measures attempted to solve the housing of refugees by creating planned refugee settlements.<sup>12</sup>

For the urban rehabilitation of the refugees, the State created then multiple institutional bodies: the Refugee Care Fund (TPP est. in 1922), later replaced by the Refugee Settlement Commission (EAP, active between 1923 and 1930) under the presidency of American diplomat Henry Morgenthau and funded by the League of Nations in form of an international loan. The EAP was supposed to act autonomously without the involvement of the government or any administrative authority. The Ministry of Welfare already involved in constructing settlements took over the work of the EAP, after the land under its jurisdiction had been used, until 1940.

The creation of settlements eventually took 3 forms: state-provided, self-housing, and arbitrary building<sup>13</sup>. The procedure was the following: In the first phase, the TPP and then the EAP and the Ministry of Welfare built new settlements on the outskirts, by creating new housing or repairing existing property and providing it to the beneficiaries. In the case of self-housing, the state would

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<sup>6</sup> General Statistical Service of Greece

<sup>7</sup> Paralikis, ‘The contribution of the Surrogate of Smyrni to the characterization of Nea Smyrni as a garden city in Athens during the interwar period’.

<sup>8</sup> Gizeli, *Social Transformations and the origins of social housing in Greece 1920-1930*.

<sup>9</sup> Moussa, Douli, and Charitou, ‘Kaisariani’.

<sup>10</sup> Moussa, Douli, and Charitou, ‘Kaisariani’.

<sup>11</sup> Moussa, Douli, and Charitou, ‘Kaisariani’.

<sup>12</sup> Moussa, Douli, and Charitou, ‘Kaisariani’.

<sup>13</sup> Touloupi and Marougas, ‘Refugee Settlements in the Wider Area of Attic Land’..

provide them with a plot, a building permit, a grant, and some technical support.<sup>14</sup> In the second stage, partially in parallel, landowners platted their land and sold it to refugees, who built arbitrary neighborhoods around the organized settlements or wherever they found space, creating new informal settlements through self-housing. Examples of such settlements created in off-plan areas with self-housing in shacks were the neighborhoods of Dourgouti, Ilisos, Gyzi (Polygon), and Asymatou.<sup>15</sup> These arbitrary settlements were partially legalized later but often continued to be claimed both by the state and private individuals for many years.<sup>16</sup> In this process, 12 main and 34 smaller settlements were created in, around, and in-between the cities of Athens and Piraeus.

To understand the strategies adopted by the actors involved the general political and economical attitude of the time should be considered. In particular, the EAP was promoting a capitalist orientation for the Greek State and was aiming at productive processes, coupling settlements with newly formed industrial areas, contributing to an increase in economic growth. The settlements had a character of an investment, not charity. The refugees had contracts for the houses in form of a mortgage, paid in rates and the rest with interest. Thus, a system based on ownership of private property per family rather than rental, which is the common situation in other European countries, was formed.<sup>17</sup> Not only the ownership relations and the location of the settlements but also the organization of the settlements themselves were influenced by this aspect.

### 2.3 The strategies defining the location of the settlements

The selection of the location (see Figure 1) of the refugee settlements by the TPP/EAP was based on the following criteria<sup>18</sup>:

- the proximity to industrial-manufacturing facilities. As characteristic examples are mentioned in the wider area of Piraeus: Drapetsona, Keratsini, Kokkinia, Korydallos, and in Athens the settlements of Nea Sfageia and Rouf, where the capital's industries were concentrated. The aim was to achieve spatial proximity between the place of residence and the place of work since the settlements supplied the factories with a low-cost labor force.

In other cases, the process was reversed: the settlement of refugees rapidly attracted industries. Such were the settlements built in the north-eastern part of the city, Nea Chalkidona, Nea Philadelphia, Nea Ionia, Neo Heraklion - as well as on the western side (in Aigaleo, the neighborhoods of Nea Kydonia, Pyritidopoiio, and in Peristeri the districts of Ano and Kato Germanika. However, in the south of Athens (Kaisariani and Byron) and Dourgouti, Nea Smyrni, and Palea Sfageia, there is no evidence of any documented correlation between industry and refugee settlement.<sup>19</sup>

- The aim was for the settlements to be as unseen and socially isolated as possible<sup>20</sup>. They were created in the outskirts at between 1 (the most common) and 4 km (only one case) from the existing town. Social segregation becomes pronounced in the spatial order of the capital with the creation of purely working-class and popular communities.

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<sup>14</sup> Touloupi and Marougas, 'Refugee Settlements in the Wider Area of Attic Land'..

<sup>15</sup> Myofa and Stavrianakis, 'Comparative Study of the Refugee Settlement Policies of 1922 and 2016 in the Metropolitan Area of Athens'.

<sup>16</sup> Touloupi and Marougas, 'Refugee Settlements in the Wider Area of Attic Land'..

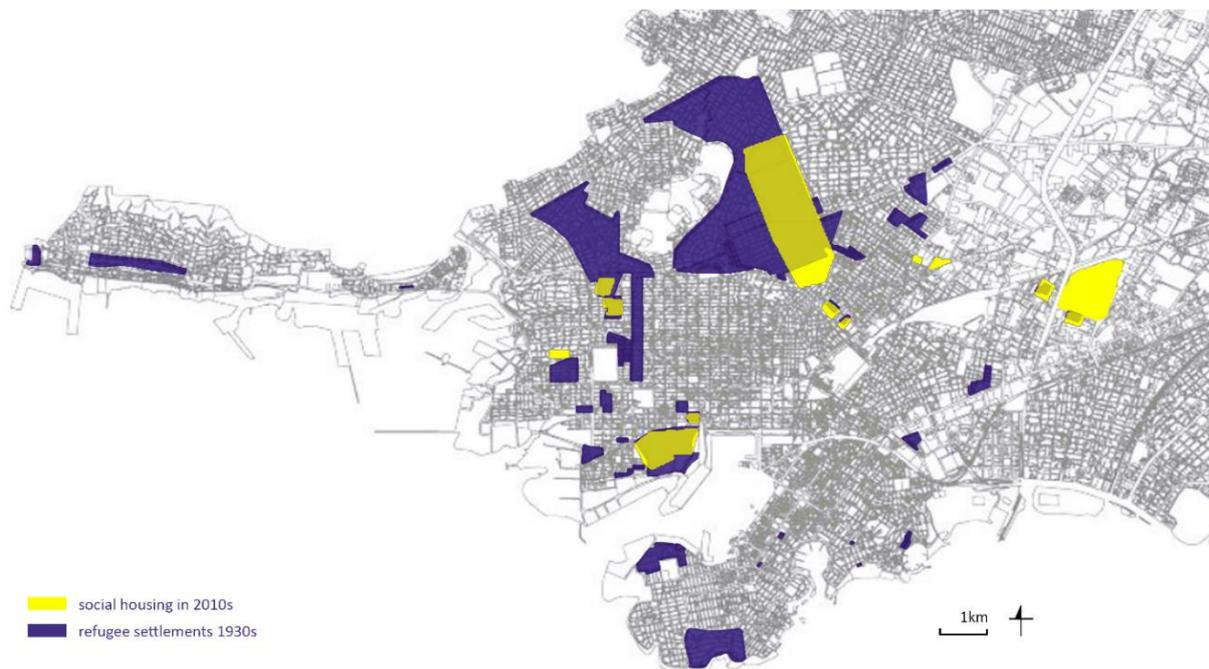
<sup>17</sup> Sakkas and Sfountouris, 'Documentation of refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus: The refugee residences of Perama'.

<sup>18</sup> Myofa and Stavrianakis, 'Comparative Study of the Refugee Settlement Policies of 1922 and 2016 in the Metropolitan Area of Athens'.

<sup>19</sup> Polyzos (1984: 48

<sup>20</sup> Leontidou, *Cities of Silence: labor settlement of Athens and Piraeus, 1909-1940*.





**Figure 2** Map of the refugee settlements in Piraeus in the 1920s and 2010s. The biggest almost uninterrupted area preserved until today is the area of Nikaia/Kokkinia, which will be examined in this thesis.

Source: Perivolari, 'The Spatial Planning of Rebetiko: The Areas of Piraeus That Developed The Musical Genre of Rebetiko, 1870-1936' for the 1930s; Tousi, 'The Imprint of the Economic Crisis in the Neighborhoods of the Piraeus Regional Unit. The Case of Refugee Building Complexes.' for the 2010s. *Editing by author.*

As the city grew in the decades to come these satellite settlements became part of the city, the formerly uninhabited areas between Athens and Piraeus were inhabited and the two cities became a single urban complex.

Even though the location of the settlements was planned by a single authority, the EAP, it is evident in retrospect, that a thought-through and integrated urban planning was absent. In addition to that, the immediate need for housing and the limited resources contributed to the neglect of utilities and collective services.<sup>21</sup> The drink water supply and sewage system were inadequate even in the settlements with connection to the grid. Other settlements used pits for drinking water. Even though basic infrastructure was missing the settlements were consolidated to a degree, and that relocation was not in question. These uncontrolled expansions would be legalized later, sharpening the dead-ends of urban planning.

## 2.4 The urban plan of the settlements

The urban plans of the settlements reflect the mainstream standards of the time and the intention to further apply principles of the modernist and then garden city movement in Athens. Therefore, following forms of settlement organization are identified:

- Use of the "Hippodamian plan" or grid system of parallel and perpendicular streets forming building blocks of the same size. Shacks are organized in rows and some gaps are left as squares of common spaces such as baths, hygienic facilities, laundry spaces, etc.
- In the case of apartment blocks the organization happens in rows of parallel blocks or corner solutions with a courtyard.
- Use of the garden city principles with circular streets and symmetric squares (Nea Ionia, Nea Filadelfia).

<sup>21</sup> Giotsalitis, 'The Refugee Apartment Buildings of the '30s'.

- Organic arbitrary plan (in the areas of arbitrary buildings)

To conclude, the location, sizes, and organization forms of the settlements were partially decided upon by the EAP according to the criteria mentioned, but also emerged in a *lezzes faire* condition in parallel to organized efforts. These forms stand in direct relation to the housing typologies encountered and will be analyzed in the next chapter.

### 3. REFUGEE HOUSING TYPOLOGIES

According to whether the settlement was planned or not the main housing typologies to be found can be divided into the following categories:

#### State-provided housing

1. Existing public buildings, exterior public spaces
2. Temporary housing units provided by the TPP and EAP (Kountouriotika, Pedion Areos, Drapetsona, Kallithea, Sfageia, Dourgouti)
3. Wooden detached houses are known as “Germaniwere ka” provided as repayment for WWI (Peristeri, Kokkinia)
4. One- or two-story, single or twin houses provided by the TPP/RSC and Ministry of Welfare (Nea Filadelfeia, Kaisariani, Byronas, Nea Ionia, Kallithea, Rentis, Kokkinia)
  - a. Two-storey dwellings with external staircases, which formed squares around a common area.
  - b. Two-storey houses that each housed two families.
  - c. A single-story house with a single room and kitchenette. It was a 32m<sup>2</sup> house for one family, with a communal bathroom.
5. Multi-storey apartment blocks provided by the same institutions (Leoforos Alexandras, Stegi Patridos, Drapetsona, Keratsini)

#### Self-housing and arbitrary housing

1. Arbitrary housing within the city (Dourgouti, Amphithea, Korydallos, Kalogreza, Perissos, etc.) or outside of the urban plan (Ilissos, Panormou, etc.) or in-between legal settlements. These were makeshift houses of poor construction and improvised housing on a site purchased or granted by the state mechanism.
2. Self-housing (Nea Smyrni, Nea Ionia, Kaisariani, Kokkinia, Korydallos, Keratsini etc.)

In chronological order, initially, single-story brick buildings with one or two rooms are erected and a toilet and a plot of land for future additions were built. Then the TTP starts building settlements in Byronas, Nea Ionia, and Kaisariani in Athens and one in Nea Kokkinia in Piraeus.<sup>22</sup> Afterward, the “Germanika” emerges. After 1933, under the auspices of the Welfare Department and after the introduction of one-floor ownership, apartment buildings were also built according to the modernist standards on minimum dwelling and standardization, applying Bauhaus principles to Greece. The planning was conducted in a centralized manner by the Technical Service of the Ministry of Welfare which was established by the rules of the state-run housing system.<sup>23</sup> These modernist refugee blocks of flats of the 1930-1940 period were built to replace arbitrary housing.<sup>24</sup>

#### 3.1 Temporary shelter in existing buildings

The refugee influx was first regarded as a matter of temporary nature, both by the State and charity organizations, as well as by the refugees themselves, who were keeping the keys to their homes for years expecting to return<sup>25</sup>. Thus, they were first housed in public buildings like schools, churches, abandoned camps, basements, monasteries, warehouses, factories, theatres, etc. (see figure 3), sports courts, church courtyards, warehouses, military camps, as well as in tents on public spaces, for

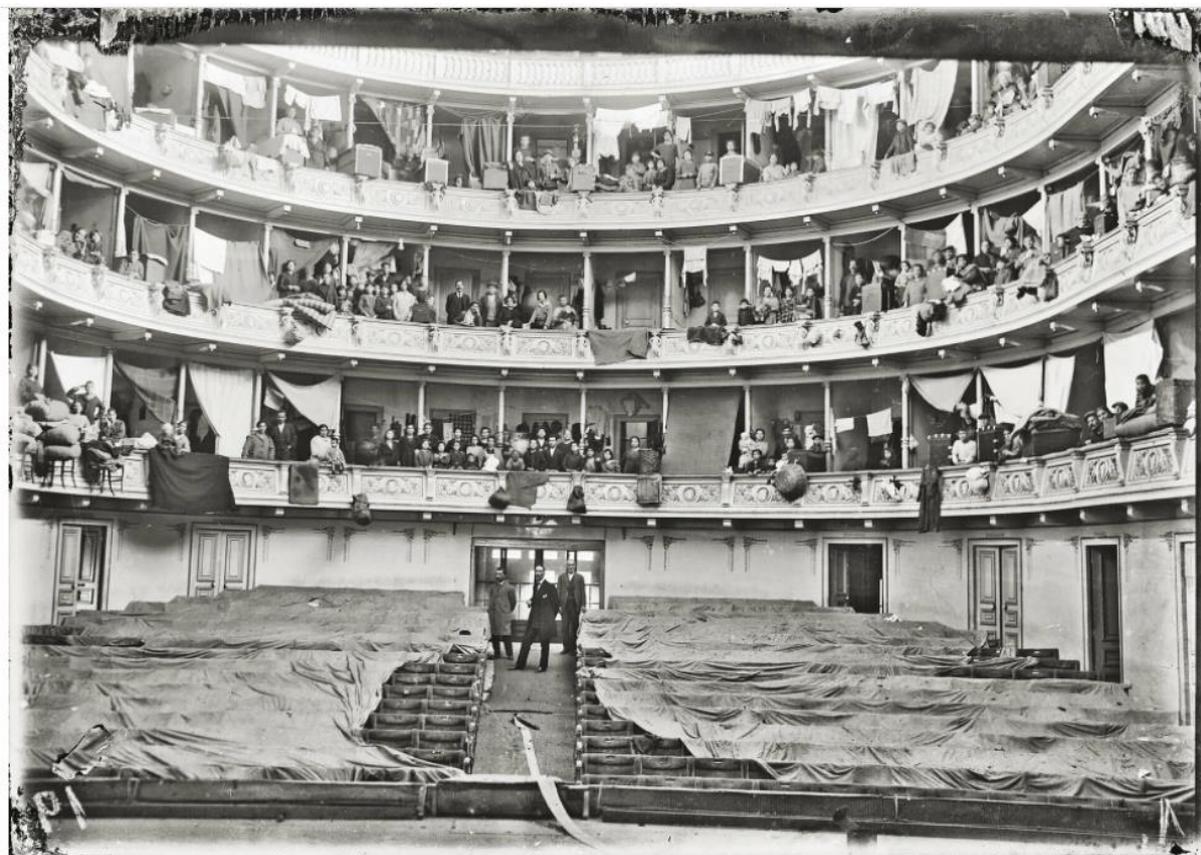
<sup>22</sup> Myofa and Stavrianakis, ‘Συγκριτική Μελέτη Των Πολιτικών Εγκατάστασης Των Προσφύγων Του 1922 Και Του 2016 Στη Μητροπολιτική Περιοχή Της Αθήνας’.

<sup>23</sup> Moussa, Douli, and Charitou, ‘Καισαριανή’.

<sup>24</sup> Myofa and Stavrianakis, ‘Συγκριτική Μελέτη Των Πολιτικών Εγκατάστασης Των Προσφύγων Του 1922 Και Του 2016 Στη Μητροπολιτική Περιοχή Της Αθήνας’.

<sup>25</sup> Danezi, *Cleinon Asty Oral History Groups*.

example in front of the temple of Theseio (see Figure 4). In the 2015 refugee crisis, similar images of temporary shelter in sports halls, former airports, and military camps are encountered. Back then in 1922, refugee tents would be set even in public squares just near the port of Piraeus where they arrived as in figure 5. This “temporary” situation lasted 2 or 3 years for most refugees.



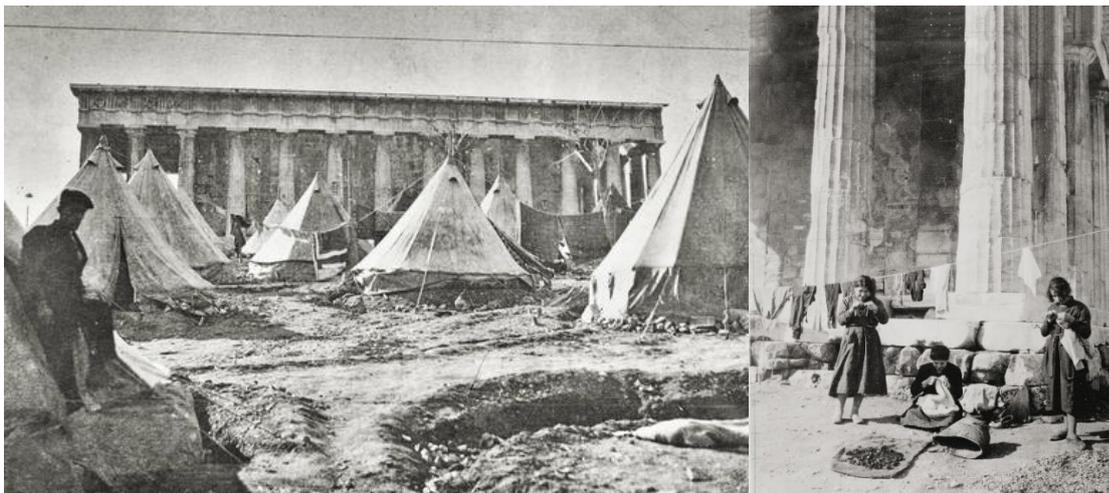
**Figure 3:** The photo by Josef Hep reveals the first response of the Greek state to the refugee issue. Initially, the situation was perceived as temporary, so the refugees were housed in open public spaces and all kinds of public buildings and private buildings which were either occupied or requisitioned for this purpose.<sup>26</sup> Specifically in the Municipal Theatre of Athens depicted in this photo 150 refugee families were housed in its 81 galleries<sup>27</sup>. They stayed there for almost 2 years.<sup>28</sup> Hanging objects, laundry, and improvised curtains reflect the need for space and privacy.

*Source: Hep, Josef. 'Refugees from Asia Minor sheltered temporarily in the Gallery of the Municipal Theatre of Athens.', 1923.*

<sup>26</sup> Moussa, Douli, and Charitou, 'Kaisariani'.

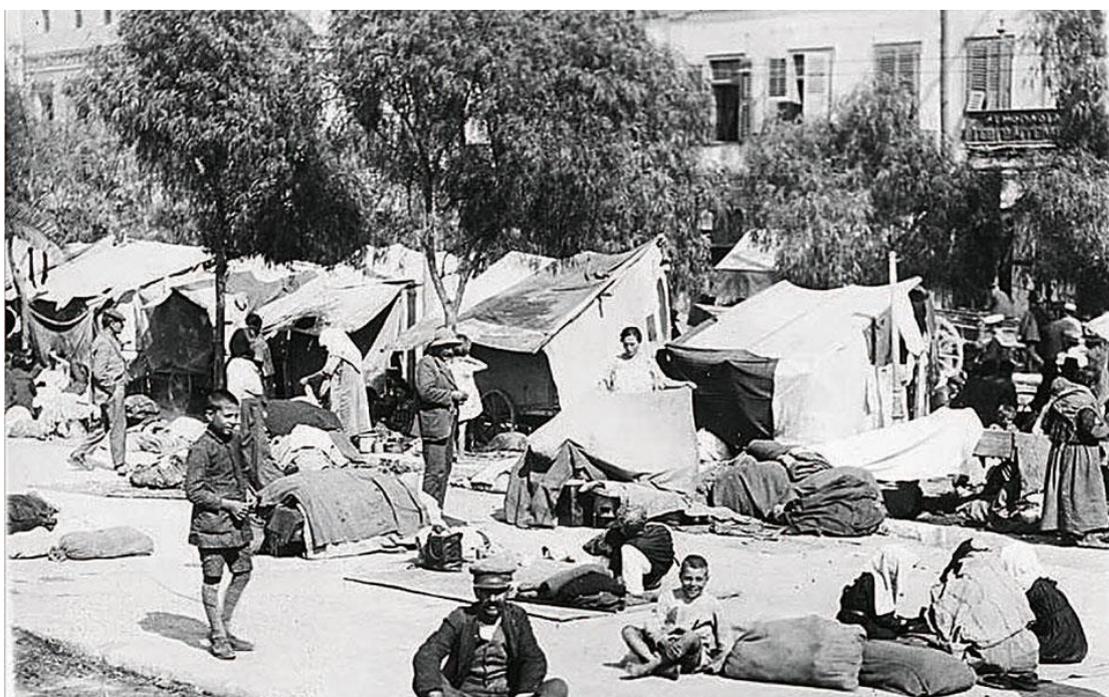
<sup>27</sup> 'The Refugees from Asia Minor in the Gallery of the Municipal Theatre.'

<sup>28</sup> 'Refugee Families Temporarily Settled at the Municipal Theater of Athens - Refugees in Greece'.



**Figure 4:** Refugees in front of the temple of Theseio in Athens.

*Source: Protonotariou, 'Refugee housing in Athens of the 1920s-1940s'.*



**Figure 5:** Refugee tents on a public square in Piraeus

*Source: Ioannidis, 'Refugees from Asia Minor: When integration was an unknown word, but gradually became a reality.'*

### 3.2 Arbitrary housing

Since the state mechanism was failing to cater to the imperative need for housing the refugees constructed their own under self-initiative. One of the most characteristic examples of such neighborhoods is Dourgouti (today Neos Kosmos), created first by refugees of the Armenian genocide and then expanded by refugees of the Greek Catastrophe. Located at a distance of 2km from the center of Athens, was back then lying outside the urban plan. The land was either expropriated by the state and provided to the refugees or sold by the owner at very cheap prices. Therefore, the poorest refugees settled there, with the hope of the area becoming part of the urban plan in the future. The housing of this settlement was arbitrarily arranged, since the refugees would just fill the gaps wherever and whenever possible, resulting in such an irregular structure (see figure 6) impossible to navigate without being a local, as described by the Nazis, during the blockade of Dourgouti were finally 200 were executed and 2.000 sent to the camp of Haidari, while part of the

settlement was set of fire<sup>29</sup>. The settlement was lacking any kind of infrastructure, with open improvised ditches such as sewers and drainage (see figure 9) and frequent floods. Water supply was either rainwater or water purchased from private taps.



**Figure 6:** The slum-like structure of Dourgouti in 1959.

*Source: Sarigiannis and Papadopoulou, 'Summary Report on the Refugee Areas of the Athens Basin'.*

An example of the constructions in Dourgouti is the houses made of bricks of mud mixed with straw, which would dry in the sun (see figure 7), analog to the lacking means of the women and children that were occupied with construction.<sup>30</sup> Another common construction was improvised wooden houses with tin roofs. This kind of micro-housing, made of the cheapest materials, improvised and without services, was usually described as "troglydytes"<sup>31</sup>, nevertheless manifests the will of the refugees for better living conditions, since the houses are painted in beautiful colors, pots filled with flowers decorate the exteriors and roofs for shading are built, forming paradoxical scenes, rendering the arbitrary settlements slightly more upgraded than slums. Lack of space and poor construction meant that there was almost no separation between public and private life, with main activities of daily life taking part on the streets and inhabitants knowing every detail of their neighbors' lives.



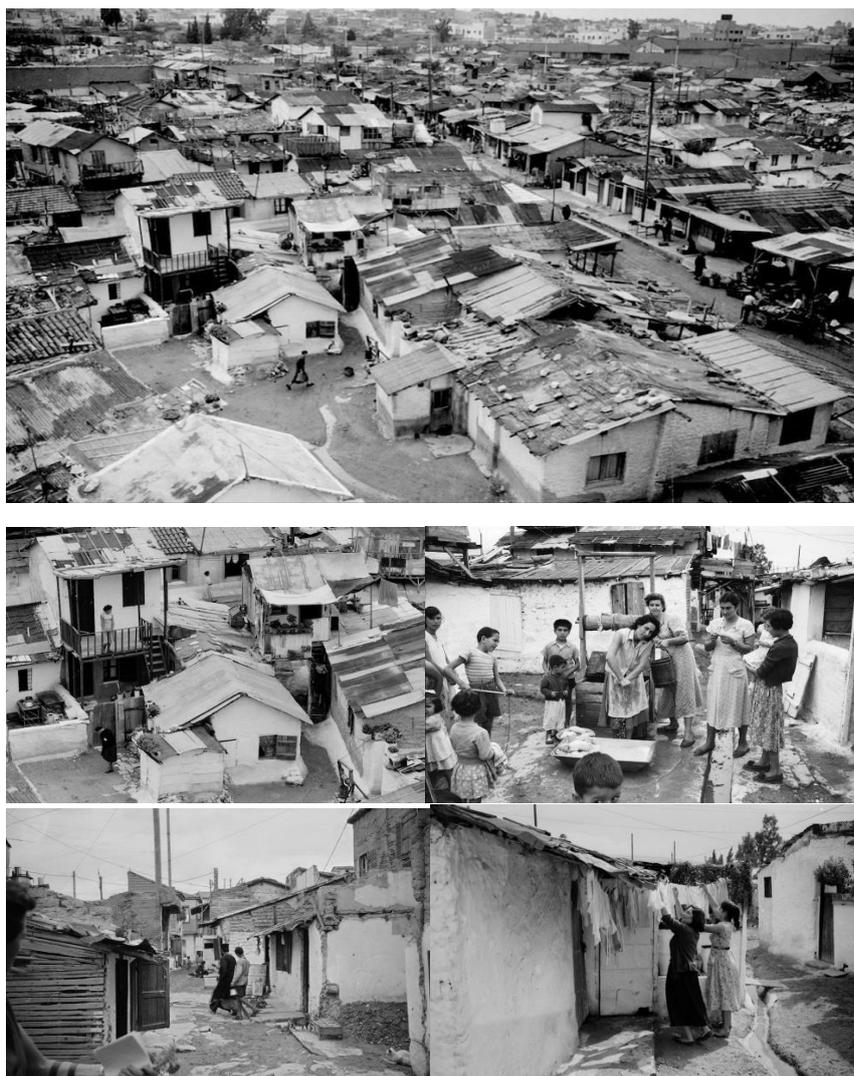
**Figure7:** Left: Refugee children constructing bricks of mud for building their houses. Construction was often carried out by women and children. Right: Makeshift wooden construction in Dourgouti

*Source: Left: Greek diary, 'Refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus'. Right: Gerber, Griechenlandreise, Europahilfe.*

<sup>29</sup> 'The unknown Dourgouti of the refugees is revealed'.

<sup>30</sup> Greek diary, 'Refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus'.

<sup>31</sup> Greek diary, 'Refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus'



**Figure 8:** The arbitrary settlement of Dourgouti through the lens of Hans Gerber in 1955. The organic structure of the settlement with uncovered streets of mud and improvised construction of the buildings is recognised. The open ditches, the improvised well for doing laundry seen in the middle right. Women and children can only be seen in the photographs, as they were in charge of all domestic activities, including building and maintaining the houses, while the men are at work.

*Source: Gerber, Griechenlandreise, Europahilfe.*

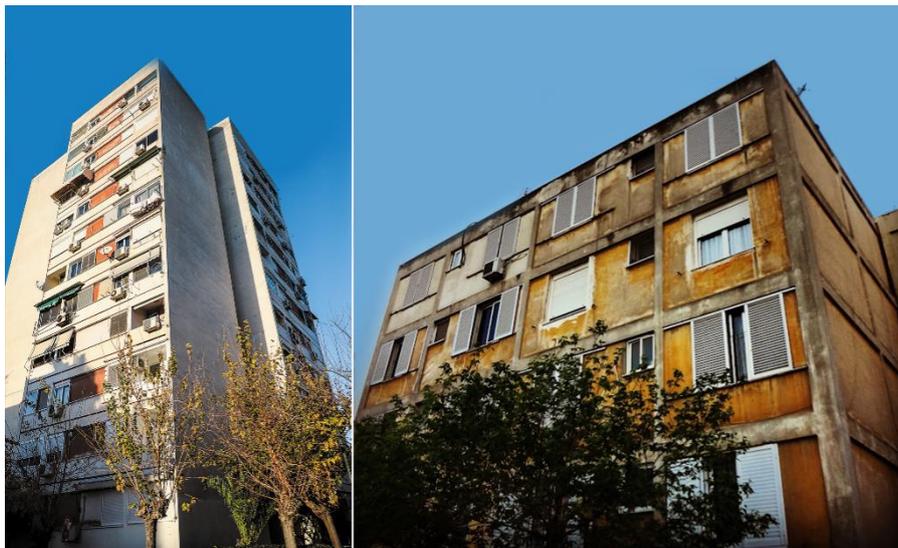
The first form of organized housing in that area was the “Italika” neighborhood, consisting of 24 1-storey housing of stonework funded by the Italian repayment for the war in 1924.<sup>32</sup> In 1935 the State builds apartment blocks (see figure 9) to replace part of the arbitrary housing.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the slum-like situation in Dourgouti remained until 1965, when under the “death to the shack!” campaign of prime minister Papandreou the area was expropriated, and residents, now not just refugees but also internal migrants from rural areas and other cities, settled in apartment buildings on a low price.<sup>34</sup> Even though the living conditions were considerably upgraded, the slum city is often portrayed nostalgically and romantically as in the movie “magical city” by Nikos Koundouros. Previous residents claim that the strong community ties created in Dourgouti were lost through resettlement in the new apartment buildings. Today these apartments are still inhabited. Intentions

<sup>32</sup> Myofa and Papadas, ‘The Evolution of the Dourgouti Neighborhood in the Neos Kosmos from 1922 until Today’.

<sup>33</sup> Myofa and Papadas, ‘The Evolution of the Dourgouti Neighborhood in the Neos Kosmos from 1922 until Today’.

<sup>34</sup> Zaxarakis, “Magical city”: The history of the Dourgouti settlements which today constitutes the neighbourhood of Neos Kosmos’.

to regenerate the neighborhood have been expressed multiple times, but the furthest they reached was to paint the multistorey apartments.



**Figure 9:** Left: 12-storey apartment building  
Right: 4-storey apartment building.  
Both were part of the “popular housing” programme of the 60s.

*Source: Theory, 'Dourgouti'.*

### 3.3 Standardized temporary housing units of the TPP/EAP

The housing units provided by the TPP and EAP were temporary shelters made of cheap wood, roofs of pitch paper (see figure 10), and the walls between the wooden structure were just from metal sheets.<sup>35</sup> The wood was imported, the living conditions terrible since the structures were not offering any kind of insulation and infrastructure was completely lacking, and maintenance was so problematic, that the EAP opted for different solutions. First, the housing type the refugees themselves were constructing from mud bricks that would dry in the sun as mentioned in the previous chapter, was adopted by the EAP as well. Only later more expensive structures from local stonework and roof tiles, with lower maintenance costs were built.



**Figure 10:** Wooden temporary housing of the TPP near Lucabettus hill.

*Source: Greek diary, 'Refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus'*

<sup>35</sup> Greek diary, 'Refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus'.

### 3.4 Standardized one- or two-storey, single or twin houses of the TPP/EAP

Two storey dwellings with an external staircase in Nea Kokkinia/Nikaia

Based on standardized plans of the EAP mostly one- or two-storey, single or twin houses, for 2 or 4 families each, accordingly, were built in many settlements. The first floor had an identical layout to the ground floor and was served by an external staircase and gallery.<sup>36</sup> They were typically constructed of brick or stonework, with wooden roofs covered in tiles. In Nea Kokkinia/Nikaia, close to the settlement of the “Germanika” entire building blocks have been preserved, almost in their original form.

In 1923 the construction of the refugee settlement of Nea Kokkinia was initiated, after the expropriation of the formerly uninhabited land (see figure11). In charge of the work was initially the civil engineer Dionysios Kokkinos, but after 1924 the EAP took over. On a Hippodamian plan around 1000, two-storey or detached houses were built on an area of 750,000 m<sup>2</sup>, in which 50,000 refugees were immediately housed.<sup>37</sup> Infrastructure was included in the plan only to be constructed in a second phase. Initially, the streets were uncovered, without a drainage system, which led to basements flooding. There was no electricity, no sewage system, drinking drink water was provided via communal self-made wells, where water brought by water sprinkles from Poros was stored.<sup>38</sup> Piped water supply only reached the neighborhood in 1936. With lacking social equipment and facilities for the collective service of the residents the social housing project remained unfinished for the years to come. Utility projects such as a hospital, a police station, warehouses, etc. were planned and built in a second phase, in some cases 20 years later.<sup>39</sup> The planning of the settlement reveals the logic of the time, in which social housing was restricted to the provision of shelters, excluding all services that support the residential function and thus did not work as neighborhood designs.



<sup>36</sup> Greek diary, 'Refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus'.

<sup>37</sup> Milesis, 'Pireorama of History and Culture'.

<sup>38</sup> Rinioti, 'The History of Nikaia. Our Kokkinia!'

<sup>39</sup> Milesis, 'Pireorama of History and Culture'.

**Figure 11:** Left: Urban Plan of the settlement of Nea Kokkinia. Right: Aerial photographs of 1937 combined Right: refugee settlement area marked on the satellite image of 2022. Nowadays the area around the settlement is densely populated. The structure as well as many of the buildings including the area of “Germanika” have been maintained.

Source: Left: Milesis, ‘Pireorama of History and Culture’. Right top: Veranis, ‘Refugee Neighbourhoods of Piraeus, from the Emergence to the Promotion of Historical Memory’. Right bottom: Google Maps. Editing by author.



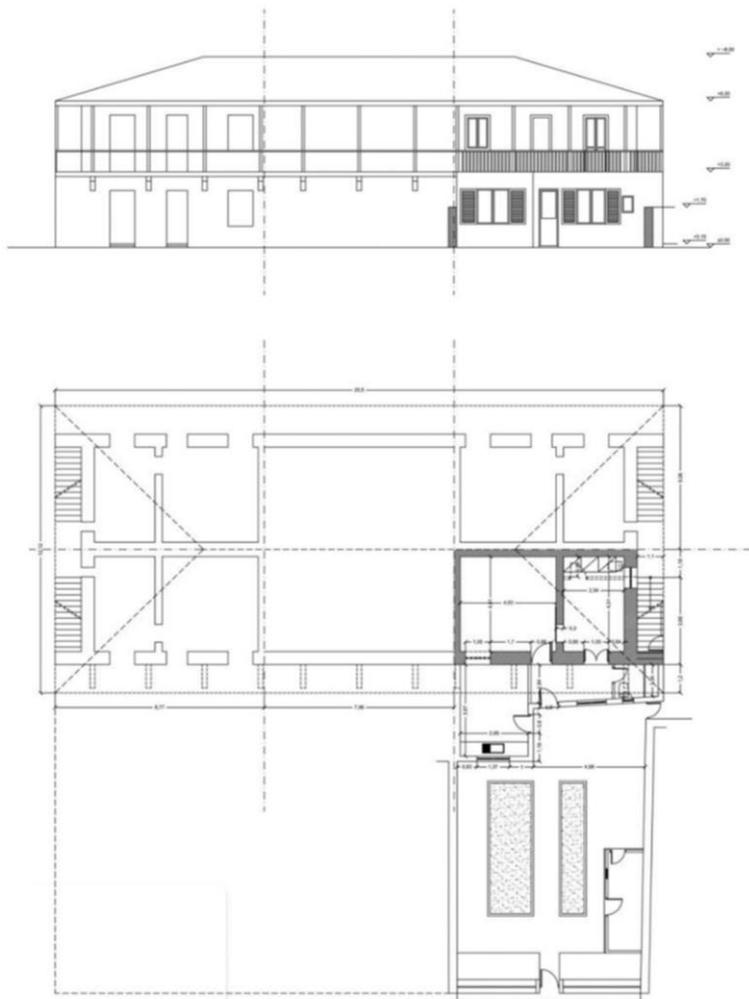
**Figure 12:** Schematic floor plan of Nea Kokkinia demonstrating one of the clustering strategies of the settlement using the same 16 apartment typology.

Source: By author based on Tousi, ‘The Refugee Housing of Nikaia’.

The houses of Nea Kokkinia were built of stonework, reinforced concrete slabs, capped by a wooden roof of French tiles, with characteristic twin dormers, external X-crossing staircases, also stone-built with wooden railings<sup>40</sup>. The construction method is characteristic of the transition from traditional materials and methods, like stonework in this case, to reinforced concrete, but also the transition from small teams of masons to the system of contractors and more mass construction. While the floorplans follow a modern organization, based on clarity, functionalism, and the standards of minimum dwelling, the wooden pillars and struts, the furrows, and the wooden railings of the balustrades (see figure 14), have a strong traditional character with origins in folk and/or Ottoman architecture, probably architectural elements employed to suggest the origin of the inhabitants.

The buildings consist of 12 or 16 apartments, 6 or 8 on each floor, and according to the “one size fits all” logic of the RSC each family would inhabit one apartment, independent of the number of family members. These apartments consisted of a single room for all uses and a small kitchen. The bathrooms were shared. Access to the one-room apartments of the upper floor occurs through common galleries connected to the exterior symmetrical staircases arranged on the common pedestrian pathways on the side of the buildings (see figure 13). These rectangular elongated houses were clustered over one perimeter of the building block around an atrium, which was used as a communal laundry space (see figure 12).

<sup>40</sup> Milesis, ‘Pireorama of History and Culture’.



**Figure 13:** Elevation and ground floor plan of the two-storey refugee housing in Nea Kokkinia with external staircase, protruding gallery and 12 apartments

*Source: Veranis, 'Refugee Neighbourhoods of Piraeus, from the Emergence to the Promotion of Historical Memory'.*

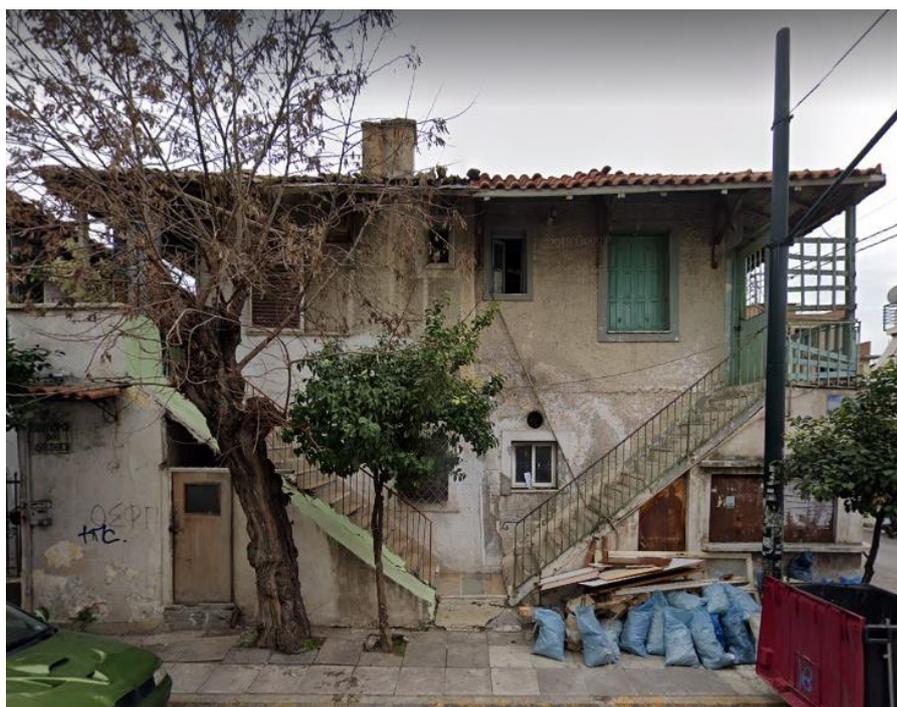
Around 50 of these buildings are maintained in the area. Over time the ground floors of the dwellings gained a variety of arbitrary additions such as bathrooms under the staircases, conversion of balconies into rooms, and extensions on the common spaces of the plots (see figures 14). Lack of space and lack of planning for common utility buildings and economic activities combined with the entrepreneurial spirit of the refugees led to the spaces under the staircases often being converted into small shops (see figures 15). Today the arbitrary extensions have been demolished and the interior of the blocks is very familiar and on a human scale and functions as a neighborhood center, playground, a meeting community space, and sometimes even as laundry still (see figure 14).<sup>41</sup> Another phenomenon is the replacement of part of the buildings with multistorey buildings (see figure 18). Nowadays, these two-storey dwellings are inhabited mostly by immigrants from Asia or former USSR countries on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and by elderly people, either descendants of the refugee families of the time or low-income pensioners from other neighborhoods.

<sup>41</sup> Papadopoulou and Sarigiannis, 'The Refugees of 1922 and Their Settlement in Athens. The Actual Condition of the Refugees' Houses in Athens and Their Protection.'



**Figure 14:** Left: Inner part of the plot with incremental growth on the ground floor. The residents have expanded in the common space. Right: Laundry space, like the situation encountered in the 1930s.

*Source: Left: Papastathopoulou, 'The refugee housing of Nikaia and their rescue'. Right: : Koulira, 'Walk in the refugee settlement of Nikaia, in a Neighborhood That Looks like a Scene from Finos Film'.*



**Figure 15:** External X-crossing staircase with addition underneath. On the right by the size of the window ledge protruding, it is evident that the space under the staircase was used as a store.

*Source: Google street view*



**Figure 16:** Combined views from the street of 16 apartment houses, well maintained in 2014. The 8 units (4 on each floor) of the building are recognizable already in the state of the facade. Some residents have transformed the space under and on the galley into a room, others have raised a fence and used it as a small garden. The pavement is still functioning as an expansion of the house, as a living space, laundry space, and storage.

*Source: Google street view, editing by author.*



**Figure 17:** Combined views from the street of 16 apartment houses, poorly maintained in 2014. In this case, the building is probably neglected for years apart from the flat on the bottom right, which shows more care. Here the original railings have only been replaced on the left unit. In the corner

*Source: Google street view, editing by author.*



**Figure 18:** Combined views from the street of a similar type of 16 apartment houses, well maintained in 2014. Found in the same area part of the building has been replaced by a multistorey building.

*Source: Google street view, editing by author*

### 3.5 “Germanika” – the German houses

The houses known as “Germanika” (meaning “German”) were prefabricated refugee houses, given by the Germans through the League of Nations in 1927, as repayment of World War I debts to Greece. They were designed by two engineers of the Bauhaus movement, the German-Jewish Adolf Sommerfeld, and the Hungarian - Jewish Fred Forbat, who came to Greece to supervise construction. These houses were installed in many neighborhoods. Particularly interesting is the settlement of Nea Kokkinia, of which a significant part has survived until today and will therefore be examined in the following paragraphs.

In a previously uninhabited area in the municipality of Piraeus in 1927<sup>42</sup> an almost rectangular area of 400mx200m in Nea Kokkinia (today called Nikaia) between the parallel streets Anogeion, Filadelfias, and 28is Oktovriou, Attalias was divided into 32 building blocks of the same size 50mx35m. These plots were divided by 10m wide lanes forming the road network. Each block was subdivided into 20 plots, where 10 prefabricated shacks were placed (see figure 19).

<sup>42</sup> Theodoropoulou and Kati, ‘Comparative Urban Planning Analysis of the Municipalities of Nikaia and Korydallos and Proposals for Their Regeneration’.



**Figure 19:** Left: Diagram of refugee shack-settlement “Germanika” in Nea Kokkinia 1934. (Digitalisation of original drawn in 2018) Right top: Aerial photographs of 1937 combined Right bottom: refugee settlement area marked on the satellite image of 2022.

Source: Left: Kyramargiou, Prendou, and Christophoraki, ‘Social and spatial atlas of the refugee Piraeus. Right top: Veranis, ‘Refugee Neighbourhoods of Piraeus, from the Emergence to the Promotion of Historical Memory’. Right bottom: Google Maps. Editing by author.

Made of a timber frame structure clad with 2 corrugated asbestos concrete sheets with a 5cm gap in between rather than stable building materials the shacks were designed as temporary shelters.<sup>43</sup> Their roofs were made of corrugated asbestos sheets later often replaced with tiles. They are ground floor shacks of 76 square meters with pitched roofs containing two twin dwelling units each. Ideally, one family would inhabit half of the shack (38m<sup>2</sup>) and have an open internal yard<sup>44</sup>. They were supported on piles. Water supply was from public taps, while one cesspit was shared by 4 houses<sup>45</sup>.

In total 276 shacks were built and directly housed 588 families<sup>46</sup>. So already, in the beginning, 36 shacks must have been inhabited by more than 2 families as initially planned<sup>47</sup>. In 1971 the number grew to 1.071 families rendering the neighbourhood the densest among the other settlements. According to Hirschon’s research 83% of the initial dwellings were continuously inhabited until 1972 and 38% had survived until 2002<sup>48</sup>. With growing and changing family needs, great population density, and lack of financial means the dwellings saw changes in the function of the rooms and large incremental growth. Since the shacks stood on piles lifted from the ground basements were often dug out and converted into a room and kitchen (see figure 20) to be inhabited usually by the parents, who gave the ground floor as a dowry to their girls, as Hirschon observes in the 1970s. Hirschon points out the importance of the kitchen: tiny in size (2 square meters on average) kitchens were built in every corner, niche, and hole of the dwellings. The number of kitchens reflected the number

<sup>43</sup> Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*.

<sup>44</sup> Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*.

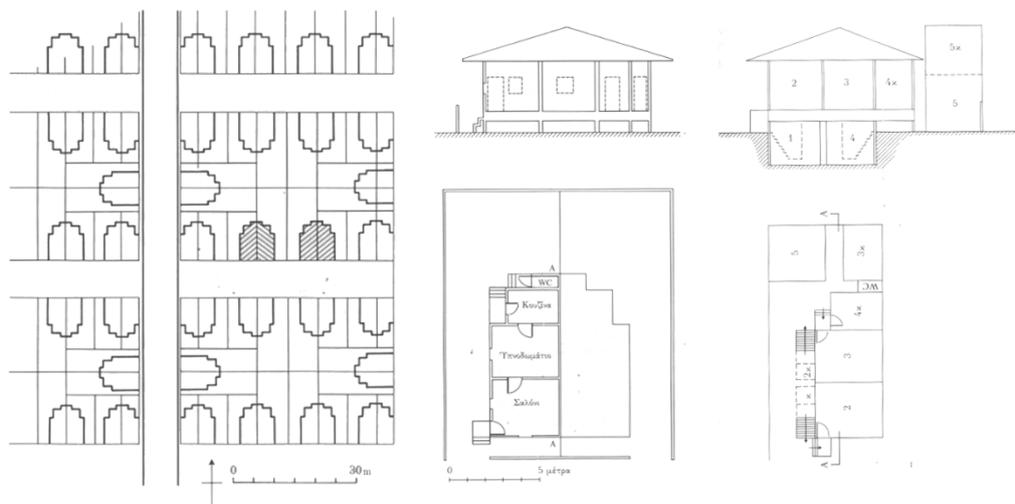
<sup>45</sup> Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*.

<sup>46</sup> Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*.

<sup>47</sup> Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*.

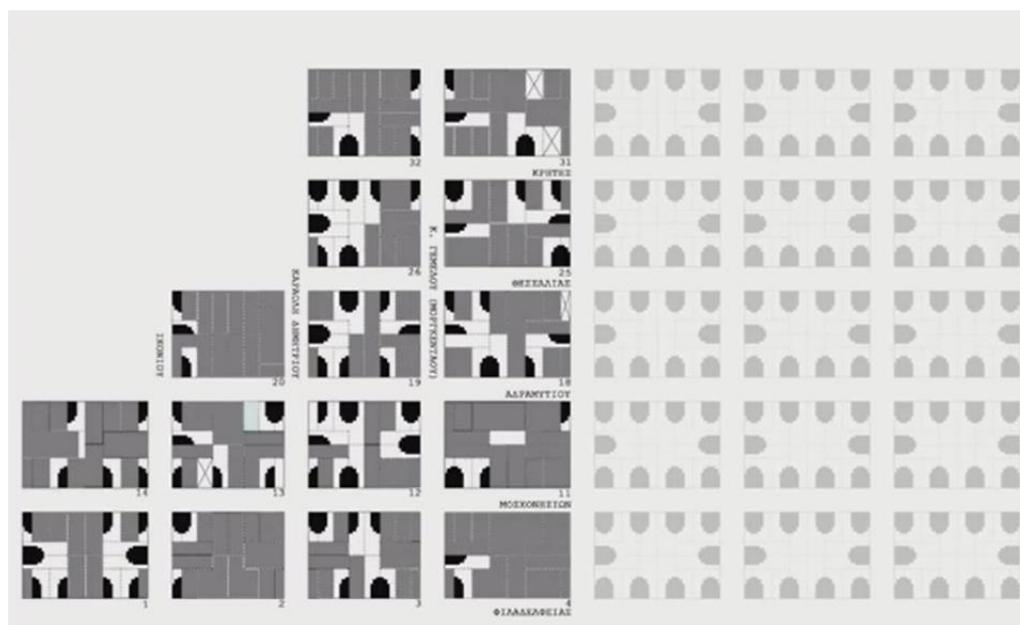
<sup>48</sup> Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*.

of households since each housewife had to have her kitchen. In an exemplary case, Hirschon counts 5 kitchens in a shack housing 17 people. In contrast, the WC was shared between the families. In a second stage, more costly additions to the patios were made to respond to the family's needs.



**Figure 20:** Right: diagram of the initial plan showing the main street (vertical) and secondary streets (horizontal) and the subdivision of the shacks into two units. Middle: Section and floor plan of a shack as designed in 1926. Left: expansion to the basement and on the patio as Hirschon observed in 1972

Source: Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*.



**Figure 21:** Right: diagram of the existing urban structure of “Germanika” documented in 2008. Left: Initial structure of 1927.

Source: Municipality of Nikaia - Ag. I. Renti., *Houses of Nikaia - 100 Years Later: Exploring the Need for the Protection of the Nikaia Refugee Housing Identity and the Possible Ways of Approach*.



**Figure 22** Left: One of the shacks in 1972. Half has been replaced by a multistorey building. Right: One of the houses was complete with both units in 2000 and 2014. Still inhabited and maintained with great care.

Source: Left: Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*, 3<sup>rd</sup> on the right: Google Street View



**Figure 23:** Left: One of the shacks in 1970. The inhabitants are cleaning the non-asphalted street. Right: The same house in 2008. The street has been asphalted.

Source: Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*.



**Figure 24:** Left: One of the houses in 2014. One unit has been replaced by a new building. Also still in use. Right: House with 2 units in 2014. The right unit displays an expansion on the pavement with a separate entrance to the basement.

Source: google street view.

Due to the scarcity of space and cultural background, a significant part of the refugees' daily life was taking place in public spaces. Hirschon describes and interprets the appropriation of public space by the women living in "Germanika". The maintenance of the houses was usually carried out by women, who painted the exterior walls and shutters before the Christmas and Easter period and even whitewashed the steps, pavements, pots, and street columns with acetylene lamps. Women's appropriation of the sidewalks and thresholds of the neighborhood's public spaces revealed informal

sociability. The pavement, as recognized in figure 25, worked as an expansion of the house in public view, where households and community would mix up. The same situation is encountered in recent times, in which the tenants of these old buildings are mostly elderly people, descendants of the refugees, and in some cases immigrants.



**Figure 25:** Family sitting on the street in front of their house in the 1970s.

*Source: Hirschon, Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*

At the time of the emergence of Nea Kokkinia, its inhabitants came from various regions of Asia Minor and belonged to the different levels of socio-economic stratification. This heterogeneous population was not connected to any form of a social network. It was only after the first years of settlement that networks of social relations in the neighborhood began to be central to life in the settlement. As stated by old residents, neighborhood ties were also strengthened by spiritual affinities and served as a shield against social segregation. It is worth noting that cohesion and strong networks at the neighborhood level were strengthened during the period of the Nazi occupation and the Resistance when most of the inhabitants of Nikaia had organized in the EAM. Recorded in the collective urban memory of the region is the "Blockade" of 17 August 1944 where more than 350 inhabitants of the area were executed and 8,000 people were arrested who ended up in the concentration camp of Haidari.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.6 Self-housing

Self-housing proved to be a convenient solution, riding the State of its responsibility to provide housing, since it would offer only the plot, a building permit, and technical supervision, as well as a small grant. Wealthier refugees mostly created settlement organizations operating on their loans<sup>50</sup> with an exclusive group of refugee clients, those, who, if granted a free plot of land and tax exemption by the state, we're able to advance 25% of the value of their house and achieved expropriation of areas<sup>51</sup> (see figure 27), received plots and loans to fund the construction of their houses by private actors.

The most prominent example of this practice is the settlement of Nea Smyrni, a homogenous community of refugees only from Smyrni. They managed to choose the area of settlement, 5km away from the center of Athens and also close to Piraeus but connected to both by roads and electric railway and the advantages of plenty of sunlight and wind, streams and hills. In this previously uninhabited area, the refugees from Smyrni wished to elevate and distinguish themselves from the refugee mass by creating a model city with a modern urban plan, based on the then modern, Western European concepts. The settlement was advertised as a "modern garden city", even though many garden city principles are not recognizable in the urban plan, which again is Hippodamian (see figure 26)<sup>52</sup>. It included wider streets, many squares, a Grove, a market, a sports court and generally

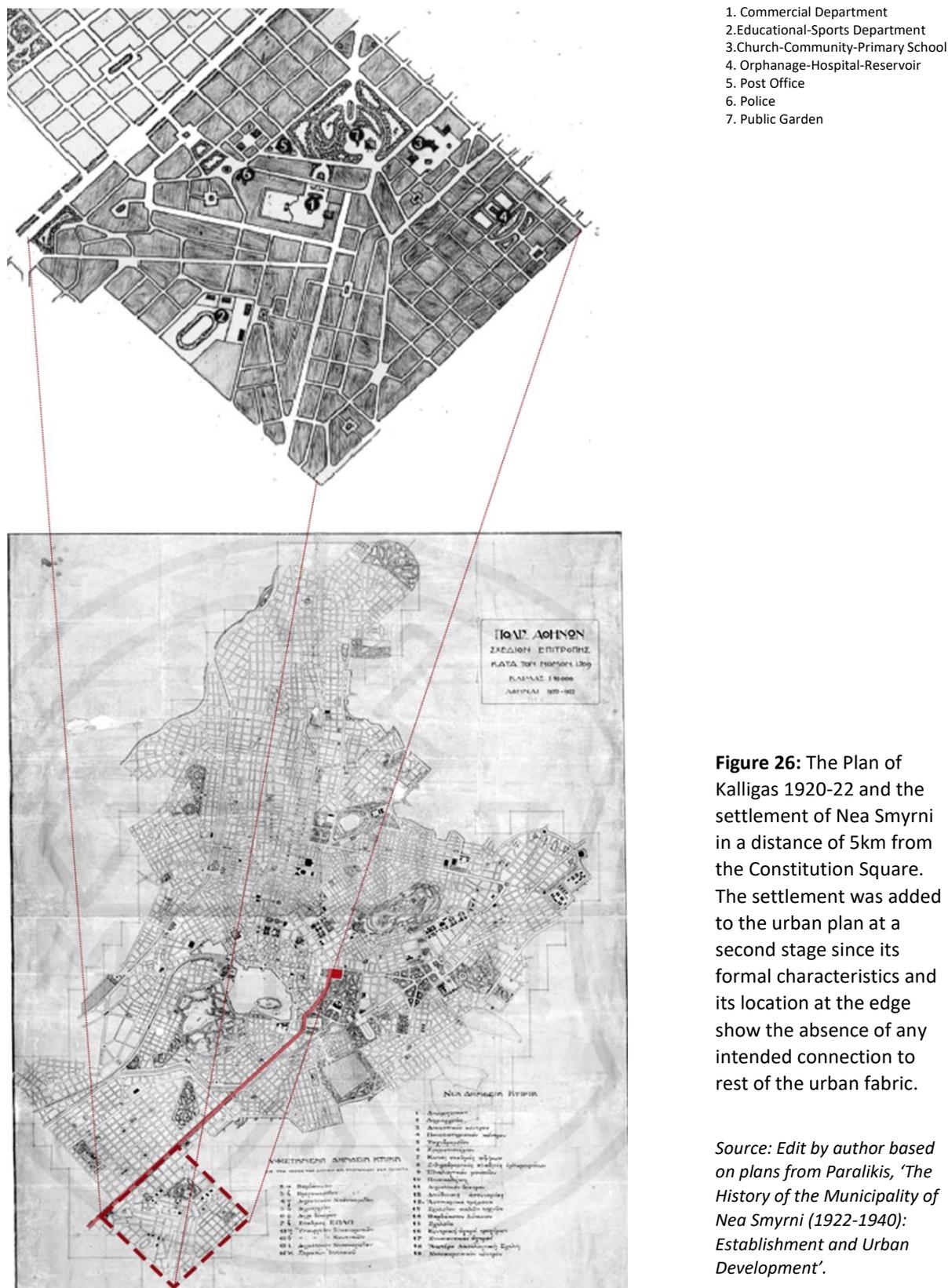
<sup>49</sup> Tousi, 'The Refugee Housing of Nikaia'.

<sup>50</sup> Sakkas and Sfountouris, 'Documentation of refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus: The refugee residences of Perama'.

<sup>51</sup> Touloupi and Marougas, 'Refugee Settlements in the Wider Area of Attic Land'..

<sup>52</sup> Paralikis, 'The History of the Municipality of Nea Smyrni (1922-1940): Establishment and Urban Development'.

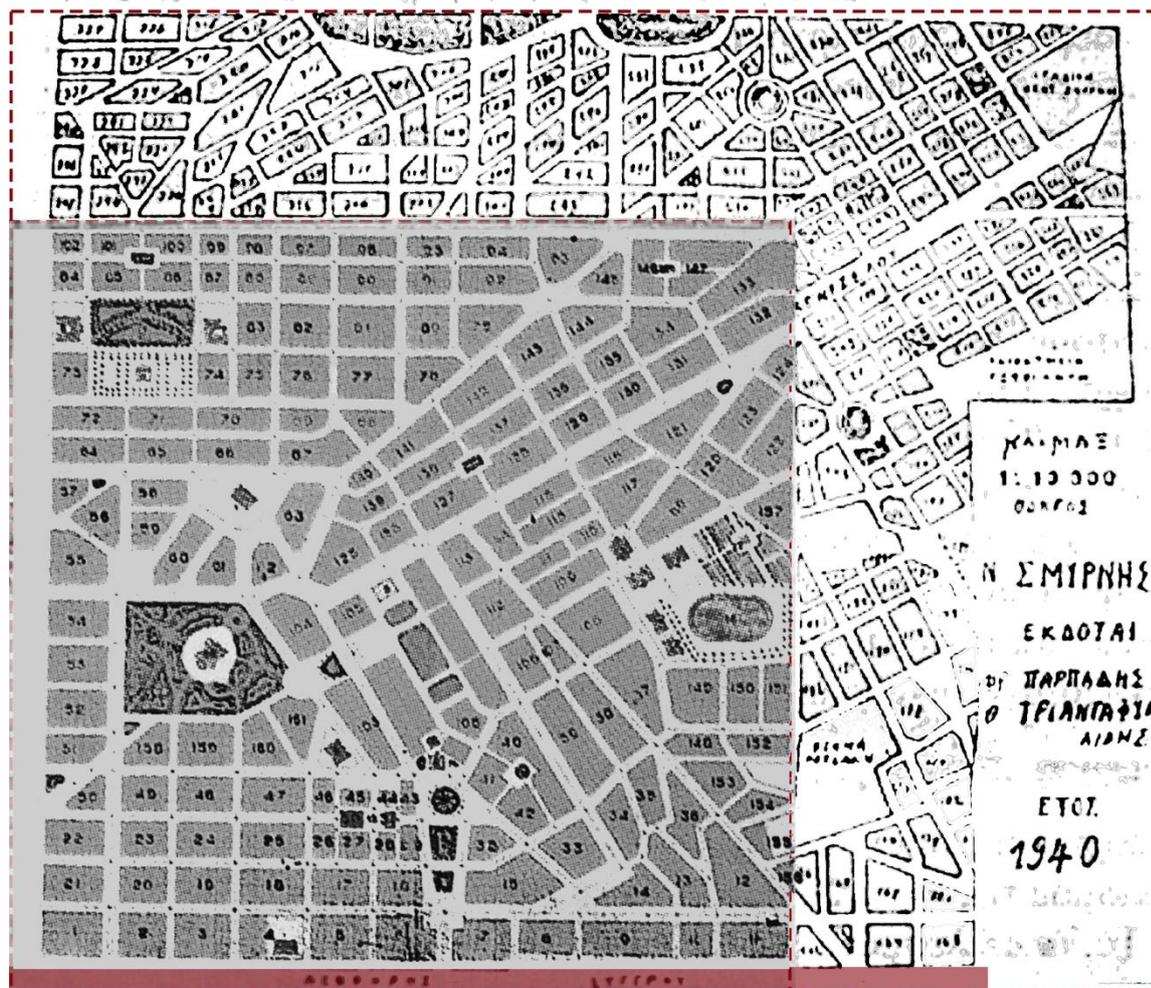
adhered to western urban planning standards of the time, with full infrastructures such as Drinkwater, sewage, electricity, and utility buildings, while transport within the settlement was carried out with cars, buses, and a tram.<sup>53</sup> The settlement was then added to the existing urban plan of Kalligas for the entire area of Athens and Piraeus and in the 1.690.000 sqm area of Nea Smyrni.



**Figure 26:** The Plan of Kalligas 1920-22 and the settlement of Nea Smyrni in a distance of 5km from the Constitution Square. The settlement was added to the urban plan at a second stage since its formal characteristics and its location at the edge show the absence of any intended connection to rest of the urban fabric.

*Source: Edit by author based on plans from Paralakis, 'The History of the Municipality of Nea Smyrni (1922-1940): Establishment and Urban Development'.*

<sup>53</sup> Touloupi and Marougas, 'Refugee Settlements in the Wider Area of Attic Land'.



- Area of the first expropriation
- Area of the second expropriation
- Leoforos Syggrou (Avenue Syggrou)

**Figure 27:** Urban plans of the expropriated areas for the settlement of Nea Smyrni in 1940. The different shades of grey illustrate the number of houses built within the plots ranging from 0 to 10 houses.

Source: Edit by the author based on plans from Paralikis, 'The History of the Municipality of Nea Smyrni (1922-1940): Establishment and UrDevelopment'.

Construction is divided into the following phases: 1926-1932 with 882 houses and 1933-36 with 1.164<sup>54</sup>. In 1928 the French company *Societe Immobiliere du Boulevard Haussmann* is commissioned after winning an international competition with the execution of infrastructure and housing units<sup>55</sup>. A catalog of 34 high-quality housing types (see figure 28) with a range of different prices was issued.<sup>56</sup> The company finally did not realize the project, due to a delay of 2 years and the National Bank not being able to provide the guarantees needed<sup>57</sup>, which inhibited the complete organized construction, but the proposed types were built anyways under the private initiative and according to the aesthetics of the time.<sup>58</sup> They were designed and built by local architects and engineers, mostly following a neoclassicist style, but rather reduced due to scarce financial resources (see figure 29). Thus, the most common typology to be found in Nea Smyrni is single-family houses of stonework,

<sup>54</sup> Paralikis, 'The History of the Municipality of Nea Smyrni (1922-1940): Establis

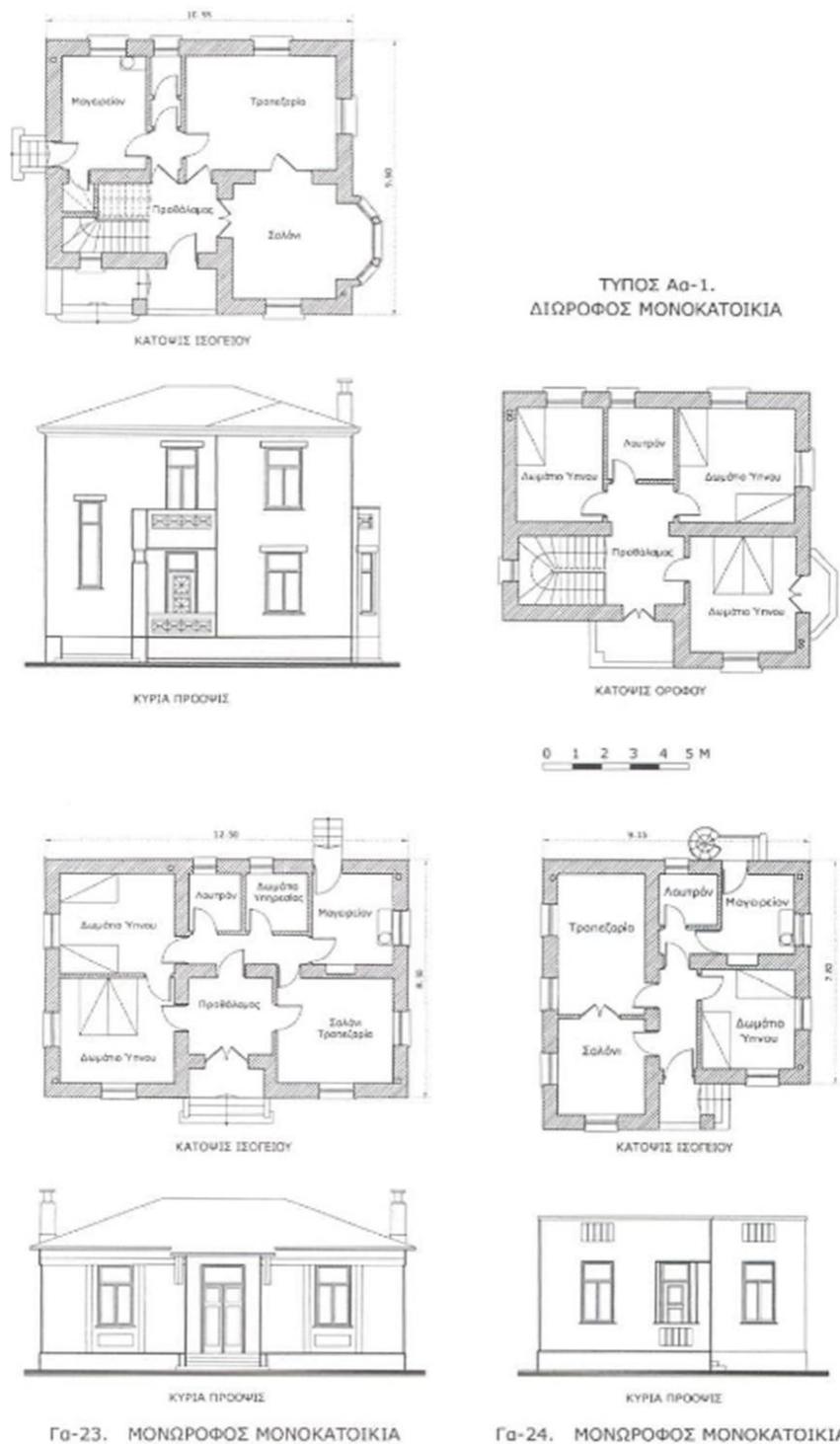
<sup>55</sup> Greek diary, 'Refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus'.

<sup>56</sup> Plemenos, 'Identity and Nature of the Greek City. Case Study: Nea Smirni'.

<sup>57</sup> Municipality of Nea Smyrni, 'From Smyrna of Ionia to Nea Smyrni of Attica - 20th

<sup>58</sup> Greek diary, 'Refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus'.

slabs of reinforced concrete with pitched roofs covered with tiles of the Marseille type. They are usually 2-3 stories high, very spacious, and rather luxurious, with internal WCs, free-standing with a garden.



**Figure 28:** Example of 3 of the 34 housing types by Societe Immobiliere du Boulevard Haussmann. Top: type Aa-1, 186sqm. Bottom left: type Ca-23, 100sqm. Bottom right: type Ca-24, 63sqm.

Source: Kousidonis, 'Organization of residential areas. 1. Introduction: Basic concepts and issues'. Drawings by Chrysa Alafostergiou.



**Figure 29:** Left: Villa Farantou in Nea Smyrni, 1936 Right: Megaro Stathatou, designed by Ziller. The design of the Villa Farantou was inspired by the design of Megaro Stathatou, by prominent architect Ernst Ziller, illustrating the ambitions and intentions of this specific refugee group for prominence among other refugees and for a social position at least equivalent to the bourgeois class of Athens.

*Source: Left: Municipality of Nea Smyrni, 'From Smyrna of Ionia to Nea Smyrni of Attica - 20th part'. Right: Apostolou, 'Megaro Stathatou'.*

Intense advertisement and the Prime Minister's involvement in the issue rendered the settlement attractive for investors. This led to refugees not having the financial ability to develop their plots succumbing to the pressure and selling their plots to non-refugees.<sup>59</sup> In 1928 the settlement had 210 inhabitants. Until 1931, 417 houses were built, which increased to 1.400, with 6.500 inhabitants in 1935 and 15.000 just before the war, rendering the settlement into a real city.<sup>60</sup>

Of these early neoclassical houses, very few are preserved today. After the 50s, due to the growing need for housing, lack of financial resources, and the system of "antiparoxi"<sup>61</sup>, most houses were replaced by cheap, low-quality multi-story apartment houses from reinforced concrete referred to as "polykatoikies". Another common phenomenon became the vertical expansion through the addition of 1-2 stories, usually without taking the architectural language of the existing house into account. Nowadays, the area has reached maximum density according to current building regulations. Contemporary "polykatoikies" are of more advanced quality, including parking and green spaces. The area is quite popular without being gentrified, mostly due to the urban plan, with wide streets allowing for convenient transport and lively, qualitative squares, rare to find in other areas of the city.

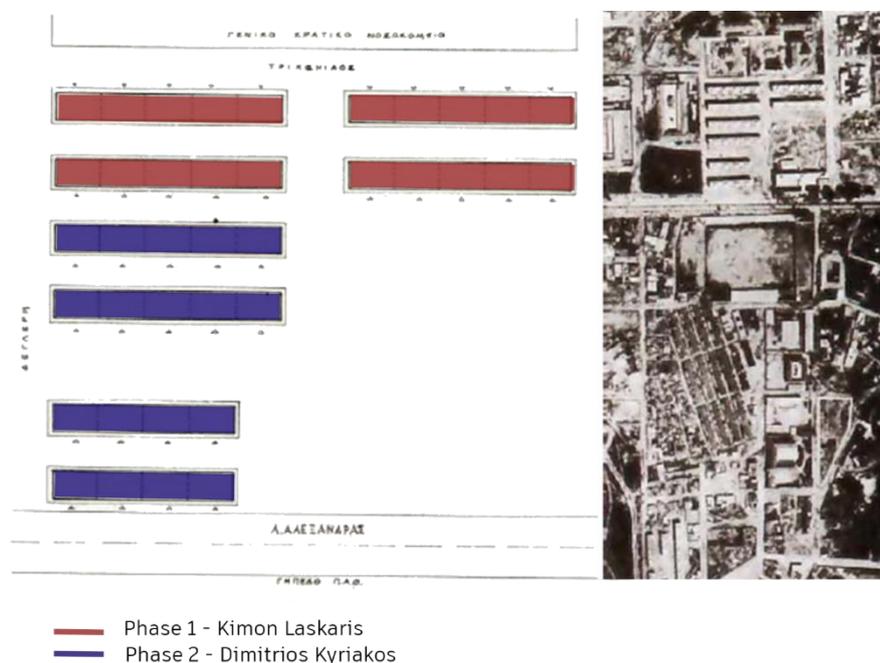
<sup>59</sup> Paralakis, 'The History of the Municipality of Nea Smyrni (1922-1940): Establishment and Urban Development'.

<sup>60</sup> Plemenos, 'Identity and Nature of the Greek City. Case Study: Nea Smirni'.

<sup>61</sup> Plemenos, 'Identity and Nature of the Greek City. Case Study: Nea Smirni'.

### 3.7 Modernist apartment blocks

The construction of the 8 refugee apartment blocks in Leoforos Alexandras started in 1933 according to the design of architect Kimon Laskaris for the 4 buildings in the north, finished in 1936, and in a second phase, the other 4 buildings were added, designed by civil engineer Dimitrios Kyriakos (see figure 30).<sup>62</sup> These buildings were also part of the state mechanism for organized refugee rehabilitation. The architects were working for the Technical Service of the Ministry of Welfare.



**Figure 30:** Left: schematic plan of the apartment blocks with indication of the construction phases. Right: aerial photograph.

Source: Giotsalitis, *The Refugee Apartment Buildings of the '30s'* (edited by author).

The plot was chosen according to the criteria of the time mentioned before in a back then deteriorated suburb of Athens, due to the presence of the “Averoff” prisons. The purpose was to house the refugees already living in the area in the shacks on the other side of the avenue. Already in the beginning there were everyday clashes regarding refugee presence in the area since the municipality had granted the land to the football team of Panathinaikos, for the construction of their stadium.<sup>63</sup> But in 1923, after construction of the stadium had already begun, an expropriation decree was issued in favor of the refugee housing.<sup>64</sup> Since neither side would back down, the solution was to relocate the refugees to the opposite side, where the apartment blocks were built.

Unlike the previously examined typologies, in this case, the issue of many private plots of extremely small dimensions is no longer the case.<sup>65</sup> A complex of 228 apartments<sup>66</sup> divided into the three-story blocks arranged in parallel rows with generous public space surrounding them and parallel to the main Alexandras Avenue according to the modernist movement (after all, Laskaris had been working in the office of Le Corbusier until 1932<sup>67</sup>) is built as a new solution to the housing issue. The “polykatoikia” (multi-story apartment building) was the newly introduced typology, embraced by most architects, to counteract arbitrary expansions of the city and put an end to the slum-like

<sup>62</sup> Protonotariou, ‘refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras’.

<sup>63</sup> Plevria, ‘The refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras’.

<sup>64</sup> Mixani tou xronou, ‘The Refugee Housing Of Leoforos Alexandras and the Clash between Refugees and Panathinaikos Fans. The Team Had Spent a Lot of Money to Turn the Pasture into a Stadium.’

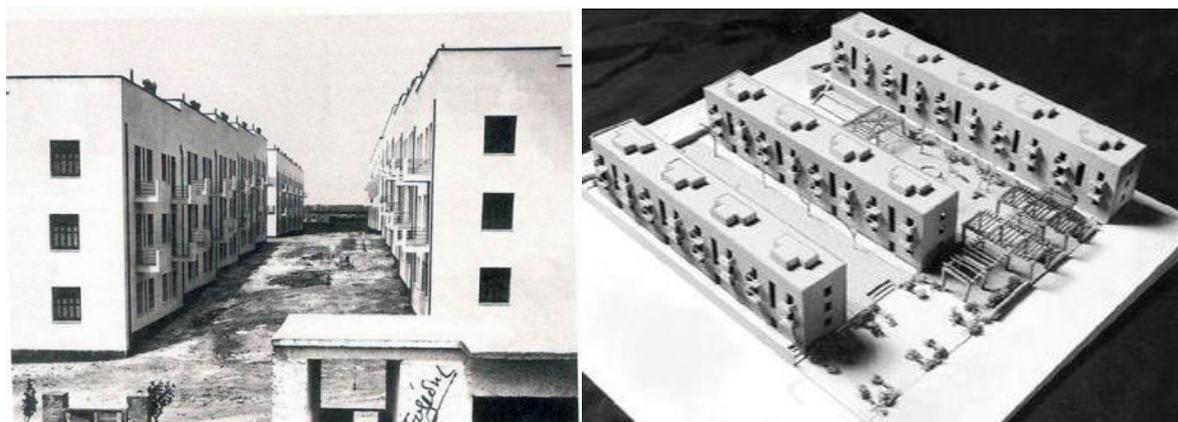
<sup>65</sup> Giotsalitis

<sup>66</sup> Protonotariou, ‘refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras’.

<sup>67</sup> Protonotariou, ‘refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras’.

settlements in its interior.<sup>68</sup> This was made possible due to the introduction of the horizontal property law of 1927 and the General Building Regulation Act of 1929, which subsequently transformed the image of the city.

According to Bauhaus principles, the starting point of the arrangement was optimal ventilation and natural light, following an NW-SE direction.<sup>69</sup> The public space in between was just dimensioned and otherwise left unplanned, in line with the general attitude of the time towards the provision of refugee housing, which only serves as a shelter.<sup>70</sup> Unlike similar mass housing projects of the time in Germany, automobile presence was not a parameter for the planning of refugee housing. Also in contrast to previously constructed refugee housing, this time water supply, sewage, and electricity were integrated into the planning. The plain repetition of the blocks towards the avenue led to apartments of one block being accessed on the private side of the bedrooms, through the public space belonging to the building behind, leading to conflicting situations.<sup>71</sup> In the northern blocks, of which four are mirrored, one public space serves as a meeting point, since entrances and living spaces are oriented towards it opposite each other, while the other space is more private, with bedrooms on both sides. This arrangement stands in contrast with the existing building types in Athens, where buildings had a “good” street side and a “back” side, lacking adequate light, ventilation, and access to qualitative exterior space.



**Figure 31** Left: photograph of the apartment blocks in L. Alexandras at the time of construction. Right: model photo of the design.

*Source: Protonotariou, 'refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras; Tratsa and Karlatira, 'The "lifting" of the refugee housing'.*

Constructed from reinforced concrete slabs and load-bearing plastered stonework. The non-load-bearing walls are made of bricks. It is remarkable, that only the slabs and balconies were made of reinforced concrete cast in situ since the technology and industry for prefabrication were lacking at the time in Greece. The 4 blocks constructed first, were executed in better materials, such as big white tiles in the living room and bathroom, red tiles in the kitchen, and a wooden floor in the bedroom. In contrast, in the other four, all flooring is made in mosaic and the door frames are from cheap wood.

Following a strictly functionalist design, no ornamentation is to be found and the floorplans follow the standards of minimum dwelling. Access to the apartments is granted through a shared internal staircase, with cross ventilation and natural light and corridors serving 2 apartments per floor. The

<sup>68</sup> Greek diary, 'Refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus'

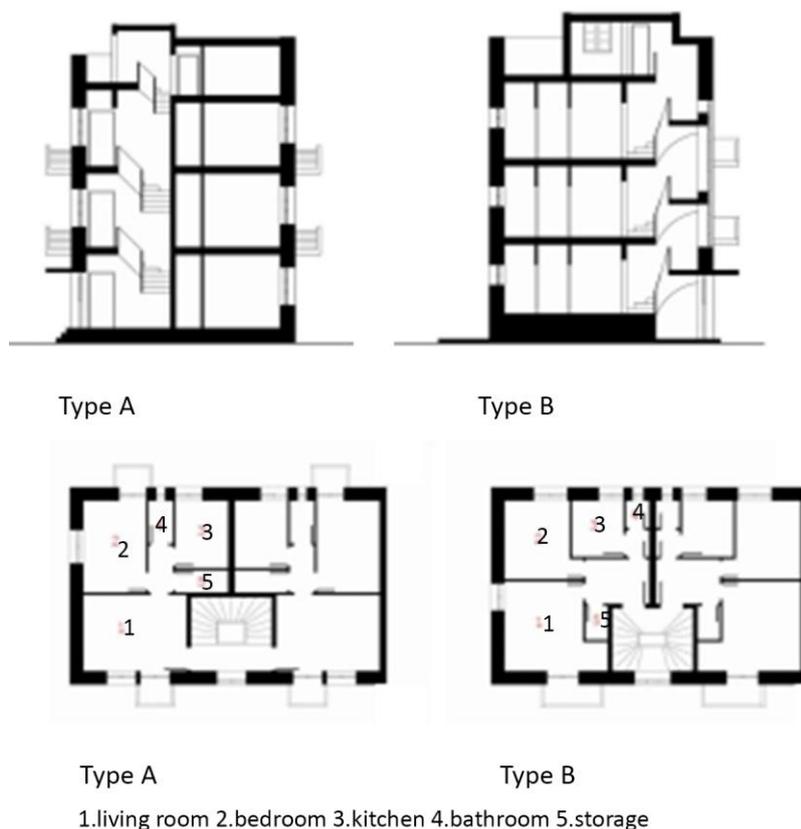
<sup>69</sup> Giotsalitis, 'The Refugee Apartment Buildings of the '30s'.

<sup>70</sup> Giotsalitis, 'The Refugee Apartment Buildings of the '30s'.

<sup>71</sup> Giotsalitis, 'The Refugee Apartment Buildings of the '30s'.

flat roofs were used as laundry spaces, to be shared by 3 flats each.<sup>72</sup> The two blocks closer to the Avenue consist of 24 apartments each and the other 6 of 30 each.

The refugees bought the 40m<sup>2</sup> apartments, regardless of family size, at the price of 80.000 drachmas each, to be paid in installments<sup>73</sup>. The plot nevertheless remained in the ownership of the state.<sup>74</sup> Even though the size of the apartments is not much bigger than the ones of the previously examined typologies, the functions of sleeping and living are separated in the design of Kyriakos. They consist of one bedroom, a living area, a WC (no shower), and a kitchen. The bedrooms are oriented towards the south, while the less private functions towards the north. In the design of Laskaris, the flats include one room, a WC, and a kitchen (see figure 32).



**Figure 32:** Sections and floor plans of the two apartment types to be found in the complex.

Source: Vythoulka, 'Transforming the Urban Landscape - The Reintegration of the L.Alexandras Refugee Housing into the City's Network'. Edited by author

For the coming 30 years, the blocks were inhabited by the refugees that bought them. Each apartment was inhabited by at least four people. Even though these flats were almost luxurious in comparison to the existing shacks and arbitrary housing, in which most of the refugee population was housed, scarcity of space was still an issue. The balconies soon were transformed into rooms and the public space in between the blocks were divided into courtyards and gardens<sup>75</sup> (see figure 33). Nowadays, the public spaces between the blocks are transformed into common streets for car traffic and parking and are only rarely used for communal activities such as the performance seen in figure 33.

<sup>72</sup> Protonotariou, 'refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras'.

<sup>73</sup> Giotsalitis, 'The Refugee Apartment Buildings of the '30s'.

<sup>74</sup> Kostakis, 'Panagiotis Kalafantis on the refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras'.

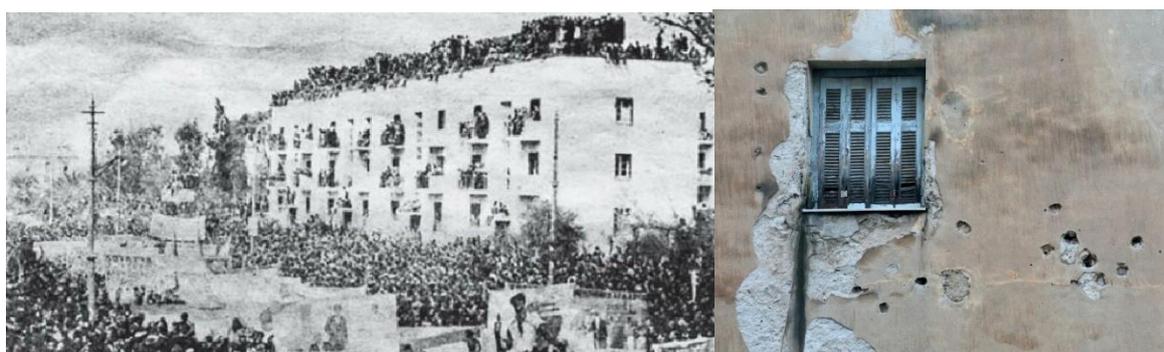
<sup>75</sup> Protonotariou, 'refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras'.



**Figure 33:** Transformations of the initial condition. Left: one of the balconies has been closed. Right: the public space is now a parking space.

Source: D. Eutaxiopoulos, *personal archive*; Newsroom, 'The Refugee apartment buildings of Leoforos Alexandras - The next day for the landmark of Athens'; The Institute, 'Anti-Fascist Performing Arts Festival'.

Towards the end of World War II, on December 3, 1944, a series of armed clashes began in Athens between EAM-ELAS forces and British and government forces, lasting 33 days.<sup>76</sup> The blocks were used as a refuge by ELAS fighters and the marks of bullets and shells fired by the British are still visible today on the exterior walls<sup>77</sup> (see figure 34).



**Figure 34:** Left: Demonstration during Dekemvriana. The refugees are involved in political life. Right: Marks from the bullets of Dekemvriana

Source: Left: Protonotariou, 'refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras'. Right: Newsroom, 'The Refugee apartment buildings of Leoforos Alexandras - The next day for the landmark of Athens'.

<sup>76</sup> Plevria, 'The refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras'.

<sup>77</sup> Plevria, 'The refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras'.

As the refugees started getting socially and economically upgraded, they started moving out and the buildings were left empty and neglected soon demolition threats occurred<sup>78</sup>, which led to further abandonment. The first demolition efforts occurred during the dictatorship in the 60s. Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the buildings have become a matter of heavy dispute. They manifest a typical case of an architectural object on which all kinds of political and ideological rhetorics of the city have been and are still being projected upon. Apart from legal fights and passing on ownership between different agents, like a ping pong ball, no act of maintenance has ever been consolidated, apart from the very limited repairs, the inhabitants themselves have managed to carry out. In some cases, the restoration carried out by the residents is very carefully done, with effort and knowledge, like in the apartment of architect Dimitris Eftaxiopoulos, who grew up and still lives there. It is exemplary of the emotional attachment to the building and the appreciation of its architectural qualities. In 1999, there was an official decision for demolition and replacement by a “leisure park”, which did not get realized. In 2000 efforts to prevent demolition from architects and inhabitants of the area started as more threats arise. 137 flats became the property of the state to replace them with green space. With the Olympic games of 2004, a new demolition threat arose, with the preface that they were in danger of collapse<sup>79</sup>, even though the buildings withstood all earthquakes including the one of 1998. 50 more flats were expropriated and were handed to the State Real estate Company as well, leading to only 51 of the initial homeowners being left in 2008, refusing to sell. The rest of the apartments were inhabited by immigrants or squatted by self-organized “anti-authoritarians” and later homeless and drug abusers, 300-400 people, mostly homeless families, the biggest squat in Athens.<sup>80</sup> In 2009 all blocks became listed buildings, due to their historical, social, and architectural significance.<sup>81</sup>



**Figure 35:** Community of Occupied Refugee Housing L. Alexandras.

Source: Viskaroudaki, *'Refugee housing in Alexandras / Swamping in inactivity'*.

<sup>78</sup> Giotsalitis, 'The Refugee Apartment Buildings of the '30s'.

<sup>79</sup> Giotsalitis, 'The Refugee Apartment Buildings of the '30s'.

<sup>80</sup> Kostakis, 'Panagiotis kalafantis on the refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras'.

<sup>81</sup> Plevria, 'The refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras'.

In 2014 they were transferred to the Private Property Fund, with the aim of sale and demolition an act canceled later. By 2020, the blocks are part of a bigger plan to regenerate the area.<sup>82</sup> The plan by Anaplasti Athinas SA suggests many of the flats become social housing for the homeless, others are turned into hostels for companions of the patients of the neighboring hospital, as well as a museum of Asia Minor memory.<sup>83</sup> Until today, in 2022, the plan was not realized, not even initiated, even though the competition was won, planning was finished and permits were issued.<sup>84</sup> It is clear, that the refugee housing blocks have always been regarded as a problem by the state, rather than as an opportunity. The lack of social housing in Athens today is enormous, especially after the 2008 financial crisis and 2015 refugee crisis. The huge reserve of refugee housing from the 1920s and 30s, including this historical complex could be mobilized with very limited means to relieve this need while preserving the historical memory of the city.

From an architectural perspective, all these cases of modernist social housing manifest early attempts to transfer the new ideas of the CIAM of 1933 in a country with very restricted means and small possibilities of industrial prefabrication at the time. Nevertheless, exactly the fact that these buildings incorporate the in-between stage of switching from the traditional to the modern, characterized by their still small scale and hybrid character between stonework and modern reinforced concrete construction techniques in combination with the modernist qualities of generous open space, are what renders them an oasis within the city. Already in the aerial view (see figure 36) it is clear how these qualities stand out in contrast to the surrounding neighborhoods of very high density and completely lacking green space.



**Figure 36:** Aerial photograph of the refugee housing in L. Alexandras.

*Source:* Trasa, 'Double redevelopment: Botanikos and Alexandra get on the rails'

Unlike the developments in industrial nations of northern Europe, in Athens, the model of mass social housing was not applied further to a significant extent. The bankruptcy of 1932 halted many social housing projects.<sup>85</sup> Renewed emphasis was placed on social housing by the dictatorial regime of Metaxas but after WWII with increasing urbanization due to the civil war the system of "antiparoxi", in which a plot of land is provided to a contractor in exchange for the acquisition of one or more properties in the building to be erected, largely took over the production of housing. Simultaneously, the legalization of arbitrary housing remained a dominant practice. The state would turn a blind eye to the violation of existing planning regulations, for this was covering the state's

<sup>82</sup> Protonotariou, 'refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras'.

<sup>83</sup> Plevria, 'The refugee housing of Leoforos Alexandras'

<sup>84</sup> Viskaroudaki, 'Refugee housing in Alexandras / Swamping in inactivity'.

<sup>85</sup> Greek diary, 'Refugee settlements in Athens and Piraeus'

incapability for the application of a broad social housing policy and because it was simultaneously creating a clientelist dependency of the residents on the political parties. The role of the welfare state in housing provision was substituted by family networks and social structures of the neighborhood. The modernist movement of the 30s in the housing sector was soon phased out with architects supporting a national rather than international architecture taking over the scene. The modernist social housing complexes thus remained rather small in scale and fragmented, built bit by bit, only when extremely necessary, even though they were all planned by the same institutions at about the same time, to house an enormous number of people. So, we only encounter a few more examples of this kind, also part of the refugee rehabilitation program such as the ones in Dourgouti, Byronas, Agios Ioannis Rentis, Stegi Patridos. Most of the refugee population remained in arbitrary slum-like situations, like the neighbourhood of Dourgouti for many years.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The demonstrated examples covered all types of responses of both state and foreign organizations, as well as of the refugees themselves to the 1920s housing issue of unprecedented scale. The pressure on all reception centers to secure housing was great and the issue would have been impossible to resolve without this combination of private initiative and state intervention in the housing sector.

The planned settlements, even though lacking to achieve the desired modernization in terms of infrastructure due to lack of financial means, constitute proof of the intention of tackling the issue in an organized and modern manner, the fruit of which is still visible today. Looking at the total balance of urban rehabilitation though, it was overall characterized by an insufficient and restricted involvement of the welfare state in the provision of social housing, which fuelled a far-reaching, self-sustaining *Jezzes faire* situation. Emerging out of a need to cover the enormous gaps left by the institutional mechanisms and combined with the desire for homeownership, emerging from family structure and promoted by the state's capitalist orientation, it proved to be a convenient solution and was tolerated further. On an urban scale, this made subsequent efforts for large-scale strategic urban planning even harder.

On an architectural scale, the ownership model left the buildings under the responsibility of the inhabitants themselves, which rendered maintenance and development rather problematic in the long run. In the cases where houses show great care by the owners, this success is to be attributed to the emotional attachment with the place and family structure rather than policy. The culture of the refugees, in combination with the pressing issue of lack of space and financial means, is what created sociability and neighborhood ties, that resulted in appropriation and care of the public space and made the absolute minimum and terrible hygienic environment liveable, as seen in different gradients in the cases of "Germanika", Nikaia and Dourgouti. These are counterexamples to the general belief that the individualist mentality characterizing the population always leads to neglect of the public space. This spirit is still encountered in the remaining "Germanika" and clusters of Nikaia and forms a positive resource for the regeneration of the neighborhoods and a role model for other areas.

Despite all the faults and absences in the settlement planning and the restricted means available, which led to the provided housing being purely inadequate in terms of several dwellings and overall living quality, dwellings such as the ones in Nikaia and Leoforos Alexandras display a set of values of the in-between stage, which form an interesting counterexample to building types of today. This lies in the duality of "modern" and "delayed" aspects coexisting in a societal, economic, political, and consequently urban, architectural, and technological level in the city at the time. From an architectural point of view, these buildings realized by the EAP such as the ones analyzed in Nikaia, are exemplary of an intermediate period of Greek architecture between modernism and tradition. The characteristic standardization and efficiency of modernism and the spread of the use of reinforced concrete as a building material are in balance with traditional building techniques and the low-rise typologies of the time. This in-between stage is particularly clear in the fact that the clear intention of modernization was only partially realized considering the absence of basic infrastructure. In the next stage, illustrated by the example of the apartment blocks in Leoforos Alexandras, the dream of applying modernist architectural language and principles of spatial organization became reality, but also still characteristic of the shift. The transition from low rise to multi-story buildings is dared, but this kind of building only emerged as a direct replacement for slums, still maintaining a relatively low density to ensure hygienic conditions. In comparison to the market housing that took

over later, these types display a better balance between efficiency and density in terms of scale and arrangement and thus form an oasis in the city worth preserving.

On the opposite side, the case of the luxurious self-housing settlement of Nea Smyrni is characteristic of disregard towards the existing back then miserable refugee settlements and the alternative vision of creating a “decent” meaning “modern” settlement, with a well-designed urban plan. This vision was realized due to the organized efforts of the refugees, who had sufficient resources. This demonstrates the segregation between the refugee groups themselves and how they were perceived by the state. The housing policy treated the refugees according to their social and financial situation in their place of origin. The socio-economic restructuring occurred later due to the efforts of the progress-oriented refugees themselves. This segregation found a very clear spatial manifestation, considering the difference between living conditions in the rather marginalized Dourgouti and Nea Kokkinia in contrast to Nea Smyrni. Nevertheless, the location considerations and urban plan of Nea Smyrni, which in contrast to the housing survived until today, and is a rather successful example of the achievable result originating from citizen initiative, when the identification of the aspirations of the state with the citizens exists.

In total, the refugee housing created in the 1920s-30s, illustrated through the given examples, carries the historical memory of the urban rehabilitation of refugees, the shifting structures of the society and the state, and architectural or/and values and should therefore be protected. They are exemplars of the only period of social housing production by the state in the cities of Athens and Piraeus, testify to the challenges attempts of the organized building faced, and despite their ranging quality in terms of urban and architectural planning and execution and the strict orientation to the absolute minimum, they still manifest a counter-argument to the current building forms in their essence and are worth preserving and regenerating.

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