

Structures for current and potential
citizens of Thessaloniki



Pre Diploma 2018
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Location	Thessaloniki, Greece

Content

Introduction	6	Motivation and background
	8	The historical Monterosso Almo extended - Bed & Breakfast and Collective Center
Topic and thesis	12	The situation of displaced people in Europe and Greece
	16	How to benefit from existing knowledge of the city?
	28	Research question
	29	References
Organization	36	Submitted material
	37	Approach
	38	Schedule diploma semester
Thessaloniki, Xirokrini	42	Potential areas for refugee housing relocation
	43	Economic strategies for housing displaced people
	44	The city center
	46	City center west
	48	Xirokrini
	54	Mapping of the city structure
	60	Program
64	References / Literature	

References

Introduction



Motivation and background

AHO + NRC

During the master course «In Transit», a collaboration between Oslo School of Architecture and design (AHO) and The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) / Norwegian Refugee Council's expert deployment capacity (NORCAP), I was introduced to the link between architecture and the humanitarian response. The case study of the master course was in Italy, Sicily. During the study trip we experienced Sicily's need for population growth, its large amount of abandoned buildings and how migrants have transformed the building mass throughout history. The possibilities for planning cities for migration, and to make use of existing structures to serve both new arrivals and the host community, made me curious to look further into the topic.

The responsibility of planners

Mass displacement is a growing and global challenge. It challenges architects to take migration into account when planning cities. The focus on the individual shelter in traditional planning for migration is a result of the response developed for rural camps, tending to be temporary. One goal is that the presence of the displaced people can be turned into a positive influence for the community, instead of pressure on the already strained resources. Architects can contribute to a shift in the mindset of planning cities by emphasizing migration as an urban phenomenon, and not a temporary state.

Terminology

Refugees are people who have been granted refugee status, as defined by the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention. These people risk the death penalty, torture or other inhumane or degrading treatment if they return to their homeland. Migrants are a very diverse group. Some leave their homes for economic reasons, others flee from war,

“Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”

The UN Sustainable Development Goal 11, sustainable cities and communities

persecution, disasters, famine, or because of climate change. Asylum seekers are persons arriving in another country on their own, applying for asylum. The person is referred to as an asylum seeker until the government has processed the application. In this project I will focus on “new arrivals”, that include migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. I choose to use this term to emphasize that this is not one homogenous group of people.

Search for local solutions to urban challenges

In Thessaloniki, there is a large group of people working on the topic of urban strategies for refugees. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) works closely with the municipality in an Urban Working Group. The NGOs in the city are also connected to the group in order to maintain close cooperation. NRC/NORCAP sat me up with the working group, so that my Diploma Thesis can serve as an additional input to their work. NRC have until now driven a large part of the work on refugees in the city, but complete their work in Thessaloniki by June 2018 due to a lack of fundings. During my research trip to Thessaloniki I met with the Department of Welfare and Solidarity and the Metropolitan Development Agency of Thessaloniki. They introduced me to the challenges in the city's social system and their approaches to the situation. By meeting with architects connected to the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, I got a broader understanding of the urban history and current situation. Several students and professors at the university are working on strategies for a social housing system. Thessaloniki is also part of the “100 resilient cities” network. The report “Resilient Thessaloniki” presents the goals of the city for the next twelve years. Based on the existing knowledge of the situation in Thessaloniki, my thesis will aim to search for local solutions to the urban challenges.

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Global Migration, Resilient Cities at the Forefront, 100 Resilient Cities, 2016
www.nrc.no/what-we-do/speaking-up-for-rights/urban-displacement/
www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html

Topic and Thesis



The situation of displaced people in Europe and Greece

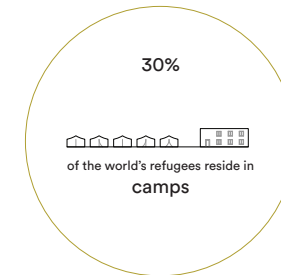
Mass displacement in Northern Greece

Refugees arriving Greece in 2018 enter from north, crossing the border from Turkey to Evros. The arrivals from the Greek Islands are stopped due to the European Commission (EU)-Turkey Statement from March 2016. The much discussed statement says that all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey. For every Syrian being returned to Turkey, another Syrian will be resettled to the EU. The agreement does not apply to the mainland border between Greece and Turkey.

About 13,000 refugees are currently hosted in temporary camps in Northern Greece. Many of them, originally designed as industrial warehouses, are not suitable for people to live in. The camps in Northern Greece are overcrowded, and camps that are closed for some reason are continuously opening again.

60% of the world's refugees reside in towns and cities, also a large amount in Northern Greece. The limits of the accommodation system are reached and there are no apartments available for the newcomers in the city.

Only minors have the opportunity to move to a camp, meanwhile being captured by the police. Currently, most refugees in Thessaloniki are homeless and some occupy abandoned building structures.



68 million displaced people worldwide

“UNHCR considers urban areas to be a legitimate place for refugees to enjoy their rights, including those stemming from their status as refugees, as well as those that they hold in common with all other human beings.”

Sources:
www.europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-963_en.htm
Study on adequate urban housing for refugees, Thessaloniki, Greece,
NRC, European Union Humanitarian Aid, ETC, 2016
www.urbancrises.org/about-us
The Urban Working Group, Thessaloniki

The current social housing system in Thessaloniki

In Thessaloniki the housing and construction market has been paralyzed since the economic downturn in 2009. Greece in general has the highest unemployment rate in Europe and the only public housing agency was closed in 2012. A large number of housing units, industrial areas and public projects closed during the economic crisis and are still unoccupied. Entire buildings and a large amount of ground floors are abandoned, especially in the western part of the city.

Out of the 55 000 documented new arrivals, 22 000 people reside in private accommodations. The Education, Community, Hope and Opportunity for refugees (ECHO) funding is secured until the end of 2018 and is, until now, supported and run by UNHCR and NGOs. Their solutions are based on renting apartments and hotel rooms through conditional cash grants and short-term hosting in Greek families. These solutions are unsustainable and short-term, but the government is gradually taking over the responsibility and the program. Today there are no public social housing systems in Thessaloniki, because 95% of the housing market are private. Therefore, to be able to find new and sustainable solutions for urban refugee accommodation, the work has to take into account the fact that the market is private.

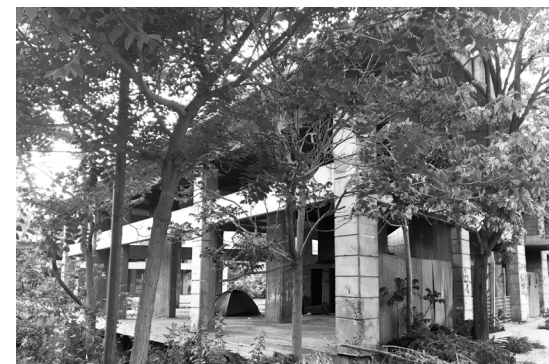
Thessaloniki remains a mixed city without great social fragmentation. The city has proven itself a welcoming city throughout the centuries and has managed to accommodate several major waves of migration, even greater than today. This history proves that Thessaloniki can indeed handle the current situation.

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Sponsorship of rental housing for asylum seekers and recognised refugees in Greece,
HOME Project, Innovation & Planning Agency, Killian Kleinschmidt, Thessaloniki, February 2018



Oreokastro camp, Thessaloniki, home to 1500 people in 2016, closed in 2017
Lynsey Addario for TIME
<http://time.com/4659464/greeces-refugee-hotels-limbo-finding-home/>

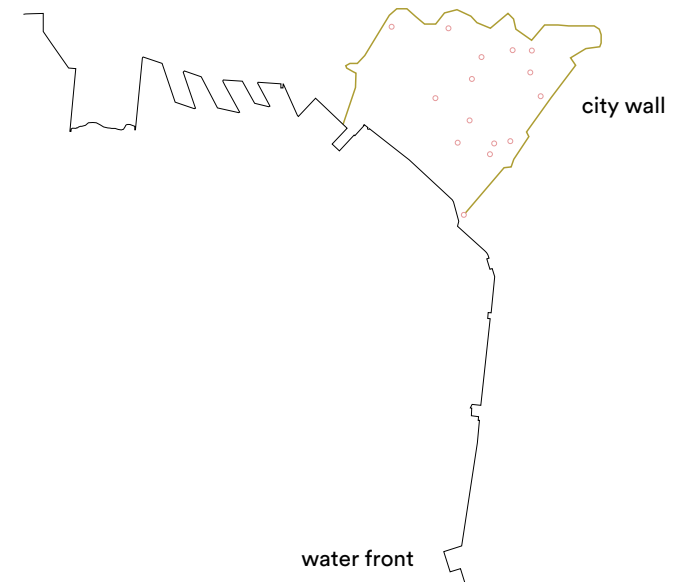


Uncompleted building structure occupied of homeless people, next to the old train station in Thessaloniki

How to benefit from historic development of the city?

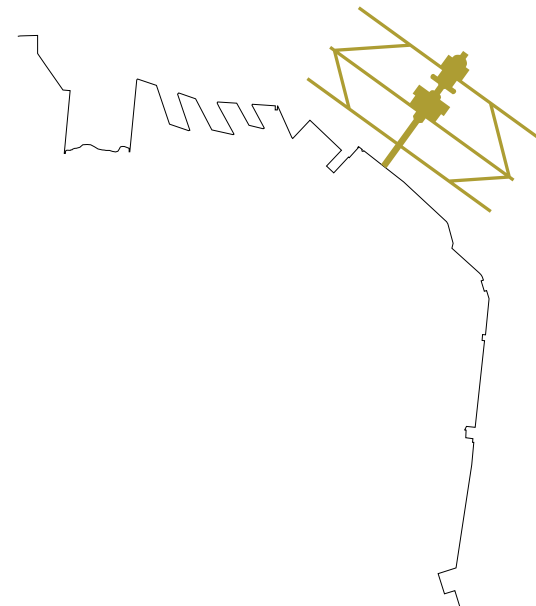
Thessaloniki 1917: The Great fire

The center of Thessaloniki was surrounded by a city wall, with churches and monuments within, back to the age of the Roman Empire. The majority of the city was destroyed in the great fire in 1917. After the fire 70 000 people became homeless and 70% of the population were unemployed.



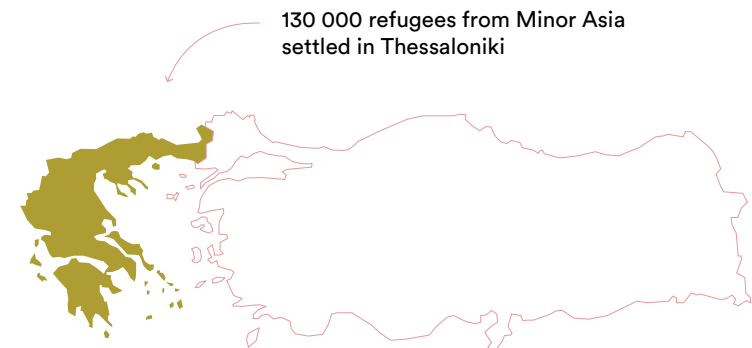
Response: New city plan

The french architect Ernest Hébrard designed the new city plan. The plan removed the medieval and Oriental features of Thessaloniki, preserved its Byzantine heritage and transformed it into a city with boulevards, squares and parks. The plan was finished in 1918, but was not implemented fully due to pressure by local influential landowners.



Thessaloniki 1922: The Asia Minor Catastrophe

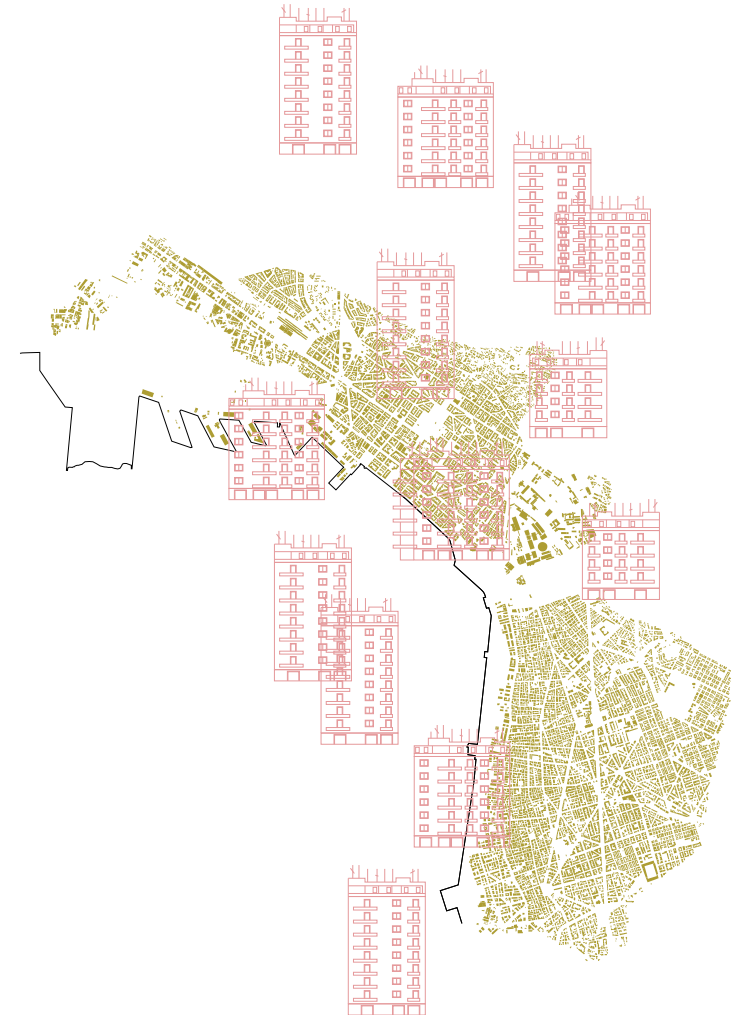
In 1922 the Asia Minor Catastrophe took place. Approx. 1.65 million orthodox refugees left for Greece, Russia, Australia and the United States. Thessaloniki received a large amount of the refugees.



130 000 refugees from Minor Asia
settled in Thessaloniki

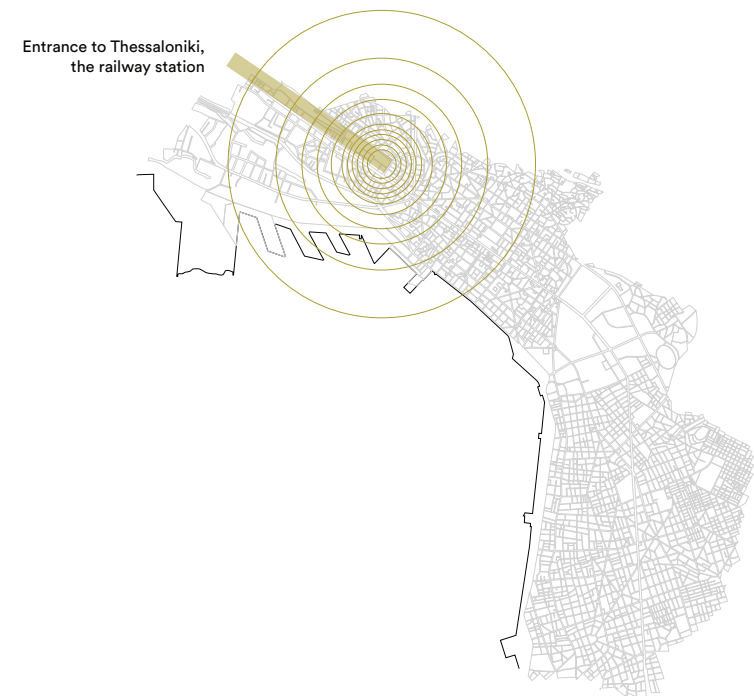
Response: Private developed city structure

The city needed a quick solution for housing, and the government started to distribute land. The landowners were offered to leave their properties to developers, in exchange for a large share of the value of the new buildings. This was a quick solution to boost the economy. The largest Greek cities we know today are built on these principles, and the result is an efficient and dense structure without architectural or environmental value. The typology is called Polikatoikia, characterized by courtyards, so called Akalyptos, in between. All property development was done by the private sector, while the public sector did not interfere.



Thessaloniki 2018: A large amount of displaced people arriving the city

In March 2018, approximately thousand refugees entered Thessaloniki and more are expected. The camps outside the city are overcrowded. The accomodation system does not have more apartments to offer. The result is that the arrivals are left homeless, and the city faces a huge social issue.



Future response: Adjust to the existing city structure

One approach is to structure the vacant building stock and empty spaces for better utilization. The ECHO funding, the municipality, the private market and the affected people need to collaborate in order to create an infrastructure for social housing. In order to create a sustainable response to the urban displacement, citizens of all levels need to be included.



1000 displaced people arrived in Thessaloniki in March 2018. Xirokrini, the neighborhood next to the railway can offer 10 000 sqm empty building space.

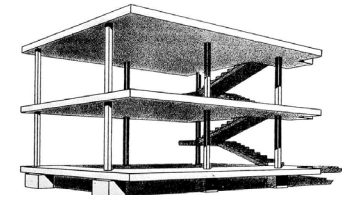
Research question

There is a large potential in the vacant buildings, the empty ground floors and the unused spaces in the city.
How can this be transformed architecturally into common structures for both current and potential citizens?

References

“A project for Athens, From Dom-ino to Polykatoikia”

Berlage Institute;
Pier Vittorio Aureli, Maria S. Giudici, Platon Issaias



Perspective view of the Dom-ino system, 1914.
Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Oeuvre Complète Volume 1, 1910–1929, Les Editions d'Architecture Artemis, Zürich, 1964

“While the Dom-ino approach encourages the individual house owner to become an independent entrepreneur who fills in, organises and manipulates his part of the skeleton, the forms we propose all imply a form of collective will and collaboration. The courtyard, the block, the street, and the ground floor become figures that can be rescued from the polykatoikia carpet. Our proposal radicalises these figures into distinct architectural archetypes.”

“A project for Athens, From Dom-ino to Polykatoikia” written by, among others, Pier Vittorio, proposes a catalogue of architectural actions for the city. The proposal aims to establish coherence in the collective urban forms by connecting the fragmented dwellings into the system. Polykatoikia is a structure based on Le Corbusiers Dom-ino system, which arose in Greek cities due to the need of quick and massive housing for newcomers in the 1920s. By using architectural methods, the project discusses the interaction between private and public spaces, and hence provides a contrast to the established view.



The groundfloor, based on the archetype platform.
<https://www.domusweb.it/en/architecture/2012/10/31/from-dom-ino-to-em-polykatoikia-em-.html>



The courtyard, based on the archetype Cloister.
<https://www.domusweb.it/en/architecture/2012/10/31/from-dom-ino-to-em-polykatoikia-em-.html>

How can the design of the ground floor establish a common ground for different people and uses? In “A project for Athens” all non-bearing elements are removed and the ground floor creates a continuous space for new social utilization, based on the platform archetype.

Empty spaces can both be utilized for individuals, by focusing on fragmented apartments, or, more broadly, for the public, by embracing the civic city structure. The courtyard, Akalyptos, in between all Polikatoikias is one example. The project gives one example of how to make use of this space, by adding a shared balcony framing the social space in between the blocks. The Akalyptos is formally owned by the surrounding dwellings. By focusing on shared solutions the city will benefit a larger range of citizens.

“The Dutch Atlas of Vacancy”

Part of the installation
 ‘Vacant NL’

RAAAF



http://www.raaaf.nl/en/projects/535_dutch_atlas_of_vacancy

The Dutch Atlas of Vacancy is a part of the installation ‘Vacant NL’, that calls upon the government to exploit the large potential in the temporary unoccupied building stock. The buildings are vacant from one week to ten years, and this temporary unoccupation gives different opportunities for programming.

The time limited experiments may lead to permanent and creative usage in the future. Because of their original purpose, the spaces are very diverse, including for example hospitals, lighthouses and schools. This encourages a variety of possible actions. The categorization of typologies and previous programs leads to the question of who the next user group will be. By including new users into an already existing framework, the focus can be on developing the area further, rather than building it from scratch.

Oderberger Str. 56, Berlin

Mixed use, work / live

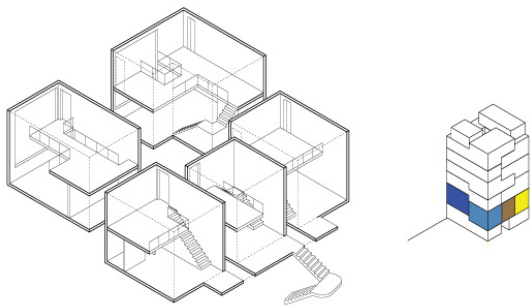
BAR Architekten



<http://www.bararchitekten.de/projects/oderberger.html>

The project proposes to continue the cities meeting places into the building. The internal urbanism encourages social interaction at various levels. Dense living, offices and commercial units create a socially mixed community.

The doubled height of the units makes it possible to add the extra level. The staircase is an interesting way of working with thresholds between working and living situations. The spaces become three-dimensional zones rather than closed rooms. The distinction between private and public is interesting in terms of designing double height ground floor spaces for living and working. What are the prerequisites for living or working at the ground floor level?

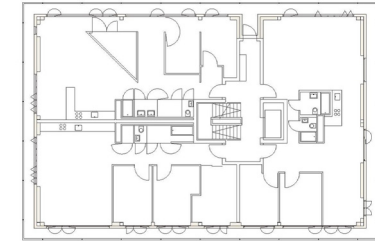


Sources:
<http://www.bararchitekten.de/projects/oderberger.html>

Ritterstraße 50, Berlin

Co-housing

ifau und Jesko Fezer and
Heide & Von Beckerath



http://www.heidevonbeckerath.com/hvb/poster/current/20151210_r50.html

The project is a co-housing project in close collaboration with the group of clients. There are several shared spaces, including the surrounding garden.

The project discusses the private versus the collective occupation of spaces. The lower levels are shared and flexible with double height. This space connects the buildings main access to the public street. It works as a threshold, or a buffer zone. The all around balconies connect the apartments on each floor and make them semi private.



Sources:
http://www.heidevonbeckerath.com/hvb/poster/current/20151210_r50.html

Organization



Submitted material diploma

Research booklet

Sensors booklet

Pre diploma

Masterplan 1:500

Site plan 1:200

Sections 1:100

Plans 1:100

Construction principals

Urban strategy axonometric

Research diagrams

Concept diagrams

Illustrations

Master model section 1:200

Approach

Social context

A conceptual strategy of social live + work for current and potential citizens, based on my experiences from meeting with the authoroties and bottom up organizations in Thessaloniki. This will be the backdrop of the design proposal.

Urban strategy

A common structure for new arrivals and citizens by experiencing vacant buildings, emty groundfloors and empty outdoor spaces. Tested in one neighborhood.

Construction level

In large scale, a research of the typology in Greek cities. In local scale, looking into the challenges of the existing structures at the site. In both levels, find principals of importance for the strategy for current and potential citizens.

The project will be shared with NRC/NORCAP, UNHCR, The Urban Working Group in Thessaloniki, The Municipality of Thessaloniki and The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Schedule diploma semester

April: first studytrip

Study trip to Thessaloniki for research

June: preparations

Prepare maps of existing neighborhood
Prepare drawing material of existing buildings

August: context

Research booklet
Diagrams, references

September: urban scale and design concept

Urban scale: strategy of the neighborhood
Block scale: architectural concept

October: design and second study trip

Study trip to Thessaloniki for site visit and further research
Urban scale: strategy of the neighborhood
Block scale: architectural concept

November: designing and finalizing

Urban scale: finalizing
Physical structures in building scale: finalizing

December: finalize

Physical presentation model
Final hand-in

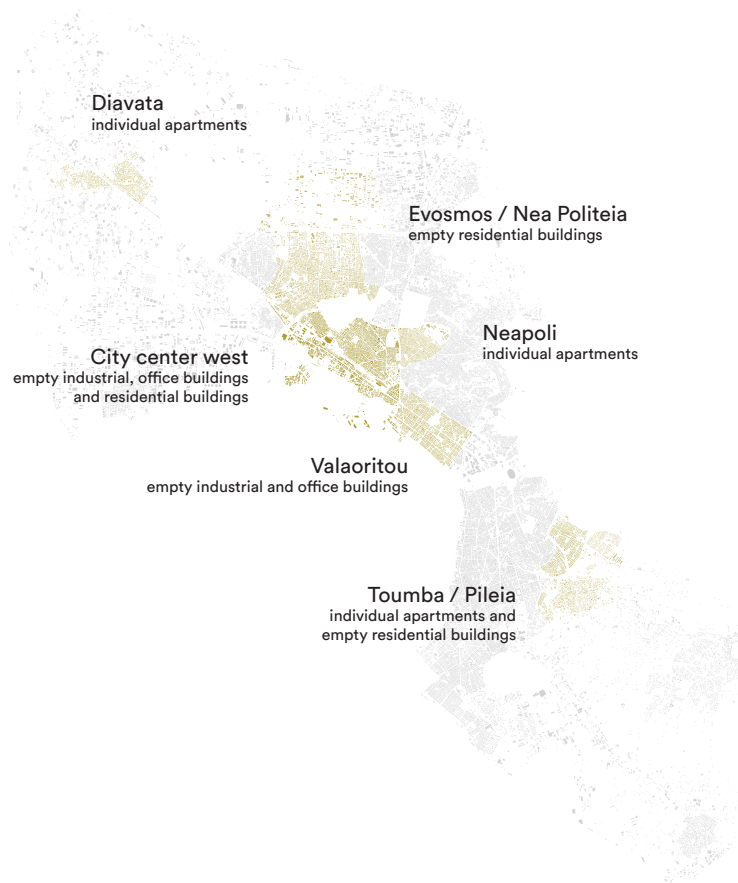
January: present

Presentation
Exhibition

Thessaloniki, Xirokrini



Potential areas for refugee housing relocation in Thessaloniki



The selection of areas are based on availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location and cultural adequacy. The housing alternatives are vacant buildings, individual apartments on rental marked or groups of apartments in certain neighborhoods.

Sources:
Study on adequate urban housing for refugees, Thessaloniki, Greece
NRC, European Union Humanitarian Aid, ETC, 2016

Economic strategies for housing displaced people

Today the majority of the urban accommodation for new arrivals are funded by NGOs, that are renting apartments in the private market. This is not sustainable and it is a short term solution. The Metropolitan Development Agency of Thessaloniki have identified different housing strategies, based on earlier social work in Greece. All the proposals are based on funding from The Government of Greece, ECHO (EU) and NGOs.

Renting apartments to the residents

The system is based on fundings, and are therefore short term. A possible impact for the new arrivals can be no motivation to find jobs, earn money or integrate.

Buying apartments to the residents

The cost is large and might be hard to conduct financially. It can turn into social discrimination if only some of the new arrivals get apartments.

Give loan to the residents

The new arrivals get responsibility to get a job for paying back the loan. The amount of paying increases. Experiences from this strategy tested on the Roman population in Greece show that the majority of the residents used the loan in other ways than to buy apartments, without paying back.

Leasing apartments to the residents

A common platform can be established for property owners and the Municipality. The property owners and the new arrivals can agree on a leasing contract, while the Government / ECHO will secure the income from the residents. The new arrival will slowly pay back the total value, and over time they will become owners of their own apartment. They may be encouraged and motivated for work and long term integration because of this active system. It is hard to sell and rent out apartments in Thessaloniki, so this can be a solution for sale of buildings in a long term perspective, that also will benefit the property owners.

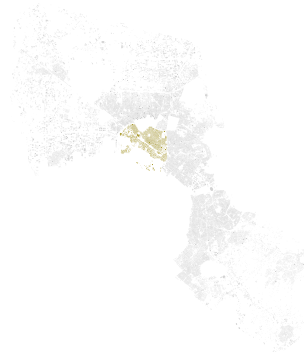
The city center



East in the city center the upper class used to have summer houses, which still exist, but for other purposes. The sea front was designed in 2009 and connects the White Tower and the Music Hall. In the centre, Aristoteles square still remains the most important square, as intended by the planner Hébrard. In the west part of Thessaloniki, the port, the industrial area and the railway station are located. The Municipality is currently focusing on this area, which is the most underdeveloped area in the city.

City center west

The city center west will be my area of interest, because of the large potential and Municipality's focus of improvement. This is where the new arrivals enter the city, by train. There are several unsafe spaces, empty buildings and unused ground floors to search for new solutions.



1 Example of abandoned office building. Area of occupied buildings by displaced people.



2 Example of abandoned residential building in a neighborhood where refugees rent private apartments.



3 The railway station. Displaced people most likely enter by the train and live in the area around.



4 The old railway station. Area of food distribution and medical check for displaced people.

- 5 The Red Light District
- 6 The port of Thessaloniki
- 7 The bus station
- 8 One Salonica outlet mall
- 9 Large empty industrial area
- 10 Site for the new Thessaloniki Holocaust Memorial Museum
- 11 Metro station 2020
- Xirokrini neighborhood

Xirokrini



Xirokrini is the neighborhood next to the railway station. The new arrivals know the area and some are also renting apartments here. The Municipality runs a project called “Open school”, which means that the schools are open in the evenings, to provide more meeting places. The population is a mix of citizens and new arrivals. The area does have some meeting places and lively streets, but a large amount of the buildings are vacant, especially the ground floors.



- 1 The railway station
- 2 Park with skate ramp
- 3 High School
- 4 Basketball court, playground, square
- 5 Church
- 6 Basketball quart
- 7 Primary school (opens school project)
- 8 Shopping street



(4) The park include a basketball court, a playground and a square facing the church. The park has functioned as accommodation for refugees in perodes.



(8) The surrounding streets are lively with open shops on the ground floor.



(7) Primary school part of the “open school project” of the municipality. The school yard is open in the evening, supposed to function as a social space.



(1) The railway station, entrance facing Xirokrini neighborhood.

Mapping of the city structure



- Vacant building
- Empty groundfloor
- Unused space



Vacant building in Spiridonos Chatzitsirou street



Empty ground floor in Stamatiou Regoukos street



Unused space in Pl. Galopoulou street



Closed facade in Spiridonos Chatzitsirou street



Open / closed facade in Vasilikis Papathanasiou street

Programs supporting long term integration

1. Revitalize the neighborhood of Xirokrini

- Resource center with joint program for both new arrivals and the host community.
- Open, social and safe spaces for the neighborhood and self organized initiatives.
- Connect with the “Open school project” of the Municipality

2. Affordable Housing

- Reuse of vacant buildings and introduce additional structures in empty spaces.
- Private and safe areas / semiprivate and social spaces.
- Homes for families, single men, unaccompanied minors.
- Test out the economic strategy of leasing apartments to the residents.

3. Work

- Reuse of empty groundfloor spaces.
- Local education lab/skill center with workshops for youths and skill building seminars.
- Work oportunities based on the connection between social work and real world business.

Sources:
Resilient Thessaloniki, A strategy for 2030,
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Background and References



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www.bararchitekten.de

www.heidevonbeckerath.com

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