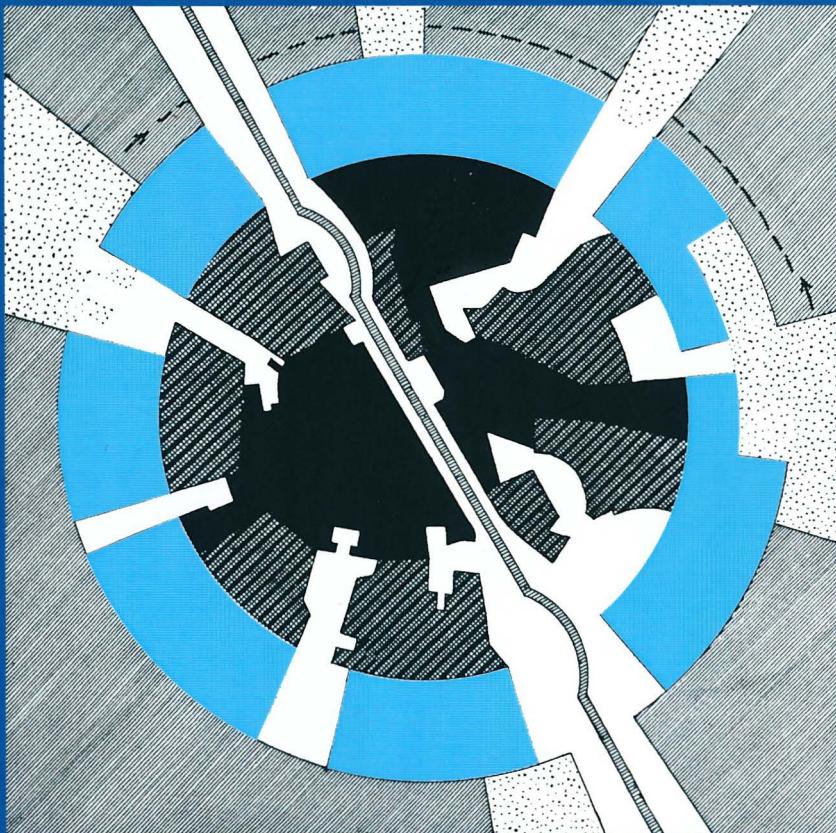


# RACES TO MODERNITY



## METROPOLITAN ASPIRATIONS IN EASTERN EUROPE, 1890-1940

*Edited by Jan C. Behrends  
and Martin Kohlrausch*

 **CEU PRESS**

## **6. Athens, 1890–1940: Transitory Modernism and National Realities**

*Eleni Bastéa*

### **Introduction: Concepts of Modernity**

As the painter M. G. wakes up, wrote Charles Baudelaire around 1860, he “watches the flow of life move by, majestic and dazzling. He admires the eternal beauty and the astonishing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained in the tumult of human liberty. He gazes at the landscape of the great city, landscapes of stone, now swathed in the mist, now struck in full face by the sun.”<sup>1</sup> This image of nineteenth-century Paris as the quintessential modern city has inspired writers, urban designers, and historians, becoming the yardstick against which all modern cities are measured.

“And so, walking or quickening his pace, he [the modern man, the flâneur] ... is looking for that indefinable something we may be allowed to call ‘modernity,’ for want of a better term to express the idea in question. The aim for him is to extract from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distil the eternal from the transitory.”<sup>2</sup> For Baudelaire, “modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable ... You have no right to despise this

<sup>1</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life” (c. 1860), in his *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, translated by P.E. Charvet (New York: Penguin, 1972), 395–422, 400–401.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

transitory fleeting element, the metamorphoses of which are so frequent, nor to dispense with it.<sup>3</sup>

Baudelaire's modernity, as sociologist Scott Lash and anthropologist Jonathan Friedman point out in *Modernity & Identity*, "is not *la moderne* of the abstract (and positivist) individualism constituted by Durkheim's *conscience collective* in turn-of-the-century France but that of Simmel's aestheticization of everyday life in turn-of-the-century Berlin."<sup>4</sup> Reviewing the broad field of modernity and modernism, Lash and Friedman juxtapose several competing positions. There is Jürgen Habermas's abstract, high modernism of "the ought" and Marshall Berman's subjective, populist, low modernism "of 'the is'; the here and now, *la vie quotidienne*."<sup>5</sup> Max Weber's high modernism, which privileges judgment and cognition, is contrasted with the subjective and transitory low modernism, the "modernism of the streets" as described by Berman in *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* and by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.<sup>6</sup>

The city has now become an active player in the project of modernity. Baudelaire's is not an uncomplicated view of modernity, as it hovers between the classical and the transitory. There is the vision of the city as an ideal place "of eternal beauty and ... harmony." But there is also the city of the flâneur with its messy and malleable street life. In fact, the city and the flâneur have become a dynamic duo that cannot exist independently of one another. Finally, there is also Baudelaire's impatience with the past, even its outright dismissal. Modernity makes its own rules.

Most scholars have considered Baudelaire's reflections applicable only to cities that were central to the birth of modernism, cities like Paris, London, Berlin, or New York. Certainly, Baudelaire did not have Athens in mind when he described a day in the life of a modern painter. Yet many of the characteristics and aspirations that defined modern men in Paris were shared by their contemporaries in Athens and other peripheral European cities. His definition of modernity, which embraced the fleeting and the new while emphatically reject-

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>4</sup> Lash et al., *Modernity and Identity*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Berman, *All That Is Solid*; Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

ing the old, can also help frame modernity in twentieth-century Athens, which was characterized by extensive destruction of the old urban fabric. Modern Athens underwent significant urban changes. The Greek state, however, was never transformed by the industrialization and land development that forged the economic and industrial revolutions in other European countries. Modernity in Athens remained a matter of appearances. For that matter, Baudelaire's descriptions of modernism in Paris—the low modernism of the streets that accepts and embraces the transitory, the temporal, and the incomplete—help describe the transitory nature of modern Athens.

Focusing on urban change in Athens between 1890 and 1940, I use the following two seminal events to frame the discussion: (1) the first modern Olympic Games, held in Athens in 1896, and (2) the fourth meeting of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), held on the liner SS *Patris II* and in Athens in 1933. Through the analysis of these events, I examine the urban development of Athens as seen by local inhabitants and foreign visitors, and review major changes that took place between 1896 and 1933.

### Historical Background, 1833–1896

After the Greek insurrection against the Ottoman Empire (1821–1827) France, Britain, and Russia signed the London Protocol of 1832 that declared Greece a monarchical and independent state. The seventeen-year-old Prince Frederick Otto of Wittelsbach, son of the philhellene King Ludwig I of Bavaria, became the first king of Greece. Forty years later, Otto was forced from the throne by an army-backed revolt. The Protecting Powers—England, France, and Russia—offered the Greek crown to Prince William George, also seventeen years old, of the Danish Glücksburg dynasty.

Upon ascending the throne in 1863 as George I, the new king declared: "The aim of my ambition is this: to make Greece, as far as that is dependent on me, a model kingdom to the East."<sup>7</sup> "Model

<sup>7</sup> Bastéa, *Creation of Modern Athens*, 23. For the history of Greece, see Clogg, *A Concise History*. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Greek and French are by the author.

kingdom,” as the historian Elli Skopetea has pointed out, was synonymous with “modern European state.”<sup>8</sup> The king’s statement expressed the undisputed direction of Greek politics and policy since 1821: the modernization and Europeanization of Greece. King George I envisioned a Greece that served as a bright beacon to the rest of the lands of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, most of which were still part of the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, twenty years later, Greece was still depicted in the local press as a chrysalis: not quite the old Greece anymore, but not yet part of Europe, either.<sup>9</sup> Throughout this period, the concepts of modernization and Europeanization were identical and interchangeable.

As far as architecture and urban design are concerned, the country’s modernization had begun long before the reign of King George I. Planners and architects employed by Governor Ioannes Kapodistrias, who came to power in 1828, were already implementing European models as they designed plans for both new and existing towns, and continued to do so under King Otto.<sup>10</sup> Despite the constant domestic and international turmoil, Greece strove to build a coherent national culture and identity oriented both toward its own citizens and toward the Greeks of the diaspora. Urban design and civic architecture, along with the institutions of public education, the army, and national ceremonies, became the main agents of the nation building project.

### Modernization and Urban Development, 1833–1896

When Athens became the capital of the Greek kingdom in 1834, it was a modest town with a population of 12,000.<sup>11</sup> An original plan for modern Athens, designed by the German-trained architects Stamatios Kleanthes and Eduard Schaubert in 1833, and approved by the government, organized the new downtown around a triangle of

<sup>8</sup> Skopetea, *To “protypo vaselio,”* 62.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> See Bastéa, *Creation of Modern Athens*, ch. 3: “From Barbarity to Civilization: Planning the Modern Greek State.”

<sup>11</sup> Leontidou, *Poleis tes siopes*, 48.

new, straight, major streets. Although later altered and modified, the plan became imprinted on the modern city: Hermou Street ran east to west; Athenas Street ran north to south; Piraeus Street ran northeast to southwest; and the parallel streets University (Panepistimiou) and Stadiou ran northwest to southeast. The first major new building, the royal palace, rose prominently on the eastern node, near the intersection of Hermou and Stadiou streets. Other civic and residential buildings, financed by private and public patronage, included the university, the cathedral, the academy, the national library, and the archaeological museum.



Figure 6.1. Athens, Panorama, facing east, from the Acropolis, c. 1900. Author’s collection.

The acropolis hill, home to the Ottoman garrison personnel and their families during Ottoman rule, was restored to its classical—if ruined—state; all post-classical additions were removed.<sup>12</sup>

Pride in the city’s development is evident both in the domestic press and in travelers’ accounts. “Stadium Street is the most beautiful in the city,” commented the French diplomat and travel writer

<sup>12</sup> Bastéa, *Creation of Modern Athens*, 69–180.

Charles de Motuy in 1887,<sup>13</sup> like “the boulevard des Italiens and the Champs-Élysées of Athens ....<sup>14</sup> From three to five o’clock in the winter and from five to eight in the summer, all Athenians promenade on the great paved sidewalks of this large thoroughfare. If one wishes to meet someone, all he has to do is walk up or down ... There are hardly any boutiques on this street, generally reserved for luxury residences and public edifices.”<sup>15</sup> A few of the shop windows, noted Charles Tuckerman, the US ambassador to Greece (1867–1874), “be it the jeweller, tailor or silk mercer, almost rival those of the Palais Royal.”<sup>16</sup> Traffic continued well into the night, when the city still reverberated with the sounds of the carriage wheels, passersby, horses, and the uproar of the trams.



Figure 6.2. Athens, Stadiou Street, c. 1900. Author’s collection.

By 1896, Athens was transformed into a bustling capital of 123,240.<sup>17</sup> Elegant parks, tree-lined avenues, and neoclassical man-

<sup>13</sup> Charles de Motuy, *Lettres athénienes* (Paris: E. Plon, 1887), 32.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>16</sup> Charles K. Tuckerman, *The Greeks of To-Day* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s, 1886), 40.

<sup>17</sup> Leontidou, *Poleis tes siopes*, 83.

sions gave the city a modern, European appearance. Yet money for this ambitious construction did not come from locally generated income. Rather, wealthy Greeks of the diaspora became national benefactors, while others found investment opportunities in the fledgling kingdom.

Perceptive upper-class Athenians who had traveled abroad knew that the impressive new building façades did not always tell the whole story. The academy building (1887), for example, designed by the Danish architect Theophil Hansen and constructed with funds from a diaspora donor, was one of the most impressive structures. The institution of the Academy, however, lacked both the funding and the manpower necessary to fulfill its scientific mission. Not only did Greece lack the means to support the Academy, it also lacked an adequate number of elementary schools. In 1896, the literary critic Emmanuel Roides pointed out that the “dining room of the restaurant Minerva can be compared with those in Paris, but not with the Parisian conditions, [and the meals at Minerva cannot be compared] to the beefsteaks offered to the [Parisian] diners ... [T]he Greeks abroad ... seem to believe that the most urgent benefaction toward their country is its decoration with luxurious structures, even if they are not immediately useful.”<sup>18</sup> Athens acquired the *appearance* of a modern capital, but lacked the infrastructure of a bona fide modern financial center that could truly support its building boom.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike expensive new structures that housed a small elite of Greek and foreign residents, the development of new streets, sidewalks, and parks affected all Athenians. Public opinion, which I have culled from contemporary Athenian newspapers, literary publications, town hall meetings, and letters to the government by residents, expresses a rather unified position: pride for the new city plans and anxious anticipation of their implementation. Although individuals objected to changes affecting their own property (as

<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Roides, “He akademia choris akademaikous” [The Academy without Academics], in *Lefkoma: He Hellas kata tous Olympiakous agorou tou 1896* (Athens: Hestia, K. Maisner and N. Kargadoule, 1896–97 [reprinted Athens: Pontiki, 1996]), 227. Also cited in Bastéa, *Creation of Modern Athens*, 200.

<sup>19</sup> For a parallel study of Belgrade, see Jovanović, “The City in Our Hands,” 32–50.

state compensation was never sufficient), there was a shared understanding regarding well-designed cities: clean, well-lit, with straight streets, regular sidewalks, tree-lined avenues, well-lit parks and squares, and well-built new civic and private buildings. Athenians were eager to see their capital turn into such a city. Newspapers paid close attention to these developments and, on the whole, supported the project of transforming Athens from "a Turkish village" with irregular roads to a well-appointed city that now belonged to Europe. And any planning deviations were promptly criticized by the press.<sup>20</sup>

The government's efforts to preserve an extensive archaeological zone around the Acropolis for future excavations were met with resolute resistance. Unable to obtain building permits, many inhabitants constructed houses illegally on public land. One of the earliest such settlements was the work of builders from the island of Anafi, who arrived in Athens during King Otto's reign to construct the new structures in the neoclassical style. They built a group of small, island-inspired dwellings for themselves and their families in the archaeological zone, at the foot of acropolis hill. Many of these *Anafiotika* houses survive to this day, now viewed as valuable examples of vernacular architecture that contrast the formal face of nineteenth-century Athens.<sup>21</sup>

Athenian journalists and intellectuals worried incessantly about foreign opinion. How will Athens live up to its name? What will travelers think of the shameful garbage on the Acropolis? All developments were evaluated with an eye to both domestic needs and foreign impressions, a mostly self-imposed fishbowl existence, always subjected to foreign scrutiny. "Becoming European" remained the propelling force throughout the nineteenth century.

Architecture and urban design reflected both the accomplishments and the limitations of the young kingdom. Outwardly, Athens acquired a European appearance, but it retained its Ottoman past on the inside. The façades of the new major buildings were regular and well-appointed, meeting the streets at right angles. Their backs, however, were often less regular, conforming to the city's preliberation

<sup>20</sup> Bastéa, *Creation of Modern Athens*, 118–27.

<sup>21</sup> On the *Anafiotika*, see Kaftanzoglou, *Ste skia tou ierou vrachou*.

property lines. A similar contrast characterized the habits of the people themselves. In public, the well-to-do residents appeared modern, rational, and cosmopolitan. In private, they maintained their religion, family beliefs, and local attachments.



Figure 6.3. Athens, *Anafiotika* houses on the slopes of the Acropolis, c. 1900.

Author's collection.

The residents of Athens were not alone in experiencing these contrasts of modernity. One could certainly observe similar disparities between outward appearances and actual conditions in late nineteenth-century Paris, Berlin, or London. Local intellectuals and perceptive foreign visitors focused on the contrasts of Athens: the modern façade versus the premodern backyard, the European clothes of the Athenians versus their Oriental family customs. Had they compared Athens with a contemporary city elsewhere in Europe, they would have found several unexpected similarities. But instead, they compared the real and tangible Athens with an idealized modern metropolis of their imagination, both unreal and unattainable.

Finally, even though the West continued to cast Greece in the classical light, by the last decades of the nineteenth century local sentiment began to shift away from the uncritical archaeology of the kingdom's early days. Greeks realized the need to modernize the country's infrastructure in order to enter European markets. The pro-business Prime Minister Charilaos Trikoupes inspired the population with a series of technological and infrastructure public works projects, the most dramatic one being the opening of the canal in the Isthmus of Corinth (1882–1893).<sup>22</sup> Beyond new city plans, modernization in Greece entailed building train tracks, opening new roads, constructing bridges, and developing local industries. But the West continued to regard Greece primarily as the cradle of classical civilization.

### Athens and the Olympic Games, 1896

The first modern international Olympic Games commenced in Athens on 25 March 1896, a symbolic date coinciding with the Feast of the Annunciation and the anniversary of the outbreak of the 1821 War of Independence. Their success laid the foundations for a major international tradition that continues to grow in scope, political significance, and symbolism.

Preparations for the Olympic Games became a national affair. The main undertaking was the rebuilding of the ancient Panathenaic

Stadium, a large-scale project started in 1874. The old marble quarries of Mt. Penteli were reopened, with hundreds of laborers working in two shifts to clear the stadium site for the installation of new marble seats. By the time the games commenced, only part of the stadium was finished in marble while the rest was fitted with wooden benches painted white. The stadium was finally completed in 1900.

The Greek poet Kostes Palamas captured the prevailing archaeophile sentiment in his opening hymn:

Ancient spirit, immortal, pure father  
Of the beautiful, the great, and the true  
Climb down, appear, and shine right here  
In the glory of your own earth and sky.<sup>23</sup>

These well-orchestrated and symbolic gestures, however, do not tell the whole story. When the Greek government was originally approached about hosting the Olympic Games, it declined vehemently. First, Greece was in dire financial conditions. In 1893 it had been forced to declare bankruptcy. Second, it endeavored to modernize by developing its industry and infrastructure. The Greek government insisted that what the country needed was access to the European markets, not the revival of ancient athletics—however noble. Countering the spirited efforts of the organizer Pierre de Coubertin, the Trikoupis government advised him to inaugurate the “peaceful modern competitions” in Paris.<sup>24</sup> Coubertin argued that the revival of the Olympic Games was a necessary antidote to the evils of industrialization. In the end, he convinced the Greek opposition and the Greek Crown Prince Constantine, who agreed to serve as president of the organizing committee.<sup>25</sup> Once Greece agreed to host the games, the domestic tide turned in their favor and the whole country engaged in their successful realization.

Attendance at the games, low in cost and affordable to everyone, itself became a lesson in modern living. A Greek article reported

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>24</sup> MacAloon, *This Great Symbol*, 182–84.

<sup>25</sup> Bastéa, *Creation of Modern Athens*, 206.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 201–4.

that already on the second day of the games “the people, having completely gotten used to order, easily found their seats, which most had selected in advance. The words right or left side, *skelos, sphendone*, tier this or that, above the landing or below, are no longer empty words or incomprehensible symbols, but old acquaintances, which they all have amiably at the tip of their tongues.”<sup>26</sup> Comfortable in a restored ancient stadium and participating in a modern spectacle that claims its roots in antiquity, the modern Greeks appeared conversant in the spatial languages of both the past and the present. The first modern Olympic Games fulfilled, and indeed surpassed, the expectations of the international organizing team and of the Greeks themselves.

Numerous foreign visitors appreciated the city’s European character, the manners of its inhabitants, and the diverse offerings of its elegant shops and “cafés like those in Paris.”<sup>27</sup> For a brief two weeks, it appeared that the most important aspirations of the modern Greek nation—to join the ranks of the civilized nations of Europe, to be accepted as the legitimate heir to ancient Greece, and to forge its own distinct cultural identity—were finally realized. Baudelaire might have recognized his flâneur among the worldly Athenians strolling about the main boulevards.

Even though the success of the Olympic Games vindicated Coubertin’s persistence and filled the Greeks with pride, the games also succeeded in placing modern Greece back on the pedestal of antiquity—a reimagined antiquity to be sure, a product of the waning nineteenth century. Whatever the country’s actual economic and building progress toward modernity was, it remained mostly marginalized. Once again, Greece was called to play its familiar classical role as “the cradle of Western civilization,” a classical playground for the Western world.

<sup>26</sup> Spyros P. Lamprós, “Ta athletika kai gymnestika agōnismata en to stadio” [The athletic and gymnastic games in the stadium], in *Léfkomia: He Hellas kata tous Olympiakous agónas tou 1896* [Greece during the Olympic Games of 1896] (Athens: Hestia, K. Maisner and N. Kargadoura, 1896–97 [reprinted Athens: Pontiki, 1996]), 99–110, 106. Also cited in Bastéa, *Creation of Modern Athens*, 210.

<sup>27</sup> Burton Holmes, *The Burton Holmes Lectures*, with illustrations and photographs by the author (Battle Creek: Little-Preston Company, 1903), vol. 3, 21, legend under the photograph of a café.

### Historical Background, 1897–1944

In 1912, Greece and its Balkan allies declared war on the Ottoman Empire, triggering the Balkan Wars. Greece made significant territorial gains, increasing its land area by 70 percent and its population from approximately 2,800,000 to 4,800,000.<sup>28</sup>

Between 1919 and 1922, the Greek army led an ill-fated expansionist campaign against the Ottoman Empire ostensibly to incorporate the predominantly Greek coastal cities into the Greek state. Turkey and Greece signed an internationally brokered peace settlement, the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), stipulating the compulsory exchange of minority populations between Greece and Turkey. More than 1.1 million Christians from Turkey crossed the Aegean Sea to Greece, increasing its population by 25 percent, as Greece at the time had a population of almost 6 million. Over 380,000 Muslims left Greece, adding 5 percent to Turkey’s population.<sup>29</sup> The political focus now shifted to the interior and the state undertook the formidable project of creating a unified Greek nation, a quarter of which included newcomers from the “Lost Countries,” that is from territories primarily within present-day Turkey with a considerable Greek Orthodox population.

On 28 October 1940, Italian forces crossed the Greek-Albanian border and Greece entered World War II. Germany attacked Greece in 1941 and Athens fell during the same year. In June 1941 all of Greece came under the tripartite German, Italian, and Bulgarian occupation. The brutal German occupation (1941–1944) was followed by a violent civil war (1946–1949) that left the country scarred and divided. The ensuing mass migration to the urban centers once again created an acute housing problem. Multifamily apartment buildings were the logical answer to the post–World War II conditions in Greek cities.

### Unchecked Urban Development, 1896–1940

The population of Athens continued to grow gradually, reaching 169,749 inhabitants in 1907 and 297,176 by 1920.<sup>30</sup> But by 1928, it

<sup>28</sup> Clogg, *A Concise History*, 83.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>30</sup> Leontidou, *Poleis tes siopēs*, 83.

nearly doubled to 459,211,<sup>31</sup> 130,000 of them being refugees mostly from Asia Minor. By 1940, Athens had reached 476,582 inhabitants.<sup>32</sup> The daunting task of settling and housing the refugees became the government's paramount project.

Although there were several new plans for Athens proposed in the early twentieth century, none were ever realized. These included plans by Paul Vakas in 1896, Ludwig Hoffmann (1908–1910), Thomas Mawson (1914–1918), Aristides Balanos (1917), and Stylianos Leloudas (1918–1921). Most offered versions of nineteenth-century grandiose designs, when the country focused on housing, hygiene, and infrastructure.<sup>33</sup> As the twentieth century progressed, most design decisions became the work of Greek architects and planners, who beginning in 1917 could be trained at the new School of Architecture, part of the National Technical University of Athens. Other significant developments included the establishment of the Ministry of Transport (1914) and the enactment of the progressive Town Planning Act (1923).

The lack of a single, unified master plan created ongoing planning obstacles. For example, in 1916 the plan for Athens was composed of 78 different parts and 498 separately approved changes that bore little connection to each other.<sup>34</sup> This problem was addressed by the Committee for the New Plan for the City of Athens. Under the direction of Petros Kalligas and after long deliberations (1920–1925), the committee proposed a new unified plan. Although initially approved by the government, it was revoked again soon after, in January 1926, primarily because there were no funds for its implementation.<sup>35</sup> Once again, the city's planning officers had to rely on earlier, outdated plans.

Throughout the nineteenth century, planning proposals and debates primarily concerned the approximation of Athens to European models. But after the military defeat of 1922 and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, gone were the lofty concerns about aesthetics and European models. The survival, accommodation, and integration of the

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>33</sup> Bastéa, "Athens," 39–40.

<sup>34</sup> Exhibition Catalogue, *Athens in the 20th Century, 1900–1940* [in Greek] (Athens: Ministry of Culture, c. 1986), 30.

<sup>35</sup> Bires, *Hai Athenai*, 284–86.

new population left no room for new urban undertakings and imaginative ruminations.



Figure 6.4. Athens, Map 1923. Drawn by Athanasios Georgiades, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Source: Kostas Bires, *Hai Athenai apo tou 19ou eis ton 20on aionia* [Athens from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century] (Athens: Foundation of the History and Town Building of Athens, 1966), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1995; p. 288.

What ensued was intensive, privately initiated, and little-checked urban construction. Land development became the primary

means of investment, resulting in high-density new housing and minimal public amenities. Athens grew without a plan. The inability and unwillingness of the government to approve any of the proposed plans or update existing ones, coupled with political turmoil and the pressing needs for refugee housing, resulted in widespread anarchy. Landowners and builders used their political connections to secure the incorporation of their lots into the city's ever-expanding piecemeal plan. Ruthless planning violations and extensive illegal construction were tolerated by the government, which remained weak and divided. New city sections often lacked basic services, roads, or public parks.

The situation was further exacerbated by competing government bureaucracies. For example, the City Planning Service of the City of Athens, established in 1925, proposed several planning improvements. These were often contradicted, however, by the Ministry of Public Works, which instead initiated housing developments in areas that were originally supposed to remain undeveloped.

Financial and political interests had already compromised the initial designs for modern Athens during the nineteenth century. But the press and residents who shared a vision for a well-designed city routinely criticized these conditions. After 1922/23, however, this shared vision for a better Athens all but disappeared. Pressing everyday problems and the widespread economic exploitation of real estate help explain people's indifference toward urban aesthetics.

Yet I believe that there was also a deeper reason for the lack of a shared vision of an ideal city: the alienation of the population itself. The newcomers and the locals, mostly poor and exhausted, competed for limited economic resources. Successive wars and frequent population displacements throughout the early twentieth century brought together people who lacked a sense of connection and identification with Athens. During the late 1920s, only one out of three Athenian inhabitants was actually born in Athens, the others being either refugees or immigrants from other parts of Greece. Despite its venerable history, if we define Athens as a community of people, as Aristotle did, it becomes apparent that we are dealing with a new city, a city of displaced people brought together by the political

upheavals of the early twentieth century.<sup>36</sup> Alienation is often considered one of the conditions of modernity. Rather than being a philosophical disposition, in Athens alienation is rather the result of population displacements and uncertain living conditions.

The poet George Seferis (1900–1971), himself a refugee from the Smyrna region and later a career diplomat for the Greek Foreign Service, captured this sense of rootlessness and alienation in several of his poems:

Wherever I travel Greece wounds me ...  
 What do all these people want, who say  
 that they are in Athens or in Piraeus?  
 One comes from Salamis and asks the other  
 if perhaps "he originates from Omonoia [Square]"  
 "No, from Syntagma [Square] I originate" he responds and is  
 pleased  
 ...  
 George Seferis, "In the Manner of G.S." (1936)<sup>37</sup>

Further contributing to this sense of anonymity and alienation was the drastic land development and rebuilding that changed the face of Athens, rendering it unfamiliar even to its old-established inhabitants. This was codified by the enactment of the Horizontal Property Law in 1929, which legalized apartment ownership. The General Building Code and the Building Heights Decree of 1934 further intensified land development and real estate profits. And given people's reluctance to invest in industry, agriculture, or other enterprises, land speculation and development became the major economic forces. As a result, between 1930 and 1940, approximately 450 new apartment buildings were constructed in the center of Athens alone.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> "It is evident, then, that a city is not a community of place ... but a city is a society of people." Aristotle, *A Treatise on Government or: The Politics of Aristotle*, translated by William Ellis, Book III (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1935), 83.

<sup>37</sup> Seferis, *Poemata*, 99–100.

<sup>38</sup> This included new building in the areas Kolonakiou, Patision, and Stadiou, Akademiou and Panepistemiou streets. Sarigiannis, *Athena 1830–2000*, 106.

Given the lack of adequate housing, many of the refugees resorted to self-help housing on public land. Construction ranged from simple shelters made out of gathered materials to masonry buildings. Self-help housing, a common practice throughout the world, was already evident in Athens during the nineteenth century, but reached extensive proportions after 1922. Although these buildings have been described as “illegal dwellings” in English, the Greek term ανθείπτα (affhaireta) is more correctly translated as “arbitrary,” “unpredictable,” “irregular,” or “unconventional.” Architect and architectural critic Dimitris Philippides has remarked that these “arbitrary dwellings” should be studied alongside some of the refugee housing and other vernacular architecture.<sup>39</sup> In fact, it is often impossible to draw the line between “vernacular” and “lacking building licenses.” All testify to the resourcefulness—and often talent and ingenuity—of the builders. All address the immediate needs of individuals and their families—without regard, however, to the rights of the general population or the overall needs of the city.

### Athens and the CIAM IV meeting in 1933

In July 1933, CIAM IV, the fourth meeting of the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne, took place aboard the SS *Patris II* en route from Marseilles to Athens, and in Athens. Founded in 1928, CIAM was the international platform of the Modern Movement, focusing on housing and urbanism. Originally a progressive organization that thrived mostly outside the mainstream of the profession, CIAM was divided between the leftist architects who sought to realize a socialist revolution by means of the Congrès, and the liberals who considered it primarily a technical and cultural movement.<sup>40</sup> According to architectural historian Eric Mumford, CIAM IV “did not break as sharply with the Beaux-Arts academic tradition as did the German advocates of the ‘new building.’ A new emphasis on mythologized history, modern painting, and the mythic

<sup>39</sup> Philippides, *Neohellenike architektonike*, 159.  
<sup>40</sup> Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, 217.

qualities of CIAM itself as an avant-garde tracing a new path across the Mediterranean were now present, and would remain an important part of CIAM’s discourse into the 1950s and beyond.<sup>41</sup>

The theme of CIAM IV was “the Functional City,” rather incongruously perhaps, given that it took place on a scenic Mediterranean cruise and in Athens, far from the industrialized cities of northern Europe. The meeting was dominated by Le Corbusier, who defined urbanism as a three-dimensional science, favored the concentrated city, and outlined the hierarchy of four functions: dwelling, work, amusement, and circulation. Le Corbusier’s talk was followed by presentations of same-scale plans of various cities prepared by different delegates. Among these was a presentation of Athens, prepared by the Greek CIAM delegate Stamo Papadaki. At the end, participants failed to reach consensus on resolutions regarding the “Functional City.” The debate continued, with different versions of their findings published after the Congress in France, Germany, Greece, and elsewhere in Europe.<sup>42</sup>

The rationalist approach to city planning advocated by the CIAM delegates did not influence later Greek planning, which continued mostly unchecked. CIAM IV did, however, provide the unique opportunity for Greek architects to meet international luminaries of the Modern Movement, most notably Le Corbusier. What left a lasting impression on the Greek participants was not the formalist urban proclamations of the proceedings, but the visitors’ interest in local culture and vernacular architecture. Certainly, CIAM participants visited the Acropolis and other nearby antiquities and were duly inspired by the ancient remains. But they also visited Piraeus, the port of Athens, and admired the Greek fishing boats which, according to Le Corbusier, connected them to the Greek spirit that had produced the Acropolis.<sup>43</sup> After the opening meeting, some of the delegates, including Le Corbusier, took a four-day cruise to the Greek islands.<sup>44</sup> This was Le Corbusier’s second trip to Greece, having first visited the country in 1911. His fascination with Greek vernacular architec-

<sup>41</sup> Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 85.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 79–81.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 84.

ture, which he extolled for its affinity to modernist formal sensibilities, encouraged Greek architects to seek inspiration closer to home, in the picturesque buildings of the Aegean islands.

Le Corbusier was not the only architect to notice local architecture. Anastasios Orlandos, professor of architectural history at the National Technical University, remarked on the occasion:<sup>45</sup>

Our [Architecture] School, though by nature conservative ... adjusted to the contemporary demands and "murdered academicism" before the distinguished foreign gentleman Le Corbusier pronounced its death ... When in a few days you visit our smiling islands of the Aegean ... you will be surprised, I am sure, as I was surprised in the past, not only by their perfect simplicity, the logic of the arrangement and the purity of the lines of the ancient houses of Delos, but also and primarily by the fascinating vision of the houses on the islands surrounding Delos with their white, austere geometric volumes projecting into space in a manner at once harmonious and picturesque ... These modest little island houses are the archetypes of modern architecture.<sup>46</sup>

Dimitris Pikionis (1887–1968), one of the most prominent Greek architects at the time, chose not to participate in the Congress. He criticized CIAM for its attachment to technological and functional needs, and for not allowing for the "possibility of sentiment."<sup>47</sup> Although Pikionis had produced designs in the modern idiom (see, for example, his school on Lyceabettus Hill, 1933), in his later work he incorporated aspects of vernacular architecture, the "architecture of the people." "The local people are the true builders," he proclaimed in 1925, "holding on to the ancient quality of their art ... [B]ut thoughtlessly we follow the foreign [prototype], always to be left behind it."<sup>48</sup> Pikionis and Orlandos, however, remained in the minority. Most Greek architects continued to first look abroad for architectural direction.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Mallouchou-Tufano, *He anastelose*, 182, 228. I would like to thank Sofia Voutsaki for this reference.

<sup>46</sup> Giakoumakatos, *He architektonike*, 182.

<sup>47</sup> Philippides, *Neohellenenke architektonike*, 209.

<sup>48</sup> Dimitris Pikionis, "He laike techne ki emeis" [Our folk art and ourselves] (1925), in his *Keimena* [Texts] (Athens: National Bank Educational Foundation, 1987), 53–69, 63, 69. Also cited in Bastéa, "Dimitris Pikionis and Sedad Eldem," 162.

<sup>49</sup> Giakoumakatos, *He architektonike*, 182.

It is not surprising that the foreign CIAM IV delegates focused on Greek vernacular architecture. CIAM IV was the first of the "romantic" congresses,<sup>50</sup> an escape not only from the much more pressing urban problems of northern Europe, but also from the dark political developments in Germany and the USSR. Already in 1932, a year before Hitler's appointment as interim chancellor, local National Socialists dissolved what they called the Jewish-Marxist Bauhaus in Dessau.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, changes in Soviet policy resulted in the new neoclassical line of "art for the people" that rendered CIAM proponents a minority.<sup>52</sup> Thus, earlier plans to hold CIAM IV in either Germany or the Soviet Union were scrapped and the arrangement of the Mediterranean cruise ship became a welcome last-minute solution. Once again, foreign visitors came to Athens searching for a refuge from the problems of the contemporary world. In 1896, that refuge was found in antiquity. In 1933, it was found not only in antiquity but also in simple, vernacular architecture and its honest inhabitants. And even though some Greek architects also cultivated this timeless picture of Greece, most were eager to join the race to modernity.

Today, CIAM IV is associated with the Athens Charter, published by Le Corbusier ten years later, in 1943. Despite its name, however, the Athens Charter was not an official publication of the CIAM IV proceedings in Athens. Rather, it reflected Le Corbusier's own theories of urbanism, which were also influenced by World War II, the German occupation of France in 1939, and his involvement with the reconstruction committee in Vichy.<sup>53</sup> The Athens Charter included general statements about the conditions of towns and dogmatic proposals for their improvement. It prescribed a strict and formalist approach to architecture and urban design that included zoning with green belts separating the different urban functions. The predominant housing type was the high-rise apartment building. "High buildings, set far apart from one another, must free the ground for broad, verdant areas," prescribed one of the Charter

<sup>50</sup> Frampton, *Modern Architecture*, 270.

<sup>51</sup> Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 76.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 153, 155.

articles.<sup>54</sup> This functionalist outlook came to dominate housing developments in the later twentieth century.

Modern architecture had already been introduced in Greece before CIAM. It was realized primarily through an ambitious elementary school building initiative. This extensive undertaking was launched by Alexandros Papanastasiou's government that succeeded Eleftherios Venizelos. Starting in 1930, it was implemented by Minister of Education George Papandreou and continued under the subsequent administration. Six thousand new schoolrooms were constructed and 2,000 existing ones were repaired across the country.<sup>55</sup> Although some of the schools followed neoclassical, neo-Byzantine and neotraditional influences, the majority displayed competent adaptations of the Modern Movement.<sup>56</sup> CIAM IV delegates visited the new schools and commented positively on their modern designs,<sup>57</sup> but this fact received little attention by the international press.

Parallel to the school building program, there was also a noteworthy hospital construction program, which was also initiated around 1930 and embraced modern architecture. Emphasis was placed on the construction of tuberculosis units, including two in Athens that were part of the Sotiria (Salvation) hospital complex on Mesogeion Avenue and were designed by Constantine Kitsikis and Ioannes Despotopoulos. Not all new civic buildings, however, followed the Modern Movement. Bank architecture remained conservative, adhering to the neoclassical idiom, while church architecture experimented with neo-Byzantine reinterpretations.<sup>58</sup>

There is a common assumption that modern architecture was abandoned or even prohibited in Greece during the dictatorship of

<sup>54</sup> Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter*, Article 29, translated by Anthony Eardley (New York, 1973), <http://modernistarchitecture.wordpress.com/2010/11/03/ciam%2E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Cthe-athens-charter%E2%80%9D-1933> (accessed 6 April 2014), Article 29.

<sup>55</sup> Philippides, *Neohellenike architektonike*, 181. Also cited in Bastéa, "Dimitris Pikiomoni and Sedad Eldem," 154.

<sup>56</sup> Giakoumatakos, *He architektonike*, 212, 213, 217.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>58</sup> I would like to thank Dimitris Philippides for his invaluable information and commentary regarding modern architecture in Greece in the 1930s.

General Ioannis Metaxas, who came to power in 1936. According to Philippides, nothing could be further from the truth. The Metaxas government never once took a position, verbally or in writing, against the Modern Movement or modern architecture. Metaxas himself remained patently indifferent to styles. Graver political matters demanded his attention. And although there were, indeed, several new public buildings that were designed in historical and classicizing styles, this was usually the result of design competitions, selected by conservative juries that were often influenced by contemporary trends in Germany and elsewhere.<sup>59</sup>

Despite some excellent early examples of modern architecture, subsequent construction became derivative and uninspired, driven mostly by short-term profit. Land development remained the safest form of investment. Owners of single-family houses turned them over to small-scale developers who tore them down, replaced them with new apartment buildings, and gave the original owners a percentage of the new flats. These new buildings made of reinforced concrete frames, brick infill, and a stripped-down modernism became the country's new regional idiom. Modern architecture became the preferred style for industrial buildings, military, medical, and educational facilities as well as some museums, all reflecting the country's progress and improved social welfare. Classical forms were often employed for commemorative buildings, such as the Monument to the Unknown Soldier (1929/30).

Several writers have criticized the aggressive destruction of the built fabric. In 1935, the archaeologist Semni Papaspyridi-Karouzou first articulated the effect of the built environment on the residents' social relationships. She analyzed the radical changes of large-scale urbanization on the rural population and the ramifications of high-density living on family structure.<sup>60</sup> In 1934, the architect Vassileios Kassandras criticized the "new formalism" that "pursued the unusual instead of the logical, the surprising instead of the useful, and the curious instead of the true."<sup>61</sup> Yet neither the neoclassical nor the vernacular traditions could undo the destruction

<sup>59</sup> Philippides, e-mail correspondence, 16 January 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Philippides, *Neohellenike architektonike*, 193.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 191.

of the urban fabric caused by the lack of comprehensive urban planning and the pressing forces of unchecked capitalism.

### Conclusion

Until 1922, Athens charted a fairly clear path to modernity. Despite the country's limited resources and nascent economy, the city had acquired a new plan, well-built structures housing governmental and educational institutions, adequate public transportation, elegant public squares, and an extensive Royal Garden. The road to modernity, which for Greece continued to mean "becoming European," was long, but clearly charted.

Like many contemporary plans, the original plan for Athens, designed by Kleanthes and Schaubert in 1833, recreated an eighteenth-century vision of the harmonious but static city with the monarch's residence at the fulcrum of the design. And even though—as successive uprisings demonstrated—the institution of the monarchy was not sacrosanct, the appeal of the orderly city remained powerful. Until 1922, the dream of a better Athens and the ambition to realize it proved a powerful unifying force. This vision rendered pre-1922 Athens a good example of classical modernism as outlined in the opening comments.

All that changed after 1922. As a result of the military defeat in Asia Minor and the dramatic population influx, the earlier preoccupation with planning was replaced by the acute demand for housing. The common vision of an ideal city disappeared from the discourse, never to be recovered. If the nineteenth-century city was Weberian, the twentieth century became Baudelairean. The elegant neoclassical house came to coexist with refugee housing and self-built structures on public land. The nation's political structure itself repeatedly came to the brink of collapse, due both to internal and external forces. Athenians learned to live with uncertainty, ambiguity, and disorientation—and that was precisely part of the experience of modernity in the Baudelairean sense. After all, modernity in the arts and architecture did not necessarily presuppose democratic governments, in Greece or elsewhere.

Acknowledging this different approach to modernity allows us to examine the changes in Athens in a new light and to begin to

understand their roots. Most of the scholarship on modern Athens bemoans the wholesale destruction of the city's nineteenth-century fabric and the onslaught of anonymous, utilitarian apartment buildings. Why this rampant self-destruction? Certainly, economic gain played a major role in the city's relentless urbanization. But that was only part of the reason. What has been called destruction, others could have called modernization. And modernization has traditionally set itself up against history, tradition, and local culture. Unless we understand the national realities that underpinned the political life of the capital, we are going to be unable to understand its urban development.

The pressing need for new housing, the lure of profit, and the appeal of the new and modern may not be the only reasons for the destruction of the city's fabric. It is important to underscore that one-third of the city's post-1923 population was born elsewhere and moved to Athens as refugees or internal immigrants from the countryside. These new residents did not share a common image of the city's recent past or future potential. Perhaps the continued destruction of the architectural past was in part a willful attempt to forget the traumatic historical events and prepare the ground for a better future. After all, new apartments with upgraded amenities held the promise of a brighter future. As the historian Eric Hobsbawm remarked, "the destruction of the past is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth century."<sup>62</sup>

What does the study of Athens contribute to our understanding of modernity, especially in the context of Central and Eastern Europe? Like some of the other European capitals, Athens shared an imperial past, though it did not enjoy a privileged status during the Byzantine and Ottoman eras. It remained a relatively small and peripheral city until the formation of the modern Greek kingdom in the early 1830s and the establishment of Athens as its capital. Athens grew at a brisk pace, though its physical growth was not supported by a parallel growth of the economy. Unlike the model of the Ottoman Empire that favored decentralized, local self-governance, the Western European model established by the kings Otto and

<sup>62</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 3. See also Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*.

George I focused all powers in the hands of a centralized government. Yet the government itself remained weak, unable, and unwilling to enforce its own laws, including legislation pertaining to architecture and urban planning. Nevertheless, despite the weak civil society and the weak industrial and commercial base, modernization initially seemed within reach.

After 1922, the country's orientation turned sharply inward, away from Western Europe, as Greece was forced to accommodate the Asia Minor refugees and integrate them into the local, struggling economy. "Becoming European" lost its original attraction. Between 1922 and 1940, building a coherent national identity and Hellenizing the immigrants, some of whom did not even speak Greek, was the pressing order of the day. And although many architects and planners continued to propose and even realize modern designs, the government focused primarily on economic development, political survival, and national defense.<sup>63</sup>

These findings are in keeping with the larger patterns of urban development that characterized other new European capitals created after the dissolution of empires. As Nathaniel D. Wood observed in his contribution to *Capital Cities in the Aftermath of Empires: Planning in Central and Southeast Europe*, capital cities were shaped by two competing forces: the myth of the nation and the myth of Europe. "The process of planning national capitals," Wood points out, "clearly blended these two mythic versions of modernity."<sup>64</sup>

## 7. Between Rivalry, Irrationality, and Resistance: The Modernization of Belgrade, 1890–1914

*Dubravka Stojanović*

Winding streets, blind alleys, representative buildings in unfitting locations, central districts without clear urban planning, crooked single-story shacks that lean against modern multistory buildings, almost unsolvable traffic problems—this situation in present-day Belgrade is the product of specific modernization processes that affected the appearance, urbanization, and infrastructure development of the capital of Serbia. At the same time, the specific modernization of the capital was paradigmatic for overarching processes in the country: it marked two centuries of its attempts to catch up with European currents as well as the breaks in its development, its disorientation, setbacks in its striving toward Europeanization and, quite often, its self-isolation.<sup>1</sup> Thus, understanding the controversial modernization processes of Belgrade also enables us to understand initiatives as well as obstacles that Serbia faced (and still faces), in its attempts to find its place in the contemporary world.

When Belgrade became the capital of the autonomous Serbian state in 1841, it primarily had strategic importance due to its position on the Danube River on the Ottoman-Austrian border. Just like in

<sup>63</sup> See, also, Koumaridis, "Urban transformation," 213–41.  
<sup>64</sup> Wood, "Not Just the National," 258–59.

<sup>1</sup> Dimić et al., *Srbija 1804–2004*. On the modernization processes in more detail, see the books edited by Perović: *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka, 1; Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima: Položaj žene; Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka, 3; Položaj elite; Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima: Žene i deca*. All translations in the text from the Serbian sources are mine.

"The volume succeeds beautifully in conveying a detailed sense of urban development in Eastern Europe and the crucial importance of cities for the modernization of Eastern Europe during the half century before World War II. It is a timely and important contribution to an exciting and growing field of scholarship. Urban historians, historians of Eastern Europe interested in the more general problems of modernity and finally comparative historians and historical sociologists will hardly be able to afford ignoring this splendid volume."

Friedrich Lenger, Professor of History, Justus Liebig University Giessen

"A fascinating Baedeker tour of the urban landscape of modernizing Eastern Europe. The reader can encounter these cities in their own local milieux, while also tracing the global ties that bind them. The tensions between nation and empire, between East and West, and between the planned and the particular animate this race to modernity. One imagines these dozen or so cities paired off in seeded brackets like so many speedskaters, each with different attributes. *Races to Modernity* is an essential guide to the transformation of Europe itself."

Padriac Kenney, Professor of History, Indiana University

"This excellent volume shows that the "race to modernity" in Moscow, Kiev, Belgrade or Athens was driven by similar hopes and ideas of urban development as in Paris, London or Berlin. Yet it took on the character of a chase to catch-up, the breakneck speed of which produced even deeper rifts and conflicts than in the metropolises of the West. A must-read for anyone interested in East European cities during the Age of Extremes."

Gregor Thum, Professor of History, University of Pittsburgh

ISBN 978 963 386 035 9

A standard linear barcode representing the ISBN number 978 963 386 035 9.

**Central European University Press  
Budapest-New York**

Sales and information: [ceupress@ceu.hu](mailto:ceupress@ceu.hu)

Website: <http://www.ceupress.com>