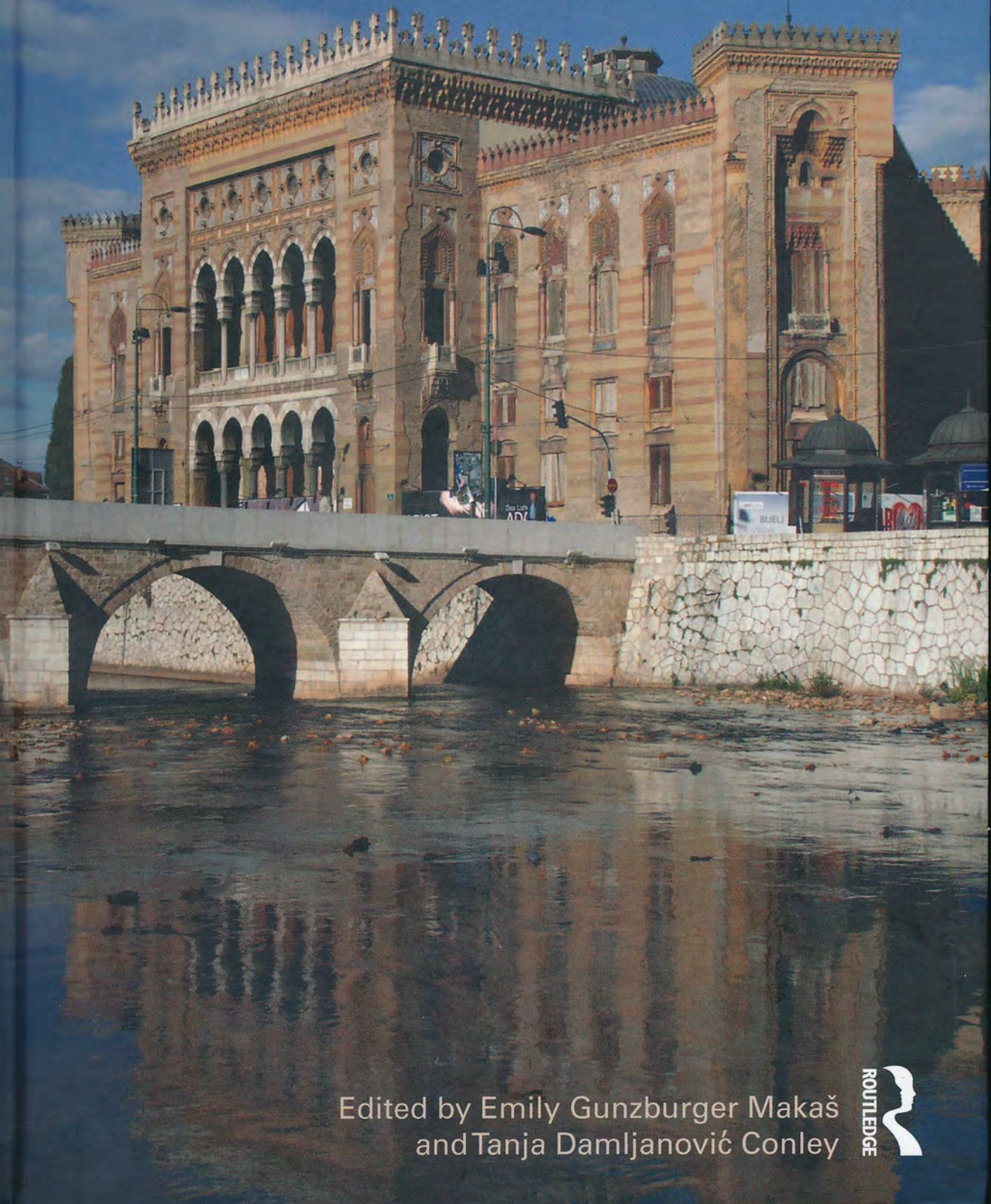


Capital Cities in the Aftermath of Empires

Planning in Central and Southeastern Europe



Edited by Emily Gunzburger Makaš
and Tanja Damljanović Conley

ROUTLEDGE 

Chapter 2

Athens

Eleni Bastéa

After the Greek insurrection (1821–1827) against the Ottoman Empire, France, Britain and Russia signed the London Protocol of 1832 that declared Greece to be a monarchical and independent state. Prince Frederick Otto of Wittelsbach, son of the philhellene King Ludwig I of Bavaria, became the first king of Greece. Following the establishment of the Greek kingdom, the country pursued the following aspirations:

1. Acceptance into the family of modern European nations.
2. Internal cultural and political unity and gradual territorial expansion.
3. Strong connection, if not identification, with the classical past.

Modern Greece had to build a coherent national culture. The construction of national identity was oriented internally, towards its own citizens, and externally, towards the Greek-inhabited territories of the Ottoman Empire. Language, history and religion were all examined anew, now seen as the foundations of a unifying state culture and ideology. State-controlled education, the army and civic and religious ceremonies were major agents of the nation building project. Urban design and civic architecture in Athens also contributed to the construction of a modern Greek national identity.

Designing New Athens: The Nineteenth Century

When the independent Greek nation was established in 1833, Athens was a provincial village of 4,000 (figure 2.1). By 1900, it was transformed into a bustling capital of about 125,000 (Leontidou, 1989). A triangle of major streets organized the new downtown area: Hermou Street ran east–west; Athenas Street ran north–south; Piraeus Street ran northeast–southwest; and the parallel streets University (Panepistemiou) and Stadiou ran northwest–southeast. The first major new building was the royal palace, which rose prominently on the eastern node,



Figure 2.1. Ferdinand Stademann, View of Athens, 1835. (Source: Ferdinand Stademann, *Panorama von Athen*, Munich, 1841)

near the intersection of Hermou and Stadiou Streets. Other civic and residential buildings, financed through private and public patronage, included the university, the cathedral, the academy, the national library and the archaeological museum. Elegant parks, tree-lined avenues and Neo-Classical mansions gave the city centre a European flair. The Acropolis hill, home to the Ottoman garrison and their families during the Ottoman rule, was restored to its classical, though ruined state, all later additions removed.

In 1866 Emmanuel Maniaky, the general in charge of public works in Greece, proudly reported the country's reconstruction: 'Greece, when she came out of the War of Independence (1827) was literally a pile of ruins'. After the liberation and within a third of a century, 'twenty-three old cities were rebuilt and ten new ones were founded'. He was especially proud of Athens, with its 'large and well-aligned streets, beautiful houses built according to Italian taste, the oldest of which date only to 1834, numerous public structures and its population which, in its manner of dressing, living, and thinking is so well identified with the great family of the civilized nations of Europe' (Maniaky, 1869). Charles Tuckerman, the US ambassador to Greece between 1867 and 1874, remarked that in Athens a few of the shop windows, 'be it the jeweller, tailor or silk mercer, almost rival those of the Palais Royal' (Tuckerman, 1886). And in 1887, Charles de Moüy commented that 'Stadium Street is the most beautiful in the city, the boulevard des Italiens and the Champs-Élysées of Athens' (Moüy, 1887). Photographs and paintings of the late nineteenth century also depict a fashionable society that frequented cafés, attended

literary salons and strolled along the newly lit boulevards on straight and paved sidewalks.

How were these remarkable planning and architectural transformations accomplished and how did they influence the country's national identity? Were the newly-opened streets and Neo-Classical façades indicative of political stability and economic prowess? To answer these questions, we will focus on the architecture and urban design that shaped the new capital and their contributions to the nation-building project.

In 1832 the provisional Greek government commissioned two young, German-trained architects, Stamatios Kleanthes and Eduard Schaubert, to design the plan for new Athens. Although the city was not yet the capital of Greece, it was widely assumed that it would become so. Kleanthes and Schaubert were asked to design 'a new plan *equal with the ancient fame and glory of the city and worthy of the century in which we live*' (emphasis in the original; Bastéa, 2000). The architects submitted their design and explanatory memorandum in December 1832. A month later, King Otto and his regents were established in Nafplion, the Greek capital at the time. Otto's government approved the Kleanthes-Schaubert plan in 1833 with the same decree that announced the transfer of the capital from Nafplion to Athens (*Ibid.*). The new plan, with its straight, wide streets, new civic structures and elegant boulevards, symbolized the country's rebirth and reconstruction (figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2. Stamatios Kleanthes and Eduard Schaubert, Final Plan for the New City of Athens, 1833. (Source: Staatliche Graphische Sammlung Munich, Inv. 27119 Z)

New Athens was designed for a population of 35,000–40,000 people. Although the old city was perched on the Acropolis hill, the proposed extension covered a relatively flat terrain. The plan followed a symmetrical pattern, accommodated the layout of the existing town and paid homage to the antiquities. Given the topography of the site, with hills on the west side of the Acropolis and a sharply sloping south side, the architects proposed a northern and eastern extension. ‘The transfer ... of the city onto the plateau to the north’, they stated in their memorandum, ‘offers the added advantage that the ground over the ancient cities of Theseus and Hadrian remains unbuilt and there is room left for later excavations. Even if the present situation in Greece does not allow for the excavations to be undertaken immediately, nevertheless, a future generation could accuse the present one of lacking foresight if this issue is not considered right away’ (*Ibid.*).

The main roads connecting Athens to the nearby towns were brought into the centre of the city. The most important historical buildings served as focal points for the new street network. The royal palace, which was originally located directly north of the Acropolis, formed the centre of their design. Athenas Street cut through the fabric of the old town and established a north–south axis in the city, stretching between the proposed palace and the foothills of the Acropolis. In the middle ground unfolded the modern city with its ordered, tree-lined boulevards, expansive gardens and various civic and commercial institutions. Northeast of the new city and towards the Lykabettos hill were the ministries of finance and war, with the mint, the arsenal and the foundry nearby. The proposed buildings did not reflect actual political conditions. The plan included two parliament buildings flanking the palace, one for the Senate and one for the House of Representatives, even though Greece did not have a parliamentary system at the time.

Shortly after the plan’s approval, the price of land increased manifold and the state could not meet the rising expropriation costs. Public criticism, directed both towards the architects and towards the government, declared the proposal unrealistic. Otto’s father, King Ludwig I, commissioned the German architect Leo von Klenze to revise the plan. Klenze’s design, which included narrower streets and smaller squares to reduce expropriation costs, was approved in September 1834. Klenze’s proposal to move the palace on the eastern node was later changed to the western node. The extensive excavation zone surrounding the Acropolis that Kleanthes and Schaubert had protected was slowly taken over by small, originally illegal dwellings that were later incorporated in the master plan.

Planning Legislation and Public Involvement

In 1836 two royal decrees set the guidelines for rebuilding the new capital, described building methods and outlined procedures for landowner compensation. All new buildings had to respect both the alignment and the prescribed height elevation of the street. Building legislation applied only to new construction. Owners and architects of new buildings who did not conform to the plans could face sanctions.

Once an existing building deteriorated, it was to be replaced by a new one according to the street alignment (*Ibid.*).

Owners were obligated to alter the borders of their lots, cooperating with each other, so they each received a street façade proportionate to the size of their original property before the new street openings. The burden of compensation was carried primarily by the owners of the surrounding lots, in proportion to their gain. Neighbours were expected to compensate those owners whose property suffered after the realignment. Properties on the three primary streets of the old city – Hermou, Athenas and Aiolou – and on all the streets of the new city, were to meet the street at right angles. The city was obligated to cover part of the expropriation costs of public squares and of the opening of Athenas Street, which was especially wide. In cases of disagreement the city architect had the final word. Buildings erected contrary to these regulations were supposed to be torn down at the expense of the owner. The compensation value of lots was determined by two experts, one representing the owner and one the city council. In case of disagreement the value was established by the court (*FEK*, no. 35, 1837). Building legislation allowed for negotiation and adjustment of building lines and compensation fees between the government and the landowners. Thus, both the government and the landowners helped shape the post-liberation city.

Town planning came to signify national progress. According to public opinion, any failure on the part of the government to finalize the plan of Athens reflected its weakness and inability to govern the country at large. Citizens remained engaged with the building process. Their suggestions ranged from critiques of street alignment to proposals for new towns. Public involvement was codified by the 1867 decree ‘On the Execution of Plans for Cities and Towns of the Kingdom’. According to that, ‘Minimum dimensions of area, façade and depth of building lots facing streets or squares in cities or towns are determined once, specifically for each city and town, by Royal decree, *following consultation with the town council in charge*’ (*FEK*, no. 27, 1867; emphasis added.) Popular resistance to the new Athens plan took several forms. Many structures went up without permits, some on lots that were reserved for future excavations, parks or squares. And although the press supported the government’s rebuilding efforts, it did not hesitate to underscore the heavy financial toll.

Throughout this process, planning and civic architecture succeeded in making the government visible to the people. At a time when the concepts of ‘government’, ‘kingdom’, and ‘parliament’ were novel and continuously redefined, architecture helped anchor them spatially and physically. This new civic architecture allowed the Athenian public to begin forming a concrete image of its governing institutions. And as the Athenians saw government offices housed in rented buildings, they realized the discrepancy between the grand, abstract ideas of Western politics and the messiness of everyday governance.

By 1900 Athens boasted several paved, straight, wide streets, some with trees planted along the sidewalks, lit at night, and even sprinkled with water on very

hot summer days. New thoroughfares like Hermou Street opened through the old city and terminated at the palace. Athenas Street terminated at the Acropolis, while Cathedral (Metropoleos) Street connected the palace and the cathedral. Other streets led to the surrounding countryside, where Athenians took day trips on Sundays (figure 2.3).

Civic Architecture

The royal palace, designed by Friedrich von Gärtner and completed in 1843, was the first major building constructed in Athens. Due to limited funds, which came



Figure 2.3. Detail of Plan of Athens, 1877. (Source: E. Curtius and J. A. Kaupert, *Atlas von Athen*, Berlin, 1878)

partly from the Greek state and partly through a loan from Bavaria, the solemn and pared down design appeared more akin to military barracks, as Gärtner himself noted. Nevertheless, its uninspired design did not affect local reception. More than any other government building, the palace became the major symbol of power in Athens, backdrop to national celebrations and popular insurrections. It helped secure the position of Athens within Greece and abroad. As the historian N.T. Voulgares noted in 1862, the palace endowed Athens with 'a certain character of permanence' (Bastéa, 2000).

Started in 1837 and completed by 1864, the university did not address the most pressing educational problems of the time, namely the lack of elementary schools. Rather, it helped mark Athens as the cultural centre of Greece, increasing its stature in the Balkans. 'The establishment of the university was one of the most important events in the history of modern Athens', wrote a Greek historian in 1896. Thus were revived 'the ancient times, when those who desired higher education came from all over to the country of Plato ... and Aristotle... Serbians, Bulgarians, Romanians began to come to Athens and to take the literature, science, and culture of Athens back to their own countries' (*Ibid.*). Designed by the Danish architect Christian Hansen, the Neo-Classical building exemplified both Hansen's familiarity with ancient Greek architecture and his knowledge of northern European Neo-Classicism.

The construction of the academy and the national library, both designed by Theophil von Hansen and begun in 1859 and 1887 respectively, further established University Street as the official cultural axis of the new capital. Underscoring the academy's symbolic significance, the Athenian city council agreed in 1859 that 'the academy, to be erected on University Square, will become an agent of the greatest ethical and material value for the municipality and the nation, contributing furthermore to the beautification of the city' (*Ibid.*). Similar arguments supported the erection of the national library, which completed the Athenian trilogy. University Street, which terminated at the elegant, tree-planted Constitution (Syntagma) Square that fronted the palace, literally and symbolically etched the line connecting official cultural production with the monarch's residence.

Through their design and their symbolic, programmatic impact, the royal palace and the buildings of the Athenian trilogy on University Street – the university, the academy, and the national library – contributed to the first national aspiration: the political incorporation of Greece into modern Europe. Becoming part of Europe was a cultural as much as a political feat. Institutions such as the library and the university did not address directly the country's practical needs, but rather its projected image as the cultural beacon of the Balkans and the Middle East.

The Greek state's second aspiration – internal cultural and political unity – found expression in the construction of the new cathedral on Cathedral Street, next to the modest twelfth-century church of Panaghia Gorgoepekoos, which had served the Athenian people during the Ottoman rule. The widespread demand for a new cathedral reflected the country's continued attachment to the

Orthodox religion that united the majority of the population during the Ottoman domination.

The design of the cathedral (1842–1862) was the subject of an architectural competition that specified the use of the ‘Greek Byzantine’ order. This was one of the first architectural competitions held in Greece. Espousal of a Greek Byzantine style expressed the urgency to establish an unbroken continuity of the Greek nation from antiquity through Byzantium and the post-liberation period. The short stretch of Cathedral Street which connected the palace with the new cathedral became an important thoroughfare. The king and his entourage walked down the street from the palace to the cathedral, not only to attend religious holidays, but also to celebrate the major national holidays, which began with a special mass. Thus Cathedral Street etched another line on the cultural map of Athens, this one firmly connecting church and state. As the royal palace signified the political independence of Greece, the new cathedral symbolized its cultural and religious connection to Byzantium.

The architecture of the new civic and government buildings adhered primarily to Neo-Classicism, which lent a stamp of permanence to the new institutions. Since Europe claimed its roots in ancient Greece and since modern Greece oriented its policy towards Europe, the adoption of Neo-Classicism was doubly justified: it strengthened ties to the classical tradition and demonstrated the country’s Western orientation. Several projects helped strengthen the connection between modern Greece and antiquity. These included the restoration of the Acropolis, which involved the removal of all post-Roman structures from it; the design of most civic and government buildings in the Neo-Classical style; and the adoption of the German educational model, which favoured a classical curriculum.

Significant among those classicizing efforts was the building of the archaeological museum. Its funding came from a prominent Greek in St. Petersburg and the site was donated by the Tositsas family in Athens. The museum design was originally the subject of an international competition in 1858. *The Government Gazette* emphasized that the museum ‘had to be worthy of the masterpieces of antiquity’ (*Ibid.*). The final Neo-Classical design was the work of the German architect Ludwig Lange, member of the competition committee, as well as Panagiotes Kalkos and Ernst Ziller. Completed in 1889, the museum’s quiet, if austere elegance offered a fitting home to the country’s growing collection of antiquities.

Although Kleanthes and Schaubert had included several civic and public buildings in their original plan, the state had neither the ability nor the intention of realizing them. The construction of public buildings happened in a rather piecemeal fashion. The process of financing each building was long and convoluted. It included the collection of funds from private donors, additional contributions from the city and the state, the search for an appropriate site – itself often donated by an individual or the municipality – and, finally, the financing of operating costs of the building, which usually burdened the state. As there was no coherent plan,

the location of most major public buildings depended on the prevailing politics at the time. The Athenian trilogy of the university, the academy, and the national library, all facing University Street and sharing a similar stylistic vocabulary, is the only notable exception.

Considering the narrow confines of the Greek kingdom, the imposing structures of the royal palace or the Athenian trilogy appear decidedly over-scaled and extravagant. Yet a closer study of the contemporary Greek commentary reveals a more complex agenda. The new buildings were not intended primarily to fulfil the needs of a minor, agrarian state. They were rather beacons of culture announcing the birth of New Athens to all Greeks of the diaspora, thus enticing them to immigrate to Greece. As the newspaper *Athena* proclaimed in 1861, 'the capital of Greece, Athens, is the focal point and centre of light and culture for two ... concentric nations, the nation of liberated Greece and the larger nation of greater Hellenism, which is still under foreign rule' (Skopetea, 1988). It was this broader Hellenism that was served by the new civic architecture.

Was the elaborate late-nineteenth-century architecture a reflection of domestic well-being and refined culture? The finely articulated mansions on Stadiou or Athenas Streets, privately financed with Greek diaspora money, contrasted sharply with the kingdom's dire economic conditions. Greece was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1893. Social problems ran even deeper. While foreign visitors praised the elegant buildings, the local press focused instead on the mounting social problems and harsh living conditions caused by the inadequate social welfare programmes and the ailing urban infrastructure. 'Progress and social change are not imposed by laws and decrees, but are brought about as the individual progresses and society grows with the passage of time', reflected a Greek journalist in 1896 (Bastéa, 2000). In a period that was mired by domestic and international problems, the new town plans and civic buildings often shone as the only beacons of hope, projecting a promising future. New and extravagant architecture proved to be an impressive façade that masked the country's troubled economic and social conditions.

By the late nineteenth century, technological advances caught everyone's imagination. Describing the steam train that connected Athens to Piraeus, the newspaper *Aion* wrote in 1869: 'The train has been running regularly since last Friday. The influx of passengers is enormous and all admit that the start of such a project promises the greatest benefits'. The expansion of the railway would pave a great future for Athens, predicted *Aion* in 1870: 'Greece, being between Suez and Europe on an almost direct line for all the merchandise travelling in both directions, will become the conduit. The city that is appointed to be the beginning of the (railway) line ... will soon become a great centre ... of commerce and industry'. The most dramatic public works project undertaken by the modernizing Prime Minister Charilaos Trikoupes was the opening of the canal in the Isthmus of Corinth (1882–1893), a technological dream that was covered extensively by the press at the time. Contemporaries also followed the construction of the

Athens underground in the Theseion-Monasteraki area with excitement. Nascent industry was exhibited in the Zappeion Building, which was designed by François Boulanger in 1888. At the turn of the twentieth century, most Greeks believed that technological and economic progress, rather than focus on antiquity, would help Greece enter the family of Western Europe (*Ibid.*).

Late-Nineteenth-Century Athens: European Façade, Ottoman Interior

By 1900, planning and architecture had transformed the city's outward appearance from a provincial Ottoman town to a modest European capital. Athenians could meet at cafés, just as their counterparts did in Berlin, Munich, or Paris. 'The great affair', wrote Henri Belle in 1881, 'is to be seen; whether one is rich or poor, one wants to make an appearance' (Belle, 1881). Did these modernizing changes also transform the Athenians? What emerges from contemporary accounts is a sharp contrast between outward appearances and personal habits. In 1884 the municipal council in Athens gave names to 250 roads, a practice that was new for Greece and relatively new in Europe, as well (Philippides, 1995). But a French traveller noted in 1889: 'The coachmen cannot read; they are unable to decipher the names of the streets and the numbers of the houses. On the other hand, they have memory and know the city admirably, and almost all of the names of the inhabitants' (Carbol, 1890). This observation highlights the two contemporaneous modes of spatial knowledge: the pre-modern mode that relied on local knowledge for orientation, and the modern mode that introduced names and numbers to a city in order to make it equally legible to an old-timer and a newcomer.

Perceptive Athenian intellectuals also pointed out that although new buildings in Athens rivalled those in other European cities, their content was often disappointing. They complained that the meals at Greek restaurants could not compare with those in Paris or London. The imposing building of the national library did not reflect a similarly high level of education in Athens. And although several shops looked like ones abroad, their offerings left a lot to be desired.

The opening of new boulevards, notably University and Athenas Streets; the widening of existing ones such as Cathedral Street; and the design of major new structures such as the Athenian trilogy and the cathedral etched an image of Athens that reflected the nation's aspirations: modernity, cultural unity and connection with antiquity. This image, however, came to coexist, rather than replace, that of the earlier city, with its ancient, Byzantine and Ottoman roots. Behind the European façade, the back roads and even the backs of major buildings remained decidedly unglamorous. Neoclassicism was not uniformly applied. Private residences displayed a rather eclectic stylistic blend. Uneven streets were a perpetual problem, since the planning of Athens was carried out in a piecemeal fashion that addressed each new street opening individually, lacking an overall street levelling programme. New buildings appeared to be on regular, orthogonal



Figure 2.4. Athenas Street with Acropolis in the background, Athens, c. 1900. (Source: Photographic Archive of Benaki Museum)

lots, but their backs continued to adhere to the street patterns and property lines of the earlier epochs: ancient Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman. Etched on the buildings and the streets of Athens are the lines of belonging to both the East and the West (figure 2.4).

Athens, 1900–1940: Searching for Indigenous Planning Solutions

Most of the major urban and architectural developments of nineteenth-century Athens were based on Western European proposals. Otto's overthrow in 1862 and the ascent of the Danish King George I (r. 1863–1913) did not affect the building scene, which continued to rely on Classical designs drawn by foreign-educated architects. These included plans for Athens by Paul Vakas (1896), Ludwig Hoffmann (1908–1910) and Thomas Mawson (1914–1918). Hoffmann, who worked as an architect for the city of Berlin but did not have planning experience, proposed a traditional, nineteenth-century Neo-Classical design. Popular concerns at the time, however, focused primarily on hygiene and infrastructure. Mawson, an experienced planner with projects both in his native England and abroad, proposed a grandiose design that included zoning, the opening of several streets, the construction of imposing government buildings, a central train station,

a major university, and an upgraded zone around the Acropolis. By the time Mawson completed his proposal, however, in 1918, Athens was exhausted and depleted by the Balkan Wars and the First World War. Given the state's financial conditions, grandiose marble-clad public buildings, new parks and avenues were deemed inappropriate. Proposals by the Greek architects Aristides Balanos (1917) and Stylianos Leloudas (1918–1921) also remained unrealized. The proposal by the Committee for the New Plan for the City of Athens (1920–1925), under the direction of Petros Kalligas, was actually approved – the first plan proposal to be approved since 1834 – and began to be implemented. Unfortunately, the plan was recalled in January 1926, by the Th. Pangalos government, forcing the city's planning efforts to rely on earlier, outdated plans (Bires, 1966). As the Kalligas memorandum had noted, in 1916 the plan for Athens was composed of seventy-eight different parts and 498 separately approved changes that bore little connection to each other (Polyzos, 1985).

As the twentieth century progressed, most design decisions were the work of Greek planners and architects. In 1914, the Ministry of Transport took over the jurisdiction of Greek town planning that had belonged to the Ministry of the Interior since 1863. Unfortunately, that change deprived individual municipalities of the ability to influence local town planning efforts to the degree they had done in the past. A positive development in the building field was the establishment of the independent School of Architecture in 1917, part of the National Technical University of Athens, which trained the new generation of architects in Greece.

Most critical, however, for the future of all Greek cities, were the political developments in Greece after 1922. Following the Asia Minor military defeat of Greece by Turkey in 1922 and the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, over 1,300,000 Greek Orthodox people from Turkey were forced to immigrate to Greece. At the time, Greece had only 5 million people. The Asia Minor Catastrophe spelled the collapse of the Great Idea (*Megale Idea*), the irredentist vision of a Greater Greece. Political focus shifted to the interior, strengthening the nation's sense of unity and continuity of the Greek race *within* the borders of the Greece.

Between 1920 and 1928, the combined population of Athens and Piraeus doubled to 802,000 (Leontidou, 1989). Of those, 222,709 were Asia Minor refugees. Despite the progressive Town Planning Act of 1923 and the large-scale refugee resettlement programme, the housing problem was approached in a piecemeal fashion. Athens grew gradually, section by section, with narrow street extensions, small city blocks and minimal public amenities, parks or squares. Even when the City Planning Service of the City of Athens, instituted in 1925, proposed planning improvements, the Ministry of Public Works often contradicted them, initiating instead, housing developments in areas that were intended to remain unbuilt. Financial interests of individual landowners and residents, political favours and the pressing need to house the Asia Minor refugees resulted in ruthless violations of the plan and extensive illegal construction that was tolerated by the state.

Although similar financial interests had already diluted the visionary

dimensions of the nineteenth-century plans for Athens, concern about the future of the city had remained in the foreground. By contrast, in the twentieth century all attention focused on pressing daily problems and immediate private profits, ignoring the city's need for infrastructure and open spaces. Finally, several new building regulations changed the density and physiognomy of Athens drastically. In 1929, we note the enactment of the horizontal property law, which legalized apartment ownership; the general building code and the building heights decree (*FEK*, no. 167, 22 May 1934), all of which encouraged intensive land development and real estate profit. As a result of this legislation, many single-family houses were torn down in the beginning of the twentieth century and approximately 450 new apartment buildings were constructed in the centre of Athens between 1930 and 1940. According to the 1940 census, the population of Athens had reached 1,124,098 and its area doubled since the Balkan wars. (Sarigiannis, 2000)

Architecture: Regional Modernism

In 1933 the *IV Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne* (CIAM) held its meeting in Athens. Founded in 1928, CIAM was the international platform of the Modern Movement. Greek architects had the opportunity to meet with famous international architects, most notably Le Corbusier. His 'discovery' of Greek vernacular architecture, which he extolled for its affinity to modernism, encouraged Greek architects to seek inspiration also in the 'timeless' Aegean islands.

Dimitris Pikionis, one of the most prominent Greek architects at the time, chose not to participate in the Athens CIAM. He criticized CIAM for its attachment to technological and functional needs, which did not allow for the 'possibility of sentiment' (Philippides, 1984). Although Pikionis had already produced designs in the modern idiom (see, for example, his school on Lykabettus, 1933), in his writings and later designs he became inspired by vernacular architecture, the 'architecture of the people', which he approached in spiritual terms: 'The local people are the true builders, holding on to the ancient quality of their art... But thoughtlessly we follow the foreign (prototype), always to be left behind it', he charged in a 1925 article that pioneered the study of vernacular architecture in Greece (Pikionis, 1987).

The Modern Movement was also challenged by General Ioannis Metaxas who established the dictatorship of 4 August 1936. Metaxas elaborated the notion of the 'Third Hellenic Civilization', after the civilizations of ancient Greece and Byzantium. During his regime, a state-sanctioned 'return to the roots' resulted in the creation of several austere classically-inspired buildings.

Another challenge to the Modern Movement came from a wider range of intellectuals. In 1935, the archaeologist Semni Papaspyridi-Karouzou was the first to articulate the effect of the built environment on the social relationships of the residents. She criticized the radical changes caused by the large-scale urbanization of rural population and the ramifications of high-density living

conditions on family structure (Philippides, 1984). Papaspyridi-Karouzou was not alone. In 1934, architect Vasileios Kassandra also criticized the 'new formalism' of architecture that 'pursued the unusual instead of the logical, the surprising instead of the useful and the curious instead of the true' (*Ibid.*). Clearly, neither the Neo-Classical nor the vernacular traditions could save the country from the destruction of the urban fabric caused by lack of comprehensive urban planning and pressing forces of unchecked capitalism.

Instrumental in establishing modern architecture in Greece was the ambitious government school-building initiative over the years 1930–1932 by the Minister of Education Georgios Papandreou. During the course of this initiative, which was continued by the subsequent administration, 6,000 new schoolrooms were constructed and 2,000 existing ones were repaired across the country (Bastéa, 2003). To be sure, this was not unalloyed modernism, as some of the schools followed Neo-Classical, Neo-Byzantine and traditional influences (Giakoumakatos, 2001).

Initially, the general public reacted to modern architecture with reservation and even hostility. But gradually, Greek modernism, developed in Athens and exported to the rest of the country, became accepted. By the 1960s Greek architecture had developed a convincing and unified modernist vocabulary, a regional idiom of stripped-down formalism. Apartment buildings of reinforced concrete frames and brick infill replaced the single-family houses of earlier periods. This new architecture reflected the country's struggle for modernization, progress and improved social welfare. Modernism became the preferred style for industrial buildings, military, medical and educational facilities and some museums. Classical forms were often employed for commemorative buildings, like the Monument to the Unknown Soldier (1929–1930) in Athens. Although the modern buildings erected in Greece were similar to contemporary buildings in other countries, architectural debates about form, place and history reflected specific domestic concerns.

Conclusion: New Architecture for a New Society

Why did Athens and the rest of the Greek cities become so intent on demolishing their past? The generation who came of age in the 1940s and 1950s was marked by fighting, starvation and death, betrayal, abandonment and political and financial dependence on the West. During the dictatorship of Metaxas, they witnessed the outbreak of the Second World War, Italy's attack on Greece in 1940, Germany's attack in 1941 and the fall of Athens during the same year. With the evacuation of King George II and his government, a collaborationist government was established. 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) which left the country scarred and divided (Clogg, 1992). Mass migration to the urban centres created an acute housing problem. Multi-family apartment buildings provided the logical answer to the post-World War II conditions in Greek cities.

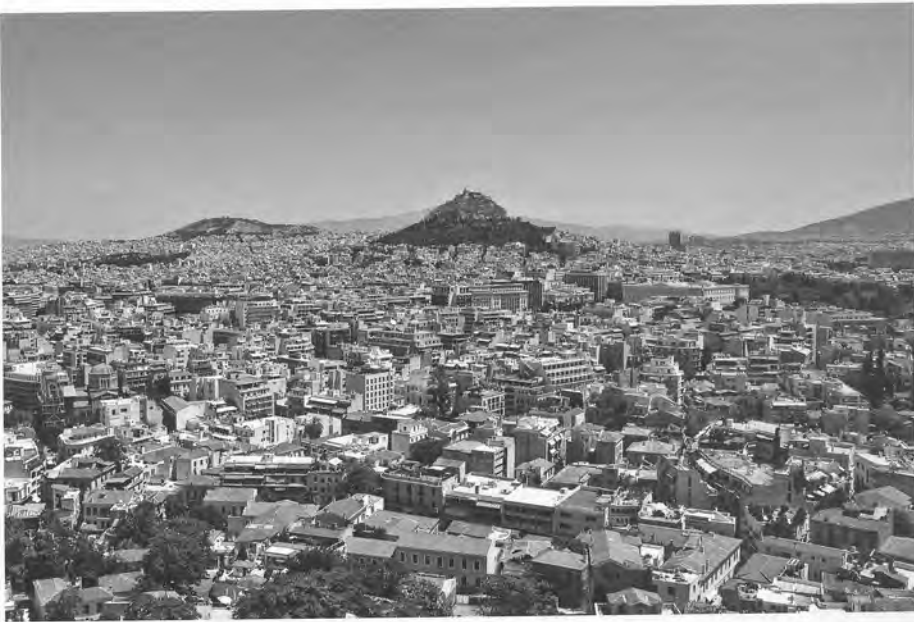


Figure 2.5. Lykabettus Hill from the Acropolis, Athens, 2008. (Source: Mark Forte)

Equally important was the symbolism of moving from a house to a self-contained flat, signalling social advancement from one's village or small-neighbourhood roots. For many lower- and middle-class families, moving into a new flat came with considerable new comforts, such as separate bathrooms and kitchens. Most people did not live in stately Neo-Classical houses but in modest dwellings, often around a communal courtyard, sharing a kitchen and a bathroom with several other families. Others lived in quickly-constructed refugee housing. Moving into an apartment building was a welcome improvement and a means of social integration. Perhaps, the large-scale rebuilding of both the urban and the provincial centres after the Second World War, compromised as it might have been from an architectural point of view, held the promise for a better future (figure 2.5).

Bibliography

- Bastéa, Eleni (2000) *The Creation of Modern Athens: Planning the Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bastéa, Eleni (2003) Dimitris Pikionis and Sedad Eldem: parallel reflections of vernacular and national architecture, in Brown, Keith S. and Hamilakis, Yannis (eds.) *The Usable Past: Greek Metahistories*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Belle, Henri (1881) *Trois années en Grèce*. Paris: Hachette.
- Bires, Kostas (1966) *Hai Athenai apo tou 19ou eis ton 20on aiona* (Athens from the 19th to the 20th centuries). Athens: Foundation of the History and Town Building of Athens.
- Carbol, Élie (1890) *Voyage en Grèce, 1889, Notes et impressions*. Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles.
- Clogg, Richard (1992) *A Concise History of Modern Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- FEK Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos* (Government Gazette)

- Giakoumakatos, A. (2001) *He architektonike kai he kritike* (Architecture and Criticism). Athens: Nefeli.
- Kafkoura, K., Papamichos, N. and Hastaoglou, V. (1990) *Schedia poleon sten Hellada tou 19ou aiona* (Town Plans in 19th century Greece). Thessaloniki: Aristotle University.
- Leontidou, Lila (1989) *Poleis tes siopes* (Cities of Silence). Athens: Cultural Technological Institute ETVA.
- Manitaky, Emmanuel (1869 [1866]) *Aperçu sur les progrès matériels de la Grèce*. Athens.
- Moüy, Charles de (1887) *Lettres athéniennes*. Paris: E. Plon.
- Philippides, Dimitris (1984) *Neohellenike architektonike* (Modern Greek Architecture). Athens: Melissa.
- Philippides, Dimitris (1995) *Lysandros Kafantzoglou (1811–1885)*. Athens: Ministry of Culture, Cultural Technological Institute ETVA.
- Pikionis, Dimitris (1987) *Keimena* (Essays). Athens: National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation.
- Polyzos, Yiannis (1985) *He pole kai oi metaschematismoi tes* (The city and its transformations), in *He Athena ston 20on aiona* (Athens in the 20th century). Exhibition Catalogue. Athens.
- Sarigiannis, Georgios (2000) *Athens 1830–2000. Exelixe–Poleodomia–Metafores* (Athens 1830–2000. Development–Planning–Transportation). Athens: Symmetria.
- Skopetea, Elli (1988) *Tò 'protypo vasilieio' kai he Megale Idea* (The 'Model Kingdom' and the Great Idea). Athens: Polytypo.
- Tuckerman, Charles K. (1886) *The Greeks of To-Day*. New York: G.P. Putnam's.