

AUTHENTICITY IN S, M, L, XL SCALE OF THESSALONIKI

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ABSTRACT: Thessaloniki's post-World War II city center and its main element, the multistorey housing building, aka *polykatoikia*, address emerging challenges of a future authenticity evaluation. The aspects of the information sources considered in authenticity judgments spread from XL to S scale. The transformation of the artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions is challenging the postwar city identity and its 'Ordinary Everyday Modernism' buildings parameters of authenticity.

Thessaloniki's peculiarity is that 2/3 of the city center has been designated *Historical Site* since 1994 [XL scale], containing both listed and non-individually listed buildings. The city's building blocks [L scale] are constituted by a diverse assemblage of built and internal free space. The built part consists of various eras constructions exhibiting diverse architectural styles, techniques, and other internal and external factors. The *polykatoikia* [M scale], integrates the contemporary practices concerning changes such as the middle-class lifestyle, the short-term rentals opportunities and the energy consumption reduction EU norms. The *polykatoikia's* distinctive ownership model which divides the building into numerous individual ownerships [S scale], like flats and stores, enters a new era that affects significant aspects like the building's uses and functions from a bottom-up view.

The paper is based on the author's postdoctoral research which is entitled: *Architectural Design in a Historic Environment. Strategies of Design Interventions in Post-War Buildings of the Historical Centre of Thessaloniki*. (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2024); recent literature and case studies analysis of OEM buildings interventions support the objectives.

KEY WORDS: Postwar Architecture, Polykatoikia, Thessaloniki, Renovation, Reuse

1. Introduction & historical site

Since the publication of the Nara document on authenticity, new challenges have emerged in the evaluation of objects as cultural heritage. The aspects of the sources of information considered in authenticity judgments expand from XL to S scale, like the *location* and *setting*, the *form* and *design*, the *materials* and *substance*, the *traditions* and *techniques*, and the intriguing aspects of *use* and *function*, *spirit* and *feeling* and other *internal* and *external factors* [ND,1994]¹. This expansion reflects the complexity and multifaceted nature of authenticity assessments, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects.

The focus on Thessaloniki arises from the fact that approximately two-thirds of the city center have been designated a Historical Site since 1994 [XL scale], encompassing a diverse range of public and private buildings, including individually listed landmarks, such as “*remarkable historical buildings, nuclei and sites, monuments, complexes, and units, of all eras and all styles, inextricably linked to each other, as well as to the history of the city.*”² while also including non-individually listed buildings that were constructed during the recent timeline of the city (Fig.1).

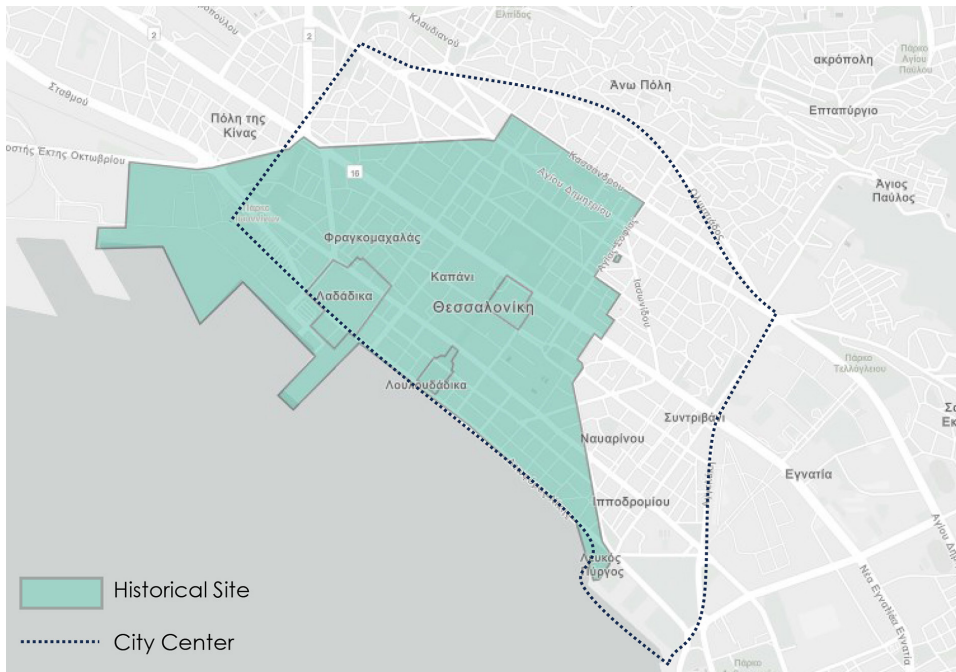


Fig. 1 Archaeological Cadastre, Directorate for the Management of the National Archive of Monuments, Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Source of map: Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Editing: S. Alexiadou, 2024

¹ Sources of information on authenticity, of the NARA document, appear in the text in italics followed by the reference [ND,1994]: ICOMOS. (1994). *The NARA document on authenticity*. <https://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/386-the-nara-document-on-authenticity-1994>

² Official Gazette 833/B/09-11-1994. (1994). *Thessaloniki Historical Site*, Article 9.

The designation of such a significant portion of the vibrant and evolving city centre of a Greek city as a *Historical Site*³ is not a common Greek strategy. For instance, the historical core of Athens is not designated as an entity, but its *Historical Sites* are scattered around specific monuments, nuclei and sites. This results in the dissociation of the direct link between the authenticity of the *Historical Site* and its buildings to the development of the city. This distinctive feature of Thessaloniki, with its extensive *Historical Site*, gives rise to questions regarding the maintenance of its authenticity while not freezing its future *evolution* [ND, 1994].

In Thessaloniki, the *topographically demarcated* [HS-GR]⁴ boundaries of the *Historical Site* are linked to the city's 20th century urban history, since they are largely identical to the boundaries of the 1917 *Burned Sector of Thessaloniki*.

In the late 19th century, prior to the incorporation of Thessaloniki into the Greek state, the city centre was characterized by a dense urban tissue of narrow streets and numerous dead ends, with buildings predominantly constructed from traditional materials such as stone and wood. This configuration presented a significant fire hazard, as evidenced by a fire that occurred in the city centre in 1890. In response to this, the affected area was redesigned, with the introduction of fire-resistant construction techniques in new buildings⁵. During the First World War, in 1917, a significant portion of the city centre, approximately two-thirds of the area, was destroyed by a major fire. This area was subsequently designated as the *Burned Sector of Thessaloniki*. The state then commissioned Ernest Hébrard, a French urban planner and archaeologist, along with a group of experts, to envision and design Thessaloniki's *New Town Plan*, encompassing both the burned sector and the rest of the city centre, offering Thessaloniki a unifying European- Beaux Artes School image⁶ that would erase the ottoman *spirit and feeling* [ND, 1994] of the previous era.

The *New Town Plan* introduced a radical redesign of the urban tissue, characterized by the creation of a wide and well-connected street network. The interwar reconstruction of private buildings in the city's burned sector represented an attempt to address the city in a new *setting*, branded by *novel forms, designs, materials and techniques* [ND, 1994] in architecture. However,

³ "Historical sites are areas on land, in the sea, in lakes or in rivers that constitute or there is evidence that they have constituted the place of important historical or mythical events, or areas where there is evidence that they contain monuments dating after 1830, or composite works of man and nature dating after 1830, which form characteristic and homogenous sites that can be topographically demarcated and must be protected due to their folkloric, ethnological, social, technical, architectural, industrial, or in general their historical, artistic or scientific significance." Definition of Historical Site in: *Definitions and terms*. (2020). [Gov.gr]. Archaeological Cadastre. <https://www.arxaiologikoktimatologio.gov.gr/en/content/definitions-and-terms>

⁴ Keywords of the Greek definition of *Historical Site* appear in the text in italics followed by the reference [HS-GR]: *Definitions and terms*. (2020). [Gov.gr]. Archaeological Cadastre. <https://www.arxaiologikoktimatologio.gov.gr/en/content/definitions-and-terms>.

⁵ Yerolympos A. (1995). *The reconstruction of Thessaloniki after the fire of 1917: A milestone in the history of the city and the development of Greek urban planning* (2nd edition). University Studio Press. (in Greek).

⁶ Ibidem; Colonas V. (2012). *Thessaloniki 1912-2012. The Architecture of a Centenary*. University Studio Press. (in Greek).

the reconstruction of private buildings in the city centre was interrupted by World War II and the subsequent civil war. The post-war reconstruction of private buildings led to a transformation of the entire city, driven by historical, *social* [HS-GR], financial and *architectural* [HS-GR] factors⁷.

2. Authenticity aspects of Thessaloniki's postwar *polykatoikia*

The new framework for postwar reconstruction was predicated on a combination of legal modifications pertaining to ownership, building regulations and practices.

The Law of Horizontal Ownership, a pivotal legal framework, witnessed a substantial adoption in the post-war era, thereby effecting a transformative shift in the realm of private building construction. Under this legal framework, the conventional ownership model – wherein a single owner possessed a building – underwent a radical transformation, giving rise to a new paradigm where ownership is applied primarily per independent apartment of a building. This legal innovation empowered many micro-owners, typically representing the demographic of middle-class, to undertake their post-war housing rehabilitation in privately owned apartments.

In addition, the postwar building legislations gave the opportunity for bigger building volumes, introducing the Greek multistorey housing building, the so-called *polykatoikia*, which has had a profound impact on the city's contemporary character. *Polykatoikia* belongs to the global phenomenon of *Ordinary Everyday Modernism* (OEM) buildings, constructed between 1945-80's in vast quantity and uneven quality⁸.

Greece's tall buildings were constructed using the Greek *antiparochi technique* [ND,1994]. The Greek term *antiparochi* is employed in the context of the Greek construction industry to denote the practice of exchange in the realm of private building development. The *antiparochi* was agreed upon in a mutually beneficial arrangement between a construction developer and a building owner. The developer would approach the building owner with the offer of exchanging their land for a percentage of the *polykatoikia* that was to be constructed on the plot. The other percentage would belong to the developer, who would be able to sell the properties to micro-owners, even during the "planning phase", thus generating the necessary funds to demolish the old building and replace it with the new one⁹.

Each micro-owner purchased an independent property individually owned, from the developer or the former plot owner, such as an apartment or a street-level store. In accordance with the

⁷ Alexiadou S. (2022). *Urban reconstruction after World War II: city and architecture in Thessaloniki during the period 1947-1974* [PhD Thesis, University of Thessaly, Department of Architecture]. <http://hdl.handle.net/10442/hedi/51975> (in Greek).

⁸ Jester T. C., Fixler D. N. (2011). Modern Heritage: Progress, Priorities, and Prognosis. *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology*, 42(2/3), 3–8. JSTOR.

⁹ Further literature on *antiparochi*: Kalfa K. (2020, September 9). *Unsettling Settling*. European Middle Class Mass Housing COST Action Lecture Series. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClmLmT18nEo>; Theocharopoulou I. (2017). *Builders, Housewives and the Construction of Modern Athens*. Black Dog Publishers.

provisions of the Law of Horizontal Ownership¹⁰, the micro-owner consequently became the proprietor of a proportion of the building's common owned 'undivided property'¹¹.

The term 'undivided property' is used to denote all shared infrastructure, facilities and equipment in a building. This includes, but is not limited to, the plot, the structural core, the common basement parts, the common pilotis parts, the terrace floor, the facades, the corridors, the steps, the entrance, all the building mechanical systems -such as the central plumbing system, the central heating system, the elevator, the central power installations, the central telephone installations etc.-, facilities at the building entrance -such as concierges-, facilities on the shared terrace, facilities in the basement. Given the potential for co-ownership to encompass between fifteen and thirty micro-owners, the legal framework delineates its *function* [ND, 1994] within a democratic model of building management. This is constituted by the "Owners' Assembly," which elects an "Owners' Management Committee." The Committee assumes responsibility for the maintenance program of the *polykatoikia* 's commonly owned parts, a program that is subject to confirmation by a majority vote of the Assembly.

The *use* [ND, 1994] aspect in a *polykatoikia* was dependent on its location; specifically, the function of the street. In a commercial street located in the city centre, the ground floor would be occupied by shops, the first floor by offices, and the upper floors would be used predominantly for residential purposes. Each floor would include components of the 'undivided property' that would serve the 'divided properties', such as elevators, staircases, underground air-raid shelters or laundry facilities on the terrace (Fig.2).

¹⁰ Official Gazette 4/A/4-1-1929. (1929). *Law 3741/1929 on Horizontal ownership by floors*. (Government Gazette).

¹¹ Alexiadou S. (2023). Middle-Class Housing Development in Thessaloniki, Greece: Polykatoikia: from Heterogeneous to Homogeneous and Vice Versa. *Docomomo Journal*, 68, 26–35. <https://doi.org/10.52200/docomomo.68.03b>

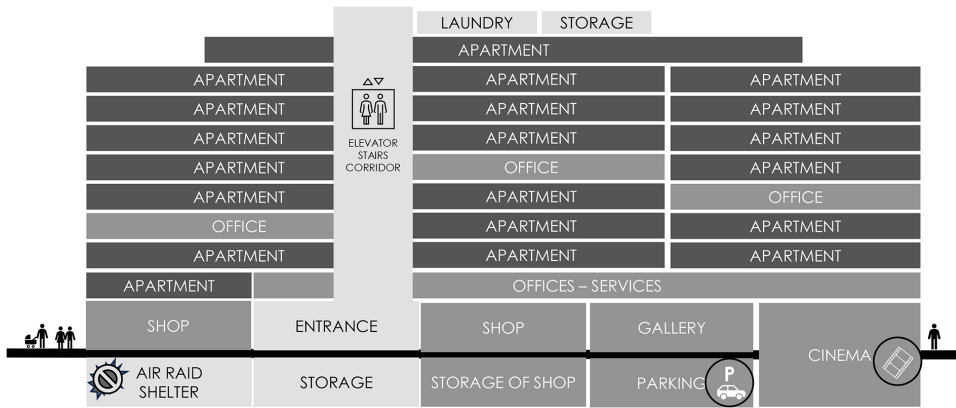


Fig. 2 Diagrammatic hypothetical section of a polykatoikia. In light grey are parts of the common 'undivided property', in mid and dark grey is each independent 'divided property'. Source: S. Alexiadou, 2022

The apartment layout - typology exhibited variability, yet a consistent feature was the clear division between the family living room and the guests' salon, which was achieved through the implementation of double sliding doors. Additionally, the kitchen was designed as a separate room with an opening to the façade for the purpose of natural light¹².

The traditional *construction materials and techniques* [ND, 1994] were replaced in response to the emergence of new architectural form of the *polykatoikia*. The adoption of reinforced concrete and brickwork resulted in the fabrication of the new shell, accompanied by the introduction of novel interior materials such as wooden parquet, mosaic, and vinyl tiles. In the meantime, the common façade was formed with the rendering technique of *artificial*¹³, wooden window frames, wooden shutters & protection rails, which were constructed in a variety of materials and forms.

The above aspects characterize the authenticity of the Greek OEM building whether its independent or common parts of the *polykatoikia*, which is the key element that *forms the characteristic and homogeneous site* [HS-GR] of Thessaloniki's city centre, both inside and outside the Historical Site. As David Fixler observes, there are two significant issues that OEM buildings are currently facing. Firstly, there is the question of "*programmatic and economic obsolescence*". Secondly, there is the issue of "*the persistent negative perception of these resources by both users of the property and the public*"¹⁴. Applying this to the Greek example, it is evident that each of the *polykatoikias* elements is not stable and is currently under judgment, review, or undergoing change.

¹² Alexiadou S. (2024b). Post-War Apartment: Furniture changes—Floor plan changes, [in:] K. Tsiambaos (Ed.), *The spaces of modernism in Greece* (Futura, Vol. 08, pp. 163–175). Docomomo Greece. (in Greek).

¹³ *Artificial* is a rendering technique used in Greek buildings since the interwar period and was widely used on the main facades of the OEM apartment buildings. It is a handmade technique that required the craftsman to apply the cement-marble mortar to render the façade and to sculpture it with special equipment.

¹⁴ Fixler D. (2017, May 30). Renewing Modernism. *David Fixler Architecture Planning Preservation*. <https://davidfixler.com/blog/2017/5/30/renewing-modernism>

3. Twisting the aspects: renovations-reuses

The new chapter in a *polykatoikia*'s storyline emerges from two distinct time-related parameters. Firstly, it is the fact that the first generation of tenants is no longer the users of the apartments and/or stores. The initial tenants, in the 50's-70's, were united by the fundamental fact that they all arrived in a newly built *polykatoikia* with all the modern amenities in the property and where everything was functioning right with no need to save for a common and individual maintenance program, appreciating the fact that they improved their living conditions. This generation has subsequently been succeeded by successive generations of tenants, with each new generation arriving and departing the *polykatoikia* according to individual needs, thereby forming a less cohesive building community. This has led to a decline in the positive perception of the *polykatoikia*, given the significant evolution in contemporary lifestyles and living conditions since the 1960s, which represents the second parameter.

A common strategy employed by successive generations of tenants involves the renovation of the apartment, whether subsequent to a sale or the property's entry into the rental market. This practice gives rise to a range of interventions, both in terms of scope and scale, impacting not only the apartment in question but also the broader building. To elaborate, the *authentic* kitchen represents one of the initial areas where a change could be made, either through the replacement of existing furniture or through a significant alteration to the apartment's internal layout *design* [ND,1994] (typology). This process requires the demolition of internal walls and the modification of room thresholds, resulting in the creation of a unified living and kitchen space¹⁵. The concept of integrating the kitchen into the living space first emerged in Greek apartments during the 1990s¹⁶ and has since been adopted in numerous renovations, with the aim of augmenting the typical two-bedroom postwar apartment with an additional bedroom.

In the context of such a project, it is recommended that a sequence of interventions be implemented, with consideration given to the requirements in these areas. These interventions include the installation of new plumbing and electrical systems, as well as new flooring in the new and old location of the kitchen. This results in a second common renovation strategy, whereby the authentic flooring of the entire apartment is replaced, regardless of its condition¹⁷. This approach effectively evokes an illusion *feeling* [ND,1994] of a newly built quality, thereby contrasting starkly with the overall condition of the communal areas of the *polykatoikia*, which remain largely untouched, despite the extensive and expensive independent renovations undertaken.

¹⁵ e.g. Urban Soul Project. (2021, May 19). *Luscious Apartment*. <https://usp.gr/portfolios/luscious-apartment/>

¹⁶ Tsiambaos K., Halvatzoglou T. (2023). Changes and transformations in the typical Athenian apartment (1974-2004), [in:] M. Tassopoulou (Ed.), *City, Politics, Architecture 1974-2004* (pp. 223–236). Laboratory of History & Theory of Architecture School of Architecture NTUA. (in Greek).

¹⁷ e.g. Fluo Architecture & Design. (2017, November). APSV Apartment Svolou. *Fluo Architecture & Design*. <http://www.fluodesign.gr/project/apsv-apartment-svolou/>

A plethora of interventions are associated with the reduction of energy consumption complying with the EU norm. These may be financially supported by the government and include the replacement of wooden frames and shades with aluminum or plastic ones. Additional financed measures may be the application of external insulation, and the upgrading of the heating and cooling systems, which has been shown to result in the addition of pipes, individual gas heating boilers, air conditioner units, and shades to the façade. However, it should be noted that any modification to the façade consequently impacts the common part of the building, necessitating at least the agreement of the owners' majority¹⁸. Furthermore, the façade, as the *form* [ND, 1994] (morphology) of the building, constitutes a crucial aspect of its authenticity, as it is the building's principal visual interface with the city.

In renovations where short-term renting is a factor, a common intervention is the subdivision of larger apartments into smaller units¹⁹. This process necessitates the provision of additional facilities, such as bathrooms and kitchens, which not only affects the typology of the post-war apartment but also places an additional burden on the *function* [ND, 1994] of the building's common installations.

A recent intervention is associated with the "death of the salesman" phenomenon and has implications for not only the *uses* [ND, 1994] in a *polykatoikia* but also the city, given its connection to the ground floor. The conversion of a former shop into a house for either long- or short-term rental purposes results in the dismissal of the former typical commercial character of the ground floor. The façade diminishes to a "window-door-air conditioner" composition on a level that its characteristic was the transparency, and the light provided to the street during the night. Though, the most harmful for the urban whole and the urban front is the conversion of a shop into a parking space, with the formation of a hermetically closed roller shutter on a 24-hour basis²⁰ (Fig.3).

¹⁸ When the building is located in a context protected by the state, as the *Historical Site* in Thessaloniki's case, any intervention affecting the façade is obliged to obtain the approval by the competent authorities.

¹⁹ e.g. T&T Architects. (2019, May 12). *Apartment division*. <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=842148379451868&set=pb.100063491293269.-2207520000>

²⁰ Alexiadou S. (2023). Middle-Class Housing Development in Thessaloniki, Greece: Polykatoikia: from Heterogeneous to Homogeneous and Vice Versa. *Docomomo Journal*, 68, 26–35. <https://doi.org/10.52200/docomomo.68.03b>



Fig. 3 Modifying a store to housing & modifying a store to parking space. Source: S. Alexiadou, 2024

The aforementioned fragmented interventions occur in a building which sustains its characteristic authentic ownership model of many micro-owners. However, the last few years, the ownership model and the democratic function of a multistorey building has been endangered, as the adoption of the solo-ownership model of the entire building has reappeared.

While this approach can effectively address issues such as structural stability, energy efficiency and mechanical systems of the building in a manner that preserves the building's overall functionality as a unit, it usually requires a radical refurbishment of the building's internal layout, along with a redefinition of the building's vertical access and distribution of functions, be it in the context of a former apartment building²¹ or a former office building²². In the case of the apartment building, this is due to the introduction of new, fragmented residential typologies for different social groups, such as students²³. In the case of the office building, it converts the workspace into a temporary living space of minimum conveniences addressing the needs of tourists. The necessity for increased sanitation facilities per floor obliges a different layout distribution per floor in both cases. Furthermore, the cohabitation within a limited square footage leads, according to each design strategy, to the design decision to configure a whole floor on different levels into gathering places for the residents. These places serve the residents- guests by offering kitchen, workout, collaboration, relaxation or laundry facilities, being accessible to them or/and any visitor of the building (Fig.4).

²¹ e.g. LoT. (2014, July 28). *AS67 Student Housing* / LoT. ArchDaily. <https://www.archdaily.com/529705/as67-student-housing-lot>

²² e.g. Arvaniti-Pollatou M. (2021, January 31). Zeus is Loose youth hostel in Thessaloniki, Greece | Urban Soul Project. *Archisearch*. <https://www.archisearch.gr/architecture/zeus-is-loose-youth-hostel-in-thessaloniki-greece-urban-soul-project/>

²³ Alexiadou S. (2023). Middle-Class Housing Development in Thessaloniki, Greece: Polykatoikia: from Heterogeneous to Homogeneous and Vice Versa. *Docomomo Journal*, 68, 26–35. <https://doi.org/10.52200/docomomo.68.03b>

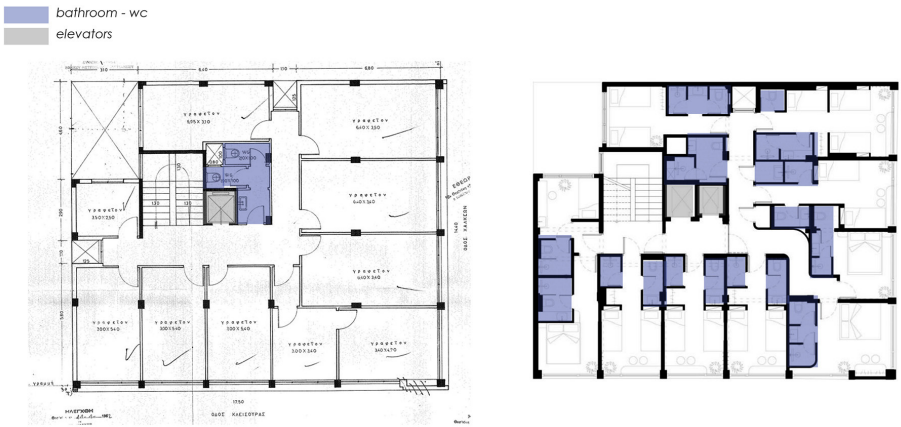


Fig. 4 Modification of an Office Building [D. Gr. Demetriades (civil eng.),1962] to a Youth Hostel. [Urban Soul Project, 2018 – 2020]. (Source of the Office Building plans: Archive of Thessaloniki City Planning Department. Source of the Youth Hostel plans: Arvaniti-Pollatou, 2021

Additionally, it enhances the building's façade, providing a more unified appearance that aligns with the contemporary proposed architectural style. In most cases this alters the perception image of the building within the city, effectively eliminating its previous identity. For instance, in the case of the transformation of the office building into a hostel, the design decision to extend the window frames to the structural building frame resulted in diminishing the emphasis on the vertical axis, a characteristic of office buildings, while emphasizing the grid as an element of the façade. The grid is a morphological characteristic of hotels, and thus, indirectly reflects the change in the building's *use* [ND, 1994] (Fig.5).



Fig. 5 Modification of an Office Building [D. Gr. Demetriades (civil eng.),1962] to a Youth Hostel. [Urban Soul Project, 2018 – 2020]. Source of the Office Building plans: Archive of Thessaloniki City Planning Department. Source of the Youth Hostel plans: Arvaniti-Pollatou, 2021

When considering the city block scale, it becomes evident that the urban blocks of Thessaloniki consist of a rather heterogeneous assemblage of buildings on a continuous system with segregated open space at the core of the block. However, when the focus is shifted to the urban scale, this same block appears to exhibit *homogeneity* [HS-GR].

The buildings are constructed on the perimeter of the block as in most European city centers, but in comparison to cities such as Vienna or Paris, the block skyline is less homogeneous. This is due to the presence of buildings with a variety of rooftops, height restrictions and setback floors. In the not uncommon case of an eight-storey *polykatoikia* situated beside a four-storey midwar apartment building within the same block, this configuration results in the unintended exposure of a "window-less" lateral pseudo-façade of the *polykatoikia*, giving the *feeling* [ND, 1994] of an incomplete *evolution* [ND,1994] of the block.

Additionally, the back facades and the uncovered portion of each plot represent an introverted space that, due to their mismanagement and lack of integration, have repeatedly inspired activation proposals²⁴, reversing its introvert *spirit* [ND, 1994] and simultaneously exposing the back facades, which traditionally host the quiet spaces of an apartment, to a publicly accessible space producing a new *setting* [ND, 1994] for the city to witness (Fig.6).



Fig. 6 City Blocks Skylines and pseudo- façades. Source: S. Alexiadou, 2014

4. Concluding thoughts

To conclude, since there is no specific hierarchy to the evaluation aspects of authenticity, it is crucial to recognize how the subjective hierarchy of parameters related to the authenticity evaluation varies across different "scales". Any feedback from the tangible and intangible aspects, objective and subjective criteria, is causing the *butterfly effect* affecting all scales in both the short and long term. It is therefore recommended that the hierarchy is periodically reasserted considering new points of view and data on the nature and *context* [ND, 1994] of heritage. Such a methodology should ensure that authenticity does not act as an impediment to *evolution through time* [ND, 1994] of the cultural heritage.

²⁴ e.g. Papadopoulou A. (2019). An experiment for the city... With a lab and a game, [in:] P. Nikiforidis (Ed.), *PUBLIC SPACE +. Proceedings* (pp. 173–176). IANOS. (in Greek).

In conclusion, the objective of this research is to initiate a discourse on the management of a significant proportion of private buildings that still retain specific characteristics of authenticity yet are often overlooked as an important component of the Greek postwar urban landscape. It is anticipated that the *polykatoikia* will soon be recognized as the next significant heritage element of the Greek city. These buildings, irrespective of the S, M, L, XL scale they form or are part of, possess historical importance, distinct identity, and special features that deserve identification, highlighting, and, in selected cases, conservation, while simultaneously not holding back the development in the living historical core of a multi-stratified historical city like Thessaloniki.

The “*persistent negative or indifferent perception*”²⁵ that the public still expresses seems to gradually reverse by experts who raise awareness for the *polykatoikia* and its aspects according to the Nara and latest documents. Recent studies of scholars indicate an increase in the recognition of the values of the Athenian *polykatoikia*. However, it is Thessaloniki that has the *Historical Site* tool to support the *polykatoikia* as Greek postwar *cultural heritage*.

²⁵ Fixler D. (2017, May 30). Renewing Modernism. *David Fixler Architecture Planning Preservation*. <https://davidfixler.com/blog/2017/5/30/renewing-modernism>

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