

# IN SUPPORT OF JOINT ACTION: METHODS FOR THE EFFECTIVE COOPERATION OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES AND NON-CONSERVATION EXPERTS IN THE PROTECTION OF THE “MODERN” MONUMENTS OF THESSALONIKI

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**ABSTRACT:** The city of Thessaloniki, the second most populous in Greece, boasts a remarkable architectural heritage, in reflection of a unique, uninterrupted history of nearly 24 centuries. A most significant segment of this legacy are the city’s 19th and 20th-century historic buildings, which are nowadays referred to as “modern” monuments. Under the Greek Constitution, their protection is an obligation of the State, and at the same time, a right of every citizen. Hence, parallel to the relative actions of the responsible state body, one notes a growing number of initiatives by non-specialist individuals, which aim to strengthen protection. So far, their impact has been minimal, a result of poor communication and coordination with the responsible Service. Yet the prospect of a fruitful cooperation remains attainable and, on the present occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Faro Convention, it calls for a methodical pursuit. To promote this effort, the present paper initially discusses the actions to date of each side and then shapes an initial set of basic methods for a fruitful joint effort.

**KEY WORDS:** Cooperation, authorities, individuals, modern monuments, Thessaloniki

## Introduction

The second largest city in Greece, Thessaloniki boasts an uninterrupted history of nearly 24 centuries, reflected in an equally remarkable architectural heritage that dates from Hellenistic to modern times. A most vital segment of this legacy are the city's 19th and 20th-century historic buildings, which are nowadays called "modern" monuments. Under the Greek Constitution, their protection is an obligation of the State, and at the same time, a right of every citizen. In view of this provision, parallel to the action assumed by the responsible state body, in alignment with the respective laws, a growing number of initiatives by non-expert individuals, in further support of protection, is noted. Yet because of poor communication and coordination with the responsible Service, the hitherto impact of these initiatives has been minimal. Nonetheless, the prospect of an effective cooperation remains achievable and, on the present occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Faro Convention, it calls for a methodical pursuit.

To promote this effort, the present paper shapes a primary methodological framework for the fruitful cooperation of the two sides. Starting with a concise review of the contribution to date of each, it continues with a systematic analysis of basic courses of action for an effective joint effort. The material for this task was provided through bibliographic and archival research, and most importantly, from the author's unique, first-hand experience as director of the responsible state body.

## I. The action of the state body

The protection of the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki is, first and foremost, the responsibility of one of the peripheral services of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, namely the Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia<sup>1</sup>. Founded in 1979, in Thessaloniki, and currently staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of roughly 30 employees, the latter is called to secure the preservation and enhancement of the city's post-1830 architectural heritage, under the clauses of Law 4858/2021, the basic legal instrument of the Ministry of Culture.

To achieve this goal, the Service undertakes, daily, work in multiple directions, which comprise<sup>2</sup>:

- the identification and documentation of non-listed architectural works of the 19th and 20th centuries, as a basis for their official designation, by the Ministry of Culture, as "modern" monuments;
- the assessment and approval of applications for changes of use, interventions, and settlement of works conducted without a building permit in the approximately 300 already listed buildings and their immediate surroundings, together with the supervision of the respective works, when undertaken by third parties;

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<sup>1</sup> As prescribed by Presidential Decree 4/19-01-2018, "Organismos Ypourgeiou Politismou kai Athlismou" (Structure of the Ministry of Culture and Sports), Government Gazette 7/v. A/22-01-2018, art. 46 (par. 2).

<sup>2</sup> Under Presidential Decree 4/19-01-2018, art. 46 (par. 4), in conjunction with Law 4858/2021, "Kyrosi Kodika nomothesias gia tin prostasia ton Archaïotiton kai en genei tis Politistikis Klironomias" (Ratification of Codex for the protection of the Antiquities and Cultural Heritage on the whole), Government Gazette 220/v. A/19-11-2021, arts. 6, 10, 11.

- the monitoring of the state of preservation of the existing listed buildings and the outlining of recommendations for their protection to the respective owners, with special emphasis on derelict structures;
- the appraisal of urban planning proposals in the vicinity of the already listed buildings;
- the drafting, realization, and supervision of conservation projects for existing listed buildings that are property of the Ministry of Culture.

## **II. The action of non-specialist individuals**

Parallel to the above work, and on the grounds of the aforementioned clauses of the Greek Constitution<sup>3</sup>, individuals with no special knowledge of architectural conservation theory and practice, but with a solid interest in the preservation of cultural heritage or more widely the enhancement of the built environment, undertake initiatives to strengthen the protection of Thessaloniki's "modern" monuments. Acting either independently or in groupings, their number has significantly increased over the past decade, a result, primarily, of the wide circulation of pictures and the facilitation of gatherings through the social media.

The initiatives of the non-expert contributors include:

- bringing to the attention of the state body non-listed buildings that they consider worthy of official acknowledgement as "modern" monuments, in most cases in conjunction with related documentary material;
- notifying the state body of completed interventions on already listed buildings and their surroundings that they deem incompatible with their special character, mainly by forwarding illustrative pictures.

The above actions, though supportive of the work of the responsible Service, have not produced, up to this point, a substantial impact. In absence of communication and coordination with the state body, the listing proposals are all too often generated by solely personal aesthetic judgements and frequently grounded on a superficial evaluation of the related documentation. Hence, they end up being disregarded or even rejected in the very early stages of their evaluation (Fig. 1). On the other hand, the reported interventions regularly reflect a very focused - if not biased - view of the completed incompatible works on the respective monuments and their surroundings. Consequently, they fail to contribute effectively to their overall protection (Fig. 2). Evidently regrettable, this outcome does not rule out, however, the prospect of a fruitful cooperation.

## **III. Methods for effective joint action**

Twenty years ago, the Faro Convention set a platform for the promotion of cultural heritage

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<sup>3</sup> Constitution of Greece (Government Gazette 111/v. A/09-06-1975), art. 24 (par. 1).

protection on a “*people-centered*” basis<sup>4</sup>. This prospect, along with the Convention itself, remain largely unknown in the Greek conservation context. Yet certain of the clauses of this pioneering document present particular interest in relation to the previously discussed issues in Thessaloniki, namely its call on the State parties to “*respect and encourage voluntary initiatives which complement the roles of public authorities*”, and at the same time, to “*develop innovative ways for public authorities to co-operate with other actors*”<sup>5</sup>.



Fig. 1 The Papafi Stables, in the Kato Toumba district. Built through successive additions to an initial core from the early 1930s, the compound served as a storage and repair facility for the carriages used to collect Thessaloniki's refuse. A listing proposal by the local residents, in late 2024, was quickly rejected, having being grounded merely on the low height of the otherwise indifferent buildings and their vague dating to the post-1912 period. Source: <https://www.google.com/maps>, retrieved March 17, 2025

<sup>4</sup> Colomer, L. (2023). Exploring participatory heritage governance after the EU Faro Convention. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 13(4), p. 856. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-03-2021-0041>

<sup>5</sup> Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, Faro, 27-10-2005, art. 11 (paras. c, d).





Fig. 2 Picture of the listed main front (2000) of the building occupying the northeast corner of Aristotelous Square, as submitted in proof of incompatible interventions by a local association. Despite the multiplicity of inappropriate features on the prestigious façade, given the fact that it overlooks Thessaloniki's most celebrated public space, attention was drawn merely to a couple of small-scale mobile telephony antennas, located within the red frame. Source: Archive of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture/Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia

Cooperation is evidently a basic requirement if the voluntary initiatives are to prove truly helpful for the state body and genuinely rewarding for the non-expert contributors. In the case of the “modern” monuments of Thessaloniki, such a prospect can be initially sought in four major fields, with the related bibliography, both general<sup>6</sup> and focused<sup>7</sup>, indicating a set of basic methods for each.

### *Identification of buildings to be listed*

In the 46 years since its foundation, the Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia has secured the designation of approximately 300 buildings of Thessaloniki as “modern” monuments. This arduous effort started with the emblematic works of the 19th and 20th centuries (Fig. 3)<sup>8</sup>, and in later years, due to the continuous understaffing of the Service, never developed in conjunction with a systematic recording of the city’s “modern” architectural heritage. Hence, nowadays, listing tends to occur only when a notable structure is brought to the attention of the Service on the occasion of impending repair, renovation, or even worse, demolition (Fig. 4).

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<sup>6</sup> English Heritage. (2000). *Power of Place: The future of the historic environment*. Power of Place Office, (pp. 28-29); Sapu S. (2009). *Community participation in heritage conservation* [Technical Note]. The Getty Conservation Institute. [https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/teaching/cs\\_tn\\_community.pdf](https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/teaching/cs_tn_community.pdf); Spiridon P., Sandu I. (2015). Conservation of cultural heritage: from participation to collaboration. *European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*, 5(1), 43-52. <https://doi.org/10.3389/ejcmp.2023.v5iss1-article-4>; Kountouri E., Benissi C., Papageorgiou J. (2018). Management Plans: A Tool for Participative Decision-making. *Internet Archaeology*, 49. <https://doi.org/10.11141/ia.49.11>; Djabarouti J. (2024). Walk slowly, listen carefully, tread softly: enhancing participation in architectural conservation practice. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 30(3), 349-364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2294760>

<sup>7</sup> Colomer L. (2023). Exploring participatory heritage governance after the EU Faro Convention. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 13(4), 856-871. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-03-2021-0041>; Gravagnuolo A., Angrisano M., Bosone M., Buglione F., De Toro P., Fusco Girard L. (2024). Participatory evaluation of cultural heritage adaptive reuse interventions in the circular economy perspective: A case study of historic buildings in Salerno (Italy). *Journal of Urban Management*, 13, 107-139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jum.2023.12.002>

<sup>8</sup> See (indicatively): Ministerial Decision A/F31/23549/3080/16-06-1977, “Peri charaktirismou astikon oikion tis Thessalonikis os oikimaton chrizonton eidikis Kratikis prostasias” (Regarding the designation of urban residences of Thessaloniki as dwellings in need of special State protection), Government Gazette 718/v. B/30-07-1977.





Fig. 3 The building of the School for the Blind, on 32, Vas. Olgas Avenue. Built in 1879, it initially served as a mansion. An outstanding work of eclectic architecture, it was one of the very first buildings of Thessaloniki to be registered as a “modern” monument (1980) after the foundation of the Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia. Photo: Author



Fig. 4 The Vosporian Megaron on 8, Aristotelous Street. An early example of the buildings erected along Thessaloniki's principal civic axis, with pre-arranged facades (1922), it was listed in 2021, in an attempt to protect its notable internal layout and decoration from a renovation aiming to clear the interior for the accommodation of a luxury hotel. Photo: Author

To secure a much-needed wider picture of Thessaloniki's non-listed architectural heritage, the Service could invite non-specialist individuals to give notice of non-designated buildings that they believe should be considered for listing. Such a contribution could be most conveniently attained through a digital platform, linked to the Service's page on the website of the Ministry of Culture. From there on, in order to facilitate evaluation, the platform could call for the registration of basic information, such as location, date of construction, and building type, in conjunction with the upload of pictures, both old and present.

Considering that the designation of a building as a "modern" monument, under the clauses of Law 4858/2021, is possible only if the architectural work in question displays multiple values<sup>9</sup>, which non-experts are usually unacquainted with and certainly not in a position to evaluate, a crucial prerequisite for a positive outcome from such an invitation would be the fostering of a basic understanding of the procedures and requirements of listing among the non-specialists. To this end, the Service could tend to the presentation of successful listing initiatives, either in exhibitions and lectures in its multi-purpose cultural venue ("Islahane") or through indicative, concise entries in its digital newsletter, its pages on social media, and the periodical printed reviews of its work (Fig. 5)<sup>10</sup>.



Fig. 5 Extract from the printed review of the work of the Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia between 2000 - 2001, featuring a typical entry on the listing of the historic building on Dimokratias Square and 20, Moskov Steet. Enriched with plans and pictures, it sets an example that remains to be followed, since no such review has been published since 2007. Source: Kambouri, E. (Ed.). (2002). pp. 14-15

<sup>9</sup> Law 4858/2021, art. 6 (par. 1).

<sup>10</sup> Such reviews were published in 2002 and 2006-2007, with a section comprising entirely similar entries. See: E. Kambouri (Ed.). (2002). *Apospasmata apo to ergo tis 4is Eforeias Neoteron Mnimeion, 2000 - 2001* (Extracts from the work of the 4th Ephorate of Modern Monuments, 2000 - 2001). Hellenic Ministry of Culture, pp. 13-45; E. Kambouri (Ed.). (2006-2007). *Apospasmata apo to ergo tis Eforeias Neoteron Mnimeion Kentriks Makedonias, 2002 - 2003* (Extracts from the work of the Ephorate of Modern Monuments of Central Macedonia, 2002 - 2003). Hellenic Ministry of Culture, pp. 15-44. Yet to this day, no similar publication has followed.



*Documentation of buildings to be listed*

In order for a listing proposal to be examined by the highest consultative body of the Ministry of Culture, namely the Central Council for Modern Monuments, the Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia needs to compile an analytical documentation report<sup>11</sup>. The latter ought to address, in an exhaustive manner, all the parameters that account for the cultural significance of the respective building, chief among them historical development and architectural, urban, social, and technical importance. The discussion of these parameters normally follows a review of available documentary material in related archives and bibliographic sources, along with on-site examination. Yet all too often, such discussions ignore invaluable information available from the people who once lived or worked in the specific building, resided nearby or simply passed by (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 Interior view of one of the buildings of the Allatini Ceramic Factory, at the east end of Thessaloniki. Built in 1939, the factory was listed in 2006, after extensive bibliographic and archival research, coupled with on-site examination. Yet given the fact that, as in the case of this particular building, its interiors largely survived bare, the documentation process could have benefited significantly from the memories of the people who had worked in the factory till its closure in the 1990s. Photo: Author

<sup>11</sup> As prescribed by Presidential Decree 4/19-01-2018, art. 46 (par. 4a).

To access this vital domain of living memory and local knowledge, the Service could initially announce its engagement in the documentation of a selected structure, through its page on the website of the Ministry of Culture, its social media pages, and its digital newsletter, in conjunction with an open call for assistance in the gathering of related documents. Such assistance could be provided through a separate platform, where the eventual contributors will be able to upload photographs or other printed material, in addition to registering testimonies and views on the importance of the respective building. Moreover, the platform could facilitate potentially enlightening dialogue with the specialized personnel of the Service, either individually or in groups.

### *Monitoring of listed buildings*

The approximately 300 “modern” monuments of Thessaloniki face a wide array of threats. The ones in use and sound state of preservation are constantly exposed to interventions intended to facilitate their present function, yet with a negative impact on their aesthetic and technical integrity. For instance, ornate facades are all too often covered with highly disruptive banners, signs, and mechanical equipment, or redecorated in inappropriate colours (Fig. 7), while their lower part is distorted by unsightly conglomerations of restaurant and coffee shop furniture, particularly tables, chairs, and umbrellas (Fig. 8). On the other hand, derelict buildings are frequently subjected to vandalism, in addition to suffering material losses simply because of their exposure to the elements, a most alarming case when they face busy streets.



Fig. 7 Exterior view of the listed building on the intersection of Syggrou and Valaoritou Streets. Erected in 1926, in the heart of the historic centre of Thessaloniki, it features ornate facades, which have nonetheless been covered with highly disruptive signs and air-conditioning units, in addition to being painted in an unsightly mixture of colours, including total black. Photo: Author





Fig. 8 Exterior view of the listed building on the intersection of Kapodistriou and Valaoritou Streets. Yet another typical example of mid-war construction activity in the historic centre of Thessaloniki, its lower zone can hardly be discerned, as a result of the extensive deployment of restaurant furniture on the ground floor. Photo: Author

The prompt recording of these forms of damage, so that appropriate remedial action may be taken without delay, requires vigilant monitoring<sup>12</sup>, which the heavily understaffed Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia cannot guarantee. Nonetheless, the Service can secure substantial assistance in this vital task from the individuals living in or close to the listed buildings, as well as from those simply passing by. To this end, a special platform on the Service's page on the website of the Ministry of Culture could allow the above parties to report inappropriate interventions or acts of vandalism and physical losses, in conjunction with indicative photographs. Considering, however, that non-experts normally lack experience in the complete recording of damage, a crucial parameter for a truly positive outcome from their contribution would be the regular hosting of special workshops by the Service, either online or in-person, with the aim of providing an initial acquaintance with the full array of threats posed to the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki and their optimum non-professional recording.

*Assessment of urban planning proposals and conservation projects for listed buildings*

When an urban planning proposal or conservation project is brought before the Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia, the latter is required, under the clauses of Law 4858/2021, to conduct a fully documented evaluation and, after consulting the Local Council of Monuments of Central Macedonia, decide the respective application. Alternatively, in cases of major urban or conservation schemes, consultation is sought from the Central Council of Modern Monuments and is followed by a decision of the Director General of Restoration, Museums, and Technical Works<sup>13</sup>.

In either case, individuals with an interest in a specific project have the right to set forth their views for consideration during the evaluation meeting of the respective council<sup>14</sup>. Yet this one-time communication, frequently conducted under the pressure of time, falls far short of allowing an optimum contribution to the assessment of the discussed scheme. Such a contribution would require a much wider consultation with the non-expert sector; a consultation that will allow the special knowledge, living memories, and overall views of the latter, particularly in cases of monuments of high social value, to be methodically recorded and fed back into the urban

<sup>12</sup> Monitoring is already prescribed by Law 4858/2021 (art. 4, par. 2), at a minimum of every three years.

<sup>13</sup> As prescribed by Law 4858/2021, arts. 10 (par. 4), 49 (par. 2), 50 (par. 5), in conjunction with Ministerial Decision 136505/3066/15-03-2020, "Metavivasi armodiotiton ton Proistamenon Genikon Diefthyneon..." (Transfer of responsibilities of the Directors of General Directorates...), Government Gazette 912/v. B/17-03-2020, art. 4, as amended by Ministerial Decision 278212/14-06-2022, Government Gazette 3013/v. B/16-06-2022.

<sup>14</sup> Under Law 4858/2021, art. 52 (par. 6), in conjunction with Ministerial Decision 567515/2284/14-10-2020, "Organosi kai Leitourgia ton Symvoulion tou n. 3028/2002 sto Ypourgeio Politismou kai Athlitismou" (Organization and Operation of the Councils of Law 3028/2002 at the Ministry of Culture and Sports), Government Gazette 4612/v. B/19-10-2020, art. 2 (par. 7).



planning and conservation projects, before their determination (Fig. 9)<sup>15</sup>.



Fig. 9 Interior view of the Modiano Market, on 24, Ermou Street. One of the principal and most frequented commercial hubs of Thessaloniki, it was listed in 1995, yet its restoration in 2022 transformed it from a busy marketplace into a vividly silent luxury hall. Consultation with the public would have allowed a better appreciation of the true character of the historic food market, to the benefit of the respective project. Photo: Author

An initial step in this crucial endeavour would be the advertisement of the schemes and the respective plans and other particulars on the Service's webpage, social media pages, and digital newsletter, in combination with the option of direct inspection at its premises. Associated insights, know-how and observations could then be recorded, either in writing, following the inspection, or through a special digital platform, connected with the webpage. Moreover, additional - and probably even more enlightening - information could be collected in the course of specially organised discussions between the Service's staff and the concerned individuals, at its multi-purpose cultural venue, supplemented with on-site visits to the monuments involved.

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<sup>15</sup> Such a consultation is currently not required by Law 4858/2021, the basic legal instrument for the protection of monuments in Greece. In the wider Greek context, consultation is prescribed in two major cases: the government bills that are introduced to Parliament, and the regulatory decisions and decisions on issues of general interest that are made by the local authorities. See: Law 4622/2019, "Epiteliko Kratos: organosi, leitourgia kai diafaneia tis Kyvernisis, ton kyvernitikon organon kai tis kentrikis dimosias dioikisis" (Executive State: organization, function, and transparency of the Government, the state authorities, and the central public administration), Government Gazette 133/v. A/07-08-2019, art. 61, and Law 3463/2006, "Kyrosi tou Kodika Dimon kai Koinotiton" (Ratification of the Codex of the Local Authorities), Government Gazette 114/v. A/08-06-2006, arts. 79 (par. 2), 214 (par. 2), respectively.

## Conclusions

However pioneering in the wider European context, the 20-year-old Faro Convention, and along with it the concept of people-centered built heritage preservation, remain literally alien to the Greek conservation agenda. Nonetheless, the preceding analysis shows that, in the course of the everyday work of the Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia, there is ample space for a fruitful joint effort with the non-expert individuals who share a concern for the protection of the “modern” monuments of Thessaloniki. The four basic fields and separate methods of coordinated action that were indicated above will secure substantial assistance to the work of the understaffed state body, and at the same time, will foster greater public awareness and social cohesion, in both cases to the utmost benefit of the understanding, preservation, and enhancement of the cultural significance of the city’s “modern” monuments.

Most certainly, apart from the primary methodological framework presented in this paper, such a prospect will also require appropriate training of the Service’s staff on issues of communication, coordination, and codification of non-specialist involvement, ideally in conjunction with a separate building, which will function as a meeting point and cooperation hub with the public (Fig. 10). These fascinating developments may appear as pipe dreams in contemporary Thessaloniki, but their pursuit sets a most promising challenge, particularly for the author, as the Service’s newly appointed director. This challenge is certainly worth embracing, given the potential for the better conservation of the city’s “modern” architectural heritage, for the benefit of all.



Fig. 10 The derelict building on 11, Gorgous Street. A typical traditional house in the Ano Poli district of Thessaloniki, it was listed in 1979 and was recently destroyed by fire. Once restored, under the Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia, it could serve as an ideal meeting and cooperation hub of the Service’s staff with the public, given its moderate size, picturesque setting, and convenient location next to an opening in the east Byzantine walls. Photo: Author

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