

ATHENS

Studio Sergison
Autumn Semester 2025

Athens



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Aerial view of Athens



Introduction

This semester the studio will work in Athens, Greece and address normative building programmes.

We have chosen six project sites in the centre of the city which in recent times has witnessed a process of urban transformation. This is in no small part due to the sharp increase in visitors, which has led to entire buildings being converted into short-term rentals. The rise of platforms like Airbnb is making it increasingly harder for Athenians to secure affordable housing and, as locals are priced out of the housing market, central neighborhoods are losing their character.

The sites selected are similar in character and quality. While we focus on the development of strong concepts for apartments, it is necessary to consider other programmes particularly, at ground level. It is important to consider the urban character of the projects and the form of construction to be employed in their making.

We will explore the potential of one of the most common building types in Athens, the polykatoikia -- a multi-housing apartment block whose name derives from poly, meaning many, and katoikia, meaning residence -- to provide low-cost, sustainable housing solutions.

View across the urbanised Attica basin towards
Mount Penteli to the north of Athens.
Photo: Michalis Langenfass

In previous semesters we studied housing and considered its ability to support contemporary forms of urban development. This semester we are interested in questioning what a 'normal' housing might be in Athens and will address this in terms of the image and plan organisation of buildings.

We invite you to consider the history of the polykatoikia as 'normal' housing in this context and how it can be used as a well-defined urban insertion by studying precedents and surveying existing examples of polykatoikies. The lessons you'll learn will help you develop initial ideas that tests how a building can add to a site and neighbourhood.

The positioning of the building should be carefully considered by testing numerous possibilities, as well as its impact on the immediate context and wider urban fabric. You must also study the appropriate form of construction to be adopted for this building type, as well as its internal organisation, the layout of apartments, and the character and quality of shared amenities.

We invite you to consider the following questions in the course of the semester:

- How do we find appropriate and sustainable approaches to construction?
- How can architecture be reconciled with climate change?
- How can communities be densified while maintaining high standards of architectural and urban quality?
- How can we preserve and transform the existing built environment?
- What can we learn from local building practices?
- What can we learn from the notion of incompleteness, a condition that is particularly significant in Athens?

Street view, Athens

overleaf
Bird's eye view of Athens
Photo: Michalis Langenfass





Mutually Generative: Athens and *Polykatoikia*
Alcestis P. Rodi
in Richard Woditsch (ed.), The public private house. Modern Athens and
its Polykatoikia. Zurich: Park Books, 2018

1833: The First Plan of Athens-
1933: “The Functional City” in Athens

CIAM IV, held in Athens in 1933 on the subject of “*Die funktionelle Stadt*” (The Functional City), was an opportunity for Greek architecture and urban planning to present itself alongside international models and standards. Greek Modernist architecture received positive appraisals, such as Le Corbusier’s phrase “*C’est très beau!*” written on the wall of the Blue Polykatoikia designed by Kyriakos Panayiotakos, a then-twenty-eight-year-old architect. At the same time city planning officials produced their own form of self-criticism, realizing malfunctions and admitting lack of vision.

“We have in mind a city that is not a city,” wrote the Inspector of Public Works Anargyros Dimitrakopoulos, referring to then-contemporary Athens right after the CIAM IV Conference. Dimitrakopoulos actually described a disorderly developing capital, “sprawling towards an indefinite end, with scattered void spaces within,” where neoclassical “*Stadtvillen*” (town houses), rented tenements, and Modernist apartment buildings for the affluent bourgeoisie as well as the needy refugees from Asia Minor coexisted with cheap faceless buildings and self-built shacks. That is what he appropriately described as a “City-Village” a few years later.

His description of interwar Athens definitely did not correspond to any plan, including the first one by Stamatios Kleanthes and Eduard Schaubert, the appointed government architects who one hundred years earlier had envisioned it as a modern capital. Athens in 1833 was merely a sizeable village. Ninety per cent of its building stock had been destroyed during the Greek War of Independence. Most Athenians “were living either in caves or in hovels, earthen or made with stones simply put one on top of the other.” The plan by Kleanthes and Schaubert introduced strong spatial and visual arrangements with the aim of enhancing the landscape and ancient relics in order to convey a sense of meaning. The plan’s written *Erläuterung* (explanation) described a city for a population of forty thousand, living in extended families in about four thousand houses that were supposed to be mostly freestanding structures, up to two stories in height, with a front yard and/or a walled garden, in city blocks of various shapes containing ten to fifteen properties each.

However, landowners and speculators cared neither for form nor for meaning and strongly rejected what they considered a wasteful and unprofitable design. Royal architect and confidant Leo von Klenze was asked to revise the plan according to both spatial and political criteria. His version provided for a city of higher density, with narrow streets, taller buildings, and continuous building facades: “instead of a city open to evolution, Klenze composed a small monolithic settlement.” Yet landlords’ interests prevailed over the provisions of the Kleanthes and Schaubert plan, which led to its authors’ resignations.

This was the first incident in what became the standard Greek planning practice to date: the open revocation or the silent non-implementation of even approved plans, codes, and decrees. The continuous battle between top-down planning and bottom-up building had begun. The city was trapped between the “European” aspirations of its modern intellectuals and the “vulgar” reality of a nation whose integration was badly delayed during its most critical stages.

Popular pressure for city expansion and unauthorized *laissez-faire*

development would shape Athens, largely before official policies and master plans were formulated. Subsequent legislation recurrently validated these expansions as “suburbs.” Politicians who sought to secure social stability and their own careers, and citizens confronted with urgent housing needs or involved in speculative plans engaged in an overall consensus that has haunted the Athenian cityscape ever since and has led to a severe environmental impact.

The surroundings of the Acropolis were not saved from *authaireta*, the “random and unauthorized structures subject to individual caprice,” that defied legal and institutional requirements and prohibitions. Overnight, a mason from the island of Anafi, pretending that he was going to build a chapel, collected construction materials and built, with the help of a fellow-islander carpenter, a little house where he took up residency. Shortly afterwards, many others doggedly followed them in taking advantage of an early law that prohibited the demolition of any house that was already covered by a roof. Thus, Anafiotika, an informal settlement, was not only created, but was also maintained despite archeologists’ recurrent petitions. Later on populist intellectuals praised the authenticity of its vernacular architecture incognizant of the dominant neoclassical models of the period and considered it an expression of a popular reaction to the bureaucracy of an incompetent authority. Anafiotika is now an area listed for historic preservation!

Meanwhile the city surrounding the Acropolis was increasing in size and density. The individual houses of the Kleanthes-Schaubert plan had been replaced by two- or three-family houses, each residence featuring an individual entrance for reasons of etiquette, privacy, and independence. Among them, an early precursory example of a multi-apartment building with shared entrances and staircases was the Skouzé Polykatoikia from 1841, designed by Stamatios Kleanthes. In its sharing of common spaces, it remained unique until the dawn of the twentieth century.

The Urban Chrysalis

According to Emmanuel Roidis, a writer and resident of the Skouzé Polykatoikia, the last quarter of the nineteenth century was a period during which Athens and Greece were transformed “from a caterpillar to a chrysalis.” Still, Athens was not yet a butterfly, that is, a consummate modern European city, and its full transformation remained undetermined.

In 1879, Athens covered an area of about four square kilometers, almost one-fifth of that of Berlin, with comparable population densities of 15,843 and 15,405 residents per square kilometer, respectively. Three decades later, Athens’ population had nearly tripled, from 90,295 in 1879 to 250,010 in 1907, and its corresponding area increased sixfold, from 320.3 hectares in 1879 to 1,918.3 hectares in 1907. The decrease in density gives proof of government priorities to secure votes over land economy. New districts were developed mostly along infrastructure arteries, important routes, and around pre-existing settlements. They featured undefined limits and sporadic buildings. While the city core was already saturated, an abundance of empty lots could be found in expansion areas.

For those who could not afford to rent a tenement or purchase a piece of land in the newly urbanized areas, the only alternative was a place in an informal

settlement. The state idly watched this form of “do-it-yourself” urbanism unfold. Due to the lack of public funds, it became an unofficial substitute for social housing.

From Speculative Fabrics to a “Miracle Plan”

The aspirations of the city's early master plan were replaced by small-scale, fragmented, and desultory additions. It was again a matter of weak planning, limited implementation, and private interests taking hold over public benefit. This combination led to a vicious cycle. Public space could only be acquired through direct purchase or expropriation, both of which were unpopular. Most subsequent proposals were unsophisticated in urban terms and ignorant or unaware of technological achievements, environmental issues, and social tensions. Pavlos Vakas proposed the transformation of Athens into a “European Metropolis” on the basis of his discovery that the urban form of Athens was developing following an arcane spatial pattern, a “happy coincidence” for the perfect octagon as recommended by Vitruvius!

In contrast to individual audacity, the administration “recoils at the sight of the last voter.” In 1908 Ludwig Hoffmann, Berlin's *Stadtbaurat* (director of urban planning and construction), was asked to design a new plan for Athens in a serious effort by Mayor Spyros Merkouris to reorganize and urbanize Athens in an integrated way by commissioning urban experts. Hoffmann reckoned the invitation as a “divine order” and as an “opportunity to help solve the remnants of ancient art from disgusting adjoining.” His “Beautification Plan” was completed in 1910 in the “Wilhelmian Style.” With no indication on how to apply these changes in situ and with the Balkan Wars approaching, it remained of no use.

Merkouris' ambitions were revived following the victorious Balkan Wars. In 1914 he entrusted the Athens Plan to a prominent figure of town planning, the landscape architect Thomas Mawson. Mawson found Athens “one of the most attractive towns in the Levant,” but was aware that it was spreading piecemeal in a way that would lead to chaos. Strongly influenced by the City Beautiful movement and supporter of the notion of planning as “civic art,” Mawson imagined an ideal city imposed on the challenging Athenian urban landscape. He envisaged a plan with formal discipline and order addressing a social and political program. Its unity, he argued, would make the “noblest” architecture look commonplace. Its final version was hailed as a “Miracle Plan” and, at the same time, was criticized as difficult to apply. When the king was exiled, his scheme had no further support. However, the high publicity of the “Miracle Plan” stimulated the public imagination. The elementary “*gentillesse*” of the administration did not allow the discouragement of submissions either. Among several proposals, Aristides Balanos (1917) focused on the expansion of Athens as a garden city. Stylianos Leloudas (1918), immediately after the Mawson report was made public, was the first to consider the urban problem and difficulties of Athens in the context of its region, Attica, and its economical and legislative issues. Besides architects and engineers, café customers were designing their own improvisations of the city on the marble tops of tables. The plan of Athens could no longer be seen as the comprehensive work of one expert.

By the end of the 1920s, following the influx of ethnic Greek refugees from Asia Minor, artistic approaches and big gestures had succumbed to individual

interests indifferent to the common good.

The Most Appropriate Building Type

Multifamily residential buildings with three stories had appeared in Athens in the late nineteenth century. Individual entrances and staircases for each unit, despite the model introduced half a century earlier at the Skouzé Polykatoikia, wasted a large part of their facade and floor area. This changed soon after 1900, with the development of a few bulky luxurious apartment buildings designed by Ernst Ziller, the architect of the Athenian élite, and his disciples. Their designs were intended as short-term residences for foreigners, with communal entrances, staircases, and elevators. Kostas Biris acknowledges beneficial architectural innovations in their layout and, also, their aesthetic appeal. He regrets, however, the lack of interrelations between the new apartments and the open space, as previously offered by houses with gardens and yards. Seeking higher efficiency and financial returns on rentable space, building footprints were continuously expanding while courtyards and light wells were diminishing, causing “odor, insalubrity, and a depressing ambiance.”

In an insightful article from 1912, Emmanuel Kriezis urgently called for the construction of apartment buildings as the most appropriate building type for the development of Athens. Although he considered the city plan as the “foundation stone of all subsequent creations on it,” he put emphasis on the role of Greek architects and encouraged them to rigorously study the new type instead of “looking down” on it as an unworthy occupation. He warned that their indifference to or despising of the new building type was equal to handing over their design responsibilities to less capable players. In the line of Kriezis, Kyprianos Biris, the architect of the high-density, four-story Logothetopoulos Polykatoikia (1930), a building that covers an entire urban block, continually criticized the capital's low-quality urban environment created by small-scale individual dwellings and promoted the *polykatoikia* as the most appropriate building type for the modernization of Athens.

Warnings and recommendations were not heard. An arson in an incomplete building led its co-owners, an architect and an engineer, to continue its construction into the seven-floor Giannaros Polykatoikia (1919-27). For the first time they employed François Hennebique's reinforced-concrete construction system in a (mostly) residential building. This debut of multistory construction in Greece was accompanied by protests, on the grounds of transgressing the average building heights of the townscape and blocking the view of the Acropolis. Eventually, a decree restricting the height of buildings was passed in 1919. The Greek polykatoikia type lost its first battle with verticality, but in the decades to follow it won the war on horizontality.

On the urban level, Ernest Hébrard (1920), in his presidential speech on the occasion of the first meeting of the new Supreme State Technical Board, argued for city expansion and construction in new areas and against the compactness of the existing city. He envisioned an “ideal and magnificent” plan, and as weird as it may sound, he did not consider it an urgent matter since it was not feasible to apply it under the given circumstances. Political instability would not allow the implementation of his ideas or those of his successors in the Supreme State

Technical Board. The opportunity to even moderately reform Athens in a critical period of development was lost.

Polykatoikia, Generated by Athens

The destruction of Flanders triggered Le Corbusier's Maison Dom-ino (1914), an architectural type, not a building type, in the form of a structure made of reinforced concrete in the Hennebique system that could be reproduced en masse. Another cataclysm, the conclusion of the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-22, eventually led to the demonstration of the ability of the *polykatoikia* building type to accommodate both residential and other building programs.

The Asia Minor Catastrophe flooded Greece with a displaced population of 1,069,957 ethnic Greeks, mostly women, children, and elderly men. Of these, 350,000 settled in Athens, which had a population of just 453,042 at the time. "Tin(plate) cities" (*tenekedoupoleis*) and tent villages of the "lowest level of civilized living" emerged in urban voids, even in the immediate vicinity of ancient monuments. When appropriate funds were secured a year later, the Committee of Refugee Rehabilitation set out to build refugee settlements of varied types (apartment buildings, one- or two-story twin houses and row houses, small detached houses, and single family houses for affluent refugees) all over Greece. In Athens, they were situated in open spaces in the city, the periphery, or close to manufacturing areas, and formed distinct neighborhoods within and surrounding the city. In parallel, illegal subdivision of agricultural land continued to facilitate the creation of informal settlements beside the planned ones.

The *polykatoikia* type was not immediately adopted for refugee housing. First, an appropriate legal framework had to be formulated - the Law on Horizontal Property- for cohousing in individually owned units within a single building. This happened in 1929, with a Belgian law from 1924 as its template. It was initially applied to refugee apartment buildings and then also to the commercial *polykatoikia*. Building heights in Athens had increased since 1922. The Erker Law was introduced in 1923 following the example of Berlin's building regulations, and intended for the improvement of the traditional Mediterranean balcony, but this was not immediately taken advantage of in architectural designs.

Following the CIAM debate on "*Die Wohnung für das Existenz-minimum*" (The Dwelling for Minimal Existence) in Frankfurt-am-Main, the Athenian *polykatoikia* would jump the hurdle by use of a building code that prescribed minimum spatial standards, floor heights, the position of the buildings in the lot, light wells, openings, projections, distance from adjoining properties, etc. Through the building code and the division of lots, Athens itself gave birth to the *polykatoikia*.

These legislative, technological, and socioeconomic changes actually generated the middle- and upper-middle-class commercial *polykatoikia* in Athens, hotel buildings in Thessaloniki, and the refugee *polykatoikia* in both cities.

A très beau Modernism:
Zeilenbau and Interwar *Polykatoikia*

The fourth CIAM of 1933 took place on board of a Greek-owned steamship and

at the Athens Polytechnic. A group of young Greek architects educated at the Ecole Spéciale in Paris and various German universities hosted the avant-garde architectural and planning elite of the time in order to discuss the *Zeilenbau*, the linear slab housing of Modernist architecture. Several plans for cities in Europe and the Americas were presented to the audience in Athens, producing the basis of the Athens Charter.

The modern urban *polykatoikia* was already creating spots in the urban fabric and appealed to bourgeois and intellectual Athenians, who had the means of settling in such fine examples. Some of them were also visited and praised by the CIAM participants, such as the Blue Polykatoikia (1932-33)—named after the bold ultramarine blue color of its facade—designed down to the smallest detail by Kyriakos Panayiotakos, as well as the Michaelides Bros Polykatoikia (1933-34) by Polyvios Michaelides and Thucydides Valentis. With its construction about to start at the time, the Refugee Apartment Houses, a then-suburban colony on Alexandras Avenue (1933-36), a *Zeilenbau* complex designed by architect Kimon Laskaris and civil engineer Dimitris Kyriakou, became a landmark of Modernist architecture in Greece.

Concurrently with praxis, theory was developed. Stamo Papadakis, while in correspondence with Sigfried Giedion for the organization of CIAM IV, published an article on the land economy of Athens. Induced by the development of the quasi-garden-city suburb of New Alexandria (1920), he attacked low-density detached dwelling types as anti-urban *par excellence*. He advocated apartment buildings on large city blocks, and offered a designed example of a *colonie urbaine*, a U-shaped scheme following the CIAM formulas. Maintaining that typical Athenian city blocks of sixty by forty meters did not allow for rational urban planning, he proposed the unification of four of them and the roads in between into a large, single block. The U-shape left one side of the new mega-block open for ventilation of the central space and the apartments. Ioannis Despotopoulos further argued that private initiatives coming from the "contemporary individualistic class" were bringing Athens to the edge of chaos.

However, the Modernist *polykatoikia* advocacy did not go unanswered. Challenging the notion that it was the ideal space for living in terms of technical, economic, or aesthetic points of view, Semni Papaspyridi-Karouzou, an archaeologist, unleashed his contempt for high-density collective housing, describing it as "homes without fireplaces (and the smell of cooked food)" and warning of unfavorable effects for human relations and social life.

Cultural opposition to this form of modernization had already been expressed by Klaus Vrieslander and Julio Kaimi (1934), who pointed to the Rodakis House, self-built in 1880 on the island of Aegina as a model of "total architecture": an architectural *Gesamtkunstwerk* expanding also to the landscape, considered antithetical to the "poverty of the modern apartment house of Athens," the "false fantasies of the mechanized apartments" that are "spiritually poorer than the poorest Bedouin of the desert." The two artists had probably visited the Rodakis House on the initiative of Dimitris Pikionis. Pikionis, born the same year as Le Corbusier, had just switched from Modernism towards a regionalist direction. His *polykatoikia* in Heyden Street (1936), in collaboration with Nikolaos Mitsakis, was Modernist in plan, but applied regionalist and traditionalist elements along its facades.

By 1941, multistory buildings had dotted the central affluent neighborhoods

of Athens, 84 percent belonging to a single owner, 85 percent being residential, and with an average unit area as large as 170 square meters. Nearly 59 percent of the interwar *polykatoikia* buildings were designed by architects, a share that hasn't been exceeded since.

External Homogeneity— Internal Diversity

The ground for post-World War II urbanization had already been prepared in the preceding interwar period. A highly important factor was the introduction of the *antiparochi* (*quid pro quo*) system in 1932. This profit-based exchange arrangement between landowners, contractors, and apartment buyers required low initial capital and permitted adaptation to the existing urban and economic circumstances. In the first decade following its introduction, only 7 percent of apartment buildings were based on this system. At that time, the privately owned *polykatoikia*, aimed at middle- and upper-middle-class tenants, did not require *antiparochi*; however in the postwar period, it became widely relied-upon practice.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Athens developed at an accelerating pace. By 1971, Athenians accounted for 30 percent of the Greek population. It was becoming clear to entrepreneurs that construction was a profitable sector. The *polykatoikia* apartment units were a response to the requirements of the emerging urban middle classes. In comparison to the previous period, there was now an increasing provision of contemporary amenities, such as elevators and centralized services. However, apartments as well as individual rooms became less spacious, though still fully complying with Modernist standards. The restrictive provisions of the 1955 building code, and the tendency of speculative developers to conform to a similar building style started to create homogeneity among different *polykatoikies* throughout the urban fabric, with an emphasis on horizontality of the facades. The *polykatoikia* became the symbol of individual success, yet remained a dream for the less affluent working class. Less privileged households sought housing opportunities beyond the control of the authorities. Out of a total of 206,147 houses built illegally in Greece between 1945 and 1969, 137,602 were located in Athens. The city was turning into a formless mass expanding in all directions and intersected by infrastructure. Thessaloniki and other provincial cities soon followed the same path.

While the exteriors of the *polykatoikia* displayed homogeneity, the interiors gave the opposite impression. Nonresidential uses on the ground and first floors and home offices and clinics for freelance professional lawyers, engineers, and doctors within many units created a true sectional patchwork mostly unnoticed along *polykatoikia* facades. Diversity was further intensified by the households' individual features. Particular requirements, such as in-house work, number of children, cohabitation with grandparents, hiring of resident maids, etc., altered the architect's or civil engineer's initial layout, redistributing rooms among neighboring units. A "typical" floor plan does not exist in the *polykatoikia*. It is reduced to a voided cliché that pays homage to the Modernist movement's concept of repetitiveness and its European apartment building precedents. In the *polykatoikia*, it is type—the Corbusian Dom-ino—that presides over function, while the maxim of "form follows function" no longer applies. Monotony within the public realm, produced by the repetition of *polykatoikia* building elements, fully conceals interior diversity.

Specifics in Generics

Though of little international acclaim, postwar Greek architecture has been creative and was often pleasantly enhanced by local identity and regionalism. This was the case with Pikionis' Acropolis Surroundings Landscaping (1950-57) and Aris Konstantinidis' low-income housing colonies, particularly the one in Nea Philadelphia (1955-57) and Xenia Hotels (1958-66), all clearly indebted to Bauhaus precedents. The following generation, although marked by regionalism, gradually turned to international models seeking spatial effects and technical innovation. Commercial apartment buildings, designed by talented young architects, emerged as important works. Examples include Nicos Valsamakis' *polykatoikies* on 5 Semitelou Street (1951-53), Vasilissis Sofias Avenue, and Kifissias Avenue, with their refined plans and framed loggias; and Takis Zenetos' *polykatoikies* on Amalias Avenue (1959-60) and Herodou Attikou Street, where versions of the Modernist curtain wall are modified for application to residential buildings.

Given the small dimensions of lots and scarcity of initial capital, large apartment buildings were an exception. One of them was Chara (Joy) (1959-61), occupying an entire city block. Varied apartment types, floor layouts, and building mass; and a communal atrium space with a reflecting pool in the center of the blocks instead of the *akalyptos*, the leftover spaces of conventional *polykatoikies*, were important deviations from the average *polykatoikia* and the homogeneity of the built fabric.

Another large and innovative scheme, though less complex in terms of its program, was the Asyrmatos Workers' Polykatoikia (1967), designed by Elli Vassilikioti, skillfully sited on the sloping terrain, resembling a curved Unité d'Habitation, with a communal entrance portico halfway up the building.

Polykatoikia, Generator of Athens

From the military junta years (1967-74) onwards, the urban landscape of Athens gradually emerged as the overlapping of thick layers produced by the repetition of the *polykatoikia* along the natural terrain. However, this mode of development was then reversed. Instead of Athens generating the *polykatoikia*, it was now the *polykatoikia* that generated the city. Panos Koulermos (1967) had already pointed out that, due to the General Building Regulation and construction laws, outdoor spaces in the city blocks had shrunk and apartment buildings were being constructed around light wells, the only sources of the famous Attica sunlight for most dwellings. The unprecedented real estate development based on the market economy and reinforced by tax reductions and abundant bank loans can be explained as an element of the junta's strategy to counter social unease.

On the urban scale, Doxiadis Associates was commissioned to develop a Regulatory Plan and Program for Athens (1973-76). Dionysis Zivas was assigned the study of the Old Town of Athen where heritage houses and their historic context — challenged by age, misuse, and lack of maintenance, and ultimately scheduled for demolition — were reappraised and saved in a pioneering realist turn for the protection of the urban and architectural heritage.

During the 1980s the historic center preservation program ran parallel to

legalizing informal building activity. Athens' population had exceeded three million people. The increased building density and environmental deterioration of central Athens led to an exodus of affluent families towards the suburbs, which now also experienced an increase in building densities and *polykatoikies* on *pilotis*.

The building code of 1985, deliberately or not, promoted illegal action in legal apartment units. Protected loggias were introduced by the regulation as befitting the climate of Attica. However, their open side could easily be closed and the loggias transformed into interiors beyond the permitted built area of the unit. Simultaneously, free setbacks from the property line; the abolition of the continuous building lines and its compulsory alignment of building volumes; and the introduction of an “ideal” prism within which the building should be inscribed resulted into a ruffled urban facade, irregular building heights, zigzag footprints, and unpredictably located open spaces and voids within the city block.

From this point onward, and due to the ongoing economic crisis, the *polykatoikia*'s shining light grew dim. Imposing and collecting fines on illegal interventions became a priority of government policy, with no attention to urban, environmental, or habitat quality and sustainability. Cuts in family incomes, unemployment, disobedience to law, and the influx of refugees/immigrants led to challenges, among others, with regards to the quality of the urban environment as well as social cohesion.

Bâtir, habiter, re-penser

Architectural creativity outperforms legislative restrictions, outlives socioeconomic crises, and outshines the ordinary.

Dimitri and Suzana Antonakakis diverted from mainstream models of the time and adopted principles of critical regionalism in their Benaki Street Polykatoikia (1972-75). By reinterpreting regional precursors, they redefined the *polykatoikia*'s massing and organization. Instead of even loosely standardized apartment units placed on top of each other, they customized designs so as to faithfully accommodate individual requirements with an emphasis on a continuous spatial experience, dynamic interior spaces, and provisions for outdoor living areas. In Antonakakis' polykatoikia, the generic stacking of similar units becomes a specific interweaving of individualized residences.

Taking advantage of a short-lived law permitting the erection of high-rise buildings, Alexandros Tombazis with Dimitris Diamantopoulos designed Difros (1971-75), using a diversity of apartment types, and Yiannis Vikelas with Andrault-Parrat created the unexecuted Sky Garden (1972), featuring an extravagant balcony with private swimming pool for every single apartment.

The exodus to the suburbs generated, next to the usual one- or two-family houses, freestanding *polykatoikies* on *pilotis*. Tasos Biris and Dimitris Biris with Maria Kafritsa investigated the possibilities of privacy and community living in their diversified apartment building in Polydrosso (1977-80).

The exodus reached its peak in the late 1990s. Meanwhile, young hipsters raised in the suburbs desired a return to the center, which presupposed a radical upgrading of the urban apartment. Such qualities are offered by the large residential/commercial complex at Metaxourgeio (2007-09), by Georgia Daskalaki, Yiannis

Papadopoulos, and Tasos Biris as consultant, following a competition set up by a group of developers in collaboration with the architectural magazine *Domés*. The cellular formation of duplexes underneath a continuous ascending roof offers a new residential ambience, while a shared pool and a landscaped atrium promote social interaction.

The Resilient City of *Polykatoikies*

Within a period of less than two centuries Athens changed from a village into a capital, from an Ottoman settlement into a neoclassical town, then a Modernist city, and recently a diffused metropolis. The very concept of planning was undermined even as the first city plan was established. Private speculation and petty interests took over. There was no administration that would act in time, capable of enforcing regulations that would prioritize common good over private benefit. City planning authorities were therefore confined to minor action and the legalization of informal activity. With the exception of very few spots with distinctive identities and/or urban forms, the greatest part of the Athenian fabric has been uniformly produced as a result of the interminable repetition of the apartment building, mostly through the *antiparochi* system.

For a century the building type of the polykatoikia, based on the Maison Dom-ino architectural type, has adequately accommodated a variety of programs and people beyond social and income groups, or economic and political fluctuations. The typological architecture of the Maison Dom-ino is recognized as an instrument that supplies Athens with whatever qualities it can possess. This genetic repletion was, paradoxically, practiced during the era of Modernism and its non-typical and non-typological solutions, but also of prefabricated (or not) repetition. Despite urban disorganization and mindless bureaucratic regulations, the *polykatoikia* managed to escape where urban plans failed. For a century, it has proven its flexible, adaptable, and provisional qualities. The *polykatoikia* is resilient.

However, Athens is not characterized by urban resilience. The fabric of downtown central Athens, as in most European cities, is strongly correlated to the dialectics of street and city block. In Paris, Haussmann handled streets according to a set hierarchy. The Parisian city block is conceived as a solid, a building where courtyards are hollowed out. In Barcelona, Cerdà designed a gridded street pattern and city blocks as perimeter buildings with a well-defined open space in the center. In contrast, in nineteenth century Athens, by rejecting any experts' designs, the city block was used as a tool to divide urban land and establish buildings as derivatives of lots. There was no will to or care for urban form, just processes. This shallow town-planning thinking considered spontaneous needs and speculations rather than the definition of urban form for a modern city that could provide for its own future transformation.

The design of the *polykatoikia* was and still is subordinate to these city blocks and not vice versa. Exemplary blocks, as in Chara, and unique blocks, as Papadakis' Athens City Block x 4, neither found followers nor developers. Thus, interior arrangements and contextual configurations of the *polykatoikia* paid homage to small lots and narrow streets, complied to street *akalyptos* rather than feasible north-south orientation, produced inadequate light wells, and created unpleasant

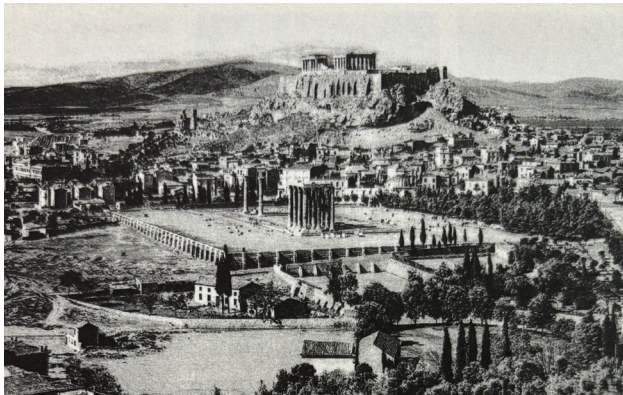
open spaces towards the rear of the buildings that were treated as leftovers. Uninspiring building regulations—without underestimating citizens' speculative aspirations—dictated the footprint and the volume of the *polykatoikia* within the city block and overruled even the most creative architectural designs.

Some scholars perceive the Athenian form with excitement and others see it as a thick urban layer formed by a lack of thoughtful planning. Accepting unconditionally the urban realism of Athens as offering a sustainable future direction on the one hand or condemning Athens as a lost case on the other are both incorrect. Furthermore, creative and imaginative designs by young, talented or famous, international architects cannot bring about a substantial change.

In Athens, urban resilience can be found in the pairing of the city block and the *polykatoikia*. It is the building configuration within the city block that deprives the urban fabric of potential for resilience, hindering diversity, adaptability, robustness, and efficiency. It is the city block that, under new socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental policies, can shape the desired urban environment. Although urban form, as in the city block and *polykatoikia*, is not deterministic of social life, the current Athenian fabric sends clear signals that it cannot manage crises. If the Greek society is in pursuit of creativity, identity, dignity, cohesion, and excellence, then architects and planners have to generate the appropriate physical space to promote and exercise these qualities.



Tent village next to the Hephaestion in the ancient Agora of Athens. Source: American National Red Cross photograph collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division



1
Athens, 1914
Unknown



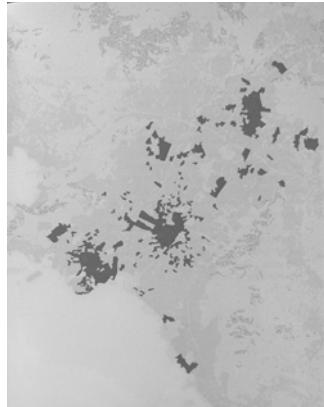
2
Athens, 1930
Unknown



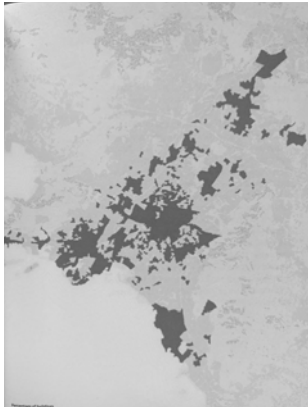
3
Athens, 1950
Unknown



4
Athens, 1960
Unknown



Average percentage of buildings
constructed before 1919
> 0.2 % average



Average percentage of buildings
constructed before 1919-45
> 1.3 % average



Average percentage of buildings
constructed before 1946-60
> 6.1 % average



Average percentage of buildings
constructed before 1961-80
> 41.8 % average



Average percentage of buildings
constructed before 1981-90
> 16 % average



Average percentage of buildings
constructed before 1991-2000
> 13.7 % average



Average percentage of buildings
constructed after 2000
> 15.2 % average

Project sites

- 1
Kon/nou Smolenski 1
- 2
Mavromichali 33
- 3
Mavromichali 43
- 4
Emmanouil Benaki 89
- 5
Ippokratous 177
- 6
Evgenikou Markou 18
- 7
Ippokratous 89
- 8
Vasiliou Voulgaroktonou 11
- 9
Asklipiou 133
- 10
Iosif Damaskinou 5
- 11
Char. Trikoupi 159
- 12
Char. Trikoupi 169
- 13
Kominon 23





1



2

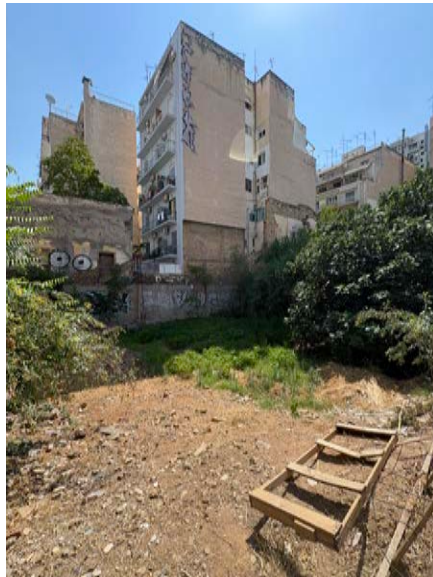


3

- 1
Site 1
Kon/nou Smolenski 1
- 2
Site 2
Mavromichali 33
- 3
Site 3
Mavromichali 43



4



5



6

- 4
Site 4
Emmanouil Benaki 89
- 5
Site 5
Ippokratous 177
- 6
Site 6
Evgenikou Markou 18



7

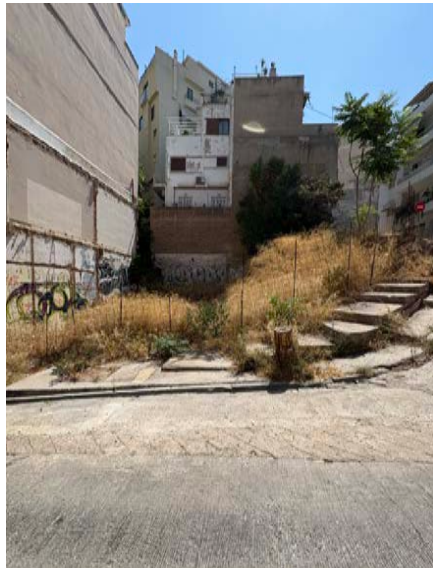
- 7
Site 7
Ippokratous 89
- 8
Site 8
Vasiliou Voulgaroktonou 11
- 9
Site 9
Asklipiou 133



8



9



10



12



11



13

- 10
Site 10
Iosif Damaskinou 5
- 11
Site 11
Char. Trikoupi 159
- 12
Site 12
Char. Trikoupi 169
- 13
Site 13
Kominon 23

First exercise, part a

Short film documenting domestic space

Over the course of many semesters we have prioritised the making of rigorous surveys as a basis for understanding buildings. This semester, our survey will in part take the form of a short film, produced by students working in pairs.

We will invite you to documents the character and atmosphere of a domestic space by making a short film. This should not record where you live, but a home that you can easily and safely gain access to. The short film should be clearly communicate the character of a domestic space and the patterns of inhabitation it invites or makes possible.

An introductory talk will explain how to carry out this first assignment, and technical support will be offered to assist you. A screening will be organised to review the completed short films.

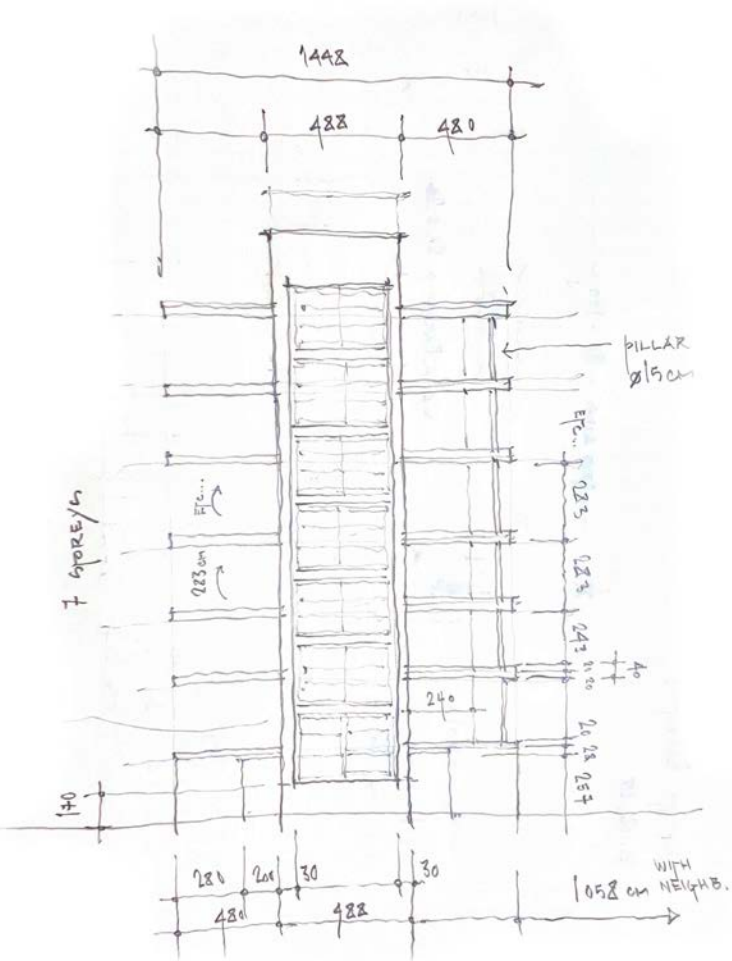


Film still from
Out Here
Chrissoula Voulgari

To help you understand your brief for this semester, we would like you to study a number of exemplary polykatoikies in Athens. This should be seen as another form of survey, but in this instance as a drawn example. We ask you to do this because we believe that through a better understanding of the qualities of existing buildings you will be able to appreciate what exist rather than believe that it is possible to invent original solutions.

You should consider the potential of this research to inform your subsequent work. We ask you to consider the organisation of the plan of the building you are studying, and particularly to concentrate on understanding the quality and arrangement of the façade by looking very carefully at the buildings, sketching them, and taking photographs as a way of recording existing conditions.

We have selected twenty-four exemplary projects and an introduction will be given to assist you in understanding how to approach this exercise, which should be undertaken individually.





Spring Semester 2025
Survey drawing
Letizia Amato and
Arianna Morini





1
Nikolaos Mitsakis, Dimitris Pikionis
1936
Chevden 30

2
Antonis Georgiadis, Emmanouil Vourekas
1955-56
Pl. Filikis Eterias 15

3
Konstantinos Doxiadis, Arthouros Skepers
1957-58
Stratitotikou Sindesmou 2

4
Ioannis Liapis, Ilias Skroumbelos
1954-57
Papdiamantopoulou 4

5
Andreas Symeon
1955-56
Apollonos 12 / Pentelis

6
Nikos Valsamakis
1951-53
Semitelou 5



7
Takis Marthas
1957
Platia Eleftherias 5 / Korinis

8
Dimitris Fatouros
1956-57
Patision 109

9
Nikos Valsamakis
1955-56
Vasilissis Sofias Ave 129



10
Souzana Antonakaki, Dimitris Antonakakis, Kostis Gartzos
1961-62
Argolidos 26 / Doukissis Plakentias

11
Nikos Valsamakis
1955-56
Irodotou 17

12
Margaritis Apostolidis, Takis Zenetos
1959-60
Vasilissis Amalias Ave 34 / Dedalou



13

13
Dimitris Papazisis
1957-58
Mithimnis 34 / Patision



14

14
Nikos Valsamakis
1959-60
Vasileos Konstantinou Ave 42 / Platia Proskopon



15

15
Dimosthenis Molfesis
1959
Vasileos Konstantinou Ave 46 / Vasileos Georgiou B



16

16
Ioannis Liapis, Ilias Skroumbelos
1962-64
Dinokratous 5-7 / Loukianou



17

17
Spyros Amourgis, Nikos Kalogeras, Panos Koulermos
1965-68
Veikou 8 / Mitromara



18

18
Dimitris Papazisis
1964-65
Xanthippou 3 / Dinokfratus



19



21



20



22

19
Dimitris Fatourus, Konstantinos Michailidis
1955-56
28 Kipselis

20
Dimitrios Venieris
1962-63
Spirou Merkouri 31 / Antinoros

21
Kostas Fines
1969-70
Dimocharous 7 / Iatridou

22
Dimitris Nakos
1972-75
Sarantapichou 51 / Doxapatri



23



25



24



26

23
Aris Konstantinidis
1971-73
Karaolou Dimitriou 30

24
Souzana Antonakaki, Dimitris Antonakakis (Atelier 66)
1969-70
Proklou 29

25
Souzana Antonakaki, Dimitris Antonakakis (Atelier 66)
1972-75
Emmanouil Benaki 118

26
Vasilis Bogakos
1961-64
Spirou Merkouri 74

In this studio we hold the position that invention is a necessary ambition in architecture, but it rarely emerges by spontaneous intuition. Generally, architects develop a truly unique proposal only after many years of study and reflection. It is questionable if true originality can be achieved given the wealth of examples in the history of architecture.

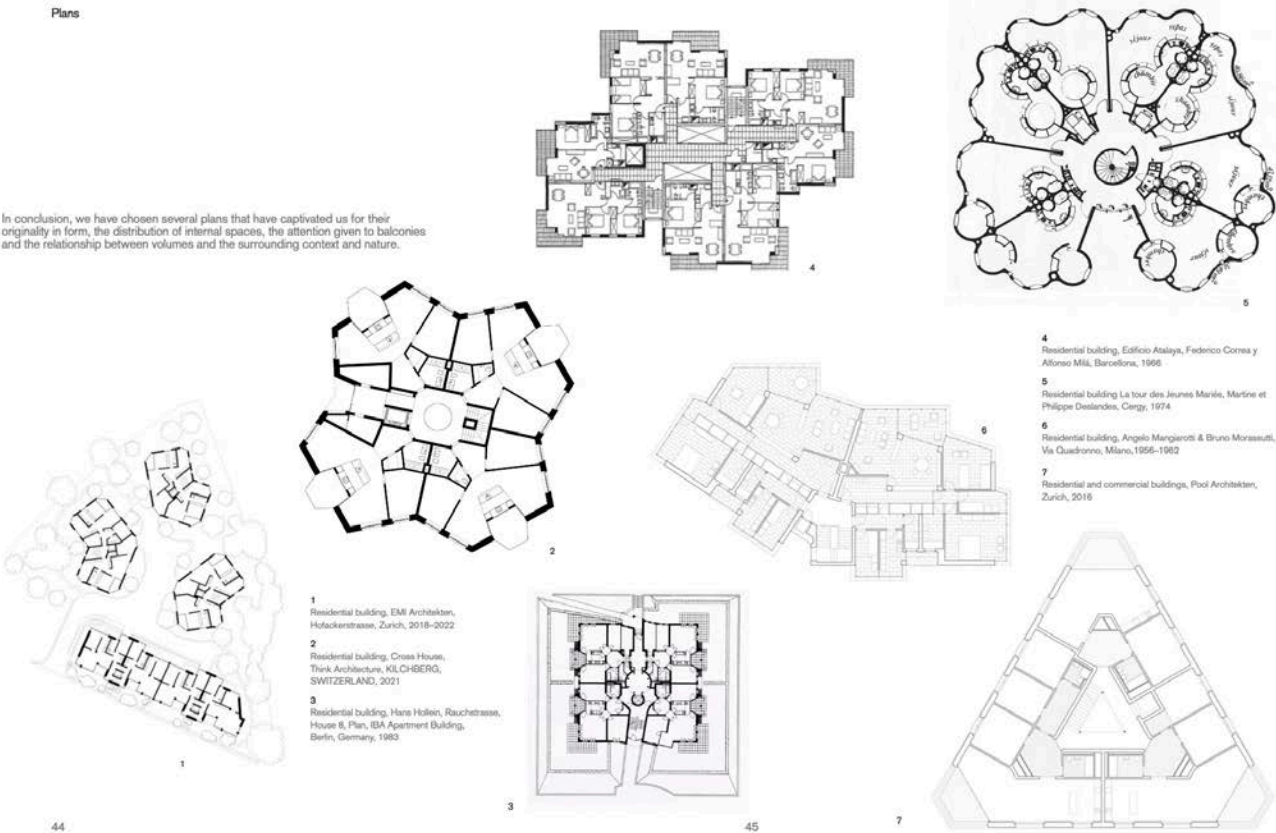
To help you understand the task for this semester we would like you to study a range of housing references. We believe that by exploring existing buildings you will be able to develop an understanding of their qualities rather than believe that it is possible to invent spontaneously.

The information compiled and recorded should be drawn upon and referred to throughout the semester, and you should consider the potential of the study for informing your work later on. Your work should consider how the project is organised in plan, and you should be able to describe your references clearly and analytically, using diagrams where necessary.

You should concentrate on understanding the quality and arrangement of the facade. This will require you to look carefully at buildings, making sketches and taking photographs where possible as a way of recording existing conditions.

You are invited to produce a booklet to illustrate the precedents and references you have studied, which should be added to throughout the semester as your interests grow and your project develops.

A lecture will be given to help you understand this exercise.



The next component of the work to be undertaken this semester requires you to develop an urban strategy and situate proposals within it. This can be understood as a typological and massing study. The principal tool to assist you in this exercise will be a 1:500 model. This should encompass a wider area of the neighbourhood in which your site is located. The base model will be made collectively by all studio members.

We ask you to begin by exploring a range of solutions that would allow the site to be developed to a reasonably high density through the introduction of new building proposals. The scale of these and the distance and relationship to existing buildings should be carefully considered. Each option you propose should be photographed and then critically appraised and tested, and developed and refined, or discarded, as appropriate.

This is the start of an iterative process you will be working on throughout the semester.

A lecture will be offered to introduce this exercise.

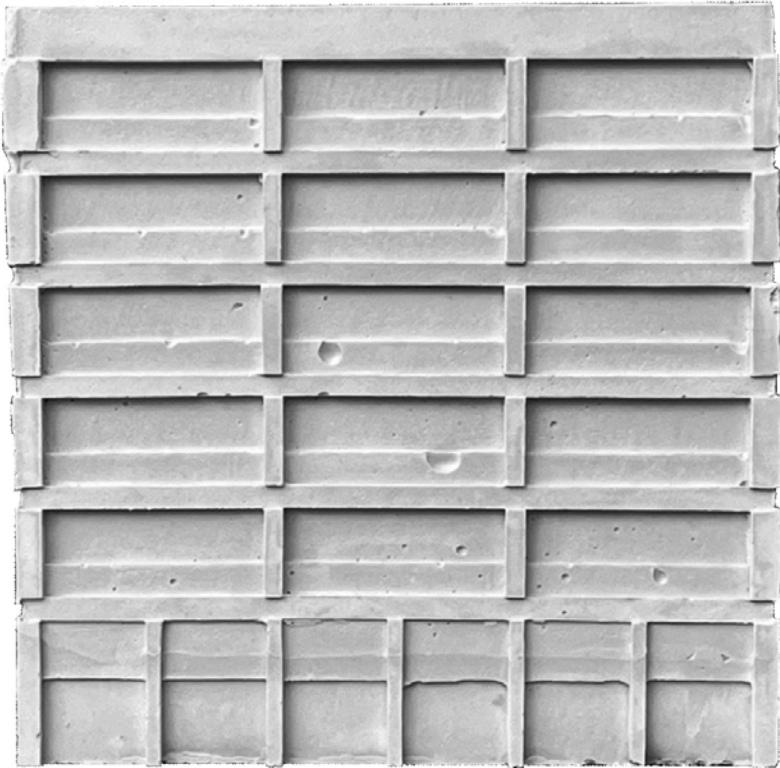
Image of the exhibition
'Locarno — An
exhibition of students
projects from Accademia
di Mendirisiu'
Locarno
July 2025



You are required to produce a 1:100 cast model of your project for the intermediate review. While it will also be necessary to produce plans, sections and elevations, the cast model will enable a more accurate assessment of the formal properties of the project. The model should be made from white, unpigmented plaster.

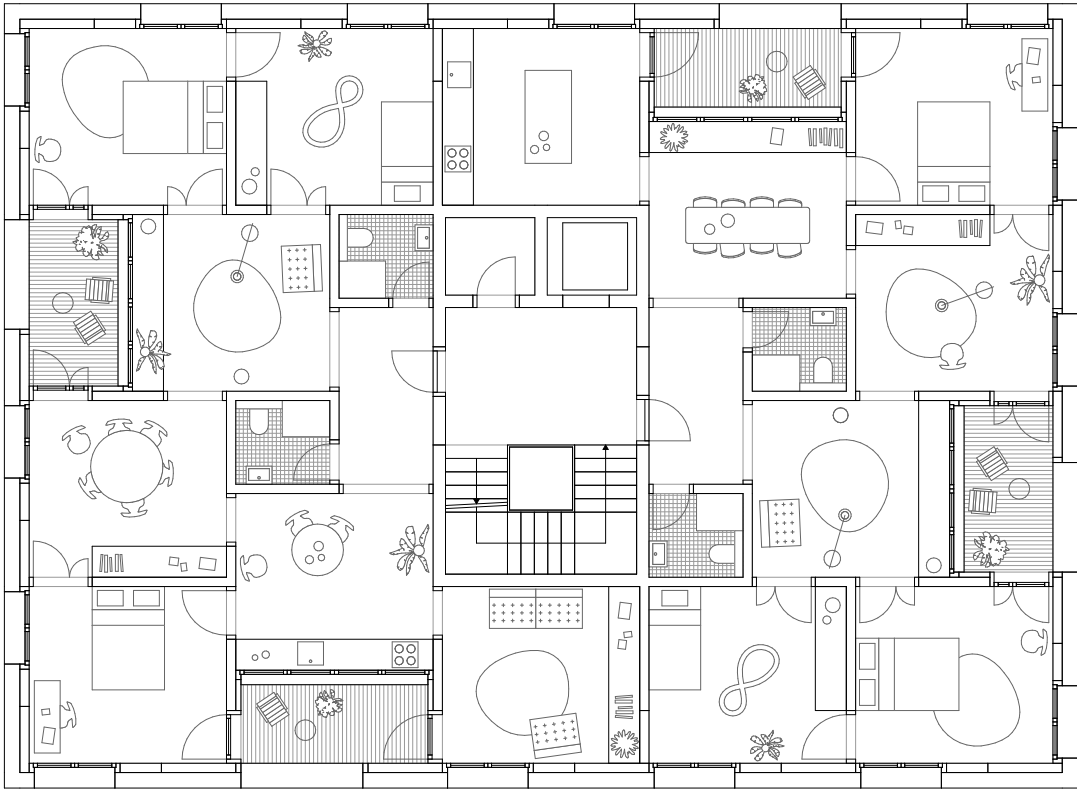
The model should represent window openings as well as the roof, including any overhang.

At this stage in the semester your work will be subject to an intermediate review with guest critics.



At this stage, you should be refining and revising the plans you developed in previous stages of your work into a final proposal.

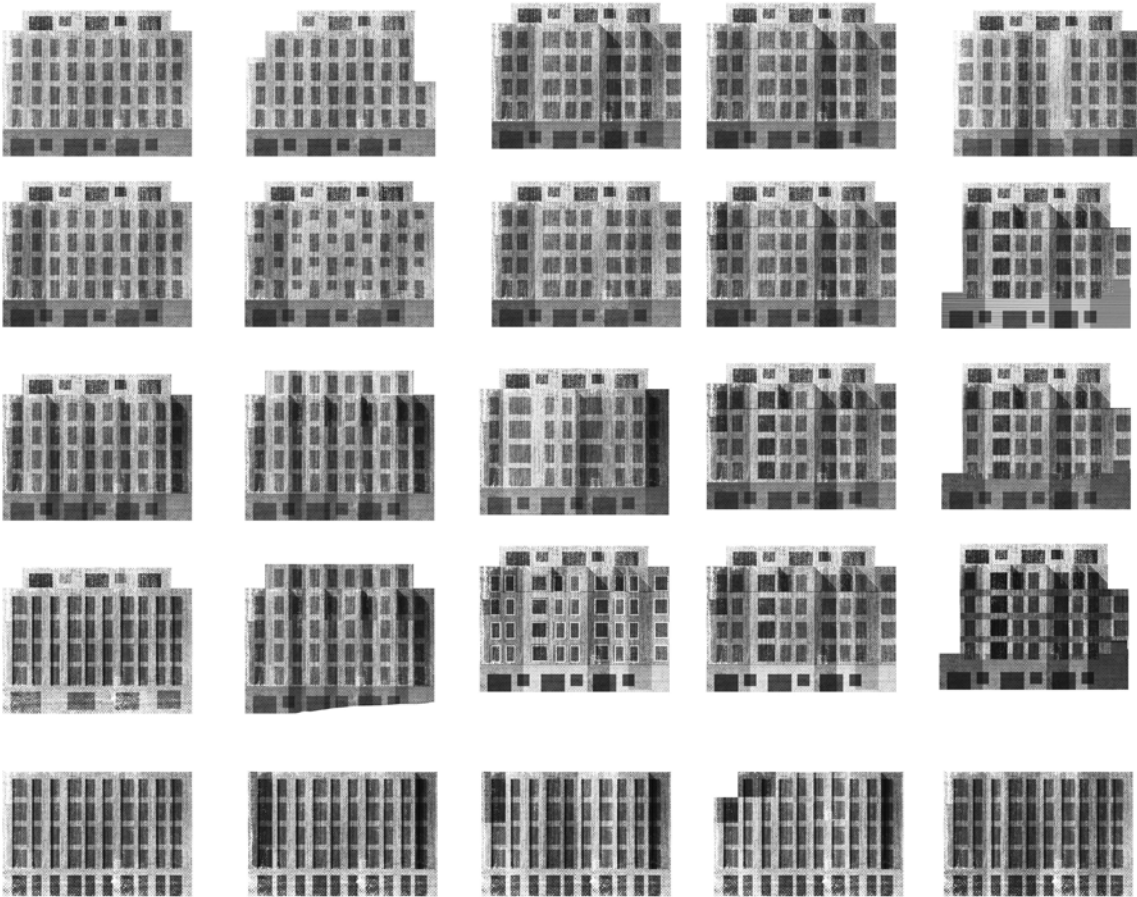
The organization of the cores, the distribution of different apartment types, the mix and arrangement of apartments should be clearly represented. It is anticipated that this work will require modifications to the facades and sections.



The results of the previous studies should now be reappraised and drawn upon to produce the next instalment of this semester's work. We would now like you to develop a more precise concept for the buildings and their relationships to the wider context. The principal tool we ask you to employ is a 1:100 study or sketch model, which should include the area surrounding the project, as part of the context you deem appropriate. We are interested in the qualities of the building or buildings you design and the way they are expressed through the organisation of the facades.

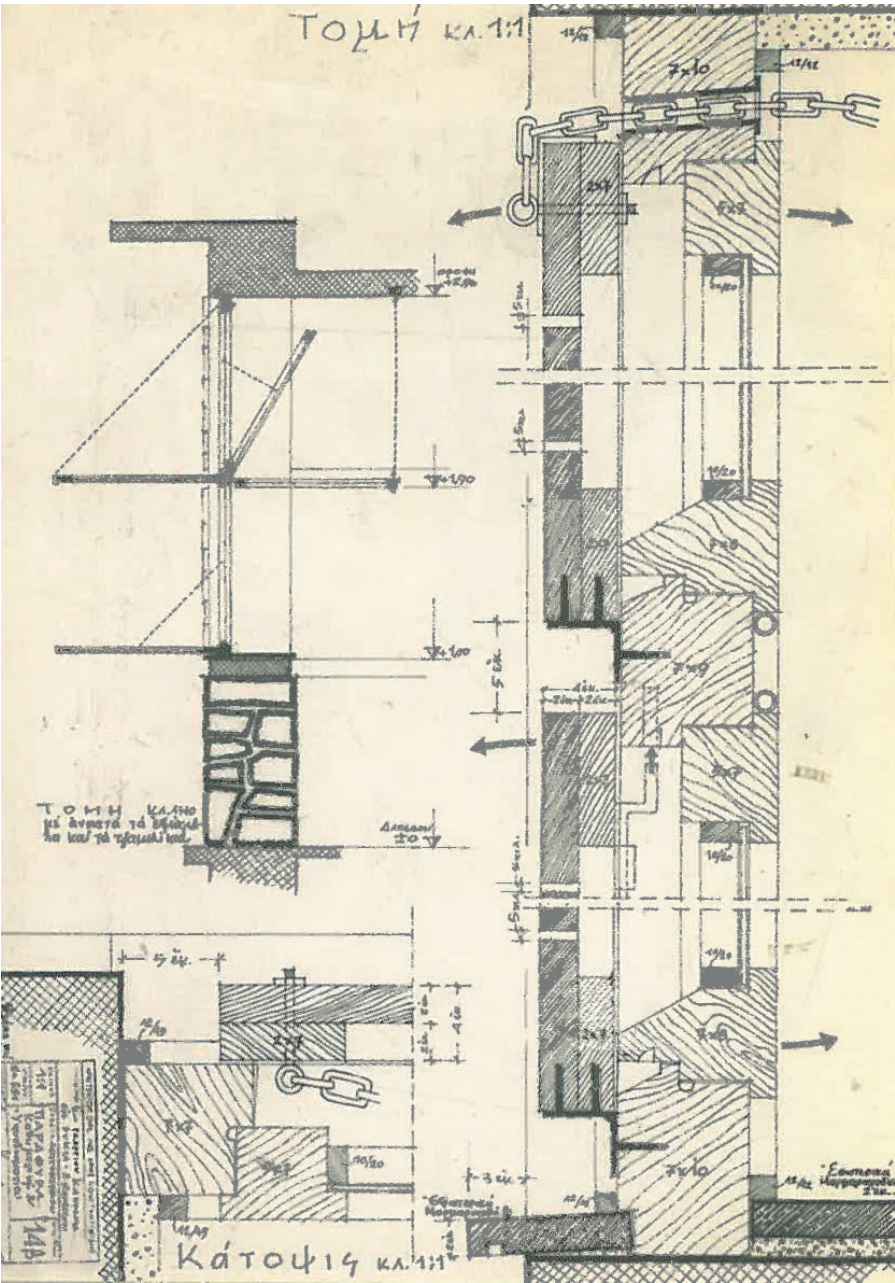
Your work should concentrate on critically appraising and further refining your earlier studies. While the model will be the main piece of work you will produce, we expect your project to be developed with study plans, elevations, sections and sketches. The facades of your buildings should be drawn at 1:100 (as unwrapped elevations where necessary) and translated into three-dimensional models.

This piece of work should be undertaken with a clear concept of the image of your building in mind. What materials is the building made from? What is your approach to the arrangement of window openings? How does the building meet the ground and how is the top of the building resolved? There are numerous additional questions you should be asking yourself about the facade of your building.



While this might have already been indicated implicitly, we now invite you to commit to a form of construction and argue for its appropriateness in terms of its environmental impact both in the process of construction, and throughout the lifespan of the building.

The key drawing to help understand the proposals that are being advanced will be the section.



Construction detail
Holidays House at Sykia
Aris Konstantinidis
1951

The penultimate piece of work you will undertake requires you to produce two images. No specific graphic technique is prescribed, although you should be able to explain why the technique you choose is appropriate.

These images should represent the atmosphere and the presence of your building. One of the images should depict the exterior of the building and its relationship with its immediate context and the wider urban fabric. The other image should represent the interior of a block and its qualities as a partly public, partly private space. It should also represent the interior of one of the apartments and convey a sense of domesticity.



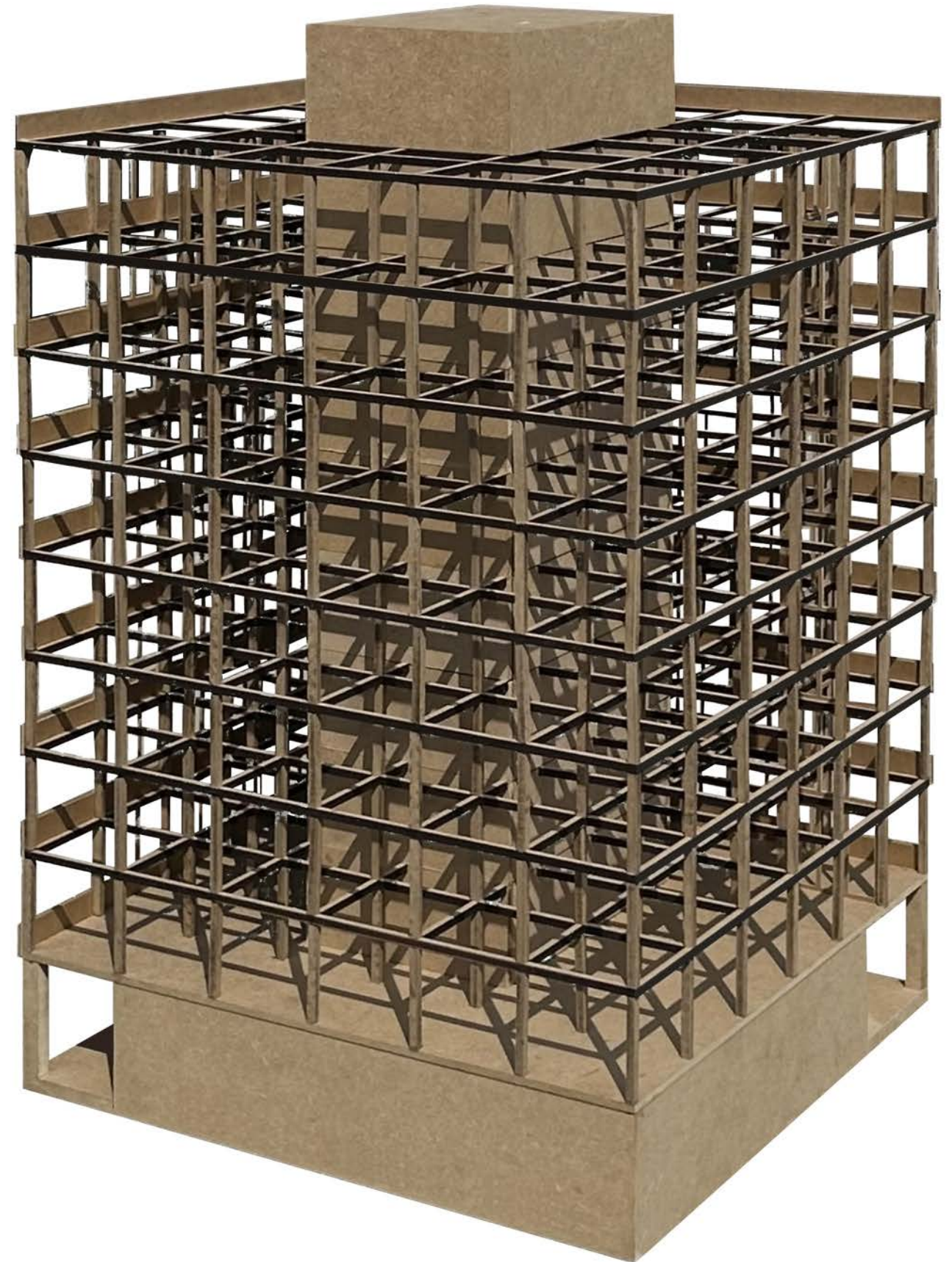
Spring Semester 2025
Fiamma Loro and
Elena Porreca

overleaf
Spring Semester 2025
Marica Pucino and Elena Secco



The final piece of work to be produced this semester is a model of the project at a scale of no less than 1:50. The materials used and the degree of detailing included should convey the concept for the project clearly.

The requirements for the final review are detailed in the semester programme (pages 66 - 67).



Spring Semester 2025
Marica Pucino and
Elena Secco

With the emergence of a convincing set of ideas for your building you will need to produce a careful set of drawings of some of the facades you have developed and a number of sections at scale 1:100.

You should also give due consideration to the plans for the project, which should be developed at 1:200, 1:100 and at a larger scale where appropriate.

You should consider repetition and variation in apartments, as well as what other programmes might be introduced, particularly on the ground floor.

A landscape plan should be produced at a scale of 1:200 indicating an approach to the landscape surfaces, hard and soft elements and the public realm in general.

A further two 'atmospheric' perspectives should be produced of the final version of your project.

Finally, you should produce a .pdf or Powerpoint presentation describing your project, the development of your work and the strategy you propose. This is an important tool for presenting your project at the final review.



| Date | Event | Details | Assignments |
|-----------------|----------------------|--|---|
| 18-19 September | Studio briefing | Jonathan Sergison (JS) presents studio introduction Lecture by JS | Short film documenting domestic space 1:500 site model Begin compiling precedent studies |
| 25-26 September | Tutorials | First draft of short film documenting domestic space Lecture by Ioanna Theocharopoulou Lecture by Cristina Roiz de la Parra | Short film documenting domestic space 1:500 site model Compiling precedent studies |
| 2-3 October | Tutorials | Review final draft of short film documenting domestic space First draft precedent studies 1:500 site model | Short film documenting domestic space Compiling precedent studies |
| 9-10 October | Study trip to Athens | Study trip to project site Survey visits (see separate programme) | Survey and site studies 1:100 elevations and other survey drawings Initial ideas urban proposals Compiling precedent studies |
| 16-17 October | Review | Short film presentation Survey drawings Precedent studies presentation Initial ideas urban proposals Lecture by Lydia Xynogala | 1:500 model studies and other drawings as necessary |
| 23-24 October | Tutorials | Building concept, model, plans, sections and elevations Lecture by Stylianos Giamarellos | 1:200 drawings, plans, sections and elevations 1:500 model studies 1:200 model studies 1:100 cast model |
| 30 - 31 October | Intermediate review | Project reviews with guest critics | 1:500 models and 1:200 models 1:200 plans, sections, elevations Images |
| 6-7 November | Tutorials | Plans, sections and elevations Lecture by Flavia Saggese | 1:200 models 1:100 plans, sections, elevations |
| 13-14 November | Tutorials | Plans, sections and elevations | 1:100 plans, sections, elevations |

| Date | Event | Details | Assignments |
|----------------|--------------|------------------------------------|---|
| 20-21 November | Review | Facade, plans, sections | 1:100 drawings |
| 27-28 November | Review | Facade, plans, sections | 1:100 drawings |
| 4-5 December | Tutorials | Submission of final drawings | 1:100 plans, sections and facades 1:200 situation plan |
| 11-12 December | Tutorials | Final models and images | Interior perspectives, Exterior perspectives, Draft Pdf presentation |
| 18 December | Final review | Project reviews with guest critics | Pdf presentation Interior and exterior perspectives 1:200 situation plan 1:100 plans, sections and facades Interior and exterior perspectives 1:50 Model |

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L'architettura della città
Padova: Marsilio, 1966

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Freedom of Use
London: Sternberg Press, 2015

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Dixit n° 01. Hyperconfort
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Modern Architecture and Climate: Design before Air Conditioning
New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020

Gaston Bachelard
The Poetics of Space
(1958), Beacon Press, 1994

Georges Perec
Species of Spaces and Other Pieces
(1974), Penguin Classics, 2008

Iñaki Ábalos
The Good Life: A Guided Visit to the Houses of Modernity
Zurich: Park Books 2017

Jun'ichiro Tanizaki
In Praise of Shadows
(1933), Vintage Books, 2006

Philip Rahm
Climatic architecture
Barcelona: Actar, 2023

Robin Evans
Figures, Doors and Passages. Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997

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Brick-work: thinking and making
(2005), Zurich: gta Verlag, 2007

After Comfort: A User's Guide
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The Public Private House: Modern Athens and Its Polykatoikia
Zurich: Park Books, 2018

Ioanna Theocharopoulou
Builders, Housewives and the Construction of Modern Athens
London: Artifice, 2017 and Athens: The Onassis Foundation, 2022

Kilian Schmitz-Hübsch
Athens' Polykatoikias 1930-1975: Formation of a Typology
Dortmund: Verlag Kettler, 2024

Norbert Kling, Tasos Roidis, Mark Michaeli
Taking Action: Transforming Athens' Urban Landscapes
Berlin: JOVIS Verlag, 2023

Stylios Giamarellos
Critical Regionalism Abroad: Aris Konstantinidis without Greece
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Maria Lalou, Skafe Aymo-Boot
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Paola Cofano, Dimitri Konstantinidis
Aris Konstantinidis 1913-1993
Milano: Electa, 2010

Yannis Aesopos, Yorgos Simeoforidis
Mutation: Athens
Barcelona: Actar, 2000

Alexander Tzoni, Alcestis P. Rodi
Greece: Modern Architectures in History
London: Reaktion Books, 2014

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