The Social Housing Question In Greece: Elli N. Vasilikioti And The Polykatoikia In Asyrmatos

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View of the access galleries and bridge of the Asyrmatos apartment building, Athens. Image from DOMa archive.

Writing during the industrialization and urbanization of nineteenth-century Germany, Friedrich Engels assembled a series of articles under the title *The Housing Question*. For Engels, high rents, overcrowding, and the precarious living conditions of the working class could not be understood as isolated problems demanding exclusively pragmatic solutions. They arose from broader relations of property and labor. To pose housing as a 'question' was therefore to situate the dwelling within a wider political economy: to ask how access to housing was organized, who controlled its provision, under what forms of tenure it was occupied, and through which social and economic relations these arrangements were sustained.[1]

It is in this sense that this article approaches the social housing question in Greece. Social housing is understood here as a range of arrangements through which public authorities facilitated access to housing at below-market cost.[2] Following the Second World War, the housing question assumed renewed significance in the reconstruction of European welfare states, although the responses to it varied according to the particular circumstances of each country.

1 For a more detailed discussion, see Friedrich Engels, *The Housing Question* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970).

2 This definition is drawn from the brief for Monsters: An Illustrated History of Social Housing, a Superstudio course taught at EPFL in 2026, initiated by Pier Vittorio Aureli with Marson Korbi, Theodora Giovanazzi, Romain Barth, and the author.



A prefabricated housing estate under construction, Watford, Hertfordshire, April 1946. Schoolchildren watch and assist as workers erect prefabricated houses. Photograph by Keystone Features. Hulton Archive/Getty Images.



Man looking at the expanding city, Athens, c. 1952. Image from Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar, eds., *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 67.

The Greek case was distinguished by the predominance of owner-occupation. Publicly sponsored housing accounted for only a small proportion of postwar residential construction and was generally directed towards specific populations, including refugees, households displaced by war or natural disasters, workers, and families living in inadequate conditions. State intervention rarely established a substantial stock of publicly owned rental housing, relying instead on subsidized loans, grants, and dwellings subsequently transferred to their beneficiaries.[3] Social housing in Greece thus remained closely tied to a housing economy structured around private property.

3 G. Kandylis, T. Maloutas, and N. Myofa, "Exceptional Social Housing in a Residual Welfare State: Housing Estates in Athens, Greece," in Housing Estates in Europe: Poverty, Ethnic Segregation and Policy Challenges, ed. D. B. Hess, T. Tammaru, and M. van Ham (Cham: Springer, 2018), 77–98.



Zero-degree perspective of the Asyrmatos Polykatoikia, designed by Elli N. Vasilikioti. Drawing by Charlène Dejean, Gentil Lay Da Silva, Paul Crisinel, Louise Balquet, and Florine Pichonnaz for the 2026 Superstudio course *Monsters: An Illustrated History of Social Housing* at EPFL

The Asyrmatos Polykatoikia, designed by Elli Vasilikioti and completed in 1967, provides a particularly useful case through which to examine this condition. Built by the state to rehouse residents of the self-built refugee settlement established on the slopes of Philopappou Hill after the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the project adopted the *polykatoikia*, the apartment-building type whose postwar proliferation in Athens was associated primarily with private development and the *antiparochi* system. Asyrmatos thus sits at the intersection of two histories usually considered separately: the limited history of publicly sponsored housing and the much broader transformation of Athens through privately produced apartment buildings. Examining that intersection shifts attention away from the polykatoikia as the expression of a single economic mechanism and towards the different circumstances in which the same type could be mobilized. It also brings into view the technical services of the state and architects like Vasilikioti, whose work has remained comparatively peripheral to histories of postwar Greek architecture.

Despite its place within this history, the Asyrmatos Polykatoikia has received little sustained historical study, while evidence concerning its design, construction, allocation, and subsequent occupation remains dispersed across an incomplete archival record. Drawing on published writings, architectural drawings, administrative documents, the implementation of regulations, oral testimonies, contemporary film, and the building itself, this article reconstructs the project from its conception to its long-term inhabitation. In doing so, it follows the building beyond the moment of construction, asking how a project produced through a specific program of rehousing was subsequently absorbed into the lives of its residents and the city around it.



View of the Asyrmatos apartment building from Filopappou Hill, Athens.
Image from DOMa archive.

THE ARCHITECT AS PUBLIC SERVANT

Elli Nikolaidou Vasilikioti (1923–2016) belonged to the first generation of women architects to establish professional careers in post-war Greece.[4] After graduating from the National Technical University of Athens in 1948, she joined the Ministry of Reconstruction, entering public service at a moment when the institutions responsible for rebuilding the country were undergoing substantial reorganization. Her first years there overlapped with the reconstruction apparatus shaped by Constantine Doxiadis, who had served as Undersecretary and Director-General of the Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction before moving in 1948 to the Ministry of Coordination, where he directed the Greek Recovery Program and remained closely involved in reconstruction until 1951.[5]



Elli Vasilikioti-Nikolaides at her drawing table, 1950.
Image from the Elli Nikolaidou-Vasilikioti Archive, courtesy of Aleka Vasilikioti Wichert.

4 *Enimerotiko Deltio TEE* (Newsletter of the Technical Chamber of Greece), no. 2091 (6 March 2000): 20.
5 See Andreas Kakridis, "Rebuilding the Future: C. A. Doxiadis and the Greek Reconstruction Effort (1945–1950)," *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*; and the Constantinos A. Doxiadis Archives.

Between 1951 and 1958 Vasilikioti lived and worked in the Middle East, particularly in Jordan, having followed her husband, a civil engineer employed first by the United Nations and subsequently by Doxiadis's office.[6] These years coincided with Doxiadis's own transition from Greek public administration to an increasingly international practice. Founded in 1953, Doxiadis Associates worked within the expanding field of international development, undertaking planning and settlement projects for governments and international organizations across several continents.[7] By the beginning of the 1960s, Doxiadis had become one of the most internationally visible Greek figures in debates around urbanization and mass housing.[8] Vasilikioti did not work for Doxiadis Associates, and the available evidence does not support a direct professional connection between their respective work. Their trajectories nevertheless intersected with a broader post-war milieu in which housing increasingly became an object of state planning, technical expertise, and transnational exchange.



Housing estate of Agios Sostis, Athens, 1962–64.
Image from DOMa archive.

Vasilikioti returned to Greece in 1959 and began a long career in the Ministry of Public Works, eventually serving as Head of the Directorate of Housing and Residential Development. Family circumstances reportedly influenced her decision to remain in public service rather than establish the independent practice she had initially envisaged. Within the Ministry, however, the design of individual buildings formed part of a wider responsibility for the preparation and implementation of housing programs. This institutional setting allowed her to work across markedly different scales. Beginning in the 1960s, Vasilikioti is credited with several housing projects undertaken through the Directorate of Housing. In Athens, she was part of the team responsible for the Agios Sostis Housing Estate, designed in 1964 on an 85,000-square-metre site near Syngrou Avenue,

6 See the biographical entry on Elli Nikolaidou Vasilikioti published by the Hellenic Society for Aesthetics, which records her work in the Ministry of Reconstruction between 1948 and 1951, her subsequent professional activity in the Middle East, and her husband's employment with the United Nations and Doxiadis's office.

7 Panayiota I. Pyla, "Ekistics, Architecture and Environmental Politics, 1945–1976: A Prehistory of Sustainable Development" (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002), 18.

8 James Clayton, "A Cruise Party Ponders the Menace of the City," *Washington Post*, July 21, 1963, reprinted in *Ekistics* (October 1963): 235–241.

and later designed the Asyrmatos Polykatoikia, completed in 1967 during the continuing redevelopment of the refugee settlement on Philopappou Hill. In Thessaloniki, she was involved in the much larger Phoenix–Votsi estate at Kalamaria, constructed between 1962 and 1967, whose sixty-seven four-story blocks contained 1,444 dwellings alongside schools, a health center, a church, and commercial facilities.

Her engagement with housing also extended beyond project design. Vasilikioti authored most of *Housing in Greece* (*Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα*), published by the Technical Chamber of Greece in 1975, a wide-ranging survey of housing conditions, policy, and production in the country. She also represented the Ministry of Public Works and the Technical Chamber of Greece in international organizations concerned with housing and urban development, including the United Nations and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and received several distinctions, among them the United Nations Peace Medal.[9] Despite her achievements, Vasilikioti's legacy has remained comparatively marginal within histories of post-war Greek architecture, although public employment alone cannot account for that absence. Aris Konstantinidis, for example, produced several of his best-known housing projects through the Workers' Housing Organization (OEK), the public body established in 1954 to provide housing for private-sector workers. As head of its Studies Service between 1955 and 1957, he designed developments at Nea Philadelphia, Renti, Heraklion, Patras, and elsewhere.[10] These projects have occupied a considerably more visible place within accounts of Greek post-war architecture. The contrast therefore concerns less the distinction between public and private practice than the different ways in which work undertaken within public institutions could later be attributed and narrated.



Cover of Ioannis Papaioannou and Elli Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα* [*Housing in Greece*] (Athens: Technical Chamber of Greece, 1975).

9 Eleni Fessa-Emmanouil and Vasso Roussi, "Έλλη Νικολαΐδου Βασιλικιώτη," *Αρχείο Ελληνίδων Αρχιτεκτόνων (1923–1981)* (Athens: Association of Greek Architects [SADAS–PEA], n.d.), accessed July 16, 2026.

10 On Konstantinidis's work for the Workers' Housing Organization, see Technical Chamber of Greece, "Workers' Housing Complex (OEK), Nea Philadelphia, 1955–57"; see also the Athens Social Atlas, "Social Housing Estates in Athens."

HOUSING IN GREECE

The book Vasilikioti co-authored with Ioannis Papaioannou, *Housing in Greece*, published simultaneously in Greek, English, French, and Russian, remains an important account of the development of housing in Greece from the establishment of the modern state to the early 1970s. Combining historical analysis, demographic statistics, housing policy, and surveys of completed projects, the book reconstructs the housing question through the successive conditions that brought it within the remit of the state. In the historical account written by Papaioannou, the period between 1830 and 1920 was characterized by limited state involvement despite a five-fold increase in population and the considerable territorial expansion of the country through successive annexations.[11] In poorer areas, housing retained many characteristics associated with traditional Greek domestic architecture but was frequently poorly constructed and severely overcrowded, with three or four people commonly sharing a room. Many dwellings also lacked what Papaioannou calls the household's basic "supportive functions." Judged according to what he describes as "Western criteria," the result was "a pale image of the conditions of housing."[12]

This situation changed substantially after the First World War. Between 1920 and 1960, successive waves of displacement, earthquakes, wartime destruction, the Civil War, recurrent floods, and the expansion of self-built settlements confronted the state with housing needs on a different scale.[13] Forced population movements were particularly consequential. Rather than treating the arrival of refugees following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 as an isolated event, Papaioannou places it within a longer sequence extending from the Russian Revolution to the Greco-Bulgarian population exchange established by the Treaty of Neuilly. By the early 1920s, approximately 1.4 million refugees had entered a country of only four million inhabitants.[14] Housing provision consequently became inseparable from the problem of resettlement.



Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel clearing rubble during relief operations following the August 1953 earthquake in the Greek Ionian Islands of Cephalonia, Zante, and Ithaca. Photograph. from Imperial War Museums, London.

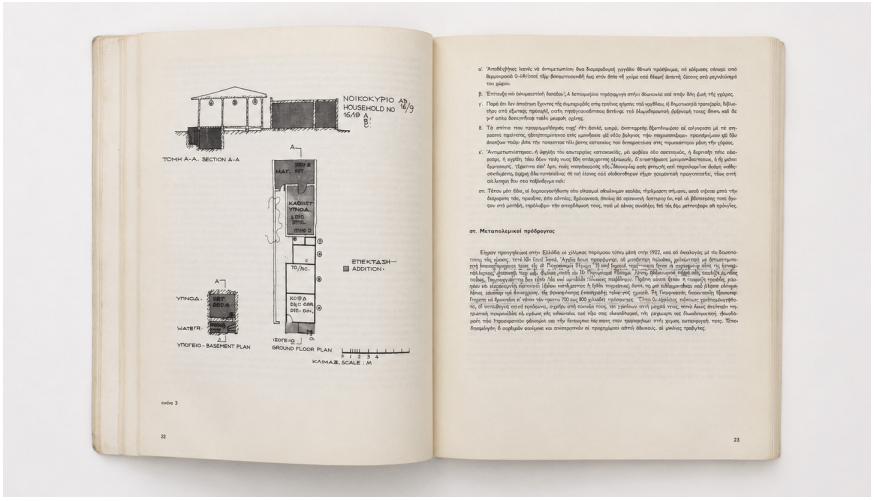
11 Ioannis Papaioannou and Elli Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα* [*Housing in Greece*] (Athens: Technical Chamber of Greece, 1975), 10.
12 Passage translated by the author from Greek. Papaioannou and Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα*, 10–11.
13 Ibid., 11.
14 Ibid., 12.



Temporary accommodation of refugees from Asia Minor in the Municipal Theater of Athens, 1922; each family was housed in one of the theater boxes.
Photograph in Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA), Athens.

The removal and replacement of refugee settlements became one of the most persistent dimensions of this expanded state involvement. Papaioannou describes it as a process that extended across half a century:

> It is a fact that the state consistently regarded the elimination of refugee slums, and their replacement with more hygienic forms of housing, as one of its responsibilities. The scale of the problem was such that its resolution required fifty years. Thus, in Athens, fifty-two years after the arrival of the first refugees from Asia Minor, the last remaining settlements are now being cleared by the state and replaced with large, multi-storey apartment buildings.[15]

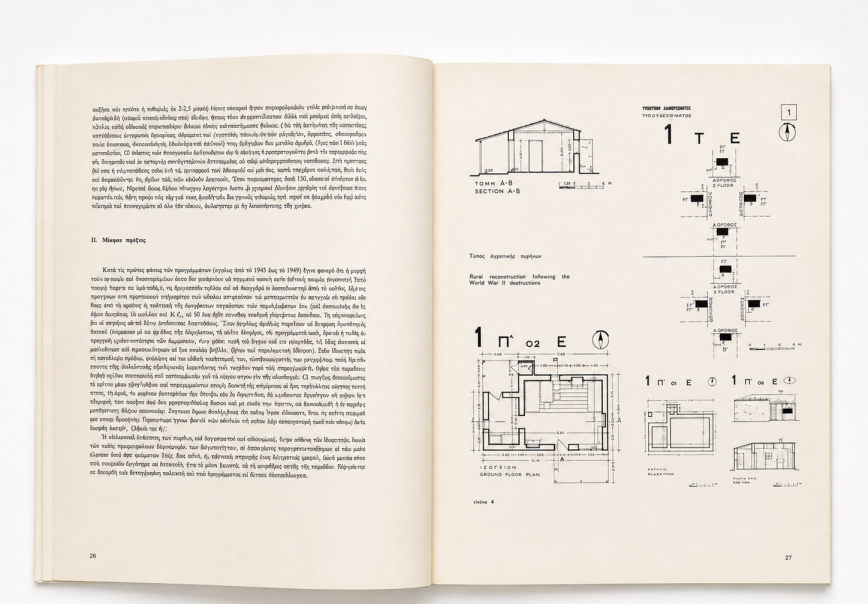


Plan and section of a refugee dwelling showing its subsequent extension.
Image from Ioannis Papaioannou and Elli Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα* [*Housing in Greece*] (Athens: Technical Chamber of Greece, 1975), 22–23.

15 Passage translated by the author from Greek. Papaioannou and Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα*, 20.

Vasilikioti's contribution takes up the same housing question from the perspective of its contemporary scale and administration. Drawing on the 1961 population census, she quantified a national shortage that involved both an insufficient number of dwellings and the condition of the existing stock:[16]

> "The number of people per room, 1.47, was one of the highest among all European countries. At the same time, 40 per cent of dwellings accommodated two people per room. The number of dwellings could not support the number of households (*noikokyria*): 2,144,000 households lived in only 1,991,300 dwellings. 3.6 per cent of households lived in dwellings considered unsuitable for habitation."[17]



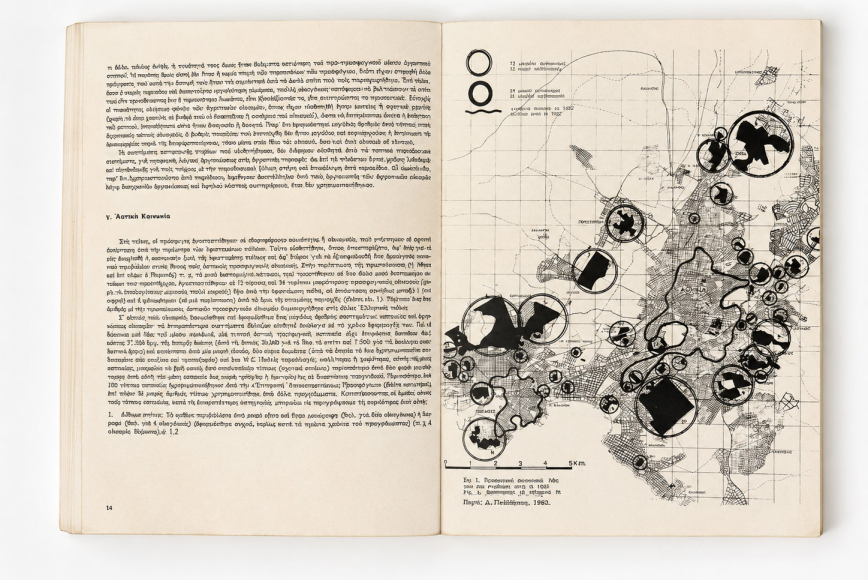
Plans and sections of dwelling types developed for rural reconstruction following the destruction of the Second World War. Image from Ioannis Papaioannou and Elli Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα* [*Housing in Greece*] (Athens: Technical Chamber of Greece, 1975), 26–27.

Housing policy was formulated in response to these conditions but was not confined to increasing the number of dwellings. Alongside improving the quality of the housing stock and reducing residential density from 1.19 to 1.00 person per room, it incorporated broader demographic and territorial objectives. These included allowing eligible households to choose between estates, encouraging settlement in emerging urban centers, reinforcing rural communities through their local centers, and improving living conditions across the country.[18] Housing thus operated simultaneously as a response to shortage and as an instrument through which population and development could be organized territorially.

This policy was administered through a network of public bodies and credit organizations coordinated by the Ministry of Coordination and Planning, each addressing particular categories of beneficiaries. Their means ranged from low-interest loans for repair and construction to the direct provision of dwellings in newly built estates. The Program for Popular Shelter (*Programma Laïkis Stegasis*), for example, addressed households whose accommodation was structurally deficient or destroyed, as

16 Papaioannou and Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα*, 43.
17 Passage translated by the author from Greek. Papaioannou and Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα*, 44.
18 Papaioannou and Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα*, 47.

well as those unable to secure replacement housing through their own resources and those displaced by land-development schemes. Its beneficiaries included refugees of Greek and non-Greek nationality and more recent arrivals from the Middle East seeking permanent settlement in Greece.[19] Programs such as Popular Housing (*Laïki Katoikia*), Refugee Housing, and Workers' Housing were supported by favorable state lending arrangements under which beneficiaries were frequently required to repay only part of the cost; in some instances, the loan was converted entirely into a subsidy.[20] What emerged was therefore a system in which individual homeownership could coexist with substantial public financing and state-directed allocation.



Map of housing settlements established in Athens and Piraeus after 1922.
Image from Ioannis Papaioannou and Elli Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα* [*Housing in Greece*] (Athens: Technical Chamber of Greece, 1975), 14–15.



Plans and photographs of the Agios Sostis Housing Estate, Athens, 1964, designed by Elli N. Vasilikioti, among others, for the Directorate of Housing.
Image from Ioannis Papaioannou and Elli Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα* [*Housing in Greece*] (Athens: Technical Chamber of Greece, 1975), 70–71.

19 Ibid., 48–49.
20 Ibid., 162.

Against this institutional background, the projects surveyed by Vasilikioti in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Rhodes acquire a different meaning. Presented through photographs, plans, and concise descriptions of their locations, capacity, and principal features, they appear without attribution to individual architects. The Asyrmatos Polykatoikia—today among the works most closely associated with Vasilikioti—is likewise presented as one project among many. Its description, however, identifies the particular operation to which it belonged: the replacement of an existing "slum" and the rehousing of its residents.[21] Asyrmatos can therefore be situated within the much longer process described by Papaioannou, in which refugee settlements were progressively targeted for clearance and reconstruction.

ASYRMATOS

State-sponsored housing accounted for only a small proportion of post-war residential construction in Greece. Most Athenians secured housing through self-construction or the private market, particularly during the apartment-building boom of the 1960s and 1970s. Unlike the large peripheral estates developed elsewhere in Europe, public housing projects in Athens remained relatively modest in scale and were generally dispersed throughout existing neighborhoods. While pre-war schemes had relied largely on detached, semi-detached, and low-rise houses, post-war projects increasingly adopted the polykatoikia, the multi-story apartment building that had come to dominate private residential construction. Its proliferation was closely associated with antiparochi, a system whereby landowners transferred plots to developers in exchange for apartments in the resulting building. This mechanism accelerated the replacement of low-rise housing with reinforced-concrete apartment buildings, transforming much of Athens after the 1950s. By the mid-1960s, the polykatoikia (from the Greek poly, meaning "many," and katoikia, meaning "dwelling") had become a common building type in both private construction and state housing provision..[22] Although its white façades, balconies, flat roofs, and pilotis drew on the architectural vocabulary of modernism, most polykatoikies were built by small-scale contractors and developers rather than architects, giving post-war Athens much of its characteristic urban form.[23]

The development of Asyrmatos began in 1955, marking one of the early attempts to adapt the type to publicly funded housing provision. Situated close to the Acropolis, the project introduced 150 new dwellings for refugees, combining detached houses with four-story apartment blocks.[24] The district derives its name from the military wireless telegraph station (*asyrmatos* in Greek) established on the western slopes of Philopappos Hill in 1911. In the aftermath of the Asia Minor Catastrophe,[25] refugees arriving from Attaleia settled in the area, and the neighborhood became known both as Asyrmatos, after the wireless station, and Attaliotika, after the settlers' city of origin.[26] Much of what is known about the physical character of Asyrmatos before its post-war redevelopment is preserved through the 1961 film *Synoikia to Oneiro* (*A Neighbourhood Named "The Dream"*), which was shot on location shortly before the settlement was

21 Ibid., 79.

22 Thomas Maloutas and Maro Pantelidou Malouta, "Housing Estates in Athens," in Housing Estates in Europe: Poverty, Ethnic Segregation and Policy Challenges, ed. Daniel Baldwin Hess, Tiit Tammaru, and Maarten van Ham (Cham: Springer, 2018), 83–84.

23 Read more in Ioanna Theocharopoulou, "The Housewife, the Builder, and the Desire for a Polykatoikìa Apartment in Postwar Athens," in Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture, ed. Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar (London: Routledge, 2005), 65–82.

24 Papaioannou and Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα*, 83.

25 The Asia Minor Catastrophe refers to the events of 1922 that ended the Greco-Turkish War and led to the mass displacement of Greek Orthodox communities from Asia Minor. The subsequent 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey resulted in the arrival of around 1.2 million refugees in Greece. Read more in Renée Hirschon, ed., *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003).

26 "Ο Ασύρματος Θησείου και η απαρχή της ραδιοτηλεγραφίας στον Ελληνικό Στρατό (1911–1926)," *Ελεύθερος Κόσμος*, January 5, 2026.

demolished. The film follows the lives of several residents of the neighborhood, whose attempts to escape poverty and social marginalization are repeatedly frustrated by the conditions in which they live.[27] Beyond its narrative, however, the film provides a rare visual record of the settlement before its redevelopment, revealing the physical conditions under which its inhabitants lived. It shows that, prior to state intervention, most refugee settlements developed, to a great extent, informally, with little or no professional planning or architectural oversight. Such settlements were typically established on residual plots at the urban periphery, occupying land left vacant between natural barriers, infrastructure, and industrial facilities. In some instances, their location appears to have been determined strategically, either to serve political objectives or to provide nearby industries with a readily available labor force, as in Nea Ionia, Podarades, and Perissos. Constructed largely from salvaged corrugated metal and other improvised materials, these neighborhoods became known as *tenekedoupoleis* ("tinplate cities") and were widely regarded as representing some of the poorest standards of urban living. Yet their physical deprivation did not preclude the development of forms of collective life. Contemporary observers noted the strong sense of community that emerged within them. Despite the scarcity of resources, residents appropriated and cared for the limited communal spaces available, while small domestic gestures—including flowerpots and curtains at the entrances of their makeshift dwellings—conveyed a determination to establish a sense of home. Although conceived as temporary accommodation, many of these settlements endured until the 1960s. Neighborhoods such as Dourgouti, Drapetsona, Koundouriotika, Kaisariani, Aegaleo, Asyrmatos, Tavros, Korydallos, and Peristeri subsequently became emblematic not only of the persistence of refugee housing but also of working-class political mobilization and dissent.[28]



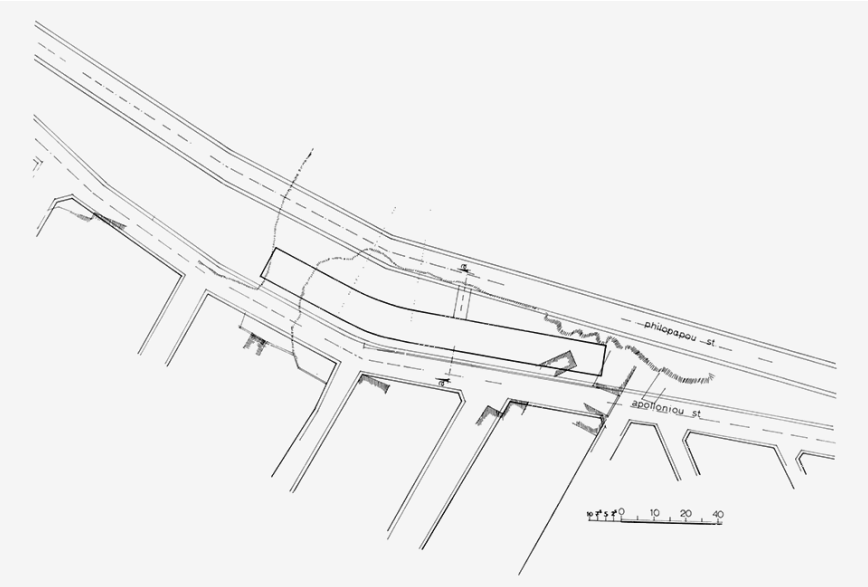
Street in the refugee settlement of Asyrmatos, Athens.
Still from Alekos Alexandrakis, dir., *Synoikia to Oneiro* [*A Neighborhood Named "The Dream"*] (1961). Cinematography by Dimos Sakellariou.

27 Alekos Alexandrakis, dir., *Συνοικία Το Όνειρο [A Neighbourhood Called "The Dream"]* (Athens: Damaskinos–Michaelides, 1961), film.
28 Alexander Tzonis and Alcestis P. Rodi, *Greece: Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2023), 76–77.



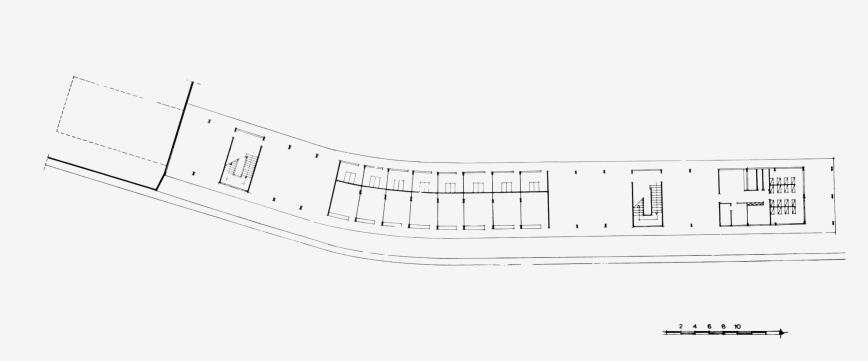
Reconstruction of the self-built settlement of Asyrmatos in the mid-twentieth century.
Aerial photographs from the OKXE (Hellenic Mapping and Cadastral Organization) archive.

The redevelopment of Asyrmatos therefore unfolded over more than a decade rather than through a single act of clearance and reconstruction. The first phase of the housing estate, begun in 1955, replaced part of the existing settlement, while older dwellings remained alongside the new construction. Vasilikioti's polykatoikia, completed in 1967, belonged to a later phase of this process and was inserted into a site already transformed by successive episodes of occupation and redevelopment. Unlike the more typical Athenian condition, in which individual polykatoikies were built side by side to form the perimeter of an urban block, the Asyrmatos building was conceived as a freestanding structure. It follows the crescent-shaped geometry of the steeply sloping site between Peripheriaki Filopappou Road above and Apollonios Street below. The pronounced difference in level—approximately five meters at the midpoint of the building—became a principal determinant of the design, allowing it to negotiate two distinct urban fronts while responding to the surrounding topography. Instead of imposing a uniform horizontal volume across the slope, Vasilikioti carefully adjusted the massing to preserve the panoramic view towards Faliron Bay enjoyed from the upper road. At the center of the building, part of the second floor was recessed to create an open terrace, ensuring that pedestrians and motorists travelling along the perimeter road retained their visual connection to the landscape beyond. This intervention also produced one of the project's most distinctive communal spaces: an elevated platform reached directly from the upper street by a pedestrian bridge, from which residents could enter the building while remaining connected to the surrounding circulation network. The ground floor reinforced this permeability. Rather than functioning as a closed residential plinth, it accommodated small shops, a laundry, storage rooms for residents, and a social welfare center. Open passages through the base of the building allowed pedestrians to move between the upper and lower parts of the neighborhood.



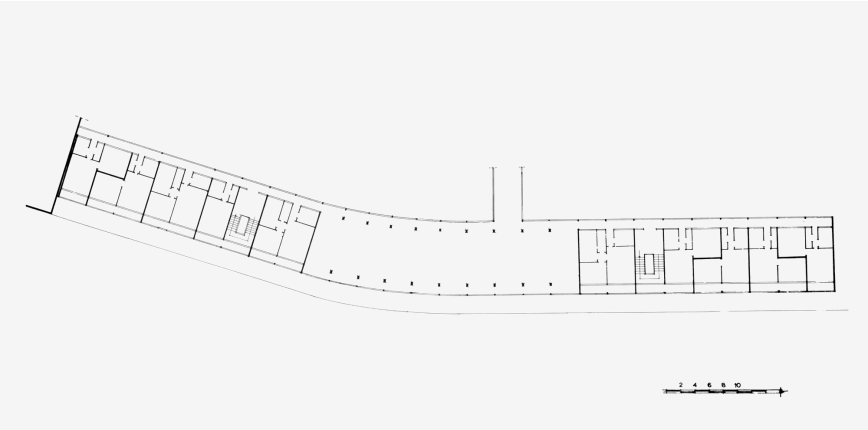
Site plan of the Asyrmatos apartment building, Athens, 1967.
Image from DOMa archive.

The apartments are reached through covered external galleries running along one side of each floor. Although the dwellings vary in size, comprising either one or two bedrooms to accommodate single occupants, couples, and families, they share a common spatial arrangement, extending the same domestic organization across different household compositions. The entrance to each dwelling leads directly into an elongated kitchen, whose windows overlook the shared circulation gallery. Beyond the kitchen lies the combined living and dining room, while a small vestibule provides access to the bathroom and bedrooms. In the typical apartment, the living–dining room and one of the bedrooms open onto a shared balcony. [29] The architectural expression of the building is correspondingly restrained. A regular white-painted reinforced-concrete structural frame establishes the rhythm of the façades, infilled with steel-mesh balcony railings and manually operated external shading devices. Along the access galleries, the kitchen windows are protected by timber louvred screens that temper sunlight, permit cross-ventilation, and provide a measure of privacy from passers-by. Over time, however, the disciplined architectural language of the building was modified through everyday occupation. Photographs show residents appropriating the galleries with flowerpots, chairs, and other personal belongings, introducing vegetation and signs of domestic life into spaces originally conceived primarily for shared circulation.

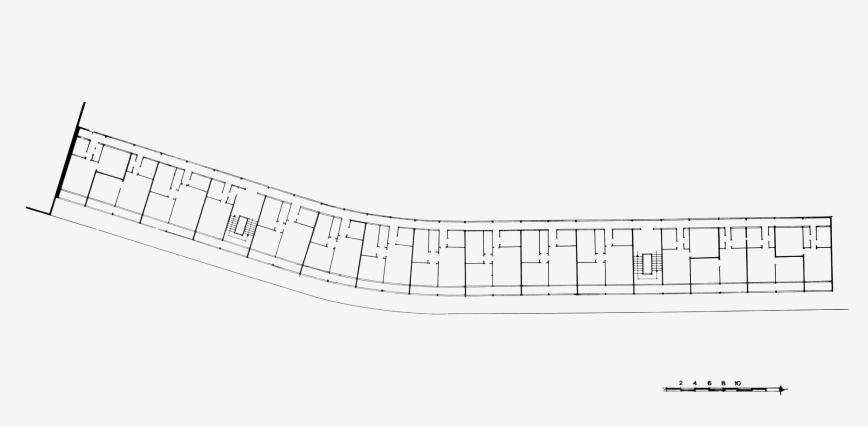


Ground-floor plan of the Asyrmatos apartment building, Athens, 1967.
Image from DOMa archive.

29 Papaioannou and Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα*, 79–82.



Second-floor plan of the Asyrmatos apartment building, Athens, 1967.
Image from DOMa archive.

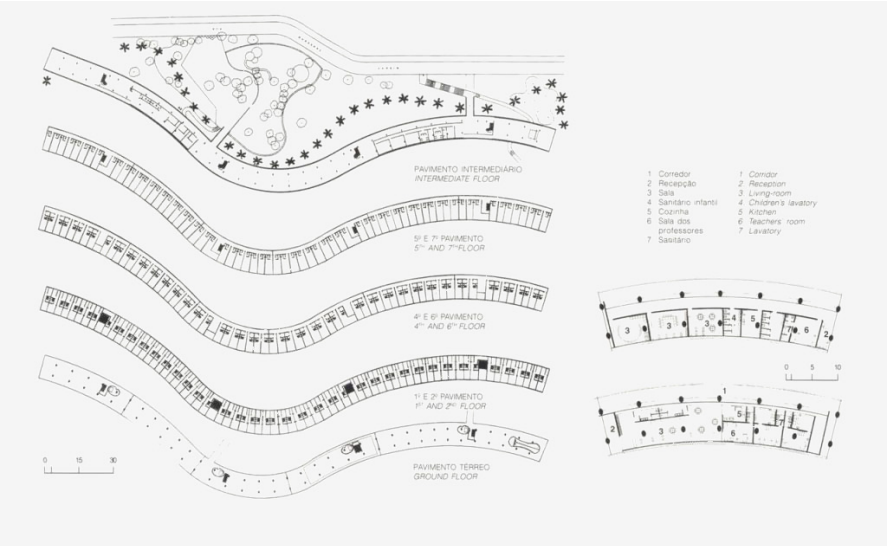


Typical upper-floor plan of the Asyrmatos apartment building, Athens, 1967.
Image from DOMa archive.

The Asyrmatos Polykatoikia invites comparison with Affonso Eduardo Reidy's Pedregulho Housing Complex in Rio de Janeiro, particularly in the way both projects responded to the topography of their sites. Although no documentary evidence establishes a direct connection between them, Pedregulho had become widely known through architectural publications by the late 1950s. As a senior architect within the Ministry of Public Works and a representative of Greece at international conferences and professional meetings, Vasilikioti participated in the networks through which such works circulated and were discussed. Whether she was familiar with Reidy's work remains uncertain, but the comparison allows us to consider how similar architectural strategies were employed within different institutional and political contexts.

At Pedregulho, Reidy arranged the principal residential block along the contours of a steep hillside, giving the building its characteristic sinuous form. Developed for the Department of Popular Housing of Rio de Janeiro, the complex comprised more than three hundred dwellings, together with a school, health center, market, laundry, sports facilities, and landscaped open spaces. Conceived as a neighbourhood unit, Pedregulho brought these functions together as part of a comprehensive program of social provision, through which the residential estate was intended to accommodate and organize various aspects of collective life.[30]

30 Ana Paula Koury, "From Formal Spectacle to the Discourse of Decay: The Pedregulho Housing Complex in Rio de Janeiro," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 32, no. 1 (2020): 47–60.





Left: Floor plans and communal facilities of Affonso Eduardo Reidy's Conjunto Residencial Prefeito Mendes de Moraes (Pedregulho), Block A, Rio de Janeiro, 1947–52.
Image from Klaus Franck, *The Works of Affonso Eduardo Reidy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), 98–100.
Right: View of Affonso Eduardo Reidy's Conjunto Residencial Prefeito Mendes de Moraes (Pedregulho), Block A, Rio de Janeiro, 1947–52. Photograph by Michel Aertsens.
Image from Klaus Franck, *The Works of Affonso Eduardo Reidy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), 102–103.

As at Pedregulho, the polykatoikia at Asyrmatos followed the configuration of the terrain, accommodated different apartment types within a continuous structure, and organized access through shared circulation. Despite these architectural affinities, the two developments differed in the scope of their respective programs. Whereas Reidy's scheme included educational, recreational, and healthcare facilities,[31] Vasilikioti's intervention was primarily directed towards accommodating an established refugee community. Although Asyrmatos incorporated a small number of shops and shared domestic amenities, including laundry facilities, schools, healthcare, and other public services remained outside its boundaries. This distinction reflected the particular conditions of housing provision in Greece, where state involvement in the construction and allocation of dwellings did not necessarily extend to the planning of their wider social infrastructure. The project thus presupposed a continued dependence on the surrounding city, whose existing institutions and services would provide for aspects of everyday life that remained beyond the scope of the architectural intervention.

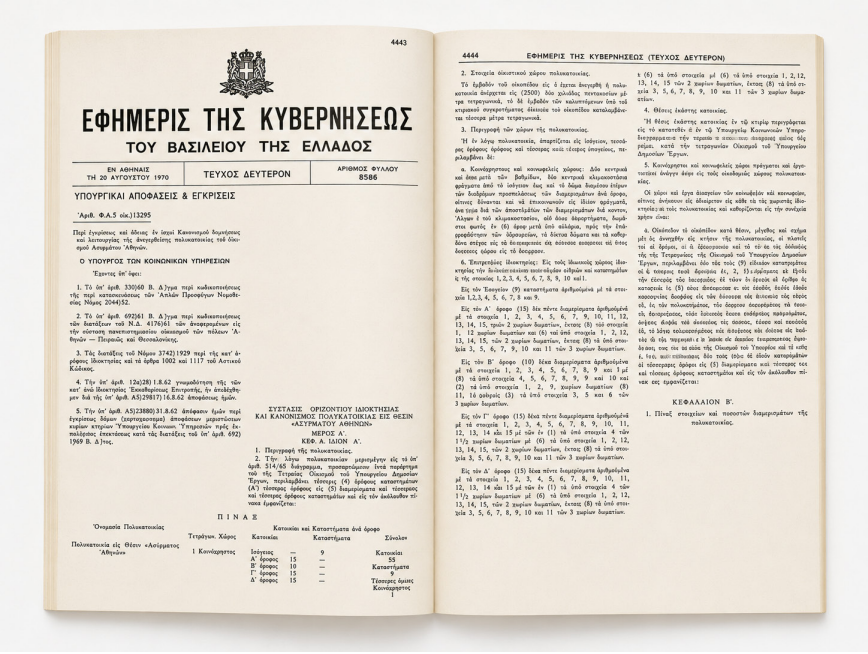
FROM REGULATION TO INHABITATION

The regulations governing the Asyrmatos apartment building, published in the *Government Gazette of the Kingdom of Greece* in 1970, provide an unusual account of the building after its completion. Issued during the military dictatorship (1967–74), at a moment when Greece officially remained the Kingdom of Greece despite the exile of King Constantine II and the suspension of parliamentary democracy, they record not the building's architectural conception or construction but the institutional framework through which it was intended to function as a residential community. Three years after the inauguration of the project, the regulations formalized the transition from a state-built housing scheme to a collectively owned apartment building, establishing the conditions under which

31 For a detailed discussion of the Pedregulho Housing Complex, see Stamo Papadaki, *The Works of Affonso Eduardo Reidy* (New York: Praeger, 1970).

fifty-five households and nine commercial premises would coexist within a single structure. Every apartment was assigned a precise ownership share, while every resident assumed responsibility for an extensive network of spaces and services that remained collectively owned.[32]

The document identifies these shared elements with considerable precision: staircases, entrance halls, corridors, roof terraces, the basement, façades, the reinforced-concrete frame, chimneys, drainage, water pipes, electrical installations, and service shafts. The regulations thus establish a precise distinction between elements belonging to individual households and those whose ownership, maintenance, and operation remained collective.[33] In doing so, a clear boundary is drawn between the apartment as individual property and the physical systems through which the building remained collectively dependent. That principle extended to its external appearance. Alterations to façades, roofs, and other visible elements were restricted, making the image of the block a shared concern. The regulations likewise specified responsibilities for repairs, cleanliness, circulation, and common facilities, while prohibiting activities that might disturb neighbors or damage the building.[34] Matters that appear mundane—repairing a pipe, maintaining a staircase, using the roof terrace—were thus placed within a legal framework governing relations among residents. The omissions from the regulations are equally telling. Bedrooms, kitchens, living rooms, and the organization of domestic life receive almost no attention. The apartment is treated as a largely self-evident private domain requiring little definition beyond ownership. Regulation becomes most detailed precisely where one household encounters another: in the spaces, structures, and services that no individual resident controls alone. Privacy is therefore constituted less by the internal organization of the dwelling than by the boundary between individual property and collective dependence.



Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως του Βασιλείου της Ελλάδος [Government Gazette of the Kingdom of Greece], no. 187, August 20, 1970, "[Περί εγκρίσεως του Κανονισμού Διοικήσεως και Λειτουργίας της Πολυκατοικίας Ασυρμάτου," 4443–4444.

32 *Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως του Βασιλείου της Ελλάδος* [Government Gazette of the Kingdom of Greece], no. 187, August 20, 1970, "[Περί εγκρίσεως του Κανονισμού Διοικήσεως και Λειτουργίας της Πολυκατοικίας Ασυρμάτου," 4819–4827.

33 Ibid., 4820–4822.

34 Ibid., 4821.




Access gallery and communal terrace of the Asyrmatos apartment building, Athens.
Images from DOMa archive.

In *Housing in Greece*, Vasilikioti approached the aftermath of rehousing from another direction: through the response of its intended occupants. Under "Citizens' Participation" and, more specifically, "Degree of Satisfaction of the Beneficiaries," she noted that residents sometimes objected to new settlements and occasionally refused to move into them. She concluded that "this program did not satisfy, in its greater part, the beneficiaries, especially in cases of relocation and construction of the new settlements, by the contracting system." Among the reasons she identified were attachment to the former settlement and its landscape, the economic relations residents had established there, and dissatisfaction with dwellings that did not correspond to the urban life they had anticipated.[35]

Vasilikioti's assessment belonged largely to the early years of these programs. Interviews conducted several decades later offer a different temporal perspective. Eleni Aggeloglou, interviewed in the apartment where she had lived since 1967, recalled the circumstances preceding her family's relocation. Before entering the new building, she had lived in Attaliotika, where her family had constructed its own house. "Ours was built of masonry," she recalled emphatically, "not a shack like the others." Describing everyday life in the settlement established by refugees from Attaleia, she remembered:

> The living conditions were terrible. There was no sewerage and no running water. Water was scarce, and when we went to the neighboring districts, people wouldn't give us any—they would shut the door in our faces because we were refugees. They didn't want us. The settlement was so densely built that the alleyways were only wide enough for one person to pass. The municipality had built two toilets for us, but they were nowhere near enough. It was dreadful. Families were large. As many as seven people lived in a single room, together with the grandparents. They were uneducated people who often didn't even know the language. People suffered greatly, but they were always trying to make a living. They weren't sitting idly in cafés. Some worked as shoe shiners, others as builders, ice-cream vendors, or sellers of *koulouria*.[36]

35 Papaioannou and Vasilikioti, *Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα*, 164.

36 Eleni Aggeloglou, as quoted in "Τα σπίτια είναι ολόφωτα στην πολυκατοικία του Ασύρματου" ["The Homes Are Flooded with Light in the Asyrmatos Polykatoikia"], *Popaganda*, October 2014, translated by the author from the Greek.



Contemporary view of the Asyrmatos apartment building, Athens.
Photograph from public domain.

Her recollections, however, were not confined to the material improvements brought about by relocation. Although she repeatedly described the apartment as her "light-filled" home and dismissed the possibility of moving elsewhere—"And where should I go? Wherever I go, I'll be looking into someone else's bedroom. In what apartment building don't you have someone living opposite you? They're all the same. People keep their windows closed so no one can see inside, with the lights on. Look here—my home is full of light"—she also remembered the refugee settlement as a place of greater sociability:

> Just think, there are fifty-six families living here, and I only visit two households as friends. We had a better life there. In the evenings we gathered in each other's homes, drank coffee, and told stories. In the summer everyone came out into the street, and we whitewashed the pavements to keep them clean. The neighborhood was like one big family. Once we moved here, each family became confined to its own home. Socially, it was better there, because you could step outside and at least greet your neighbors.



Detail of the access galleries of the Asyrmatos apartment building, Athens.
Photograph by Nikos Razis.

Other interviews carry the account beyond the generation that experienced relocation directly. Maria Nikolaou, whose grandparents had been among the refugees from Attaleia, purchased her apartment from an aunt "so that it would remain in the family." She recalled that residents themselves gradually planted the communal garden—"My family planted these trees"—and praised the building's position on Philopappou Hill: "Although you're in the center of Athens, it feels as though you're living in the countryside."[37] Her husband, Babis Triantafyllou, who grew up in Petralona, similarly remembered the polykatoikia in question as a distinctive local landmark while noting that its size had made collective decisions among residents increasingly difficult.[38]

WHAT A WAY TO MAKE A LIVING

The history of Asyrmatos offers a particular perspective on the character of social housing in post-war Greece, where public provision did not necessarily entail the development of a distinct architectural type. The state identified a population in need of rehousing, financed the construction of new dwellings, and organized their allocation. The adoption of the polykatoikia, already widespread in Athens and associated with the expanding middle classes, situated the project within an architectural tradition increasingly identified with social advancement and modern urban life. Yet its construction through public intervention gave this familiar residential form a different purpose, addressing housing needs that had not been met through the private market. Regulations issued after completion established individual ownership of the apartments alongside collective governance of the building's structure and common spaces, arrangements that brought Asyrmatos into the property relations characteristic of post-war Athens. Over time, the building became part of the ordinary urban fabric, a polykatoikia among many others. What distinguished Asyrmatos as social housing was therefore not an architectural identity separate from private residential construction, but the particular relationship between public responsibility, housing provision, and private ownership that shaped its development.



Contemporary view of the access galleries of the Asyrmatos apartment building, Athens. Photograph from Aspasia Koulira.

37 Maria Nikolaou, as quoted in "Τα σπίτια είναι ολόφωτα στην πολυκατοικία του Ασύρματου" ["The Homes Are Flooded with Light in the Asyrmatos Polykatoikia"], *Popaganda*, October 2014, translated by the author from the Greek.

38 Babis Triantafyllou, as quoted in "Τα σπίτια είναι ολόφωτα στην πολυκατοικία του Ασύρματου" ["The Homes Are Flooded with Light in the Asyrmatos Polykatoikia"], *Popaganda*, October 2014, translated by the author from the Greek.

The accounts of residents show how the meaning of that intervention changed through occupation. For the first generation of inhabitants, who experienced the relocation itself, the move to Asyrmatos could be remembered through an unresolved combination of material improvement and social loss: the new apartments offered light, sanitation, and more adequate living conditions, while the settlement they replaced remained associated with forms of proximity and collective life that the polykatoikia could not reproduce. The perspective of a later generation is different. For those who inherited or grew up with the apartment, Asyrmatos could already be understood as part of a family history and as a valued place within the neighborhood, rather than principally as the outcome of rehousing. The contrast resists a simple narrative of either progress or displacement. Instead, it shows how the original act of public provision gradually receded as decades of occupation, inheritance, adaptation, and attachment gave the building meanings increasingly distant from the circumstances of its construction.

Vasilikioti's place within this history becomes clearer when considered across the continuity and breadth of her work. Few Greek architects of her generation appear to have been involved so consistently with publicly sponsored housing, from Asyrmatos to large developments such as Phoenix–Votsi, while also contributing to its study and administration. Her career also points to a more complex relationship between public service and architectural authorship. At a time when women faced considerable obstacles in establishing and sustaining independent practices, the nine-to-five routine of public employment offered access to commissions and forms of professional responsibility that might otherwise have been difficult to attain. Her case raises a broader historiographical question: how many other women working within public institutions contributed to the housing question in comparable ways, while their identities and individual contributions remained largely absent from its architectural history?



Contemporary view of the Asyrmatos apartment building, Athens.
Photograph from public domain.

This question finds a particularly telling expression in *Housing in Greece*. In its survey of completed projects, individual architects are not named; the Asyrmatos Polykatoikia appears simply as one entry within an extensive record of state housing provision. Vasilikioti thus documented at least three buildings she herself had designed without identifying herself as their architect. This anonymity points to a mode of practice in which

the individual building was understood as part of a wider undertaking rather than primarily as an autonomous work attributable to a single author. Read together, the projects assembled in *Housing in Greece* can be understood as a project in their own right: a sustained attempt to address housing as a collective problem. Perhaps it is precisely this ambition—to conceive of the housing question as a project extending beyond the production of individual buildings—that is lacking in many contemporary attempts to address it.

AUTHOR

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