

Thessaloniki before and after Ernest Hébrard

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Thessaloniki's entrance into the 20th century has been largely recounted as a period of development for the city, as its most cosmopolitan era. Apart from its commercial influence, the city was a major military and administrative center, with a pronounced international profile, which regulated European penetration and trade. A transportation and transit hub for the Balkan hinterland, it also functioned as a breeding-ground of new ideas for the renewal and democratization of the Ottoman Empire during a particularly unstable period for the Balkans and Macedonia, characterized *inter alia* by tremendous mobility of the population between the agrarian countryside and the cities of the greater Balkan inland region.

Taking as our starting-point the major reorganization of its city-plan that occurred in Thessaloniki after it was incorporated into Greece in 1912, and its destruction by fire in 1917, we shall consider the more general climate of the era, which fostered and encouraged innovations and transformations on a large scale at the national level, as well as in the city of Thessaloniki. Correspondingly important was the role of those who were involved in this undertaking, among them Ernest Hébrard, a French architect, city planner, and archaeologist with an international reputation. His close and harmonious collaboration during all stages of this effort with Alexandros Papanastasiou (the Minister of Public Transport), Venizelos and the country's top technical personnel hints at the convergence achieved between general goals and concrete possibilities and the desire to implement these.

At first glance, this history is well known:

In 1917, five years after its liberation, the historic center of Thessaloniki was destroyed by fire. The government of the Liberals led by Eleftherios Venizelos and with important politicians of that era like Alexandros Papanastasiou working together with him, decided to redesign the city. With the support of General Sarrail, the job was assigned to Ernest Hébrard, a French architect who was coincidentally in the city, having been enlisted in the Army of the East (during the First World War).

The view that has prevailed regarding the evaluation of this plan is that in the end, a number of roads were widened, but that generally speaking, the plan was not implemented and ... “thus, the chance for us to acquire a city that would meet the requirements of the modern period was lost”, a phrase that returns as a permanent refrain on the lips of local leaders.

Even the causes of the fire are frequently brought into question, as well as the objectives of the governments of the time to redesign the city.

The text that follows argues in favor of a distinctly different viewpoint. To be sure, historical research is an open process, and it is possible that at some point other views will emerge. But until that time, the evidence we have at our disposal does not lend itself to different interpretations.

Thessaloniki at the end of Ottoman rule

The first half of the 19th century was a period of tremendous political and institutional weakening of the Ottoman Empire, and one of intense anarchy within. It coincided with the national liberation movements in the Balkans, and certainly influenced cities in the Balkan region. This was one of the darkest periods in Thessaloniki’s history (fires, insecurity, epidemics, economic reverses and abandonment, decline in the number of inhabitants, etc.), while the Greek population was subjected to intense pressure and persecution not to join the Greeks who had revolted in the southern provinces. The Reforms announced in 1839 promised equality of civil rights and equality under the law but they essentially remained essentially inefficacious for the next thirty years. The city continued to be stifled within its walls, and presented the traditional layout by neighborhoods and precincts that corresponded to the ethnic-religious origins of its inhabitants.

Continuous steps taken by European consuls vis-à-vis the general administration of the *vilayet* in regard to matters of urban hygiene, improvement of prison conditions, the embellishment of the city, as well as pressure exerted by them for the formation of a city government from 1858 and onwards remained without response. While the visit by the Sultan in July 1859 provided a motive for some embellishments, and while in 1868 we note the first attempt to open up and widen the central avenue (Egnatia) to a width of 8 meters (from building to building!), the substantive influence of the new spirit of the Reforms in the city began in 1869. Early in that year, Sabri pasa assumed the office of governor of the *vilayet*; he belonged to the new generation of Ottoman officials, and was charged with implementing the commitment to modernization measures. To that time are dated the installation of a city government, the publication of an official newspaper for the

prefecture, the hastening of works on the rail connection between Thessaloniki and Skopje-Mitrovitsa, and the opening of the city both towards its countryside as well as the sea through the demolition of a large section of the walls.

The demolition of the walls and the construction of a quay were the most important planning operations in the city up to the end of Ottoman rule, and they altered the urban form of Thessaloniki, permitting its connection to the harbor and the railway stations to the West, and its eastward expansion. This development was imposed by new trade conditions in the Mediterranean, particularly after the opening of the Suez Canal, and it marked a renewed role for the city, both international and regional. At the same time, it allowed the partial restructuring of the historic center and the improvement of hygiene conditions within the city. Apart from functional transactions, it was also anticipated that newly designed building lots would attract the interest of businesses that were arriving in the city and seeking space to establish their offices. Business operations, hotels, and entertainment comprised the triptych of new activities whose development had not been permitted by the old layout of existing urban space.

The intervention program, which originally foresaw the obligation to allot a number of lots for public services, was complemented by the creation of a public park in the area of the old *Bechtsinar/Bes Çinar* gardens. Also owed to the same plan was the final widening of Venizelos Street (*Sabri pasa*) towards the sea, concluding in the formation of Freedom “Square” (Plateia Eleftherias), and completing the picture of an important commercial street, offering the most lively spaces for entertainment in “modern” Thessaloniki, right at the juncture of sea-harbor and commerce. From that time, the traditional arrangement of the city, with its distinct ethnic-religious precincts and complex of low-built, extensive markets would be subject to continuous transformations.

Of interest in the process of modernizing the city was the effort to establish city self-government in an effective manner along the lines of western models, and for the city to acquire a legal status, special sources of income, a public works program, and public services. Although in its initial years the activities of the Mayor’s office were practically non-existent, in the decade 1880-1890 they became more substantive, thanks largely to the presence of newspapers (the *Ερμής-Φάρου της Μακεδονίας*) which, supported by citizen groups, demanded the adoption of basic city planning measures to control use and construction, as well as the formation of public services. At the same time, the presence of Galib pasa in the general administration supported a more suitable promulgation of modernization programs, on behalf of which more substantial steps were taken in the years following.

The first planned expansion of Thessaloniki dates to 1879, coinciding with the demolition of a portion of the eastern wall, extended to public lands, which were freed from fortifications, and to neighboring private plots. The build-up of this area was promoted with particular interest by the authorities, who wanted to prod Thessalonians to adopt new ideas about their habitation spaces. A new boulevard was laid out beside the traces of the wall and planted with trees, and a series of fashionable residences was built according to the plans of architects from Constantinople. These were the well-known “*Sultaniká*”, which were quickly snatched up by the city’s residents. The Sultan expressed his pleasure by offering the fountain that gave the precinct the name by which it still goes, Syntrivani.

A plan for the entire city within the walls was prepared before 1882 at the initiative of the Mayor’s office. It foresaw the opening of a number of streets running perpendicular to the seacoast, so as to better connect the inner precincts of the city with this nearby area of activity and recreation. The division of what had been a unified lot belonging to the Metropolis, with the extension of the irregular street of Aghia Sophia leading down to the sea, dates to this period.

Thanks to the increased financial yield from private land ownership, there was a great deal of reconstruction from 1882 onwards, and the center began to change its appearance. The need for office space, non-existent in the traditional city, arose rather suddenly and it became necessary to seek it in existing buildings, whose typological organization suited such usage. The traditional inns, which abounded in the area of the “Old Market”, were converted into office buildings, housing new activities in small spaces around a traditional central courtyard. Next to these, banks and hotels, theaters and “department stores”, warehouses and factories were built, including the Saias spinning-mill, which was set up along the wharf in 1879 beside the Metropolis. With its modernizing architecture, it put its mark on the seaward face of Thessaloniki until it burned in 1917. During the same era, changes in social life created new habits and demands for space to satisfy these. From 1880 on, there is reference to the existence of social and professional associations like the Bar Association, the Medical Society, the Greek Club, and a little later, the Chamber of Commerce. The European Club, an association founded by the English consul John Blunt, was probably older.

The expansion of the city outside the walls also proceeded at a rapid rate, confirming the growth of the urban population. In the town plan of 1889, there appear for the first time two “suburbs”, covering an area of 90 hectares to the east and 60 to the west (vis-à-vis the 300 hectares covered by the core within the walls). The very rapid development of the eastern suburb, which was named “Hamidiye” in honor of the Sultan Abdul Hamid, formed an important chapter in the history of the modern city. Entirely new uses came naturally to be established by virtue of the

empty land; new forms of spatial organization and occupying space developed. The traditional separation according to religion or ethnic origins, which continued to characterize the old city center, no longer obtained.

The most important change to the historical center came from the redesign of the central precinct between Egnatia Street and the quay, and around Saint Sophia and the Metropolis (an extent of about 20 hectares), which burned in 1890. The fire struck the oldest and most unsanitary area of the city. The effort to redesign this central part of Thessaloniki had important consequences for its morphology. The new plan presented an area “open” towards the city, creating the new organizational element of the urban plan, the regular building block, with all the buildings arranged so that their façade faced the street. For the first time, the city acquired within its walls new, broad streets like Aghia Sophia, with a width of 18 meters, and Capanaca (Tsimiski) and Hamam Matalon (Vasileos Herakleiou), both 12 meters wide. Aghia Sophia Street would henceforth be called “the street of rich houses”.

The rapid rise in the urban population, from around 50,000 in 1850 to 135,000 in 1905, and the profusion of new residences in Thessaloniki resulted in dense construction within the walls and in makeshift settlements in newly zoned areas. At the end of the 19th century, Thessaloniki came to know habitation conditions that had appeared much earlier in the developed cities of the West. The population increase, the aging of an accumulation of buildings already in poor repair, calamities, economic fluctuations that created instability and uncertainty in the region, and the absence of an organized social policy for housing severely aggravated the housing problem and sanitary conditions in the city.

“Refugee camp” and “European-style precincts” composed the twin visage of Thessaloniki at the turn of the century. And in fact during these years, the city’s various communities were engaged in a striking building competition, reflected in the city’s architecture, while City Hall was also developing intense building activity, chiefly with the presence, from March 1893, of Hamdi Bey. Hamdi built public buildings, beautified public spaces (gardens and the quay), and negotiated a “mayor’s loan” to widen and adorn the city’s streets. Particularly impressive was reconstruction in the new precinct of Hamidiye or Pyrgoi. In fact, while the old precincts always remained labyrinthine and “chaotic”, the new areas in the extensions enjoyed regularized plans. Simultaneously, a social and functional specialization of space began to be created: residential housing for the upper classes in the eastern extension and along the main artery of Pyrgoi (Vasilissis Olgas); railway installations, warehouses and lower-class housing in the western extensions; business activities in the Frangomachala and along the quay, as well as along the coastal section of Sabri pasa street (Venizelou), which ran perpendicular to the seaside. Small and

medium-sized incomes inundated the redesigned areas of the center and the eastern extensions at some distance from the sea, creating embryonic agglomerations with a distinctive social composition and mixed ethnic-religious origins.

New infrastructure works included the construction of a modern drainage network, the expansion of the gaslight line into the eastern extensions, the establishment of city transport with horse-drawn tramways that were soon converted into electric ones, the creation of a bus-line, and urban coastal navigation.

At the same time, the economic and urban planning evolution of the city was marked by the creation of two new rail lines (to Monastir and to Constantinople via Dedeagatz) and the expansion of the port, begun in the 1890s and completed in the early 20th century. The widening of the road along the sea, the construction of an imposing customs building by the civil engineer Eli Modiano in 1910, the new warehouses and silos, all underscored the continuation of Thessaloniki's traditional role as a center of transport trade.

Thessaloniki was touted in 1912 as “the most modern city in the Ottoman Empire”. But its modernization remained incomplete. The city continued to reflect its multi-religious composition (3 main ethnic-religious groups: Jews –the most populous group, Muslims and Christians), and to function around different power centers, one of which was the Ottoman public administration. When Thessaloniki became Greek in 1912, the Greek authorities immediately decided to intervene in order to hasten its transformation in accordance with the western prototypes of the Modern Greek state.

1912-1940. The fire, new planning, and the city's rebuilding

The first Greek administration of Thessaloniki immediately occupied itself with the restructuring of the city's city planning, despite the very serious political, military and economic problems the city was facing. From early 1913, and without losing any time, the official representation of the Greek government, K. Raktivan, formed a committee to prepare a new city plan, with the architect A. Zachos as advisor. Also serving on the “Embellishment Committee”, as it was called, were P. Roumbos, the painter and architect K. Maleas, and city engineer G. Menexes; the Committee's Chair was Pericles Argyropoulos.

Among the Embellishment Committee's recommendations were the widening of Egnatia Street to a total width of 24 meters, with 5-meter sidewalks planted with trees; also recommended was the widening to a total of 24 meters of the road extending down to the sea – the modern-day

Venizelou Street – which connected the port with the *Dioikitirio* (the government building) and which was covered at many points, as we have already seen. Simultaneously, in agreement with the Archaeological Service, it was proposed to preserve the Byzantine wall and to open up squares in front of many of the city’s monuments, such as the Arch of Galerius and all of the important churches, parallel with the imposition of special restrictions for the facades of neighboring private buildings. There was also active intervention to preserve the White Tower, when thoughts were expressed about demolishing it. It is worthy adding here that in a later newspaper interview, A. Zachos claimed that in 1913, the White Tower escaped demolition only by virtue of the great cost that would have been incurred by doing so!

The Embellishment Committee worked up until the middle of 1914, but then interrupted its work due to the war. Its proposals were ignored, since with the arrival of the Army of the East the city was obliged to live under emergency conditions, essentially being transformed into a military camp and recreational city for 200,000 soldiers. Throughout the “Great War”, Thessaloniki operated as a waystation for refugees, soldiers, and every sort of adventurers and conspirators, while commercial, recreational, and every kind of services swelled to meet demands of the army and large numbers of visitors.

The fire of 1917, five years after Thessaloniki’s liberation and five years before the Asia Minor catastrophe and exchange of populations, was a landmark in the history of the city. Simultaneously with changes to its ethnic character and role, and with the exchange of a large percentage of its population, Thessaloniki also changed with respect to its spatial composition/underpinnings.

In the space of 32 hours the fire, which broke out on the afternoon of August 5 (18) in the northwest part of the city, burned to ashes 120 hectares of the most important section of the city center, and effected the final disappearance of Thessaloniki’s “Eastern” visage and traditional layout, which had continued to exist in spite of attempts at modernization around the turn of the century. The destruction struck indiscriminately in precincts that had been beautified during the final years of the 19th century, in traditional marketplaces, and in a large number of residential areas, creating 70,000 homeless, three-fourths of whom were Jews. Financial operations, administrative services, recreational spaces and the most important spiritual and religious buildings of the ethnic-religious communities, together with their archives, became prey to the fire. 9,500 buildings, among them a large number of synagogues and structures belonging to the Chief Rabbi, mosques and Christian churches such as Saint Theodora, Saint Nikolaos o Tranos, and that of the city’s patron, Saint Demetrius, were completely destroyed. No human victims are mentioned in the

numerous reports by the responsible services and those of the communities and various private citizens, but it is certain that there were victims, both among the rescue crews as well as among those stricken, who searched desperately among the ruins during the days that followed.

As causes for the extremely rapid and merciless spread of the fire, the following have been suggested: lack of rain (it was summer); the northwest wind that was blowing (the Thessaloniki “Vardaris”); lack of water in the city, owing to enormous demand on the part of the allied military camps; the absence of organized fire protection; the city plan itself and the materials from which buildings were made, and finally, the “zeal” of allied forces, which took part in fighting the fire. It would seem that in their effort to create firebreaks, the soldiers blew up entire city blocks, which were immediately transformed into the foci of new fires.

During this period, Thessaloniki was the headquarters of the General Administration of Macedonia and was essentially under occupation by the Armée d’Orient. The population of 150,000 recorded in 1913 had been significantly increased by groups of refugees passing through the city. Of course, the published figure of 278,000 residents recorded in 1917 calls forth doubt, and cannot be taken seriously. In addition, the rumor that the fire was essentially intentional cannot be considered as having any basis in truth. The inability to identify any convincing arguments concerning motives for arson, and the complete absence of any sort of related suspicions in written sources and in personal correspondence left by distinguished Thessalonians of that era leave no room for discussion of this question, though it might be reexamined in the light of new evidence.

Immediately after the disaster, one is impressed by the decisiveness and enterprising manner in which the Greek government confronted the multi-dimensional problem of rebuilding the city. The unheard-of earnestness with which the Liberal government proceeded to a complete redesign of the central area of the city, without taking into consideration the plans of the Embellishment Committee, underscores the disposition of leaders to intervene in a decisive way in the city’s new evolution. Adopting the most recent ideas and methods of city planning, and deciding to ignore the pre-existing situation and traditional land uses, the government wanted to employ the city’s rebuilding as a spur to its social, economic, and spatial modernization, to exert a policy of reform, and to stress its political presence in Thessaloniki, while at the same time attracting international interest in an ambitious undertaking.

Implementing its decisions, the Venizelos government formed a committee which the French architect-archaeologist Ernest Hébrard, the English landscape architect Thomas Mawson, the French military engineer Joseph Pleyber, the architects Aristotelis Zachos and Konstantinos

Kitsikis, the port expert Angelos Ginis, and the city's Mayor, Konstantinos Angelakis, were invited to join. At the same time, a committee of lawyers, under the guidance of the then-Minister for Transport (and city planning) Alexandros Papanastasiou, undertook to study the requisite legal framework that would permit implementation of the plan in accordance with the broader social aims that had been set forth. A third committee of finance experts and topographers undertook to record the damage, prepare a detailed land registry, and provide estimates of the value of public and private land that was to be redesigned.

The plan the International Planning Committee prepared for Thessaloniki under the guidance of Ernest Hébrard constitutes an interesting transfer of that era's leading views concerning design to geographically local and historically particular circumstances. It introduced Thessaloniki to classical divisions (with axes, diagonals, monuments-focal points), a hierarchical street network, the concentration of public services, and the creation of a "civic" center for the city, the rational organization and zoning of spaces for production and consumption, the selective highlighting of monuments, and preservation of a number of "picturesque" residential precincts. The traditional image of Thessaloniki faded away, and was replaced by a "modern" homogeneous space, without its previous defining features. The plan proposed new extensions, so that the city could accommodate 350,000 residents and encompass a total of 2,400 hectares. Industrial zones, workers' housing, residential and recreational areas were determined and their boundaries established. The basic organizing element of its plan was the geometric building block, which replaced its irregular and labyrinthine neighborhoods.

The heart of the city center was created by two squares connected by a boulevard perpendicular to the sea, which left open a view towards Mt. Olympus from within the city. The "civic" square, beside the area where the ancient Agora was later excavated, would gather together city hall, the law courts, and buildings connected with public services. The second square, today's Aristotle Square, a site for retail commercial activity and recreation, stressed – in accordance with the model of the Piazzetta of Venice – the city's opening towards the sea. The so-called "Neo-Byzantine" style was prescribed for the buildings on the two squares and their connecting axis, so that they would function, in combination with the public buildings, as a monumental whole for the city.

To make the new plan more attractive, and to ensure the city the open spaces that had not existed in the past, Hébrard employed the city's monuments (chiefly its Byzantine ones, but also the few Ottoman monuments that had survived from the fire) as focal points for a network of public spaces (squares, sidewalks, tree-lined main streets). The new road connecting the Rotunda

with the Arch of Galerius, which passes through Navarinou Square to descend to the sea, thus combining an archaeological tour and elements of the city (hills, the sea) with a heavily-frequented working and residential area, is owed to the same logic. Many more well-designed squares surround monuments and public structures, including the White Tower, Acheiropoiitos, the Dioikitirio, Syntrivani, and Vardaris, as well as the buildings for the guilds, the Post Office, and the Stock Exchange, which were never built.

The Thessaloniki Planning Committee was not limited to the preparation of general city planning documents; rather, it proceeded to many individual proposals regarding particular aspects of the city's rebuilding. Plans were prepared for the University of Thessaloniki, which was being established at that time, for workers' housing, for the industrial regions, and for the port. The Committee made an important contribution to model plans for the new type of collective housing, the apartment building, which imposed views about a "modern", densely-inhabited urban space. It is from this era that there first appeared, and later prevailed, "horizontal ownership", incorporating at the same time the construction of multi-storeyed office and residential buildings into the economy of the marketplace.

While Thessaloniki's new plan is well known in general outline, since it was to a considerable degree implemented – at least as regards two of its dimensions – the legislation that supported the plan's implementation has been ignored by historians. Beyond the particular interest it presents for the reshaping of Thessaloniki, this legislation serves as a valuable testament to the views developed during the decade 1910-1920 concerning the possibilities for urban spaces to contribute to the economic, social, and ideological transformation of the Greek state. According to those who introduced the legal texts, the Greek city was not in a position to support – or even, to accept – a much sought-after modernization of the economy and society, which aimed at the industrialization of the country, the development of new activities belonging to the tertiary sector, and the creation and satisfaction of new and distinctive consumption behaviors by the numerous new urban classes. These objectives required the more rational exploitation of urban land, particularly that in traditional historic centers, the rejection of low-yield economic activities, the use of new technological achievements in the building technologies (as e.g. reinforced concrete, which makes possible taller buildings and new forms of co-ownership), and the adaptation by the traditional city to automobile traffic. They also required the adoption of new city-planning mechanisms that imposed zones with different building uses, so as to form areas whose economic and functional purposes are specialized.

At the same time, the texts are pervaded by the conviction that the city's continual geographic and demographic expansion did not necessarily mean its technological and economic development; therefore, these needed to be subject to constant controls, and the state needed to intervene not only through controls, but also by programming in advance the organization and development of urban space. Consequently, the increase in the value of urban land that is observed in cities under development, inasmuch as this is controlled by the state, is not due to landowners and is therefore not automatically attributable to them. On the contrary, it has a social origin and accordingly a sense of social justice is imposed for this increase (in part, if not *in toto*) to be returned to the whole of society, and to be redistributed among the socially disadvantaged classes. Thus, the dimension of modernization was accompanied by elements of reform policy, which were absent from the city planning legislation of the 19th century, and which were introduced for the first time into Greek city planning via the new legislation for Thessaloniki's reconstruction.

More specifically, this legislation:

- Treats the city as an organic whole rather than the sum of its private properties, and accordingly, it directs state intervention towards the entire restructuring of urban space, and not towards its correction according to circumstances or at individual points.

- Employs city planning to prompt the increase of land values and simultaneously, to redistribute the appropriation of surplus value.

- Takes cognizance of socioeconomic problems and the conflicts that are inherent in a traditional city during its modernization and transition to a new level of development of capitalist economy, and endeavors to manage these by expanding the role of state intervention. At the same time, it expresses the confidence of those who introduced the legislation in the possibility for the harmonious coexistence of private and public interests within a framework of successful regulations.

- These important innovations were clearly stated in Law 1394/1918, according to which the implementation of the new city plan presupposed:

- The complete appropriation of land in the historic center's fire-stricken zone.

- The creation of a real estate group whose members would be the old owners, on whose behalf the appropriation would take place. The owners became shareholders in the real estate group, in accordance with the value of their property, and their rights were certified through the issuance of a deed of ownership. With certain exceptions, the sale and purchase of deeds of ownership was entirely forbidden, so that ownership did not change hands.

- Free planning of the center, without consideration for the boundaries of privately owned plots of land. The planning of the new lots would be subject to more general planning parameters,

including: particular land features, the hierarchy and width of streets, pre-ordained uses of the area and the lot, and the architecture desired for the city.

- Return of the new lots to old or new owners following compulsory public sales (auctions with written offers) that would be open to all. The upper prices of most lots were not allowed to go above a predetermined limit; in cases where equal bids were submitted, the previous owner was given preference, and no one was allowed to acquire more than two lots, so as to avoid the land in the city center's falling into the hands of the few.

- Acquisition by the community (the city and the public) of all land necessary for collective services, according to what the plan foresaw, at prices that had been determined before the plan's implementation.

- Distribution of the profits of the Real Estate Group equally between the previous owners and the city, which would employ them to carry out necessary infrastructure works for the city.

- Taxation on the change in value of urban properties in all their future sales.

With these regulations, the desire on the part of the state sponsor of the legislation to define in detail the roles of all those who would intervene in, and give shape to, the city was clear. Also obvious was the modern spirit displayed by the Liberal government in adopting views concerning the organization of urban spaces, which had only just been codified by groups of Western European specialists in order to deal with the enormous destruction brought about by the war. As testimony to their time, they show the blind faith of their sponsors in the possibilities of technology and rational organization to function as spurs to social progress. They also make clear the certainty that the undertaking would attract not only international interest, but also the assent of Thessaloniki's various social groups.

Within the same framework there was included yet another objective, one of particular significance for the historical circumstances, which however was never explicitly stated. This was the sought-after melding and homogenization of a society with multiple religions and diverse cultural origins, organizing structures, and broader connections and objectives, and the support of the Greek presence in the city, both in terms of population and economics.

In any case, it is interesting and noteworthy that the result of the planning of Thessaloniki is to a large degree identical to the plan the experts had prepared for the city center. In contrast, the complex mechanisms just referred to by which the new Thessaloniki would once again revert to its residents were not adopted. As related research has shown, when the Liberals were defeated in the elections of November 1920, implementation of the new plan had not gone forward due to intense reactions incited by groups of large financial interests in the city. The simultaneous inability of the lower and middle classes to express their views, and the advancement of demands and claims of a

different character by worker's groups in the city left open the field of action to powerful capitalists who appeared as the mouthpieces of the inhabitants. Thus, the retreat that was accomplished under pressure from the most powerful economic players primarily concerned the reforming characteristics of the original view about the city's redesign, and much less the form of the plan, about the adjustments to which it could be claimed that they were in large part distinguished by a pragmatism demanded by conditions.

More specifically, Dimitrios Gounaris' government of the Populist Party, with the sponsorship of Panagis Tsaldaris, who had replaced Alexandros Papanastasiou, supplanted the 1918 law with Law 2633/1921. According to the new legislation:

- The free disposition of deeds of ownership was permitted, which immediately resulted in the operation of a shadow market in old titles in competition with appropriations of new lots, thus lending support to land speculation.

- The procedure for appropriations changed. On the pretext of supporting the Thessalonians, the exclusive presence of holders of deeds of ownership (not the old owners) was imposed, but prices were left to fluctuate freely, without any upper limits, at open auctions.

- The profits from appropriations were employed to finance the purchase of prime lots in the city (3rd section, commercial district), where the greatest competitiveness for ownership had appeared; this competitiveness absorbed the capital that was to have been invested in rebuilding.

The auctions lasted four years (1921-1924), and were particularly profitable. Research into the archive of the 2,400 appropriations reveals that only 56% of the deeds (as a percentage of their total value) were actually submitted for purchases of new lots; it is unknown how many of these were used by the original owners. Of the remaining 44%, 18.5% were redeemed and 22.5% remained unused by their bearers, who thus lost all rights to their former property. It may therefore be maintained that both the destruction of the city itself and the delay of around five years before its rebuilding began, as well as the mechanisms for the redistribution of space as these finally operated, resulted in the transfer of profits from the city's redesign in favor of new owners, who purchased the choicest pieces of property. All those who could not afford to wait were lost, or cut off from the auctions at the outset: small property holders, craftsmen and small merchants (of all ethno-religious origins), who sold or redeemed (in devalued drachmas) their ownership deeds, and were thus banished from the city center, so that a newly-organized socio-economic hierarchy could establish itself there.

While the reformist characteristics were abrogated and the purchase of new lots worked so as to favor speculation, a number of the objectives of the modernization were fully achieved:

-The historic city center could now attract, and receive, the increased activities of the tertiary sector, offering spaces for luxury-class retail commerce and recreation meeting high specifications, and allowing the establishment of residential housing for the middle and upper classes.

- The traffic network and infrastructure were modernized. The harbor was expanded, the railroad stations reorganized, urban infrastructure established, and a modern road network was created that could serve increased vehicular traffic.

- The servicing of production activities was improved, with spaces specially devoted to industrial installations, warehouses, wholesale merchandising, etc.

- Land values were reorganized and preserved (of course, only rudimentarily) through regulations concerning a number of basic uses, and through the development of building regulations and control services.

- The use of concrete was imposed in buildings, together with new, increased building heights in the city, intensifying land exploitation and introducing new behaviors of collective habitation.

Also significant were the consequences of the redesign for the social arrangement of urban space, expressed with the dissolution of its old structure with multiple foci, the spatial disengagement of the inhabitants as regards their communal and religious identity, the refinement of financial and non-financial activities in accordance with their productivity (and correspondingly, their remaining in, or being transferred from, the center), with the promotion of the “urban lifestyle” at all levels. As was already noted, one of the most important ideas in the new plan for Thessaloniki was the proposal for the creation of a “civic-political center” with a monumental character, which was missing from the city, and which was intended to comprise the heart of the historic center. The original idea was for city hall, the law courts, and public services buildings to be symmetrically placed facing an imposing arch, thus creating a “civic square”. Beside them, the Byzantine Church of Panagia Chalkeon and the Ottoman baths Bey Hamam would emphasize the city’s multicultural past. Moving towards the Upper City, the monumental whole would include the basilica of Saint Demetrius, the religious center for Thessalonians, rising towards the Byzantine church of Prophitis Ilias via terraced gardens. Towards the lower city, a boulevard would lead to a second square, having a commercial-recreational character. Aristotle Square, whose setting Hébrard compared to that of the Piazzetta of Venice, was designed to be open on its seaward side, thus proffering one of the world’s most beautiful views, the profile of Mt. Olympus.

During the plan’s implementation, this axis acquired quite a different character, but it was one that was not negative for the city. When the question of building the Courts arose, excavation research preceding construction confirmed the presence of the city’s ancient Agora. An impressive

ancient “political center” rightfully occupied the place where the city planners of 1917 had foreseen a modern one. The law courts were built at another location, while City Hall is still awaiting completion of its own new building. At the same time, financial difficulties did not allow the continuation of this axis beyond Cassandrou Street, up to the lovely Byzantine Church of Profitis Ilias, which was “smothered” by cheap apartment buildings. In contrast, from Egnatia down to the seacoast, buildings constructed in an imposing “Neo-Byzantine” style house the city’s main functions – commerce, offices, high-income housing, recreation and expensive hotels – giving a special character to this area.

Another of the plan’s exceptional ideas that was adopted was the axis of small shops, which intersect Aristotle Square: food shops as well as workshops, tavernas, pubs, and small shops aimed at popular consumption, in a colorful and noisy chaos, covered by sailcloth, corrugated sheet metal, and wood, creating at the rear of the “aristocratic” facades of Aristotelous the atmosphere of a traditional fair. Here too, the plan imposed facades with bilobe windows, in an effort to create yet another architectural unity. This was an ingenious city planning solution in which spaces for everyday and humble, yet vital needs ran into its central, monumental axis. And of course in this case as well, modern-day officials seem incapable of forestalling the alteration of a great number of buildings into noisy eateries that are gradually banishing other uses, altering the character of the area.

It is also worth noting the extension of the city’s port towards the West, and not towards the White Tower. This was a bit of foresight of particular significance, because it allowed the exploitation of problematic lands for harbor operations, while leaving the historic center open towards the sea. Contrary to this early and shrewd choice, it was only towards the end of the 20th century and in the wake of exceptionally costly city planning interventions that other Mediterranean seaport cities like Barcelona, Marseilles, and Genoa managed to free their seaside of port installations.

Another particular contribution of the new plan was the creation of a green zone around the city’s perimeter, which reached the limits of the historic center, “separating” the city into three parts. As we have seen, this was only partially implemented, giving Thessaloniki the forest of Seih Sou and the complex of the White Tower park, together with the areas of the University and the International Fairgrounds, east of the walls. A similar formation surrounding the western wall was not followed in the area of Vardaris Square.

During the entire interwar period, the form of Thessaloniki was changing at a rapid pace. Between 1921 and 1924, while refugees were arriving in droves, there were sales of new building lots and the center's reconstruction began. During the same period, the city to a large extent lost its composite cultural character, as it was necessarily abandoned by its Muslim residents and gradually, by a significant number of Jews, who emigrated to Western Europe and Palestine. In fact, although 97,025 refugees settled in the city during this same period, the population of Thessaloniki increased by only 74,380 between 1920 and 1928. Apart from the departures noted above, a particularly high mortality rate was noted in the city between 1921 and 1924. But the "capital city of refugees", as Giorgos Ioannou has aptly named it, had no difficulty in redirecting its vitality in spite of generally disadvantageous circumstances, including the loss of the city's traditional hinterland, the economic crisis of 1930, and the wider political instability that prevailed in Greece.

Thus, what is usually said regarding the "lost opportunity" of the reconstruction, so that we could acquire a modern city, is rather hypocritical, or belies an ignorance of the important changes brought about by Thessaloniki's reconstruction, during a period of a very few years and under conditions that were exceptionally adverse to projects of such large scope. Furthermore, it is a given that developments between the wars, and chiefly post-World War I choices of the state regarding the city's rebuilding, annulled many of the aspirations of Thessaloniki's city planners: control of urban development was to a large extent abandoned in the face of the immediate needs for the mass settling of 100,000 refugees. At the same time, the great diminution in relations with Balkan states shrank Thessaloniki's hinterland and undermined its economic role, while in the wake of the Second World War the sharp increase in construction coefficients gravely hurt – and continues to hurt – every attempt at city planning. Thus, the opportunity was not lost at that time, but much later, and opportunities continue to be lost every day, as public spaces in the city are continually and dramatically decreased.

However, exogenous conditions do not suffice to explain the disappearance of the social nature of city planning interventions. The reform of Alexandros Papanastasiou was overturned by its own logic. This was the vision of an exceptionally limited minority, unsupported by general demands and claims. Continuous and sweeping changes – geopolitical, economic, social – and the consequent social instability, did not favor the formation of social classes capable of adopting these largely social democratic ideas. Study of the interwar period reveals many similar efforts that remained incomplete and similar socio-economic retreats. The redesign and reconstruction of Thessaloniki in 1917, a unique Greek city planning undertaking with respect both to its extent and

its objectives in our modern history, expresses almost symbolically both the dynamics as well as the limitations on spatial modernization and social transformation in Greece during the first half of the 20th century.

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