Archetype



Κληρονομιά χωρίς Κοινότητα: Τα Καστρόπληκτα ως Τόποι Μνήμης και Σύγχρονης Κατοικίας

Παναγιώτα Μανέτα - 09/03/2026

Ερευνητική Εργασία

Όνομα: Παναγιώτα Μανέτα (Φοιτήτρια Πανεπιστημίου Πατρών – Τμήμα Αρχιτεκτόνων Μηχανικών)
Καθηγητές/τριες: Ευρυδίκη Γεωργαντέλη, lham Khuri-Makdisi
Πρόγραμμα: Harvard Summer School in Greece 2025

Η ερευνητική αυτή εργασία εξετάζει τα καστρόπληκτα της Άνω Πόλης Θεσσαλονίκης ως σημείο συνάντησης στέγασης, μνήμης και πολιτιστικών πολιτικών. Δημιουργήθηκαν μετά το 1922 από τους πρόσφυγες της Μικρασιατικής Καταστροφής, οι οποίοι, χωρίς κρατική στήριξη, κατέφυγαν σε πρακτικές αυτοστέγασης,

χρησιμοποιώντας φτωχά και ανακυκλωμένα υλικά όπως ξύλο, πέτρα και λαμαρίνες. Παρά τον πρόχειρο χαρακτήρα τους, οι κατοικίες αυτές απέκτησαν μορφολογική ταυτότητα και συναισθηματική αξία, καθώς αποτέλεσαν το πρώτο αληθινό καταφύγιο για οικογένειες που είχαν χάσει τα πάντα.

Chapter 1: Historical and social context of the creation of *kastroplikta*

The history of the *kastroplikta* of the upper city of Thessaloniki began with the arrival of refugees from Asia Minor in 1922, following the Treaty of Lausanne and the compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. Approximately 1.2 to 1.5 million Christians from Asia Minor arrived in Greece, with Thessaloniki welcoming almost 150,000 of them, while approximately 40,000 Muslims from the city moved to Turkey.[1]

1.1. The genesis of *kastroplikta*

The Greek state needed a loan from the League of Nations to manage this massive influx of Greek refugees into the city and established the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee (EAP).[2] The first measures taken to address the housing problem were the confiscation of Muslim homes in the Upper Town.

The Upper Town area was built amphitheatrically above the commercial center of Thessaloniki and was mainly home to the Muslim elite. The reasons for settling in this part of the city were mainly security and climatic, such as the unobstructed view and clean air. After their forced departure, the gaps created in the existing structures and the proximity to the fortification walls attracted refugees who resorted to self-housing practices.

[1] Yerolympos, Alexandra. 1996. Urban Transformations in Thessaloniki. Thessaloniki: University Studio Press.

[2] Refugee Settlement Commission (EAP). n.d. "The Refugee Settlement Commission." Accessed at 100sources.gr.

1.1.1. Self-housing and architectural invention

The refugees added to the Ottoman *sakhnisi* and removed the buildings' old identity. Many of them built makeshift dwellings on the edges of the Byzantine and Ottoman walls, even using parts of the wall itself as ready-made building material[3], the so-called *"kastroplikta."*.[4] These buildings were characterized by poor materials such as wood, mud, tin cans, and reeds, with shared toilets, water from municipal taps, and courtyards filled with handmade details. The minimal size of the houses [approximately 30 square meters], as well as the close social ties, encouraged the residents to spread out into the outdoor space, living both inside the house and outside, in the courtyard and on the neighborhood street.



Figure 1: Picture from the Lapardas tower. On the left is Eptapyrgiou street. In front of us is the small neighborhood around the tower (1930-1940)

[3] Tsavdaroglou, Haris. 2024. "The Wall as a Housing Threshold for Refugees." In Culture–Borders–Gender/Social Studies, no. 3, 72

[4] Kefala, Ch.-Z., and Nikolaos Samaras. 2019. "The Kastroplikton Residences in Ano Poli of Thessaloniki, Greece." In Sustainable Development, Culture, Traditions, 1a.

Η τυπολογία τους ποικίλλει από τα απλά ξύλινα παραπήγματα με τσίγκο και τα λιθόκτιστα με πρόχειρη στέγη, έως τις μικτές κατασκευές που συνδύαζαν πέτρα, ξύλο και λαμαρίνες, αλλά και τα πιο εξελιγμένα πολύχωρα παραπήγματα με αυλές, όπου μικρές οικογένειες ή συγγενικές ομάδες συνυπήρχαν γύρω από κοινόχρηστους εξωτερικούς χώρους. Η αρχιτεκτονική τους μαρτυρεί την ευρηματικότητα των προσφύγων, οι οποίοι κατάφεραν να μετατρέψουν την ανάγκη σε καθημερινό τόπο ζωής.

The *kastroplika* were more emergency shelters than conscious architectural compositions. Nevertheless, they acquired character, morphological identity, and emotional significance through the experiences of the refugees. As professor Nigdelis notes, these buildings were transformed from makeshift shelters into "houses of love" and he describes them as *"clean, decorated with care and imagination... giving a feeling of warmth, a refuge after the storm".*[5]

1.1.2. Typologies of *kastroplikta* dwellings

Beyond their improvised and temporary character, the *kastroplikta* developed into certain recurring typologies that reflected both the material possibilities of their builders and the gradual stabilization of refugee life. The the simplest structures were the wooden huts with tin, made of boards, old beams and sheets, with a flat or slightly sloping roof made of tin or tar paper, which usually consisted of a single room for sleeping and cooking and housed the poorest families. More durable were the stone-built ones with a rough roof, made of stone and mud or poor mortar, often from demolition materials, with a single-room layout and a small courtyard, but with a strong problem of humidity due to direct contact with the walls.

The most common type were mixed houses (stone, wood and tin), with low walls of stone or brick at the base and an upper part of wood and sheet metal, a roof with tiles or tin and 1–2 room spaces, often with an outdoor kitchen or storage room, which accommodated families with a slightly better economic situation. Finally, more sophisticated forms were the spacious huts with courtyards, which started as single room houses and gradually expanded with new additions, creating small neighborhoods with common courtyards and narrow corridors, which functioned as living units of kinship and social coexistence.



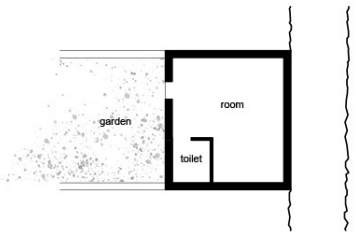
Figure 2: Typologies of kastroplikta dwellings roof with tiles or tin

1.2. Urban planning pressures and state neglect (1930–1997)

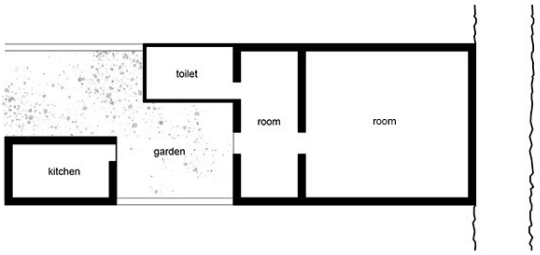
In the 1930s, based on the urban plan of the French architect Ernest Hébrard for Thessaloniki, which envisaged an orthonormal, hierarchical, and "modern" urban grid, the *kastroplikta* were considered arbitrary and their demolition was proposed.[6] The presidential decree of 1931 provided for the destruction of approximately 900 homes to create a green urban zone along the walls.[7] Since then, the name *kastroplikta* has

[5] Nigdelis, Dimitrios. 2016. The Everyday Life of Refugees. Thessaloniki: [Publisher not listed].

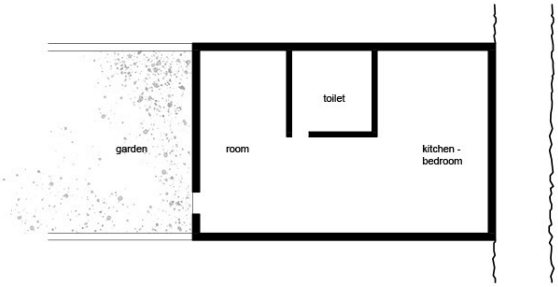
[6] Amygdalou, Katherine. 2014. Architectural History and National Identity in Modern Greece. PhD diss., University College London.
[7] Government of Greece. 1931. Law on [Title, if known]. Official Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, no. 406, A/04.12.1931



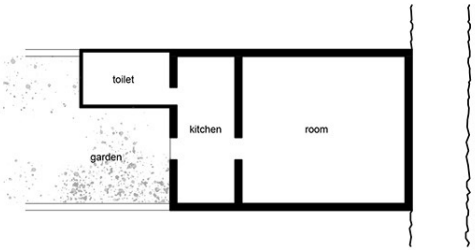
Type A: Single room with a toilet inside and outdoor space



Type C: Two spaces inside the house and a toilet, kitchen and storage room are a diffrent volume and outdoor space



Type B: Same space for the kitcen and the bedroom toilet inside and outdoor space



Type D: Two spaces inside the house (bedroom and kitchen) and a toilet and outdoor space

Με την πάροδο των δεκαετιών, τα καστρόπληκτα βρέθηκαν στο στόχαστρο πολεοδομικών σχεδίων, που τα αντιμετώπισαν ως αυθαίρετα εμπόδια στην «ανάδειξη» των βυζαντινών τειχών. Το μεγαλύτερο μέρος των καστρόπληκτων στο τμήμα του Επταπυργίου μεταξύ της κεντρικής και της δυτικής πύλης έχει πλέον κατεδαφιστεί.

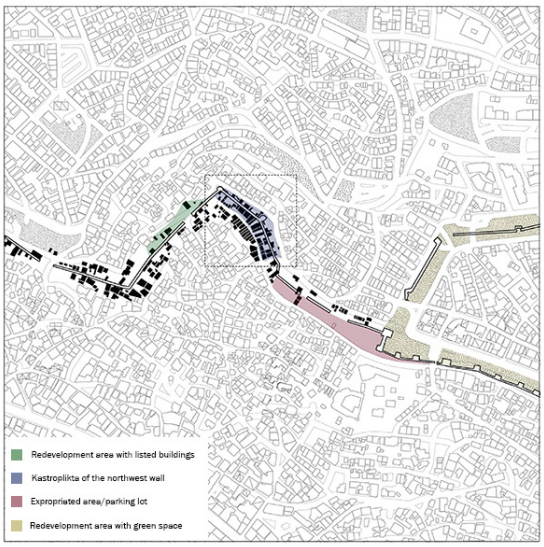
background. However, their current use as walking routes significantly serves the local community of Ano Poli, which is particularly important given the lack of green spaces in Thessaloniki. Furthermore, the concept of "archaeological value" could be broadened to include not only monumental remains but also traces of everyday life and social history, such as those found in the case of the kastroplikta.[10]

2.2. “Gentrification by heritage”

Today, most of the *kastroplikta* in the section of Eptapyrgio between the central and western gates have been demolished. However, several of the remaining buildings, mainly in the northern part of the walls, have been occupied by newly arrived refugees who are often threatened with eviction. A vivid example is Mahmoud, a refugee from Palestine who recounts his personal experience in Thessaloniki. He recounts that workers repairing the walls of the Upper City threatened him with police intervention because he was living in an abandoned castle ruin: *"I saved this house from collapse, just as you are repairing the walls. It was built by refugees, and I am also a refugee. I belong here."*[11]

The example of the *kastroplikta* highlights a broader cultural strategy that many scholars refer to as "gentrification by heritage."[12] It is a process whereby certain cultural resources of a place are used to promote the gentrification of the area, while at the same time the social groups that create them are gradually marginalized or displaced. This strategy is not neutral. It serves specific cultural hierarchies. As anthropologist David Harvey points out, *“cultural value is never innocent”*. The state selects, imposes, and reproduces it to control space and populations.[13] This whole process can ultimately lead to monumentalization without community.

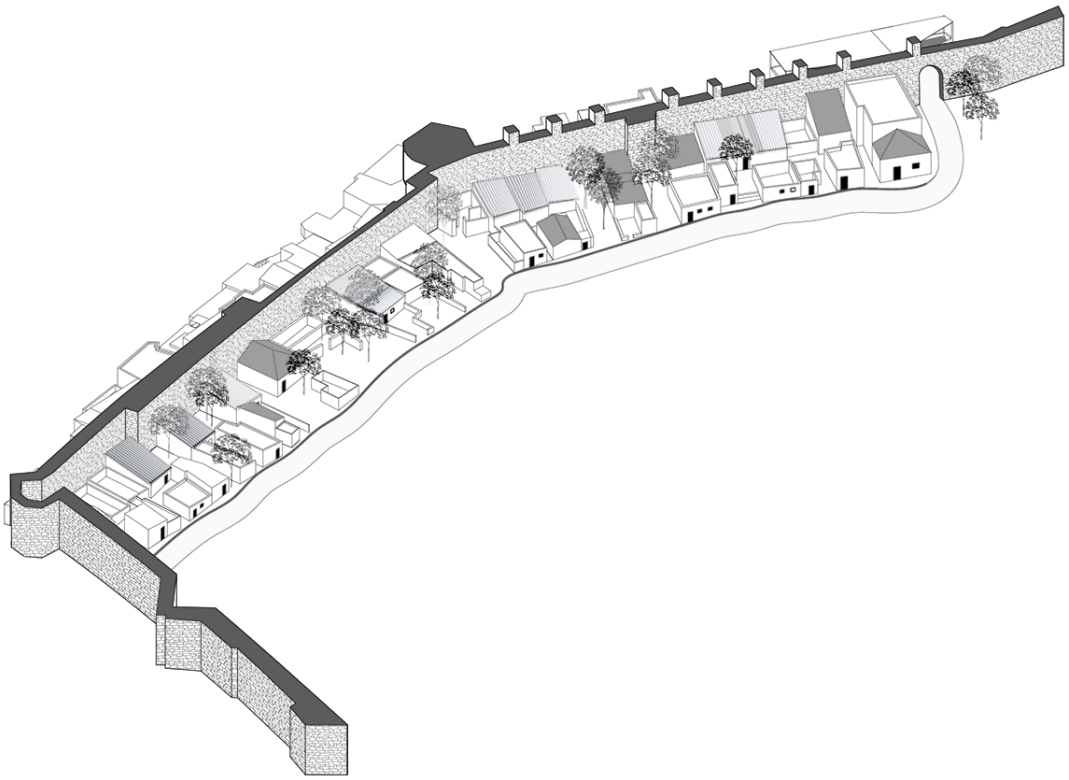
On the contrary, ethnographic research and oral testimonies highlight the idea of habitation as a cultural act.[14] Castles are not simply buildings to be preserved, but structures that save people. Their contemporary use by refugees does not negate but rather reinforces their value, as it confirms that memory is not static but negotiable.



[10] Mazower, Mark. 2006. Thessaloniki: City of Ghosts – Christians, Muslims and Jews 1430–1950. Athens: Alexandria Publications. (Original work published in English.), 330
[11] Tsavdaroglou, Haris. 2024. “The Wall as a Housing Threshold for Refugees.” In Culture–Borders–Gender/Social Studies, no. 3, 86-87
[12] Smith, Laurajane. 2006. Uses of Heritage. London: Routledge.
[13] Harvey, David. 2008. “The Right to the City.”
[14] Tsavdaroglou, Haris. 2024. “The Wall as a Housing Threshold for Refugees.” In Culture–Borders–Gender/Social Studies, no. 3, 87



Παρά τις πιέσεις και τις κατεδαφίσεις, αποτέλεσαν εστίες αντίστασης και μνήμης, ενώ η επιλεκτική ένταξή τους στη ρητορική της «παραδοσιακής αρχιτεκτονικής» ανέδειξε το παράδοξο της μερικής αναγνώρισης και ταυτόχρονα του αποκλεισμού.



Σήμερα, πολλά καστρόπληκτα συνεχίζουν να κατοικούνται από σύγχρονους πρόσφυγες και μετανάστες, οι οποίοι απορρίπτουν συχνά τα κρατικά κέντρα φιλοξενίας και επιλέγουν να ενταχθούν στον ιστό της πόλης. Οι αφηγήσεις τους δείχνουν ότι οι χώροι αυτοί δεν αποτελούν μόνο μνήμες του παρελθόντος αλλά και ενεργά καταφύγια, που προσφέρουν μια αίσθηση ελευθερίας.

Chapter 3: Experiences of contemporary refugees living in *kastroplikta*

Nowadays, many of the remaining *kastroplikta* in the Upper Town are inhabited by refugees and immigrants, mainly from Syria, Palestine, Morocco, Algeria, and other countries in West Asia and North Africa. Their settlement in the Upper City was not the result of an organized and institutional decision by the state, but rather an arbitrary decision by the refugees themselves. Many reject the official accommodation structures and seek more sustainable ways of living in the urban fabric.

3.1. From camps to the "castle": The choice of self-housing

The state camps in Thessaloniki, and in most cities in Greece in general, were located outside the urban city. The largest camps close to Thessaloniki were Diavata, Oreokastro, Kalochori, Synatex, Softex, Derveni, and Vasilika. All except Diavata closed in 2017 because of an urban housing program that would resettle refugees in the city of Thessaloniki.[15]

Despite the program, most camps remained overcrowded and overfilled. To this day, the state structures that continue to operate are characterized by restrictions on movement, bureaucratic delays, strict controls, and people in the camps often face emotional and psychological difficulties. As ethnographic studies show, living conditions in the camps often exacerbate trauma rather than alleviate it.[16]



Figure 6: The official refugee camp in Diavata, Thessaloniki. Established by the Greek state as part of the national reception system

One of the refugees who chose to live in an abandoned house next to the walls of Thessaloniki reveals his daily life and describes it as an experience of reflection and contact with the environment. Samir, from Syria, has been living in the Upper Town since 2021 and, as he says, the walls calm him, connect him with the cultural Thessaloniki, and help him discover himself. Samir's narrative recalls Victor Turner's theory, which describes people on the threshold *(liminal persons),* in this case on the *kastroplikta*, as subjects in transition, with increased identity fluidity and the possibility of redefinition.[17]

[15] Yardley, Jim. 2016. "A High Degree of Misery: Refugee-Swollen Greece. Idomeni, Greece. March 17, 2016." The New York Times. Accessed March 29, 2019.
[16] Pechlidou, Eleni, Haris Tsavdaroglou, and Burcu Yapıcıoğlu. 2020. "Refugee Reception Structures in Greece: Exclusion through Infrastructure." Journal of Urban Research

[17] Turner, Victor. 1977. The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

3.2. “Housing with significance” in the Upper Town

In addition, Menti from Morocco, who lived in a state camp after arriving in Greece, referred to a feeling of grandeur he now experiences by living in the *kastroplikta* of the Upper City. As he says: *"When I climb the walls and see the sea and Mount Olympus, I feel free. It's as if the horizon belongs to me."* The above description reveals that the appropriation of the buildings by modern refugees has a symbolic and imaginative dimension. The places where refugees find refuge are no longer prisons, as they felt the state infrastructures were, but landscapes of meaning and hope.



Figure 7: Interior of an abandoned house in the Upper Town of Thessaloniki, part of a demolition plan to "clear" the Byzantine walls. There is some refugee items left in the room.

The *kastroplikta* are taking on a new form thanks to the habitation practices of the new refugees. Their original function is being revived, and they are being preserved through daily use. The ruins are transformed into platforms for *"meaningful habitation"* as proposed by architecture professor Stavros Stavrides.[18] The spatial and collective practices of the new arrivals create what Turner calls *"communitas", a kind* of egalitarian community that emerges in threshold spaces.[19] Refugees living in the *kastroplikta* have the option of interacting with the residents of Thessaloniki and the opportunity to create their own community within the urban fabric, which offers them both a sense of security and acceptance in their new country.

3.3. The demolished house and the traces of life

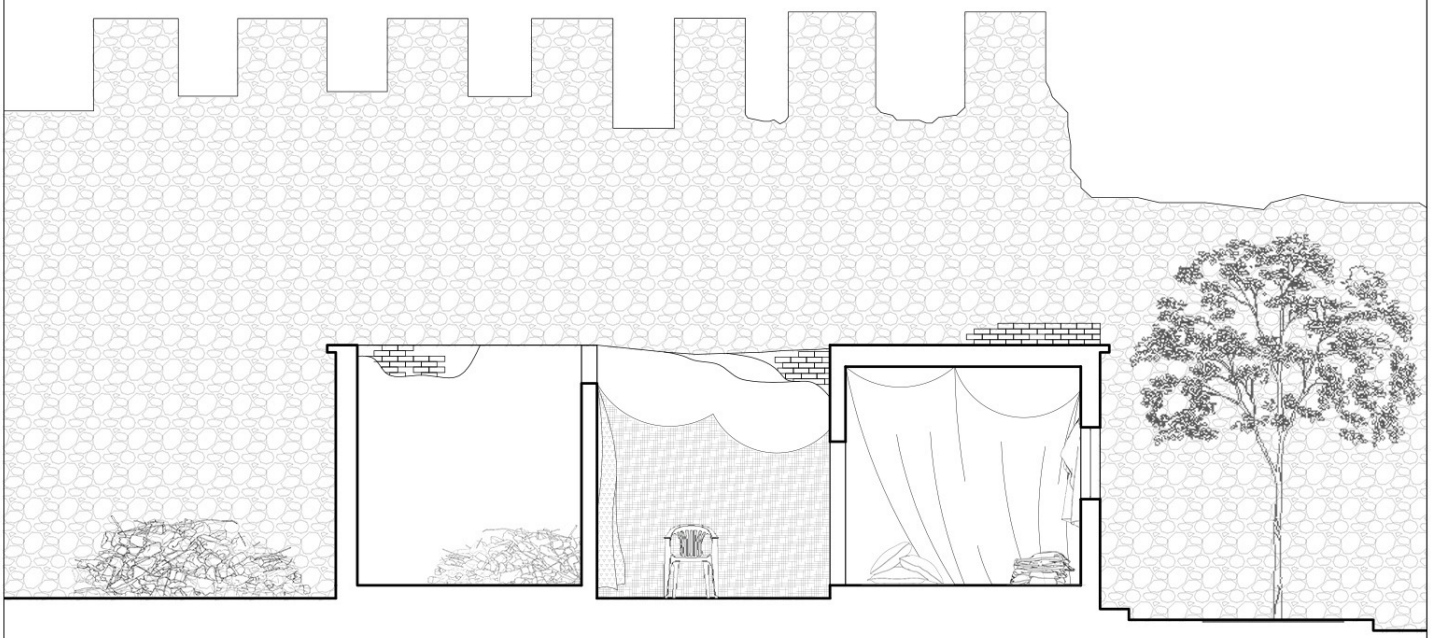
A typical example that highlights the dramatic dimension of the conflict between memory and urban renewal concerns a *kastroplikto* in the Eptapyrgio area. This house, although already destroyed, had hosted modern refugees from Syria and Afghanistan in recent years. The last time the existence of the house was recorded was in 2014 by the photographer Eleni Vraka and a few years ago it was demolished as part of the work to highlight the walls. Personal objects were also found in the ruins: mattresses, children's toys, kitchen utensils; silent evidence of an everyday life that was violently interrupted.

The image of forgotten objects inside a demolished shell highlights the brutality of the "politics of cleansing": memory is not lost only at the level of architecture, but also at the level of small, personal stories. The residents took nothing with them, carpets, curtains, pillows and plastic chairs, leaving behind material traces that were recorded by neighbors and researchers. The demolished kastroplikto thus functions as a monument to loss: not only of the past of Asia Minor refugees, but also of the current presence of new refugee communities in Thessaloniki.

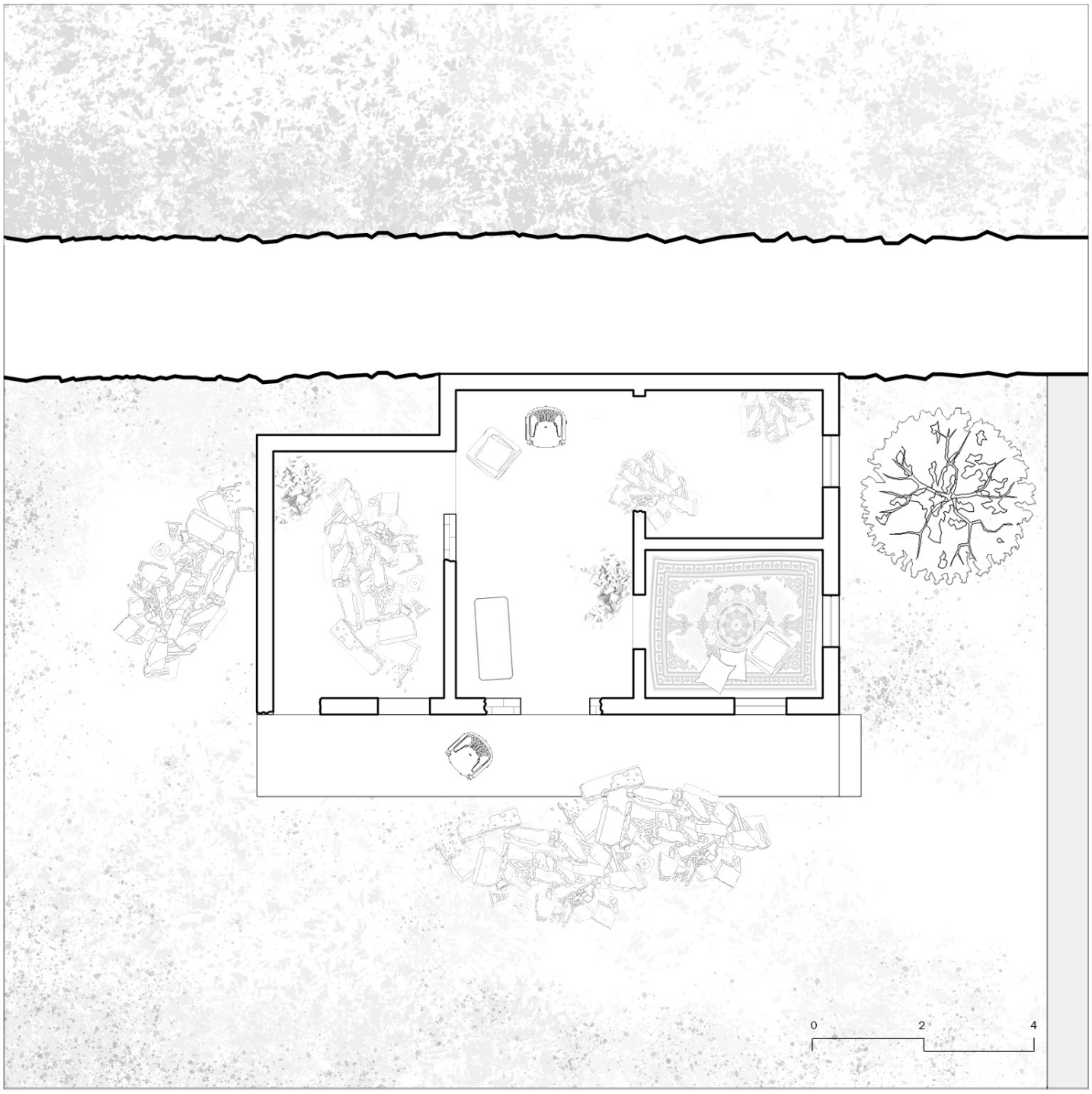
[18] Stavrides, Stavros. 2016. Common Space: The City as Commons. London: Zed Books.

[19] Turner, Victor. 1977. The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

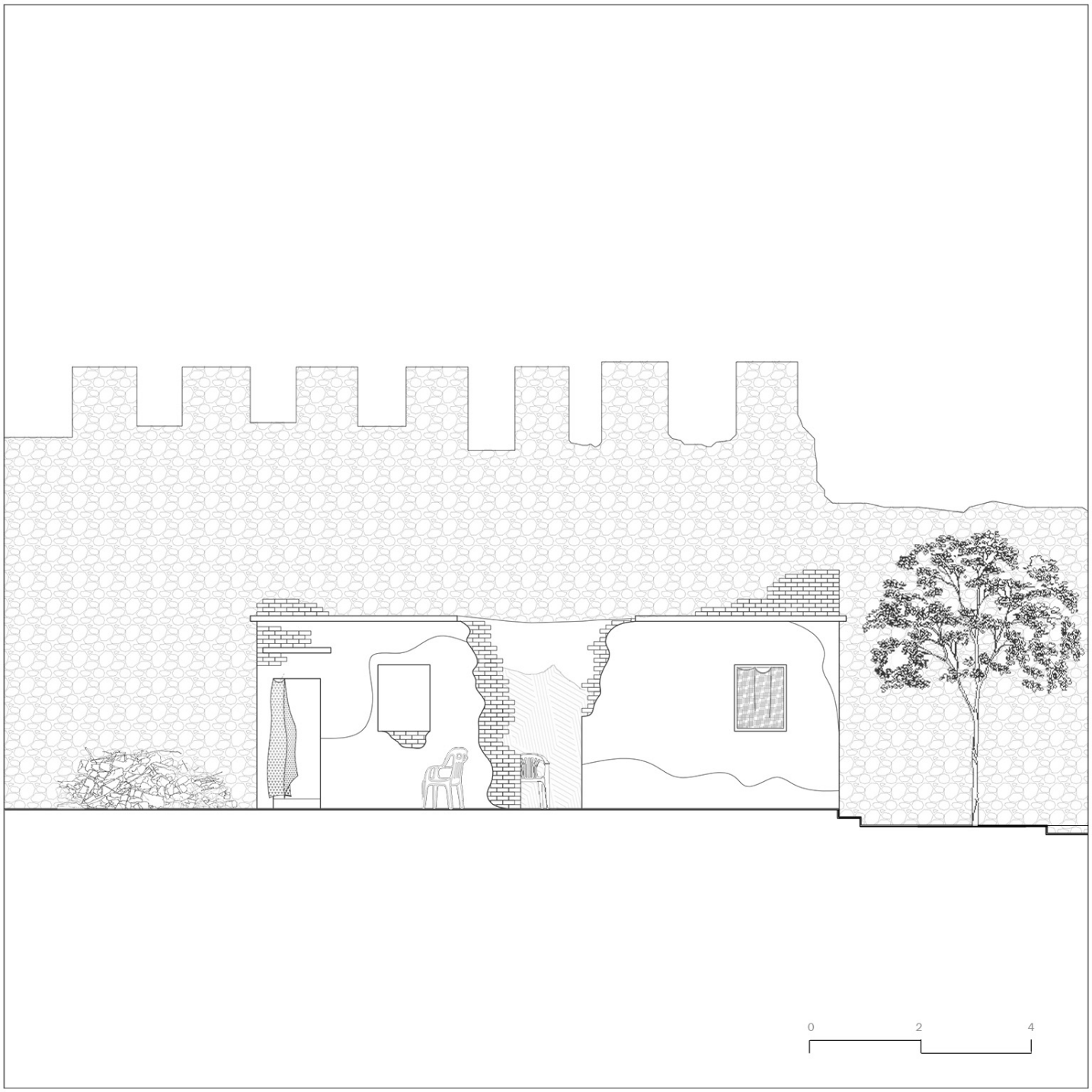
Η παρουσία τους επιβεβαιώνει ότι η μνήμη παραμένει ζωντανή και διαπραγματεύσιμη, όχι στατική. Η περίπτωση ενός κατεδαφισμένου καστρόπληκτου, όπου βρέθηκαν προσωπικά αντικείμενα των τελευταίων ενοίκων, καταδεικνύει με δραματικό τρόπο την απώλεια όχι μόνο αρχιτεκτονικών καταλοίπων αλλά και ολόκληρων βιωμάτων.



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Σε διεθνές επίπεδο, η περίπτωση των καστρόπληκτων συνδέεται με τάσεις «gentrification by heritage», όπου η πολιτιστική κληρονομιά χρησιμοποιείται ως μέσο εξευγενισμού και εμπορικής εκμετάλλευσης, εις βάρος των πιο αδύναμων κοινωνικών ομάδων. Θεωρητικοί όπως η Saskia Sassen και ο David Harvey δείχνουν πώς τέτοιες διαδικασίες οδηγούν σε «συσσώρευση μέσω αποστέρησης», με χαρακτηριστικά παραδείγματα σε γειτονιές της Μασσαλίας ή της Μαδρίτης.



Η σύγκριση με την Cañada Real είναι αποκαλυπτική: ενώ τα καστρόπληκτα εντάχθηκαν εν μέρει στη ρητορική της «παραδοσιακής αρχιτεκτονικής» και πολιτιστικής κληρονομιάς, η Cañada Real παραμένει αόρατη στον επίσημο πολεοδομικό λόγο. Και στις δύο περιπτώσεις, όμως, τίθεται το ίδιο κρίσιμο ερώτημα: αν οι αυτοσχέδιοι χώροι επιβίωσης θα αναγνωριστούν ως ζωντανά τμήματα του κοινωνικού ιστού ή αν θα συνεχίσουν να αντιμετωπίζονται ως τοπία προς κατεδάφιση.

Indeed, the concept of visible and invisible becomes crucial here. Tourists, urban visitors, and institutions see on the walls only the archaeological imprint, not the social trace. They do not see the refugees who live in small rooms built on the walls, repairing their homes themselves with ingenuity and dignity. Cultural promotion here performs a depoliticization: it renders the space neutral, erases the traces of struggles and experiences.

4.1. European parallels and critical perspectives

This process is not unique to Thessaloniki. In many European cities, the same double movement is observed: upgrading of "historicity" while simultaneously expelling its living carriers. A typical example is Le Panier in Marseille, which for decades was a neighborhood of refugees, immigrants and working-class families. Since the 1990s, a process of "cultural upgrading" has begun, aiming at the tourist exploitation of its historical identity. In parallel with the promotion of the architectural heritage and the attraction of artists, an increase in rents and a gradual expulsion of old residents have been observed. As Saskia Sassen notes, this is a *"gentrification-led displacement"*, where memory is romanticized, but its living carriers are marginalized. Cultural policy thus becomes a tool of class and cultural stratification, often to the detriment of refugees and immigrants.[21]

David Harvey describes this trend as *"accumulation by dispossession"*, a form of wealth accumulation through the removal of resources and rights from the weakest.[22] In the case of the *kastroplikta*, this translates into the accumulation of cultural capital (exploitation of the walls, attraction of tourism, increase in the commercial value of the area) through the deprivation of housing and visibility to refugees and immigrants.

Against this logic, some voices propose the revision of the concept of heritage through lived experience, the multilingualism of memory and the integration of the "inhabitation of the present" in the monumental narrative[9]. True urban renewal cannot be based on a sterile aesthetic, but on a fair, polyphonic and socially inclusive narrative of history and space.

4.2. Comparing with Cañada Real in Madrid



Figure 11: A woman in sector 6 of Cañada Real (Madrid) EFE / Photo by Federico Segarra

Both the *kastroplikta* of Thessaloniki and the Cañada Real in Madrid developed around a central axis that determined their spatial form and social organization: in the first case, the Byzantine and Ottoman walls functioned as a natural boundary, a protective shelter and a point of reference for the linear arrangement of small and irregular dwellings, while in the second, the Cañada Real road formed the backbone of

[21] Sassen, Saskia. 2014. Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
[22] Harvey, David. 2008. "The Right to the City." New Left Review 53: 160-165

