



# EXPLORING COMMONING AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Re-use of abandoned buildings and plots  
for the creation of commons in the Greek context

by Christina Saxoni

Master's thesis at Chalmers School of Architecture  
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering  
MSc Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability

supervisors: Emilio Brandao, Shea Hagy  
examiner: Marco Adelfio

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Design activism beyond borders

Göteborg, 2022



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Finally I want to thank my family and friends for always supporting me.

# Abstract

Since 2011, Europe has experienced an unprecedented influx of people fleeing countries facing political turmoil. Refugees in Greece have been admitted to state run camps, segregated and excluded from social life and have been denied their basic human rights.

In the meantime the Greek socioeconomic crisis since 2008 has led to high unemployment rates, the increase of homelessness, poverty, rising inequalities and expressions and acts of racism and xenophobia. Housing exclusion and affordability has become a rising concern and the state has treated refugee housing issues as emergency problems for a transient population, independent from those of the local population, and tackled them with temporary solutions.

On the contrary of the above mentioned negative consequences, different citizen-led initiatives claiming the right to the city through commoning have emerged. People joined, created networks of solidarity such as community kitchens and collaborative self organized housing squats. Copying strategies from those housing squats have been pointed out as prominent fields for social innovation.

This thesis aims to examine characteristics of housing as commons, through literature readings, research about collaborative housing solutions and visiting and observing commons, while rethinking and mapping the current unused urban infrastructure. The context for this exploration is a neighborhood in central Thessaloniki where abandoned buildings and undeveloped plots exist in abundance. This 'dead' property provides opportunities for the integration of newcomers, by creating housing solutions for both them and locals. Although initiating this project to explore practices of integration of refugees, the intention is to benefit both existing citizens and newcomers.

Collaborative housing forms and intercultural living can facilitate interaction between inhabitants and offer opportunities for mutual learning. Furthermore, using interstitial space for commoning activities, as space in the making, through social participation and self-management can support people's empowerment and inclusion.

keywords: housing as commons, social integration, newcomers

## About the author



CHRISTINA SAXONI

Nationality: Greek  
Date of Birth: 20.12.1991

Contact information:  
+30 6981286900, +46 (0)722892023  
christina.saxoni@gmail.com

### EDUCATION:

2021-2022	MSc Architecture and Planning beyond Sustainability, Chalmers University of Technology
2009-2016	BSc & MSc Architectural Engineering, Democritus University of Thrace

### WORK EXPERIENCE:

10/2017- 07/2020	Architect at ME architects, Malta
3/2017- 10/2017	Architect at euzen architecture, Thessaloniki, Greece

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

# Glossary-terminology

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**refugees:** people who fled their countries because of war, violence or persecution, seeking protection elsewhere. They have a right to international protection. (Amnesty International, 2021)

**asylum seekers:** people who fled their countries because of war, violence or persecution, seeking protection elsewhere. They have not yet received their refugee status but have the right for asylum at least until the decision is made. (Amnesty International, 2021)

**migrants:** people who left their countries for various reasons. In this thesis the term is used to identify people who although might be in danger in their countries, they do not fit the different criteria to receive refugee status. They are protected by the international human rights law. (Amnesty International, 2021)

**newcomers:** an umbrella word that will be used to identify the target group in my work, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

**common space:** inclusive space, produced, managed and developed collectively, characterized by the continuous activity and openness to newcomers. (Stavrides, 2016)

**housing commons:** inclusive structures for living, produced, managed and developed collectively. (Stavrides et al., 2019)

**integration:** the dynamic process during which diverse groups are incorporated in a unified society, having the same rights and opportunities.

**public space:** a space that is considered to be inclusive but is predefined and controlled by the state. (Stavrides, 2016)

**interstitial space:** left over spaces and parts of buildings that lack of function and identity.

**appropriation:** the actions to transform, modify and utilize underused space and resources in spite of the official ownership status.

# Background-Commons and the right to the city

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## **The right to the city and the emergence of common space**

In recent years, various social movements have emerged around the world, challenging the socioeconomic system in different ways and fighting for inclusion and equity. The right to the city, the concept invented by Lefebvre which is referring to the rights of citizens to appropriate and reshape their urban environments, (Lefebvre, 1996) becomes more and more popular. Emancipatory political initiatives and experiments revolving around alternative ways of collective and self-organized urban everyday life have been emerging and common spaces have been produced.

## **About the commons**

While there is an extensive literature regarding commons their definition is quite unclear. Commons refer to the resources that are shared by everyone and should be open for everyone. In the article 'The Tragedy of the commons' in 1968, Garret Hardin argues that these resources will be eventually depleted, as, if everyone had access to them they would try to exploit them individually. Consequently, he claims that in order to preserve them, privatization and state regulation are needed. (Hardin, 1968). However, this neoliberal way of thinking about the commons does not take into consideration our social assets and needs.

Commons are not just the resources that we share but consist of three main aspects: Some non-commodified common pool of resources;; the communities-commoners; and the action of commoning , the continuous processes and activities for the management, reproduction and evolvement of the commons. (An Architektur, 2008).

"To speak of the commons as if it were a natural resource is misleading at best and dangerous at worst—the commons is an activity and, if anything, it expresses relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature. It might be better to keep the word as a verb, an activity, rather than as a noun, a substantive." (Linebaugh, 2008)

## **Urban as commons**

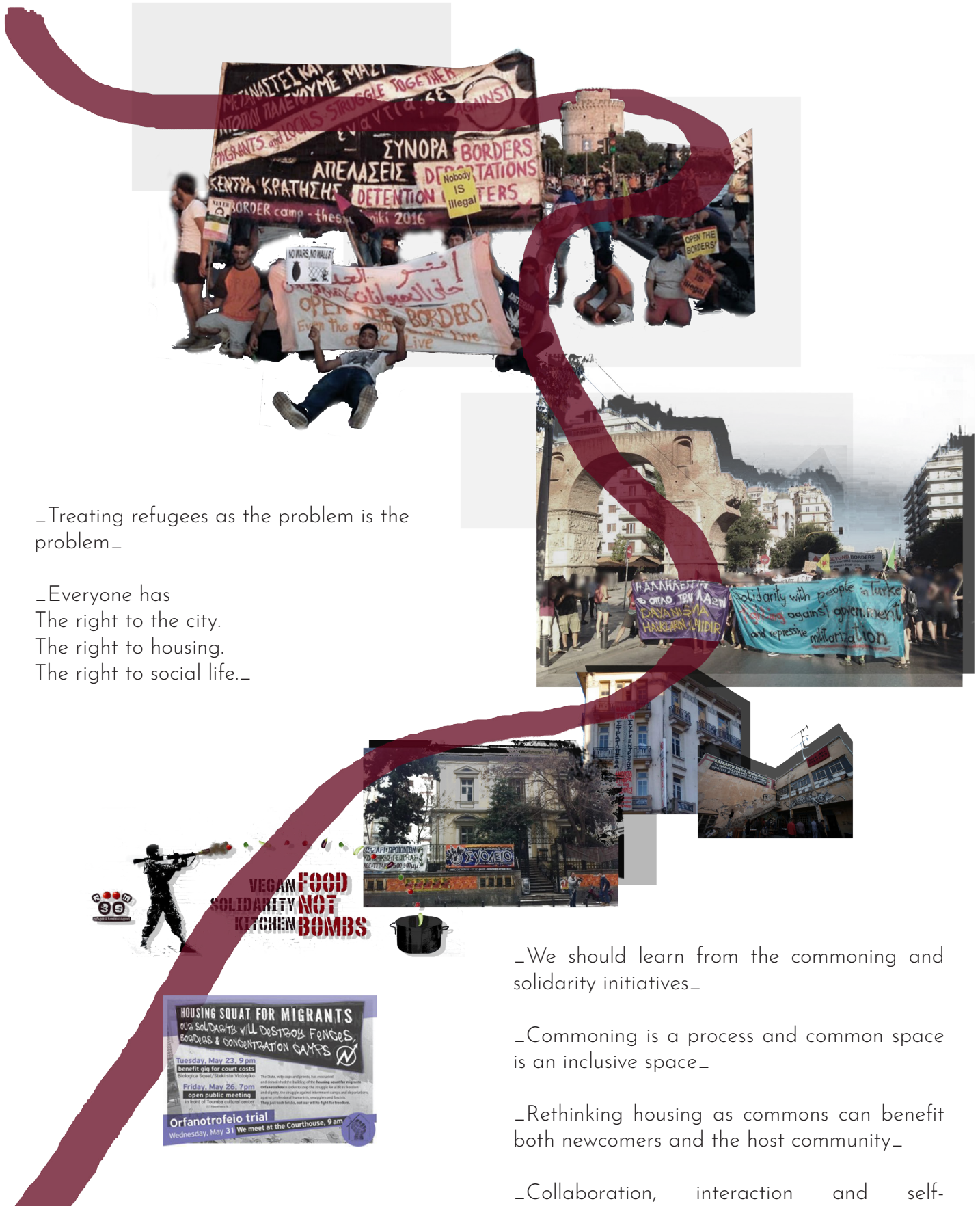
From this perspective, the revolts and collective practices and actions that aim to reappropriate and actively participate in the shaping of our urban environments and turning them into active political sites could be thought as urban commons. These spaces challenge the hegemonic power relations, norms and all forms of systemic oppression while connecting, building networks and hosting differences. They are collectively inventive and open to otherness (Stavrides, 2016). Inclusion and equity are essential parts of commons.

## **Housing as commons**

The right to adequate housing is our fundamental human right. Considering housing as commons, inclusive and self managed is directly connected to the right to the city. As the state and the market have proved to be unable to fully cover the issue of housing, different initiatives of autonomous housing have emerged.

Haris Tsavdaroglou connects the theory of commons to the refugee housing squats produced in Greece during 2015-2016. The violation or restriction of the right of refugees to acceptable housing eventually led to the co-creation of housing commons, which proved to contribute to the newcomers integration much more than the official processes and actions. (Tsavdaroglou, 2018)





\_Treating refugees as the problem is the problem\_

\_Everyone has  
The right to the city.  
The right to housing.  
The right to social life.\_

\_We should learn from the commoning and solidarity initiatives\_

\_Commoning is a process and common space is an inclusive space\_

\_Rethinking housing as commons can benefit both newcomers and the host community\_

\_Collaboration, interaction and self-management can be the answer\_

Fig. 1.1: Manifesto, Commoning during the refugee crisis in Thessaloniki

## Research Question

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**“How can we contribute to an inclusive city, for the benefit of newcomers and locals through transforming underused buildings and space to housing commons?”**

## Aim and Relevance

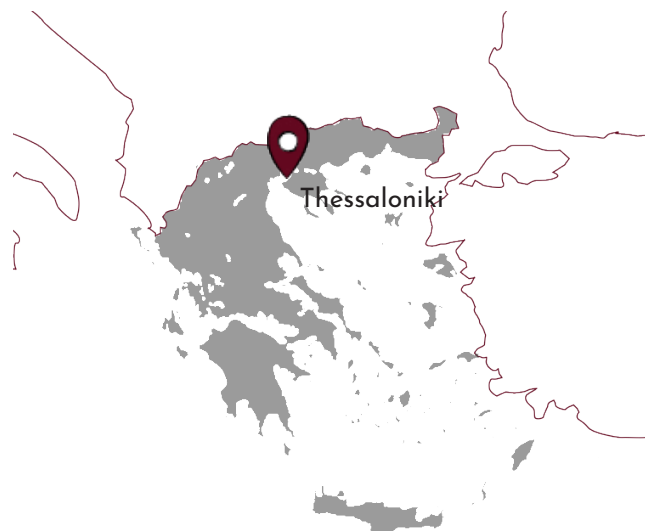
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### WHAT?

The thesis aims to lift the discussion about the current practices of integration of refugees and immigrants into the inner city and their disconnection from the local community, by exploring how housing commons can be developed in the center of Thessaloniki, in Greece, providing opportunities for inclusion.

Ideas of collaborative housing and inclusive meeting spaces with functions that can facilitate integration and benefit the whole community, are explored by reutilizing derelict buildings and inactive spaces.

### WHERE?



*Fig. 1.2: Location of Thessaloniki on the map of Greece*

## WHY IN THESSALONIKI AND WHY NOW?

Europe (and Greece) has been hosting large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees fleeing conflict and poverty while failing to protect their rights

They are admitted to segregated camps, excluded from many aspects of life, including employment, education, access to services and social interaction.

The intense commodification of housing leading to housing exclusion or insecurity (Maloutas, Siatitsa, Balampanidis, 2020), lack of neighborhood infrastructures and insufficient public spaces are dominating the Greek context.

In the meantime, a lot of businesses and homes, and even whole apartment blocks, office and industrial buildings and open spaces remain empty and unexploited. (parallaxi, 2021)

The continuing injustice and inequalities which have been normalized in our modern cities and the failure of our system to address exclusion have been leading to events of urban rage and resistance. (Dikec, 2017). Commoning initiatives and solidarity practices that emerged in Thessaloniki, Greece during the so-called 'refugee crisis' and the socioeconomic crisis reveal interesting prospects in the search for alternatives for the inclusion of refugees and migrants and for community-building, engendering solidarity and belonging. (Tsavdaroglou & Lalenis, 2020)

## WHY IS IT RELEVANT TO THE ENGAGEMENT OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING?

This thesis tries to question the current socioeconomic situation and read the city as a collective resource, that could be utilized for the benefit of the community, established or new.

It is an attempt to think of urban development disconnected from profit or consumption and serving a community purpose. Insisting on public-civil partnerships instead of the public-private partnerships that dominate nowadays, and contributing to a just city. An inclusive city, where differences are not merely tolerated but treated with respect and recognition.

In this context, space is not predefined by the architect but guiding and able to allow alterations from the users. Space is dynamic and its productions continues over time, as part of an evolving sequence, with no fixed start or finish with multiple actors contributing at various stages. (Awan et al., 2011)

# Delimitations

---

While it is a multifaceted project with various aspects that could be explored, I focused on those that are directly connected to my own interests or that proved to be significant for my project throughout my research and design process.

	This thesis is about....	This thesis is somewhat about...	This thesis is not about.....
Sustainability	-social	-economical	-environmental
Social aspect	-inclusion -housing as a right -self-management	-social movements -reappropriating	-co-design and participation workshops
Functions	-shared spaces -urban commons -housing as commons	-housing units	-commercial or -public space
Design	-exploring commoning -encourage interaction -process -functions and activities	-networks -building transformation	-sustainable energy systems -restoration
Outcome	-conceptual	-methodology -theoretical	-detailed design -construction proposal

Fig. 1.3

# Methods and timeplan

The process started with research on commoning and collaborative housing practices and how a concept like this could be applied in the Greek context, for newcomers and locals.

Through a field work process, and after some site visits a neighborhood in Thessaloniki was chosen to test and illustrate the different findings or ideas.

As the social aspect was more significant than the spatial one, further research on the processes for newcomers in Greece, their needs and characteristics as well as the openness and processes of local commons, was conducted through literature, site visits and informal interviews.

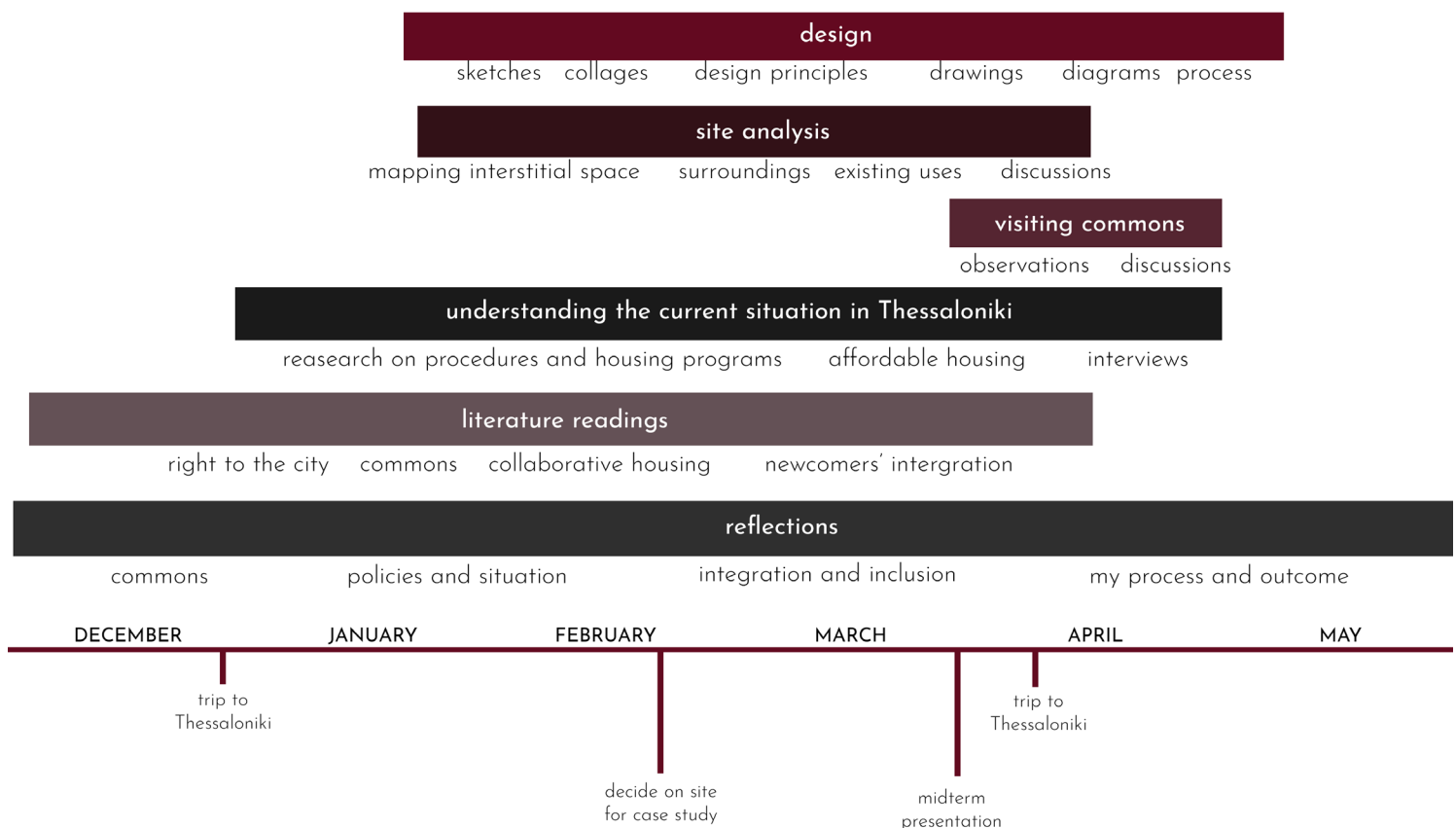


Fig. 1.4: Timeplan of main actions and methods used

## 2. CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

# Introducing Thessaloniki, mother of refugees

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Thessaloniki is the second largest city in Greece, and situated on its northern part. It has been a multicultural city with a rich history marked by influences from Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman empires and from the

settling of many ethnicities and religious groups. It has provided refuge to displaced people for many years, and has been called mother of refugees.

## Brief history of the recent development of the city

Up to 1869 the old town was enclosed within Byzantine walls and the inhabitants lived in separate neighborhoods according to religion and ethnic origin. (Yerolymbos, 2018) The face of the city began to change in 1869 with the demolition of the coastal wall. As the city opened up, new districts were created to the west and east. (Yerolymbos, 2018)

1917

The Great Fire of 1917 destroyed 3/4 of the city. 9,500 buildings went up in flames and more than 70,000 people (52,000 Jews, 11,000 Muslims and 10,000 Christians) were left homeless. (Yerolymbos, 2018)

French architect Ernest Hébrard redesigns the city from scratch within the walls, with wide boulevards within a hierarchical road network, and the monumental axis of Aristotelous street and squares. (Yerolymbos, 2018)

1922

In 1922 over 100,000 Greeks of Asia Minor arrive while with the Treaty of Lausanne 30,000 Muslims are displaced from the city. The refugees are housed in the center, in public areas and in houses abandoned by Muslims as well as in shacks around the city. (Yerolymbos, 2018)

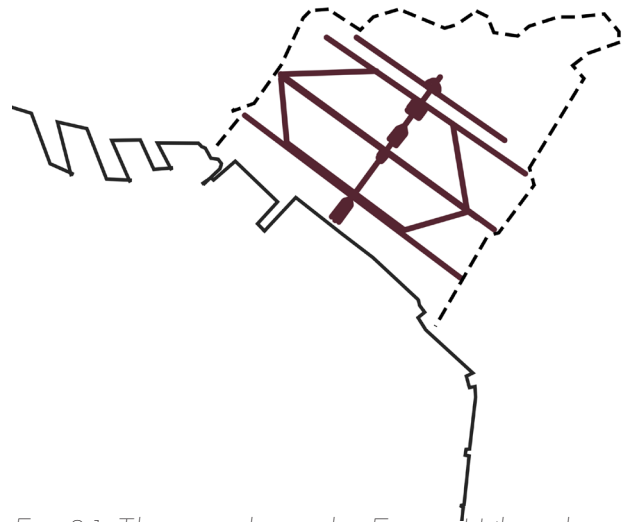


Fig. 2.1: The new design by Ernest Hébrard



Fig. 2.2: Influx of refugees from Asia Minor in 1922

## 1930s

As an answer to the new housing needs, the notion of “horizontal property” appeared and building regulations mandated the use of concrete – for the erection of four and five-story buildings. (Kolonas, 2011)

Redistribution of land occurs and the notion of antiparochi is introduced, an exchange with tax privileges between a property owner and a contractor. This leads to mass construction of apartment buildings. (Kolonas, 2011)

## 1940s

World War II, the German occupation, the Holocaust and the civil war are the events that marked Thessaloniki during the 1940s. At this time almost the entire population of the Jewish community was deported and exterminated by the Nazis, changing the population breakdown of the city..

## 1950s

The 50's are a milestone for the post-war architecture. The Polytechnic School was founded and after a long period of inactivity large scale public buildings start being built. (Kolonas, 2011)

## 1960s & 1970s

The industrial development of the city and the near-total abandonment of the countryside by tens of thousands of impoverished Greeks results in the need for cheap housing and labor being crucial demands that the lucrative construction business sector is responding to, without the slightest state intervention. (Kolonas, 2011)

The development is unplanned and hurried, and the phenomenon of the polykatoikia, the Greek apartment building, explodes. (Kolonas, 2011)

## 1990s

With the displacement of people due to the Balkan wars and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country experienced a new wave of migration. Millions of refugees, returnees and migrants arrived in search of a better life and almost 140,000 migrants settled in Thessaloniki. (Deprez, & Labattut, 2016)

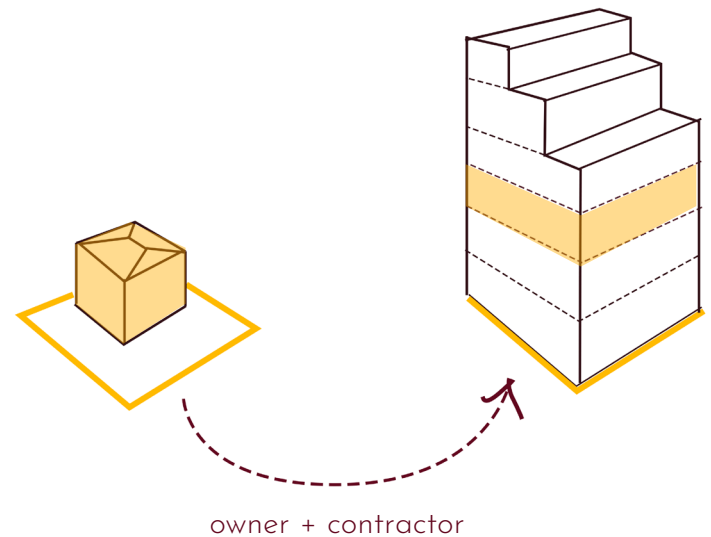


Fig.2.3: The antiparochi property exchange system

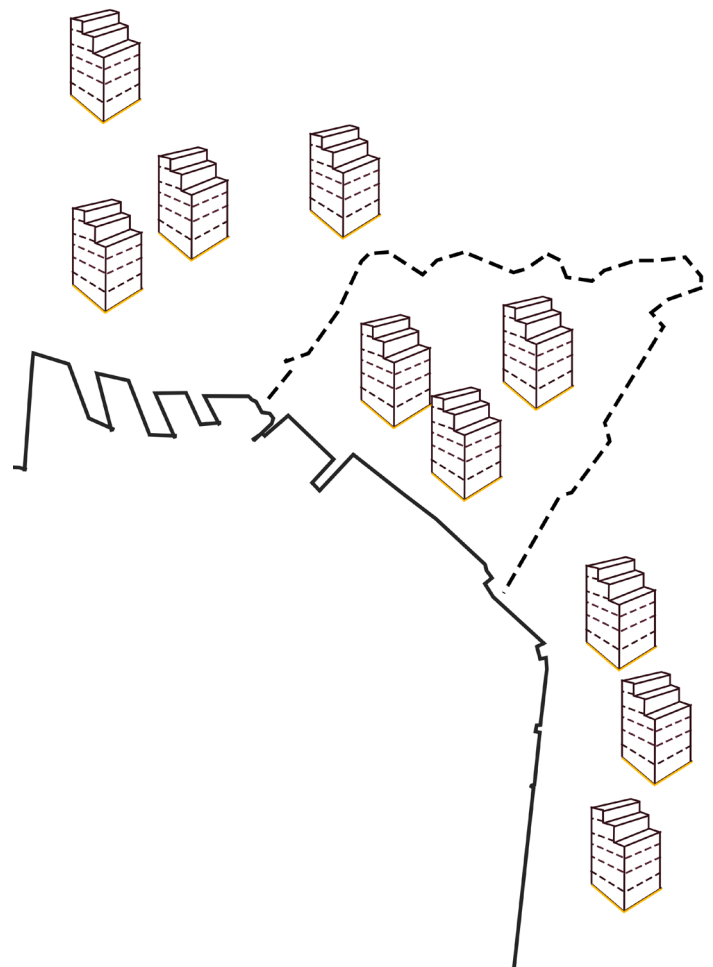


Fig. 2.4 : Mass construction of apartment buildings during the 60s-70s



## The city since the crisis of 2008

Since 2008, Greece experiences an unprecedented economic crisis. Thessaloniki has been seriously hit, struggling with high unemployment rates, the increase of homelessness, poverty and rising inequalities. In 2012, 30% of businesses in the centre closed down and many major public works programs have been canceled as a result of the austerity measures (Deprez, & Labattut, 2016) imposed by the different governments and Troika (decision group of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund). In the wake of Greece's economic crisis, expressions and acts of racism and xenophobia have become

much more prevalent and the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party entered the parliament in 2012.

At the same time, the refugee crisis of 2015, has reached extreme rates, with millions of people being forced to abandon their homes because of war, political conflict or related threats. Thessaloniki has emerged as a major stopover in refugees' journey, where most of them have been settled in state-run camps on the perimeters of the city. (Balkans route. Refugees in Towns)

The health crisis of Covid 19 outbreak (2020-2022) came to add to the existing problems and worsen the situation, especially for newcomers.

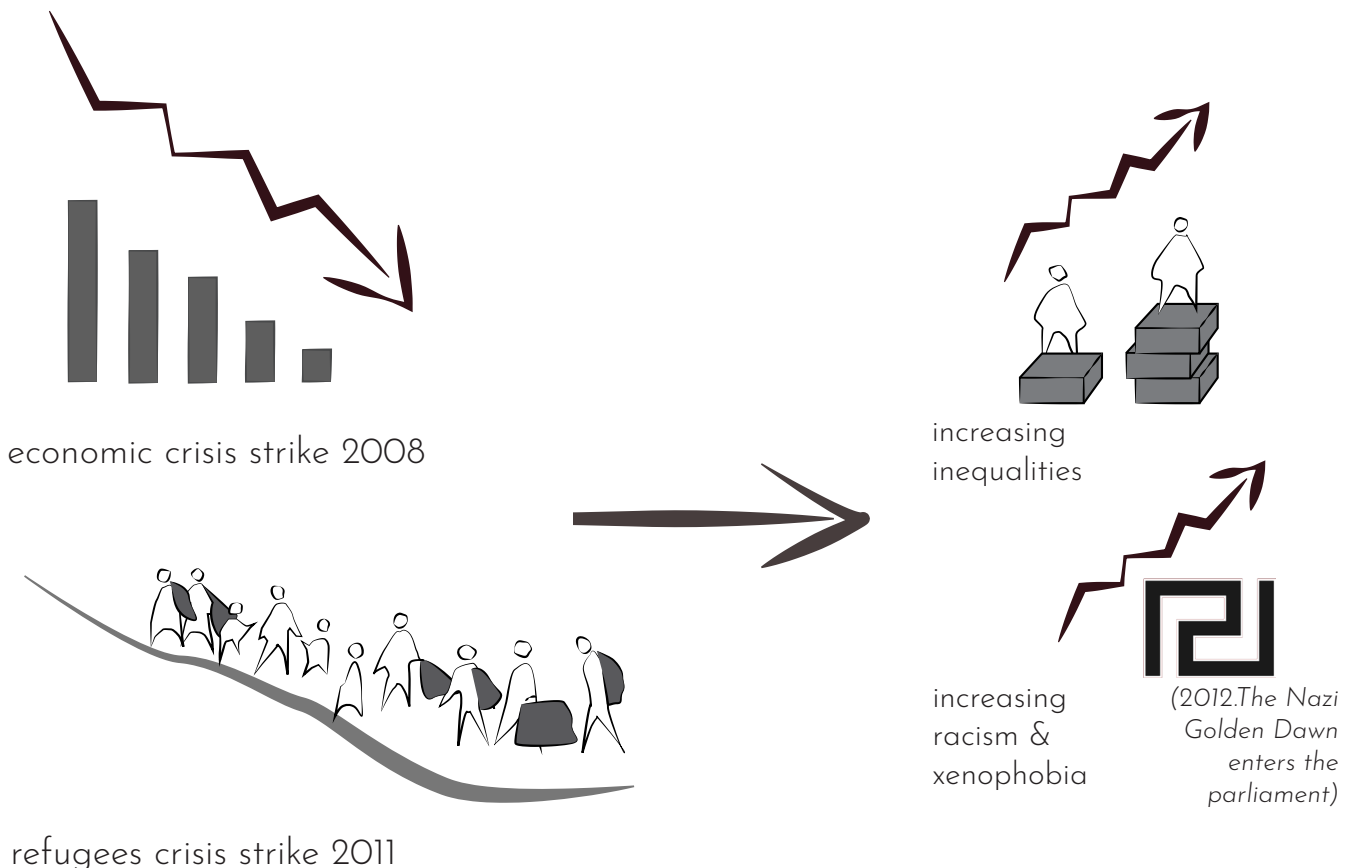


Fig. 2.5: The crises and their outcomes

# Commoning since the crisis of 2008

On the contrary of the abovementioned negative consequences of the crisis, since 2008 different citizen-led initiatives claiming the

right to the city, resistance acts against the austerity measures and commoning practices have emerged. People joined, created



In May, people of all ages occupied squares and demonstrated against the austerity measures in large cities

First waves of refugees and immigrant flows due to the Arab Spring

Greece is accounted for 90% of "illegal border crossings" in Europe. (European Website on Integration, 2012)

2011

More than 1 million of immigrants and refugees enter through Turkey.

Solidarity initiatives such as solidarity kitchens, legal help from activists, language and other classes in activist squats become more and more common.

Old Orphanage building (Orphanotrofio) becomes the first self organized housing squat. (Karaliotas & Kapsali, 2020)



2015

2008



Economic crisis strike.

Alexis Grigoropoulos gets murdered by the police.

Uprisings and riots emerge and spread all over the country.

2013

The following years more and more common places around Thessaloniki emerge, such as the pocket park neighborhood initiative at Svolou.



2016



Greece sees unprecended numbers of new arrivals usually following the Balkan route (through Idomeni) On March 8, the border through Idomeni is closed and more than 57000 people are trapped. On March 18th, the EU- Turkey deal takes place (all new irregular migrants should be returned to Turkey) (Amnesty International, 2016)

Threats for evacuation of Idomeni settlement.

Solidarity initiatives self-organise a transnational No Border camp in the city center. Activists from all over Europe with refugees, build direct-democratic assemblies and organize demonstrations, and housing squats. On 28th of July three housing squats in Thessaloniki are raided and evicted. Orphanotrofio is immediately demolished. (Migrant resistance, 2017) Acts, protests and demonstrations of solidarity are being organised.

networks of solidarity such as community kitchens and housing squats.

This timeline illustrates basic information and incidents that took place in Greece since 2008, regarding the socioeconomic and refugees crisis, and the different commoning

and solidarity initiatives which were triggered. While there are much more important events regarding the refugees crisis around Greece and especially the Greek islands, I mostly focus on the situation and changes taking place in Thessaloniki.

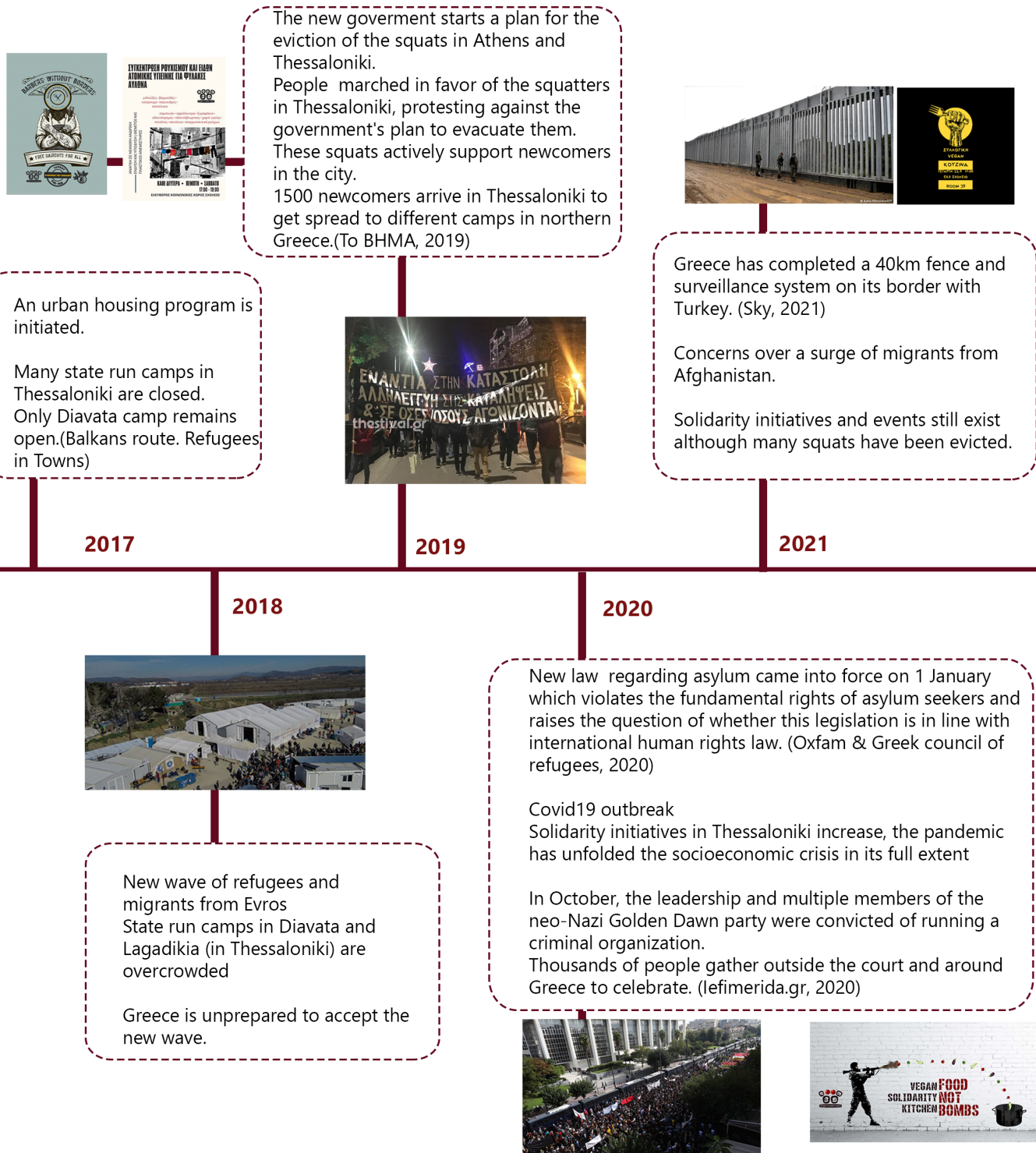


Fig. 2.6: Events regarding the socioeconomic and refugees crisis and how they triggered commoning practices in Greece since 2008



## Building stock

While people are being evicted or denied access to adequate affordable housing, in Thessaloniki there is a large number of empty or underused buildings and apartments. However, the increase in investments is a threat to this opportunity.

-Whole abandoned buildings: More than 500 abandoned buildings as well as more than 200 listed and protected buildings have been counted by the Central Macedonia Department of the Technical Chamber of Greece. The abandonment of many of them led to a state of serious danger and desolation. (parallaxi, 2021)

-Vacant homes: According to the data Census of 2011, from about 508,000 dwellings, the 123,355, ie 24%, had been declared vacant. (Chatziprokopiou , Karayanni, Kapsali, 2021) Something less than half (47%) of vacant homes in Thessaloniki are located in the Municipality of Thessaloniki, with the 28.3% of the total number being vacant dwellings . (Chatziprokopiou , Karayanni, Kapsali, 2021)

-Empty ground floors: Since the long economic crisis of 2008, several stores have been closed, and the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020, has worsen this situation. Hundreds of ground floors remain empty and unused.

more than 500  
abandoned buildings  
former industries  
warehouses  
office buildings  
residencies

more than 200 listed  
abandoned buildings

1/4 of dwellings is uninhabited

hundreds of empty  
ground floors  
(former stores)



Fig. 2.7: Empty building in the city centre

# Housing market and access to housing

## Housing provision systems

In Greece, public housing for rent has never been developed, social housing has been very limited and measures on market forces in order to provide affordable and inclusive housing have been absent. (Maloutas, Siatitsa, Balampanidis, 2020). Discussions about the need for a renewed social housing agenda and affordable housing provision have multiplied during the last years (Maloutas, Siatitsa, Balampanidis, 2020) especially since the outbreak of the financial crisis (2008), the 'refugees crisis' (2011) as well as the worsened conditions due to the covid-19 pandemic (2020). The housing policies are characterized by the indirect role of the state in housing provision and a focus, in the past, in a direction of strengthening the construction sector and supporting access to ownership.

The antiparochi system (explained earlier) resulted in the production of apartment blocks (polykatoikia) and provided massively affordable housing. At the same time, the market became the main mechanism for housing provision. The first decades of the postwar period, conditions of supply, demand, and rent regulation were favorable for housing affordability and inclusion. (Maloutas, Siatitsa, Balampanidis, 2020) Over time though, the liberalization of the mortgage market and the increase of the purchasing power of middle-class households, resulted in gradually decreasing the of access to affordable housing for lower income households. (Maloutas, Siatitsa, Balampanidis, 2020)

## crisis and post-crisis period the housing market

The economic crisis led to a severe recession of the real estate market. House values dropped by 41.7% overall and especially in Thessaloniki

by 45.2%. (Deprez,, Labattut,2016).

However, since 2018 and the so called post-crisis period, the real estate market has been experiencing a sharp increase while tourist demand is on a rise and the short-term rental sector and online platforms such as Airbnb have been developing and attracting investors. (Maloutas, Siatitsa, Balampanidis, 2020) This situation results in rising rents and prices, making housing unaffordable, especially for the most vulnerable population groups.

## Access to housing \_local population

The effect was soon apparent to tenants, as due to the increasing unemployment rates and the decreasing salary amounts, they were often obliged to leave their homes and search for cheaper ones or share dwellings with family members. (Maloutas, Siatitsa, Balampanidis, 2020) This has been a solution especially for young adults who were unable to afford housing.

Homeowners, who are a large amount of the population, (property ownership rate is 75%) were effected much less immediate, as measures were taken until 2015, to prohibit the seizure of their first residence. (Maloutas, Siatitsa, Balampanidis, 2020)

However, the sharp increase of housing expenses such as taxation, made home ownership a burden for many households. More and more Greeks are now in a situation where they are unable to repay their mortgages and keep their houses.

Furthermore, homelessness increased visibly and especially 'neo-homelessness' affecting people with medium and high level of education who were left impoverished in such a short period of time. Homeless people are estimated to be around 20,000 in Greece. (Deprez, , Labattut, 2016).

## Focusing on the newcomers

The number of refugees and asylum seekers in Thessaloniki and the surrounding areas are estimated to be around 16,000 (Balkans route. Refugees in Towns) and they are people from different countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Most of the refugees who arrive to Thessaloniki intend to use it as a transit city and move to wealthier countries in Europe. However, there are also many who see Thessaloniki as a permanent destination and want to be integrated in the society. (Balkans route. Refugees in Towns) Almost one tenth of the asylum applications in the country in 2019 were submitted at the Asylum Service office of Thessaloniki (7,387). In total from 2015 to 2019 about 35,000 applications were submitted in Thessaloniki. (Chatziprokopiou , Karayanni, Kapsali, 2021)



Fig. 2.8: Location of state run camps in 2016  
Source: Tsavdaroglou, 2020

## Housing provision

Refugee housing needs has been treated with ephemeral solutions as an exceptional emergency problem for a transient population, completely disconnected from the local population 's housing needs.

The main solution has been the state-run camps which do not meet international standards. They are overcrowded , segregated from urban centres and , within degraded, polluted and dangerous industrial zones where residential use is not permitted. (Tsavdaroglou & Lalenis, 2020). The lack of access to public services, health and education facilities, employment opportunities and social life is an impassable barrier for the integration of the newcomers to their new environment.

Different approaches seeking the integration of refugees through urban housing programs have been of a small scale and precarious status.(Maloutas, Siatitsa & Balampanidis, 2020)

According to Chatziprokopiou, Karayanni and Kapsali (2021) and their research findings about affordable housing, the newcomers' population in Thessaloniki in 2020, resided in :

- 4 refugee camps in the Regional Unit of Thessaloniki 3,000 people (715 households)

- Apartments for rent through the ESTIA program  
3,880 people (1,360 households)

- Housing units supported by HELIOS program  
224 people (131 families)

- Accommodation centers for unaccompanied minors  
720 people

- Hotels within metropolitan area, leased by IOM, at which resides unknown number of asylum seekers.

- Houses which are rented by own means: 592 people (482 households)

- Temporarily abandoned spaces. The number of homeless refugees is about 700.

- Self-organized housing initiatives. The larger ones have been evicted but at the same time, there probably still exist smaller-scale efforts of "Solidarity housing", in abandoned houses, via direct hosting individuals or families, or through support networks.  
(Chatziprokopiou , Karayanni, Kapsali, 2021)

\*Around 16,000 people in total

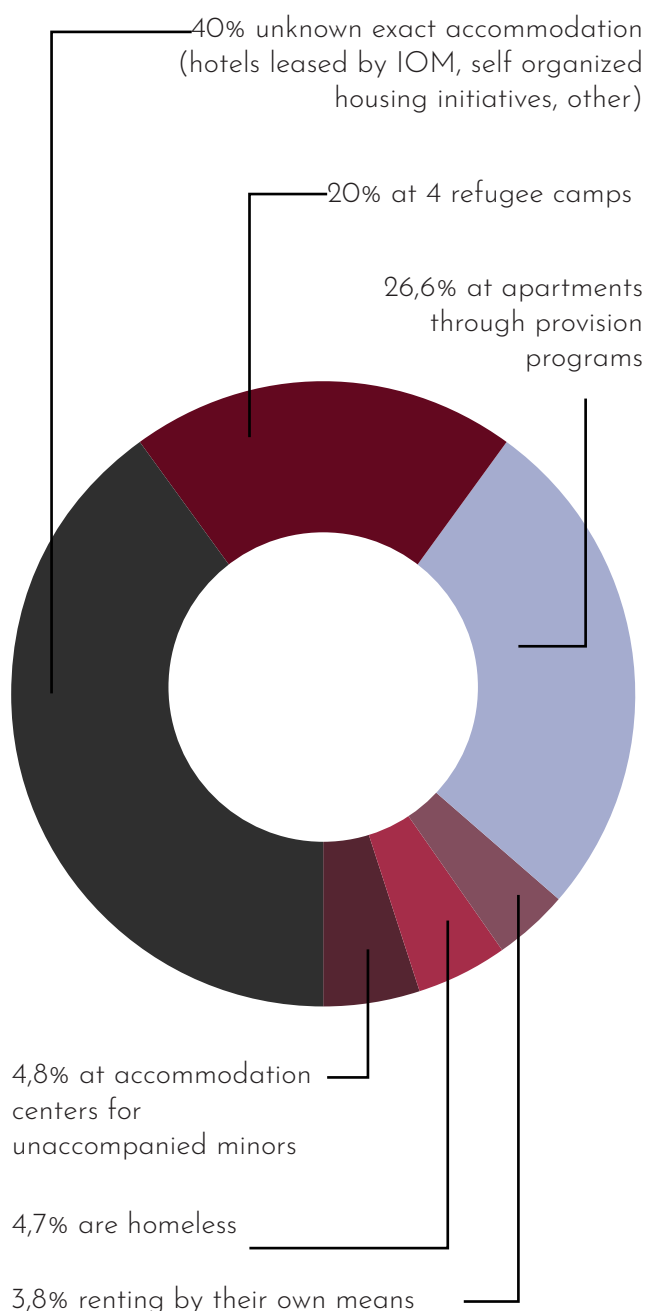
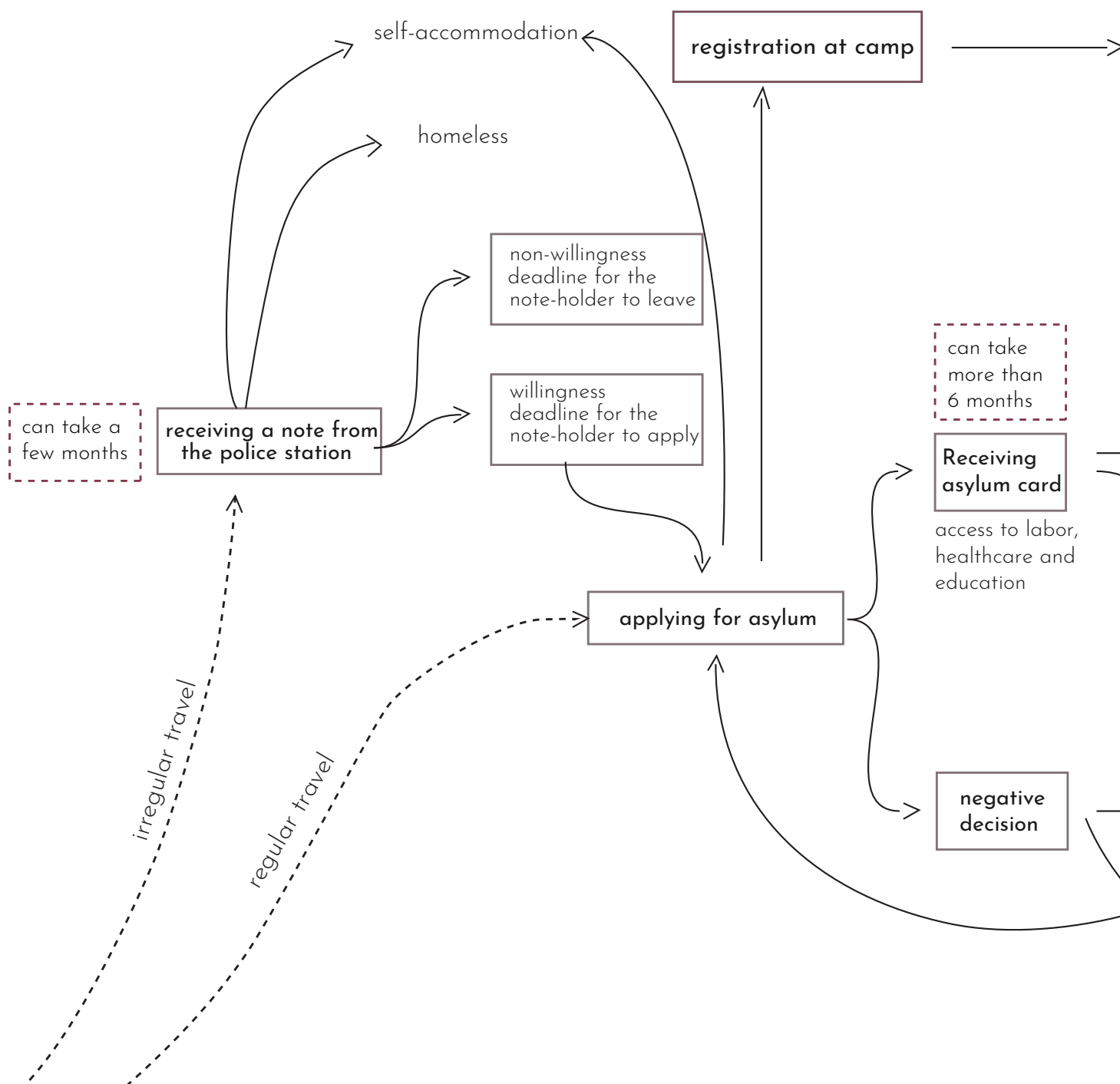


Fig. 2.9: Accommodation of newcomers in Thessaloniki in 2020

## Process the newcomers follow when arriving

The following diagram is an attempt to explain the application process newcomers are following after their arrival in Greece and relate it to the accommodation options. The

procedure is very long and complex, and the situation is changing day by day.





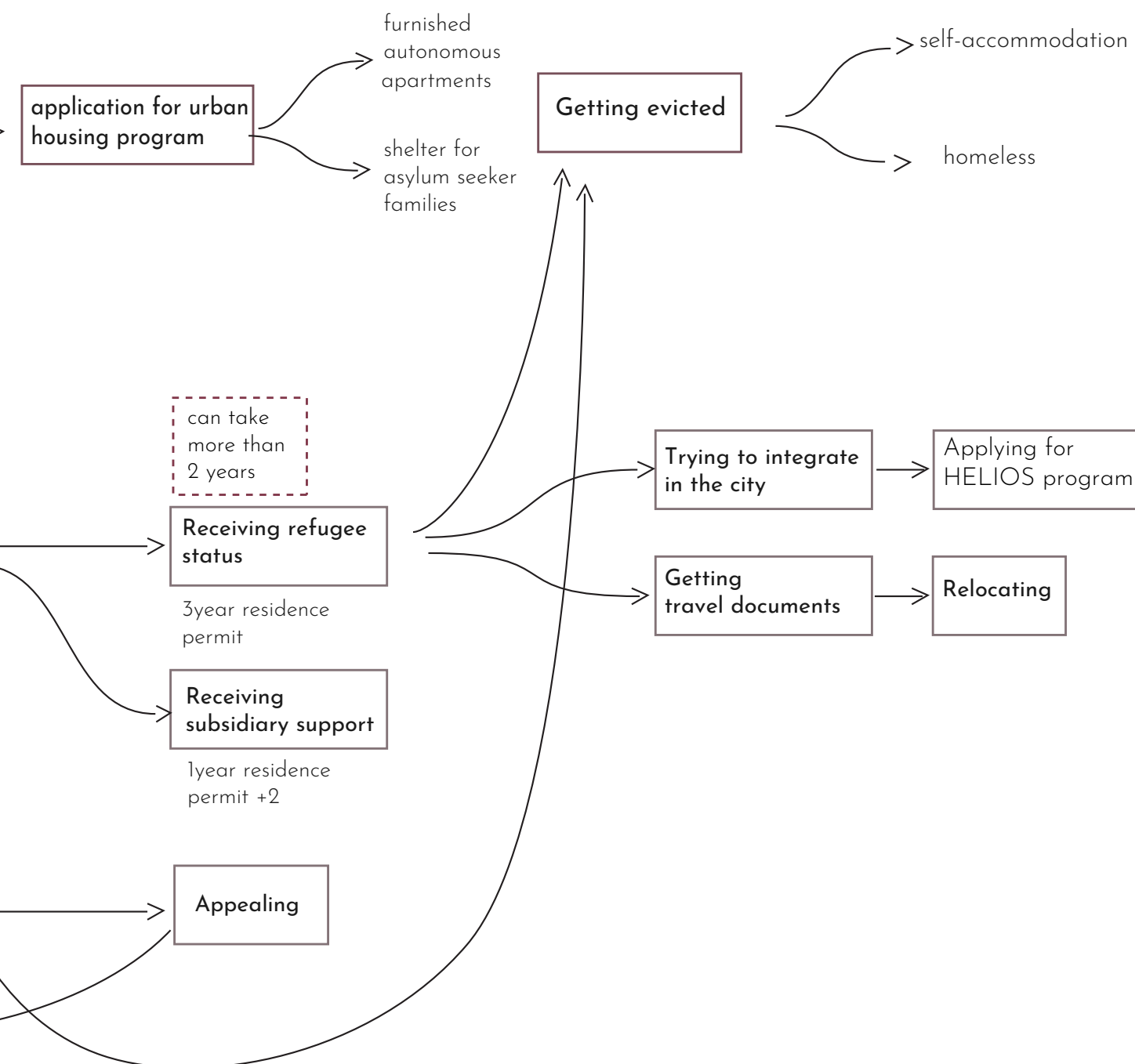


Fig. 2.10: Understanding the process newcomers have to follow in the Greek context

Sources: Applying for Asylum. (2021, June 9), Balkans route. Refugees in Towns, Amnesty International.(2021), Iliadis, N. (2021, November 22), and informal interviews and discussions with professionals working with refugees.

## Current situation

The Greek government has recently declared success in bringing the movement of asylum seekers and migrants into the country under control.

"Greece is no longer experiencing a migration crisis," Minister of Migration and Asylum Notis Mitarachi said in August 2021. Since 2020 the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum is drastically reducing the number of accommodation places for newcomers provided through the housing program ESTIA.

Approximately 26,400 beneficiaries, who were hosted under REACT (part of ESTIA housing program) until August 2021, should by April 15, 2022 be reduced to 12,000, ie a reduction of about 55%. As the representative of the ministry stated, the significant reduction of the new arrivals of refugees and immigrants in Greece makes it unnecessary to keep so many places in apartments, since there are vacancies in camps.(Iliadis, 2021)

Since 2021, less and less people apply for the urban housing program but prefer to stay at the camps as solidarity and services meet their needs and give them a sense of stability that they would not have by joining the housing program. Different organizations, including UNHCR, continue to provide medical care, first aid, transportation, interpretation, and food assistance. (Balkans route. Refugees in Towns)

Living at an apartment this period has proved to be very challenging. The visits from professionals are rare while the bureaucracy, especially during the pandemic, creates problems.

Recognized refugees are immediately denied accommodation and support and are evicted. The integration program HELIOS for recognized refugees is impossible to join, with its strict preconditions.

Newcomers are eventually 'forced' to leave the country when they get the chance. If the conditions and the support was adequate to get integrated into the Greek society, they would prefer to stay, as aspects of life, such as the weather, the culture and traditions but also their resemblance with locals in terms of social characteristics and habits are significant factors for them.

# From context to thesis exploration

Refugee housing issues have been treated independently from those of the local population, and tackled with temporary solutions, unable to achieve integration. In the meantime a large amount of the local population is struggling with housing issues and is falsely blaming refugees for housing unavailability due to the existing programs.

The implementation of a housing program for the provision of social and/or affordable housing for both locals and newcomers, is necessary, and available properties still exist.

We need to take the property that is “dead” to make a profit and “fill” it with people in need. For this program, coping strategies from the housing squats and encouraging practices of sharing and active participation might result in multiple benefits regarding integration.

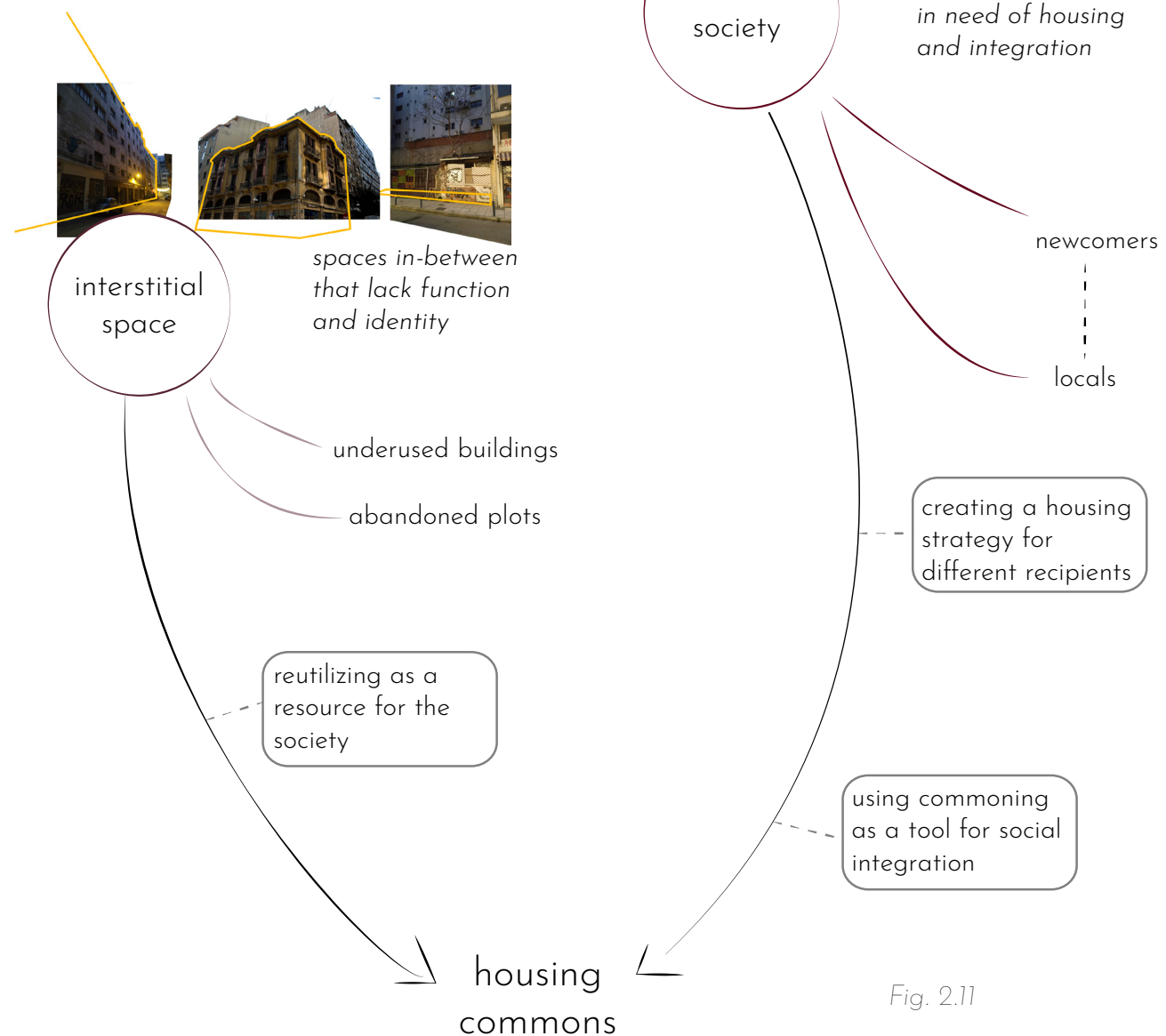


Fig. 2.11

### 3. EXPLORING HOUSING COMMONS

# Aspects defining housing commons

Different housing forms can be considered to promote or generate new forms of urban governance through cooperation, sharing and collaboration. Collaborative housing models and self-organized communities of residents show an alternative way potentially able to become an answer to the commodification of the housing right, rising inequalities and exclusion.

According to Stavrides (2019), in order to speak of housing as commons different aspects could be considered and examined.

\*Social relations in the housing estate  
relations that have to do with the formation of a community of people who share things  
Processes through which cohabitation develops practices of sharing

\*Construction and development of the housing estate  
The participation of the people during the process

\*Self-management and appropriation of the housing area  
(Stavrides et al., 2019)

But commons most importantly require to be inclusive and lead to the formation of a community where diversity is protected and fully accepted and promoted.

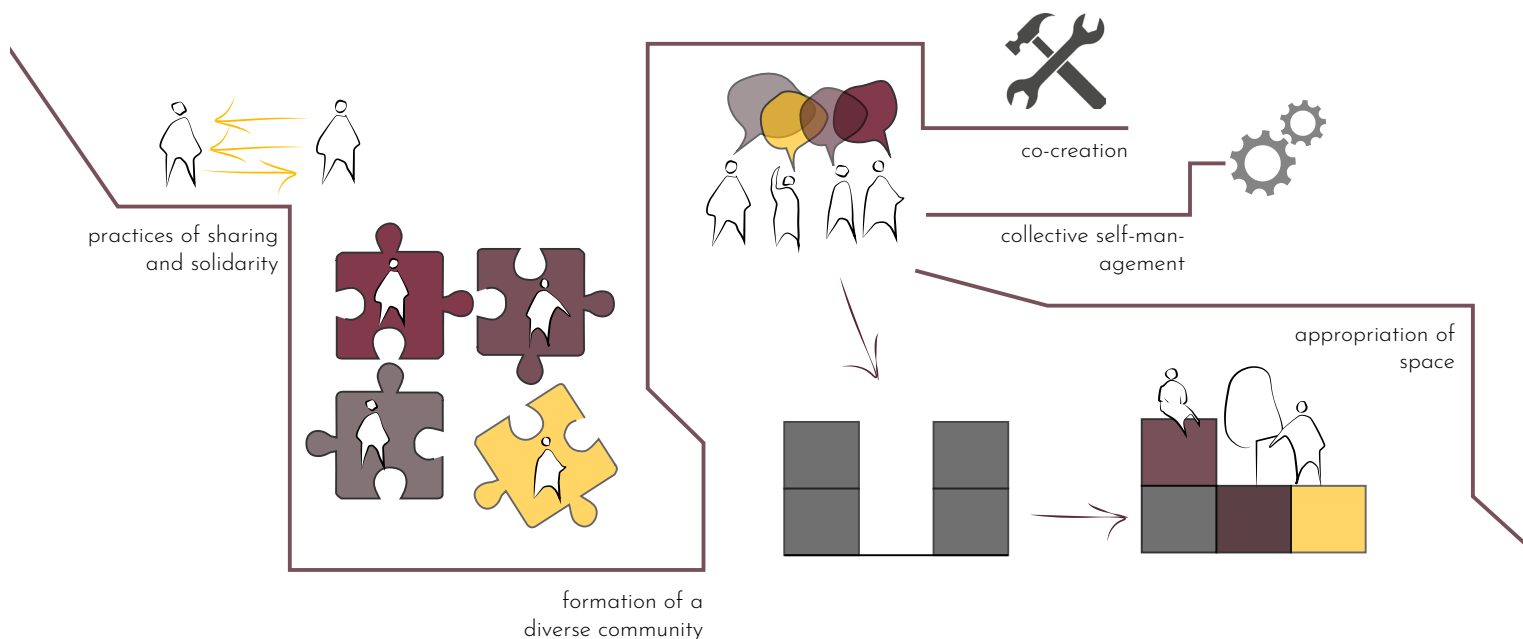


Fig. 3.1: Understanding housing commons

# Collaborative housing as commons

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Collaborative housing is an umbrella term covering a wide variety of collectively self-organized and self-managed housing models. It is not a specific building type or legal form but a concept suggesting that collaboration, in a sense of coordinated action towards a common purpose, among residents, a community of residents and/or external stakeholders is an inseparable part of the housing model. (Oorschot, 2021). It has originally emerged as a bottom-up

initiative; people joining forces to provide housing for themselves and by themselves. (Czischke & Huisman, 2018) These self-organised communities share some common values that in spite of their other differences, want to follow together. They run the whole process, from design to funding and realization and try to make it accessible to different members. (Bresson 2016). In this sense, they can be considered as housing commons. But are they actually inclusive?

## Social inclusion and collaborative housing

---

Collaborative housing models are considered to encourage sharing through collective management, solidarity and empowerment, benefits which prevent social exclusion. However, the amount of capital (economic, social, cultural) needed for participants to set up collaborative housing projects makes it impossible for different people to join, and could lead to segregation or gentrification. Collaborative housing models have even been criticised as being private residential enclaves' or even gated communities. (Bresson 2016).

Recently, top down initiated collective housing projects have been emerging and are considered to be much more inclusive than the traditional bottom up initiated ones. These projects are facilitated by a professional entity, private, governmental or NGO with a purpose to develop innovative forms of housing, accessible to a range of people. (Czischke & Huisman, 2018) The top-down actors own a property, or are able to acquire one and finance the future (re)development of it into a collectively self-managed housing project. Usually, common spaces and activities

are decided and discussed with the residents and developed and co-designed with their participation. (Czischke & Huisman, 2018) Both bottom-up and top-down projects are accessible to households with low incomes but this does not mean social and cultural diversity. (Bresson 2016) Bottom up projects are usually formed by groups with a degree of homogeneity as the participants usually have academic and activist backgrounds, and share common personal and political beliefs. (Bresson 2016). People in urgent need of housing and/or people with less privileged backgrounds do not have the time, knowledge or incentives to become part of a self-organized community.

Top-down projects seem to be more inclusive to different kinds of people, especially those who do not have the necessary resources to get involved in self-organised forms of housing and would not spontaneously consider it. (Bresson 2016). The professionals work as initiators and some times facilitate the function of the CH model, encouraging an approach based on mutual help, collaboration and solidarity. (Bresson 2016).

## bottom up initiatives

**strong links between residents, who autonomously self-organize and join forces**

### **focus on sharing:**

common ideas, values, how to live space (common areas)

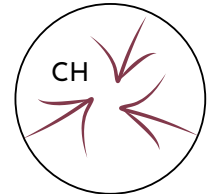
### **focus on affordability:**

providing homes to lower or medium income groups



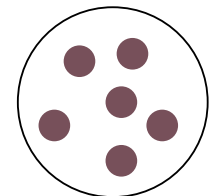
### **inward-looking nature**

inside solidarity among direct beneficiaries themselves



### **homogeneity**

has even been compared to enclaves or gated communities



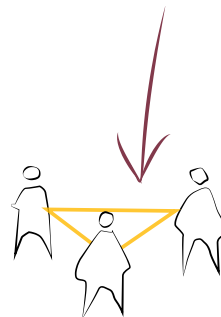
## top down initiatives

**top down actors as initiators-facilitators  
collective management and collaboration**

### **focus on collaboration and social relations**

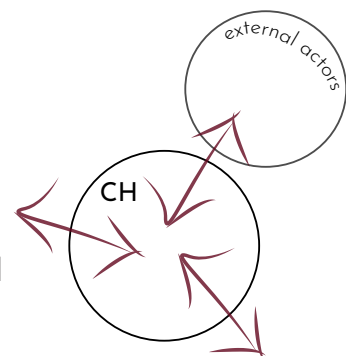
### **focus on affordability:**

providing homes to lower or medium income groups

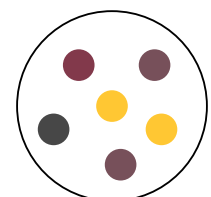


### **outward-looking nature**

external collaboration and assistance



### **socio-cultural diversity**



# Housing commons as a model for integration

Regarding the establishment of newcomers into their host societies, academics have noted the distinction between integration and assimilation. While assimilation is regarded as a one way effort from the newcomers to be included in the host society, integration can be regarded as an interactive process, during which both newcomers and the host society adapt to each other.(Czischke & Huisman, 2018)

Thus, this process requires willingness and effort from the migrants themselves to become active members of the host society, to learn about the new culture and way of living but also from the host society to facilitate integration through housing and services etc but also from the local community to accept, interact and produce new social connections. (Czischke & Huisman, 2018)

The following diagram illustrates the different domains of the newcomers integration. These ten domains are interdependent.

The three forms of social connections: “social bonds (with family and co-ethnic, conational, co-religious or other forms of group), social bridges (with other communities) and social links (with the structures of the state)” (Ager & Strang, 2008) are basic part for the integration process. Collaborative housing forms would facilitate more interaction between inhabitants comparing to traditional forms of housing. (Czischke & Huisman, 2018) A strategy of housing commons for newcomers and locals could facilitate interactions between the commoners and mutual learning, and development of skills.

All these, in turn, might help refugees (and even locals) to engage with other elements of integration, such as employment or education.

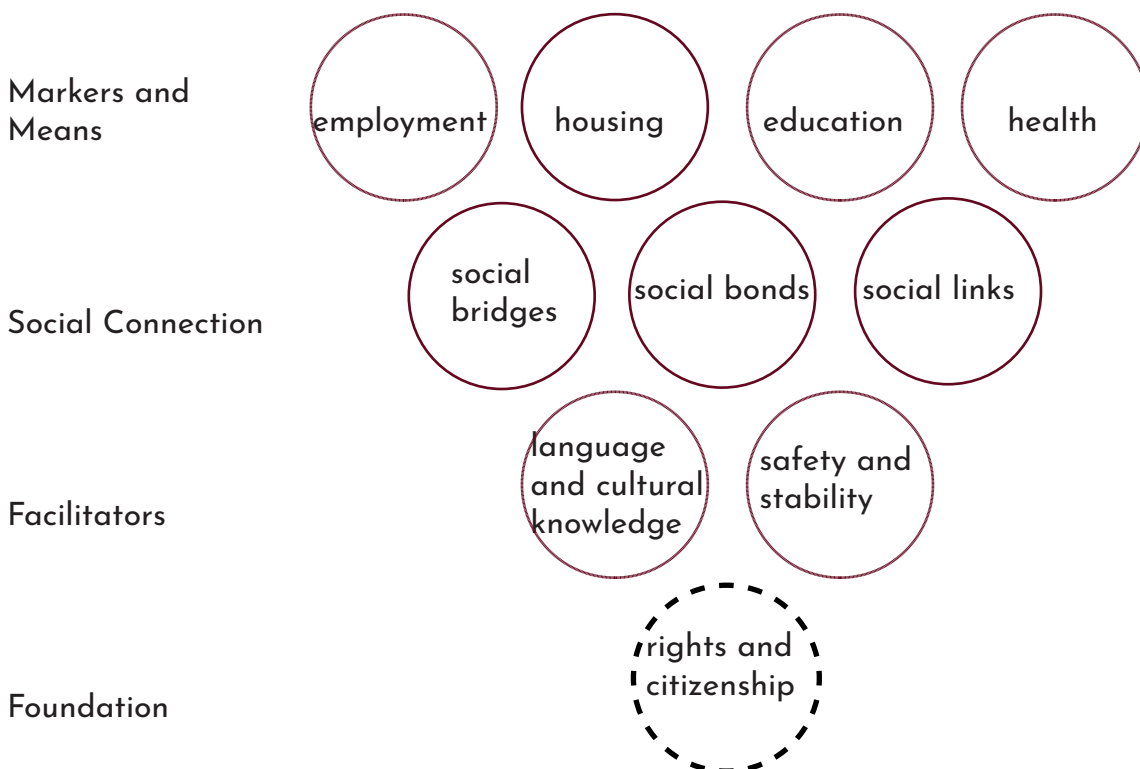


Fig. 3.2: Conceptual framework concerning the core domains of refugee integration , Source: Ager & Strang, 2008, )



Integration methods in Greece attempt to address the housing issue through housing programs without putting much effort on creating the preconditions for the formation of social connections or acquisition of skills.

On the other hand the bottom up initiatives emerging around Greece in the form of housing squats are not only linked to housing needs and their personal space, but also linked to the claim to the right to the city, meaning the right to the multiple dimensions of

everyday life, such as the public and political sphere, the social and cultural relations even in the sphere of imagination and representation. (Tsavdaroglou, Giannopoulou, Lafazani, Pistikos, & Petropoulou, 2018) The idea behind self-organized collective housing is not only to provide shelter but also to facilitate integration and empowerment. Housing commons are an interactive process, benefiting both newcomers and the hosting community and contributing to a just inclusive neighborhood and city.

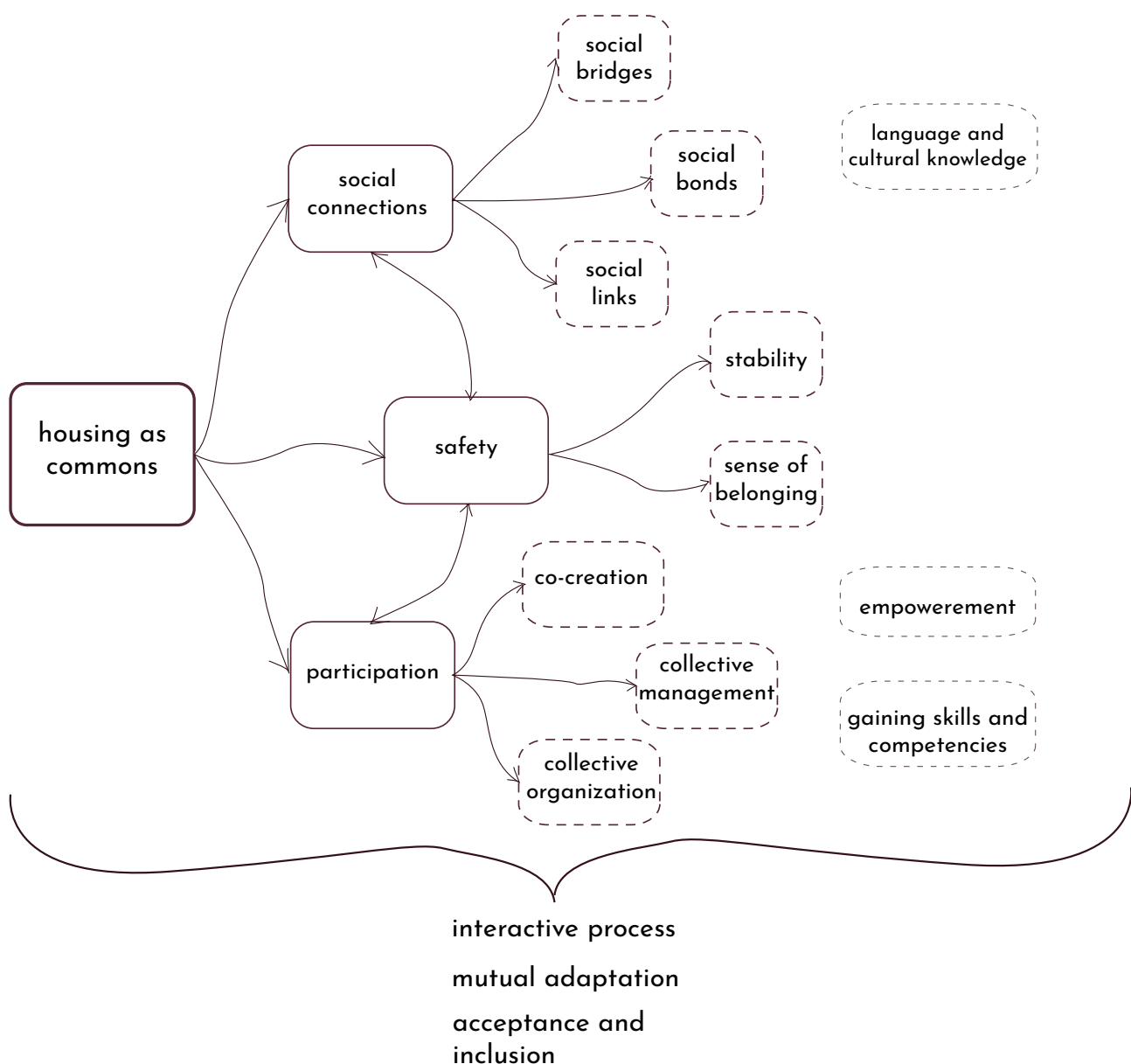


Fig. 3.3: Different aspects of integration that are expected to be facilitated through housing commons

## Reference projects

### The Orfanotrofio project

Refugee housing squat of a former orphanage (orphanotrofio) in the center of Thessaloniki. It was formed in 2015, when immediate action was required to provide housing for people who were trapped in the city, after the closing of borders of Eidomeni.

This bottom -up project reveals that by reutilizing existing spatial resources and while working autonomously without any top-down support or funding, it is possible to create homes in the center of the city and support the integration of newcomers through interactions and active participation.

#### Main takeaways:

- appropriation and co-creation of space as a form of self empowerment, but also a way for participants to feel space as home..



Fig. 3.4: View of the building, Source: <https://en.squat.net/2015/12/31/thessaloniki-a-vis-it-at-the-orfanotrofio-squat/>

- collective self-organisation and self-management through assemblies, teams and support groups
- networking with different solidarity groups and collectives

### CoHab Athens

Research project on co-housing and collective ownership models for reclaiming affordable habitat quality in Athens, initiated in 2017. The research focuses on how these housing models could fit the Greek context and be developed autonomously, without support from the state with main objective the decommodification of housing.

#### Main takeaways:

- combination and re-use of separate properties and buildings to fit the multi-horizontal- ownership scheme that dominates Greek cities.
- time-sharing as a way of sharing skills and knowledge beyond the market

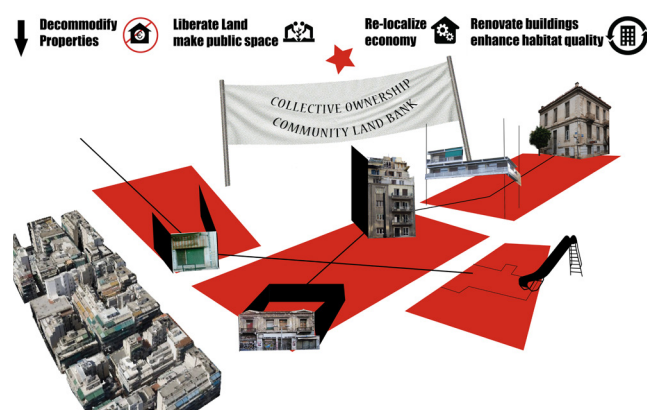


Fig. 3.5: Cohab Athens, Source: <https://cohab-athens.org/>

## Micoll, Bergsjön

Research program for collaboratively designed and built housing for refugees in Bergsjön, Göteborg (2021-2022). This project focuses more on the process rather than the result, as a way to benefit peoples' living through participation, with opportunities for employment, education.

### Main takeaways:

- self-construction as a learning activity,



Fig. 3.6: Micoll, Source: <http://micoll.org/>

- gaining skills and competencies
- collaboration of bottom up and top down actors, forming connections, legitimize community driven projects
- re-activation of neighborhood for the common good

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## Haus der Statistik

Proposal for the re-use of the "Haus der Statistik" in Berlin, by combining affordable refugee housing with working spaces for art, culture and education. It was initiated when actions of a group of committed citizens led to the prevention of the building's demolition and the development of the plot from investors.

### Main takeaways:

- synergy of uses aiming to facilitate integration, promote sociocultural diversity and make the project economically stable
- participation of the urban society in the development process , by creating a participation center and organizing workshops
- collaboration of top-down and bottom up actors, making the project feasible.

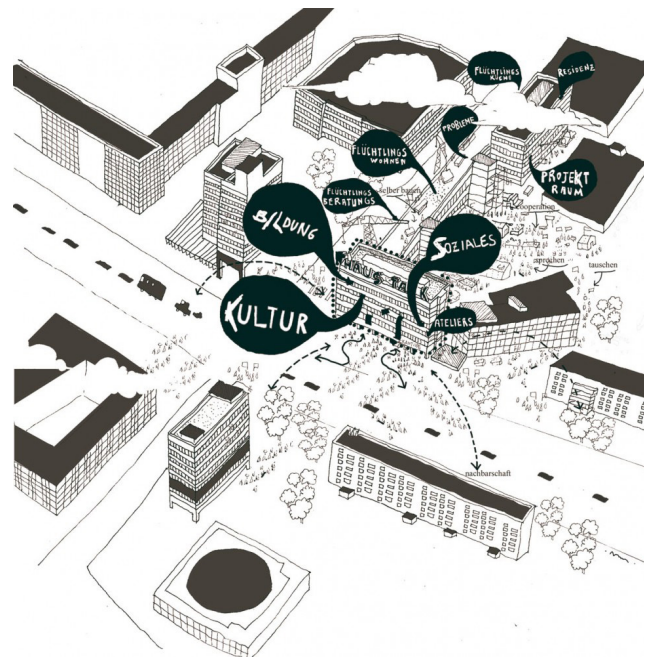


Fig. 3.7: Synergy of uses, Source: <https://raumlabor.net/haus-der-statistik/>

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## Startblok Riekerhaven

Top down initiated collaborative housing for young refugees and locals in Amsterdam (2016) with the aim to facilitate integration through interactions and self-organization.

### Main takeaways:

- homogeneous demographic for the creation of social bonds
- collective self-organization and self-management for the empowerment of participants and to form social connections



Fig. 3.8: Startblok Riekerhaven, Source: <https://startblokriekerhaven.nl/over-het-project/>

# Reutilizing interstitial space for housing commons

Interstitial space, or spaces in-between which have been abandoned and lack a specific identity have been providing opportunities for reappropriation and creation of space for improvised activities that could not otherwise happen in our overcommercialised society. Commoning as a space in the making, constantly developing and changing through participation of newcomers 'fills' urban interstices and benefits the urban society. (Lau 2012).

Housing commons in the form of collaborative housing for refugees and locals can be combined with cultural activities, co-working

spaces and open common spaces welcoming the neighborhood and city and facilitating integration.

A project like this, with all its complexity should be supported and funded by the municipality and/or NGOs, ensuring access to the vulnerable groups of citizens.

My intention is to explore ways to encourage users to be actively involved in the management and organization of space and design spaces in a way that they encourage interaction and allow people transform their surroundings and participate in the process.

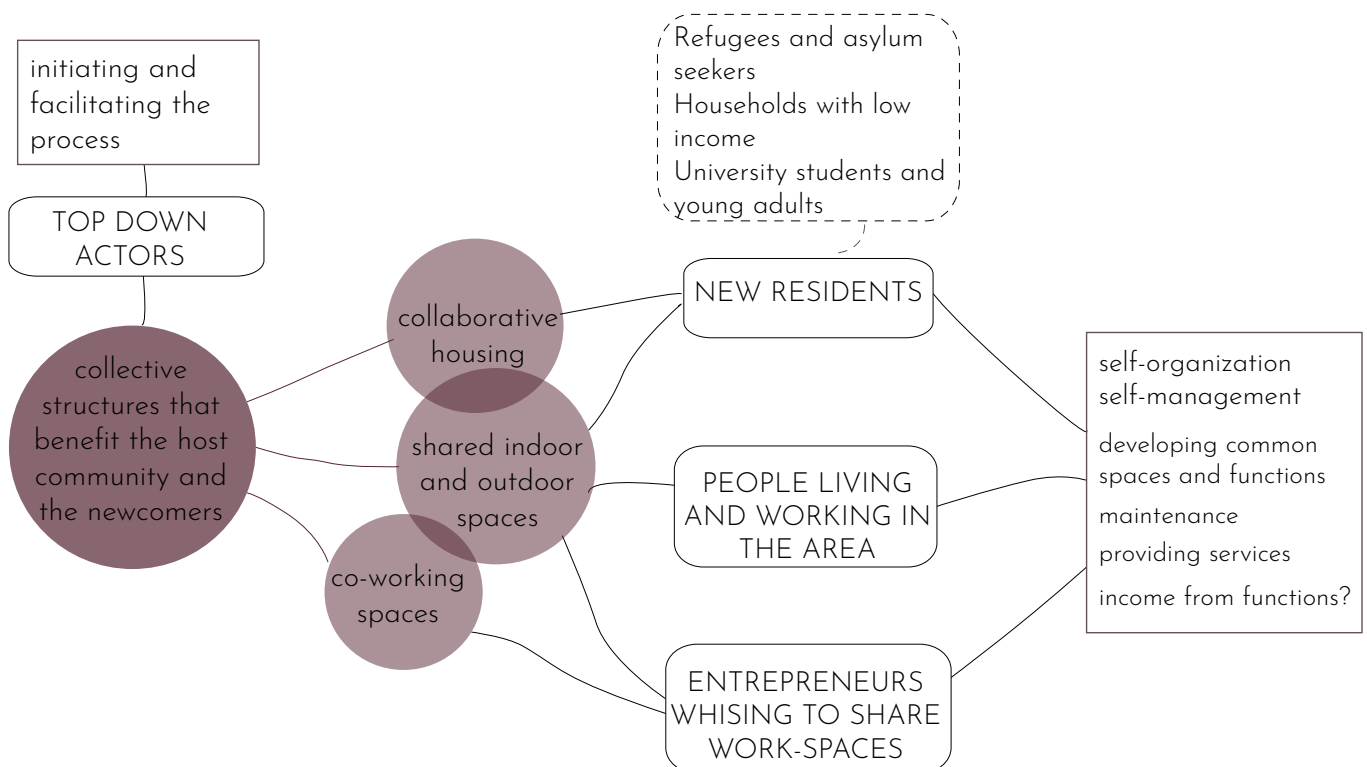
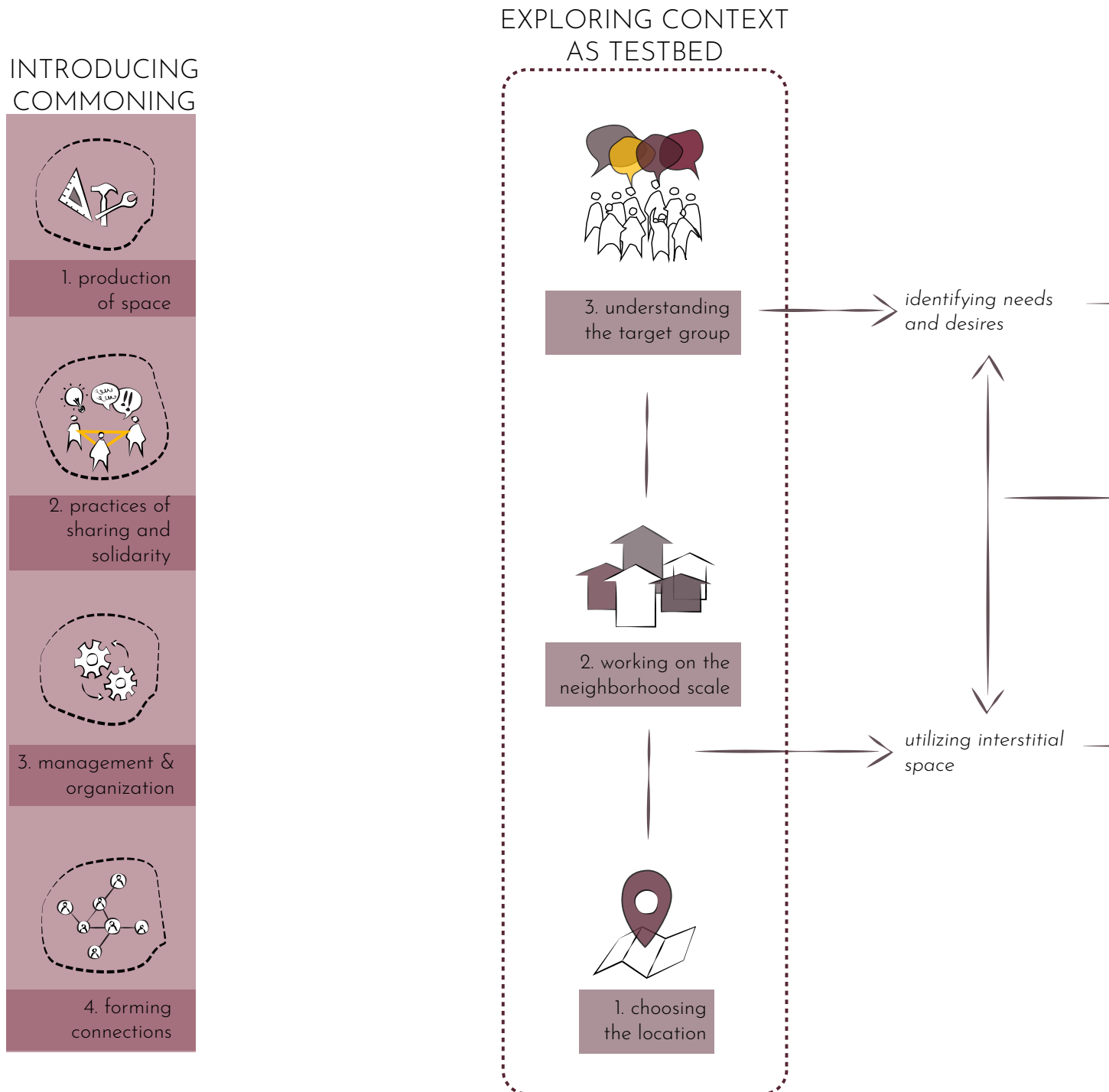


Fig. 3.9

## 4. ITERATION

# Road map to commoning



This diagram illustrates different steps and strategies considered for the creation of the housing commons in Thessaloniki. The steps and their order are not strict and the process is iterative and not a linear one.

## CO-DESIGN PROCESS

4. establishing facilities of different levels of sharing

### FACILITIES

- housing clusters
- different households
- households & offices -industries
- open to the neighborhood

### KEY FUNCTIONS

- arts and culture
- gardening
- gastronomy
- learning for adults and children

### SPATIAL INTERVENTIONS

- connecting
- easy access
- adaptable
- extendable
- human scale

### CO-INITIATION



5. encouraging key functions supporting integration and participation

6. applying necessary spatial interventions

7. kickstarting co-creation

*sharing space and interacting*

*promoting diversity and exchange*

commoning

*using architecture as guiding*

*initiating action!*

## INTRODUCING COMMONING



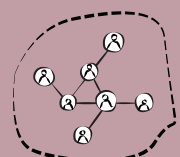
1. production of space



2. practices of sharing and solidarity



3. management & organization



4. forming connections

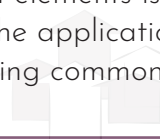
## EXPLORING CONTEXT AS TESTBED



3. understanding the target group

identifying needs and desires

Firstly, an introduction to commoning and its main elements is presented and suggestions for the application of these elements at the housing commons are discussed.



2. working on the neighborhood scale

utilizing interstitial space



1. choosing the location





# INTRODUCING COMMONING

Urban commons comprise three elements: the city as a common resource, governed by a community of commoners who regulate their relations and commoning processes of social cooperation and collective action. (An Architektur, 2008)

Commoning describes all those ways people come together to take decisions collectively and take actions independently from the market, to improve their surroundings, everyday lives and support one another. Sharing is to be the guiding principle of self-management practices. The precondition of egalitarian sharing then is sharing of power. (Stavrides, 2016)

The following 4 elements of commoning, which are directly connected to each other, can be applied on the collaborative housing project for newcomers and locals as a means towards integration.

## Production of space

Producing space becomes possible by utilizing the community's skills, creativity and knowledge.

Various self-design and built projects have been realized around Thessaloniki. Neighborhood parks, small kitchens or cultural spaces (by appropriating old buildings or empty properties) have been co-created by commoning initiatives.

Svolou initiative is a neighborhood collective which in 2017 started co-creating a pocket park on an empty plot. The process includes construction workshops, collaborations with universities and organizations and open calls to the citizens. The materials in the past were acquired through collaborations with the former municipality of Thessaloniki, local shops in the neighborhood and donations from participants. A 'kitchen' has been constructed using the cob technique, stones were installed for pathways and a small square, and various furniture were constructed with timber pallets.



Fig. 4.1: View of the Svolou pocket park

## Integration through design and build projects

Top down initiatives in camps in Greece have shown that collective design and build projects can be widely accepted by newcomers who in many case have also self-organized to manage the space when it was realized. According to Jaradat and Beunders(2021),

newcomers can have positive experiences through participative design and construction. Many participants were skilled in different fields such as carpentry, tiling, roof construction, design or art. Inexperienced people contributed as well in simple tasks, such as digging the ground. During the process, more people discovered talents they never knew they had and improved different skills. Experienced workers were motivated to

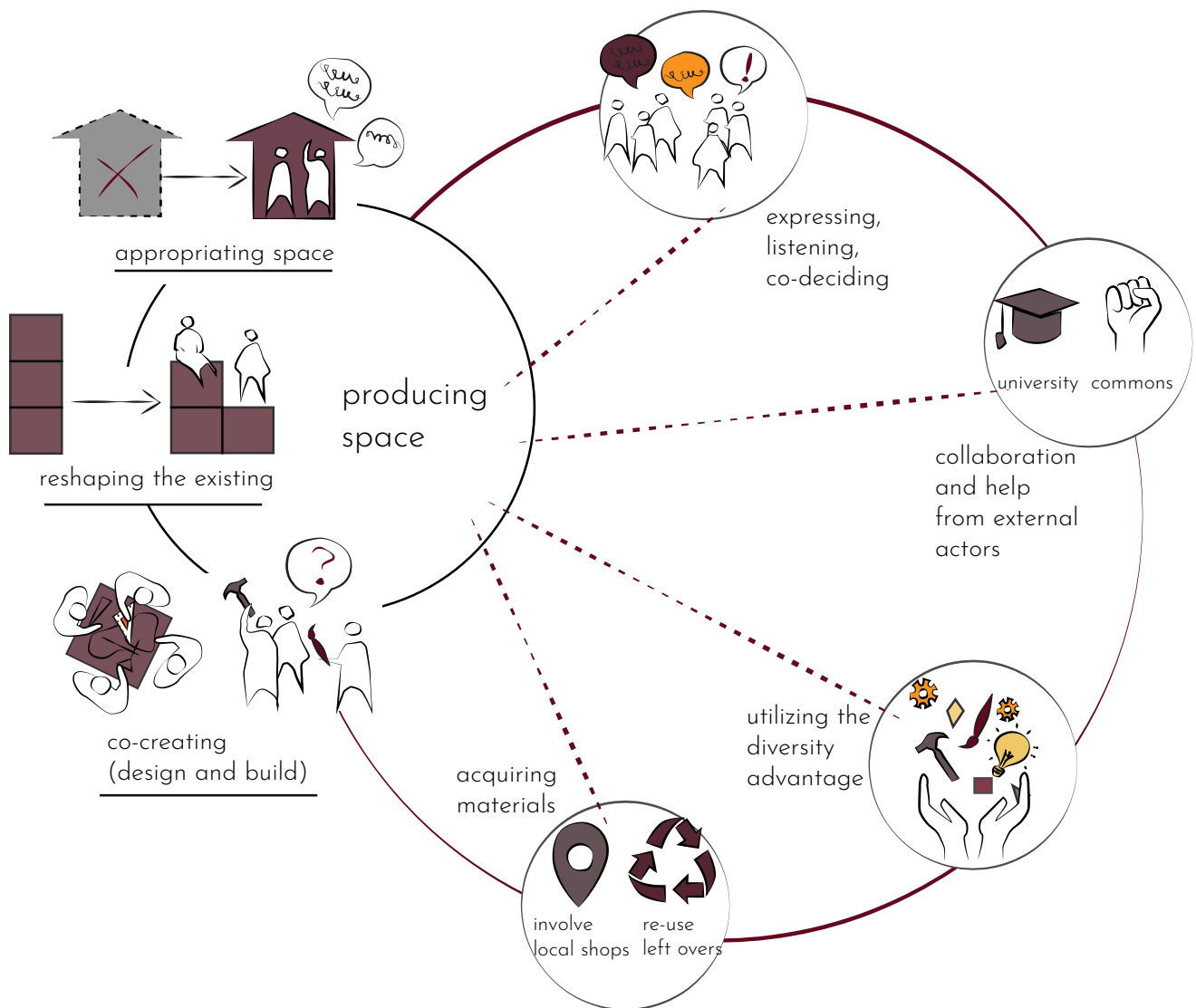


Fig. 4.2: Exploring the process

## Sharing skills and knowledge

Anyone, wherever they come from have things to offer to the society. It is important to identify or reveal the competences of individuals and how to connect them to activities where these skills may be useful.

### Diversity advantage

While locals or refugees that have been already established in the city might be more competent in activities or services connected to the local life and assist newcomers, newcomers have a wide range of skills and competences that are usually underestimated and neglected. These talents should become valued and employed to improve their personal growth, while assisting others.

### Examples

language, art and culture courses  
children care  
events, festivals and exhibitions  
community kitchen management  
maintenance of housing area etc

Other than these actions, gradually both newcomers and locals could become more active. More bottom-up activities might appear.

### Time banking as an alternative currency

Different collectivities also use the system of time banks, exchange of services, skills and time through a network independent of money profit and the laws of supply and demand of the market. Every participant can state what they can offer or need and exchange their services with others.

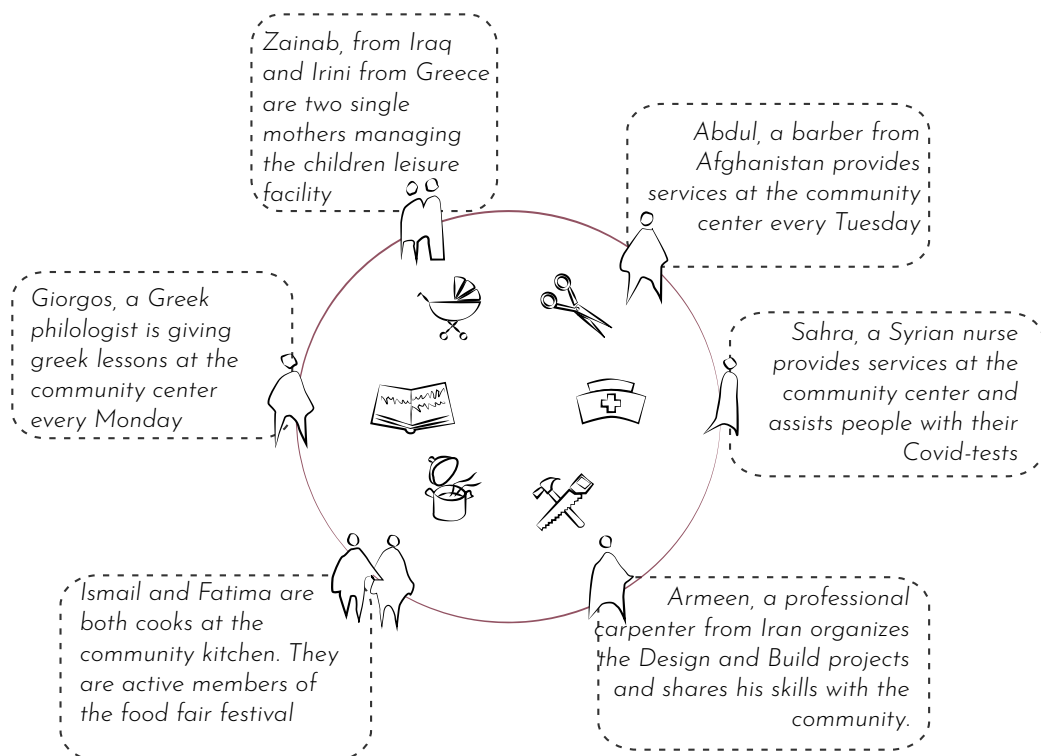


Fig. 4.3: Sharing skills among the community

## Self management and self organization

Common spaces are characterized by collective decision making, self management and self organization. Open meetings, where every one can have a say are organized frequently.

### Collective decision making through assemblies

For the collaborative housing, a board consisted by both newcomers and locals can be formed having a secretarial-administrative role and functioning with a frequent rotation, and all decisions can be based on a weekly assembly. The Orfanotrofeio (orphanage) squat as an example, used daily assemblies that build the organizational basis. Decisions regarding the management of the housing area were based on a consensus. According to the activists-participants there was a continuous effort to minimize barriers and encourage refugees to participate, a process which takes a lot of time and effort. The language barrier could be a burden at the beginning and the participation of the newcomers more difficult than the locals'.

Commoning is however based on equity and solidarity. This means that sometimes some can offer more than the others.

### Formation of teams

Through the assembly of Orfanotrofeio for the everyday tasks further teams were developed. Some collaborated and worked for the necessary material, some were responsible for the kitchen, some the infrastructure, electricity, water etc. A team supporting and welcoming newly arrived people was also formed. The collaborative housing organization can follow a similar pattern. Teams can be formed for the cleaning and maintenance of the shared spaces, some for preparing common dinners and others to organize different events or actions weekly.

### Common rules-principles

Rules of sharing are not created by an external institution or authority but collectively by the participants to ensure that one respects another and that a harmonious living is ensured.

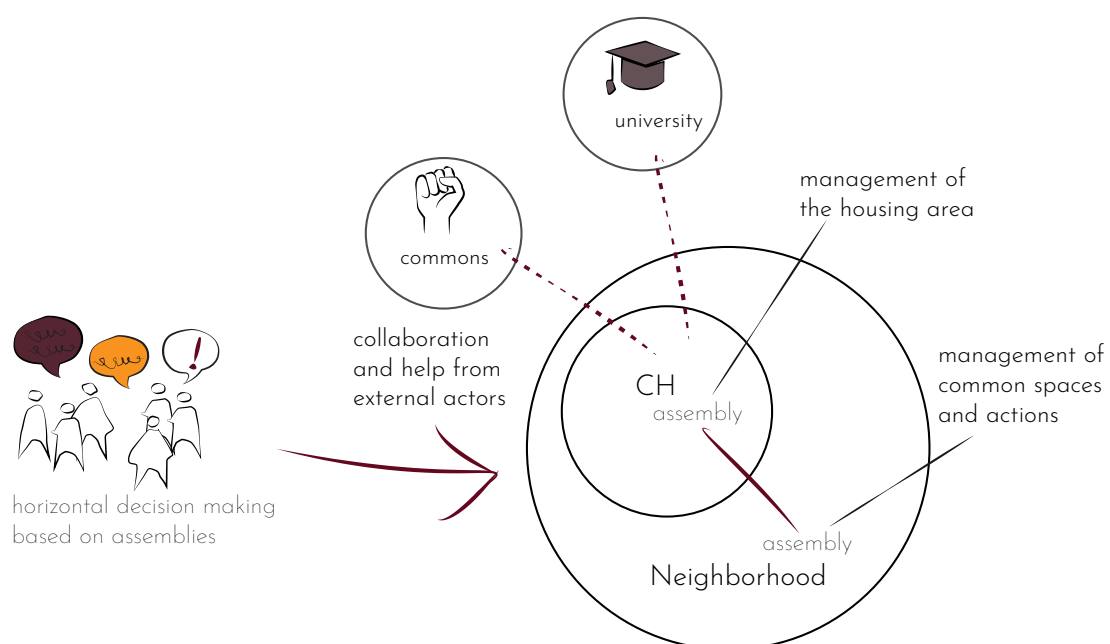


Fig.4.4: Self- management and organization through assemblies

## Forming connections and networks

Different collectivities forge networks and alliances and work together for common objectives. Openness and networking is an important part for the commons' effectiveness and prosperity. Everyone is welcome and included except from the excluders.

Except from collaborating with the municipality, the housing commons collective should actively form collaborations with other commons and collectives in the city. Support from these collectives can facilitate different activities and strengthen the community's resilience.

Svolou neighborhood commons as an example, collaborates with different collectives and forms networks of assistance and solidarity. They have established a wider network with other neighborhood commons for matters of eviction, exclusion and homelessness. They actively participate in marches and protests and support different solidarity initiatives.

### **Vardaris neighborhood collective**

carries out small-scale interventions in the urban landscape and organizes various cultural activities and events.

### **Migrants Place (Steki)**

supports newcomers. The open social center has been evicted but the group continues its activities

### **Svolou neighborhood collective**

carries out various cultural and participatory activities. They have been co-creating a neighborhood pocket park.

### **Free social space school**

experiments on open learning and the renegotiation of knowledge through participation and self-management.

### **Room 39**

a self-organized support group for refugees / immigrants and the homeless. They organize social kitchen and other actions.

### **Yfanet squat**

a squat of a former factory. Organizing different events and actions. Have worked on construction and preservation projects of the facilities.

### **Aristotle university of Thessaloniki**





Fig. 4.5: Location of existing commons and university in Thessaloniki. Scale 1:25000

## INTRODUCING COMMONING



The contextual analysis is made using a specific neighborhood as a testbed. The importance of a central location, brief history and presentation of the location, main characteristics and interstitial spaces are examined. The way of using the neighborhood as a whole and not a single building, is explained and the reasons behind it. Understanding the people and identifying their characteristics and their needs is the last part.



3. management & organization

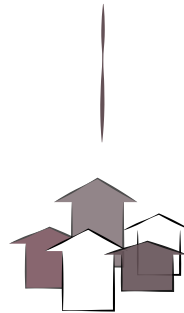


4. forming connections

## EXPLORING CONTEXT AS TESTBED



3. understanding the target group



2. working on the neighborhood scale



1. choosing the location

identifying needs and desires

utilizing interstitial space





# EXPLORING CONTEXT AS TESTBED



## Choosing the location



### The importance of a central location



*...“the right to the city, not to the ancient city, but to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of these moments and places.”(Lefebvre, 1996) .*

The centre of the city is a privileged space, a space where gentrification and city branding activities exclude parts of the population and marginalize them for the sake of private profit. For the creation of a just city, one where everyone is included and respected, urban development and transformation is not an exclusive process but an opportunity to benefit the diverse community while utilizing its advantages as a part of the city's identity.

Access and participation in the urban life offers different opportunities for social integration:

- social connections
- opportunity for employment
- access to education, hospitals and other services
- creating networks
- reinforce intercultural interaction
- challenge stereotypes

## Valaoritou neighborhood



As a testbed for the housing commons, Valaoritou neighborhood was chosen. A central district with great social and

The previously called Frangomahalas area was at the beginning of the 20th century a commercial center of Thessaloniki. Workshops and shops, of Muslims, Jews and Christians, galleries, insurance offices, cafes, restaurants, shipping companies and hotels were dominating the area.

During the German Occupation and after the extermination of the Jewish population of the city which was an active part of the city's economy, Frangomahalas began to decline and the use of buildings in the area to change. With the development of manufacturing gradually, it was transformed into a craft area with clothing and linen industries, textile shops, etc. In the 1960s and 1970s it flourished and was the manufacturing face of the city.

The crisis that hit the industrial activity in the 1990s resulted in the economic decline of the area and its transformation into a place of entertainment. The area started gaining activity again, and young creative professionals moved due to the low prices. The small shops (food, spices and building materials) and offices and industries are not that many, but together with the new uses form an interesting collage of plurality and diversity.

Urban regeneration interventions have already started with bioclimatic squares and pedestrian streets being created and interest from investors is on the rise. Old buildings are turned into hostels and Airbnb apartments and the owners of the small shops and offices are gradually displaced due to the rising rents and prices.

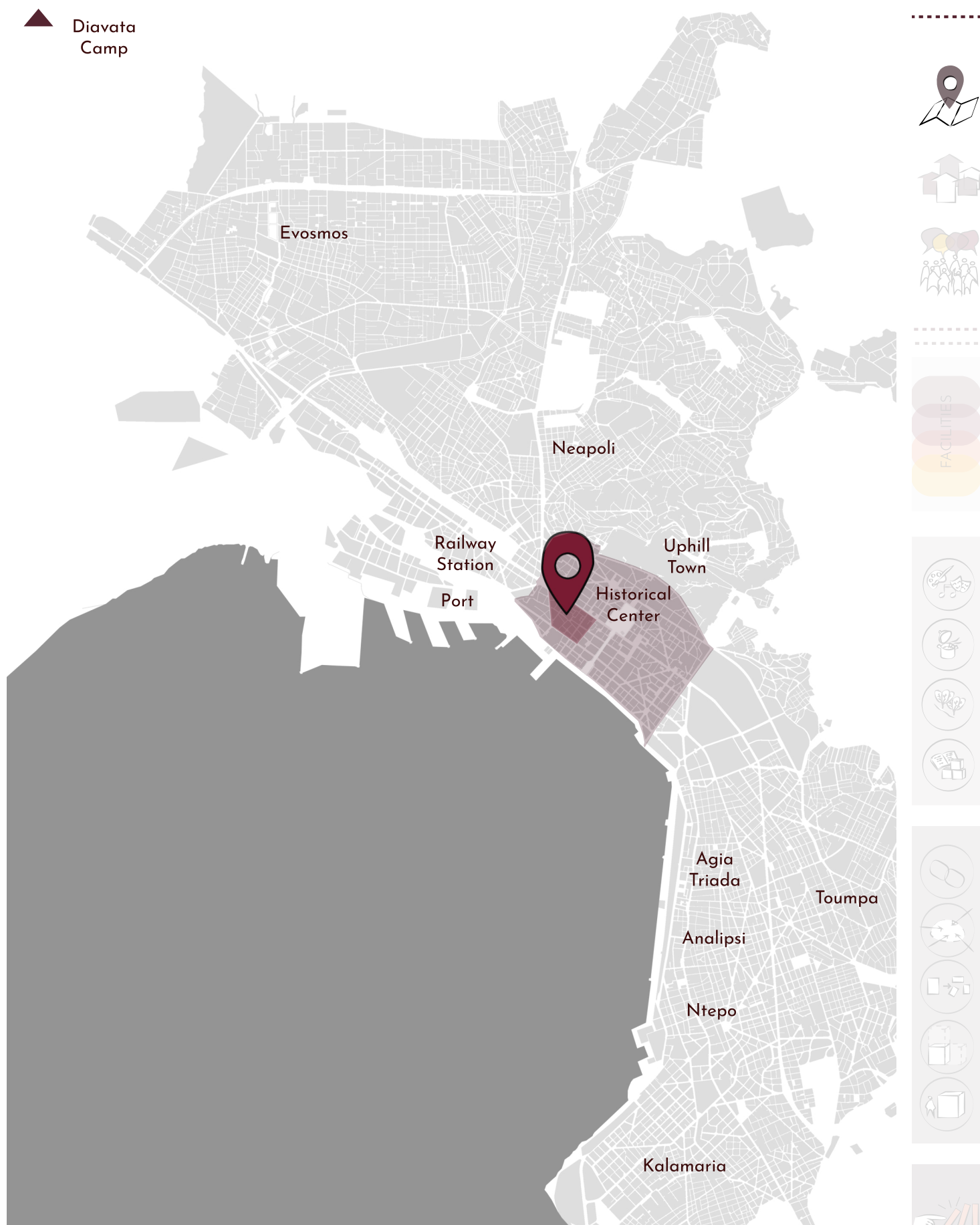


Fig. 4.6: Location of Valaoritou neighborhood in Thessaloniki. Scale 1:75000

## Main characteristics of the case study area

- A generally degraded sector of the historical center
- Domination of bars and recreation
- Most of existing buildings are office and industrial ones
- Many listed and protected buildings
- Lack of open spaces
- Lack of greenery
- A large amount of interstitial spaces (unused old tobacco warehouses, industry and office buildings (floors or whole buildings), apartments, former stores, aged abandoned historical buildings, plots, courtyards and rooftops)
- Multiownership and fragmented properties

## Opportunities for the housing commons in the area

diversity of interstitial spaces  
representative situation of multi-ownership  
some activity in the area  
opportunity for expansion in the area  
creative professionals

## Challenges for the housing commons in the area

difficult to work with multiple owners and properties  
recent investments have raised the prices and rents



Fig. 4.7 : View of Emprar street and the two partly unused industrial buildings



Fig. 4.8: Empty building on Edessis street





Fig. 4.9: Nightlife in the area, Source: <https://parallaximag.gr/einai-tora-efkairia-na-allaksei-valaoritou-124080>



Fig. 4.12: View of the new Chrimatistiriou square



Fig. 4.10: View of Irakleiou street



Fig. 4.13: View of the new Emporiou square



Fig. 4.11: Empty historical building for sale, Source: <https://parallaximag.gr/einai-tora-efkairia-na-allaksei-valaoritou-124080>



Fig. 4.14: View of partly unused building on Olimpiou street

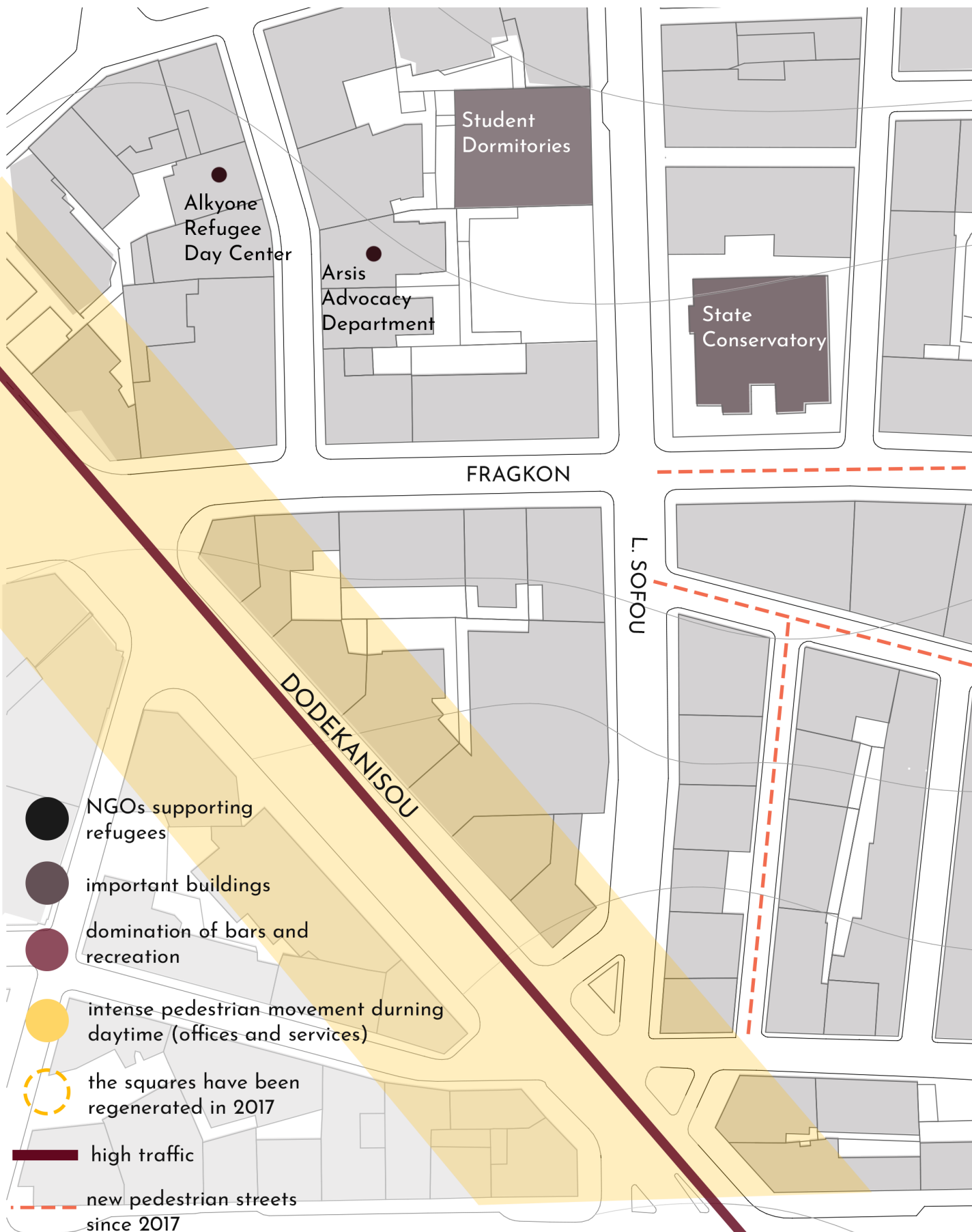
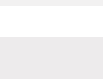


FACILITIES





FACILITIES



- NGOs supporting refugees
- important buildings
- domination of bars and recreation

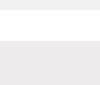
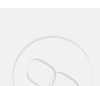
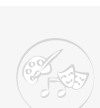
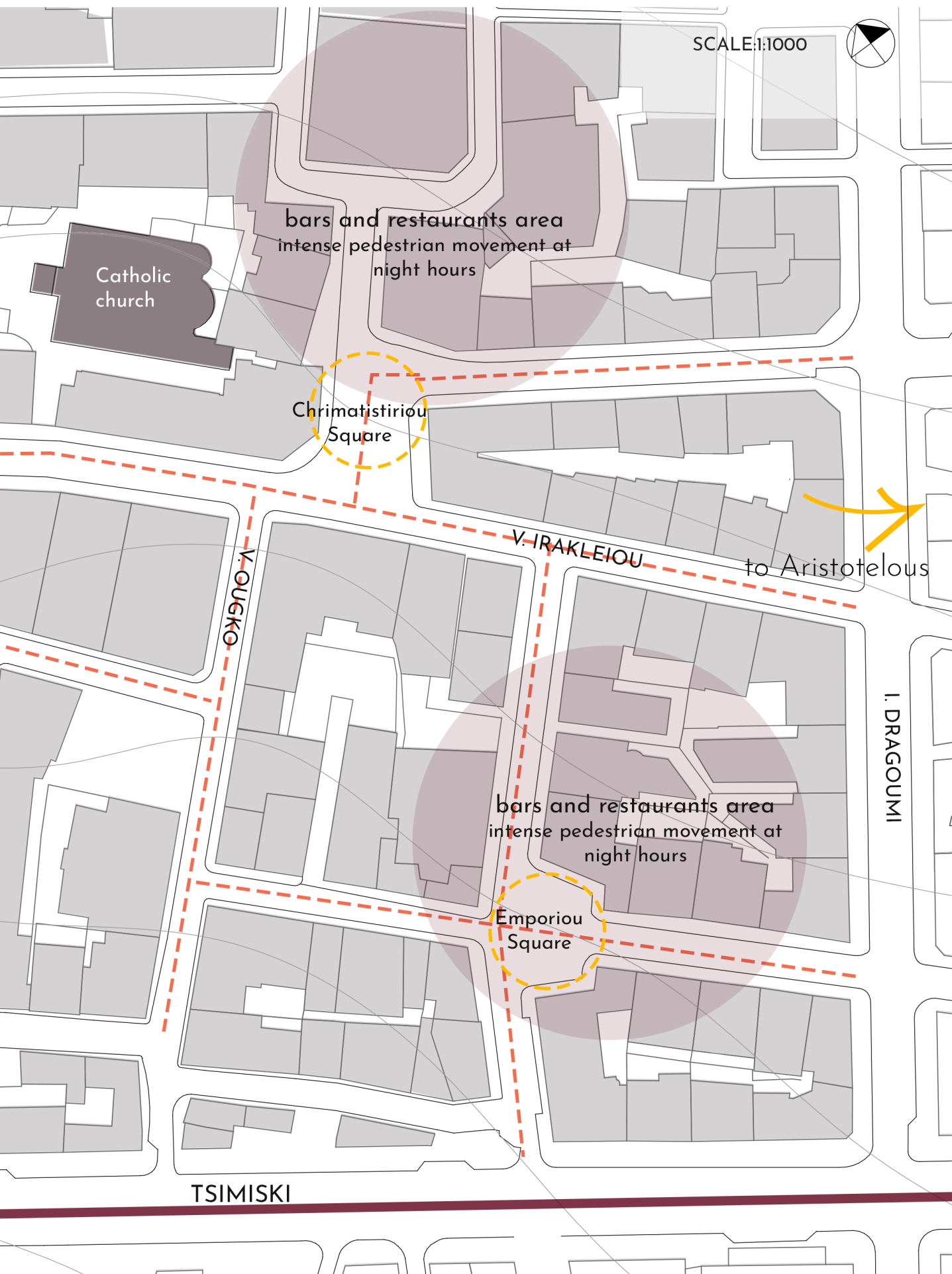
● intense pedestrian movement during daytime (offices and services)

○ the squares have been regenerated in 2017

— high traffic

- - - new pedestrian streets since 2017







FACILITIES





## abandoned historical buildings



## undeveloped plots



## partly unused former industrial or office buildings

The decline of industrial activity inevitably led to the decline of the region and the crisis led to the closing down of many office spaces. Large buildings now stand (partly)empty



## unfinished building

Construction has stop around 10 years ago due to the economic crisis



## unused ground floors

After a long economic crisis was faced with a health one, several stores have been closed, while more are expected to follow. Ground floors remain empty and unused.

## akalyptos

(means uncovered in greek) is the mandatory empty space in the back side of buildings and it is what remains of the land plot when the permitted building coverage ratio is fully exploited and built. Usually it is under-used, neglected, covered by cement and some sporadic vegetation, separated with blind walls from the adjacent akalyptos.



FACILITIES



## Working on neighborhood scale

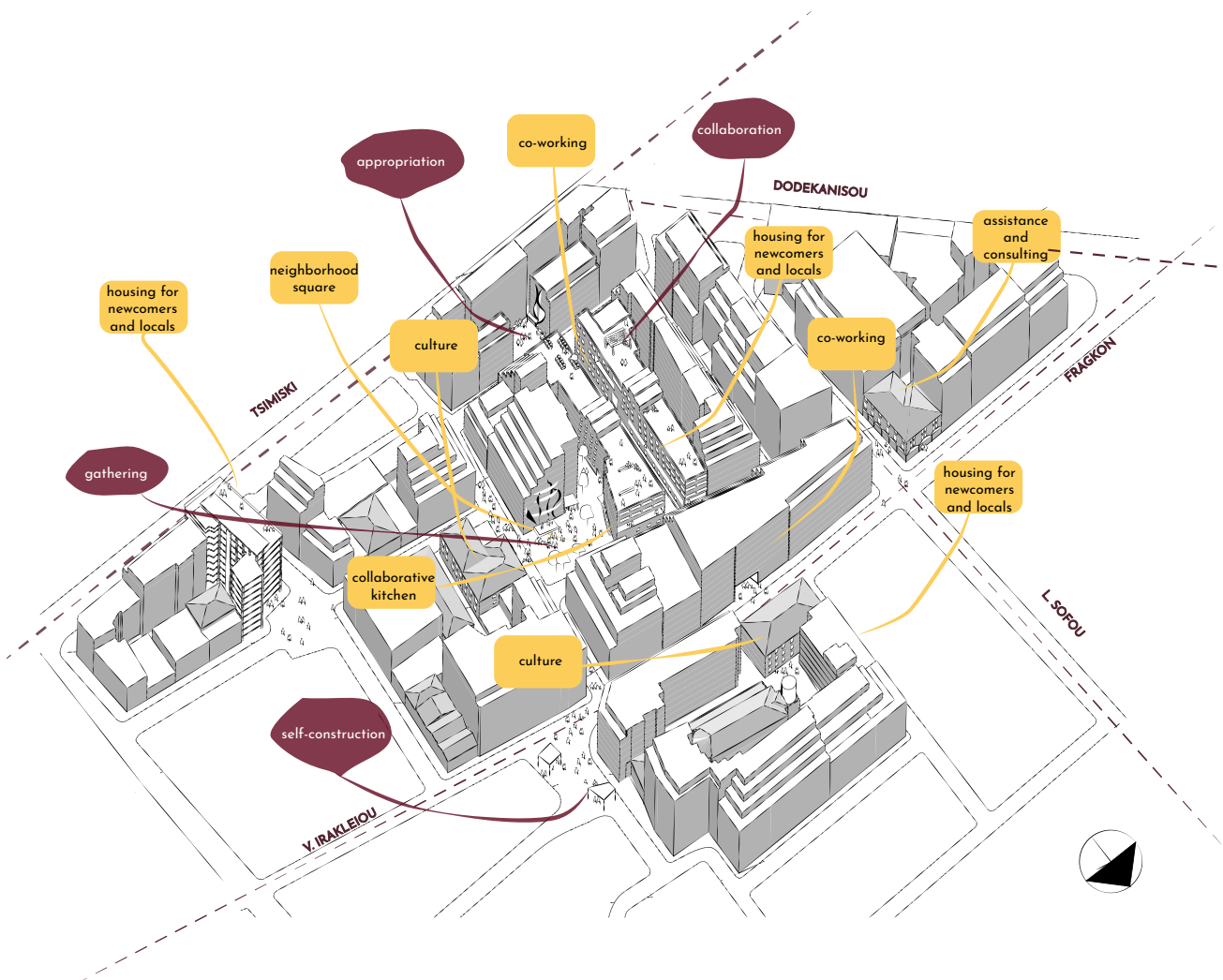
The project is proposed to be realized in neighborhood scale instead of a building both for practical reasons but also in order not to create an inwards looking segregated community.

Multi-horizontal- ownership and fragmented property is a common situation in Greece and Thessaloniki. Usually only parts of buildings remain unused and this scheme “protects” the buildings from getting back to the market.

Cohab Athens proposes a collaborative housing form that fits this system. Housing units in the neighborhood share common spaces and form a wider model of a collaborative housing.

This form of housing commons can encourage more social interactions, involve more people and contribute to a just and inclusive city. A network of spaces scattered in the neighborhood, that can be used by existing inhabitants and users in the area but also the new group. A higher level of acceptance is expected to be achieved and gradually lead to the integration of newcomers in the local community.

Furthermore, a mix of uses (housing, industries and creative offices, culture) extended and connected through common spaces and co-working areas will facilitate more cultural exchange but also benefit the project's economy.



# Thinking of the target group

There is no doubt that newcomers in the city are in urgent need of adequate and efficient housing and integration strategy. A significant part of the local population is at the same time in need of affordable housing, social interactions, and spaces that promote well-being.

Since the initiation of the urban housing program for asylum seekers and refugees there has been criticism that it worsens housing access for locals and creates tensions. Housing provision for different groups (except from being a necessity) might therefore facilitate the acceptance of the newcomers by the hosting community.

For this project the main target group are newcomers in the city, locals who are struggling with housing issues (low income, young adults and students etc.) but also professionals and entrepreneurs wishing to share facilities and people already living and working in the area

## Providing the essential for he newcomers

The newcomers have had a challenging journey affecting their psychology and will to integrate or participate in different activities. Being in a transit state, they are sometimes inactive or unwilling to self-organize. The long and complex application process and their disconnection from their homelands, culture and families affect their well being and sometimes leads them to depression, loneliness and stress.

### Necessary actions-visits

While a more autonomous living is proposed in the form of commons and based on solidarity and mutual help there are certain actions and needs that should be supported by professionals and experts.

Legal help, provision of information, social worker visits, interpretation, psychological support, health care assistance, collaboration with schools and cash assistance are necessary for the newcomers living.

The most important thing is to understand the problems or challenges they are facing and try to solve them. Some important steps are to help the newcomers with their applications and any documents they need, sign the children at schools, work with self-knowledge and problems that might arise regarding co-living.

### Possible risk

Direct proximity and connection to different services and actions might lead to the institutionalization of newcomers. They feel safe but also 'too comfortable' and avoid any form of initiative or taking action.

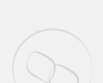
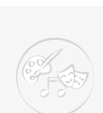
Supporting them and referring them (or accompanying them) to other organizations in the city is more preferable and also activates them to move around and create more social connections.



## Identifying different characteristics



The following diagram illustrates different demographic characteristics of the group. They are not the only ones, but an attempt to identify the most common ones, after interviews with professionals working with newcomers and other sources.



### legal status

migrants during applications process  
asylum seekers  
recognized refugees  
Greek citizenship

### origins

Afghanistan	Greece
Iran	established migrants from Arabic countries
Syria	
Pakistan	established migrants
Iraq	Balkan or former Soviet countries
Ukraine	

### household formation

young nuclear family  
single parent family  
single person household  
couple  
unaccompanied minors

### financial & employment situation

employed  
unemployed  
low income  
student

### future plans

want to relocate abroad  
want to relocate in Greece  
want to integrate in the city

## Creating bonds and bridges

### Having something in common

Startblock collaborative housing project proposes a focus on a group that despite their cultural differences share something in common demographically. This demographic homogeneity promotes bonding between inhabitants. (Czischke & Huisman, 2018) These groups can be young adults and students, single parent families or young families with children at school age for example. The inhabitants in this case will have similar life styles comparing to groups of a different age or family status.

The assumption is that social bonding is facilitated when providing shared spaces for people with common interests who are a diverse group ethnically and culturally.

### Interaction of different groups

The newcomers' group is proposed to be a mix of people from different origins. This is expected to encourage interaction between the different ethnic groups and form social bridges.

Startblock also proposes an even mix of locals and newcomers 50/50. Having half housing units for locals and half for newcomers and arrange them and the shared spaces in a way that they provide opportunities for interaction is expected to lead to the formation of social bridges between the groups. (Czischke & Huisman, 2018)

In this proposal and due to including also co-working spaces and existing uses (majority is expected to be locals) the number of inhabitants from the two groups can differ. Having more housing units for newcomers is more urgent right now. However, having a sufficient number of local households is important for the integration of newcomers, mutual adaptation and acceptance.



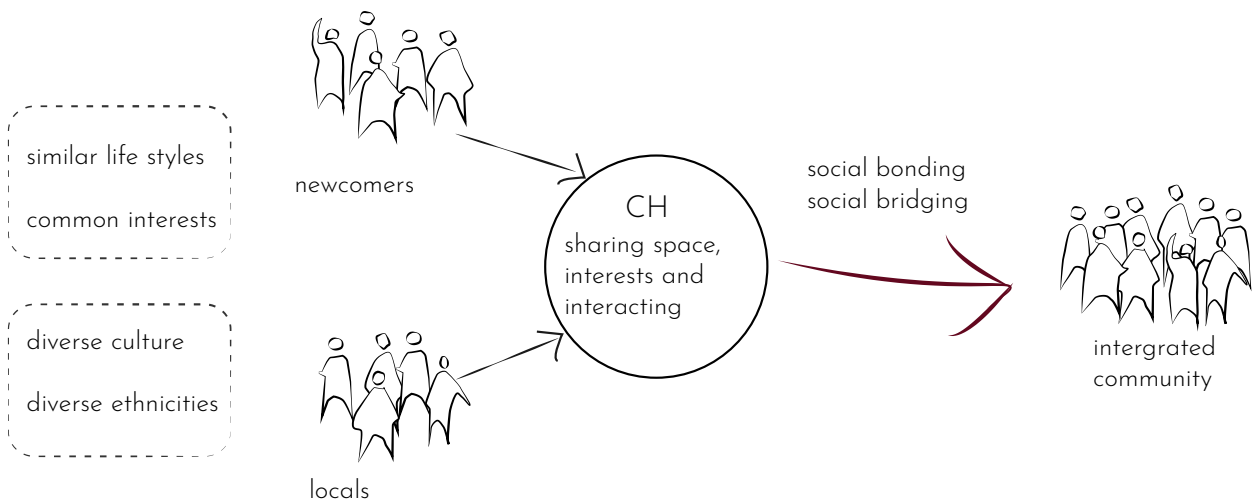


Fig. 4.15: Towards an integrated community through social bonds and bridges

## Listening and involving the existing users and inhabitants

Existing users of the area are experts knowing possible problems, having specific needs and desires. It is important to involve and inform them about the project, understand their thoughts or concerns about any changes and try to benefit them as well.

Open spaces and cultural functions can benefit everyone living or working in the area. While spaces such as children facilities, shared laundry rooms or study spaces can be used by existing inhabitants. As most buildings are right now hosting offices and industries, creating spaces that could be shared by different employees and new professionals moving to the area, such as co-working spaces, common workshops, or break areas might be economically beneficial to the small size enterprises who are struggling to keep their premises with the rising prices.

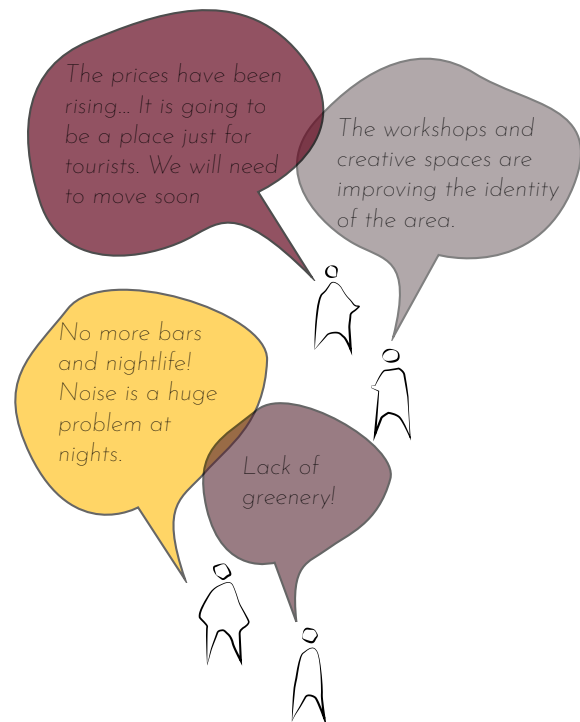


Fig. 4.16: Quotes of people living and working in the neighborhood

## INTRODUCING COMMONING



1. production of space



2. practices of sharing and solidarity



3. management & organization



4. forming connections

## EXPLORING CONTEXT AS TESTBED



From the analysis to the co-design process. To host the people's needs and to encourage interactions, the interstitial spaces are going to be re-utilized. Starting from the housing unit, facilities shared between different actors are proposed.

Some of the spaces can accommodate certain functions that have proved to be beneficial to the newcomers integration and can promote diversity.

Any spatial interventions applied, should follow some guidelines, aiming to open up and activate hidden inaccessible space, facilitate better circulation among new and existing functions, encourage appropriation and allow future changes.

The spatial interventions, the functions and sharing can encourage people to interact, appropriate and activate spaces, but it is difficult to initiate co-creation and self-production without support. A participatory design project at a central area can kick-start this process and spark the people's creativity.



1. choosing the location

## CO-DESIGN PROCESS

4. establishing facilities of different levels of sharing

### FACILITIES

housing clusters  
different households  
households & offices -industries  
open to the neighborhood

### KEY FUNCTIONS

arts and culture  
gardening  
gastronomy  
learning for adults and children

### SPATIAL INTERVENTIONS

connecting  
easy access  
adaptable  
extendable  
human scale

### CO-INITIATION



5. encouraging key functions supporting integration and participation

6. applying necessary spatial interventions

7. kickstarting co-creation

*sharing space and interacting*

*promoting diversity and exchange*

*using architecture as guiding*

*initiating action!*

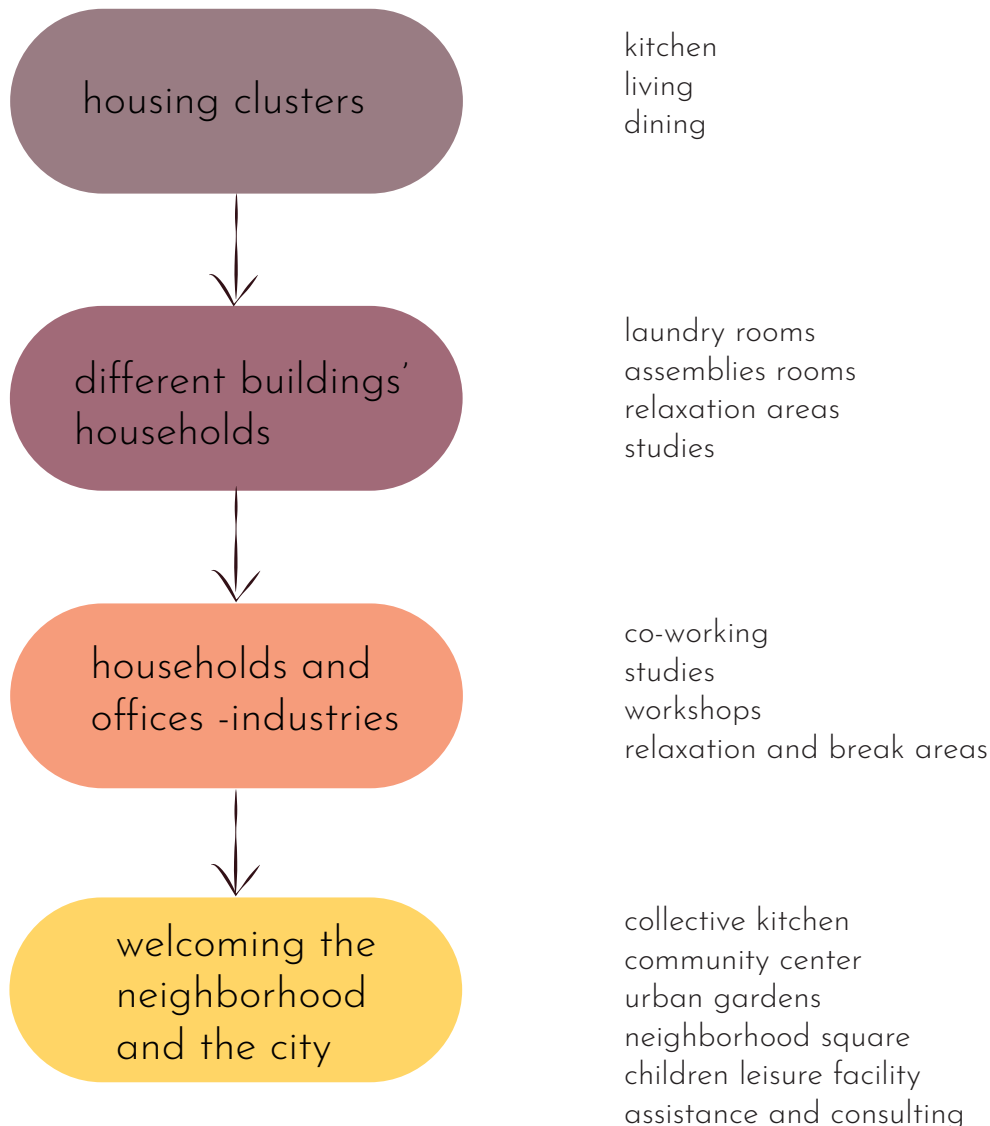
commoning

# CO-DESIGN PROCESS

## Establishing facilities of different levels of sharing

Different facilities are shared between specific groups and households and other are open to the whole neighborhood and city. This organization is expected to encourage more interactions and build connections between

new and established groups, households and working professionals in the area and support a wider acceptance and integration in the city.





# Encouraging key functions for integration and participation



## -Arts and Culture

Integration through arts and culture can raise voice against discrimination and social exclusion and enable intercultural dialogue. (McGregor et al., 2016)

Love Without Borders organization provides refugees with the supplies and enables them to express their creativity and emotions. The artworks are afterwards exhibited. Workshops are also organized connecting local and newcomer artists.

Benefits:

Recreation and therapy

Connect with homeland

Reinforce intercultural interaction

Challenge stereotypes

Inform about the experiences of migrants

Engage a broad audience emotionally

Form connections and friendships

Utilize the peoples' skills and knowledge  
Encourage local artists and businesses to participate

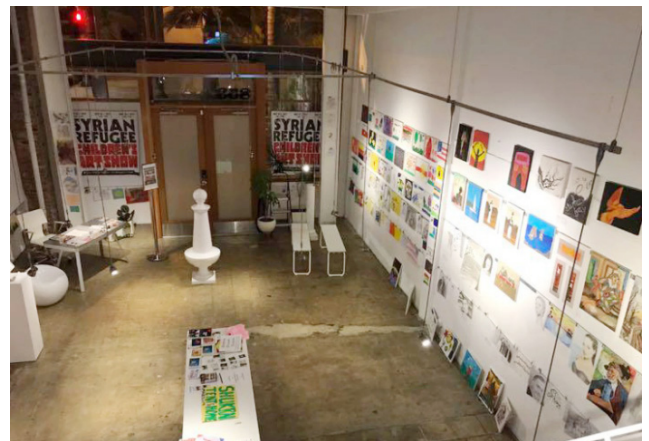


Fig. 4.17: Exhibition organized by love without borders Source : <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/greece/athens/>



## -Gastronomy

Gastronomy is a way to explore other cultures and food is a tool to bring people together. Initiatives such as food fairs, culinary courses and the creation of recipe books or blogs promote different cultures and facilitating integration.

Multi Kulti Kitchen', an initiative in Bulgaria, Sofia, focusing on different actions connected to gastronomy with a purpose to engage local populations. (McGregor et al., 2016)

Kitchen on the Run is another example promoting intercultural connections. A mobile kitchen container travels around Germany and Europe for different cooking evenings.



Fig. 4.18: Kitchen on the run, Source : <https://kitchenontherun.org/en/>



Thessaloniki is a city with a multicultural culinary heritage. Many cultures have made the city home, and each left various traces behind. The city's culinary traditions are highly connected to the East. This has shaped the city's identity and become its power.

Benefits:  
Explore other cultures  
Connect with homeland  
Form connections and friendships  
Highlight the city's identity



## -Gardening

Urban gardening projects can boost biodiversity and contribute to a more sustainable city but also benefit the participants well-being and psychology. In Seved district in Malmö, a variety of vegetables and flowers grow around residential buildings and cooperation between people of the Somali society and Swedish pensioners is encouraged. (Rombach I., 2017)

Benefits:  
recreation and therapy  
Land use and food production  
Practical and informal learning opportunities



Fig. 4.19: Urban gardens in Seved, Source : [http://www.urban-agriculture-europe.org/mediawiki/index.php/Malmoe,\\_Sweden](http://www.urban-agriculture-europe.org/mediawiki/index.php/Malmoe,_Sweden)



## -Learning for adults and children

Different types of courses can be organized by and for the community. Open lessons and courses to promote open and accessible learning, cooperation, solidarity and self-organization.

Focusing on the children is very significant for their own integration but can also help enhance the integration of other family members, who sometimes prefer to stay inactive as they are unsure for their future. Child Friendly Space activities at Agia Eleni refugee camp in Greece focuses on the children through recreational and non-formal educational games and workshops.

Benefits:  
Recreation and therapy  
Developing skills and creativity

Utilizing the people's skills and knowledge  
Build relationships  
Engage locals



Fig. 4.20: Child Friendly Space activities, Source : <https://www.yce.gr/en/activities/refu->

# Identifying spatial interventions to encourage self-action

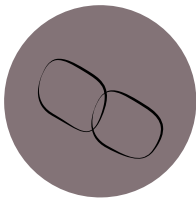
Spatial interventions should aim to open up and highlight abandoned spaces, link functions and encourage interactions.

The minimum infrastructure that could enable people to activate, change and redevelop space should be designed. Common spaces shared between different people with different interests and needs and different demographic

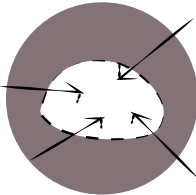
characteristics need to be multi-functional and flexible and able to allow appropriation of space, changes according to the peoples' desires and the arrival of new commoners. For this purpose some design strategies are proposed as guiding for the transformation of the buildings but also at the neighborhood scale.

## Design strategies

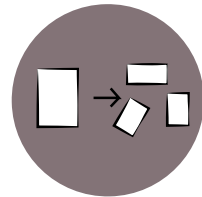
connecting



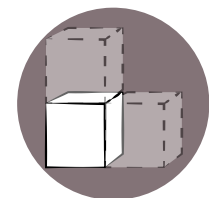
easy access



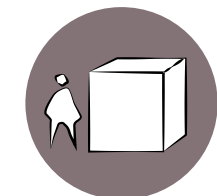
adaptable



extendable



human scale



Connections between different common spaces but also connecting housing units in the most efficient way with the shared facilities to make sure that the spaces are activated and working efficiently. Different spaces can also work in groups or pairs to strengthen the spaces visibility and presence.

Easy access to the housing facilities, with new entrances, stairways and lifts might need to be designed depending on how many units are added. Underused spaces such as the backyards (akalyptos) must be visible and accessible.

Spaces should be adaptable to multiple needs. Light outdoor structures can accommodate different activities, such as fairs and festivals, markets and everyday meetings. Indoor spaces might need to host multiple activities at the same time or following a schedule.

Light structures that can be easily extended or multiplied by the users can work as a starting point for space self-production.

Finally, human scale structures can contribute to a sense of belonging and safety and encourage people to re-appropriate space.



## Kickstarting co-creation

Appropriation and self-production of space might be difficult to be initiated by the newly formed community. Different actions might be necessary to encourage people to co-create and co-build a common space. Initiating a participatory design and build project can empower, activate people and spark their creativity.

### The neighborhood square

A multi-functional open space directly connected with other functions and housing units. A corner plot, centrally located and visible from various buildings and locations.

How?

Establishing an info point-participation center  
Listening and identifying desires  
Calling for participation  
Collaboration with university and commons  
Utilize participants' skills and knowledge  
Encourage local people and businesses to participate

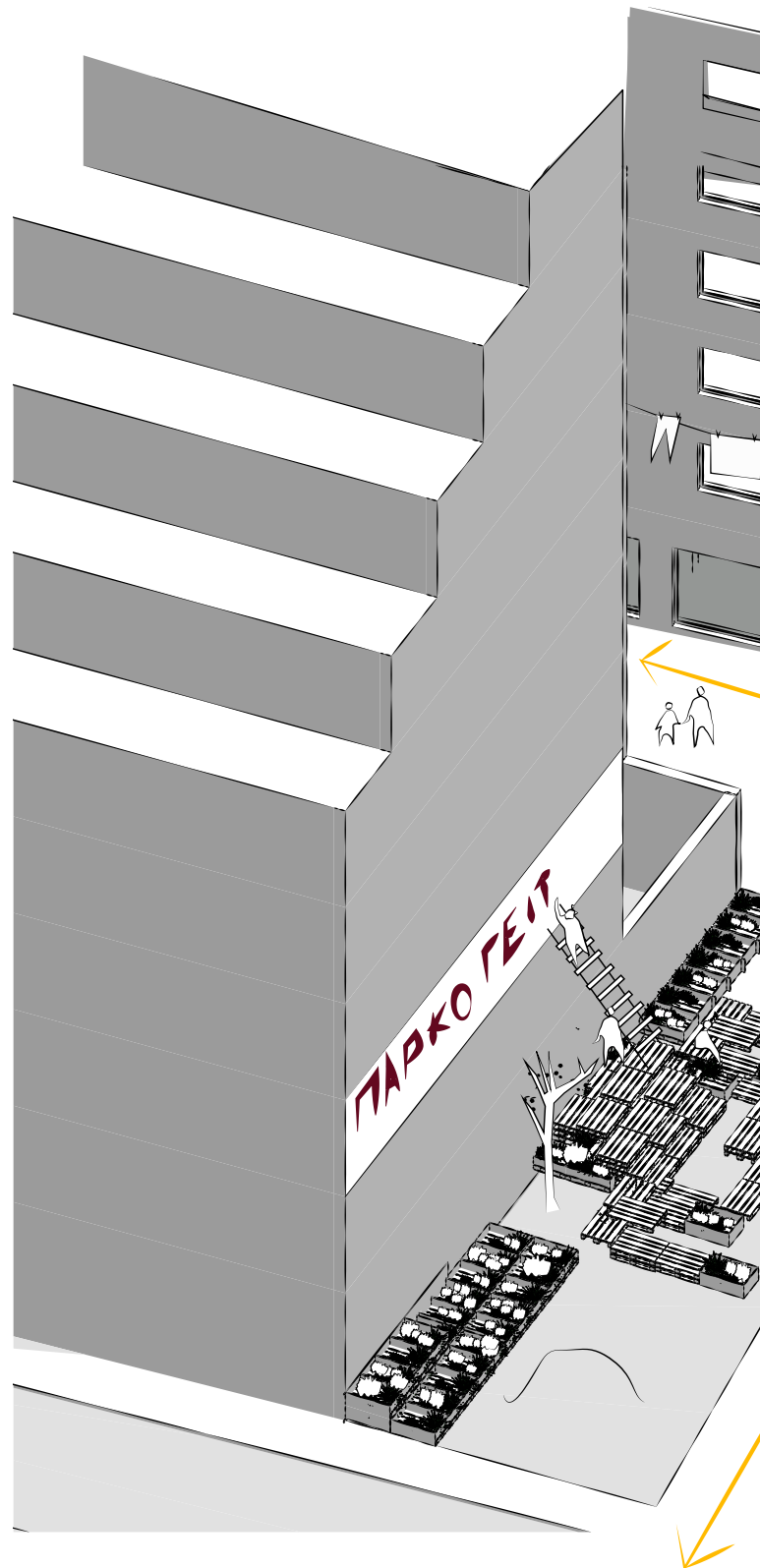
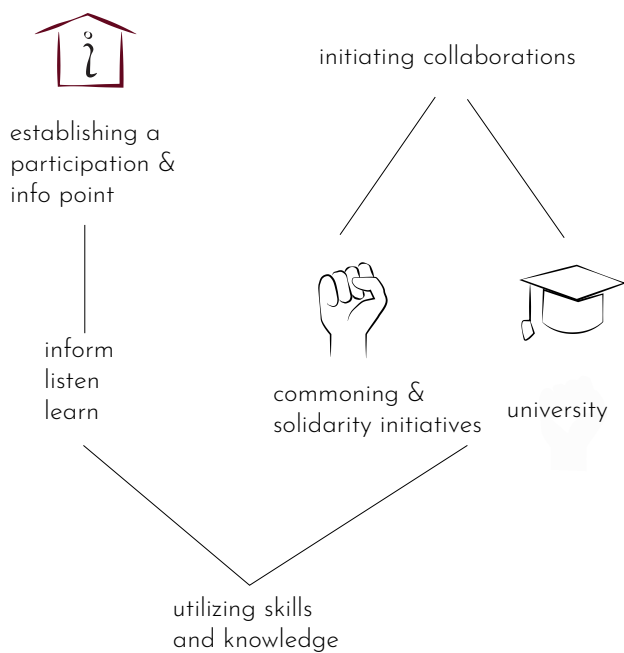




Fig. 4.26



## FACILITIES



72



## Interventions\_ urban scale

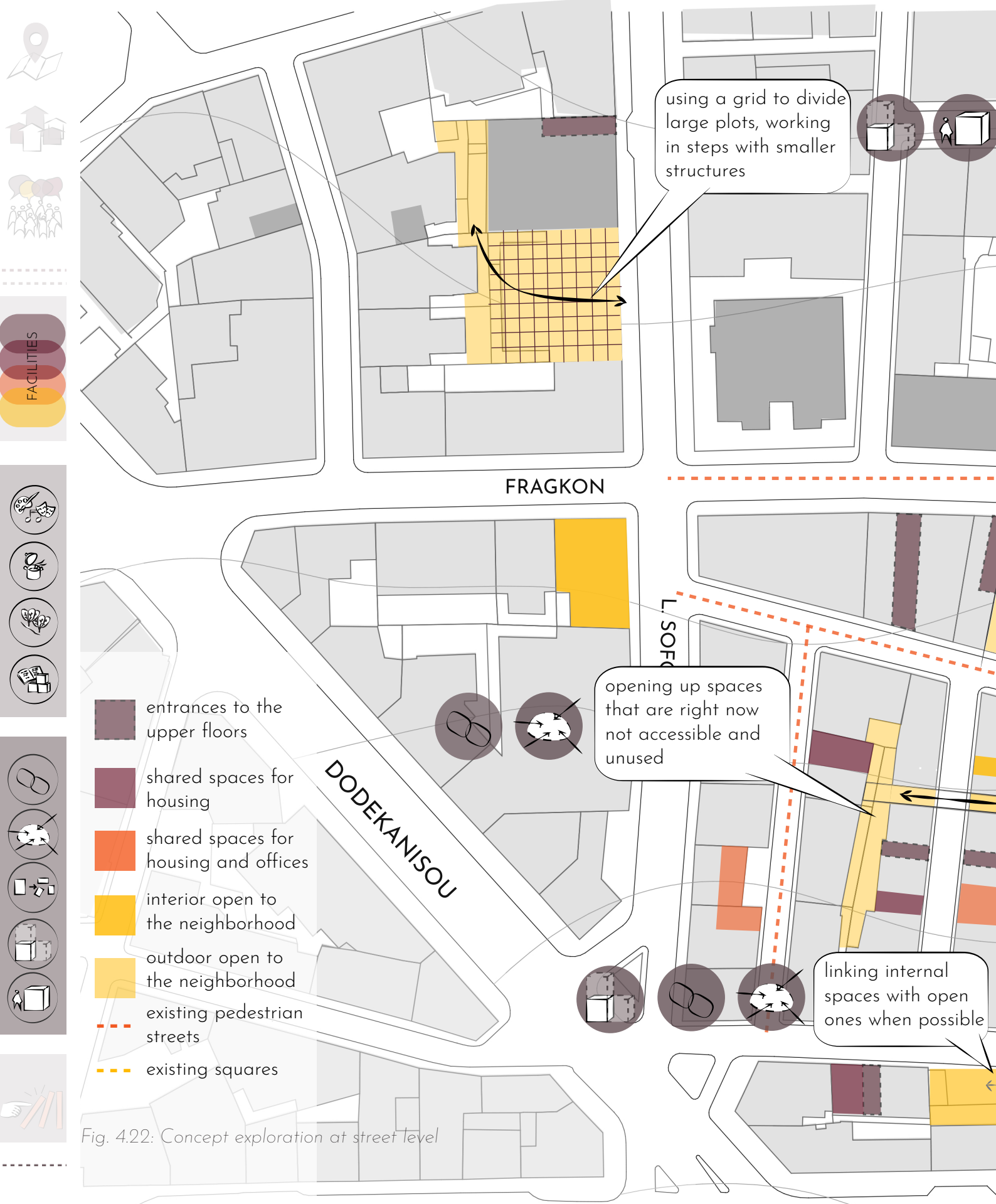


Fig. 4.22: Concept exploration at street level



SCALE:1:1000



FACILITIES



using empty stores  
as passages,  
connecting spaces  
and functions

using the buildings'  
grid, providing  
opportunities for  
extension

using ground floors  
as an semi-sheltered  
extension of the  
square

V. IRAKLEIOU

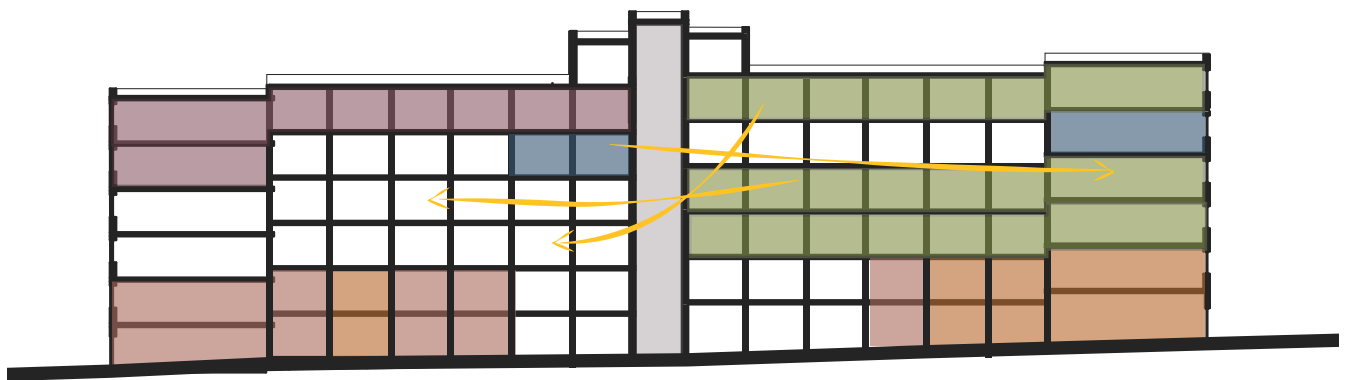
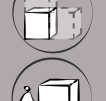
I. DRAGUMI

## Interventions\_ building scale

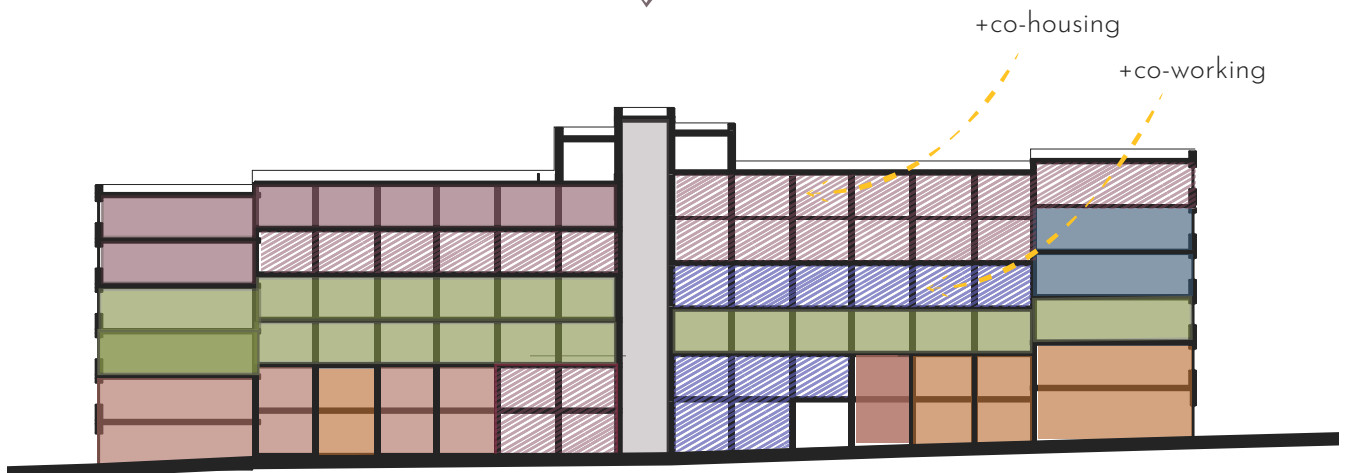


Most of the greek buildings of 60s-70s are constructed based on a reinterpretation of maison dom-ino which allows a variety of possible uses which could co-exist in a single building and their transformation into apartments of different sizes, shared spaces and the other uses.

In Valaoritou, as mentioned earlier, exist buildings with whole floors or parts of them empty and unused. The existing uses are rearranged to better fit the new complex. The top floors are transformed into housing clusters and co-working areas are added on the middle floors.



Section. existing uses scale 1:500



Section. existing uses scale 1:500 Section. proposed uses scale 1:500

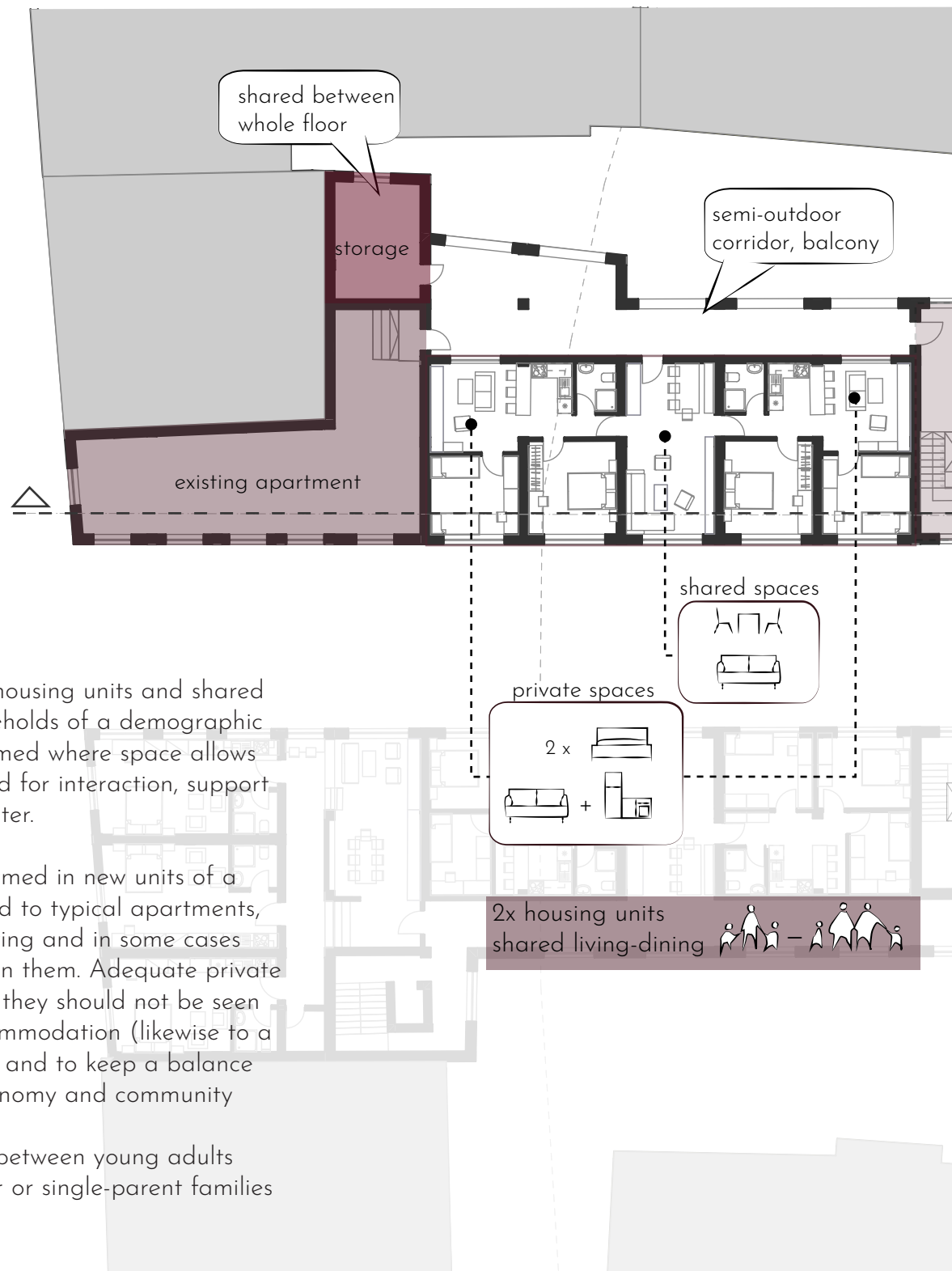
- apartments
- retail
- offices
- recreation
- industries
- empty properties

Fig. 4.23: Rearranging existing uses and re-utilizing empty properties. Building on Emprar street



Fig. 4.24: Section. scale 1:200. Building on Emprar street

## Housing units and clusters of households



Different clusters of housing units and shared space between households of a demographic homogeneity are formed where space allows so and when the need for interaction, support and solidarity is greater.

This space is transformed in new units of a smaller size compared to typical apartments, and shared dining-living and in some cases kitchen areas between them. Adequate private space is designed as they should not be seen as a temporary accommodation (likewise to a camp or hotel room) and to keep a balance between tenant autonomy and community formation.

They can be shared between young adults and students, nuclear or single-parent families etc



Fig. 4.25: 4th floor plan. scale 1:250. Building on Emprar street

## INTRODUCING COMMONING



1. production of space



2. practices of sharing and solidarity



3. management & organization



4. forming connections

## EXPLORING CONTEXT AS TESTBED



3. understanding the target group



2. working on the neighborhood scale



1. choosing the location

identifying needs and desires

utilizing interstitial space

## CO-DESIGN PROCESS

4. establishing facilities of different levels of sharing

### FACILITIES

housing clusters

different households

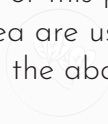
households & offices -industries

open to the neighborhood

### KEY FUNCTIONS



arts and culture



gardening



gastronomy



learning for adults and children

### SPATIAL INTERVENTIONS



connecting



easy access



adaptable



extendable



human scale

### CO-INITIATION



Potential scenarios of commoning in the neighborhood are explored. For this purpose collages on photos of the area are used to showcase how people can fill the abandoned spaces with life.

*sharing space and interacting*

*promoting diversity and exchange*

commoning

*using architecture as guiding*

*initiating action!*

6. applying necessary spatial interventions

7. kickstarting co-creation



# The neighborhood square and collective kitchen

The co-created square can host various activities, from everyday interactions, relaxation and gardening to events, screenings and festivals.

Small and larger scale festivals in Thessaloniki focus on cultural diversity and exchange. The neighborhood square can become a great spot for a small scale multicultural festival, welcoming the city and showcasing the diversity advantage.

stage and sitting area from palletes and leftover wood.

kiosks, for markets, exhibitions and festivals

outwards extension of the collaborative kitchen



Fig. 4.27: Festival on the neighborhood square. Photo taken from Verias street



# The rooftop gardens

Rooftops are leftover spaces, which if appropriated by the users of the buildings could become a great asset.

Around the world, various offices use terraces as break areas to satisfy the employees.

People working and living in the buildings can create their own 'urban gardens', for relaxation, healing and different events.

production  
of fruits and  
vegetables

light structure  
and furniture  
from recycled  
materials



Fig. 4.28: View of the rooftop gardens on Emprar street

# The multipurpose community hall

Interior spaces should also be able to host various activities and events. Courses, arts and culture, assemblies and studying could function according to a schedule created by the inhabitants. They are co-created and maintained by the inhabitants-users.



Fig. 4.29: Community center, located in the building on Emprar street.



## The children facilities

Outdoor and indoor facilities for the children of the neighborhood, collectively managed by the inhabitants. A simple playground, space for games and informal learning, but also a space where parents meet and interact.

direct  
connection with  
indoor spaces

light  
structures and  
playground  
areas



Fig. 4.30: View of the children facilities on Olympiou street

## 5. REFLECTIONS

## General

Integration of newcomers is an challenging issue which most countries neglect. The ongoing war in Ukraine (2022) is now causing a new unexpected and growing refugee crisis. Although the new wave of newcomers has been accepted by the Greek state, and Ukrainian refugees are able to enjoy international protection, non-Ukrainian refugees are treated quite differently. There is no plan or actions aiming to integration, rather than practices that are actually forcing people to leave. Furthermore, fear of the unknown and the unfamiliar leads to xenophobia and racism. People are perceived as “them” and not “us.” There is no solution without actions for integration.

On the other hand, the solidarity initiatives and commons have proved that existing resources can actually make a difference and lead to great benefits for the participants’ integration. This became the starting point for my thesis and my exploration on how underused space could be transformed and contribute to an inclusive city.

## The process

The situation regarding newcomers in Greece has been changing constantly, especially during the last 2 years, and it has been challenging to be certain about the latest legislation, processes and programs for the refugees. The interviews and discussions should have been conducted earlier in my process. Maybe other aspects would have been considered from the beginning and I would have taken a different route.

I have doubted my work many times and felt that the current hostility towards newcomers, the lack of integration programs and fund cuts, together with the ongoing market based development, do not allow any opportunities for this kind of visions. Working with multiple

aspects and trying to understand as much as possible, delayed my design process but in the meantime made my objectives more clear.

## The outcome

The iteration part is a mix of different aspects that I have identified as important during my thesis journey. A detailed design proposal was not the aim of my thesis. I have chosen to focus on the process; the steps that can lead to commoning and integration. The outcome can be thought as a handbook, a collection of thoughts based on the knowledge I have earned during the past months.

## The context

The thesis is connected to the Greek context regarding the practices and processes for newcomers, the housing issues of the local population and the availability of space. The functions proposed are also connected to the local lifestyle and weather but also the identity of the city of Thessaloniki. Furthermore, the mixed use buildings and program fits the Greek urban context. The neighborhoods in Greek cities are developed with multiple uses of land. This has of course negative, but also positive effects. The liveliness of the urban environment that elevates from the mixture of different uses, contrary to the development of other European cities where strict zones were applied is one of these. The densely built environment also affects the project and reutilizing spaces such as the neglected backyards and roofs becomes necessary. In another urban context public squares and parks could possibly become sites of exploration of how inclusive meeting spaces could be developed by and for the people.

## Other steps and feasibility

The process for such a project will require many steps that have not been examined in this thesis. Finding the right incentives for the

property owners, selecting the beneficiaries, exploration of how the renovation could happen according to new energy efficiency guidelines and finding funding from various sources or programs might be some of them.

In the long run, the legal status of newcomers will be examined by the competent bodies (length of stay, etc.) and the possibility of financial benefits or alternative forms of economy should be given. The program could include different forms of housing. More temporary for people who wish to leave the city and reconnect with their families or longer term, and paying a low rent amount for households with a certain income. Co-working spaces could also generate an income to the project as the spaces can be rented by different professionals. Maybe, even some of the functions, like cultivation, collective kitchen or workshops, could generate income and allow the community of residents to pay part of the rent.

It might seem utopian and impossible to be realized. However, there is an urban housing program for newcomers which should be extended and reinforced more and which if enriched with shared spaces between apartments and common spaces encouraging participation of both the established and the new community, can improve the quality of life of both and facilitate integration. Furthermore, sharing space between different households and for various functions can benefit the economy of the program.

### **Commoning as an alternative**

While commons are autonomous spaces independent of the state and collaboration with top down actors has been criticized, this thesis uses commoning as a tool and an opportunity for integration for a more permanent solution and through collaborations between top down and bottom up organizations and individuals.

This is because within the Greek context, there are elements such as legal frameworks, new hostile immigration policies, and also hesitation from property owners to rent housing to newcomers. These matters cannot be solved autonomously without external support, changes of the legislation and the way newcomers are treated.

However, people are already self-organized. Groups of asylum seekers, established refugees and activists and groups of people from different origins already exist and support each other. What if these groups connect and co-create their neighborhood and city? What if the community reappropriates space besides the ownership status? The continuation of commoning initiatives is a way for people to actively participate in shaping their surroundings based on their own needs and priorities and resisting against the accepted norms and socio-economic hegemony. Results from these initiatives can show the benefits for the city and eventually lead to change.

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## Multimedia

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**All images were produced by the author except for the following:**

Fig. 2.8: Location of state run camps in 2016 , Source: Tsavdaroglou, 2020

Fig. 3.2: Conceptual framework concerning the core domains of refugee integration , Source: Ager & Strang, 2008, )

Fig. 3.4: View of the building, Source: <https://en.squat.net/2015/12/31/thessaloniki-a-vis-it-at-the-orfanotrofio-squat/>

Fig. 3.5: Cohab Athens, Source: <https://cohab-athens.org/>

Fig. 3.6: Micoll, Source: <http://micoll.org/>

Fig. 3.7: Synergy of uses, Source: <https://raum-labor.net/haus-der-statistik/>

Fig. 3.8: Startblok Riekerhaven, Source: <https://startblokriekerhaven.nl/over-het-project/>

Fig. 4.9: Nightlife in the area, Source: <https://parallaximag.gr/einai-tora-efkairia-na-allaksei-valaoritou-124080>

Fig. 4.17: Exhibition organized by love without borders Source : <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/greece/athens/>

Fig. 4.18: Kitchen on the run, Source : <https://kitchenontherun.org/en/>

Fig. 4.19: Urban gardens in Seved, Source : [http://www.urban-agriculture-europe.org/mediawiki/index.php/Malmoe,\\_Sweden](http://www.urban-agriculture-europe.org/mediawiki/index.php/Malmoe,_Sweden)

Fig. 4.20: Child Friendly Space activities, Source : <https://www.yce.gr/en/activities/refugee-camps-2020/>

