

Archiving Metaxourgio

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An ‘archive’ is a totality of records, layers and memories that are collected. A city is an archive that consists of the conscious selection of these layers and traces of the past and the present, looking towards the future. Metaxourgio is an area in the wider historic urban area of Kerameikos in Athens that includes traces of various eras, beginning in antiquity and continuing all the way into the 21st century. Its archaeological space ‘Demosion Sema’ is mostly concealed below ground level, waiting to be revealed. In this proposal, the area of Southern Metaxourgio is redesigned in light of archiving. Significant traces of antiquity, other ruins and buildings are studied, selected and incorporated into new interventions.

The area becomes an ‘open archive’ that leads towards its new character. The proposal aims not only to intensify the relationship of architecture with archaeology, but also to imbue the area’s identity with meanings that refer to the past, present and future.

- 1 Thomais Kordonouri and Alcestis Rodi, "Re-interpreting urban palimpsest," in *26TH-28TH NOVEMBER 2019 – DELFT LDE HERITAGE CONFERENCE on Heritage and the Sustainable Development Goals. PROCEEDINGS*, edited by Uta Pottgiesser, Sandra Fatoric, Carola Hein, Erik de Maaker, Ana Pereira Roders (Delft: TU Delft Open, 2020), 36-43.
- 2 John Habraken, *The uses of levels* (Seoul: Open House International, 1988), 2.

1 Introduction

Urban heritage and preservation of cultural memories towards the remembrance of the past have often given rise to various discussions and criticisms in the cities of today. The need to manage layers of existing heritage is ever increasing and challenging. Concepts such as that of the 'archive' have already emerged and have been compared to cities in order to deal with the preservation of stored memories of the past, present and future. The questions that arise are: is there any visible point of this co-existence in the city? Since archaeology is often concealed below ground level, how will new layers dialogue with it? What does this 'management' of traces mean?

To respond, 'authors' or archivists, namely spatial designers, policymakers and users, should, before creating, first recognize the place's memory and traces of the past without obeying them uncritically.¹ In the end, they work in relation to what already exists either by accepting or by destroying the existing environment, but they are obliged to contribute with their own meaning.² Thus, the 'archive' is a spatial totality that represents selected ideas of the past, and new meanings that will be useful for the future.

Pondering these issues, this article re-introduces the conversation about archiving and its comparison with the city, investigating it as a design method in the area of Metaxourgio. This is a historic area in central Athens, an unfinished palimpsest of records from antiquity until today that have lost their hierarchy, but are continually renewed.

The article explores first the notion of 'archive' and its relation to the city. Later, the historical and urban context of the area, and its relationship to its archaeological space are analysed. In addition, the research illustrates Metaxourgio's plan as a palimpsest and explores traces that will lead to the final design of the masterplan. Following that, the article defines the archiving method in the architectural scale through the use of existing typologies that are collected as references in archive maps, in order to investigate them in new typologies. Finally, Metaxourgio is designed as an 'open archive' that allows the coexistence of layers of the past, present and future.

2 The Notion of 'Archive'

2.1 Definition

The archive constitutes the "body of records" of memories, meanings and layers that are collected. As Jacques Derrida suggested in his lecture in London, the meaning of archive is not tracing the archaeological excavation and the search for a lost time, as one would expect, but rather the desire to return to the origin. Etymologically, the latin word 'archivum' or 'archium' is linked to the greek word 'ἀρχεῖο' (arkhio) which comes from ἀρχή (arkhe), with the meaning of 'beginning' and at the same time 'order'. He mentioned the 'ἀρχή' of nature as a beginning of things, and the 'ἀρχή'

- 3 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 4 Stamatis Zografos, *Architecture and Fire: A psychoanalytic approach to Conservation* (London: UCL Press, 2019), 24.
- 5 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, n.1, 4 in Zografos, S. *Architecture and Fire*, 25.
- 6 Vyjayanthi Rao, "Embracing Urbanism: The City as Archive," *New Literary History*, vol. 40 no. 2, (2009): 371-383.
- 7 Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn, Hamilton, Verne & Harris & Jane, Taylor & Michele, Pickover & Graeme, Reid & Razia, Saleh (Cape Town: Springer, Dordrecht, 2002), 25.
- 8 Zografos, *Architecture and Fire*, 28.

according to the law and authority, the order. The meaning of both the Latin and Greek words for archive comes from the residence, an address, the habitat of senior lords that ruled.³

Furthermore, in his talk, Derrida mentioned violence as something that occurs through the process of archiving. This act implies the establishment and implementation of a law, which is equivalent to 'the violence of power'. Therefore, the archive is a place where power is exercised. Also, violence is associated with preservation of the past in the process of archiving, since the archivist is responsible for selecting what is worth remembering and also what needs to be erased. So, on the one hand, this violence can be considered as positive, as it allows new interventions to the collected material and memory. On the other hand, it can be perceived as negative, since memory is limited by a part of it missing.⁴

In addition, Derrida makes a further link between archives and political power, reminiscent of the interpretation of archive by Michel Foucault, claiming that "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratisation can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation." Michel Foucault, in his work "Archaeology of Knowledge" also referred to the place where the archive is relieved. As Derrida mentioned, the history of exterior places should be created so that the places and the context in which they are recorded are understandable. The *context* is an archive. The open archive is the complete record of the past of what needs to be preserved for the posterity, while at the same time enabling the record's 'Otherness of an outside' to come within and unsettle it.⁵

2.2 The City as an Archive

As a concept, the archive can extend beyond the limits of the physical entity and can be analogized to the city. As Vyjayanthi Rao mentioned, transforming cities are archives 'in the making,' and have a deep effect on our understanding of the past as a history of the present.⁶ In particular, the city is an archive with traces, ruins and monuments that is produced through the dialectics of place, time and ideas. The process of putting back together debris and reassembling remains, is "bringing the dead back into life by reintegrating them in the cycle of time" and gives an opportunity to these remaining ideas or objects to be expressed through new forms.⁷

For Paul Ricoeur, the archive symbolizes the moment when the historiographical process is written following testimony.⁸ He also compares archives to monuments, which mostly express the ideology and the collective memory of people. He claims that on the contrary, archives approach more the notion of the document that is independent on ideology, and therefore more subjective. However, for him documents 'attack against the conditions of historical production and its concealed or unconscious intentions ... we must say with Le Goff that once its apparent meaning

- 9 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 118, in Zografos, S. *Architecture and Fire*, 28.
- 10 Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive," 20.
- 11 Jane Taylor, "Holdings: Refiguring the Archive" in *Refiguring the Archive*, 246.
- 12 Kristina Agriantoni and Maria Kristina Xatziioannou, *To Metaxourgio tis Athinas* (Athens: Kentro Neoellinikon Erevnon, Ethniko Idryma Erevnwn, 1995), 46.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 K. Biris, *Αθηναϊκά μελέται [Athenian Studies]*, vol. 1 (Athens: 1938), 16.

is demystified, "the document is a monument."⁹ Therefore, archive is linked to a 'status', as a result of 'discrimination and selection.'¹⁰

The archivist, even by collecting the memory of the past, prepares the arrival of the future. The archive includes erasure and revision at the same time, and promises complete recall but never entirely delivers on it. It deutes to its 'manager' the opportunity to select which heritage elements are worth preserving and which traces should be deleted, and shaping the future in this way. Furthermore, this preoccupation with the archive 'redefines' its manager. Pondering the contemporary theory that suggests that 'being' is symbolically linked to 'having,' the questions arising are 'do archivists possess the archive or does it possess them?'¹¹ So, it is evident that the choices and hierarchies that an archivist will make indicate his/her identity.

3 The Case of Metaxourgio

Taking Metaxourgio, an area of historic Athens, as a case study, we attempted to convert it into an archive-city, by intervening on it both on the urban and the architectural scale.

Located in the wider Kerameikos area, east of the ancient Greek avenue, Iera Odos, Metaxourgio (in Greek 'silk factory') is an urban area that has been built on the ancient cemetery of eminent Athenians, 'Demosion Sema' and consists of various historical layers. Until the establishment of the Greek state, in 1830, it was mostly a rural area that stood on the outskirts of Athens. However, later, the new urban plan stipulated that the royal palaces would be connected to Kerameikos and, therefore, many prominent people bought estates or built houses in the area of Metaxourgio.¹²

The name comes from the silk factory that was constructed in the early 19th century and defined the character of the area. Because of its expansion and due to the Hatzikonsta Orphanage that was founded in 1856, housing was prevented for a long time. Slowly, Metaxourgio became a neighbourhood that housed the working class, craftsmen, tradesmen and small business owners. During the twentieth century, the population continued to increase, until a period of abandonment started at the end of 1970s.¹³

3.1 Metaxourgio City Plan as a Palimpsest

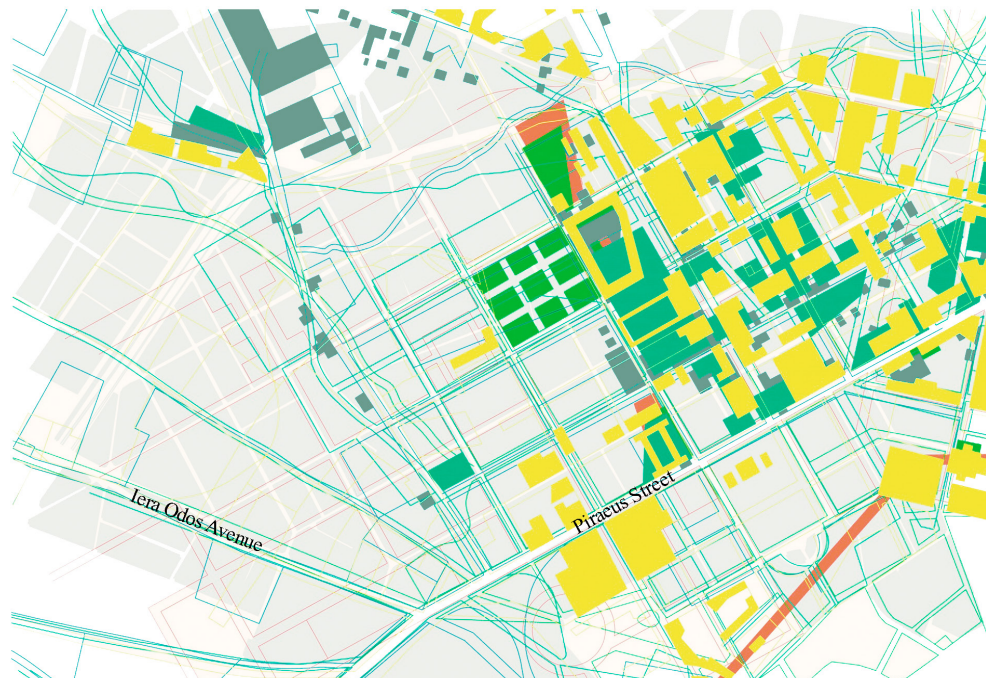
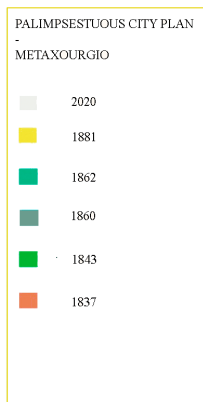
After the establishment of the Greek state, architects Stamatis Kleanthis and Eduard Schaubert were assigned to cartograph Athens and, later, to create the Athens Plan and follow specific principles. In particular, they planned the city so that "the royal palaces would enjoy at the same time the picturesque Lycabettus, the Panathenaic Stadium, the rich and proud memories of the Acropolis, and the warships and merchant ships of Piraeus."¹⁴ Therefore, they positioned the palaces accordingly by creating a triangle and placing them at its summit, which would be today's Omonoia

- 15 Leonidas Kallivretakis, "Athens in the 19th century: From regional town of the Ottoman Empire to capital of the Kingdom of Greece," in *Archaeology of the City of Athens*. Last access: 30.12.20. http://archaeologia.eie.gr/archaeologia/gr/chapter_more_9.aspx
- 16 Biris *Αθηναϊκά μελέται*, 16.
- 17 Roger Paden, "The two professions of Hippodamus of Miletus," *Philosophy & Geography*, 4 (2001): 25-48.

Square. Later, Klenze and Gaertner were assigned to improve the initial plan, and repositioned the royal palaces to today's Syntagma Square, but followed similar principles.¹⁵ The traces of this plan are also illustrated in the survey of the topographers Ferdinand Aldenhoven, Chenavard, Dimitrios Kallergis, Strantz and Johann August Kaupert who mapped Athens from 1832 to 1882.¹⁶

Taking these plans into account, we created a master plan which is a palimpsest of these plans, in other words the plans in superimposition (see figure 1). This "palimpsestic" plan indicates that in the past, the basic design layout that was applied in the northern part of the area was the conventional 'Hippodamian Plan' (grid plan), where straight streets intersect each other at right angles to form a grid.¹⁷ As is evident in all the maps, the north-eastern area close to today's Omonoia Square, the initial position of the palaces, was mostly built. The main buildings that are illustrated in the drawings are the silk factory and the Hatzikonsta Orphanage. On the contrary, southern Metaxourgio, next to Iera Odos avenue, was marked as a sprawling area with oblique crossings and streets, which evinces a rather rural character of the area without housing blocks.

fig. 1 Metaxourgio's city plan as a palimpsest.



18 Charis Stoupa, *Archaeological Site of the Demosion Sema*, Last access: 30.12.20. http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/3/gh351.jsp?obj_id=20844

3.2 Demosion Sema: Historical Background

As previously mentioned, Metaxourgio is inextricably linked to Demosion Sema (see figure 2). This is characterized as the most important cemetery of ancient Athens, dating back to the 5th century BC. It is located along the ancient road that connected the Kerameikos area with Plato's Academy. It was 40 metres wide and 1478 metres long. This cemetery is associated with the rise of democracy, since it was founded in the classical period with prominent men and fallen men buried there. In particular, there are more than one hundred points in the area that include burial monuments. According to the Athenian custom 'Patrios Nomos', the fallen men of wars, after being cremated, were transported from the distant battlefields for an honorary burial. Moreover, two sanctuaries have been found among them in this area, one of which is dedicated to Dionysus Eleuthereus and the second one to Ariste-Kalliste, which was a name for the goddess Artemis.¹⁸

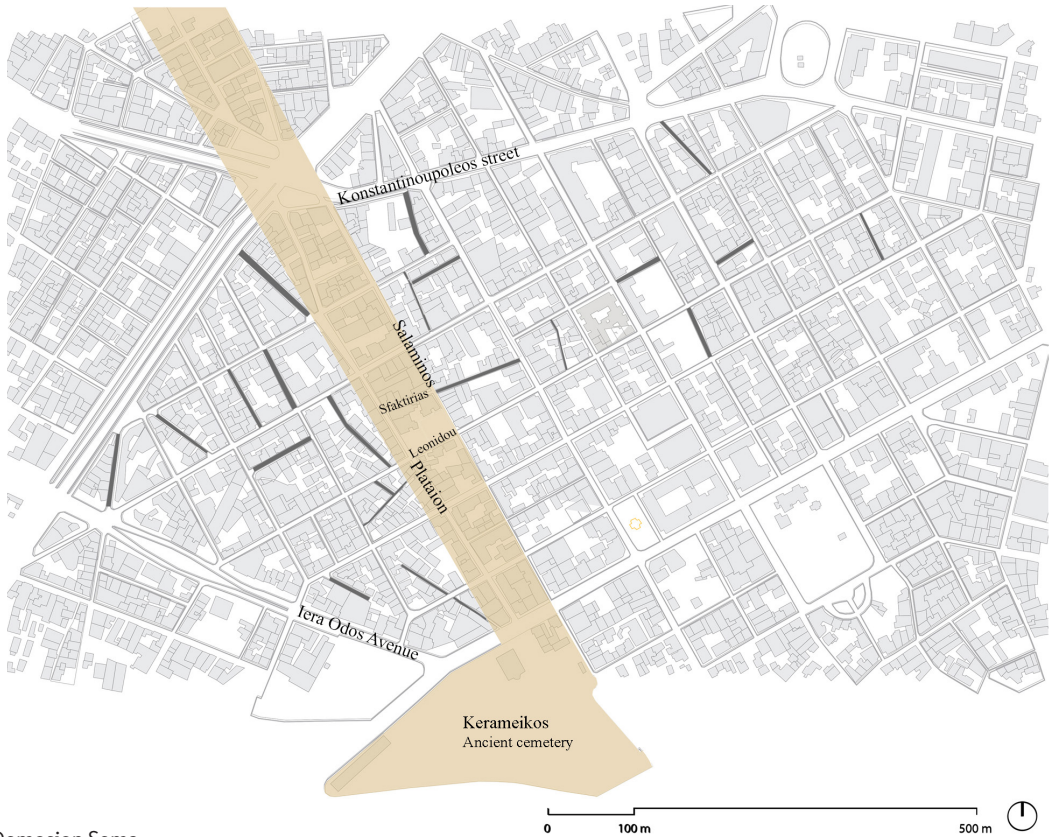
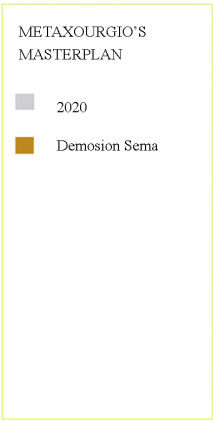


fig. 2 Metaxourgio's city plan with Demosion Sema and oblique streets as traces of the pasts.

3.3 The Image of Today

In the framework of the unification of the archaeological sites of Athens from Kerameikos to Plato's Academy, the Central Archaeological Council authorized the proposal of a creation of an archaeological promenade, from the Kerameikos area to Plato's Academy. However, excavations have not started yet.

Nowadays, the only evidence of memory of antiquity is the archaeological site of Demosion Sema that goes along Plataion Street. However, it can only be seen in the parts of burial monuments in the intersections of 35 Salaminos Street, Plataion, Leonidou and Megalou Alexandrou Streets.

Nevertheless, the ancient ruins of Demosion Sema are not the only fragments that are a testimony of the past. The abandonment of the 20th century is also a characteristic of the area today, as we can see in figure 3: 48% of Metaxourgio's neoclassical buildings are

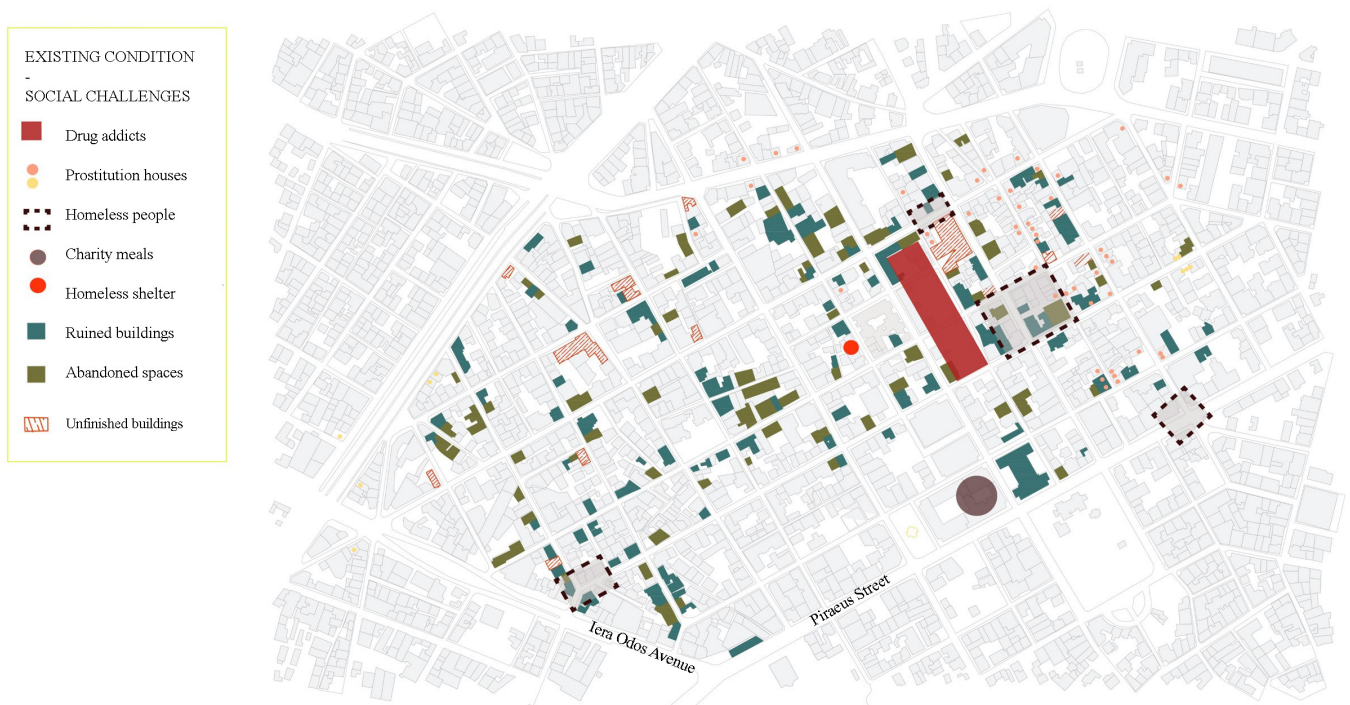


fig. 3 Existing conditions of Metaxourgio
– social challenges

- 19 X. Tzanavara, "Athina: nees idees gia palia provlimata," *Enet.gr*, January 2011. Last access: 30.12.20. <http://www.enet.gr/?i=issue.el.home&date=30/01/2011&id=245855>

damaged or ruined, and in addition to the lack of public spaces, they create "discontinuities" in its urban landscape.¹⁹ If we see it in its totality, Metaxourgio is a palimpsest of heterogeneous elements. Often, it is described as a "transitional" area that is fragmented in many aspects and needs regeneration. Not only does the built environment vary, but so do its residents and land uses. Belonging to the different social groups are immigrants, homeless people, the working-class, artists and tourists. So, the public programmes include residences, trade, theatres, schools, artists' workshops, restaurants and services of tourist accommodation housed in old reused residences due to its central location. Moreover, as is also indicated in the diagram (see figure 3), a great part of the northern area has neighbourhoods with prostitution houses and drug addicts.

Therefore, it is evident that the identity of the area is linked to a mixture of residents that co-exist in a built environment that has been made throughout different eras. However, in this environment it is also perceptible, that there is dearth of hierarchy of layers and significant traces.

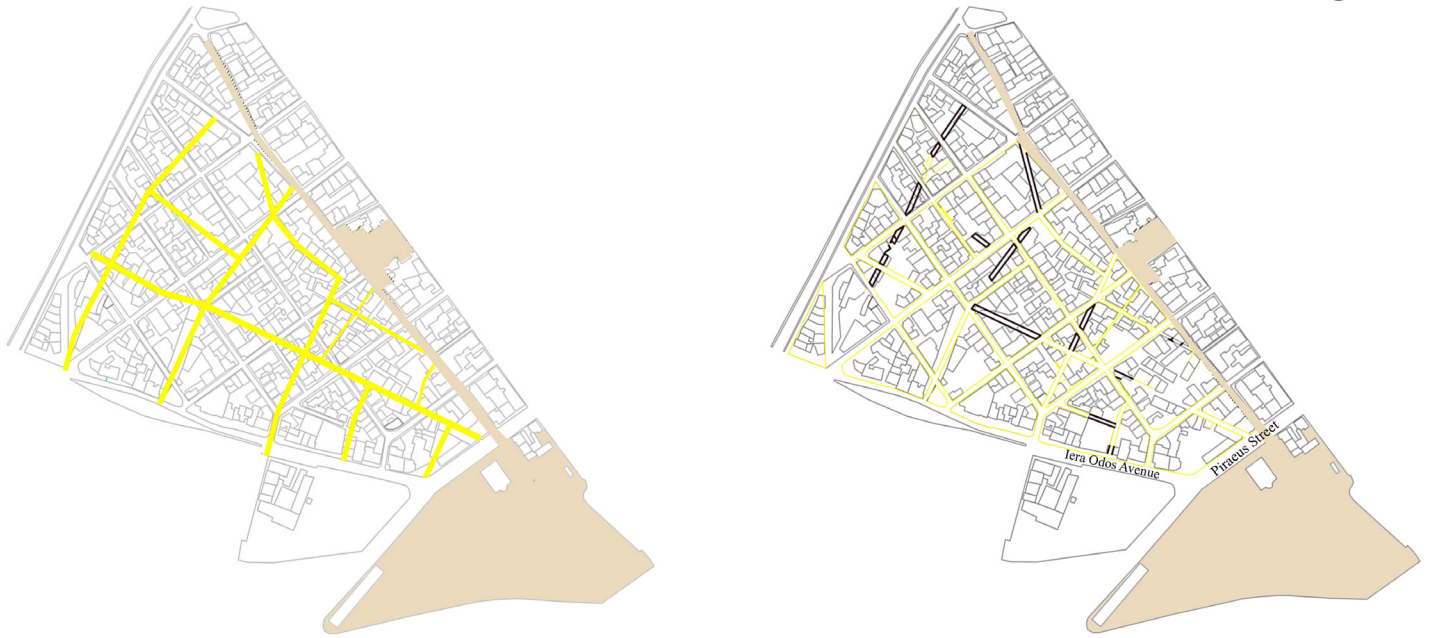
Based on this conclusion, the aim of this study is to reconfigure Metaxourgio as an 'archive-city' where selective memory will lead to the management of all the layers. Also, the production of new forms that host the necessary programmes will bring a dialogue between the past and the future. Which memory should be restored? Is oblivion essential? According to which criteria will the archive be created? The following section will explain the archiving method both in the urban and the architectural scale.

3.4 The Re-design of the Area Following the Traces of the Past

Before proceeding to examine archiving on an architectural scale, it is important to rethink the whole plan of Metaxourgio. By isolating these oblique streets that reveal the traces of this palimpsest in today's plan, we notice their high density in the southern part (see figure 2). The project focuses on this area, since it includes the initial layers with Demosion Sema. The latter is already revealed, as explained before, in the intersection of 35 Salaminos, Plataion, Leonidou and Megalou Alexandrou Streets.

Now, Demosion Sema emerges again. The excavations run through the entirety of Plataion Street, as seen in figure 2. We reveal and expand the trace of the oblique old engravings in order to reconnect the south ancient area of Kerameikos and Konstantinoupoleos Street. In this way, a new axis is shaped between Iera Odos avenue and Plataion Street (Demosion Sema).

This axis constitutes a pedestrianized area and, on both sides, a park zone is inserted. Therefore, the new zones are categorized in the public zone of Iera Odos Avenue, the park zone and the cultural zone of Demosion Sema. In between them we preserve the areas with neighbourhoods that already exist in Metaxourgio.



Moreover, since traces of the past emerge, we produce a new *oblique* grid, so that one's gaze turns to the archaeological spaces of Kerameikos and Demosion Sema, the initial layers of the 'archive'. Thus, the final masterplan consists of the superimposition of the oblique grid on the existing one, as is clear in figure 4.

In particular, the new grid reshapes the existing buildings not only in the plan but also in the third dimension. It actually *divides* the one-floor buildings and penetrates six metres into the ground of multi-storey buildings. As a consequence this change unifies small fragmented buildings into larger ones and into the shape of new blocks. Therefore, the architectural scale of the area increases, and new relationships between void, solid and public spaces are produced. In figure 4, we see these penetrations in black, whereas the new outlines of blocks are marked in yellow.

Before moving to the architectural interventions, we interpreted the area by recognising qualities that would be worth archiving and we collected 'archive maps' that include spatial features of the urban landscape, which we found important for the narrative of each era and accord to some principles such as that of order. Galinié defined urban forms that can be identified by the geometric and physical configuration of the system

fig. 4 Author's work, Plan's evolution. On the left: diagram with the extension of traces of the past. On the right: the final masterplan.

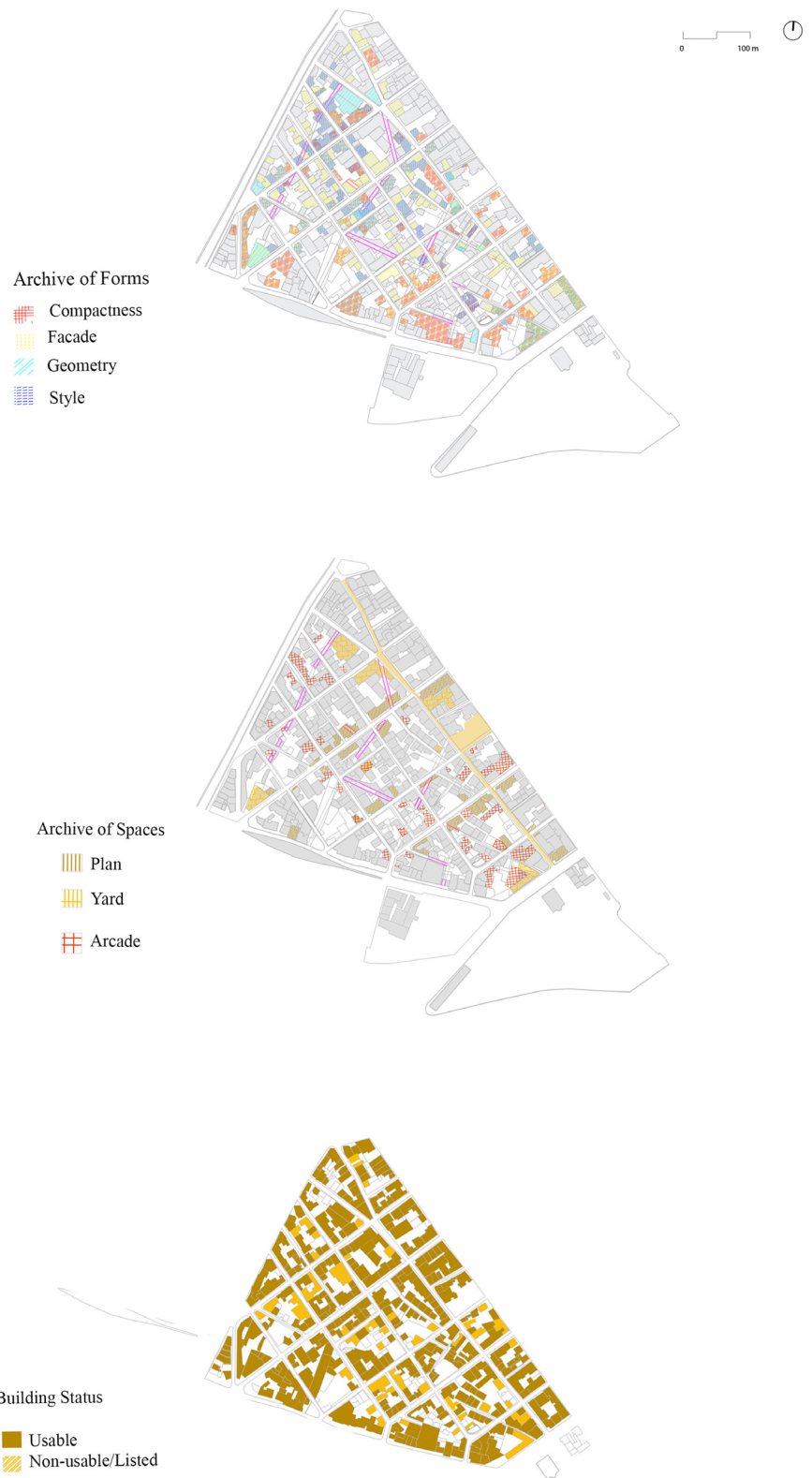


fig. 5 Author's work, archive maps of forms, spaces and building status.

20 Henri Galinié, *Ville, espace urbain et archéologie* (Tours: Université François Rabelais, 2000), quoted in Hélène Noizet, “Spaces and spatialities in Paris between the ninth and nineteenth centuries: Urban morphology generated by the management of otherness,” *Urban History*, 47(3) (April 2020): 402.

of streets—plots—buildings, as spaces.²⁰ For the need of this research, we categorise them in architectural form and space.

In this way, the memory of selected ideas of the past will be saved in the future interventions. As we can see in figure 5, we created ‘archive maps’ according to:

- 1 the form, including features of compactness, façade, geometry, style;
- 2 the space, including building typologies of plan, yards, arcades; and
- 3 the building status, namely we studied which buildings were useable and which ones non-useable but listed.

We point out that these maps should be taken into account before our future architectural intervention in the area. In particular, the archive of *forms* includes compactness, geometries, styles of buildings or elements of façades, such as windows, doors and columns from various eras that we would like to incorporate into our intervention, either literally or as a model that we would imitate.

Respectively, in the archive of *spaces* we include plan typologies, yards and arcades that suggest ways of living in previous periods. After studying the courtyards’ typologies, we noticed that thresholds and access to the main entrance vary depending on period. For example, in numerous neoclassical buildings, the door of the main entrance of the building is accessible after the entering a yard and ascending a staircase. Another case is the entrance in a mutual yard of two buildings or the position of the courtyard behind the main entrance of the building.

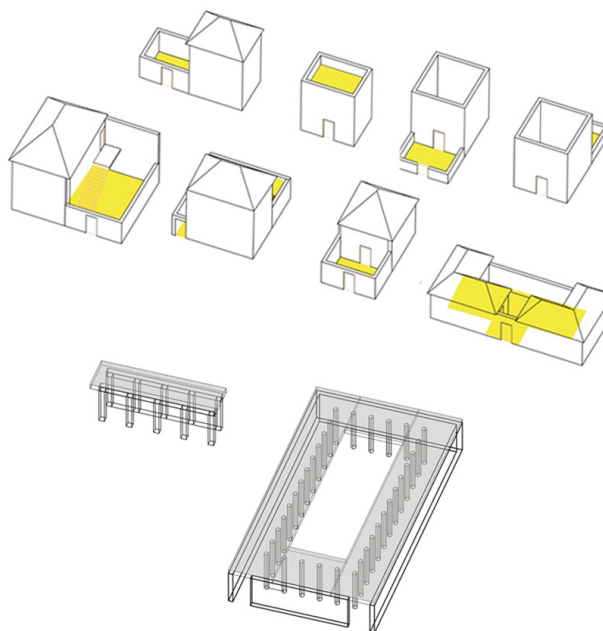


fig. 6 Author's work, spatial archived typologies of yards and arcades of the area.

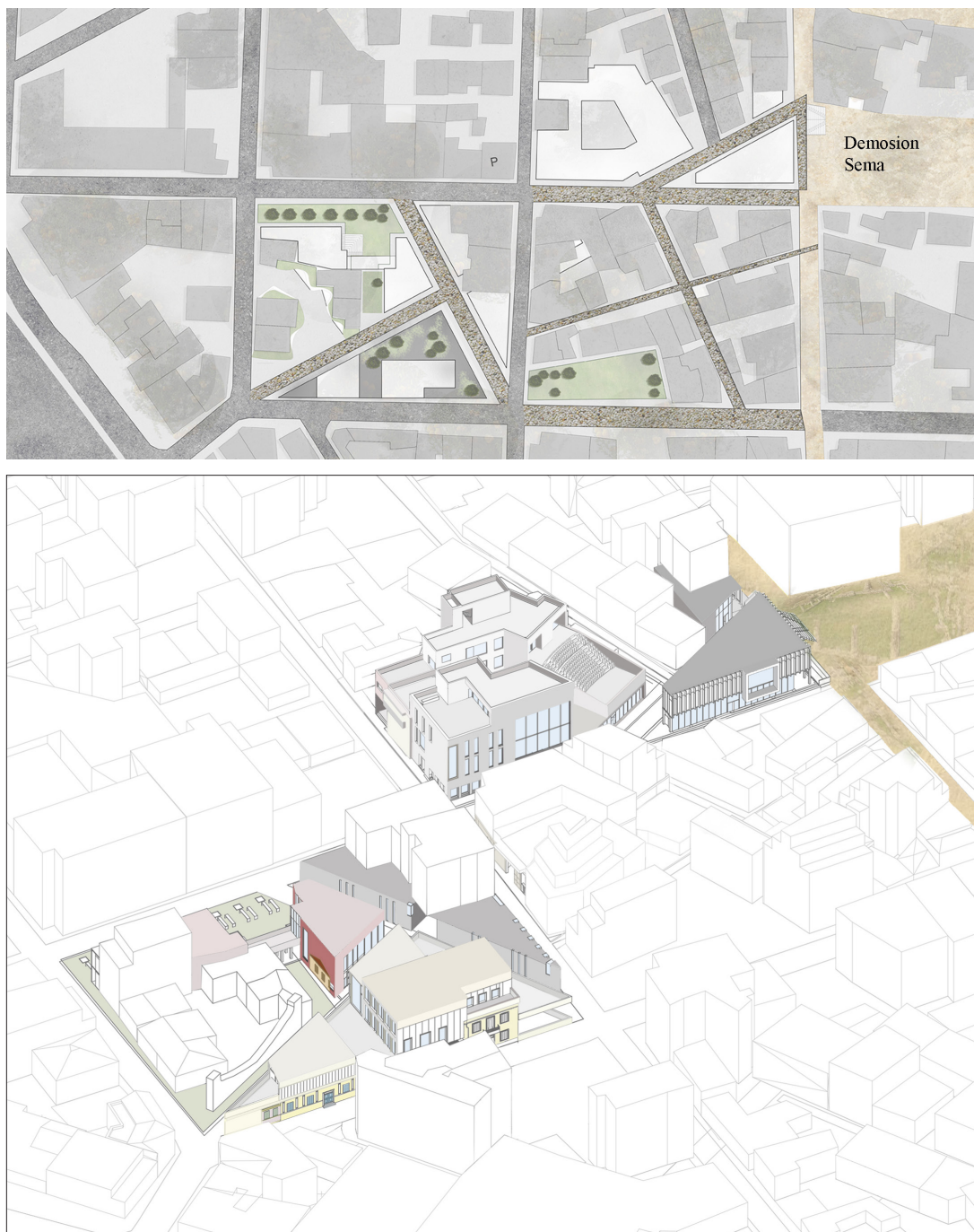


fig. 7 Author's work, top view and axonometric view of the intervention in the focused area.

In modern and contemporary buildings and ‘polykatoikias’ (apartment buildings) we can see the ‘Domino’ typology on the ground floor and roof gardens (figure 6).

Moreover, by studying thresholds, we also examined the typology of the arcade. This typology existed in antiquity, in Kerameikos, but today is only seen as a ruin in the cemetery. However, in the modern architecture of ‘polykatoikias’, this typology was reused again, serving encounters in a covered public space (figure 6).

What would happen if the superimposition of all these typologies would take place in the future archive of Metaxourgio? How would all these typologies interact with each other? What if through an arcade, random encounters with fragments of the past would take place? The new proposal will be a totality of representations of ideas of the past that will be composed so that they give new meanings.

Having discussed the *collection* of the ‘archiving fragments’ that we deem useful for our intervention, this section will explain how these will be incorporated and give new meaning in the architectural intervention. The project focused on a street of the new master plan that intersects Iera Odos Avenue, the new oblique axis and Plataion Street (Demosion Sema), as can be seen in figure 7. The examined street is pedestrianized and constitutes a public promenade. On both sides, there are new structures which intervene on the existing ones and host public programmes that meet the needs of the residents. In particular, we maintain the *neighbourhood* profile of the area, adding public spaces, recreation areas, a restaurant and café, mental health centres, public baths, a community centre and, close to Demosion Sema, we enrich the cultural zone with galleries.

Beginning from Iera Odos towards Demosion Sema, the first interventions a visitor would meet are a recreation area with a skatepark and a public market on the left-hand side, and the restaurant and the mental health centre on the right. The new building of the recreation area is the result of unification of fragmented buildings. Following the archive maps, we preserved those existing and incorporated them in the new elevation, reconstructing the model of a neoclassical yard, where the staircase leads to an entrance. The new building now enfolds the yard in a closed space on the ground floor. The recreation area communicates with another building which now acts as a closed market. This connection takes place through an arcade that symbolises an ‘entrance’ in the open space of the public market (figure 8).

On the other side, the visitor sees a unified block made out of existing and new buildings that are unified through a mutual roof which also acts as a mutual yard. The neoclassical façades of the existing buildings are also preserved and co-exist with the new additions (figure 9).

Moving further, the new urban block is occupied not only by the existing apartment buildings, but also by two larger volumes that we will be used as public baths. They have a mutual yard, and on the western elevation



fig. 8 Author's work, diagrams and plan of the recreation area and the market.

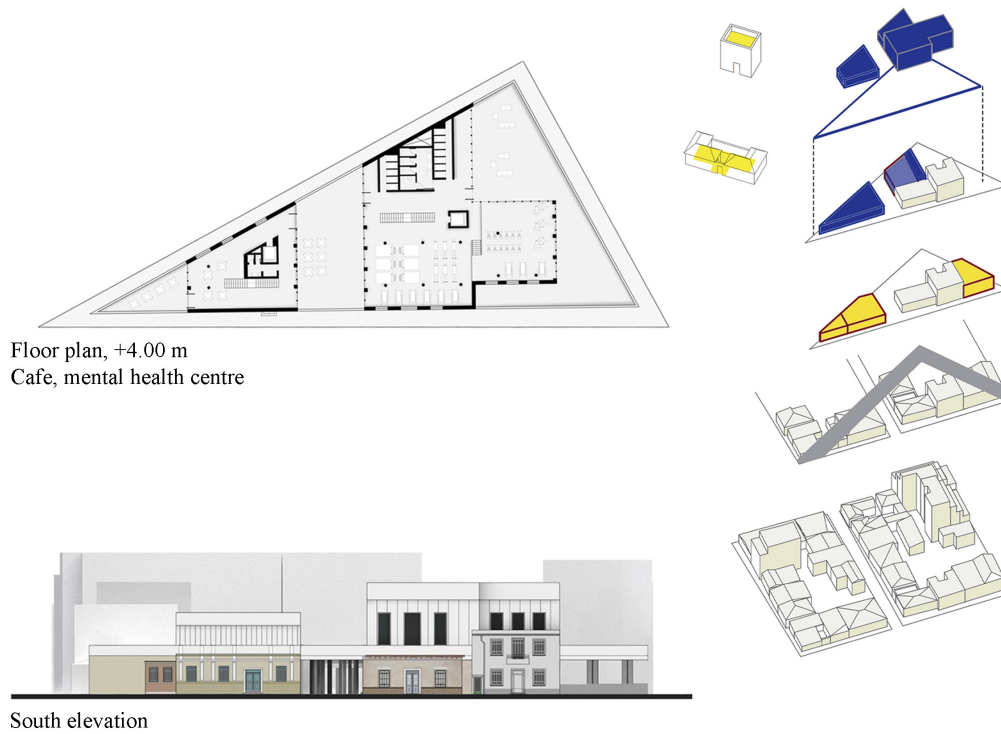


fig. 9 Author's work, diagrams, plan, elevation and view of the restaurant and mental health centre.

we unify the new volume with the existing polykatoikia through an arcade. Continuing to walk on the arcade, the visitor is led to the next intervention which is the café, next to the lift of a ground floor of an apartment building.

On the other side of the street, the unification of the existing fragmented buildings gives the opportunity of creating a massive volume that can be used as a community centre with a café, a cinema, meeting rooms and a learning centre. Here, we preserved the neoclassic and modern façades of previous buildings, and we used the typology of a volume with arcades around a patio, recalling the ancient typology of the arcade of Kerameikos cemetery. Moreover, we used the typology of the gardens on the roofs of each floor, enhancing the sense of community (figure 10).

Approaching Demosion Sema (Plataion Street), the archive also appears in the last intervention, the new gallery next to it. The old buildings have been replaced by the new volume that is linked with another fragmented building through a joined space, the basement. Now, the exhibition space is united with the excavated archaeological space. The volumes' 'mutual yard' is next to their common basement, the archaeological space. Also, in its glass and metal shelter, the new gallery incorporates the preserved façade element of the house that existed there before. In addition, a new arcade serves as an inviting element to the gallery (figure 11).

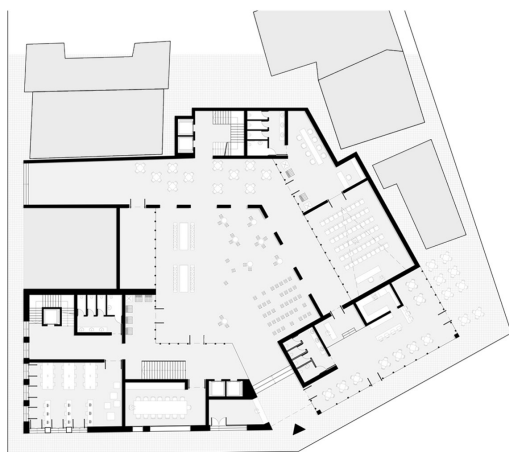
4 Conclusion

To conclude, this paper pointed out that the constitution of the archive presupposes the interpretation of the place. In the current study, we attempted to convert a palimpsestic area of Metaxourgio into an archive-city by understanding its history and spatial characteristics. To find its new identity, we firstly preserved the initial and important tangible traces of antiquity, by excavating the archaeological space of Demosion Sema and creating a new plan that encouraged both the connections with it and vistas towards Kerameikos. Moreover, we collected archive maps with typologies in space and form of the area that represented preservable ideas and principles of the past, such as order, compactness and style, and suggested encounters and ways of living. We transferred them to contemporary spatial relationships in the architectural scale and, thus, fragments of the existing buildings are now only experienced interwoven in the new totality of interventions.

In the end, the archive allows 'authors' to consciously select insertions and erasures of records, and produce architectural meaning by organizing the coexistence of the past, present and future. Therefore, it can be called an 'open space' representing ideas of all the eras. The role of an 'author' is to offer a work with qualities that will transform the residents' consciousness and enrich the urban landscape with new meanings. This will be achieved only through the continuous recording and interpretation of the existing space. In this way, 'authors' will contribute to the configuration of a place's identity.

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Ground floor plan, +0.00m
Community spaces and Cafe



Facade

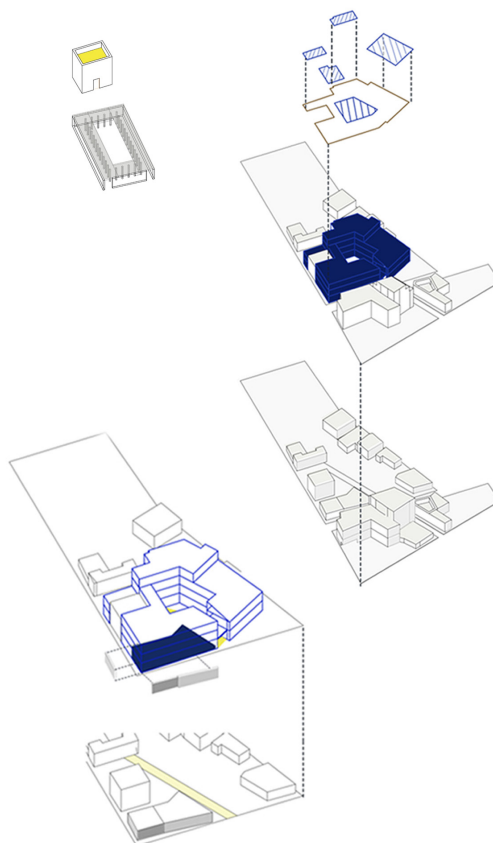


fig. 10 Author's work, diagrams, plan, elevation and view of the community centre.

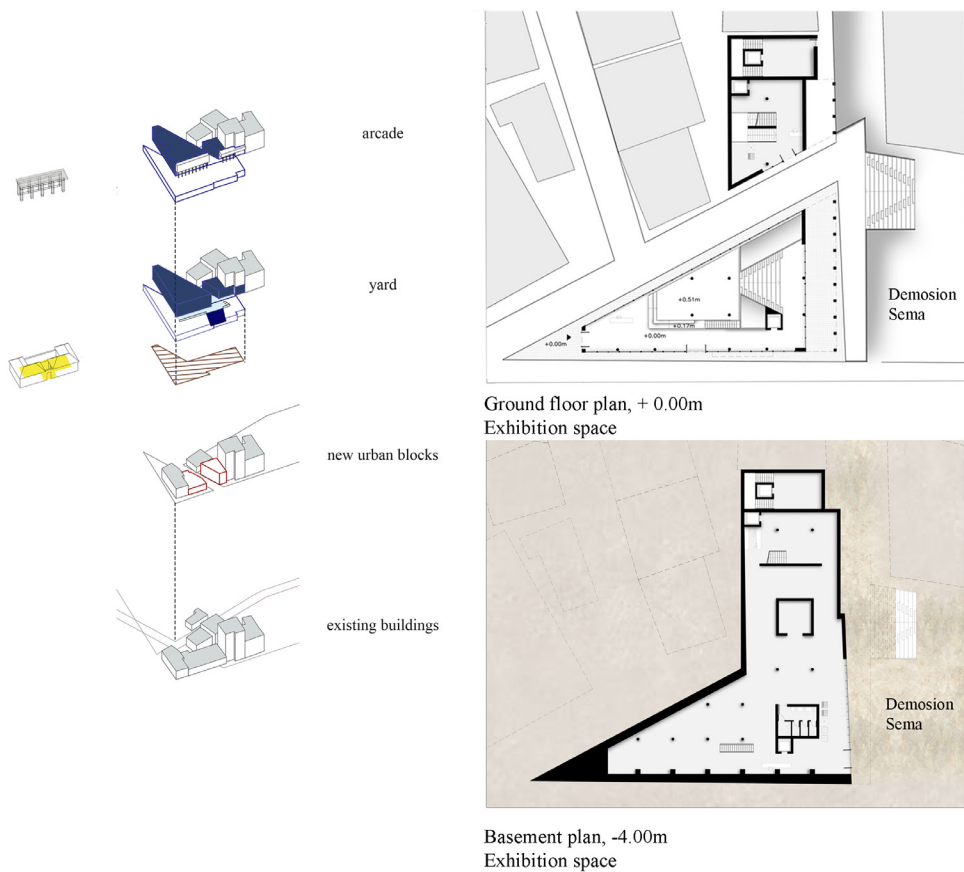


fig. 11 Author's work, diagrams and plans of the gallery, view of the archaeological space towards the gallery.