

Beginnings of Modern Urbanity and Architectural Expression: The Balkan Tale of Northern Greece

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The urban consciousness under foreign domination is a complex issue, especially when the reporting period is the 19th century, the century of great social, ethnic, and economic changes in Europe. The issue is further complicated in the case of the Balkans, during the latter period of Ottoman rule. But how did certain cities manage to emerge from rural or suburban enslaved routine and develop a European urbanity? An urbanity expressed itself as lifestyle (habits, costumes, entertainment), as art and as formation of the urban environment and architecture. The State pushed for modernization by the Great Powers, ethnic communities with parent countries seeking to differentiate themselves from their “backward” conquerors, economic opportunities through trade and new visual observations by penetration of European countries and companies: all this would create suitable conditions for an unprecedented urbanization. This shift in the quality of life was clearly expressed in the new architecture, which always continued, as ever, to reflect the cultural activity. The transition from vernacular architecture to historicism and eclecticism would capture the most characteristic moment of the beginning of urbanization in northern Greece.

Keywords: urbanization, Europeanization, modernization, 19th century, Northern Greece, Balkans, eclectic architecture

Urbanity and City

The concept of urbanity, as a way of life, as a total of urban realization, or as an element of cultural identity is vague in its explanation and has also been explained in so many ways in various periods of times and by various philosophical schools of thought (German, French, etc.) (Schneider, Achilles, & Merbitz, 2014). At the same time, however, this very urbanity is not expressed through one particular way of life, through rules and restrictions, but it is shaped—and was shaped historically in fact—by the conditions valid at the time. The correlation of urbanization and the middle classes with the town, as was expressed initially by Lothar Gall (1990), and the simultaneous examination of them, is today more or less taken for granted. In fact, an examination of the built urban environment with urbanity and their mutual relationship forms a multifaceted field of interest about architectural theory. The limitation of the meaning of urbanization has the characteristics of its medium and the way in which it expressed itself through architecture. Conversely, however, urban architecture becomes a means of research of urbanization and a measure of influence and diffusion of standards.

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In this background, the cases of towns in specific historical periods present special interest, where intense social-political changes led to primary development of urban social models, while presenting bold transformations in the towns. The European nineteenth century was a characteristic period for this type of processes, or in other words, the century of urbanization, or the “urban century” (Kocka, 1987). Within this vast period of time and spatial area, towns and civilizations are included with marked differences and contradictions amongst them, so that it is not possible to actually state which is the term to describe exactly what European urbanization is, despite the similarities which it actually has in its various manifestations. Respectively, there are many different pre-existing conditions, reasons, and way in which urbanization was caused.

The Balkans in the 19th Century

The case of the Balkans in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century presents a particular case for the European region. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had managed to maintain many territories (despite the fact that had been losing ground since 1683), among which include most of the Balkan area and the eastern Mediterranean. This long-lasting territorial occupation by a power of a different cultural character, led to the creation of a particular social background. Various ethno-religious groups (in the Southern Balkans: Christians, Muslims, Jews, Greeks, Bulgarians, Slavs, Albanians, Ottomans, and various Europeans) co-existed for almost four centuries under the umbrella of an empire. Essentially, the citizens of other religions had limited rights, being excluded from some activities. Even the Muslim Ottoman citizens as a whole did not flourish, as, apart from the élite few, made up mostly of politicians, army officers, and religious leaders, a percentage had to live in difficult conditions. It is clear, therefore, that within this social framework—to a great extent different from the rest of Europe—the existence or creation of a European urban class was practically difficult. In this context, it should be noted that because a significant percentage of the citizens lived in agricultural settlements and in the countryside, unable to reach easily the town. The cases where social groups can be considered urban, like the Western Macedonian merchants of the 18th century, or the old noble families, like the Phanariots of Constantinople, constitute individual and minority samples.

The situation which dominates the eighteenth century empire seems to have the very same characteristics of the Balkan towns: random town planning where narrow and inaccessible streets often lead to dead ends, densely populated areas, large numbers of small and cheap buildings and areas which are often plagued with fires or infectious disease. Urban organization in the inner-city takes place in quarters which are characterized by religious homogeneity, outwardly appearing relative introverted. Even the architecture itself in its particular samples, despite the creativity and completeness which it displays, is based on traditional techniques, detached from European developments, while with its insular and protective character, in many cases, it reflects the conditions.

The mid-nineteenth century saw the first substantial political changes, which in turn affected a group of other parameters. The empire had reached marginal levels as its wear from internal problems as well as the fact that insufficient control of its great territorial areas and population had begun back at the 18th century. At the same time, its indebtedness to the European powers had weakened the empire, while the political and economic aspirations of the Great powers pushed the empire to adopt changes and eventually introduce reforms (mainly the “Hatt-i-Humayun” of 1856). These measures provided for modernization of the state (new organization of the state, changes in provincial administration), while an essential point, which constituted equal treatment of Muslims, Christians, and Jews and the enhancing of rights for people of other religious affiliations, like

establishing formal schools (Somel, 2005), the right for ethno-religious groups to construct community buildings, reducing the tax burden, etc. (Yerolympos, 2004) In the city of Monastiri all the schools of the Greek community were erected in the 1880s and 1890s, which became an educational center of the region, such as the Gymnasium (1885), the Urban School (1885), the Girls' School (1881 designed by L. Kaftantzoglou), the Kindergarten (1886), and others. Also in the late 19th century the Bulgarian school (1905) was built and the Jewish as well (1896), by the Alliance Israelite of Paris. Furthermore, European construction companies get into action by building infrastructure (Geyikdagi, 2011) while a significant number of European citizens settled in the area, as merchants or consul representatives.

The Formation of Urbanity

Looking into what urban patterns and behavior were like during the second half of the 19th century raises specific areas of research, which moreover arise from the definitions of urbanization. Based on the quality characteristics of the middle class (Raptis, 1998) like economic standing, education, and social position, we are faced with research questions like: how was suddenly gained economic power by a particular group and how it was identified—if identified—with the senior educational inhabitants? What exactly was it that happened in the waning Ottoman Empire that helped to generate a middle class and how is it combined with Hellenism? How was that middle class expressed and what were its behaviors?

With the evolution of political and social conditions in the Ottoman Empire, conditions begin to form for the creation of a middle class. A key element of the new conditions is the economic recovery of communities and new opportunities presented by the establishment of trade exchange with Western Europe. The definitive freedom of trade, established through the Anglo-Ottoman Treaty of 1838 defined the new beginning of a great trade tradition, which the Greek Vlachs of Western Macedonia and Epirus were the developers of. Thus, after the boom of the Christian communities, internal trading in the Ottoman Empire, immigrants, merchants, and shopkeepers created strong communities in the trading towns, while keeping the language, religion, and concern for the homeland unchanged. In cities like Vienna, Budapest, Venice, London, Paris, or Trieste, and Odessa, chambers of commerce were being built, both for export purposes and import, but mainly for import, to the cities of the Ottoman Empire on the wider North Hellenic area. Competition from European countries, where each one looked to export industrial products to new and growing markets (Svoronos, 1996), was decisive for the evolution of both the economy and the population itself.

The corresponding initial development of export of agricultural products from the regions of the empire to Europe brought about an increase in production, the establishment of new commercial enterprises and retailers and ultimately increased profits for a large number of citizens. Then, a great economic boost was given by flourishing industry (like jewellery making, ironworks, tobacco, gunsmiths, wainwrights, tanneries, rope manufacturing, the textile industry, etc.). In this way, we see the creation of a frenetic—for those times—growth cycle, with production increasing, commerce bringing new goods and the consumer trends growing, widening that cycle. Thus, we witness the development of a capitalist system based on trade, industry, and private ownership of property, taking the place of the earlier feudal system of the previous centuries, intensifying more and more in the Balkans during the second half of the 19th century (Todorov, 1986) Similarly, the development of commercial and manufacturing occupations and organization of professional guilds, in a short time created a social group of wealthy citizens. In this context, examples of tobacco cities, such as Xanthi and Kavala are typical. Meanwhile, the economic growth of cities, the creation of jobs in

unprecedented sectors (industry, trade, services), and a proportionally large number of these jobs, led to the phenomenon of urbanization, meaning the arrival of the poorest inhabitants of the rural countryside in the cities.¹

This contact with nineteenth-century Europe, however, had more than just economic consequences. The period up to 1860 is characterized by the Balkan national revolutions that led to the formation of the first national states (parts of the present countries of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, and Montenegro), while weakening and losing territories of the Ottoman Empire. An important role in these revolutionary movements and in general in the 19th century political developments was played by the ideological background that had formed in Europe. The two dominant currents were liberalism and nationalism (Jelavich, 2006). Liberalism was based on the principles of Enlightenment and its main elements were the defense of individual freedom, political equality, and independence of all citizens within the limits of the state as well as the protection of their rights. The idea of nationalism, which developed during this period, meant nation, a unity of citizens linked by common elements, such as language, religion, culture, etc. Such unprecedented ideological references and searches went wild amongst expatriate merchants, but also pioneer intellectuals, who would prove to be the spreaders of modern European ideals. Along with these deeper ideologies, the greatest influence on the western civilization—which affected all the expatriates or at least those who were involved in it—was the overall feeling of life and urban perceptions of the developing European centers. To a certain extent, the whole idea of Europeanization and modernization was based on imports from clothing and glassware to medicines and general ideas. These novel ideas and the overall cultural influence of the European centers would be expressed in many ways. The expatriates had a yardstick for many things, such as the system of governance, quality and way of life, human rights, education and of course, the material environment, architecture.

Another crucial aspect of the reforms that contributed to the process of urbanization of the Ottoman cities was the right of ethno-religious communities both to education and the establishment of schools. In a region which is the heart of intense national conflicts and demands, education is not only a means of education and culture, but goes back to a key pillar forming national consciousness. Education was of a community character, structured around the community, usually ethnic, with an ecclesiastical body for reference. The church-centered character and lack of a secular education system on the Ottoman side, reinforced each ethnic group, essentially excluding the Ottoman state from what could be a propaganda and modernizing tool (Jelavich, 2006) For the Greeks the center of reference was the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which set its educational functions, and regulated the general framework for community functions and its parts. The exact operating framework, however, did not follow specific rules exactly word for word, as the dependence of education on the community and the Patriarchate would receive multiple configuration and the local wealthy citizens, who either because they funded it or wielded the power, could interfere with the whole educational process.

An important factor in the shaping of the new urbanity is how the residents are socially organized. Apart from the already-existent professional organizations, the guilds (*isnaf*), it is also important how the various ethno-religious groups are organized in Communities, which were clearly delineated by Community and Provincial Regulations. For the Greek community of the city of Monastiri, the Community Regulations of 1896, 1901, and 1911 and the Pelagonia region of 1906 and 1911 are preserved. This type of functioning was a standard system of government and self-organization, and against this background the Greek residents carried

¹ The reporting period, the relationship between urbanity and population grow exponentially.

out their most important activities. Also characteristics of the social constitution of the Greek community were economic committees or tax offices. Separate and autonomous administrative tax offices were for the church, the schools, the hospital, and the cemetery. Beyond national and liberation associations which were organized mainly by Greeks and Bulgarians, a dense network of social organizations of an educational, cultural, and charitable nature developed. This was reinforced by gradual economic development, but benefited decisively from the reform policy of the Empire, and by the efforts of the Greek State. It is fact that all organizations demonstrated the level of both local development and social responsibility and awareness. From the above the middle class character of the cities reveals itself, at least from a social standpoint. City dwellers were proud of the lively social activities that were developing as well as the very high educational and intellectual level. The level at which local urban civilizations rose, such as Thessaloniki, Monastir, Constantinople, Izmir, etc., was a symbol of education and artistic expression.

This transition to the modern way of life, “the European”, would particularly promote two more conditions: (a) the desire for liberation and the enhancement of the revolutionary actions and (b) the contribution to the constitution process of the modern nations. Despite the fact that nation states of the region had already formed from the first half of the 19th century, they were finally completed after 1912, incorporating the former Ottoman possessed areas. The urbanized Greek community of these cities and especially the outstanding field of education fostered the subsequent Greek State. Moreover, there would be many personalities of Northern Greece that rose in the upcoming decades, while parameters, such as trade and the particular culture, would further progress urbanization of modern Greece.

The Expression of Urbanity in Architecture

At the same time as the shaping of new cultural conditions, there was a great turnabout in architecture. European trends in historicism—obviously with a time delay—started gradually from the second half of the nineteenth century to affect buildings of vernacular architecture. The period between 1860 and 1880 witnessed a clear effect on typological principles, with the symmetrical neoclassical floor plan, as well as on the morphology with the hesitant introduction of framework in doors and windows and mounting cornices and pseudo-pilasters. The following decades from 1880 to 1912 (fall of the Ottoman Empire) constitute the pinnacle of historicistic styles and eclecticism (Loyer, 1990)² The gradual introduction of more and more morphological elements from various currents of architecture, like neo-Renaissance, neo-classical, and art-nouveau style established the aesthetic values of the whole of Northern Greece and beyond.³ However, both on a typological, but mainly stylistic level, this architecture was not the exclusive privilege of the Greeks in the area. The forms used by the Ottoman state to house the modernization of the structures cannot be looked at separately from the houses (see Figure 1). Also the other ethnic-religious communities (Jews, Bulgarians, etc.) respectively, develop the aesthetic patterns, with small differences, due to the influences and beliefs involved. The universal acceptance of historicist forms by however many social groups could become partakers of modernity, and can be seen from within the house.

² About styles see: Francois Loyer. 1990. “Ο Ιστορικισμός στην αρχιτεκτονική του 19^{ου} αιώνα” [“Historicism in the architecture of the 19th century.”] In *History of Art*, edited by Chatelet Albert, Groslier Bernard Philippe]. Athens: Larousse.

³ As already seen, the term northern Greece not only described the geographical area of current borders, but a wider area which flourished the Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire. It noted that the case of the capital Constantinople/Istanbul is a different case of Urbanity.



Figure 1. Detail of the Ottoman Bank at Thessaloniki.

Within these rhythmologic elements a number of residential buildings in various cities can be identified (such as Thessaloniki, Florina, Kavala, Drama, Xanthi, Alexandroupolis/Dedeagats, as well as in other cities with a strong Greek presence which were eventually left out of the boundaries of the Greek state like Monastir/Bitolia, Korça, Rhaedestus/Tekirdag), which show further sizeable dimensions and imposing presence in the urban space (Kotsopoulos, 2014). It is probably an elite of cities, regardless of ethno-religious origin, diversified economically and socially from the rest of the group, and which selects the construction of new housing either in prominent places of cities or outside them, but always in a “European” way, setting higher qualities in the way of living. A particular example of these trends is the district of “Extramural” of

Thessaloniki (Kolonas, 2014) which at the same time is a typical example of urbanity, and the exodus of the wealthy from city centers, a European trend from the late 19th century (Figure 2) (Ackerman, 1990).



Figure 2. Villa Kapantzi at extramural Thessaloniki. An excellent example of the local eclectic style.

The new uses arising from the modernist lifestyle, the essential urbanization of cities necessitated the construction of new buildings. At the same time, however, that building unity was the most characteristic in substance modernization of the modernist societies around in the late 19th century (Figure 3). Besides, these new uses, such as industrial buildings, hospitals, schools, railway stations, municipalities, theaters, etc. appear and spread across the whole of Europe in the 19th century (Gyetvai-Balogh, 2007). Buildings of common use were raised to accommodate the growing population, and to provide higher quality living conditions, revealing on the one hand a new social architecture profile, while on the other introducing the architectural design in new fields, which in a sense may be regarded as a precursor of modern movement of “functionality”. The hotels of the era are in a class of their own; the interesting element introduced into their form and function is the European character in the short stay in relation to the traditional inns. The transition from traditional inns to modern hotels should in no way be interpreted as an evolutionary process, but rather as an instantaneous cut of the moment. No longer hosting animals, hygiene conditions added to the general feeling of luxury which was

expressed through the architecture of the hotel is a significant sign of a Europeanizing trend and a new turning towards a different, imported habit (Figure 4). Moreover, even the very idea of the tourist or visitor was almost unheard of until then.



Figure 3. The public gardens are an expression of urbanity in the early 20th century. At this case from Monastiri/Bitolia we can see the well designed garden and a building that was probably using as leisure center (Carte Postale—personal collection).



Figure 4. Aspect of urbanity in the early 20th century in the Balkan city of Monastiri/Bitolia. The eclectic building of the “Hotel d’ Orient”, with commercial shops and restaurant on the ground floor, European costumes, street lighting, paved road (Photograph—Istanbul University, Archive Nadir Eserler).

These major changes in architecture could not have taken place without the simultaneous regard for the urban place and town planning. The implementation of reforms by the Ottoman Empire in the mid-19th century had already caused significant alterations to urban planning. An effort to arrange the complex urban net was attempted within the city, through the widening of the roads (especially central ones), the opening of the dead-end streets, and the design of a new urban plan. Typical are the examples of cities where after a fire, new segments were designed according to a normal system of horizontal and vertical alignments—grid for the first time. In this context typical example is the market area of the city of Monastiri, which is fully redesigned after the fire of 1863 (Figure 5), but also a large area of the center of Thessaloniki, where, after the fire of 1870, the rationalization of the urban net is carried out. In addition, cities expanded to meet the housing needs of a growing population. More specifically, Thessaloniki, where building outside the walls was forbidden until a few years ago, was extended towards both the new urban section with villas (Exohes) and the western side of the city, as well. Moreover, these modifications were based on planning maps plans, most of which have been saved, such as the planning after the demolition of the seaside walls of Thessaloniki by Rocci Vitali in 1871 (Yerolympos, 2004). In the same time, projects as the sett of the roads, the building of bracing along the livers and the street light fitting improved the standards of living. These new conditions of urban organization would become the basis for the development of the new architecture. It is noteworthy that the majority of the urban planning interventions are obvious in the most important and privileged points of the towns and not in all of them (Figure 6). Consequently, a kind of classification of social urbanization tended to be prominent, based on the condition that could be proved by both the architecture and the individual communities, as well.



Figure 5. Representation of the market area of the city of Monastiri (Bitolia) around 1850 (left) and 1880 (right).



Figure 6. Parts of cities remain under the rural conditions, both in infrastructure and in architecture (personal collection).

The Correlation Between the Middle Class and Architectural Evolution

From an examination of cultural elements of Ottoman-occupied Northern Greece of the second half of the 19th century, the emergence of the middle class is clear to see, a social group within which we can see citizens regardless of ethno-religious classification. In the new social “class”, we can see that the Greek community has an important position; it is pioneer intellectually and up to a certain extent defines the new aesthetic criteria. Correspondingly to the rise of the middle class and the overall modernization of the city, the luxurious or modernist lifestyle also grew. Urbanization was originally initiated by senior executives of the State or by the State itself and consulates with European citizens; it was widely spread in the city by the progressive class of merchants and manufacturer, to finally intensely or superficially penetrate way most quarters of the city and larger segments of the population. The new middle class wanted to express its diversity or its superiority, even through architecture. For this reason, the expression of modernization or “European imitation” was now expected primarily in the form of the private residence. The family residence presented all the advantages for this purpose: it was private and did not accept substantial limitations from Ottoman legislation on shape and size, while presented as an extension of the self, as self-promotion of prosperity and success for the entire society of the time.

The majority of the buildings and the level of architecture can be interpreted as urban competition, both on a personal, as well as a communal level. Monumentality trends, which were expressed both in the floor plan as well as in appearance, through seeking regularity, symmetry, good proportions, and unity of the whole (Filippides, 1983) they appeared in a series of urban residences, as well as key symbolic buildings like schools, public buildings, and consulates (Figure 7). Many of these new buildings, among others, were outside the pre-existing building scale and were cut off from tradition in their use and morphology and their volume and the relationship of the human scale to the built environment. The “Europeanization” trends that appeared, beyond the charm that they would surely exercise on the wealthy middle class, who had the capability and opportunity to follow, posed an additional deeper “I want”. This is none other than the ardent desire to have free expression based on options and self-identifying data. In search of new aesthetics and modernization, the

trend of classicism gets rid of the traditional past, which had been interwoven with the domination. The clear political and social message which was to suggest a change of habits and to adopt Western principles, or else urbanization, was underestimated by the conquerors, and for this reason permeated the whole of society, nourishing revolutionary reaction (Chasiotis, 2001)⁴.



Figure 7. The administration building of the city of Florina (last decade of 19th century). Although relatively small town, in the photo is clear the monumentality of the building and the historicistic architectural vocabulary (personal collection).

This renewal, however, has many levels: from the same lifestyle, urban functions, the services provided, to the urban fabric and buildings. The Northern Greek and generally Southern Balkan cities in 1912, are neither modern European nor traditional oriental. To an oriental mentality—obvious consequence after 400 years of Ottoman rule—European integration functions, habits, and aesthetics came rather sharply. The clash of the two cultures was ongoing, overwhelming and on many levels (Gounaris, 2000). The traditional past, the habits developed by the ancestors, and the traditions over the centuries have fought in the consciences of the citizens with the avant-garde, the innovations and the European standards. The wealth and opportunities they had for a better or different future appeared too tempting for a population that was actually on a daily basis forced to make compromises. Urbanization is transferred directly onto the face of the city: in the 1890s, sanitizing urban projects were carried out, theaters were built, the new style spread to houses, hotels replaced inns, cafés and restaurants opened on verandas (Lory & Popovic, 1992).

Conclusions

The reporting period is the era of the creation of the modern middle class for Northern Greece, and more

⁴ The Greek literary of the 18th century understood that the uplift of the enslaved will occur through the reduction of cultural distance between the conquered and the progressive West. Ioannis Chasiotis, 2001, *Μεταξύ οθωμανικής κυριαρχίας και ευρωπαϊκής πρόκλησης. Ο ελληνικός κόσμος στα χρόνια της τουρκοκρατίας [Between the Ottoman sovereignty and European challenge. The Greek world in the years of Turkish rule]*. Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, p. 175.

broadly for the Southern Balkans. It was the time in which both the middle class was formed and there was a great domestic demand for it. In this newly created middle class were included wealthy merchants, scholars, and professionals in emerging professions. These were people of knowledge and money (Raptis, 1998) two categories which were closely intertwined with each other, in a society where the main differentiation from other European communities was the substantial absence of an aristocracy, at least by European standards. The main difference with the urbanity of the past in the Ottoman Empire is that it has spread to a much larger population and in a short time, due to new political and technological conditions.

Urbanity as an expression of the middle class was reflected in various manners, such as respectable clothing, courtesy, social interactions, consumerism, and living in a modern house, which covered the new comfort requirements and met the innovative aesthetic models. The architecture was therefore not directly subject to political and ideological basis, but it expressed social recognition and economic prosperity.

However, urbanization, as a configuration of the city, was expressed both by public character buildings (whether state or community) and sanitizing projects of the State. Commonplace all these material structures of urbanization seemed intent on modernization and Europeanization from all sides. In one sense it was a process of cultural transformation in which the traditional and random arrangement formed in the city. All the processes of transformation, whether from State reforms or from the Community and private initiatives were felt most in the Northern Greek cities, facilitating living conditions and setting the stage for future development within a modern European state.

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