



Αγορές σκουπιδιών | Agoras of Waste

Urban space appropriation in the context of Eleonas' wastepicker markets

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Αγορές σκουπιδιών | Agoras of Waste
Urban space appropriation in the
context of Eleonas' wastepicker markets

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Prof.Dr. Sabine Knierbein
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Martina Soi Gunelas
1027500

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Abstract

This thesis studies phenomena of urban space appropriation at the wastepicker markets of Eleonas, Athens. The history of wastepickers in Athens is shaped by repression and displacement from central urban spaces and is marked by the relocation of the wastepicker bazaars to the area of Eleonas. Eleonas became a subject of degradation and subsequent urban restructuring processes in the last thirty years, yet remaining the productive core of the city. Narratives of failure and decline have supported this transformation, while they fail to grasp the living and working realities of Eleonas' users. The wastepicker markets—*agoras of waste*—that settled in the area facilitate various expressions of urban space appropriation, with the market actors claiming resources such as public space and solid waste in order to support their livelihoods. I thus ask in which ways urban space appropriation is manifested through trading practices at the wastepicker markets of Eleonas, in the background of urban restructuring processes, displacement and marginalization. I argue that this expression of space appropriation, in the context of large scale urban redevelopment projects, constitutes an act of commoning. This happens as a contestation of imposed plans that are defined by hegemonic understandings of the residual in the city, by Eleonas' users who, through their actions, resist being treated as passive subjects. By highlighting this topic, I aim to amplify the acting subjects' perspectives and realities.

Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit Phänomenen der urbanen Raumaneignung auf den *Wastepicker* (Abfallsammler:innen)-Märkten von Eleonas, Athen. Die Geschichte der Abfallsammler:innen in Athen ist geprägt von Verdrängung und Vertreibung aus dem Stadtzentrum und wurde durch die Umsiedlung der Märkte in das Gebiet von Eleonas markiert. Eleonas wurde in den letzten dreißig Jahren zum Gegenstand von Degradierung und urbaner Umstrukturierungsprozesse, blieb aber dennoch der produktive Kern der Stadt. Narrative des Scheiterns und des Niedergangs haben diese Transformation unterstützt, während sie die Lebens- und Arbeitsrealitäten der Nutzer:innen von Eleonas nicht erfassen. Die Müllsammler:innenmärkte, die sich in der Gegend angesiedelt haben, ermöglichen verschiedene Ausdrucksformen der Aneignung städtischen Raums, wobei die Marktakteur:innen Ressourcen wie den öffentlichen Raum und Abfälle für sich beanspruchen, um ihren Lebensunterhalt zu bestreiten. Ich frage daher nach der Art und Weise, wie sich urbane Raumaneignung durch Handelspraktiken auf den Müllsammler:innenmärkten von Eleonas vor dem Hintergrund von städtischen Umstrukturierungsprozessen, Verdrängung und Marginalisierung manifestiert. Ich behaupte, dass dieser Ausdruck der Raumaneignung im Kontext groß angelegter Stadtentwicklungsprojekte einen Akt des commoning darstellt. Dies geschieht als Anfechtung auferlegter Pläne, die durch hegemoniale Auffassungen vom urbanen *Rest* definiert sind, durch die Nutzer:innen von Eleonas, die sich durch ihre Aktionen dagegen wehren, als passive Subjekte behandelt zu werden. Durch die Behandlung dieses Themas ziele ich darauf ab, die Perspektiven und Realitäten der handelnden Subjekte hervorzuheben.

Table of contents

06	1. Introduction	74	4. Pazaría: the case of Eleonas' wastepicker markets
06	1.1 Research interest	75	4.1 Network of actors: visitors, unions and interview partners
07	1.2 Research questions and structure of the thesis	75	1. Profile of wastepicker unions active in Eleonas
09	1.3 Research design and reflection of methods	78	2. Informants and interview partners: profiles
16	2. Athens & Eleonas: spatial context	79	3. Roma presence in Eleonas and on the market grounds
18	2.1 <i>Ελαιώνας, πεπτικό σύστημα της Αθήνας; Eleonas, digestive apparatus of Athens? Urban development of Athens in relation to Eleonas</i>	82	4. Clubbers, dandies, day laborers–market personalities
18	1. «Athens is a child of the exclusion of refugee towns» ¹ : Historical urban development of Athens	88	4.2 <i>Το παζάρι πρέπει να είναι στο ιστορικό κέντρο the bazaar has to be in the historical center</i> ⁵ –Chronology of displacement and market growth
22	2. «It was the houses that created the city and not the other way round» ² : Self-made, unauthorized building and its heritage	91	1. Monastiraki, Thissio, Psyri (pre-2004)
24	3. Athens today	93	2. The Korean market era–Keramikos (2004-2012)
27	2.2 <i>From olive grove to waste land</i> –Historical urban development of Eleonas	94	3. Eviction from Keramikos (2012)
27	1. Becoming agricultural land	96	4. Moving to Eleonas, Iera Odos 94 and surroundings (2012-2014)
32	2. Industrialization	99	5. Second move in Eleonas– <i>Allilengýi Market, Agiou Polykarpou 95 (2014-2016)</i>
34	3. Residential aspects and de-industrialization	101	6. Eviction from Agiou Polykarpou 95 (2016)
35	4. Demographics, economy and employment	104	7. Spreading into several locations in Eleonas (2016-present)
43	2.3 <i>Ό,τι δεν χωράει ή δεν είναι επιθυμητό αλλού, ρίχνεται στον Ελαιώνα Everything that does not fit or is not desirable elsewhere is being thrown into Eleonas</i> ³ –Urban restructuring processes	112	4.3 <i>Ήταν χωματερή και το κάναμε σαράι It was a dump and we made a sarai out of it</i> ⁶ –Turning Eleonas' contested land into a bottom-up trading field
43	1. Public administration and urban pressure	112	1. Defending claimed spaces: the market struggles
48	2. Institutional perspectives and regulatory attempts	118	2. Resistance, encroachment and space appropriation
50	3. Big investments, contested projects. <i>Double Regeneration Plan Votanikos/Alexandras</i>	121	3. Relation with authorities, dependency and autonomy
55	4. Urban decay. Rhetoric of failure and decline	132	4.4 Elements of trading spaces and commoning practices
56	5. «στον αστερισμό των αστικών αναπλάσεων/in the solar constellation of urban regeneration» ⁴ : Rent gap and gentrification	132	1. Wastepickers' strategies of survival
60	3. Markets, wastepickers, unions: socio-spatial context	133	2. Marketscape characteristics
61	3.1 Of commons and markets	156	3. Architectural elements of the marketplaces
62	3.2 Other markets, informality and the Greek paradigm	166	4. Cadastre of marketplaces
63	3.3 Urban street markets in the Greek context	178	4.5 <i>Μας βλέπουν σαν σκουπίδια They see us as garbage</i> ⁷ . Challenging hegemonic narratives
67	3.4 Introducing the actors: Wastepicking as necessity and as profession	178	1. Wastepickers' self-definition and opposition to heteronomy
67	1. Wastepicking	181	2. Of Gods and Virtues – orientalist discourses in the context of Eleonas' wastepicker markets
68	2. Wastepickers	183	3. Conflict and negotiation
71	3. Wastepicker unions	184	4. Visions and self-determination
		186	4.6 Summary
		187	5. Epilogue
		192	6. Appendix
		192	Bibliography
		201	List of figures
		202	Glossary

1 (Koubis et al. 2002: 70)

2 (Koubis et al. 2002: 76f)

3 Website of the Citizen's Committee for the Rescue of Eleonas (elaionas.wordpress)

4 (insider.gr 2021)

5 (Magalios 2019).

6 (Vahtet 2016 in avgi.gr)

7 (Vahtet 2018)

1. Introduction

«Οὐ σύ με λοιδορεῖς, ἀλλ' ὁ τόπος» (Αἴσωπος)

“It is not thou who mockest me, but the roof on which thou art standing” (Aesop)¹

The hunting wolf in the Aesopian tale finds comfort in the thought that not his prey is mocking him, but the place—the roof on which the little goat found shelter. It bares the simple meaning that sometimes the circumstances, the topos, allow for one to act superior and presumptuous towards another, which in fact are more proficient and able². This myth was told to me by a wastepicker in Eleonas. The storyteller was describing how the fables’ moral and particularly identifying with the wolf—in this case representing the struggling individual that is mocked by the coincidentally powerful—is giving him strength in daily life situations. However, when translated to the context of the daily struggle at the marketplaces of Eleonas, what does this reveal about the topos we were standing at?

The multiple possible readings of the title *Agoras of Waste* go along with manifold understandings of the topic of this thesis, the case of the wastepicker markets of Eleonas, Athens, as places of urban space appropriation. Originally, *Agorá/Αγορά* was the open place of assembly in ancient times and has been understood as a symbol of a space that facilitates negotiations and conflict, where debate happens, announcements are made, and decisions are discussed. Besides this, it signified also the physical marketplace of the ancient polis. Even today, in Modern Greek the same word defines the open-air or housed marketplace of a city. *Agoras of waste* are then quite literally the markets of waste, but they are also spaces of conflict and negotiation, contest and solidarity.

1.1 Research interest

I encountered the wastepicker markets of Eleonas for the first time in 2016, at a time of climax of migratory flows with Greece being a hub for refugees on their journey towards wealthier countries of the global North. While studying the refugee housing situation, I had the opportunity to accompany a friend to his workplace at the Eleonas refugee camp. On the way, I stumbled upon a sign of the wastepicker union *Allilengýi*³ that welcomed visitors to one of the first trading grounds of Eleonas, at that time adjacent to the refugee settlement. The sign was striking and packed with symbols, including three flags (the Greek one, a flag of the Orthodox Church and one of the European Union), a black-and-white image of two men shaking hands and a depiction of the Roma wheel framed by the typical colors of the Romani flag (green-blue). Following caption completed the image: “It is a wheel that turns—Roma and non-Roma” (Ρόδα είναι και γυρίζει—Ρομά και μη Ρομά). I was intrigued by that image and the promises of the space it was making.

After returning to the area for a studio excursion in 2017⁴, I realized that the market I had previously encountered was evicted and instead various market spaces had sprouted in other locations of Eleonas. A market is, according to Sophie Watson, a site of “[...] social association and inclusion, enacted through sharing a space not specifically designated for a social purpose, but which nevertheless

functions as such” (Watson 2010: 1589). In this context, Watson speaks of the «magic of the marketplace» which perhaps best sums up the captivating first impression I had of the Eleonas bazaars. I wondered how in this seemingly remote and unwelcoming environment of Eleonas such a messy, but captivating, bustling marketplace could sprout. The traces of eviction from the previous market site raised questions related to the limitations and possibilities of appropriation of urban space by marginalized groups and individuals.

In this sense, my motivation for this thesis was sparked by the observation of acts of urban space appropriation at the wastepicker markets of Eleonas⁵ paired with the experience of Athens’ urban transformation in the late 2010s⁶. Wastepicker markets belong to the most dynamic sources of social life in Eleonas while substantially supporting the livelihoods of an important number of vendors and customers alike, attracting some thousands of people each weekend from all over the region and beyond. Appropriative practices – understood as acts of commoning – unfold on the grounds of Eleonas through the wastepicker markets while resources such as public space and solid waste are understood as commons.

1.2 Research question and structure of the thesis

In the context of this thesis I ask in which ways urban space appropriation is manifested through trading practices at the wastepicker markets of Eleonas, in the background of urban restructuring processes, displacement and marginalization.

First, a brief overview of the thesis structure will be given. In order to grasp the various complexities in which wastepickers’ trading practices activate space appropriation processes, I start with a chapter on the specific urban context of Athens and in particular Eleonas as the hosting field of the wastepicker bazaars. In chapter 2.1, I will focus on the continuities of unauthorized building and space appropriation that are inscribed in the urban development of Athens, while, at the closing of the chapter, I will illustrate an image of the contemporary state of the city. In chapter 2.2, I will link this background to the various phases of Eleonas’ urban development from sacred olive grove, agricultural land, and industrialized terrain to contemporary *waste* land. The overview of this historical development will be rendered on the base of Eleonas’ attributes, like residential and demographic aspects, which will be further discussed. Next, in 2.3, I will address the topics of urban restructuring and the institutional approaches on regulation that shaped the area since the 1980s and 1990s. Key aspects of the main urban redevelopment project affecting the area where the wastepicker markets later grew, the Votanikos/Alexandras *Double Regeneration* plan, will be outlined. In addition, in chapter 2.3, I will highlight narratives of failure and decline that further strengthened and supported calls for the urban transformation of the area. Last, I will address how abandonment and devaluation generate a rent gap and the right conditions for urban redevelopment through investment in terms of real estate and large projects. These overlap with the actual uses of the marketplaces, greatly influencing the wastepickers’ base of existence. By the end of the second chapter, one will be possible to imagine how, in this specific socio-historical and spatial context, non-regulated, unauthorized uses became a fundamental element of Eleonas’ everyday living and working reality.

⁵ In this thesis I will indiscriminately use all of the following terms in order to describe the market context of Eleonas: market (singular), markets (plural), bazaar/bazaars, pazar (as in Rom Pazar)/pazari/pazarla. This is due to the specific spatial characteristics and structure of the markets and because of the liquid boundaries of Eleonas’ marketscape, which is further highlighted in chapter 4.

⁶ A city whose urban spaces were deeply shaped by the harsh economic measures that were taken in the preface of the financial crisis. The Greek economic crisis that followed the global recession of 2008, was confronted by the government with austerity measures as imposed by several “memorandums of agreement” between the Greek state and its lenders (IMF, EU and the ECB). It was a prolonged state that affected not only the economy but also social cohesion, shaking up meanings and processes that weave together what can broadly be labeled as “Greek everyday reality”. (Crisis-Scape 2014: 7)

¹ Townsend 1871: 47ff.

² „Time and place often give the advantage to the weak over the strong” (Townsend 1871: 48)

³ Greek for Solidarity, cf. Glossary in appendix.

⁴ Dealing with the topic of urban transformation processes in Eleonas, supervised by Christoph Luchsinger and Maria Oikonomou at the department of urban planning at TU Wien.

In chapter 3, aspects of (urban street) markets as the socio-spatial context of the thesis' case will be highlighted. First, in 3.1, I will elaborate on the relation between urban commons and street markets, leading over to an account of informality in urban markets, which I connect to the Greek paradigm of Eleonas. In 3.3, an overview of the outdoor market landscape in the Greek urban context will be given. I will offer insights in the structure of the popular market typology of *Laiki Agora* while relating these to the form and structure of Eleonas' *Agoras* of waste. What the practice of wastepicking is really about, and where and when it occurs, will be outlined in chapter 3.4. Further, I will introduce the figure of the urban wastepicker as a key-actor of the markets, and their organizational bodies, the wastepicker unions.

Completing the contextual chapters, I move on to the main analytical body of the thesis, chapter 4. In chapter 4.1, I will pick up where the sketching of the wastepicker markets' actors from chapter 3 ended, albeit in a more localized account. The profiles of wastepicker unions active in Eleonas will be highlighted (4.1.1) and my main dialogue partners will be introduced (4.1.2). I will further emphasize on the role and relevance of Roma people for Eleonas and continuities regarding their presence on its grounds, while addressing multi-layered mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination (4.1.3). Finally, I will illustrate the profile of market visitors and customers as part of the actor web of the wastepicker markets (4.1.4).

In chapter 4.2, I will offer a comprehensive timeline of displacement and parallel market growth between 2004 and the present, connecting this process with knowledge gained in chapter 2 about urban restructuring processes in Eleonas, and their relevance for the eventual rooting of the wastepicker markets in the area. I will further show that repression and displacement from central urban spaces shaped the history of the wastepickers and marginalized people of Eleonas. However, harassment by the ruling authorities (departments of the Municipality of Athens, the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Development and Investment, State and Municipal Police) and de novo displacement legitimized by the wastepickers' attributed illegality did not stop after the markets moved from the center to Eleonas. Yet, as I highlight in 4.3, wastepickers resist being treated as passive subjects through their actions and struggles of defending newly claimed spaces (4.3.1). Further illustrated in this chapter are the ways in which market actors express their resistance, both silently by encroaching on common resources such as public space and solid waste, and boldly, demanding recognition through wastepicker unions and their alliances. In order to fully grasp this process, I will discuss Asef Bayat's concepts of quiet encroachment and non-movements, and bold encroachment as outlined by Tom Gillespie, connecting them with urban space appropriation in the case of Eleonas (4.3.2). Finally, I will illustrate the complexities of relations between wastepickers and local governments, the condition of dependency and the wish for autonomy, and amongst wastepicker associations (4.3.3). At this point, it will become clear that wastepickers autonomously shape their base of existence through their bazaars, encroaching on resources, producing new commons while quietly or boldly resisting further displacement. Various strategies of survival and appropriation emerge through these actions, and histories of conflict, negotiation and solidarity are inscribed on the ground of the wastepicker bazaars of Eleonas.

In chapter 4.4, I will address wastepickers' strategies of survival (4.4.1) before outlining marketscape characteristics on an urban scale (4.4.2) and concrete examples of architectural elements on the scale of the individual market sites (4.4.3). These are highlighted as relevant for appropriative practices manifesting at the marketplaces. In the last part of chapter 4.4, profiles of major bazaars will be sketched, while examples for the characteristics described previously will be given (4.4.4). The chapter is accompanied by photographic documentation related to the above topics.

Finally, in chapter 4.5, I will discuss wastepickers' self-representation and opposition to external definition (4.5.1) and address the issue of orientalist discourses in the context of the wastepicker markets (4.5.2). In conclusion, conflict and negotiation in the context of wastepickers' relation with authorities will be addressed (4.5.3). Finally I will link these topics with wastepickers' demands and visions

in the sense of a future envisioning of the wastepicker markets (4.5.4). At last, in the epilogue, I will return to challenges of today and final words by my dialogue partners in an open-ended conclusion of this thesis.



Right: Top to bottom.

Sign announcing the wastepicker market Allilengyi in 2016, reading "The association of wastepickers 'the Solidarity'(Allilengyi) and the union welcome you to our bazaar", and in smaller letters "Sunday".

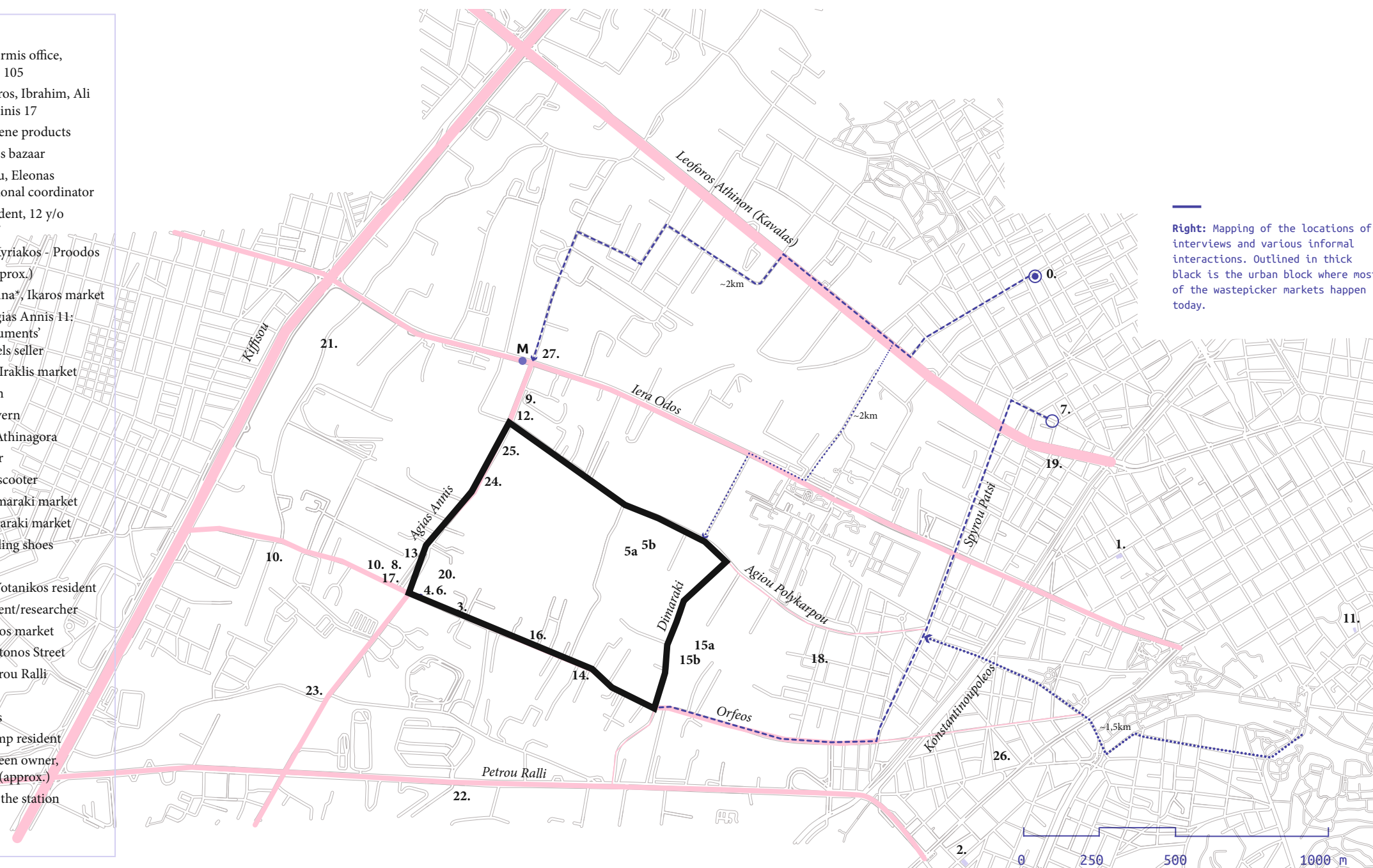
The same corner in 2019. Visible is the sheet metal extension of the surrounding wall of the in the meantime expanded refugee settlement.

1.3 Research design and reflection of methods

Interested in the ways in which appropriative practices manifest in the trading spaces of Eleonas, I started developing the topic of my thesis intuitively long before deciding on it, since 2016/17, as I presented in the beginning of this chapter. From today's perspective, this corresponds with the process of empirical case analyses, which start from the observation of a phenomenon in order to consequently formulate concrete research questions. My approach was intuitive and non-linear, resulting to multiple loops and revisions of the thesis objectives with subsequent adaptations of main questions and hypotheses.

Because of my personal-familial ties to Greece and Athens, I was in the city at least two times a year. Visiting the marketplaces of Eleonas and keeping track on the changes became routine. The constant back and forth between Athens and Vienna allowed me to obtain a spherical image on the dynamism of the phenomenon, learn about the dynamics between the marketplaces' actors, while being able to reflect on it in the times of absence. The constant transformation and reproduction of spaces was remarkable and I kept notes: which markets were new? What has been left behind? What has been added

0. Own home
 1. Kamper Vahtet Ermis office, Megalou Alexandrou 105
 2. Ertzan, Raif, Spyros, Ibrahim, Ali Proodos office, Alkminis 17
 3. Mrs. Eleni*, hygiene products
 4. Spyros at Proodos bazaar
 - 5a. Christos Stefanou, Eleonas refugee camp educational coordinator
 - 5b. Arin*, camp resident, 12 y/o Agiou Polykarpou 87
 6. Spyros, Kostas, Kyriakos - Proodos
 7. Spyros' street (approx.)
 8. Aggeliki* & Marina*, Ikaros market
 9. Encounters at Agias Annis 11: Ice cream man, instruments' seller, watches & jewels seller
 10. Dino*, guard at Iraklis market
 11. Group discussion with Spyros at the tavern
 12. Canteen owner Athinagora
 13. Guard on scooter
 14. Market-goer on scooter
 - 15a. Trader (f) at Dimaraki market
 - 15b. Trader (m), Dimaraki market
 16. Man with car selling shoes
 17. Two clubbers
 18. Lady with dog, Votanikos resident
 19. Nikos, PhD student/researcher
 20. Mr. Ilias*, Proodos market
 21. Coffee owner Plutonos Street
 22. Coffee owner Petrou Ralli
 23. Priest in church
 24. Boy with samosas
 25. Street vendor, camp resident
 26. Mrs. Anna*, canteen owner, in front of her home (approx.)
 27. Lady selling near the station
- * Pseudonymized



Right: Mapping of the locations of interviews and various informal interactions. Outlined in thick black is the urban block where most of the wastepicker markets happen today.

or removed? This early material proved to be highly valuable later when my interest solidified in the decision to author this thesis.

During a three-month research stay, I had the opportunity of a constant presence at the markets and to carry out on-site research not only during the vacation season (normally the time I would visit Athens). I made use of a scholarship, granted by TU Wien for short-term research stays, for the period between December 2019 and February 2020. In Athens, I actively participated at the markets and interacted with the community while establishing links and developing (friendly) relations to certain actors. As part of my methodological palette in the sense of a multi-method approach, I started documenting the dialogues with market visitors and different social actors (like guards and traders) recording audio memos, or keeping notes. I held semi-structured interviews with representatives from wastepicker unions (atomized: Ermis, collective: Proodos), and one scheduled with an employee of the Eleonas refugee camp together with one of his students, a teenage resident of the camp, who joined spontaneously. I also had stationary and walk-along (or ride-along) discussions with a number

of casual market-goers and traders. I would often use a bicycle to move around the markets because of the long distances, but also because depending on the mode of transportation, different types of interactions were possible. The oral focus was intentional, since one impetus for the thesis was to amplify the voices of the markets' actors. I further analyzed press reports on the markets and Eleonas, and researched already existing interviews with wastepickers to complement my original material. Additionally, I documented changes at the overall market area between 2017 and mid-2020 and collected spatial data.

When planning my stay in Athens, I considered finding an accommodation in proximity to Eleonas and the markets. I assumed – correctly, as it turned out – that due to the social geography of Athens, in the adjacent neighborhoods of the city's western districts the density of traders and market regulars would be higher. By staying near, the chances of getting in contact with community members off-market and meeting relevant discussants increased. I ended up staying in Akademia Platonos, my home was some ten-minute bike-ride from Eleonas metro station. As I found out during the collective interview with Proodos, one

member of the union lived close to my flat and we later often met and talked in the street in front of his house. During the subsequent weeks, I intensified my presence at the marketplaces that I visited each weekend. I spent most time at Proodos market, where I was welcomed as a friendly habitu . My contacts grew during that time. I further took part in events of casual socialization (like joint lunch, coffee breaks, get-togethers etc.) within the structures of Proodos. I kept returning to this particular market site each week, usually at the end of the market day when I had checked on other locations before.

With the help of my interview partners, I gained access to valuable material concerning the markets, like a hard copy of Marina Danezi's film "Scavengers Union" (filmed 2011), a rare portrait of Ermis union, various print material and other relevant items from the markets. Relevant Greek language works on Athens and Eleonas I found at the central municipal library of Athens and the library of the NTUA Architecture department.

Parallel to my weekly presence at the marketplaces, I established contacts in and around the markets, resulting in links to actors from the broader context of the wastepicker markets, such as Christos Stefanou, an educational coordinator at the Eleonas refugee camp and market regular. In January 2020 I arranged an in-length interview with Stefanou and Arin⁷, a 12-year old resident of the camp, whose family frequents the wastepicker markets and who joined the interview by chance. On February 16, 2020, I witnessed and documented the police crackdown on the impromptu traders at Agias Annis Street, resulting in tons of confiscated wares and fines of thousands of euros.

Reflection of methods

Inductive approach

In determining the topic of my thesis, I soon became aware that doing qualitative empirical urban research in a location that I am not permanently living requires an open approach and constant re-evaluation of the tools being used. An inductive approach thus characterizes the structure and framework of this work. Inductive research can be generalized as "learning-by-doing", meaning that the researcher departs from observations in the field, making empirical generalizations in order to develop hypotheses and a theoretical explanation or conclusion (Bernard 2011: 7).

Time and space

The selected methods were constantly re-evaluated in a back and forth between on-site research and theoretical analysis, framed by the specific Athens/Vienna time-space continuum. A period of reflection (Vienna) followed each on-site visit (Athens), eventually leading back to a phase of planning and preparation. This on-off contact with the site and the research subject influenced the way the analysis of material was later carried out. In some ways, this circular motion both impeded the overall process (in the sense that each "brake" prolonged the process and bared the risk of drifting away from the topic) and added quality and depth to the findings (offering enough time and distance to reflect and think about the collected material and what was perhaps still missing). Additionally, I was able to witness major changes at the markets and to steadily get acquainted with its actors.

Strategic spatial considerations, during e.g. my stay in Athens as part of the KUWI short-term scholarship, played an important role for the fruitfulness of the field research. Choosing a flat in a residential area close to the markets and in proximity to several union offices turned out pivotal for establishing a network of relevant contacts and finding potential interview partners. As it happens, one vocal board member of "Proodos" union lived in my neighborhood and in the course of a few weeks we developed a friendly relation. This allowed for insights into more private areas of everyday life besides the marketplaces. Of course, cautious handling of private information was required in this situation.

⁷ Pseudonymized.

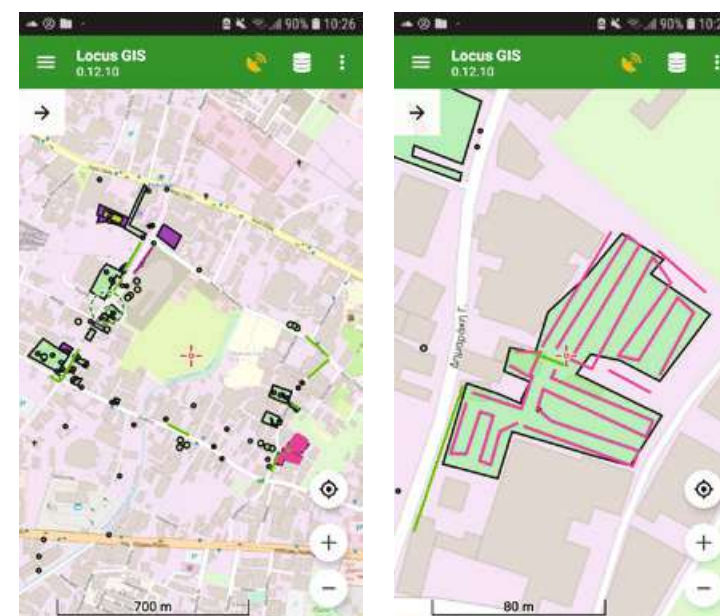
Fluid and eclectic

Since the trading activity and space appropriation at the markets of Eleonas is a dynamic phenomenon characterized by constant change, the applied methods equally required certain fluidity. The resulting eclectic set of methods includes: document analysis of plans, decrees and existing research on Eleonas; literature review on commons/everyday life/informality from a critical (de-colonial) perspective; field notes, participatory observation; go-alongs/walking & talking, non-structured interviews with wastepickers and traders and semi-structured interviews with union representatives; mapping and cartographic illustrations.

[Document Analysis] Analysis of planning documents and the literature review were parts of the research that were possible to be done from a distance. Some material only had limited access over the university network of the National Technical University of Athens, its library I used during my KUWI-Scholarship. Most of information/literature however was freely accessible on the web. Base maps for the area of interest had to be drawn with open source data from Open Street maps, cadmapper and other online map services, as well as the GIS phone app Locus. [Interviews] Regarding informal talks and unstructured interviews, I drafted a general methodical framework but did not hold tight on it, leaving room for events simply to unfold. This allowed for spontaneous interactions like e.g. when market visitors offered a scooter ride or car lift down the street, or when joining my interview partners for lunch after a Sunday at the market. During such situations valuable information could be gathered. In some cases I was granted permission to spontaneously record a discussion, in other situations I kept memory notes afterwards in form of text or audio.

[Interviews] Three hour-long, semi-structured narrative interviews were planned in advance and carried out in the spaces of the respective interviewees. Semi-structured means that I asked my interlocutors general questions I had prepared but allowed the discussion to be driven by the replies. In narrative interviews, work is done inductively and the researcher ideally enters the process without scientific concepts about the subject areas of the interview. Concrete and clear questions can prove to be narrative inhibiting, while open, not so clearly formulated questions can open up a free space in which the interview partners can introduce the topics relevant to themselves.

In planned interview settings I clearly stated my position as student and urban researcher and briefly explained the aim of my work. This was not always the case in the informal, spontaneous talks with



Right: Screenshots of the Locus GIS app interface. Left, the overall market area capture and right, a close up of Dimaraki market.

traders and visitors. Either because the interaction was too brief and an introduction from my side was not possible, or because I assessed it would inhibit the discussion or intimidate my interlocutor. This was a challenge because in such cases the researcher's own biases might influence the interaction. At the market site where I spent most of my time (Proodos) my role was transparent.

[Maps] Cartography as a method played a significant role in interpreting the urban environment and the phenomena unraveling. Leaning on insights from urban ethnography, "involving mappings" developed, which were changing and adapting with each of my visits. The idea behind this tool from urban ethnography is that the researcher is also map author, while remaining involved in urban space and its social, cultural and political complexity (Genz 2018). I should add here that I also considered doing participatory mappings, in order to include my interviewees' and market actors' perspectives on space appropriation in the urban space of Eleonas – it however turned out difficult to organize and carry through without losing the effortless spontaneity of interactions. Eventually I assessed it as more valuable to invest the time in the personal talks and interactions on-site, which I also documented. Taking up an intermediary role means that the researcher places a lens of interpretation already at the early phases of data collection.

I used the phone application *Locus GIS* in order to document specific coordinates on-site and locations of points of interests, encounters and other relevant information that were later processed into base maps and cartographic illustrations. Following a categorization system that I prepared for this purpose, I kept notes and collected further material on infrastructures and space-enhancing architectures. Documentation of the spaces was carried out through digital and analogue photography and video recordings that have a special value as they best capture the rhythms, sounds, colors and general constant transformations of the markets.

Interpretation and evaluation

Both by documenting agency and by translating language/expression, I placed myself in between the acting subjects and the original meaning/intention of their actions. No translation is free from the translators' own filter and can never be considered objective (Benjamin 1923: 9). For this reason, Greek original citations were included wherever possible. It was not possible in some of the informal talks and settings where I had to rely on notes and memory records.

There is a mutual dependency between data collection and data evaluation. The evaluation of data already begins with the documentation of interviews, as this also involves selection, categorization, and interpretation. (Kowal/O'Connel 2004) Transcriptions were made in *easytranscript*, an open source software. After having collected and reviewed some of my material, I decided not to transcribe each interview verbatim. Instead, I listened to the audio recordings and wrote down relevant quotes, also noting where in the conversation certain topics arise. This was done in order to deliberately return and collect more material from the recording when needed.

Ethical aspects

Ethical considerations played a role at the display of maps and visual representations of the market sites. It was a challenge to find a middle ground between two contradicting positions by wastepickers about what amount of visibility is right for the acting subjects and the spaces they inhabit or work in. One argument embraced by part of the community (e.g. by the unions), is demanding visibility and recognition from the authorities as a political standpoint; whereas another position suggests that a certain grade of anonymity is essential for the toleration of the trading activities in the area (e.g. individual street traders) (cf. 4.2). Each map included in the thesis was accordingly evaluated; wherever needed, sensible information was obscured.

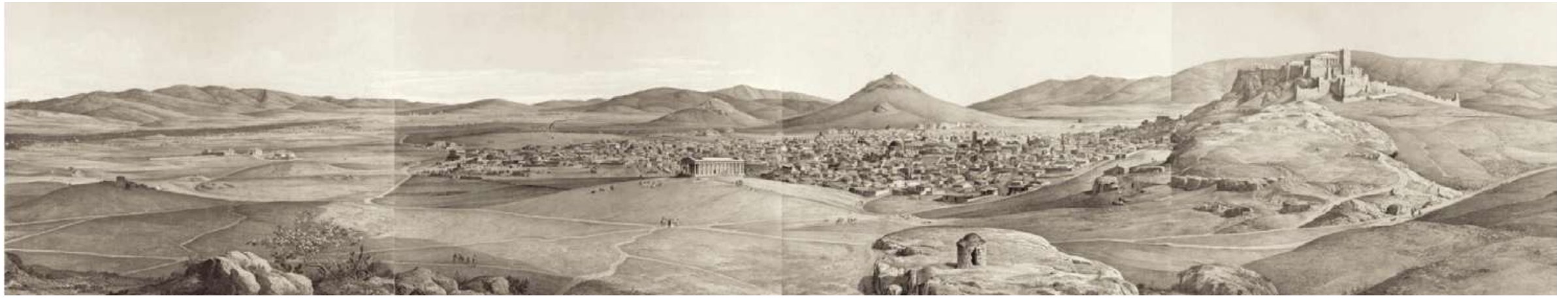


Right: Interview spaces, top to bottom.

Ermis office, union president Kamper Vahtet, 2018.

Teacher's office at the container camp/refugee settlement Eleonas, 2020.

Proodos office, "wall of fame". Important moments for the union, 2019.



ACROPOLIS - VOTANIKOS

ΑΚΡΟΠΟΛΗ - ΒΟΤΑΝΙΚΟΣ

[...] / Running from her feet / oil in Votanikos / with the water / copper-headed Madonna... / Votanikos! / A sapling here and there / Grows in the chaos / then the shack, the garage / the dark-haired mechanic / smudge of a halo / beyond, two lettuces / a hairdresser / and the wild buses / tearing up the air.

Spineless, blurred / the charm of now / little surprises in the turns / magic of ugliness / Votanikos / Why so much joy in nothing? / Where had I suffered? / I was in the belly again / smelling the surroundings / before life became a ghost / before I was torn from the meat / and from my umbilical cord hanging / high in light and air / an acropolis.

(Katerina Aggelaki Rooke 2014¹)

[...] / Τρέχουν απ'τα πόδια της / πετρέλαια στο Βοτανικό / με το νερό / χαλκομανίες μαντόνας... / Βοτανικός! / Ένα δεντράλλιο δω κι εκεί / φυτρώνει μες στο χάος / μετά η παράγκα, το γκαράζ / ο μηχανικός μελαχρινός / μουντζούρα φωτοστέφανο / πιο πέρα δυο μαρούλια / μια κομμώτρια / και τα λεωφορεία αγριωπά / να σχίζουν τον αέρα.

Ασπόνδυλη, θολή / η γοητεία του τώρα / κουλουβάχατα / μικρές εκπλήξεις στις στροφές / μαγείες της ασχήμιας... / Βοτανικός / γιατί τόση χαρά στο τίποτα; / Που είχα υποφέρει; / Ήμουνα πάλι στην κοιλιά / εμύριζα τα γύρω / πριν φάντασμα γίνει η ζωή / πριν ξεκολλήσω από το κρέας / κι απ' το λώρο μου κρεμαστεί / ψηλά σε φως κι αέρα / μι' ακρόπολη.

Top: "Panorama von Athen", Ferdinand Stademann, ca. 1830. Right the Acropolis, Lycabettus hill in the middle and in front the temple of Hephaestus. Part of the Eleonas grove left in the distance.

Bottom: The same panorama in the window front of a convenience store, central Athens, 2020.

1 Excerpt. Original in Greek, translation by the author.

2. Athens & Eleonas: Spatial context

Acropolis-Votanikos: Greek poet Katerina Aggelaki-Rooke captures with her words the relationship of Athens to Votanikos and the greater area of Eleonas². Her verses transport an atmosphere that characterizes the dominant narrative for this decaying and often misunderstood district. Athens is a city whose past and present are constantly in a process of renegotiation – from glorious capital of the antiquity to provincial Ottoman town, to seat of the Bavarian King and again capital of modern Greece and regional metropolis. Eleonas has been the functional provider of goods and services throughout this time. It is a vital area that once fulfilled essential functions as common olive tree field of the ancient polis³, that today has become an arena for contested, and yet essential uses. Eleonas is seen by many as the “ugly” side, the “backyard” of the city – the “dirty” yet important innards of Athens that give birth to her bright sides, as implied in Aggelaki-Rooke’s poem. The metaphor of Eleonas as a vital but “often unappetizing” organ can be found in other sources too. In the syllabus of an urban design studio at TU Wien (2017/2018), Eleonas is compared to the digestive system that is indispensable for the functioning of the Athenian body: “The Eleonas district – originally an olive grove – is the infrastructural ‘digestive apparatus’ of Athens, located in the immediate vicinity of the historical center and a gigantic conversion area in the time horizon of the next five to twenty years.”⁴ In the following chapters I will examine the relation of Athens to Eleonas and look at the implications of such images on a macro-level, before moving on to the central point of this thesis which is the actual users and uses of the urban spaces of Eleonas in the context of wastepicker economies.

2.1 Ελαιώνας, πεπτικό σύστημα της Αθήνας; Eleonas, digestive apparatus of Athens? Urban development of Athens in relation to Eleonas

In order to set the frame for today, I will first outline the urban development of Athens over time, pointing to its role in the transformation of Eleonas and its socio-spatial context. Various layers of planning traditions that shape the city’s expansion will be illustrated. In chapter 2.1.2 I will continue by showing Athens’ background of autonomous self-made settlement and unauthorized building processes, discussing the relevance of this heritage for Eleonas in the present day. Finally, in 2.1.3 I will outline the contemporary state of Athens in the context of the financial and urban restructuring processes of the 21st century, pointing to conditions of crises and urban transformation as shaping factors of Eleonas’ development of uses.

2.1.1 «Athens is a child of the exclusion of refugee towns»⁵: Historical urban development of Athens

In its recent history, the city has rapidly grown into Greece’s largest urban center, becoming a haven for urban newcomers, opportunity-seekers and people chased by poverty or war, fostering manifold understandings and expressions of urban life. Since its establishment as Greece’s capital in 1834, Athens has undergone a series of major changes, that were linked to the arrival of displaced people, before growing into the buzzing metropolis of today. Everyday life in Athens can be termed postmigrational,

in the sense that it follows a socio-spatial order shaped by the experience of migration (Yildiz 2014). Athens would not be the same without the contribution of hundreds of thousands of migrants and their economies who left their imprint on the city with essential business infrastructures (Leontidou 2017). The long-lasting effects that popular land appropriation by refugees and migrants for working or living purposes had on the urban development of Athens will be illustrated in this chapter.

Greece was nearly four centuries (1458 to 1822 AD) part of the Ottoman Empire – a circumstance that fundamentally shaped the ways of urbanization and the town layouts of that time. Entering the 19th century, which was marked by significant revolutions and upheavals, Greece declared independence, established its own constitution in 1828, and became a kingdom under the reign of king Otto – the underage son of King Ludwig I of Bavaria. Otto chose Athens as his seat in 1834 and the Bavarian administration launched a series of adaptations for the new capital that radically disrupted the previous urban order. Monuments and heritage sites were selectively accentuated, while the new ruling class commissioned representative buildings in line with the neoclassical aspirations of that time, drastically changing the urban environment: “European neoclassicism emerged in the cityscape and in urban architecture, along with narratives about its Hellenic roots, which aimed at the reconciliation of Greek urban inhabitants with the imposed Bavarian administration and power” (Leontidou 2017⁶).

By the turn of the century, German and other western architects were heavily involved in the architectural and urban development of Greece’s urban centers⁷. The Greek vision of “keeping up, at all costs, with developments in Western Europe” was a leitmotif for urban planning, reproduced on the base of “wonder plans” and foreign expertise (Philippides 1999: 65-66). City planning followed the formation of a Greek national identity that was strongly based on distancing itself from Ottoman legacies such as the labyrinthine neighborhoods of the past, in Leontidou’s account, and moving closer to European modernism (Leontidou 2017). Despite the efforts for a cosmopolitan, European appeal, Athens remained a rather provincial small town at the end of the 19th century, with a slowly emerging industry and a tendency, so Leontidou, of becoming a “conflictual working-class city” (Leontidou 2017) that offered poor living conditions for its landless proletariat.

In the aftermath of World War I, the Greek-Turkish War and the events known as “Asia Minor Catastrophe” (1922)⁸ Athens will change dramatically. What followed these brutal conflicts and transformed the region and its inhabitants in intangible and everlasting ways was the so-called population exchange between the two countries – a forced migration of Christian and Muslim citizens. Greece received more than a million refugees at that time, while a massive influx of displaced people raised the population of Athens by more than a quarter million in a short period of time⁹. In 1928 the area that constitutes Athens today had seen a 75% increase in population compared to eight years before (Romanos 1969: 140). Refugees of Greek decent flocked into urban centers and either established settlements on the outskirts of the cities or were placed in temporary camps that later became suburbs. Parts of Eleonas, such as Markoni – which at that time was agricultural land – also served as reception grounds for the newly arrived (Tsadari 2019: 224). In Leontidou’s account of this narrative of Athenian history, the “slums of despair” of the impoverished working class gave way to “slums of hope” in the refugee shanty towns (Leontidou 2017). She argues that: “This is a paradox, since the violent relocation of refugees, instead of misery, inaugurated a period of creativity and substituted the ‘cities of silence’ with vivacious popular suburbs. The refugee inflow rendered the poverty pockets of the landless proletariat a minority in a city, which started expanding with popular self-built settlements and owner-occupation – even if in shacks and shanties” (ibid.).

2 The district of Votanikos is a part of Eleonas under the administration of the Municipality of Athens

3 Ελαιώνας/Eleonas literally *olive grove*.

4 Original in German: “Der Stadtteil Eleonas – ursprünglich ein Olivenhain – ist der infrastrukturelle Verdauungsapparat von Athen, in unmittelbarer Nähe des historischen Zentrums gelegen und eine gigantische Konversionsfläche im Zeithorizont der kommenden fünf bis zwanzig Jahren.” From the studio description “Eleonas Athen” by Christoph Luchsinger and Maria Oikonomou (TU Wien 2017/2018, TISS number 260.484)

5 (Koubis et al. 2002: 70)

6 <https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/slums-of-hope/>

7 E.g. Ludwig Wagner, 1908; Thomas Mawson, 1914 (Philippides 1999:66)

8 The destruction of Izmir and retreat of Greek troops that preceded the uprooting of the city’s Greek community.

9 Population of Athens in 1921: 473.000. In 1928: 801.622 inhabitants (Papagrigoriou/Papadaki et al. 2011:10)

«Athens became a city of refugees»

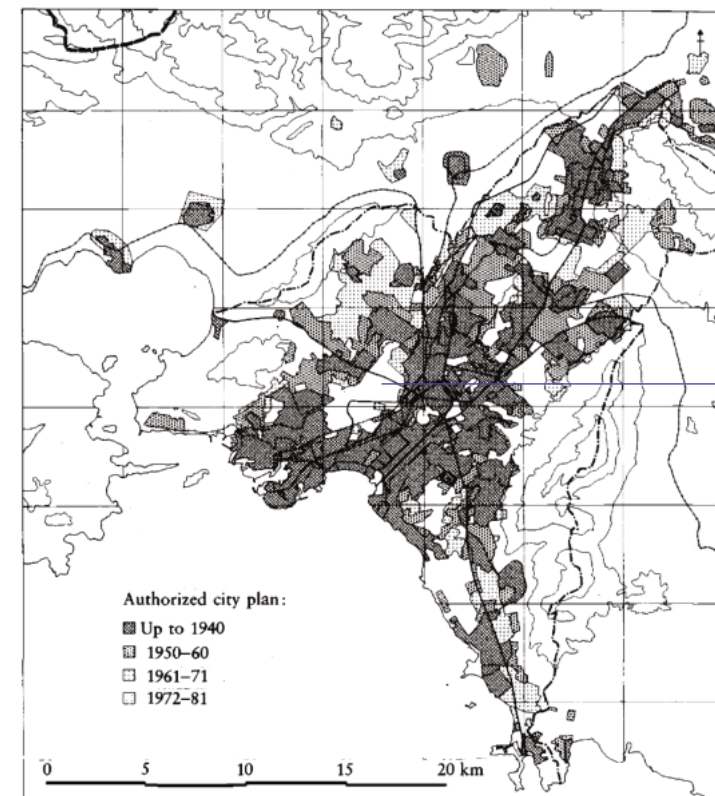
(Angelidakis 2017)

State-led centralized planning and social housing programs could not cover the needs of the displaced, and public authorities opted for a tolerant position on autonomous building activity. *Afthereta* – “unauthorized” buildings, as they would be called – made up a major part of the new refugee settlements, with authorities turning “[...] a blind eye to unauthorized construction, and then charging supplementary fees to allow such buildings to become legal” (Angelidakis 2017). Angelidakis states that the law on *afthereta* is “one of the most revised pieces of legislation in Greek law” (ibid.) with authorities periodically announcing the demolition of illegal buildings in order to eventually integrate them into town plans or bring them up to code, in exchange for a contribution by the owner in land or money (Angelidakis 2017; Papagrigoriou/Papadaki 2011:70). In cases where the lack of infrastructures in makeshift settlements, such as transport, roads or proper sewerage system, became urgent, the state was eventually forced to settle them in exchange for supplementary fees or contributions in land (cf. 2.3.2). This aspect is relevant for Eleonas in the sense that large parts of the area were affected by pending applications of town plans, which according to Greek law are realized through ‘Implementation Acts’ carried out by the Municipalities (Papagrigoriou/Papadaki 2011:70) (more on these aspects of urban development in Eleonas in chapter 2.3.2).

As a result of World War II and the Greek Civil War (1945–1949) new settlers from a devastated countryside moved to the city and established their homes in former refugee settlements that had already been integrated into the city plan. The population of Athens went up 140 times in a period of time where the total population of Greece increased approx. eleven times (1833 to the mid-1960s) (Romanos 1969: 139). Earlier settlements had a spontaneous and in essence anarchic character. New residents at first constructed elementary dwellings and later expanded them. Whole districts were created like that and gradually connected to the urban infrastructure (Philippides 1999). Sometimes they would occupy new areas, “often in empty and unsuitable locations in the urban fabric such as the beds of seasonal rivers or steep slopes” which led to the “formation of entire urban extensions on the west side of Athens, adjoining the industrial zone along the Kifissos River” (Philippides 1999: 68) – meaning Eleonas and its surroundings. Most of the residential enclaves in Eleonas were established in this way. According to Philippides this distribution caused a distinct socio-economic division in Athens’ population that remains until the present day (Philippides 1999: 68). Leontidou informs that between the years 1940-1970 about 450.000-500.000 people were housed illegally in Athens (Leontidou 1990:150).



According to Koubis/Moutsopoulos/Scoffier, the practice of exclusion of refugee towns from initial town plans nurtured unauthorized building and was in fact stimulated by the same authorities that ordered this exclusion, and which later oversaw the prohibition of illegal building: “illegal and legal building went hand in hand” (Koubis et al. 2002:70), shaping the urban environment in which Eleonas is inscribed.



Eleonas

Left: View over a former refugee settlement (Durguti/Neos Kosmos) in 1955. (Hans Gerber, ETH Bibliothek)

Right: Top to bottom. The labyrinthine layout of Athens before 1800. (Sébastien Fauvel, via Wikimedia Commons)

The expansion of the Greater Athens Plan, 1940-80. Eleonas is visible as blank spot in this depiction (Leontidou 1990: 150).

2.1.2 «It was the houses that created the city and not the other way round»¹⁰:

Self-made, unauthorized building and its heritage

«Athens has always developed through retrospective ‘legalization’ of already urbanized areas. This affords a continuity in the process of urban expansion in the two centuries of its modern history: the inclusion of areas into the city plan followed rather than preceded settlement.» (Leontidou 1990: 84)

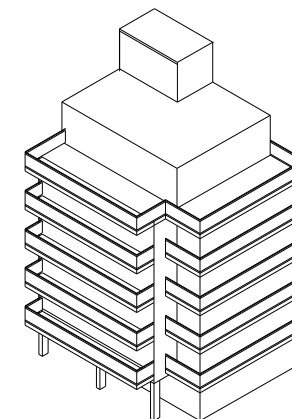
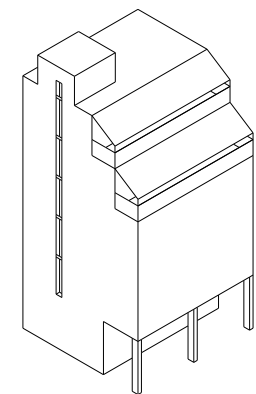
What was formed in this historical moment was a state of autonomy, self-made-ness and improvisation that in large measures defines the citizen-state relationship in Greece until today. Koubis/Moutsopoulos/Scoffier raise the thought, that the “illegal” building activity that characterizes Greek housing should not be seen solely as the negative effect of “a city pathology, as a nihilistic or cynical expression of modern Greek attitudes” (Koubis et al. 2002:70). “Illegality affirmed legality”, they state in relation to unauthorized building and argue that: “urban formation is merely an effect or the relationship that exists between citizens and the state”(ibid.:76f). The history of Athens, they conclude, “is a chronicle of how laws were perceived and how they were defied”(ibid.). Acute housing needs, according to Papagrigoriou/Papadaki: “were never satisfied by a regulated state interference” (Papagrigoriou/Papadaki et al. 2011: 15). At the same time, they state that in Athens, like other Greek cities, “urban development usually comes before planning.” (ibid: 18)

At the same period during the first half of the 20th century, when the massive influx of migrants shaped the appearance of Athens, the influence of modernism defined the development of the Athenian model of the apartment building: *Polykatoikia* (literally: multi-dwelling). A building no higher than six floors, developed in small plots by private contractors; it would soon dominate the Attic urban landscape (Dragonas 2014:7). Particularly favorable for this development was a legal, “quid pro quo” or “flats-for-land” system of exchange, supported by the state through tax benefits – *antiparochi*. This system made it possible for someone owning a small piece of land, but without the means to invest in it, to hand the property over to a developer (usually a small-scale construction business) who would develop it in exchange for an agreed number of apartments. The contractor – usually a small family business – would build a polykatoikia on it, giving part of the building to the land-owner and re-selling the rest of the apartments in share with the financial backer (Angelidakis 2017, Philippides 1999: 68). Wide areas of Athens were still growing under conditions of unauthorized construction, but the system of antiparochi fueled the city’s urbanization process towards the image we have today. Papagrigoriou and Papadaki note that after the act of implementation (integration into town plan) of formerly illegally claimed and built areas, they are usually being rapidly and densely populated, with residential development up until recently through the system of antiparochi (Papagrigoriou/Papadaki et al. 2011: 19).

Seven years of military dictatorship between 1967-1973 further strengthened private home ownership in the form of the polykatoikia (Angelidakis 2017). In 1971, the city had more than 2.500.000 inhabitants. Small-scale, individual-centered urban development based on the particular housing model decisively shaped the cityscape of Athens. In the meantime self-housing diminished with the introduction of control regulations on unauthorized construction. The population stabilized at about today’s level in the late 1980s, while another period of international migration emerged in the early 1990s. The suburbanization of the city, dysfunctional public and individual transport, and the environmental degradation became major problems in the last quarter of the 20th century (Pilippides 1999). Athens today continues to expand, mostly on its margins, while the central districts are shrinking. Unauthorized construction was deemed responsible for the capital’s malicious conditions related to urban sprawl and

environmentally damaging expansion, and was gradually restricted. But, as Philippides suggests: “The story of how Greek cities were designed is a lengthy list of initial layout plans, none of which were ever implemented – or at best were implemented sporadically, with infinite changes and revisions” (Philippides 1999: 65).

Concluding, I want to emphasize as well on the aspect of appropriation of public space as a central point in the described modes of urban development in Athens. Koubis et al. argue that: “Transgressing housing laws in order to acquire a roof over one’s head is equal to a strong or weak appropriation of public space. It is also a fundamental precondition so that there may arise a starting point for the creation of networks and infrastructures. Athens entirely fulfills this ontological precondition, on the basis of which this city is founded.” (Koubis 2002:76f) Eleonas, as the central space where the phenomena examined in this thesis unravel – appropriation of public space in the context of the area’s wastepicker markets – is an extraordinary example of how historical events, policy interventions and above all popular-led transformative processes and their multiple intersections affect the built and living environment. Through the brief historical outline in this chapter, it became clear how much the current image of Athens, as a space marked by experiences of migration and displacement, contested spaces and the constant designing, adapting, and discarding of plans and visions, is related to impactful events in the past and present of the city and shaped by its geographical and symbolic location at the borders of Europe. In the following chapter, I will discuss contemporary urban conditions of Athens in relation to Eleonas.



Bottom: Transformation of Athens' building stock with the *Polykatoikia* housing model and urban expansion through *Antiparochi*. Reinforced concrete roof slab in central Athens, 1950s (Dimitris Charisiadis, Benaki museum in lifo.gr).



10 (Koubis et al. 2002: 76f)

2.1.3 Athens today

Athens today is a regional metropolis of approximately 3,8 million inhabitants¹¹, so more than a third of Greece's overall 11 million population lives in the capital¹². By administrative terms, the Attica region comprises eight regional units¹³ while 95% of the region's population lives in the metropolitan area of Athens: a large urban agglomeration of Athens' central and peripheral districts together with the port-city of Piraeus. The Eleonas area is at the trilateral border between the Central and West Athens regional units and the Piraeus regional unit, at the junction where the basin's main water currents, Kifissos river and other smaller streams (which were essential for the area's former use as fields and agricultural land), flow towards the Faliron Bay Delta.

The city is crossed from east to west by one major regional highway, "Attiki Odos" (AO), the "backbone of the road network of Attica" (Kaparos/Skayannis 2015). This road connects the Athens airport to the East and the port-city of *Elefsina* to the West, and intersects with the national highway PATHE that links Patras, Athens (including the port of Piraeus through Kifissou Avenue) and Thessaloniki. The construction of the AO was part of the major infrastructure works that were planned and completed in the wake of the 2004 Olympic Games. Among these major projects were also the metro network with three lines and twenty stations and the new *Eleftherios Venizelos* international airport (ibid.).

Athens has undergone a series of large infrastructural upgrades in the recent decades, both in an effort to satisfy the needs of the growing metropolis and to adapt to the demands of the global market of urban competition in the age of neoliberal political agendas. The impact of such mega-projects for Athens and Eleonas can be more clearly understood through Dimitris Dalakoglou's discussion of the "[...] rapidly transformed ways that infrastructures are imagined in Greece" (Dalakoglou 2016:825). As he points out during the 1990s to mid-2000s the symbolic meaning of hard and soft infrastructures had shifted from "emblems of absolute materialization of development and progress [...]" to a symbol of political scandal [...] and eventually to a domain of social contestation in the 2010s" (ibid.). These processes of neoliberal development, which peaked around the 2004 Olympics and left deep traces in Athens' urban layout, permanently altered the social and political structures and processes of urban development as well as how it is perceived by society.

«Against this backdrop of spasmodic fragmentation, bureaucratic centralization and clientelism, the most prominent event that introduced neoliberal restructuring into planning was the 2004 Olympics. Ad hoc planning frameworks were implemented under a 'state of exception' for construction projects and redevelopments related to the Olympics, strengthening links between the central state and local business elites and international investors, and giving new impetus to clientelism.» (Alexandri 2018: 42)

Mega-infrastructures such as shopping malls, transport networks, etc., as part of urban re-development projects of a period of economic growth, had multi-layered effects on the city, Dalakoglou states. Both the exchange value of real estate as well as the symbolic value of certain parts of the city changed (Dalakoglou 2013: 29). Dalakoglou explains that at the same time as "new and renewed spaces" were emerging, parts of the city center were descending into "material decay"(ibid.). Further he refers to residential or commercial areas of the center where processes of suburbanization led the better-off classes to move away from the degraded center. Instead marginalized social groups took their place in



Right: Top to bottom.

Overview of the Athens' metropolitan area with major roads, Attiki Odos and PATHE highway. Outline of the Athens region (Athens basin) in blue, outline of Central Athens in black. (Stamen maps with text overlay by the author)

Repurposing of regional borders at the market spaces (Dinaraki bazaar)...

Traces of the past. Athens 2004 wall inscription in abandoned parking site, 2017.

¹¹ Elstat: <https://www.statistics.gr/el/2011-census-pop-hous>

¹² In 2018 the population density of Athens (10.436 inh/km²) was the second highest in Europe after Paris (21.033 inh/km²) (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCI/#?vis=nuts2.population&lang=en>)

¹³ North Athens, West Athens, Central Athens, South Athens, West Attica, East Attica, Piraeus, Islands

a process of “soft” socio-spatial segregation¹⁴ (ibid.:29). The change of value in the case of the central parts of Eleonas, albeit manifested through its distinct characteristics as (post-)industrial area, can be understood at the intersection of the processes described by Dalakoglou. A more in-depth account of the processes of devaluation that played a role in the urban development of Eleonas can be found in chapter 2.3.5.

Even though the unemployment rate in Attica is hitting almost 20%¹⁵, the capital is beyond doubt the number one source of employment in the country: 38,95% of Greece’s overall workforce is concentrated in Athens (eurostat¹⁶). High population density and a high unemployment rate while being the epicenter of employment for the country provide the demographic framework of Athens’ urban development.

The city has been facing increasing economic, social and political challenges since the Greek crisis of 2008, reinforced by global capitalist restructuring processes which can be traced back to transformations taking place in the 1980s and 1990s (Tsadari 2019:23). Sofia Tsadari, who researches spatial transformations in Eleonas in the era of crisis, points out that fundamental elements of the TI-NA¹⁷-logic of crisis management were the destruction of workers’ rights and the exploitation of public wealth in form of privatizations. In this context, Tsadari states, cities evolved into a “privileged field” of the promoted restructurings (Tsadari 2019:23). Saskia Sassen points out that within the contexts of shrinking economies and crisis: “[...] in our global modernity, we are seeing a surge of what are often referred to as primitive forms of accumulation” (Sassen 2015: 46). These primitive accumulations are no longer classic examples of earlier economies like the enclosure of common pastures, but rather: “[...] enclosure by financial firms of a country’s resources and citizen’s taxes, the repositioning of expanding stretches of the world as sites of extraction of resources, and the regearing of government budgets in liberal democracies away from social and workers’ needs” (ibid.). And yet, as Harvey emphasizes, even when it seems that the autonomy of agency of city dwellers is shrinking: “The human qualities of the city emerge out of our practices in the diverse spaces of the city even as those spaces are subject to enclosure, social control, and appropriation by both private and public/state interests” (Harvey 2012: 72). It is these contested and ever-changing contexts within which Athens evolves into a metropolis that comes close to Stavrides’ concept of the: “urban archipelago of enclosures” (Stavrides 2016: 16). Stavrides explains that the image of the urban archipelago “can be used to conceptualize spatial order (or non-order) as well as to interpret it. An emphasis on the chaotic aspect of urban space may be taken to correspond to images of unexplored or, even, untamed seas. Urban islands, in such a perspective, would be enclaves of order in the middle of urban chaos” (ibid.).

In the following chapter, I will outline the historical background and the social and morphological characteristics of Eleonas’ *islets*, existing in Athens’ *urban sea*; enclosures of commons, in the sense of resources such as public space and waste, and corresponding commoning practices (appropriation of space and discarded items) (cf. 4.3.2) will be discussed throughout the thesis. Further, I will connect the urban development of Athens that was outlined in chapter 2.1 with the processes taking place in Eleonas.

2.2 From olive grove to *waste land* Historical urban development of Eleonas

Athens is situated in the Attica basin, an urban topography pierced with multiple hills. Rare interruptions in the endless pattern of *polykatoikias* (cf. 2.1.3), are occasional patches of green, isolated tall buildings, parks, or uncovered surfaces; Eleonas is one of those rupturing exceptions. From the top of Lycabettus hill, facing west, the large area of almost 900 hectares is clearly visible and distinguishable from its surroundings. Even from a distance, one can sense that this part of the city – with its low-rise structures and undeveloped land, indicated by reflecting cladding roofs and its brown-grey colors – followed a different pattern of urban development. Eleonas has been a collector of controversial, “difficult” or “unwanted” uses for the past half century. The transitory character of the area, the site’s size, the low property value, and its proximity to the city center have made it a desired land for private investment and regulatory processes (cf. 2.3.3), which were however deemed repeatedly unsuccessful over time (cf. 2.3.4).

Before illustrating aspects of the planning framework for Eleonas in chapter 2.3, in the current chapter I will offer an overview of the historical urban development of the area. I will address arguments and reasons around the apparent failure of Eleonas’ regulatory attempts and draw connections between this aspect and the development of non-formal economic activities and especially trading within the context of the weekly wastepicker markets of Eleonas. I will further highlight the area’s character as a container of contested and sometimes contradictory uses, describing the current setting as a facilitator and catalyst of self-determined entrepreneurial activity. Despite, or perhaps because of, the area’s devaluation and state of decay (while at the same time being subjected to developmental pressures, cf. 2.3), Eleonas has become a ground of expression and agency for marginalized communities.

In what follows, I will explain this condition in more detail and highlight links between the peculiarities of Eleonas’ planning history and the aforementioned character as the city’s “backyard” and at the same time incubator of autonomous entrepreneurship. Further, I will draw the framework in which it was historically convenient/possible for the markets/bazaars to develop in Eleonas and I will introduce the part of Eleonas where trading activities take place. In the first sub-chapter, I will offer a brief overview of how the character of Eleonas has changed over time.

2.2.1 Becoming agricultural land

The area spanning from the foot of the Acropolis hill west and south towards the port city of Piraeus was covered with dense fields of olive trees in antiquity. Eleonas (in Greek: Ελαιώνας – literally olive grove) was the common and sacred olive grove of ancient Athens, a worshipped and appreciated land¹⁸. Iera Odos (Sacred Road) – the main road crossing through Eleonas – used to connect the ancient polis with Elefsina, a town on the western coast of Attica¹⁹. To this day Iera Odos Street is a main connection between downtown Athens and its western districts.

The area of Eleonas counted some thousands of trees which remained important for the city for a long period of time. During Ottoman times, the economy of the small town of Athens²⁰ was based mainly on the export, along with honey, of olives and olive oil from Eleonas (Tsadari 2019:179). At the beginning of the 20th century a reduced number of 50.000 trees still existed on the site (Sapountzaki/

¹⁴ Dalakoglou clarifies that this happens in the specific context of Athens, which is a “socio-spatially porous” city (Dalakoglou 2013:29).

¹⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=de&pcode=tgs00010&plugin=1>

¹⁶ Remarkable considering that the area covers only about 4,5% of the country’s surface

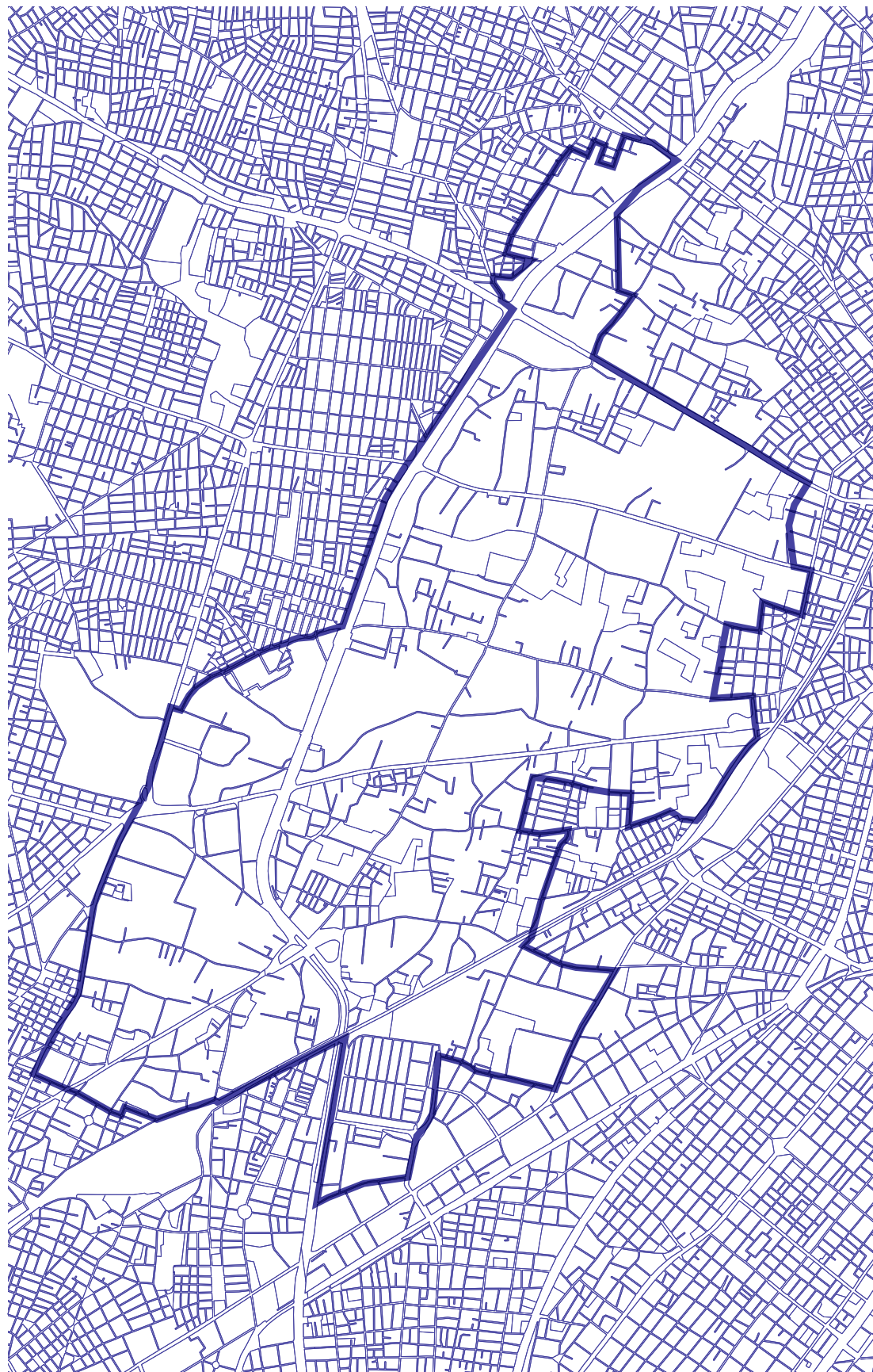
¹⁷ “There Is No Alternative”. Term coined by the Conservative British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

¹⁸ Sacred symbol of ancient Athens was the olive tree.

¹⁹ Elefsina was where the Eleusinian Mysteries, an annual ritual celebration, was taking place. A procession on Iera Odos was part of the mystery. The ancient use of the road is still manifested by the stone-paved remains that are displayed at the exit of the Eleonas metro station adjacent to Iera Odos Street.

²⁰ Population 12.000-15.000.





Left: Street network of Athens and Eleonas

Right: View from Lycabettus hill towards the west. Eleonas in the back.

View from Eleonas towards the Acropolis.

Previous page: "Karten von Attika - Athen und Umgebung" Excerpt of Ernst Curtius and Johann Kaupert's map of Athens, ca. 1895. On the left the "olive forest" (Olivenwald) of Eleonas is visible. (Archive Uni Heidelberg)

Wassenhoven 2011: 8). The olive-grove character was kept until the beginning of the 20th century, when Eleonas was gradually transformed into a field of vegetable gardens and cultivated land for the increased needs of the growing city.

The decline of agricultural land began around 1900 with the establishment of first small-scale industries²¹ close to the water reservoirs of the area and along the axis of the first rail and road connections between the port of Piraeus and downtown Athens. Refugees from Asia Minor settled in the 1920s mainly in the western parts of Athens, near productive units where there was work (Ropaitou-Tsapareli 2006: 133). The population increase caused a construction boom that additionally forced back farmland, while urbanization processes of the after-war further strengthened the industries and transport services. This is according to a historical account by the *Citizens' Committee for the Rescue of Eleonas* (CCRE 2009: 2) (following CCRE), which was a lobbying group with an activist expression that formed in the late 1990s in order to propagate and defend the perspective of a green urban development in Eleonas²². Their action culminated against the “Double Regeneration” urban development project, which I am going to illustrate in chapter 2.3.3.

2.2.2. Industrialization

«Well, I've known this area since I was a little kid. It was a vegetable garden. Isn't there where you have your stall a well that used to draw water? [Talking to colleague] This is how [the area] was. Then it took on value. All these agencies were on Piraeus, where Leonidas is, down there... You have seen this! [Talking to colleague] A lot of haulers. Then they got rid of them, said we'll take them to Aspropyrgos.» (Magalios 2019)

«Λοιπόν, εγώ την περιοχή αυτή την ξέρω από μικρό παιδί. Ήταν λαχανόκηποι. Εκεί που στρώνεις δεν είναι ένα μαγκάνι που έβγαζε νερό; Έτσι ήταν. Μετά πήρε αξία. Τα πρακτορεία όλα αυτά ήταν στην Πειραιώς, που είναι ο Λεωνίδας, από κάτω... Και εσύ τα πρόλαβες! Πολλά πρακτορεία. Μετά τα διώξαν και είχαν να τα πάρει στον Ασπρόπυργο.»

Gradually, Eleonas became more and more an industrialized terrain; since the 1950s, intense urban development took place with the construction of the national road (Kifissou Avenue) connecting the port of Piraeus with Thessaloniki and the rest of Greece and the urban extension of the city towards the west and the industrial zones along the Kifissos River (Philippides 1999: 68). In the second half of the 20th century the last traces of the ancient olive grove were almost completely eradicated. At the same time, heavy industries settled in Eleonas along the main road and rail arteries, and the use of lots as repair sites and depots for public transportation buses and other vehicles emerged (Marda 2017). Intense urbanization and the rapid industrial development after 1960 permanently changed Eleonas' image. A network of initially consumer industries (e.g., food factories, textile industries, pulp and paper plants, etc.) developed along the axis of metropolitan highways. Small industrial units (tanneries, smitheries, potteries, building material yards etc.) were installed along the elementary local street network (Orfeos Street, Agias Annis Street, Agiou Polykarpou Street) (Papagrigoriou et al. 2011: 36). During the same period, Kifissos River was channelled below the multi-lane national road, changing the landscape drastically (ibid.). Deterioration of the environment because of the industrial uses of Eleonas started

²¹ Type of industrial activities reported in the 1920s: food, textile, chemical, energy, clothing, paper, wood, leather, turnery and tobacco industries (Leontidou 1989).

²² According to Tsadari, the “Citizens' Committee for the Rescue of Eleonas” (Original: Επιτροπή Πολιτών για την Διάσωση του Ελαιώνα) was set up on the initiative of the “Coordinating Committee of Associations and Movements for the Protection of Open Spaces in Athens and the Quality of Life” (Συντονιστική Επιτροπή Συλλόγων και Κινήσεων για την Προστασία των Ελεύθερων Χώρων της Αθήνας και την Ποιότητα Ζωής) (Tsadari 2019: 65). Its purpose was to draw the attention of active citizens and public and municipal authorities and to fight for this “forgotten” but vital area for Athens, as stated in the group's website: <https://elaionas.wordpress.com/about/>.

being debated. In the words of Nelly Marda, Eleonas gradually transformed into “a depot of unwanted noisy and polluted uses of the Athenian city”(Marda 2017).

In the 1980s, logistic enterprises became active in the area, and changed the character of Eleonas more towards the traffic-dominated and transportation-centered place it is today. Hauling companies and transport agencies, as well as storages/warehouses, lorry parking areas, etc., appeared. Initially they were supportive elements for the industrial activities, before turning into the dominant sector, favored by the strategic location near the port and at the center of a major transport system. Eleonas steadily became a productive island inside the city's urban web, offering large unbuilt areas and a certain frivolity in the use of land, since it remained an out-of-plan area until 1991 (Kontaratou 2008/09: 133). The era of heavy industries ended in the 1990s, when major industries with several thousand employees were gradually re-located and moved out of Eleonas and the city center (Marda 2017). At the same time, global capitalist restructurings lead to the international relocation or closure of remaining factories (e.g. ETMA textile plant or SOFTEX paper industry). However, small-scale “non-disturbance” businesses (silent activities), the haulers, transport companies and a large informalized sector (cf. 2.2.4, account on informality cf. 3.3) remained in the area. The relocation of heavy industrial uses in the 1990s was followed in the last three decades by attempts of formulating legal frameworks for Eleonas – a more detailed account on which will be given in chapter 2.3.2.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Eleonas is still a productive layer of the metropolitan core of Attica, where a large network of small and large-scale industrial and wholesale activities that developed around large industries, remain in the area. This means that its overall character today is determined by the processing and manufacturing activities and the people framing them (cf. 2.2.4) (Tsadari 2019: 53).



Top: 'Volos', Larissa', 'Mytilini'; Haulers are organized in regions based on the range of their operation. One can find all Greek cities represented on the haulers' map of Eleonas.

Bottom: One side of the facade of a Tannery business, located adjacent to Dinaraki market (in front).

2.2.3 Residential aspects and de-industrialization

Eleonas is otherwise sparsely populated; its character as a traditional terrain of industrial production since the mid-20th century attracted a multitude of individuals in search of employment opportunities, but did not favor residential development. Workers settled in the area's vicinity, mostly moving to the popular neighborhoods of adjacent districts such as Egaleo or Peristeri and rarely within Eleonas. The weighed down environment and the lack of spaces allowed primarily for irregular, unauthorized settlements in the form of housing "islets" in some of Eleonas' outer edges. Seventeen such enclaves were documented in 2011, constituting less than 4% of its overall surface (Papagrigroriou et al. 2011: 47). These are either old, popular neighborhoods such as Markoni²³, firstly built as unauthorized settlements and later legalized, or pockets of informal housing.

«At one point when I was a student I worked here in the transport companies, these ones here. One of them. No that's a lie, not here, outside, but we used to come here all the time to load goods and stuff. And that's how I first got to know the area, when I was, like, 19 years old. And I was very impressed, I mean I didn't know Agias Annis and all that. [Did you expect it to be like that?] No, not then and not now. Not then that it would be like that, nor now that it would have stayed like that. So I imagined that the refugees would have been put somewhere here before I first came.» (Stefanou 2020)

«Κάποια στιγμή όταν ήμουνα φοιτητής δούλευα εδώ στις μεταφορικές, αυτές εδώ. Σε μία δηλαδή. Ψέμματα, όχι εδώ, έξω, αλλά εμείς ερχόμασταν συνέχεια εδώ για να φορτώσουμε προϊόντα και τέτοια. Και έτσι είχα γνωρίσει την περιοχή πρώτη φορά, όταν ήμουνα 19 χρονών ας πούμε. Και μου είχε κάνει πολύ εντύπωση, δεν την ήξερα δηλαδή την Αγίας Άννης και αυτές δεν τις ήξερα. [Το περίμενες; Ότι θα ήταν έτσι;] Όχι, ούτε τότε ούτε τώρα. Ούτε τότε ότι θα είναι έτσι ούτε τώρα ότι θα έχει μείνει έτσι. Φανταζόμουνα δηλαδή ότι τους πρόσφυγες κάπου εδώ θα τους έκουνε βάλει, πριν έρθω πρώτη φορά.»

The above statement comes from Christos Stefanou, an employee of the refugee camp of Eleonas. The background of historical displacement together with the most recent immigration from the Middle East and other parts of the world—albeit today having a different impact on urban expansion and development, with self-building much less represented—shaped the character of settlements in Athens and districts such as Eleonas. Most newly arriving refugees and migrants land in Athens, where they live in leased apartments or camp-like settlements and under special housing arrangements. For some not surprising that a refugee camp was established in this area (Stefanou 2020), since Eleonas is known for being handled simply as a "depot" for various uses (cf. 2.3), the refugee settlement of Eleonas, established in 2015, houses a large part of the area's total population, with the capacities of the camp at about 2.000 people (UNHCR 201824). At the present moment, there is no prospect neither for the camp's transformation into a permanent structure, nor of its dissolution. Another aspect of housing in the area concerns the appropriation of space by Roma people for living purposes. Up until 2012 at least two major sites of Roma settlements existed in the area, with Roma inhabitants being documented in Eleonas since the 1990s (Tsadari 2019: 62). According to estimates cited in the work of Tsadari, in 2007 about 2.000 Roma lived in Eleonas (ibid.). More aspects of the relation of Roma populations with Eleonas are given in chapters 2.2.4 and 4.1.3.

²³ Neighborhood in the North of Eleonas (Municipality of Athens) of about 7,5 ha. It was founded by internal migrants in the 1930s. Today it is one of three protected settlements of the area (the other two being in Tavros and Renti).

²⁴ Ca. 1500 in 2018 according to UNHCR (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/66038>) however the numbers of inhabitants fluctuate and in 2020 an extension of the camp with a new transit zone was decided.

The residential situation in Eleonas as described in this chapter, relates to the dynamic transformatory conditions that enabled processes of appropriation by marginalized communities. Day-to-day jobs, inexpensive housing or encroachment opportunities on urban spaces made Eleonas a terrain for the city's subaltern²⁵ groups. People that live today in Eleonas are mostly attracted by labor opportunities in the production sites and secondary services or in rather informal settings (Kontaratou 2008/09: 134f) which offer a base for pursuing their livelihoods.



Top: Solidarity with refugees banner at a demonstration in front of the Eleonas refugee camp, against governmental policies on migration, February 2020.

Bottom: View of the Markoni neighborhood in 2020.

2.2.4 Demographics, economy and employment

«Many [transport] agencies. Then they kicked them out and said, we'll take them to Aspropyrgos. But, it's difficult because to go to Aspropyrgos, I need at least forty five minutes on the motorbike to go to Aspropyrgos. Now who goes there for two parcels to Trikala... And, it's more functional no matter if the roads... Unacceptable! And all the goods going to the provinces leave from [Eleonas]. Millions of money! And the roads are shit. Anyway. [...] We are talking about transport. The haulers.» (Magalios 2019)

²⁵ The term subaltern has been coined by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and was later critically appropriated by the Indian Postcolonial Subaltern Studies Group and Gayatri Spivak in particular. The term refers to a social position of individuals and groups within a society who are marginalized, oppressed, exploited, and cut off from any access to social mobility, reinforced by the lack of any recognized voice or speech within social, economic, and political structures (Dhawan/Castro Varela 2020: 198; Spivak 2010).

«Πολλά πρακτορεία. Μετά τα διώξαν και είπαν, θα τα πάμε στον Ασπρόπυργο. Αλλά, είναι δύσκολο γιατί για να πας στον Ασπρόπυργο, ενώ με μηχανάκι που πηγαίνω στον Ασπρόπυργο θέλω τουλάχιστον τρία τέταρτα. Τώρα που να πας να πούμε δυό δέματα για τα Τρίκαλα... Και, είναι πιο λειτουργικό άσχετα αν, οι δρόμοι... Απαράδεκτο! Και φεύγει όλο το εμπόρευμα που διακινείται στις επαρχίες από εκεί. Εκατομμύρια λεφτά! Και οι δρόμοι είναι σκατά. Τέλοσπάντων. [...] Για τις μεταφορές μιλάμε. Τα πρακτορεία.»

Regarding land uses in Eleonas, the dominant share is claimed by the secondary and tertiary sector. However, the productive base has seen a clear push-back since the mid-80s, with the proportion between industrial and wholesaler units reversing between 1984 and 2000²⁶. Still, more than half of Eleonas' surface today is occupied by small production units and industries, while another big part is made up by logistics, transport, storage, commerce, services, education, entertainment and the like (Samartzopoulos 2014: 21). As Sofia Tsadari breaks down, all categories of enterprises show off a general upward trend between the years 1991-2011. The total number of enterprises increases constantly until 2008, and then slightly dropping (-1.7%) in 2011 with a total of 23.920 registered companies in the Greater Area of Eleonas²⁷. This decline could relate to the urban transformations linked to the undergoing preparations for the "Double Regeneration" plan of Votanikos/Alexandras during that time (cf. 2.3.3). This was a development project with the idea of simultaneously upgrading the two Athens districts, Votanikos in Eleonas and Leoforos Alexandras. The construction of a new stadium for Panathinaikos FC in Votanikos would be followed by the creation of green and open spaces for the dense neighborhood of Leoforos Alexandras with the subsequent demolition of the old Panathinaikos stadium. The urban restructuring tied to the double regeneration project is key for the interpretation of other transformations in the the social and work dynamics of Votanikos and Eleonas and will be further analyzed in chapter 2.3.

According to the Ministry of Employment, in 2017 about 18% of the total workforce of private employees of the Attica prefecture²⁸ was located in Eleonas²⁹. This constituted a drop of 20.000 employees since the 1980s³⁰. However the numbers from 2017 must be in fact larger, because of the unregistered businesses of Eleonas not showing up in official statistics. Even if these are not taken into account due to the lack of quantifiable data, a large workforce is still connected to the area.

A characteristic phenomenon of the working landscape of Eleonas is when former employees of businesses located in or tied to Eleonas return to the area as unregistered or informalized workers in today's wastepicker markets or scrap yards.

«I've been working here [in Eleonas] at Carrefour lately. I passed nine years here at Athinon Avenue. Then Marinopoulos took over, it didn't work out, we were fired and since then I've been unemployed again. And necessarily, [I do] the same job again.»³¹ (Hasan R. 2019)

«Τώρα τελευταία δούλευα εδώ στα Carrefour. Έκανα εννιά χρόνια, στη Λεωφόρο Αθηνών, εδώ. Μετά πήρε Μαρινόπουλος, δεν πήγε καλά, μας απολύσανε και από τότε πάλι άνεργος. Και αναγκαστικά, πάλι η ίδια δουλειά.»

²⁶ 2,317 (industrial) to 1,241 (retail) in 1984, whereas in 2000 it was 980 to 1,560 (Tsadari 2017: 3)

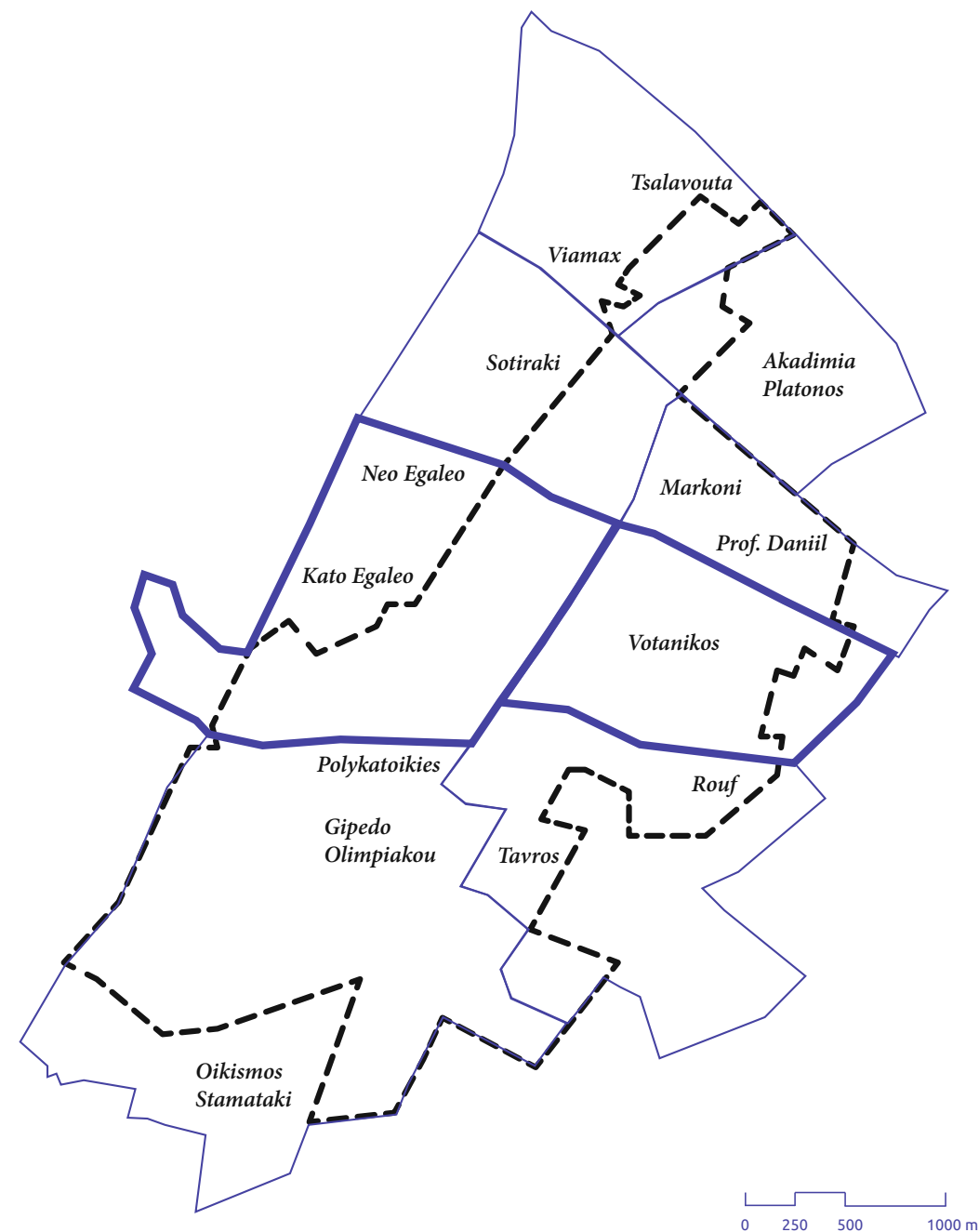
²⁷ The Greater Area of Eleonas was used in the research by Sofia Tsadari as an area which is comprised by boroughs of five municipalities, intersecting with the institutional boundaries of the Eleonas area. Reason for this definition is the availability of reliable data by postal codes of the boroughs (Tsadari 2017: 5). The account does not include informal or non-registered businesses.

²⁸ Approximately 50.000 out of 909.098 (Ministry of Employment, Social Insurance and Solidarity 2017)

²⁹ As a measure of dimensions, this number approximately equals the workforce of Vienna's 23rd district, Liesing in relation to the total of Vienna. In 2017 55.125 out of Vienna's 1.001.735 employees were working in Liesing, about 18% of the city's total workforce (City of Vienna).

³⁰ According to the Ministry of Environment, 70.000 people had their jobs in Eleonas during the 1980s. (TEE 1992: 1)

³¹ Marinopoulos and Carrefour were large retailers with stores and warehouses in the area of Eleonas.

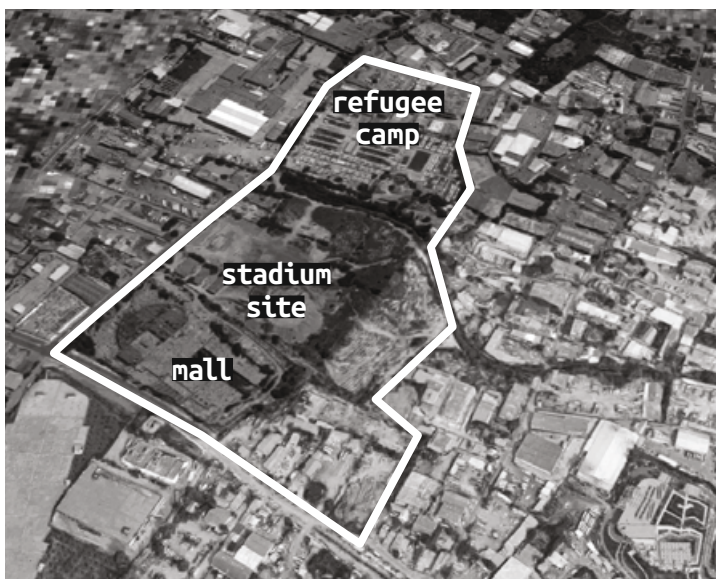


Mr. Ilias³², a wastepicker I encountered, worked for many years in a chemical plant that used to supply materials to the ETMA spinning mill – a former industrial giant of Eleonas. He experienced the global capitalist restructuring that was addressed in 2.2.2 and the chain effect it had on the sector as a worker, and eventually lost his job:

«To ETMA we were bringing materials. And then when that stopped, we started to make detergents. And that's where the industry failed. The textile industry when it stopped, when the Chinese companies came in the spinning industry, it stopped here. And who were they going to give the material then, since there weren't the factories and so on, well, and to keep things going they switched the production to bleach... And there, the end.» (Ilias 2019, voice memo)

Right: The Greater Area of Eleonas, defined by Tsadari (Tsadari 2017: 5). Own illustration. The area is comprised by boroughs of five municipalities (thin line), intersecting with the institutional boundaries of Eleonas (dashed line). Two districts are marked where wastepicker markets are located, Votanikos and Egaleo (thick line) (cf. 4.2 and 4.3).

³² Pseudonymized.



Left: Top to bottom. Transformation of Votanikos/Eleonas over time.

View from the Roma settlement of Agiou Polykarpou towards the ETMA factory. (Katsarou 2007)

Plots included in the double regeneration area prior to the ETMA factory demolition and other clearances of building stock (tovima.gr)

The double regeneration area today. On the place of the ETMA factory is the abandoned construction site of Vovos' shopping center (cf. 2.3.3). (google maps)

What Mr. Ilias describes happened before he was legally entitled to retire with a paid pension, so he had to turn to other forms to earn a living, namely collecting and selling at wastepicker markets. One other wastepicker I talked with (more information on the profiles of my informants in 4.1.2), mentions that the tarpaulin workshop in which he still works used to be located near the former Roma settlement in Orfeos Street (cf. 4.1.3) but was affected by the spatial regulations requiring the relocation of noisy industries:

«Yes, there was a settlement, I've never been in it, but because I was working there in Orfeos, the shop I work in now has been moved to Aspropyrgos, I was just working there in Orfeos and I know them, I knew them.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Ναι υπήρχε οικισμός δεν έχω, δεν είχα μπει ποτέ μέσα αλλά το, επειδή δούλευα εκεί στην Ορφέως, το μαγαζί δηλαδή που δουλεύω τώρα έχει μεταφερθεί στον Ασπρόπυργο απλά εγώ δούλευα εκεί στην Ορφέως και τους ξέρω, δηλαδή ήξερα.»

Regarding demographic developments of the last decades in Eleonas, there have been shifts and transformations that relate to the economic restructuring following the urban planning processes from the 1980s onwards and the start of the double regeneration plan in the mid 2000s. Also processes of displacement of squatting communities and the subsequent settlement of refugees in the area. The number of inhabitants in the censuses of 1991, 2001 and 2011 first increased and then decreased³³: in the first decade the population grew by 15.3%, perhaps connected to the relocation of industries and to the rise of informal or temporary housing that developed in the area. According to Tsadari, in 2000 there were five reported points of temporary housing, mainly related to Roma community settlements (cf. 4.1.3). In the period 2001 to 2011 the population decreased by 36%, which is surely related to evictions of some of the informal camps, as in 2011 only three settlements remained, which were evicted as well in the following years. The population decrease follows a general trend for the central city districts. The proportion of Eleonas residents in search of employment increased dramatically from 11,6% in 1991 to 39,1% in 2011 (Tsadari 2019: 237). At the same time, the percentage of citizens in Eleonas with a nationality other than Greek rose steadily: from 2,6% in 1991 to 21,6% in 2011. A key development in the demographic dynamics of the area after 2011 (that has not been recorded yet in a scheduled decade census) was the foundation of the Eleonas refugee camp in 2015 and its subsequent extension to a capacity of up to 2500 inhabitants in 2020, making it one of the main residential complexes of the area.

In conclusion, Eleonas has faced many challenges and transformations related to the restructuring of the industrial sector. The area has suffered losses in jobs, building stock and infrastructures. However, Eleonas is still an essential part of the productive base of Athens with many small-scale non-nuisance businesses remaining in the area and it has become Athens' centre of goods' transportation and main logistics hub. In fact, Eleonas is still today a productive subsection of Attica's metropolitan core, where a diffuse network of small-scale industrial and wholesale activities has developed around the large industries. This practically means that its overall character is still today determined by the small-scale manufacturing activity and the accompanying uses (Tsadari 2019: 53). The number of inhabitants and employees in Eleonas has decreased over the last decades, but nevertheless remains substantial. This is important to recognize, particularly considering the number of people who are involved in non-formal working settings and are thus not appearing in official statistics. It can be said that the traditional distinction of registered and non-registered work is failing to grasp the complexity of the living and working realities of the actual everyday users of Eleonas, which is anything but an empty space for them. In the next chapter I will offer an overview on systemic approaches of regulation and the planning history of the area. I will also outline the urban regeneration proposals gravely influencing the development of the area and the wastepicker markets of today.

33 1991=5762, 2001=6643, 2011=4252. Data by ELSTAT, in Tsadari 2019: 229.

Transformations of Eleonas in the last decade



2009



2019

Top: Widening of the street at the corner Agias Annis and nameless side street on the right (entrance to Ifestos market). Tachograph manufacturing site has been replaced by transport company. Both in 2009 and 2019 an sign can be seen, announcing information about the metro depot construction site.



2009



2019

Left: Transformation of Agias Annis Street.

Bottom: Other side of the same intersection, Agias Annis/Agiou Polykarpou. The older Eukalyptus trees on the right were removed during the street widening, while the young trees at the food truck location have grown and are today a by market visitors much appreciated tree canopy. Visible are also the mobile WCs of the Athinagora market (cf. 4.4).



2009



2019

Top: Transformation of site on the left from hauling company to bazaar (Athinagora market, left behind the sheet metal fence). Agias Annis facing south.



2009



2019

Bottom: Transformation of space on the right from parking site in 2014 (previously trailer rental yard) to bazaar (Dimaraki market, behind the fence). The fallow ground on the left has become a parking space, at times allocated to the market (cf. 4.4).



Top: Transformation along Agias Annis Street. Aluminium works site and tire workshop have been demolished in preparation for the extension of the double regeneration construction site (visible in the distance). In the remainings of the demolition (metal sheet canopy) today one of the bazaars takes place (bottom image, closer view).



Bottom: Transformation of small wire extrusion plant to bazaar space (Proodos market in Orfeos Street).

2.3 Ό,τι δεν χωράει ή δεν είναι επιθυμητό αλλού, ρίχνεται στον Ελαιώνα / Everything that does not fit or is not desirable elsewhere is being thrown into Eleonas.³⁴ Urban restructuring processes

If one picture ought to describe Eleonas today, it would have to include: empty lots and construction sites, scattered cultivated fields, abandoned and active industrial plants, warehouses, premises of transport companies and small-scale production units, car parks and scrap yards. Also the central vegetable market of Athens, large vehicle depots, one military base and temporary settlements (e.g., Roma or refugee camps) mixed with public institutions and shopping malls, university campuses, and a few residential enclaves.

After the brief elaboration in the previous chapter of the radical and multiple changes of Eleonas' character, I will next summarize the diverse urban planning approaches since Eleonas started to be considered as an entity to be regulated. In the following chapter I will illustrate the processes related to the urban restructuring attempts of the area, before framing the present-day appropriation of Eleonas' space as expressed by popular initiative, shaping the area in a sense of spontaneous urban development (Leontidou 1990: 85).

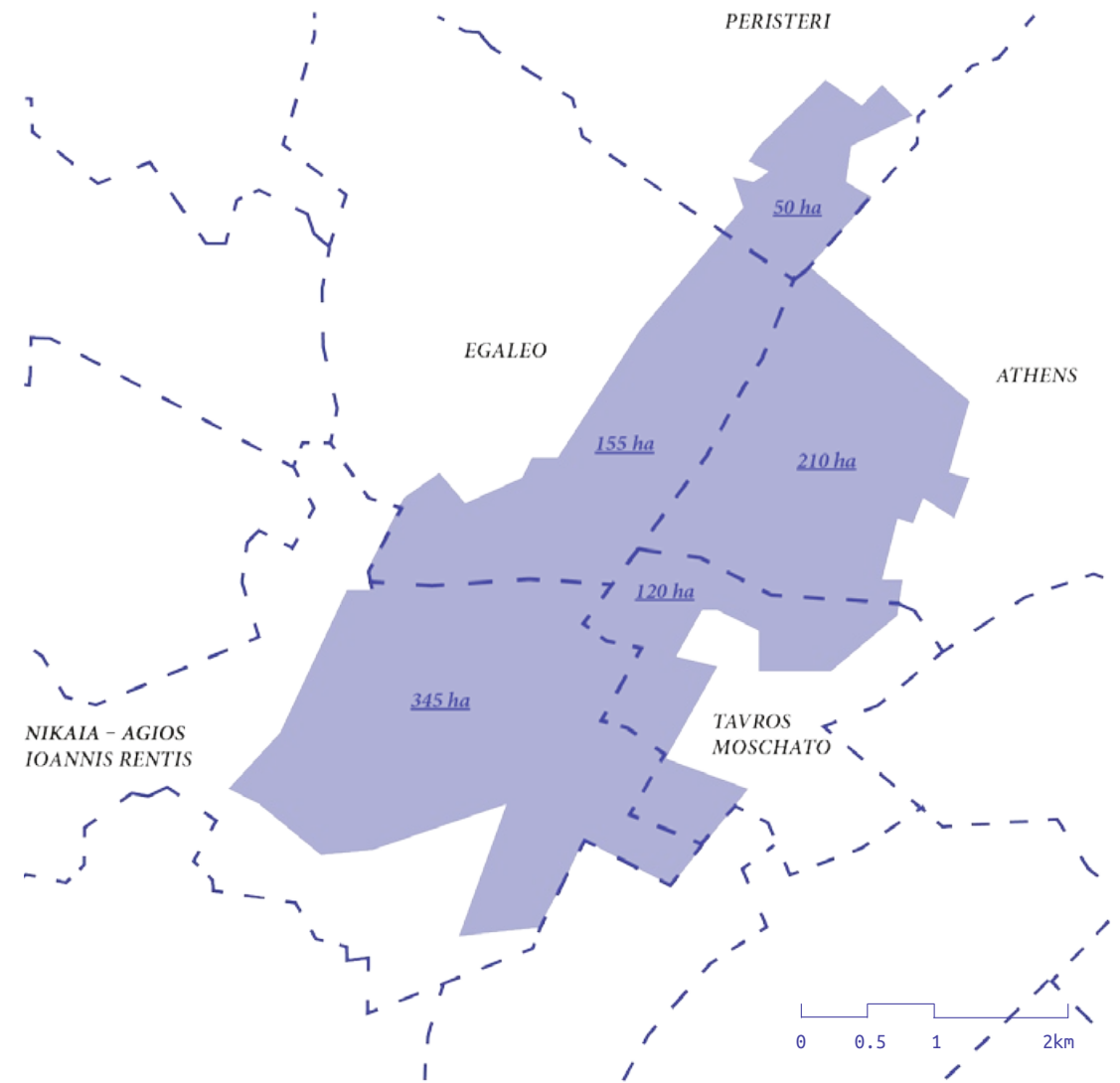
2.3.1 Public administration and urban pressure

As I highlighted in chapter 2.2, typical urbanization processes in 20th century Greece included the expansion of unauthorized settlements and unregulated building activity, mainly driven through conditions of need³⁵. The withdrawal of the state as a planning authority in the context of housing of displaced populations and rapid urban expansion allowed for a self-regulatory development. Sapountzaki and Wassenhoven, both leading members of the National Technical University of Athens's research team that conducted studies for the development of a regulatory framework for Eleonas in the 1990s, describe planning in Athens as "piecemeal and haphazard" (Sapountzaki/Wassenhoven 2003: 6). Concerning official statutory plans, they state that these were used as a draft that was extended with ad hoc adaptations: "each time legalizing unauthorized built up areas, which grew spontaneously in all directions." (Sapountzaki, Wassenhoven 2003: 6) Industrial areas were usually excluded from these developmental mechanisms while Sapountzaki's and Wassenhoven's critique is that this resulted in a lack of sufficient and adequate supply or serviced land for allocated productive uses: "The failure to plan ahead has left a legacy of poorly equipped industrial zones, with an elementary road network and nonexistent utility infrastructure." (Sapountzaki/Wassenhoven 2003: 6)

Eleonas is perhaps the best-known Athenian example for an industrial zone growing in such conditions. While housing was never a major element of the area's urban development, industrial uses were able to flourish instead (ironic, if one considers the former flourishing of woods and farmlands). Due to early installation of industries in the area and because of the risk of flooding of the Kifissos River, residential development was initially averted, or rather shifted towards the area's margins. The common process of former agricultural land parceling was adapted to the demands of industrial uses and thus lots kept their large size. Eleonas developed on the base of the early industrial plants. The urban fabric reveals much of this history, with large industrial buildings, big, asymmetrical urban blocks, sparse road network and narrow streets leading to dead ends (Papagrigoriou/Papadaki et al. 2011: 18).

³⁴ Website of the Citizen's Committee for the Rescue of Eleonas (<https://elaionas.wordpress.com/about/>)

³⁵ Historical examples for such conditions are the housing crisis related to the Asia Minor refugee influx in the 1920's; internal migration from rural areas of the country and mass urbanization phenomena in inter- and post-war Athens; or the recent history of transnational migration from eastern European and Caucasian regions from 1990 onwards.



Limits and connectivities

Eleonas is physically delineated mostly through large building complexes (e.g., the Agricultural University in the east, etc.) and the extended road network with which Eleonas is surrounded and outwardly connected. Major road arteries as well as railway and metro lines encircle the area: the lines P1 of the Athens Suburban Railway and M1 of the metro network transgress the districts Tavros and Rentis on the southeastern border of Eleonas. While to the west and north, the heavily trafficked Kifissos and Athinon Avenues mark a clear boundary between Eleonas and the working-class districts of Egaleo and Peristeri. On Eleonas' inside, except for a metro station (line M3)—serving the northern parts of Eleonas close to Iera Odos Street – and a few bus lines, car and truck traffic dominates, reinforcing the poor connectivity to the rest of the city.

While Eleonas signifies a clear cut in terms of urban development from residential parts of the city, the area is also embedded in its surrounding districts, among which it was divided in terms of administration. These were five municipalities: Athens, Peristeri, Egaleo, Nikaia-Agios Ioannis Rentis and Tavros-Moschato. These districts followed the general pattern of urban development of the city towards the west as described in 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.

Peristéri's share of Eleonas is small, but substantial, as there lies the KTEL of Kifissos, one of the currently two intercity bus stations of Athens. Peristeri is a populous municipality (the fifth in size in Greece), with a strong refugee heritage, as big numbers of displaced Greeks settled there in the previous century. It has a predominantly working class population and below average rents.

Egáleo is a multifaceted district with strong knots to Eleonas, as its first residents were farm laborers or workers in big industries like ETMA that settled near their workplace. Numerously populated by Asia Minor refugees and internal economic migrants, it was the capital of western Attica until recent reforms. Egaleo received three metro stations after 2004 (including the station “Eleonas” —line M3) which upvalued the surrounding areas, as stressed by members of the local social space/squat Sinialo, kicking off processes commercialization of public space (Sinialo squat collective 2015: 17³⁶). Egaleo hosts the University of West Attica, with two campus locations within the district’s boundaries.

Níkea-Ágios Ioánnis Réntis on the south-western part belongs already to the regional unit of Piraeus. It includes the largest part of Eleonas and is thus considered an industrial part of Athens, while it is characterized by below-average rents. The Athens School of Fine Arts is also located in Rentis, at the border to Tavros district.

Távros-Moscháto grew out of one settlement established by Asia Minor refugees, (Papagrighiou/Papadaki et al. 2011: 35), which until the present day houses many immigrants. Ironically, the Aliens and Migration Directorate of the City of Athens (Petrou Ralli central police department) is located here too.

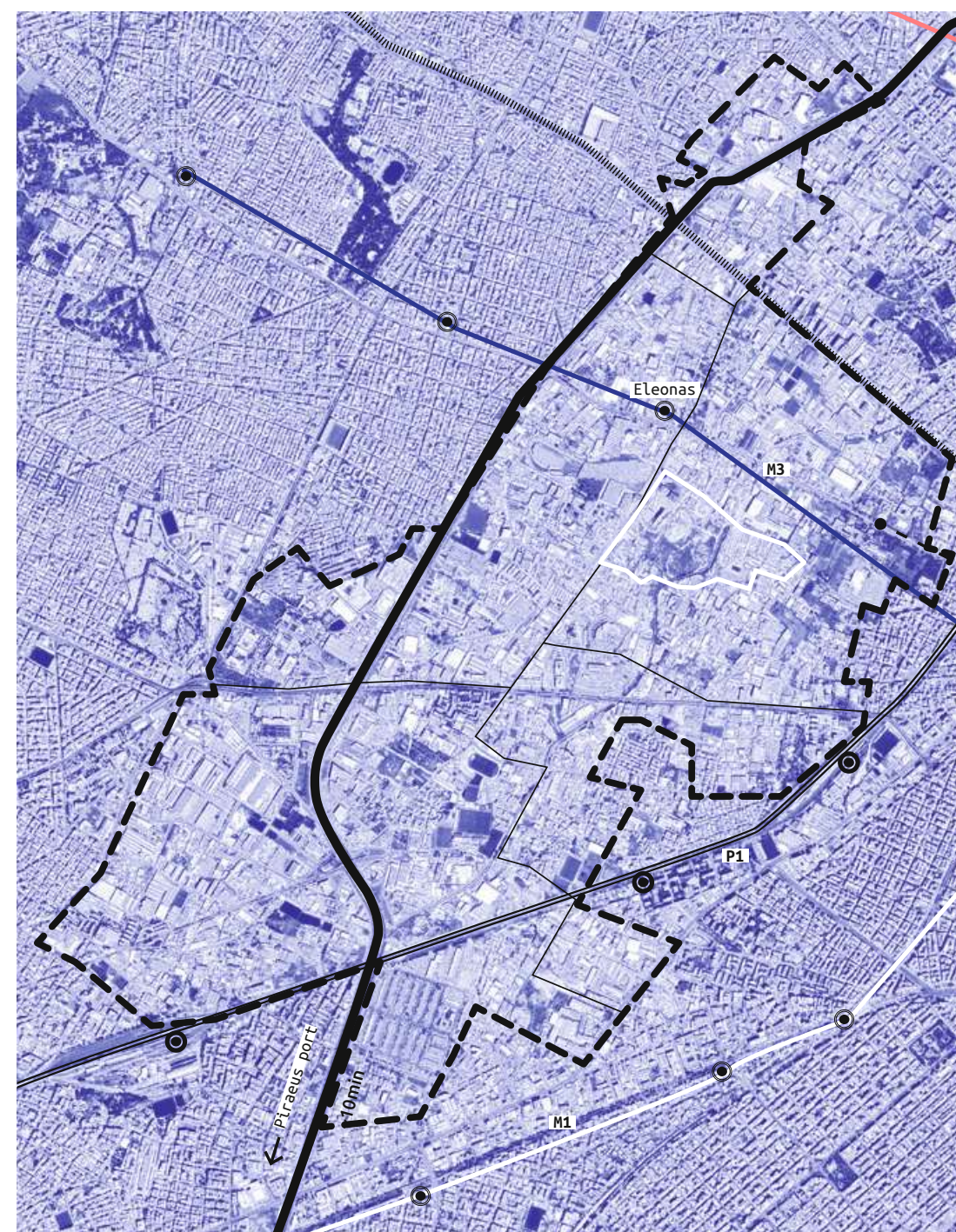
Athens. The part of Eleonas belonging to the Municipality of Athens³⁷ is clearly facing the strongest developmental pressure, as it is hosting the plots for the “double regeneration” development project that was already mentioned and will be further outlined in chapter 2.3.3. The area was thus subjected to speculative investment. Moreover, as geography professor Thomas Maloutas points out, Votanikos is an area that showed several signs of gentrification in recent years (important growth of higher categories of employment and parallel significant reduction of the working class) (Maloutas 2018: 246).

Even though the surrounding areas were all integrated in statutory plans, Eleonas remained an out-of-plan area until the mid-90s, as it was shown in 2.2. It was so deemed by many a “blind spot” in the urban fabric (Sapountzaki/Wassenhoven 2003: 3; Kontaritou 2008/09: 133). Some argue that the fact that Eleonas was an area with no regulation regarding construction and land uses, served a development where all activities and uses that could not be carried out in the rest of the Attica basin, but were essential for the economic development of the city (industries, productive sector, transports and supportive secondary uses), where collected there (Kontaritou 2008/09: 133).

The pressing need for regulating and controlling the urban development of Eleonas was supported by debates picturing the area as a source of water pollution and environmental degradation for the whole of Attica region. Tsadari highlights that the environmental aspects in Eleonas’ case, based clearly on an existing problem, and the logic of the “backyard” that had prevailed at that time, served the promotion of a populist discourse (Tsadari 2019: 93f). Imagined was the conversion of the area from ‘industrial hell’ to ‘green paradise’ – a rhetoric that expresses broader and established social concepts and relationships (ibid.). Eleonas had to become a “green lung” for Athens instead of an “olive grove with 143 olive trees and 1850 industries” – two of the common phrases in newspaper reports and public debates that are cited by Tsadari (ibid.). As she points out, Eleonas may have been home to 70,000 jobs, but the political priority of planning in the 80s and 90s was directed towards the valorization of the area in the terms of real estate (visions of tertiarization on the one hand and residential development

as a counter-paradigm) (Tsadari 2019: 94). This left little space for a user-centered examination of the area’s possibilities based on the needs of the established uses and productive businesses.

In what follows, I will illustrate the frameworks attempted in integrating and “normalizing” Eleonas in order to show the continuities of regulative attempts and plans in the last thirty years –in a reflection of Eleonas as the urban enclave that is created or reproduced through processes of ordering and normalization (Stavrides 2016: 15).



36 <https://sinialo.espiv.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/carexflacca3.pdf>

37 Votanikos - the third district of Athens and a borough on the northeastern corner of Eleonas.

2.3.2 Institutional perspectives and regulatory attempts

The main tool for the integration of out-of-plan areas offered by the Greek legal statutory framework is the “Implementation Act” (Papagrigoriou/Papadaki et al. 2011: 19). As it has been discussed earlier in chapter 2.1, for the case of in-plan integration of settlements, landowners were bound to contribute land or capital to the Municipalities in exchange for the legalization of their property. The idea for the contributions is that they are later used for the provision of public infrastructures (roads, etc.). This system exists until today and played an important role in the urban redevelopment of Eleonas, as will be shown.

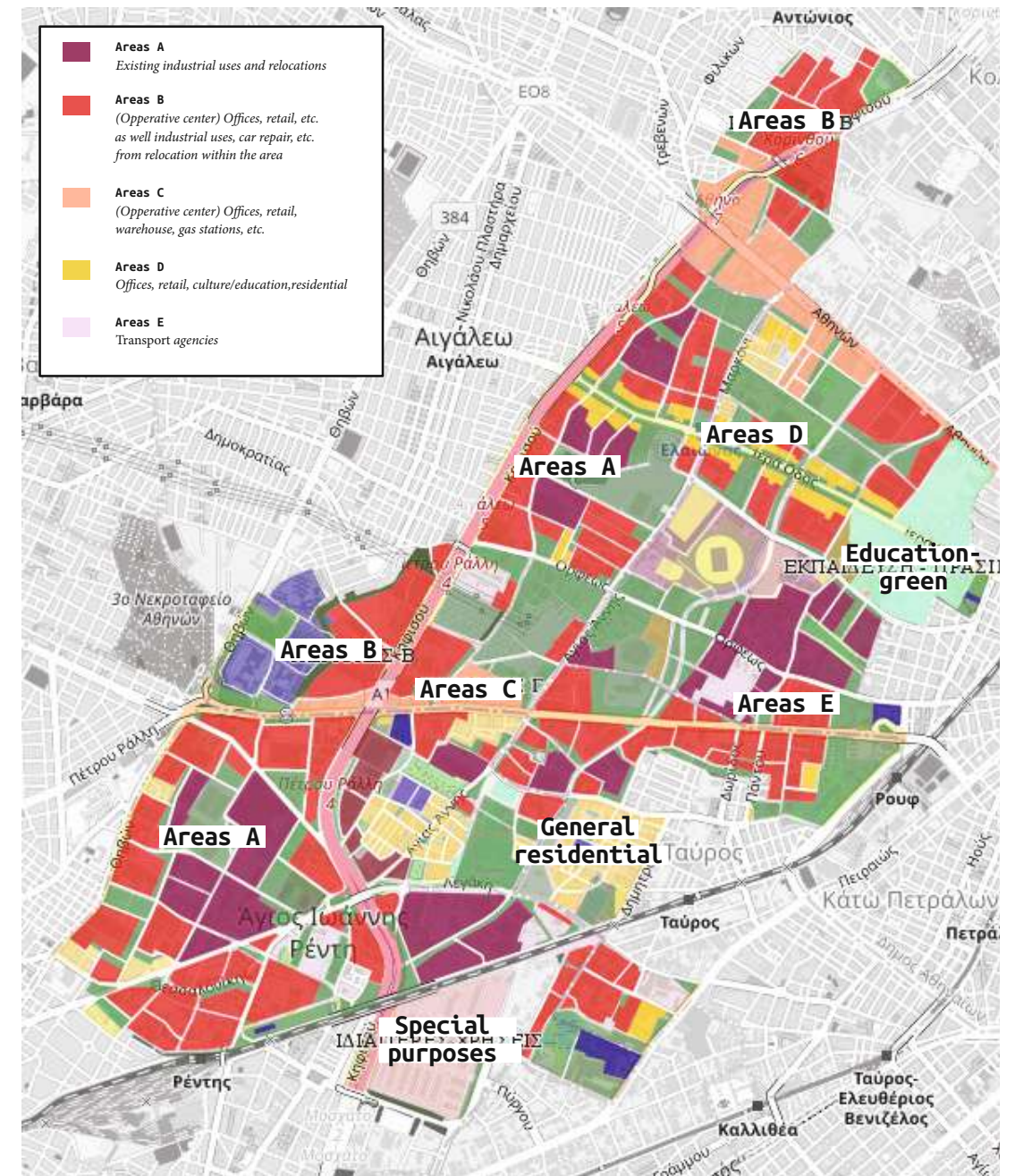
As described by Tsadari, Eleonas appears prominently in the context of reforming the planning system in Greece to European standards with an environmental focus in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Tsadari 2019:84). At that time, she states, the issues of environmental degradation, a trend reinforced by policies for the removal of large industrial units, and the possibility of exploiting land reserves with new uses and a new planning philosophy came to the forefront of the debate (ibid.). During the 1980s a series of legal measures were taken that ordered the relocation of heavy and polluting industries from the area that were reinforced by the Athens Regulatory Plan of 1985³⁸. Preceded by a Presidential Decree in 1991 (that was never enacted due to its rejection by the municipal authorities³⁹) (ibid.: 92), the process concluded in the 1995 PD, which remains the statutory framework for Eleonas until today (ibid.:98).

The main points of the 1995 decree were: creation of extended green areas (30% of the total land: approximately 300ha), relocation of the military facilities (one nautical base in Profitis Daniil), and removal of warehouses. Moreover, the relocation of polluting industries and protection of non-disturbing secondary activities, as well as the expropriation of private properties and implementation of sustainable land uses with incorporation of adequate public infrastructure services and facilities. The total percentage of green spaces and spaces intended for public use should be raised to cover 65% of the area. Also, one aim was the improvement of the transport system and, last but not least, the plan proposed the formation of an organization, which would be responsible for the implementation of the foreseen points.

To this day, the 1995 framework has not been implemented as it was intended. Tsadari argues that this has to do with missing regional policies and the lack of involvement of relevant ministries (such as the Ministry of Environment) that did not provide for the creation of appropriate relocation areas for Eleonas’ industries and neither for the monitoring of the procedure (Tsadari 2019:101). Another main obstacle for its smooth application was that the area delineated in the Presidential Decrees was divided among five distinct Municipalities (outlined in 2.3.1), constructing an “island” that was called Eleonas, as Tsadari remarks (ibid.). Due to conflicting interests⁴⁰ the Municipalities have had uneven influence on the plans’ implementation in their respective parts. Delays and the slow process of expropriation of private land also inhibited the implementations, as the expropriation costs gradually rose, making

38 The Athens Regulatory Plan was an instrument of spatial guidelines concerning the urban development of Athens rather than an elaborate master plan. Particularly for Eleonas the RP provided for the use of “industrial parks” in about 70% of the area, while the remaining 30% was organized into general housing (18%) and special uses (Tsadari 2019:88). The relocation of small (foundries, tanneries, etc.) and large highly polluting plants was required (ibid.).
 39 The 1991 PD (also known as “Manou decree”) was rejecting the idea of the industrial parks of the previous regulatory plan and instead proposed zones with mixed industrial, commercial and wholesale uses, residential areas and high building coefficients, with a small percentage of public green spaces (Tsadari 2019:92). Fierce criticism by the involved Municipalities resulted in appeals to the Council of State, where the plan was finally rejected. The main arguments against the PD, as reported by Tsadari, were the increase in the built-up volume and the “surrender to free market”, the environmental degradation, the special treatment of the polluting industries and the tertiarization that would apply by it (ibid.). The authorities’ appeal was followed by a revision of the 1991 plan with a study commissioned by the “Organization for the Master Plan and Environmental Protection of Athens” (known also as “Organization of Athens”) to a research group of the National Technical University of Athens (Sapountzaki/Wassenhoven 2003: 8)
 40 Related also to who would collect what part of the contributions in land or money (according to the integration of out-of-plan areas process that was highlighted earlier in chapter 2.1.3).

the undertaking more complex (Papagrigoriou/Papadaki et al. 2011: 70). In conclusion, according to Tsadari, the plan had a unified philosophy but missed a single implementing agency, which in combination with the unfortunate demarcation of the area and its undergoing stigmatization set the outlines of the city’s “backyard”, with consequences that were important for the later development (Tsadari 2019: 101)



Right: Land use of Eleonas according to the 1995 Presidential Decree. (msa.ypeka.gr)

Another aspect that was left disregarded by the regulatory proposals that were outlined in this chapter was the role of the small-scale entrepreneurial forces which are involved in the everyday life of Eleonas. Kontaritou critiques that the human resources of Eleonas were not studied thoroughly (Kontaritou 2008/09: 137). In this sense, low income workers, informalized economies and the people working in them, the Roma communities, and other marginalized people living and working in Eleonas, were not included in the process of formulating its future. Their realities were not taken into account, and it remains an open question if this disregard has caused more problems to the area than the non-implementation of the regulatory plans.

In the following chapter I will outline the *Double Regeneration* plan, an urban redevelopment project of the mid 2000s that followed the institutional ordering efforts that were described in this chapter. The project greatly impacted the further development of Eleonas and will be highlighted subsequently, as it dominated the discourses around the development of Eleonas/Votanikos in the following years up until now, becoming the central point in a pool of proposed projects for the area that grew larger over time. In the next chapters I am going to outline some of these projects, focusing on the influence of developmental pressures on the evolution of the area and the actual users and uses of the space.

2.3.3 Big investments, contested projects.

Double Regeneration Plan Votanikos/Alexandras

As summarized by Tsadari and Papagrigoriou/Papadaki, the plan for the relocation of the Panathinaikos stadium from Alexandras Avenue led in 2006 to the idea for a double redevelopment. The “double regeneration plan” as it was called, concerns the envisioned urban upgrade of two areas within the borders of the Municipality of Athens: the area of Panathinaikos’ old football stadium that should be replaced, Alexandras Avenue, in the center of Athens and a part of Eleonas (Votanikos), where the new sports infrastructure complex of Panathinaikos FC should be built (Tsadari 2019: 107; Papagrigoriou/Papadaki et al. 2011: 73). A central point of the double regeneration was the “exchange” of dedicated surfaces (buildable and green spaces) between the two sites. As described in Tsadari, the law 3481/2006, that stipulated the project, provided for the “transfer” of the square meters allowed to be built on Alexandras Avenue – under the current building regulations – to Eleonas (maximising the possible built area), while the area where the old stadium would be demolished, would be less covered and converted into a green area with parks. So, in a sense, designated green spaces would be subtracted from Eleonas as a “return” (Tsadari 2019: 107). This aspect of the plan was criticized from the start by various parties, such as the Citizens’ Committee for the Rescue of Eleonas (CCRE) (introduced in chapter 2.2.1), that feared losses of designated green zones for Eleonas and further environmental deterioration of the area.

Besides for the new stadium, the plan for Votanikos included the creation of underground parking areas, a complementary sports complex and, most controversial, the development of a shopping center tied to investor Babis Vovos⁴¹, who placed himself in the deal when he became the owner of an important share of the plots (the premises of the old ETMA factory) allocated to the double regeneration area. Supporters of the idea saw an influential project that could function as a “[...] catalyst for the creation and expansion of open green spaces in the whole area attracting private funds that can support and maintain such spaces, at the vicinity of new commercial activities” (Papagrigoriou/Papadaki et al. 2011: 73). According to representatives of the City administration, the Municipality of Athens would profit from the deal with Panathinaikos FC and the private investor, as the football team would bear the costs for the construction of the stadium (on land acquired by the Municipality),

⁴¹ INURA Athens describes Vovos as a “private investor, owner of a large construction company with strong lobbying connections, that placed himself in the deal by making a ‘right on time’ investment on the plot to be regenerated” (INURA Athens 2008).



Top: Old Panathinaikos (“Apostolos Nikolaidis”) stadium and surrounding neighborhood of Alexandras Avenue. Opposite to it the “Alexandras refugee housing complex (“Prosfygika Alexandras”), a listed monument from the 1930s which is also part of the regeneration area. On the left the Supreme Court of Greece. On the right the Attica Police Headquarters (GADA). (bing maps)

Middle: From an older presentation of an architectural model. The hand is pointing beyond Profitis Daniil Stream towards today’s refugee settlement on Agiou Polykarpou Street. (sdna.gr)

Bottom: Rendering of the planned stadium and complementary uses (A&S Architects). Text overlay of the location of present uses and the planned shopping mall.

while after completion the property would remain in public hand and Panathinaikos would pay a reduced lease for the use of the sports facilities⁴². Opponents of the project critiqued that the terms of the public-private partnership were not favorable for the Municipality and for the public (CCRE). The Citizens' Committee united against the project based on the conviction that it would have a negative impact on the environment and brought the case to the Council of the State. The key point of critique raised by the initiative was the deal between public administration and private investor Babis Vovos, as it was feared that the construction of the shopping mall would happen at the expense of green spaces of the overall plan (CCRE).

For many years, the main expectations for the area were developed based on urban development visions in terms of real estate (Tsadari 2019: 39). After the appeals to the Council of the State, the project was brought to a halt in 2012/2013, as the negative impact of the project's enactment and deterioration of the area's environmental conditions could not be ruled out, even though the construction of the shopping center was underway (INURA Athens 2008). The investor's construction company bankrupted in 2012 due to sizeable loans and effects of the economic crisis (Tsadari 2013a: 7). According to Tsadari, the bankruptcy of contractor Babis Vovos, the extension and deepening effects of the economic crisis, combined with the change in the aspirations of Panathinaikos FC for the stadium site, froze the implementation of the double regeneration project, reinstating a state of uncertainty about the future use of the Eleonas' site (Tsadari 2019: 39). Since then the fundamentals of the shopping mall lie idle and until recently it remained unclear whether and how the overall double regeneration plan or parts of it will develop in the future (Tsadari 2013a: 7). It seems as if Eleonas is resisting development as a collective, but fragmented actor.

Excursus

Fast forward a few years later, coinciding perhaps with the election of an investment-friendly government in 2019⁴³, rumors about the unfreezing of major investments and urban redevelopment projects as in the cases of Eleonas have been circulating. In 2021 the case of Votanikos seems to have resurfaced, with newspapers reporting on the finding of a solution sealed by a "memorandum of cooperation and understanding" between the Panathinaikos Football Club, the Municipality of Athens and the Ministry of Investment and Development. According to newspaper *To Vima*, the alternative plans will be based on the revised Presidential Decree that was adapted to the ruling of the Council of the State from 2012, according to which the project had stopped. The PD includes specific land uses, conditions and building restrictions, so no new obstacles are estimated according to the newspaper report. (tovima.gr 2020)

Other projects

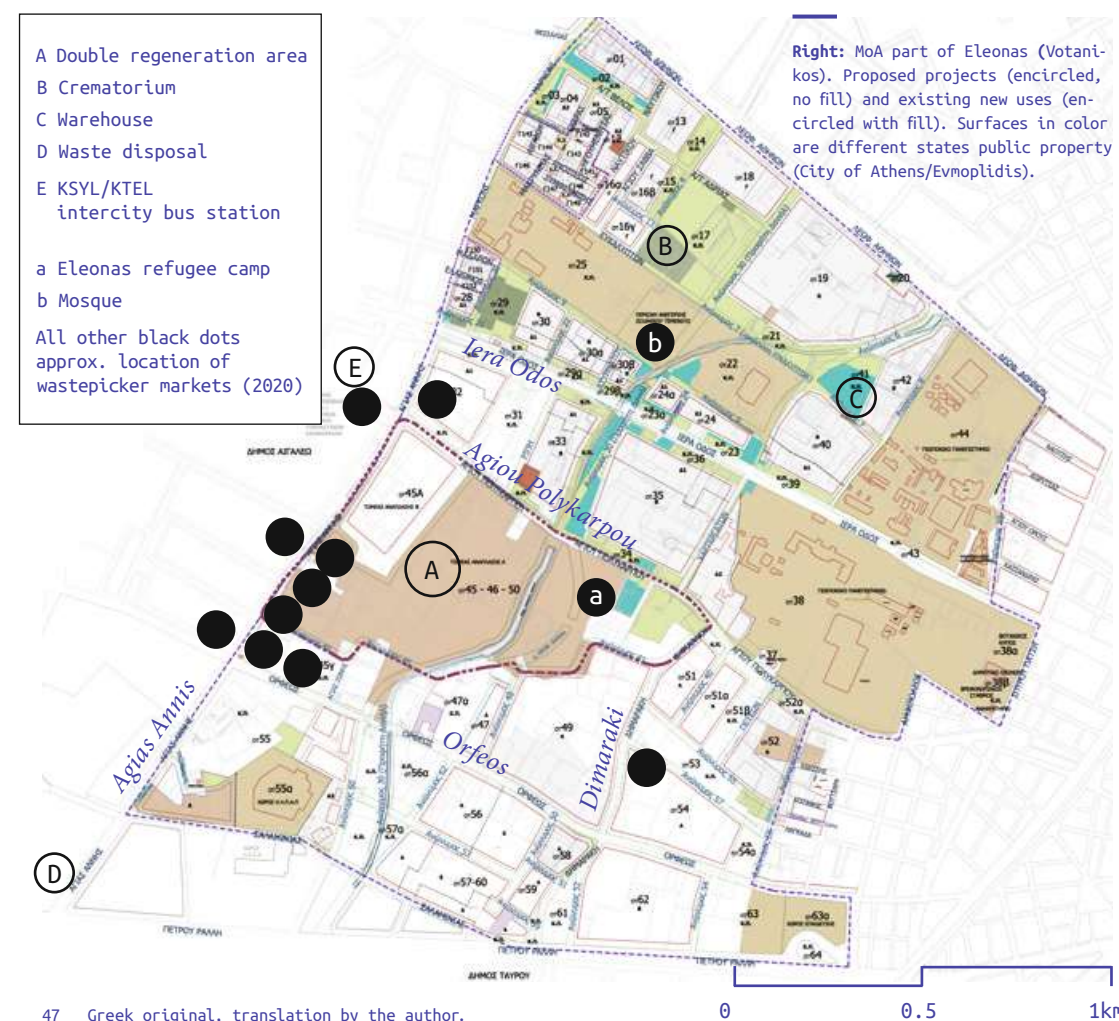
The area of Eleonas has been frequently proposed as a host for disputed or controversial projects in the last few decades. One of the projects that caused outrage among islamophobic far-right groups⁴⁴ and was also criticized by the CCRE for different reasons⁴⁵ is the central Islamic mosque of Athens that should become a representative place of worship for the Muslim community of the country. The mosque was planned in an area of 17.000 square meters in the northern part of Eleonas, within the borders of the Athens municipality, close to Iera Odos Street, on the grounds of a former marine base. It was financed by the state and was in delay for several years, mainly caused by complications in the competition procedure and the awarding of contracts. In the past it was a topic of high dispute that has not yet been settled. The project was completed in 2019⁴⁶.

42 Press release by mayor Nikitas Kaklamanis on February 18, 2018 (City of Athens 2008 in greeceinfo.wordpress.com)
 43 The ruling Conservative party Nea Dimokratia under Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has been promoting its political programme with the unfreezing of large investments that were brought to a halt under previous governments.
 44 Neo-fascist party "Golden Dawn" (in 2020 ruled a criminal organization by the Greek court) opposed the Mosque's construction and staged actions like the occupation of the premises in 2016 (efsyn.gr 2016).
 45 The Citizens Committee for the Saving of Eleonas criticized the size of the building and the fact that the plan includes insufficient green spaces (https://elaionas.wordpress.com/about/).
 46 Initially planned for 2017.

Other, much discussed projects proposed to be located in Eleonas include the central cremation facility in Greece (near the Islamic mosque); a central waste disposal close to Agias Annis Street; municipal warehouses and the intercity bus station (KTEL or KSYL) within the boundaries of the Municipality of Egaleo. The recent arrivals of refugees that increased from 2015 onwards led to the decision of the state to transform the empty DR area on Agiou Polykarpou – owned by the Municipality of Athens – into a refugee accommodation area in form of a container camp. The settlement has been expanded to two more adjacent areas occupying a larger surface within the previously designated area for the construction of the Panathinaikos stadium.

It was in such a setting where wastepicker markets found also their place. First, the weekly market of the *Ermis* wastepicker union was hosted in a municipal property in Iera Odos, and from 2014-2016 in Agiou Polykarpou Street, located within the borders of the Double Regeneration area (and right next to the later refugee camp). The multiple change of location of the markets within Eleonas is discussed as part of the analysis in chapter 4.2.

The CCRE, in a statement on the attempted process of Eleonas' regeneration, refers to it as a typical political approach on Eleonas. They describe the process as following: "(initially abandonment – 'discovery' – 'invention' of a need – 'salvation' by business intervention)" (CCRE 2009: 8)⁴⁷. What can be observed is a display of awareness among the involved activists and subaltern actors that: "everything that doesn't fit or is not desired elsewhere, is thrown into Eleonas [...]" (CCRE). A general climate of discontent and resignation regarding the area is shared by planners and citizens alike. In the following chapter I will address this issue and the rhetorics of failure and decay that dominate the public debate about Eleonas and how these shape the living and working conditions for the actual users of the area.





Left: Different views of Eleonas (2018-2020).

2.3.4 Urban decay. Rhetoric of failure and decline

«All cities have their “black holes”, we imagine, and in Athens we have accepted our own “black holes” as one tolerates a small, cute anomaly or aberration. The truth is that there is nothing cute in the slum of Votanikos, in the dark soil where Panathinaikos wants to build its new stadium.» (lifo.gr 2007⁴⁸)

The above excerpt from an article of popular Athenian magazine lifo about the double regeneration project and the “slum” of Votanikos reflects very well the climate in which the project of the double regeneration was discussed in the late 2000s. “We discovered Votanikos very recently, when Panathinaikos FC agreed with the Municipality of Athens to build the club’s new stadium there” (lifo.gr 2007), says the journalist in said report, and it seems as if indeed the high society of Athens had just found out about the existence of Votanikos and observed from a distance the terrible conditions prevailing in the area. The media representations highlight the public’s perception of the area and illustrate the narratives of experts on the developmental history of Eleonas – which revolves around a prevailing rhetoric of failure – and the situation today.

Sapountzaki and Wassenhoven speak about Eleonas today representing a “(spatial and a-spatial) ‘black hole’” (Sapountzaki/Wassenhoven 2003: 3). In studies and reports about the area, the status-quo is described as following: “Eleonas is a heavily polluted (and polluting) post-industrial land: a sort of ‘dump’, a vast scale of amorphous fabric, a territory of disparate land uses with undeveloped road network” (CMT 2013: 229). Questions are raised why such studies emphasize rather on infrastructures than on places of public life and encounter or networks of formalized industries still existing in the area. Sofia Tsadari captures the pessimistic undertone of an employee of the “Organization of Athens”(cf. 2.3.2), who is involved in the development of the area since 1989, saying that: “The story of Eleonas is exactly the sample of how the Greek state works and operates” (ibid.: 9). With the words of an area’s resident, cited by Tsadari:

«Eleonas is the shame of the official state, which has pulled a curtain to hide it, and it does this for years. Like the backyard of a house where we throw all the useless so that the neighbors won’t see them [...]» (Tsadari 2013a: 8⁴⁹)

Describing Eleonas as an “urban void” is quite frequent, but most commonly expert terms like this are not freed from negative connotations and biases. Marginalized users of Eleonas’ urban spaces are seen as part of the problem and not as key to its solution. This can be observed for example in the following quote by Papagrigoriou/Papadaki et al.:

«This process created a parasite called urban void. Urban voids have reached epidemic proportions in many contemporary cities and understanding this phenomenon allows to prepare strategies of facing this issue. [...] Urban voids are unattractive to passers-by and neighborhood. They often give a temporary shelter for homeless people, Roma people or illegal immigrants: marginal groups within marginal spaces – the urban gaps.» (Papagrigoriou/Papadaki et al. 2011: 29)

Other researchers and academics articulate their position in even more explicit ways. Patargias and Pouloudis for example, in a 2002 paper, state their fears about the future of Eleonas in a strong language:

«[...] the area will soon end up to what some people call a ‘City Planning Abscess’ (not unjustifiably so).» (Patargias/Pouloudis 2002: 2)

⁴⁸ Greek original, translation by the author.

⁴⁹ Greek original, translation by the author.

It is clear that most of the involved professionals' opinions predict or corroborate the decline or doom of Eleonas. Moreover, the tendency of calling out Eleonas for its role as the "troublemaker" of Athens produces a condition of demonization of the current uses accompanied by a process of "othering"⁵⁰ of the people actually living and working in the area. Sofia Tsadari notes: "[...] Eleonas became in a way the residual, the leftover of the city" (Tsadari 2013a: 7).

Yet people are important links when trying to understand the area's dynamics and modes of functioning. Kontaratou argues that, as pictured in the previous chapters: "in Eleonas the heart of the productive and transitory activity of the city is still beating" (Kontaratou 2008/09: 134)⁵¹. Kontaratou argues that it is wrong to present Eleonas as simply an "urban void", as its character as the productive nucleus of the city and the human networks that assure the area's functionality are still strong. Instead, she stresses the importance of trying to understand these networks before intervening with grand plans. Knowledge about them and their modes of functioning is crucial in order to plan appropriately without destroying important human and other existing resources, something that would have direct or indirect (negative) effects on a wider radius in the Attica basin and beyond (ibid.) Tsadari, in line with that argument, finds that: "General quotes always run the risk of flattening and stigmatization. And they usually cannot describe reality. So Eleonas is not in general 'area in crisis', 'urban gap', 'no man's land' as it has been characterized. Decline, though, is not causality. There are conditions for a different perspective. But the latter requires radical change of objectives, priorities and orientation of public spending" (Tsadari 2013a:1).

This statement essentially sums up what the symbolic and actual position of Eleonas is in the city today. It has been shown that the area has been used as a collector of contested, "difficult" or "unwanted" uses for the past half century. The generalized climate of crisis after 2008 further strengthened the "problematic" image of the area. "Urban backyard", "black hole", the city's "dump-site", etc.... all these attributions shape a public opinion of Eleonas as a burdensome, worthless space, that should better vanish, or in the best case become "normalized". Dalakoglou and Vradis state that "in the face of this fear [that of the 'city-jungle'] the bulldozer often takes charge [...] through normalizing non-beneficial and non-productive conceptually empty territories in Eleonas, in the colonial logic of commercial gain [...]" (Dalakoglou/Vradis 2011: 72) In this context, the newly proposed uses (cremation facility, waste disposal site, mosque/spiritual headquarter for a minority religion, refugee camp) strengthen the semantics of the residual space that Eleonas constitutes.

In this specific sociohistorical context, informalized relations and activities have grown and taken root in Eleonas. This particular sphere of life is deprived of its legitimacy and is excluded from considerations and plans that affect the area. The mechanisms of such considerations will be the subject of the subsequent chapter.

2.3.5 «στον αστερισμό των αστικών αναπλάσεων / in the solar constellation of urban regeneration»⁵²: **Rent gap and gentrification**

The urban space of Eleonas, as it was highlighted in the previous chapters, is a highly contested field that is constantly exposed to developmental pressures. Seemingly antagonistic to this framework, Eleonas is also a devaluated area frequently coined urban void, leftover or blind spot. The relation between urban development projects and the city's residual spaces can be understood through the lens of the rent gap theory (Smith 1987). The rent gap describes the difference between the highest achievable

rent and the low rent income under the current use of a property or land. The rent gap's maximization is a driving factor for capital investment in the built environment, meaning redevelopment and gentrification:

«At some point, the devaluation of capital depresses the ground-rent level sufficiently that the "rent gap" between actual capitalized ground rent and the potential ground rent (given a "higher" use) becomes sufficiently large that redevelopment and gentrification become possible.» (Smith 1984: 199-200)

The steady devaluation of areas of the center affects both brownfields and residential districts, land which then becomes the focus for new development. Critical formulations of rent gap theory understand this gap as an "outcome of political decisions, agency and class struggle" (Krijnen 2018: 1042):

«Rent gaps are not simply a result of the market forces of supply and demand, but are created and exploited by state-legitimized power and "agents of capital" (financiers, real estate brokers, developers, policy elites), through, among others, the legal framework and investment and disinvestment decisions.» (Krijnen 2018: 1042)

The above seems to describe the processes happening in the case of Eleonas, where planned relocation of industry resulted in low ground values before leading to a series of large-scale investment. A newspaper article from 2007 covering the eviction of a Roma settlement from the double regeneration area in Votanikos reads:

«Indeed, some residents claim that the abandonment of the area by the state was deliberate, so that the plans for the "exploitation" of this blind spot of Athens, which is so close to the centre of the capital and with minimal infrastructure, its value can skyrocket for the benefit of informed speculators.» (iospress.gr 2007)

Thus, urban pressure and urban decay very often go hand in hand, albeit their antagonistic features, as exemplified by the reoccurring attempts to exploit the developmental potential of Eleonas' residual spaces, mainly through the infamous double regeneration plan and its side projects.

Gentrification and displacement

Perhaps two factors in particular contributed to Eleonas becoming a receptor of informal trading practices. The gradual expulsion of street trade from the historic city center (cf. 4.2), the spatial displacement and dispossession of the vulnerable on the one hand, combined with the effects of chronic degradation and land devaluation in the context of urban regeneration on the other, in line with processes which were outlined in the current chapter.

Such phenomena paired with the prospect of investment opportunities link to processes of gentrification (Harvey 1989; Smith 1996). The urban upgrade of areas that were traditionally locations of work and also home to many wastepickers (Metaxourgio/Keramikos, Psyri, Gazi) conditioned the establishment of the markets in the less central, non-populated areas of Votanikos/Egaleo in Eleonas. Of course this does not exclude further displacement happening in Eleonas. On the contrary, the new uses brought up a conflict of interests with the pertinent authorities and investors, like in the case of the eviction of Roma encampments around the Double Regeneration Plan area (iospress.gr 2007; Tsagaratos/Georgiadis 2010: 43). As part of the regeneration plan envisioning, neighboring Roma camps surrounded by industrial uses were vacated, latest was one in Agiou Polykarpou within the DRP borders

⁵⁰ Othering refers to the social practice of constructing the "other". Through the stigmatization of the "other", one's own group identity is constructed, whereby the self is valorized by the negative placement and imagined inferiority of the other group. The othering process is thus not only about locating the subject to be dominated, but also about strategically locating the hegemonic self (Fuchs/ Nöbauer/ Zuckerhut 2001: 184).

⁵¹ Greek original, translation by the author.

⁵² (insider.gr 2021)

and another one which had its entrance from Orfeos Street (Tsadari 2019: 39). Newspaper magazine *Ios* was reporting at the time of the evictions: “The Municipality of Athens treats the Roma families of Votanikos like rubbish. In order to expel them from the area where the Panathinaikos stadium will be built, the services of the Municipality and the interested ‘investors’ use every means”⁵³, slamming the ruling party at the city council on its indifference towards the violent eviction (iospress.gr 2007).

In research, there are different positions on gentrification in the Greek context, which are summarized here through the thoughts of social geographer Thomas Maloutas and social anthropologist Georgia Alexandri. More specifically, Maloutas argues that because of the lack of direct state intervention the phenomenon cannot be identified in the classic sense in the Greek case. Gentrification in Athens is less related to housing than to changes of use of public space (Maloutas 2018). In some areas like Metaxourgeio, Gazi or Psyri the result is the replacement of local artisans and small scale industry by leisure activities, such as dining out or clubbing (ibid.). According to Maloutas this replacement also changes the city: “but it’s not the usual type of gentrification». (Maloutas 2017 in greeknewsagenda.gr) Alexandri, meanwhile, states that the absence of the state or rather its abstract action comprises: “a liquid strategy promoting gentrification, tolerating speculation and overlooking displacement” (Alexandri 2018: 37). She further highlights that in Athens: “gentrification has emerged from the fractures of a spasmodic planning system- a system in which politically networked social groups and the elite are able to change the planning framework and impose their own rhythms upon space production” (ibid.). It is safe to assume that the same system as a political heritage is applied in the planning framework for Eleonas and the strategic urban restructuring of the area.

It is also worth mentioning the perennial effort of the Athens Municipality to limit the space of the artisan traders⁵⁴ on Apostolou Pavlou Street near the Thissio metro station. The conflict between the municipality and the craftspeople exists at least since 2008 when the artisans achieved to get a permission of use for the pedestrian zone connecting the metro station with the Acropolis hill. Since then, the petty traders have been confronted multiple times with persecutions, arrests and seizures, while the Municipality of Athens regularly filed motions aiming at the relocation of hawkers from the area. Most recently, in 2019, a proposal was made to relocate traders to the pedestrianized part of Ermou Street, towards the edge of the historic center (efsyn.gr 2019) meaning close to the “Korean market”, the former location of the wastepicker bazaar (cf. 4.2). One of the MoA arguments was that due to the commercial activity the path towards archaeological sites would be obstructed and there would be “anarchy in front of the Acropolis” (Daskalou in efsyn.gr 2019). This leads to the conclusion that displacement of artisans and street hawkers from central areas in front of archaeological sites, etc. happened in the preface of urban traders not “fitting” into the image of the city’s ancient past, a commercialized history that serves the needs of the tourism sector.

Conclusion

In conclusion of chapter 2, essential points can be highlighted as following. Widespread urban appropriation practices for residential, agricultural, or industrial purposes have been inscribed in the historic urban development of Athens and have greatly influenced the environment of Eleonas. Urban restructuring processes of the late 20th century have shaped conditions of abandonment and devaluation of Eleonas, generating a rent gap that led to the era of urban redevelopment through investment in real estate and large projects. The double regeneration area, that as a plan included such projects, overlaps with the wastepicker marketscape of Eleonas shaping the contested base in the context of which wastepickers are driven into invisibility. In the context of the area’s urban restructuring, various enclosures affecting green zones and natural resources (agricultural land, unbuilt surfaces, water streams), cultural heritage (small entrepreneurship, traditional industry), and in general public space have inspired intended or unintended resistance – non-movements – from the ranks of the urban poor and the marginalized. Despite the controlling policies attempted in the recent past, non-regulated, non-formal uses are a fundamental element of the area’s everyday living and working reality.

In the next chapter I will focus on these uses and in particular on the evolution of the wastepicker markets in Eleonas. In order to transition to the case analysis, first I will highlight general aspects of (street) trade, wastepicking and wastepicker unions in the Greek context.



⁵³ Greek original, translation by the author.

⁵⁴ Producers of jewelry, art objects, craftspeople. Legally they are not related to wastepicker traders, however they share a similar treatment by the authorities.

3. Markets, wastepickers, unions: Socio-spatial context

Hegemonic rhetorics of urban decline that have been adopted about Eleonas fall short in grasping the realities of everyday life and work situations on the bottom of Eleonas' devaluated land. The area functions still as the productive core of the city while the workers at the remaining industrial units or in the informal sector (on weekdays) and wastepickers/traders as well as market visitors (on weekends) are the real actors of Eleonas. The latter are claiming streets and pavements, green spaces, public and even private areas of Eleonas as part of pursuing their livelihoods, regardless of superimposed plans and future scenarios of urban regeneration and development. Another meaning and gravity is added to the urban space of Eleonas, shifting the attention from commodified space as a valuable asset to wastepicker markets as an example of lived space, appropriated by the urban subaltern.

In this chapter I will discuss the idea of urban public space as commons in the context of wastepicker markets. Commoning processes are framed in the context of space appropriation in the urban environment of Eleonas. I will continue with an account of urban street markets in the global and local context, before discussing informality in relation to the paradigm of wastepicker markets. Finally I will bridge over to the case analysis with an account of important aspects of the wastepicking profession, while sketching the profile of the Eleonas markets' main actor, the urban wastepicker. I will close with a description of wastepicker organizational bodies, the wastepicker unions and associations and their most important features.

3.1 Of commons and markets

Common spaces according to Stavrides are “those spaces produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses, supports and expresses the community they participate in” (Stavrides 2016: 54). Urban geographer Tom Gillesbie introduces the notion of commons in his examination of the ways city dwellers take collective action to defend their access to urban space in Accra, Ghana. Gillesbie describes everyday strategies of urban traders while highlighting the appropriation of public space by squatters and hawkers. He argues that by doing so they contribute in the creation of *urban commons* (Gillesbie 2017: 982). A commons constituted by “spaces over which city dwellers have established a collective property claim through sustained patterns of collective use and appropriation” (ibid.). When this perspective is applied to the contested urban space of Eleonas, the spaces in which the wastepicker markets grew (pavements, parking lots, warehouses, streets) can be understood as *urban commons*.

Spaces of trade are essential elements of the urban environment of cities. Martha Chen, international coordinator of the WIEGO Network¹ argues that the resources in question for the work of urban waste collectors – solid waste and public space – constitute urban commons (Chen 2016: 2). In the context of collective use and appropriation, one way to view urban markets is the space itself as the acclaimed common. In urban areas, Chen refers to Foster, public space, such as streets, sidewalks, and parks, are widely seen as “the most obvious analog to the commons metaphor” (Foster 2009: 267). As a consequence, organizations of street vendors and wastepickers around the world, so Chen, collectively bargain with local governments to secure access to the public resources needed to pursue their livelihoods – waste and public space (Chen 2016:1). However collective organization is not always an option, as Bayat states: “the growing fragmentation of labour, informalization, the shrinking of public sectors, and “NGOization”—all associated with the neo-liberal restructuring—further curtail the popular capacity for organized activism in the form of, say, traditional trade union organizations” (Bayat 2010: 25). When states do not fulfil the subaltern's social and material needs and expectations, one result is

¹ Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

that matters are taken into people's own hands, Bayat argues and exemplifies: when authorities are incapable of or unwilling to provide resources such as housing or jobs for the poor, and legal channels (e.g. lobbying) to achieve these goals are unreliable or hindered by bureaucracy, people resort to "direct squatting on land or shelters, or illegally spreading their street businesses" (ibid.).

Another way of thinking the relation of Eleonas' market spaces and appropriation processes of public space is to address the wastepicker bazaars as spaces where commoning takes place, as in the act of producing and/or defending commons. In order to describe key features of commoning in the context of wastepicker markets it is relevant to have a closer look at the different forms and types of urban markets in Greece and the actors involved, which will be given in the next chapter.

3.2 Other markets, informality and the Greek paradigm

Globalization and the liberalization of markets have led to an uprising of informal(-ized) economies around the world. An early definition by Castells and Portes states that the informal economy basically includes "all income-earning activities that are not regulated by the state in social environments where similar activities are regulated" (Castells/Portes, 1989: 12). *Informality* is examined in the context of this thesis from a postcolonial perspective. Roy and AlSayyad describe the complexity of categorizing informality by saying that, while one may find ways to define informal activity, it is much less easy to find a category for the individuals involved in it. Roy notes for example that: "Many people do not work wholly in either the formal or the informal sector; rather they switch between them over time, even during the working week. Thus, the construction worker at a formal building company will do freelance work in his spare time" (Roy/AlSayyad 2003:41). For the (informalized) wastepicker of Eleonas this is very much the case, since many traders have multiple (official and unofficial) jobs.

Bayat argues that people living or working in communities of the "informal" spectrum pursue an "informal life" in the sense that they "tend to function as much as possible outside the boundaries of the state and modern bureaucratic institutions" (Bayat 2010: 182f). They do so because they are urged by their existential working and living conditions, as: "modernity is a costly enterprise, in that it requires a capacity to conform to the types of behavior (adherence to strict discipline of time, space, contracts, and so on) that most poor people simply cannot afford" (ibid.). Applied to the case of Eleonas this could mean implications around e.g. tax registration, joining the chamber of commerce, limiting trading hours to a certain schedule (Magalios 2019), etc. (cf. 4.3.3) People living or working under such conditions, so another example by Bayat, could prioritize "reciprocity, trust, and negotiations" in their relationships, rather than building them on "modern notions such as individual self-interest, fixed rules, and contracts" (ibid.) in order to reach autonomy over (bureaucratic) institutions.

Often researchers frame informal² work and life settings as the opposite of formalized standards. They are placed in the negative space of a canon, or, as critiqued by Roy: "informality appears as a state of exception from the formal order of urbanization" (Roy 2005: 147) while different frameworks in the planning discipline fail to recognize how informality "might be a differentiated process embodying varying degrees of power and exclusion". Roy argues that we should instead look at informality as a mode of urbanization and reject the notion of the informal sector (Roy 2005:148). Roy along with Al-Sayyad suggest that informality is not a separate sector but rather "a series of transactions that connect different economies and spaces to one another". (Roy 2005: 148; Roy/AlSayyad 2003).

Global

Cities around the globe owe much of their urbanity to markets. Their physical spaces come in various forms, sizes and appearances – be it trade halls, fairs, popular markets, improvised street stands and

kiosks and are often embodiments of so-called informalized economies, meaning the spectrum of unauthorized, atypical, illegalized types of work. There is a variety of market categories according to Mörtenböck et al., from "notorious"³ to post-conflict markets, border or interstitial markets, container markets, recycling or wayside markets, people's markets etc. As they say, from the "megacities of the Global South to the old centres of political and economic power", those markets represent places of negotiation and conflict between different social actors (Mörtenböck et al. 2015a:12).

In the context of this thesis I am dealing with the wastepicker markets of Eleonas, where practices of garbage picking and waste collection find their final expression in form of (street) trade. Eleonas's trading activity has interstitial characteristics — meaning the market is filling up an urban void — placed in the shrinking economy context of Athens. But what is the practice of wastepicking really about and where and when does it occur? These questions will be further outlined in the next chapters.

3.3 Urban street markets in the Greek context

«Bustling and colourful markets in the city's neighbourhoods are a familiar image in Athens and in the major municipalities of the Attica basin. Farmers and professional retailers compete against each other behind their stalls, advertising their high-quality but affordable products. (...) For years, street markets have been places where Athenians of all ages and incomes buy and sell products.» (Petrou 2015)

In the context of displaying Athens' market traditions in this chapter I will introduce the mainstream canon of open-air, popular, street markets in Greece, the concept of *laiki agora*⁴. I will discuss laiki in relation to the wastepicker Sunday bazaars as both belong to the open-air market landscape of the city, offering important background knowledge on open-air marketplaces in Greece. The popular farmers' market, laiki, functions as a mainstream paradigm and might offer a better understanding of the culture of street trading. I will thus briefly describe the key characteristics of this type of market, sketching a parallel to the topics of urban space appropriation in the context of street vending.

Open-air and temporary street trading in Greece have traditions that can be differentiated based on the core characteristics, target group and orientation of the respective market type (farmer's, religious fair, artisan market). The popular farmers' street market is an essential element of Greek neighbourhood life. As a concept, laiki was conceived in 1929 in order to cover popular needs. Social anthropologist Michalis Petrou refers to it as a "policy to address speculation and fraud during the economic crisis in the interwar period" (Petrou 2015). Initially met with hostility by professional traders and middlemen, the new market-concept quickly gained in popularity and was embraced by the people. The markets were deployed as a tool aiming to help local farmers sell their produce at lower prices by avoiding food trade intermediaries and simultaneously improve poor people's living standards who were benefiting from cheaper prices.

The first laiki market took place in Thissio, an area known for its commercial activity. Nowadays artisan craftsmanship stands and general trading activity dominates Thissio's public spaces — while a certain old-wares and flea market atmosphere is strong around the area. Thissio and the traditional second-hand markets of Monastiraki and Avissinias Square form together the hard core of the city's old-wares' commerce, with antique shopkeepers and thrift store owners stocking up their wares at the

³ "Notorious markets" is a term used by the U.S. Trade Representative Office in the "Special 301" reports which are issued annually. The reports are considered to be a mean of pressure by the U.S. towards foreign economies that "deny adequate and effective protection of intellectual property rights or fair and equitable market access for U.S. Persons that rely on intellectual property protection" (cf. <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2004%20Special%20301%20Report.pdf>)

⁴ Greek: Λαϊκή Αγορά = Popular market, farmer's market. Laiki for short, plural: laikes agores or just laikes.

² Also "aformal", "non-formal", "atypical" and other words used as synonyms.

wastepicker markets of Eleonas. Kamper Vahtet, board chair of wastepicker union *Ermis* (cf. 4.2.2) confirms in the interview with me:

«Listen! The market is not only those who sell; it is also those who buy. [...] If there's no more market [...] also the stores from Avissinias Square would cease to exist. The antique shops, they would start closing one by one. Why? These people come each week and trade from us fresh produce. [...] Well, if there is no market, if the market is closing: the antique shops are also closing» (Vahtet 2018)

«Πρόσεξε! Το παζάρι, το παζάρι δεν είναι μόνο αυτοί που πουλάνε. Είναι και αυτοί που αγοράζουν. [...] Αν δεν υπάρξει παζάρι [...] Δεν θα υπάρξουν τα μαγαζιά που είναι πάνω στην πλατεία Αβησσυνίας - τα παλαιοπωλεία - ένα ένα θα αρχίσουν να κλείνουν. Γιατί; Αυτοί κάθε εβδομάδα εμπορεύονται από μας φρέσκο εμπόρευμα. [...] Λοιπόν. Δεν υπάρχει παζάρι, κλείνει το παζάρι; Σιγά σιγά κλείνουν και τα παλαιοπωλεία.»

The popular farmers' markets on the other hand offer mainly fruit and vegetables, but also fish or dry nuts, as well as home products and clothes. With the years *laiki* has become the dominant daily market type and an integral part of Greek society and culture. They are such important links in the consumer supply chain that during repeated lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak *laikes* continued their operation with spatial adaptations (lesser stands, bigger distances) and a social distancing protocol. (Ministry of Development and Investment 2020) Going to the farmer's market was one of the few reasons one could break the strict lockdown. Together with super markets and pharmacies, the popular street markets were among the essential services, relevant for the city's emergency functioning.

The operational scheme has as following. On a fixed day of the week, a particular street – usually a long and well-known in the area – is sealed off and traffic is halted. Signs prompt drivers to move their parked cars the day before. A specific number of stalls fill the street; they usually do not exceed six meters in width. Produce is labelled by origin. Umbrellas or other types of coverings serve as weather protection (sun and rain); these share appearance, material and color. Every market has a security team and provides a number of mobile toilet units. Sometimes there might be food trucks (canteens) participating. The market lasts from as early as seven in the morning till late noon. Another characteristic of *laiki* are specific temporalities. Customers who are after best quality go early in the morning. Prices are higher then but bargaining is a must. Later towards noon the best products are gone but at the same time prices have fallen - this is when lower income customers are heading out to fill their carts. Others who collect leftovers come at the very end, when municipal cleaners have already started clearing the field (Petrou 2015). Most of these characteristics are shared by wastepicker markets. Currently there are 180 *laikes* operating solely in the Prefecture of Athens-Piraeus, out of which 44 are located within the Athens Municipality borders (ibid.). Market enthusiasts or people with existential needs (leftover collectors) are able to go to multiple markets during a week by moving around different parts of the city.

The management of the markets is regional. A proposal by the relevant municipal council has to be submitted to the relevant regional council in order to start a *laiki*. The proposal includes the opinion of the relevant *Committee of Public Markets*⁵ and the competent police authority for traffic. The regional council decides approval or rejection of the proposal, while regulating characteristics such as the number of stalls, the exact location etc. Each *laiki* defines the internal rules of good conduct for the market. Producers have a tax registration and cash register, which is the most essential

⁵ The Athens equivalent is the "Attica Popular Markets Organization" (Greek Ministry of Development and Investment 2017)

difference to wastepicker markets and perhaps the reason why wastepickers avoid association to producer markets. Contrary to the essential character of *laiki*, the concept of *flea market*, in the way it is established in form and style in western European cities as a temporal and legitimate form of urban second-hand market, is something Greek society is little familiar with. "Old-wares trade" happened mostly in dedicated antiquary shops or thrift stores in assigned districts like Monastiraki and Psyrri in Athens (cf. 4.2).



Right: Top to bottom.

Laiki at Epidavrou Street in Akademia Platonos neighborhood.

Unauthorized extension of the Fylis Street laiki market. Image from May 2021, a time when the markets of Eleonas were still affected by restrictions related to the Covid19 pandemic (Beraldo 2021).

Popular representation of laiki, Kallidromiou Street, Exarcheia. Video-still from the music video "In Athens" (Στην Αθήνα) by group "Usurum" (youtube.com).

Cheap convenient and practical – laiki eventually became fully integrated in the everyday life of urban centres in Greece. Petrou stretches the important social aspects of these markets, since people come here not only to shop their weekly needs but also to meet neighbours, chat, exchange news, speak politics etc. (Petrou 2015) There is little doubt that these popular street markets are essential infrastructures and local social hubs. As such and due to people's embrace and active participation they are inherent part of everyday life and constitute a lived space of the city.

However, certain popular consumer needs are not covered by this type of market, that is where laiki's limits are reached. On the one hand there is a steady growth of demand for suppliers of low-budget daily goods. On the other hand more and more unemployed and working poor, as well as marginalized groups (Roma, migrants, refugees) have a two-folded relationship with laikes. Increasingly in recent years they do not only find affordable products but also try to sell their own belongings, fresh produce (fruits and vegetables) and trash bin findings (Kouzas 2017) This phenomenon manifests in the encroachment of existing infrastructures (unauthorized extensions of official laiki segments), or in the transformation of traditional laikes in dense and low-income neighbourhoods into impromptu flea markets (e.g. Saturday market at Michail Voda Street in Agios Panteleimonas neighbourhood, Central Athens). Crackdowns by state and municipal police are routine, with a common tactic being sweeping actions that classify as operations against fraud and unlawful trade, as well as against (undocumented) migrants⁶. In a VICE magazine report the journalist vividly describes his own encounter with the police at the laiki of Michail Voda Street in 2016, when the unauthorized market was swepted and dissolved and wares were eliminated:

«The [unauthorized] traders collect their stuff hastily, when a minute later I see a municipality service car stopping and two police officers jump out. One starts running behind some cars, crouched so as not to be noticed, and catches an immigrant with some rags off guard. The man is shook, his things fall on the street and the policeman asks for his papers. Meanwhile the municipality car has approached the scene and the trader's wares land in the back of the truck.» (vice.gr 2016 translation by the author)

More social adversity – which led to higher numbers of hawkers and wastepickers – correspondingly increases their spatial needs, eventually driving a growing number of individuals towards collective forms of (passive) organization (e.g. following the more experienced, joining groups, participating in unions/associations, contributing in information exchange networks, etc.). In the next chapter I will outline some of these practices in the context of increasing informalization following neoliberal restructuring processes.

A comparison between the wastepicker markets of Eleonas and the popular farmer's market laiki revealed many of similarities in appearance, rhythms and temporalities. However, a gap lies between them mainly in terms of legal frameworks, regulation and establishment. On a formal level, little has been done to acknowledge wastepicker markets (and rights) since their formation. While law 4497/2017⁷ covers several types of markets, second-hand flea markets and wastepicker bazaars are barely mentioned⁸. Eleonas' terrain remains an unseen market landscape, a field for society's invisibles,

⁶ See for instance reports from the 2013 height of force led police operations against proclaimed illegal migration in the capital (operation "Xenios Dias") strongly affecting areas with high numbers of migrants such as Agios Panteleimonas (Dalakoglou 2013: 31).

⁷ Law 4497/2017 - "carrying out outdoor commercial activities" (<https://www.lawspot.gr/nomikes-plirofories/nomothesia/nomos-4497-2017>) offers some definitions for common types of trade: 1. „Outdoor trade“ means the commercial activity carried out in the open, such as the sale of products in public and other organized open-air markets, as well as street trade. 2. „Stationary trade“ means the pursuit of an outdoor commercial activity by a seller who does not move from a fixed point designated by the competent authority. 3. „Street trade“ means the pursuit of an outdoor commercial activity by a seller who moves with or without the use of any motor vehicle or trailer or any other movable means.

⁸ More on the legal implications and discontent over regulatory attempts of the wastepicker markets cf. 4.3.3.

its subaltern others⁹, in the case of Athens: Roma people, minorities, immigrants and refugees, unemployed or poor people.

Central figure of the Eleonas markets is the street junk or waste collector, the urban wastepicker. In the next chapter I will outline the global profile and regional manifestations of the act of wastepicking. Further I will render an image of the wastepicker and the implications of their role in shaping Eleonas' wastepicker markets. Finally I will give a general account of wastepicker unionizing and its local characteristics.

3.4 Introducing the actors: Wastepicking as necessity and as profession

«On the sidewalks, encased in spotless plastic bags, the remains of yesterday's Leonia await the garbage truck. Not only squeezed tubes of toothpaste, blown-out light bulbs, newspapers, containers, wrappings, but also boilers, encyclopedias, pianos, porcelain dinner services. It is not so much by the things that each day are manufactured, sold, bought that you can measure Leonia's opulence, but rather by the things that each day are thrown out to make room for the new. So you begin to wonder if Leonia's true passion is really, as they say, the enjoyment of new and different things, and not, instead, the joy of expelling, discarding, cleansing itself of a recurrent impurity.»

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972)

I Wastepicking

The urban wastepicker, junk or rag collector, is a central figure of Eleonas markets. Thus, it is necessary to sketch the profile of these defining actors, people engaging in the field, and add a few words about the act of wastepicking, collecting and dealing with old, discarded objects.

Wastepicking is widely practiced and documented, particularly in the Global South but also increasingly in the northern hemisphere (Roy/AlSayyad 2003) In 2008, during the "First World Conference of Waste Pickers" in Bogota, Colombia the profession was officially outlined and the name *wastepicker* (equally found as *waste-picker* or *waste picker*) was adopted. Globally, the job is nowadays performed by millions, and occurs when people collect discarded recyclable or reusable objects or scrap (metal/paper/wires etc.) to make profit by selling them at markets or by supplying recycling and waste processing companies. Organizations like WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) or GAIA (Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives) argue that the profession of wastepicking is essential for reducing the harms of modern day waste-producing societies and thus "advocating for recycler and waste picker rights is an important part of working for environmental justice and zero waste" (GAIA 2016¹⁰). Wastepicking is also considered important because it offers substantial financial support to people who would otherwise fall through the social security net, like for example the homeless, long-term unemployed people or undocumented migrants.

In Athens the image of people salvaging items from trash bins has become increasingly common. The wastepicking phenomenon has reached a climax in recent years, with various reports pointing out its relations to the economic crisis. (Dalakoglou/Kallianos 2014; Kouzas 2017) Dimitris Dalakoglou and Yannis Kallianos problematize the case of the major landfill of Filli, a town near Athens, and

⁹ *Othering* refers to the social practice of constructing the "other". Through the stigmatisation of the "other", one's own group identity is constructed, whereby the self is valorized by the negative placement and imagined inferiority of another group. The othering process is thus not only about locating the subject to be dominated, but also about strategically locating the hegemonic self. (Fuchs/Nöbauer/Zuckerhut 2001: 184)

¹⁰ <http://www.no-burn.org/recycling-worker-and-wastepicker-rights/>

related waste flows. They note that significant transformations on everyday flows of waste find their origin at the ordinary trash bins (Dalakoglou/Kallianos 2014). According to evident observations, since 2010 an increasing number of individuals are searching in the city's garbage bins for valuables to sell as scrap (i.e. metal, paper), in order to re-sell through private networks or at second-hand markets. Also the number of individuals simply searching for edibles in the municipal trash bins has greatly increased (ibid.). The researchers further note that: "Austerity policies have rapidly created a new level of extreme poverty, the most 'fortunate' social classes simply consume less (generating less garbage) while the lowest classes struggle to survive, sifting through and consuming the rubbish of the others" (Dalakoglou/Kallianos 2014: 25).

One of the side-effects of these phenomena according to Dalakoglou/Kallianos, is a decrease in the volume of rubbish that end up at Athens' landfills (ibid.). However the majority of garbage in Greece, 76% of the overall disposed waste in 2014 is buried in landfills according to the Greek Recycling Association whereas only 16% of waste gets recycled according to the same report. More interesting is that out of the recycled waste 94,5% came from waste collectors and scrap yards with the rest coming from the state's recycling bins (blue bins) (Greek Recycling Association 2014, in Egaleo Municipality Strategic Plan 2015: 29).

Social anthropologist Georgios Kouzas reminds that the enormous changes that took place in Athens due to multiple marginalizations of individuals and certain groups of the population are certainly visible today (Kouzas 2017: 231). These changes were caused mainly by the ever-expanding financial crisis and developed from having an economic origin into becoming a profound social and humanitarian crisis (ibid.). A high number of people were pushed to the street or in other precarious situations where wastepicking seemed like one of the options for generating income. The situation deteriorated after 2015 with the arrival to the urban centers of thousands of often destitute refugees, great numbers of which were not able to continue their journey to other cities and stayed in Athens. With their papers and work permits in process and their legal status often uncertain, many migrants turn to informal trading for a living.

II WASTEPICKERS

«I see it as a social action. As an extra income, although it's no longer an extra, it is what people live on. We used to go to the market to get something extra to better support our family. When the crisis ended the building industry, the number of wastepickers increased.» (Vahtet 2017 in newsbeast.gr)

«Το βλέπω σαν κοινωνική δράση. Σαν ένα εξτρά εισόδημα, αν και πλέον δεν είναι εξτρά είναι αυτό που ζει ο κόσμος. Κάποτε βγαίναμε στο παζάρι για να βγάλουμε κάτι εξτρά να ζήσουμε καλύτερα την οικογένειά μας. Όταν τελείωσε η οικοδομή με την κρίση αυξήθηκαν και οι ρακοςυλλέκτες»

According to Kouzas, the number of waste collectors mushroomed in recent times, while the job has received a lot of media attention as an iconic «crisis occupation». (Kouzas 2017: 232) Wastepickers (*Rakosylléktes*) can now be found more often than ever on the streets of Athens. (ibid.)

As the field became bigger and new actors entered, conflicts and contradictions arose while old (racist) stereotypes were occasionally strengthened (e.g. towards Roma). A certain part of the older wastepicker generations tend to identify with the image of the misunderstood and undervalued preservers and guardians of the gems of Greek culture, which would forever be lost unless saved by them.

Remembering an anecdote from one of the first encounters with the board of *Proodos* wastepicker union, my interlocutors brought an antique copy of Cavafy's poems (famous Greek poet of the early 20th century) which was salvaged from the trash, in order to emphasize on their role as servants of the public interest.

Usually a person doing business with old objects could be called one of the following names, each of which bears a different connotation and constitutes a specific identity:

Paleopólis m., **paleopólissa** f. / paleo'polis, paleo'polisa / (παλιοπόλης m., παλιοπόλισσα f.) merchant who buys and re-sells second-hand items, often of significant value (antiques).

Paliatzís, pl. **Paliatzídes** / παλα'τζίς, παλα'τζιδες / (Παλιατζής, pl. Παλιατζήδες) junk dealer; scrap-person. Petty trader who buys old and used items, usually of small value, for scrapping or reselling.

Rakosylléktis m., **rakosylléktria** f. / rakosi'lektis, rakosi'lektria / (ρακοςυλλέκτης m., ρακοςυλλέκτρια f.) rag collector, wastepicker; a person who collects various items from the garbage that they find valuable (to sell or for own use).

Wastepicker Kamper Vahtet exemplifies this distinction as following:

«We're not paliatzides. The scrapman is mainly interested in metal, in volume and quantity. We sort through the items, clean them, love them, and give them away at very low prices to people who, like us, ultimately come out ahead. [...] The concept, in general, is to find something useful, something beautiful or, anyway, something that you can sell as such from the rubbish.» (Vahtet 2016 in popaganda.gr)

«Παλιατζήδες δεν είμαστε. Ο παλιατζής ενδιαφέρεται κυρίως για το μέταλλο, για τον όγκο και την ποσότητα. Εμείς ξεδιαλέγουμε τα αντικείμενα, τα καθαρίζουμε, τα αγαπάμε και τα δίνουμε σε πολύ χαμηλές τιμές σε ανθρώπους που βγαίνουν, τελικά, όπως κι εμείς, κερδισμένοι. [...] Το concept, γενικά, είναι να βρίσκεις από τα σκουπίδια κάτι χρήσιμο, κάτι όμορφο ή, τέλος πάντων, κάτι που εσύ μπορείς να το πουλήσεις ως τέτοιο.»

Excluded from such identities are the new poor, migrants and refugees who started doing the job out of need and/or coincidence. The undesired competition (causing deficiency of collectable items in the garbage) causes some old "paliatzídes" and "rakosylléktes" to be hesitant and even hostile towards newcomers. A common fear is that they will have to deal with price dumping (greater need causes traders at the markets to "give away" things for very low prices). Old wastepickers are also afraid of losing their fragile (positive) reputation and public image. The situation is complex, wastepicker Spyros' explains in an interview with Kouzas:

«With the crisis in recent years a lot of people confuse us with homeless people, beggars or those looking for trash to eat. We have nothing to do with them. It is very important (to understand) that we existed and have been working for decades. Now that the crisis has become the first issue and everybody is getting poorer, they have noticed us and are placing us in the category of the miserable, even if we don't have anything to do with beggars and the like. Not

that we are rich, but we are not beggars, by any means. We work day and night on the street, we do not ask for alms and help from anyone.» (Spyros 2015 in Kouzas, efsyn.gr)

«Πολύς κόσμος τα τελευταία χρόνια με την κρίση μάς μπερδεύει με τους άστεγους, τους ζητιάνους ή όσους ψάχνουν στα σκουπίδια για φαγητό. Εμείς δεν έχουμε καμιά σχέση με αυτούς. Είναι πολύ σημαντικό ότι εμείς υπάρχουμε και δουλεύουμε εδώ και δεκαετίες. Τώρα που έγινε η κρίση πρώτο θέμα και όλοι φτωχύνανε πιο πολύ, μας προσέξανε και μας βάλανε κι εμάς στην κατηγορία των δυστυχημένων κι ας μην έχουμε σχέση με τους ζητιάνους και με όλους αυτούς. Οχι ότι έχουμε τρελά χρήματα, αλλά ζητιάνοι δεν είμαστε, με την καμιά. Εμείς δουλεύουμε μέρα-νύχτα στον δρόμο, δεν ζητάμε ελεημοσύνη και τη βοήθεια κανενός»

We see in this statement that Spyros makes a distinction between the new urban poor and himself, lifting himself above the others, the beggars as he calls them in a rather pejorative way. He is certainly not the only one with this view, which is exemplary for the aforementioned form of conflict among the different people working with garbage in the streets. Hierarchical structures have not spared the wastepicker communities and associations. However their concrete expression reveals a lot about the individuals' everyday life struggle.

However other wastepickers demonstrate different paradigms, calling for solidarity and tolerance among various informal workers. Old-wares trade and wastepicking in Athens is closely connected to the living realities of discriminated populations like the Roma or the native Greek Muslim minority and in recent times also rising numbers of migrant populations which progressively inhabit the (shrinking) urban centre. Kamper Vahtet, representative of Ermis union, emphasizes that for him there is no reason for conflict with immigrants who engage in the work of scrap collection:

«There is nothing to divide me from a man from Pakistan or Africa who collects paper [card-board] and metal. I collect objects; he collects paper and metal» (Vahtet 2017 in newsbeast.gr)

More about the topics of conflict, competition and solidarity as well as an account of the counter-hegemonic self-perception of market actors can be found in chapter 4.5.



Left: Travel poster - advertisement for Thrace as found in one of the markets.

III Wastepicker unions

We can observe how organizational efforts of informal workers trace the story of the wastepicker markets in Eleonas. These efforts resulted to early stage unions and interest organizations, campaigning for more wastepicker rights and better working conditions. Some unions also campaign for visibility, demanding legal recognition by the state. It is a matter of fact that organizations of street vendors and waste pickers around the world bargain with local authorities, in order to secure access to public resources, which are essential for pursuing their livelihood. Sometimes these alliances even collectively manage public resources they are able to gain access to, as Martha Chen, international coordinator of the WIEGO Network notes on her paper on managing urban commons in the context of informal employment. It is important for the purposes of this thesis to emphasize on Chen's statement that the resources in question – solid waste and public space – constitute urban commons. (Chen 2016)

Wastepicker unions in Greece and Eleonas

The recent history of trade with old wares is directly connected to Eleonas. It begins roughly in the 1960s, after internal migrants from Greece's rural areas (many of them Greek Muslims from Thrace¹¹) settled in industrial areas in and around Eleonas (Gazi, Votanikos, Kerameikos). Many newcomers initially found employment as workers in the construction sector and developing industries which at that time were mostly settled in Eleonas: textile factories, paper plants and others. Through their occupations some started engaging with the practice of scrap and waste collection, which at that time was an opportunity for extra earnings. For many new residents later this became a primary source of income. Wastepicker Raif Hasan describes his first contact with the job, picking up the habit of collecting old items in order to later sell them along with his father in law, a paper collector:

«We talk 84 [1984], yes, that is when I came to Athens. My father in law was collecting, he had a small truck and I would go with him, he was collecting paper and I, you know, I would find various things and then go to Adrianou [Street] near the train trucks to the bazaar.» (Hasan R. 2019)

«Το 84 μιλάμε τώρα, ήρθα Αθήνα εγώ, ναι. Μάζευε ο πεθερός μου, είχε ένα φορτηγάκι και εγώ πήγαινα μαζί του, αυτός μάζευε χαρτί και εγώ ξέρεις, έβρισκα διάφορα πράγματα και πήγαινα εκεί στο Αδριανού κοντά στις γραμμές του τρένου στο παζάρι.»

It was in 1992 when a small group of people—predominantly Greek citizens of Muslim faith from the Muslim community of Thrace, North-Eastern Greece—formed an informal association of wastepickers. Six years later in 1998 the group would become the most active and well-known union of wastepickers in Athens: *Ermis*.

In the case of Eleonas, unions of wastepickers manage the marketplaces on their own, even taking over public relations and administrative work necessary for this cause. In this context it is also interesting to look at the fragile equilibrium between the unions themselves and between wastepickers and the public authorities (Municipality of Athens and Municipality of Egaleo, Mayor and Deputy Mayor for Waste Management and Recycling, State- and Municipal Police, Governor and Vice-Governor of the Prefecture of Attica and representatives of the Ministry of Finance/Ministry of Development and Investment). The degree in which cooperation with these authorities is striven for differs between the

¹¹ Explicitly recognized minority in Greece, the Greek Muslims of Thrace, are Greek citizens of Muslim faith. The Muslims of Thrace were not expelled to Turkey during the population exchange of 1922-1923 (cf. 2.3) and stayed in Greek territory. The minority has representatives in the Greek Parliament and certain minority rights related to education and religious affairs. The largest numbers of the minority live in Thrace, however many left the region in the postwar and settled in larger cities such as Athens.

unions. This is certainly an important aspect to be considered when examining the administrative framework of the markets and the relation between their actors.

« I think because of the financial crisis, downturn led these people to do this [job]- no, as a sideline. One thinks let's earn fifty, thirty euros, how much can I get. And so became this flood. We were one bazaar and we became fourteen-fifteen.» (Magalios 2019)

«Εγώ πιστεύω λόγω της οικονομικής κρίσης η δυσπραγία οδήγησε αυτούς τους ανθρώπους να κάνουν αυτή τη [δουλειά] - όχι, σαν πάρεργο. Σου λέει να πάρω πενήντα, τριάντα ευρώ, πόσα μπορώ να πάρω. Και έγινε αυτή η πλυμμηρίδα. Ήμασταν ένα παζάρι και γίναμε δεκατέσσερα-δεκαπέντε.»

Wastepicker unions in Greece have grown a lot in recent years. Kamper Vahtet, current president of Ermis, states in an interview from 2017 that he receives multiple calls each day from people who are interested to join the union. Vahtet detects high rates of unemployment as the cause, and declares the union's readiness to host these people:

«On the one hand I am sad but on the other at least I am glad that I can give him a point of reference» (Vahtet 2017 in newsbeast.gr)

«Από την μία στεναχωριέμαι αλλά από την άλλη τουλάχιστον χαίρομαι που μπορώ να του δώσω ένα σημείο αναφοράς.»

How to join the union

Not all simple traders consider themselves active members of the union (Ilias 2019), however they have to be registered in order to sell at the markets. The procedure one has to follow to become a member varies from union to union. Fehridun Memis, former president of Ermis explains in 2014:

«To become a member you must prove that you have a real need for this job. Or one can become a member if he is nominated by 3 members of the association. However, the demand is very high, people constantly want to join the union. We could be 10 thousand members. The financial crisis has led many people to this job.» (Memis 2014 in thetoc.gr)

«Για να γίνει κάποιος μέλος πρέπει να μας αποδείξει ότι έχει πραγματική ανάγκη για αυτή τη δουλειά. Η μπορεί να γίνει μέλος αν τον προτείνουν 3 μέλη του σωματείου. Πάντως η ζήτηση είναι πολύ μεγάλη, συνεχώς άνθρωποι θέλουν να εγγραφούν στο σωματείο. Θα μπορούσαμε να είμαστε 10 χιλιάδες μέλη. Η οικονομική κρίση έχει οδηγήσει πολλούς ανθρώπους σε αυτή τη δουλειά.»

Other modalities include a fee to cover basic expenses of the unions. Vahtet elaborates on this aspect to a journalist covering a story about Ermis:

«You should know that the union is non-profit, but there are some contributions which are of course very affordable. These are to cover the absolute necessary expenses of our space, the rent, electricity, the Internet and so on. There is also a security and safety group that is overseeing the happenings at the bazaar, clean the space after and receive a small amount for this job, so as to do it correctly and consistently.» (Vahtet 2016 in popaganda.gr)

«Το σωματείο, για να ξέρετε, είναι μη κερδοσκοπικό, αλλά υπάρχουν κάποιες συνδρομές, πολύ οικονομικές, φυσικά, για τα απολύτως αναγκαία έξοδα του χώρου μας: το ενοίκιο, το ρεύμα, το Internet και τα λοιπά. Έχουμε, επίσης, και μια ομάδα περιφρούρησης που επιβλέπουν τις διαδικασίες στο παζάρι, καθαρίζουν το χώρο μετά και παίρνουν ένα καρτζηλίκι, ας το πούμε, γι' αυτή τη δουλειά, ώστε να την κάνουν σωστά και με συνέπεια.»

The contributions work similar in other unions. The stall fees vary and according to on-site observations ranges from 5 to 15 euro per table per market day. One can understand that for some vendors this amount is an obstacle and this is the reason why not all traders belong to a union and instead choose to sell their goods on the street regardless other threats (police harassment, fines). Vahtet further explains how one can sign up for his union:

«The process of signing-up for Ermis Union is fairly easy. We request two pictures for us to know his face, an ID copy and one proof of his address (electricity bill, rent contract etc.).» (Vahtet 2016 in popaganda.gr)

«Η εγγραφή του ρακοσυλλέκτη στο Σωματείο ΕΡΜΗΣ γίνεται πολύ απλά. Ζητάμε δυο φωτογραφίες να δούμε τη φάτσα του, μια αστυνομική ταυτότητα και ένα αποδεικτικό για το πού μένει. (ΔΕΗ, ενοικιαστήριο κλπ).»

Proodos union has a special registration form with the union's rules of conduct. These rules concern the good management of the site but are also intended as external coverage against arbitrary controls and harassment. Every prospective member has to agree to respect them before entering the union and when commencing their weekly trading practice at the wastepicker markets.

«That is, we have set up a situation, before you become a member you have to fill in a form that you accept the terms of the association. [...] So if the police come, we should know how to handle it.» (Hasan E. 2019)

«Δηλαδή έχουμε φτιάξει μία κατάσταση, πριν γίνεις μέλος να συμπληρώνεις ένα αίτημα ότι αποδέχεσαι τους όρους του σωματείου. [...] Οπότε άμα έρθει η αστυνομία να ξέρουμε και εμείς πως να το χειριστούμε.»

I have showed in this chapter the foundations of street markets and urban trading in Greece, the background of second hand, old-wares street markets. Further I have outlined the actor network behind wastepicker markets and gave an insight on the working realities of individual actors and representative associations shaping the base for the formation of Eleonas' wastepicker markets. In the next chapter I will continue with a specific account of the market actors, unions, communities and customers of Eleonas and introduce the history of displacement and relocation behind the wastepicker markets. I will further analyse the ways in which acclaimed spaces are defended, modes of organising and resistance of market actors and I will also discuss the complexities of relations with authorities. I will then frame the marketscape of Eleonas as a field of space appropriation and commoning, analysing the market spaces in regards to their spatial characteristics and relations to their urban environment. Finally I will show ways in which self-management of the market sites was made possible and discuss topics of self-representation and opposition to external definition, concluding with demands and visions of Eleonas' acting individuals.



4. *Pazarria*: the case of Eleonas' wastepicker markets

The terrain of Eleonas is specific; it is either a place most Athenians have ignorance about, a place to be avoided, or both. Considered by many an “urban void”, a vessel waiting to be filled with function and content, frequently coined the decaying backyard of the city, we have seen that these attributions fall short in grasping the essence of everyday life in Eleonas (cf. 2.2). With the specific background of urban restructuring processes in mind and in consideration of the fact that Eleonas is subjected to developmental pressures for at least the last thirty years, the markets of Eleonas seem to contest hegemonic plans by imposing a use in the context of which space is actively claimed by and for people from the margins of society.

Soon, a whole network of marketplaces spread across various streets in the surroundings, in abandoned buildings, parking lots, warehouses and other industrial architectures. Nuclei of self-managed, weekly marketplaces spontaneously formed around Eleonas, centered on the activity of urban wastepickers and their organizational bodies, wastepicker unions (cf. 3.4). The markets—that take place mostly on Sundays and partially on Saturdays—spread in the northern part of Eleonas, that is shared by two municipalities (Athens and Egaleo), on a site of approximately fifty hectares (the size of about seventy football stadiums) which largely overlaps with the Votanikos double regeneration area (cf. 2.3.3). It consists of several market sites, mostly inside abandoned industrial infrastructures (warehouses, parking lots etc.) which are privately organized by wastepicker organizations and unions. Including the rows of makeshift stalls on the intermediate streets, they form market clusters and larger conglomerates that infiltrate public streets, private properties, grey zones, dead-ends and green spaces. The markets are attracting some thousand sellers/vendors and customers/market-goers from all over the region of Attica and even beyond regional borders. Growth of the trading sites has been exponential in the late 2010s, a development which is linked to conditions of crisis and urban restructuring in the Athens context (cf. 2.3).

Eleonas' marketplaces as sites where counter-hegemonic uses of space take place was discussed in the previous chapters since my first encounters with the case. The early contact I had with the markets and expected long timeframe for the completion of this thesis allowed observing the growth of the marketplaces throughout a period of a few years. It made the question relevant of how wastepickers, bound in a peculiar form of community, manage to claim space for their practices and to sustain themselves and their infrastructures with no institutional support or even despite facing the authorities' outright rejection and hostility. The markets are sites of negotiation and conflict and places where eventually questions of “cooperative decision making, and social cohesion” become relevant (Mörtenböck et al. 2015a: 7). How processes of displacement from the city center, of repression and marginalization of the markets' protagonists, the wastepickers (the profiles of which will be outlined in chapter 4.1) greatly influenced the development of the markets, will be discussed in chapter 4.2. Central is the relation between displacement and urban restructuring and space appropriation in the context of Eleonas' marketplaces – wastepicker struggles of defending their common grounds and aspects of resistance will be looked at in chapter 4.3. Subsequently, how trading practices and their spatial elements play a role in the activation of commoning processes will be addressed in chapter 4.4. Finally, challenging hegemonic narratives about wastepickers, envisioning perspectives and future outlooks will be discussed in the concluding chapter 4.5.

4.1 Network of actors: visitors, unions and interview partners

In order to be able to address spatial issues in the context of the wastepicker marketplaces of Eleonas in this chapter I will first give an overview of the unions and other wastepicker associations active in Eleonas. Further, interview partners will be introduced and the aspect of Roma people as steady actors with long presence in Eleonas will be addressed. Last, various visitor types, the market audience, will be discussed.

4.1.1 Profile of wastepicker unions active in Eleonas

Eleonas' wastepicker markets are an amalgamation of a heterogenous crowd of thousands - people with different identities, backgrounds, motivations and needs. Grasping all the differences and binding elements of the traders of Eleonas is beyond the scope of this thesis, however I attempted to map this multifaceted terrain and the corresponding roles and identities of its actors in spatial terms. Based on my observations there are two main types of vendors in the trading terrain of Eleonas: 1. the vendors selling independently, meaning they do not belong to any association or group and choose urban public spaces as their trading ground, and 2. traders who belong to a wastepicker association or union either with an active role or passively, meaning they are just users of the market spaces.

It must be said at this point that the views and statements which were integrated in this thesis are based predominantly on perspectives from the category of active traders in the context of a wastepicker association. Since unions are outwardly oriented with a stronger presence in i.e. social media, press reports etc. it was easier to find contacts and establish a connection with representatives and people affiliated with them. The first contacts with Ermis and Proodos union combined with my Athens' living circumstances in close vicinity to wastepicker offices, hangouts and homes, brought more contacts along the way. This is no wonder, as unions actually strive to be visible and their voice should be heard, that's why they act as representatives of wastepickers' rights and interests.

However, the situation of individual vendors is much more precarious, they can't afford this visibility, they don't have a representative body that protects their interests and rights, they are a vulnerable group and often affected by illegalisation. This certainly influenced the results and also made clear why

the Roma and individual vendors were not as easy to reach. However, many informal conversations were possible, reaching out spontaneously on the street was eventually the way street traders' and Roma voices found a way into this research. Still, due to the haphazard nature of these talks and formal restrictions they could not always be integrated in the work, so the perspective of union representatives moved into the foreground.

The sites

Wastepicker interest groups are managing market sites with organized characteristics (enclosed, demarcated stall areas, moving corridors, marketplace food stalls, toilets, oversight/security team) while representing wastepickers and their interests. Next to the street hawkers thus, wastepicker unions are big protagonists of the Eleonas bazaars, significantly affecting the collective space appropriation unfolding in the area. For this reason it is important to show the basic characteristics of these unions as this is relevant background information concerning the informants I engaged with for the purposes of this thesis.

Each market site has their own, distinct character and set of rules, dependant of the organising body. Most of the times the managing group is a listed wastepicker union (Ermis, Ikaros, Proodos) or an informal association of wastepickers (Ifestos, Athinagora). Usually multiple names exist for different market sites. Sometimes they are named after the organising union (i.e. "Ermis" bazaar) or they take their name after a certain demographic (i.e. *Rom Pazar*). Some are simply known by their address (i.e. Dimaraki bazaar) or by the former or current use (i.e. *Marmaradiko* meaning marble processing site or *Dias*¹ which is the name of the hauler operating on the same site). Three of the markets in 2020 are located within the borders of Egaleo Municipality, west of Agias Annis Street (Ifestos, Ermis, Ikaros) while the rest (nine bazaars²) are located east of Agias Annis which makes it Municipality of Athens.

Even though unions do not have explicit rules regarding the societal status or cultural background of new members, however there is certain homogeneity among members, with traders often belonging to the same community or minority group (e.g. Roma from Greece or from other Balkan countries – mostly Albania and Bulgaria – and the Muslim minority of Thrace). Two of the oldest wastepicker unions, Ermis and Allilengýi, offer good examples for this distribution. Ermis' founding members come from the Muslim minority of Thrace (Greeks with Muslim faith), from which many relocated to Athens after a period of intense internal migration during the 60s and 70s:

«[Ermis] was founded by Greek Muslims. By majority, the analogy was 90-10.» (Vahtet 2018)

«[Ο Ερμής] εκει ιδρυθεί από Έλληνες μουσουλμάνους. Την πλειοψηφία, ήταν 90-10 τα ποσοστά.»

Allilengýi on the other hand was initially founded as "Association of Roma wastepickers" with a large number of its members belonging to the Roma community. During the time when only few unions existed these were constantly growing (Ermis at some point had more than thousand active members), causing the composition of the group to become equally heterogeneous and the background of its members correspondingly diverse. Kamper Vahtet from Ermis elaborates:

«Thirty percent are Greek Muslims, [...] sixty percent are Orthodox Christians and ten percent I have, uhm, Roma, Pakistanis, Egyptians, uhm, people who have passports. [...] With a residence permit, legally, in Greece and they are with passports. All the others are with ID cards, they are Greek citizens, just with a different religion. That's the difference.» (Vahtet 2018)

¹ Or Zeys (Zeus).

² Athinagora/Rom Pazar, Dias/Zeys, Marmaradiko, "Alana", "Katiforiko", Praktoreio Kerkyras, Arkadia Trans, Proodos, Dimaraki.

«Τριάντα τις εκατό έχω τους Έλληνες μουσουλμάνους, [...] ένα εξήντα τις εκατό έχω χριστιανούς ορθόδοξους και ένα δέκα τις εκατό έχω εε Ρομά, Πακιστανούς, Αιγύπτιους ε, τέτοιους ανθρώπους οι οποίοι είναι με διαβατήρια. [...] Με άδεια παραμονής, νόμιμα, στην Ελλάδα και είναι με διαβατήρια. Όλοι οι άλλο, και οι μεν και οι δε, είναι με ταυτότητες, είναι Έλληνες πολίτες, απλά με διαφορετική θρησκεία. Αυτή είναι η αλλαγή.»

It seems important for Vahtet to emphasize on the fact that all members of Ermis have legal papers, regardless their background. This is no wonder considering the constant discrimination faced by authorities on the preface of the undocumented status of many wastepickers. Vahtet clarifies that there are no ethnic criteria for admitting new members into the union, laughing about the question if separations based on ethnicity exist within the union, jokingly instructing that this would be racist and that the union stands against racism:

«Kamber Vahtet: No. That would be racism!

Gunelas: Well yes (laughing).

Kamber Vahtet: Here we are looking to fight racism (laughing).» (Vahtet 2018)

«Kamber Vahtet: Όχι. Αυτό θα ήταν ρατσισμός!

Gunelas: Ε ναι (γέλιο).

Kamber Vahtet: Εδώ εμείς κοιτάμε να πολεμήσουμε τον ρατσισμό (γέλιο).»

Vahtet yet confirms that there are markets were traders predominantly belong to a certain community. It seems that after the breakdown into several smaller groups, somewhere in the turbulent phase of the first period in Eleonas from 2014 onwards (cf. 4.2), a centering on identities has been strengthened in some cases of wastepicker associations. The managing groups of markets "Ifestos" and "Athinagora" for example are very likely to consist basically by Roma people. A clear signal is the alias name of Athinagora market: "Rom Pazar", the answer with a shrug of the central food stall owner, to my question about alternative names of the market. Another characteristic is the presence of Jehovah's witnesses distributing flyers in Romani language at markets' entrances. There are more nameless groups managing market sites that could not be distinctly identified in the course of this thesis, where people from the Roma community are most represented. Strong indicators are the languages spoken and the dominant music playing from various speakers and at the food stands.

Proodos union came up as a division of Ermis in 2014 and many of its board members are former agents of Ermis. There are old vendors from the Greek Muslim minority in Proodos, however the union's internal composition, according to Magalios, is rather based on the people's experience and credibility which has to do with their long presence at the markets:

«We're an older generation, that is, we have several years in the bazaars. And we've gotten to the point where we're making picks, which means we're not taking in anyone that's coming. We have to know him. Because a million problems can be created out of nothing.» (Magalios 2019)

«Είμαστε μία γενιά παλαιών, δηλαδή, έχουμε αρκετά χρόνια στο παζάρι. Και έχουμε φτάσει στο σημείο και κάνουμε και επιλογές, δηλαδή δεν παίρνουμε τον πάσα ένα που θα έρθει. Πρέπει να τον ξέρουμε. Γιατί χίλια δυο προβλήματα μπορούν να δημιουργηθούν απ'το τίποτε.»

In some cases market administrator is an individual entrepreneur who leased a small space and is the sole user (e.g. Mrs. Eleni). Some of the markets are known by the organisers' name (Ermis, Proodos

etc.) and others bear no particular name or rather are known either by their address (Dimaraki 33) or by the former use (e.g. marble processing site).

4.1.2 Informants and interview partners: profiles

During the several visits to Athens and the wastepicker markets of Eleonas three arranged interviews and several informal talks with market actors took place. Determining for my research was the access to the field. At least thirteen Sundays (thirteen weeks) were spent on a regular base at the markets between December 2019 and February 2020 while on a three month research scholarship in Athens. The continuous presence helped me better understand the space and the activity unfolding, as well most importantly establish deeper links with the people at the markets I spent most time at. Another at least fifteen Sunday and Saturday visits on an irregular basis add between 2018 and 2021. Many hours were spent in the market sites of the center, Monastiraki, Thissio etc. and on social occasions with wastepickers outside the markets. Establishing communication networks and developing trusting relationships were crucial for the overall research process.

In the following chapters I have engaged analytically with the practices of space appropriation in the context of Eleonas while having the aim to give my interview partners a platform of expression – direct citations have been an integral part of this analysis. Within this context, in-depth narrative-oriented interviews were an important methodological tool. One group interview with the board of Proodos union, where the union board (five people) were present, and another with the head of the board of Ermis union were central to the overall chapter. The interviews were both individual and group interviews, in the context of a multi-method approach. As well one in-length interview with teacher Christos Stefanou and his student from the Eleonas refugee camp inform the research. Semi-structured interviews can give spontaneous reactions and responses. Much more they give the opportunity to develop a relationship of reciprocity and trust between researcher and interviewee that can result in e.g. a life narrative of the informant. Informal talks were pseudonymized and as well integrated in the following chapters. Often a question was the trigger for the beginning of an extended narrative, which referred to the interviewee's past. Since content of the next chapters is strongly tied to these narratives, it is important at this point to introduce the key figures that keep getting referenced in the next chapters³.

Kamper Vahtet (37), head of Ermis Union

Mr. Vahtet took over from the previous Ermis head of board, Feridun Mehmis, in 2016. Vahtet's family descends from the North-Eastern Greek town Komotini and is part of to the Muslim minority of Thrace. At Ermis market he and his wife run one of the two site canteens. Besides his job at the market and in the union, Vahtet works at a plane printing company in Votanikos. I came in contact with Kamper Vahtet after finding

Raif Hasan, Ertzan Hasan (Father and son)

Raif Hasan (59), head of Proodos union. He sells mixed old wares at the market and together with his wife they operate one of the markets' canteens. The Hasan family is part of the Muslim minority of Thrace and Raif came as an internal immigrant in 1984 to Athens. Raif's father in law owned a truck and worked as scrap (old paper) collector. Through him Raif Hasan first got in contact with the wastepicker job. He worked for many years on-off in the area of Eleonas. That is when he started working again at the markets.

Ertzan Hasan (37), treasurer of Proodos and Raif's son. The family runs a trading stall at the

market. Besides engaging in the wastepicking business, alike his father, he is employed as a sanitation worker for the municipal garbage collection service. Ertzan manages the union's social media and communication channels. He was my first contact to Proodos union with whom I arranged the collective interview at Proodos office and who remained the link to the union after I returned to Vienna.

Spyros Magalios, (72), Secretary of Proodos. An old member both of Proodos and Ermis, Magalios changed many jobs and started selling at old-wares markets more than forty-five years ago. His guide was an old man in Piraeus whom he used to help dragging his cart to the market, when he was a student, he tells me. Spyros' interest lies primarily in antique objects, art and old books – he is considered among the “educated” by his fellow colleagues. Among other professions, Magalios worked in the printing industry as engraver and at construction sites in demolitions. At times he engaged in wastepicking parallel to his other jobs, but in the last years this is his sole occupation. Spyros was my neighbour during my three-month stay in Athens, in the neighbourhood of Akadimias Platonos. We would meet sometimes in the side street in front of his house on non-market days and have coffee talks. Sometimes he would bring me back from the markets with his scooter, or we would meet other wastepicker colleagues in nearby cafes.

Christos Stefanou, ~35 and **Arin**⁴, 12

Date: January 9, 2020

Duration: 1:02:17

Place: Agiou Polykarpou 87

Stefanou works as a teaching coordinator at the Eleonas refugee camp in Agiou Polykarpou Street and is very familiar with the area. Our scheduled interview in his office container is interrupted by Arin, a 12 year old Syrian student of his, who came to ask for his help with her homework. The girl spontaneously joins our discussion and becomes part of the interview.

4.1.3 Roma presence in Eleonas and on the market grounds

An important aspect of public life in Eleonas has to do with the lives of Roma people, who have a steady presence in the area in the form of settlements at least since the 1990s. (cf. 2.2.3 and 2.2.4) Regarding displacement of vulnerable groups settling in Eleonas, marginalized communities were affected much by the urban re-development of the area, perhaps most prominently with the eviction of Roma settlements. As Amnesty International reveals in a report from the year 2005: “the organisation was informed that Roma living in the area of Votanikos in Athens received an eviction order, as the site had been proposed as a location for the construction of a new stadium for the Panathinaikos team. According to information received in August 2005, 70 Roma families were threatened with forced eviction from Votanikos without being offered alternative relocation solutions”⁵ (Amnesty International 2005). A process of othering of Roma can be observed in announcements and press reports from that time. Meanwhile the former Athens mayor Nikitas Kaklamanis, speaking about the displacements, attempted to present the case to the city council as a great success of the municipality:

«We took a decision to clean up, not to evict, to clean up the area. [...] The municipality took the decision to clean the area of Votanikos and not to expel the Roma. [...] The Roma left alone, no one expelled them.» (Kaklamanis 2007 in iospress.gr)

⁴ Pseudonymized.

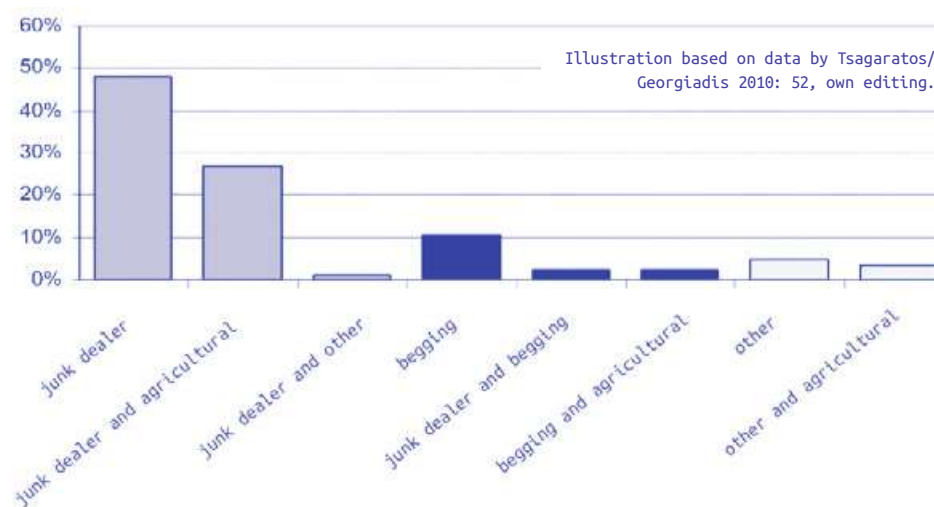
⁵ Greek original, translation by the author.

³ Complete account of interlocutors in appendix.

«Πήραμε μια απόφαση να καθαρίσουμε, όχι να εκδιώξουμε, να καθαρίσουμε την περιοχή. [...] Ο Δήμος πήρε την απόφαση να καθαρίσει την περιοχή Βοτανικού και όχι να εκδιώξει τους Ρομά. [...] Οι Ρομά έφυγαν μόνοι τους, δεν τους εξεδίωξε κανείς».

Regarding the connection of these communities to today's markets, the trade with scrap and old items is closely tied to the history of the Roma population. It is well documented that trading, scrap collection and dealing with old items and junk belong to the main occupations by Roma people in Greece. A report from 2010 on the living conditions at the Orfeos Street Roma settlement confirms: the study about «possibilities for the relocation of Roma from Eleonas» showed that 75% of the interviewed inhabitants of the camp were working as “junk dealers” (paliatzis/παλιατζής), exclusively or partially. (Tsagaratos/Georgiadis 2010)

Roma populations were inhabiting camp like settlements in Eleonas at least since the 1990s. The two last residential pockets in 2011 were one on the banks of Profitis Daniil stream at Agiou Polykarpou Street and another on a side road of Orfeos Street. The first settlement near the river had the misfortune to fall into the double regeneration area so it was demolished early in 2007, as part of the preparations for the upcoming construction site (Tsagaratos/Georgiadis 2010; iospres.gr 2007). The second settlement at Orfeos Street was destroyed during a fire in 2012 and was soon after removed by authorities (kathimerini.gr 2012). Other settlements used to exist near the KTEL intercity bus station at Kifissos and elsewhere in the area (Tsagaratos/Georgiadis 2010). In 2011 the Roma people of Eleonas were estimated at about 2,000 people, mostly of Albanian origin (Papagrighoriou et al. 2012; Tsadari 2019: 62).



No visible residential encampments exist nowadays, but the area and the wastepicker markets remain strongly connected to the everyday lives of Roma communities. The historical continuities described in this chapter and the spatial relevance of Eleonas for Roma however do not reset discrimination behaviours, also within the wastepicker community. Resentment towards Roma wastepickers occasionally comes up during the interviews I had with other wastepicker representatives. Conflicts exist between different trader associations regarding limited spaces being claimed by too many people, who allegedly face problems with the police because of law offences or because of their undocumented status:

«We, as citizens of Athens, we have a demand, and I do not consider it unreasonable, [the Athens municipality] to support us. This guy cannot come now, I have no racism, with the Roma who comes from Romania once every fifteen days and wants a place to sell. I don't know what he

will do. Find a way to sell, but what do we owe him? [Interviewer: Are there many who come?] They come, yes. Bulgarians... who don't live here, they come and sit for two weeks, make a bunch of things, I don't know how they make it and come here with big vans and try to sell it.» (Magalios 2019)

«Εμείς ως δημότες Αθηναίων, έχουμε την απαίτηση, και δεν την θεωρώ παράλογη, να μας στηρίξει [ο Δήμος]. Δεν μπορεί να έρχεται τώρα, δεν έχω ρατσισμό, με τον Ρομά που έρχεται από τη Ρουμανία μιά φορά στις δεκαπέντε και θέλει χώρο να πουλάει. Δεν ξέρω τι θα κάνει. Να βρει έναν τρόπο να πουλάει αλλά εμείς τι οφείλουμε σε αυτόν; [Έχει πολλούς που έρχονται;] Έρχονται ναί. Βούλγαροι... οι οποίοι δεν μένουν εδώ, έρχονται κάθονται δύο εβδομάδες, φτιάχνουν μία πραμάτεια δεν ξέρω πως την φτιάχνουν και έρχονται εδώ με βανάκια μεγάλα και προσπαθούν να την εκποιήσουν, να την πουλήσουν.»

However, the source of resentment against Roma most probably can be traced back to systemic discriminatory prejudice (relating as well with the discourses of chapter 4.5.2), evoking the alleged idea that rules are not being kept in Roma bazaars. In the same logic this becomes a reason why all traders face problems with the police and authorities. Ertzan and his father Raif Hasan fear that rumors and misconceptions shape a generalized opinion that wastepickers are law breakers.

«So ten people steal, bring it there and the price is paid by all markets. They don't say (the public or the media), you know, one bazaar... All the bazaars! They say, they sell, you know, drugs, they sell guns... So the responsibility goes to everybody.» (Hasan R. 2019)

«Δηλαδή κάνουν δέκα άτομα, κλέβουνε, φέρνουν εκεί και τη νύφη την πληρώνουν όλα τα παζάρια. Δεν λένε ξέρεις, ένα παζάρι... Στα παζάρια, λένε, πωλούνται, ξέρεις, ναρκωτικά, πουλάνε πιστόλια... Δηλαδή η μπάλα παίρνει όλους.»

One can say that the overall discriminatory and racist addressing of wastepickers from municipality and state representatives has trickled down to the individual level and led to internal conflicts of such nature. Unfortunately scapegoats are usually Roma people and their workplaces. Ertzan Hasan refers to a council meeting where one ruling party representative called for the total closure of the markets, while perpetuating aforementioned stereotypes :

«It was racist and he [one councillor] had said he was going to close the bazaars and so on. [...] Yeah and another community councillor jumped in and said oops! Why do you say that? Do your action but don't be racist. And he stopped it there. The thing, you know what's going on? Because that's kind of how it is, we sell what we find, what we collect from the bins, we go and sell it. It's absolute wastepicking. So you can't sell meat in a pharmacy or you can't sell drugs in a butcher shop. We have made an internal agreement that if you have new items you have to inform the board. That's where we are, and before somebody comes in, a new member, we ask them what you have to sell and so on and they report to us. But if we see something similar we say 'well, I'll tell you, you can't sell canned goods, milk, spaghetti at a bazaar'. You can't do that. In a bazaar you sell a frame... an old telephone, an old cassette player...» (Hasan E. 2019)

«Ρατσιστικό ήτανε και είχε πει θα κλείσει τα παζάρια και τα λοιπά. [...] Ναι και πετάχτηκε κάποιος κοινοτικός σύμβουλος και του είπε όπα! Γιατί το λες αυτό; Κάνε την ενεργειά σου αλλά

όχι τόσο ρατσισμό. Και το έκλεισε εκεί. Το θέμα, ξέρεις τι γίνεται; Επειδή είναι το είδος έτσι, πουλάμε τα εύρετα, αυτό που συλλέγουμε από τους κάδους, πάμε και τα πουλάμε. Είναι τελείως ρακοσυλλεκτικό. Δηλαδή δεν μπορείς σε ένα φαρμακείο να πουλήσεις κρέας ή σε ένα κρεοπωλείο φάρμακα. Εμείς έχουμε φτιάξει έναν εσωτερικό κανονισμό ότι εάν έχεις καινούργια είδη πρέπει να ενημερώνεις το σώμα. Εκεί είμαστε εμείς, οτιδήποτε, και πριν έρθει κάποιος, νέος μέλος, το ρωτάμε τι έχεις να πουλήσεις και τα λοιπά και μας αναφέρει. Εάν δούμε κάτι αντίστοιχο όμως λέμε «να σου πω, δεν μπορείς να πουλήσεις κονσέρβες, γάλατα, μακαρόνια σε ένα παζάρι». Δεν γίνεται αυτό το πράγμα. Στο παζάρι θα πουλήσεις μία κορνίζα... ένα παλιό τηλέφωνο, ένα κασετόφωνο...»

Who will buy the frame or the telephone and with what intention, will be the topic of the next chapter, where I will render an image of the most common types of market visitors, their backgrounds and motivations.

4.1.4 Clubbers, dandies, laborers – market personalities

«And let’s not forget that every Sunday, and every bazaar of them is a visual art event. That is, you might see things you’re not going to encounter another time in your life.» (Magalios 2019)

«Και μην ξεχνάμε ότι κάθε Κυριακή, και κάθε παζάρι από αυτά είναι ένα εικαστικό δρώμενο. Δηλαδή μπορεί να δεις πράγματα που δεν πρόκειται να τα συναντήσεις άλλη φορά στη ζωή σου.»

It is almost midday, I am browsing through the stalls of an underground market space when I encounter two men in a joyful mood, dressed in stuff they had found at the bazaars. Oversized, bright, plastic sunglasses, a flower necklace, a toy guitar in one hand, a coffee in the other. They stick out from the crowd, we start talking and wander around the markets together. They have been clubbing in the adjacent Gazi neighbourhood and came directly after the closing hour. My companions are eccentric customers but they are certainly not alone in Eleonas. As diverse as the backgrounds and motivations of the vendors, the same goes for the characteristics of the market visitors.

«The average customer of the bazaar varies between: a junkie, a thief, a prefect, an ambassador, a consul, a... they come from... the whole spectrum of society. There are people who don’t go to the bazaar. But there are people who are searching, painters, famous people...» (Magalios 2019)

«Ο μέσος πελάτης του παζαριού είναι: από πρεζόνι, κλεφτρόνι, απο νομάρχη, από πρεσβευτή, από πρόξενο, από... όλο το φάσμα της κοινωνίας έρχεστε. Υπάρχει κόσμος που δεν πάει στο παζάρι. Αλλά υπάρχουν άνθρωποι που ψάχνουν, ζωγράφοι, επώνυμοι...»

A multitude of people with different kinds of social backgrounds are attracted by the markets, some by necessity and because they rely on them for their daily shopping, others for the fun, the passion or lifestyle.

«[...], the people who visit the bazaar are indeterminate. Rich, poor, old and young, Greeks and foreigners come to us to find something different that they themselves may have been looking for a long time...» (Vahtet 2016 in popaganda.gr)

[...], ο κόσμος που επισκέπτεται το παζάρι είναι ακαθόριστος. Πλούσιοι, φτωχοί, γέροι και νέοι, Έλληνες και αλλοδαποί σ’ εμάς έρχονται για να βρουν κάτι αλλιώςτικο που μπορεί να αναζητούσαν οι ίδιοι καιρό...»

Intellectuals and artists are mostly good allies of the wastepickers’ cause because many rely on the markets for their artistic work (i.e. cinematographers, designers etc.) but also because a romantic understanding of the markets is prevalent among them.

«Heirs or children of deceased military or civil servants come to us and ask us to empty old houses and mansions. There may be opportunities, maps, books, documents, uniforms or clothes that may be of interest to bohemian types, culture vultures, artists or historians.» (Magalios 2010 in tovima.gr)

«Έρχονται κληρονόμοι ή παιδιά αποβιωσάντων στρατιωτικών ή δημοσίων υπαλλήλων και ζητούν να τους αδειάσουμε παλιά σπίτια και αρχοντικά. Από εκεί μπορεί να προκύψουν ευκαιρίες, χάρτες, βιβλία, ντοκουμέντα, στολές ή ρούχα που ενδιαφέρουν μοτέμ τύπους, κουλτουριάρηδες, καλλιτέχνες ή ιστοριοδίφες» .

Below the statement by former dean of the Athens School of fine Arts explaining his motives for visiting the markets as an answer to the journalist’s question about what he is searching for at the wastepicker markets, where those two would accidentally often meet: «The bazaar where we often meet is a place, a nest where memory incubates its eggs, a place where the past penetrates the present as a component of the present [...]. Now, then, where work, production, physicality tends to be disconnected from experience, through this place (the bazaar) the passage of time becomes apparent, but also the hope for the emergence of unforeseen events and synastry of free acts, of different people.» (Charalambous 2015 in edromos.gr)

Nostalgia is another reason why people visit the markets, as described nicely in a report of the music blog “ogdoo”: «If as a kid you used to search the empty houses with a torch to find old things and today there is nothing left of what you discovered, you have a good incentive to go to Eleonas to find it.» (ogdoo.gr 2018) The “instinct of the gold digger”, drives these bazaar aficionados even at an old age to the endless quest for memories, hidden treasures and best bargains. Christos Stefanou, an employee of the refugee camp at Agiou Polykarpou Street, speaks about his family’s relation with the markets and his own memories of it as a child. Remarkable is the loyalty of his father that still drives him at an advanced age to Eleonas’ bazaars, even if he does not live close by:

«I used to go to Monastiraki. My family has a tradition, my father, since he was very young, we used to go to Monastiraki on Sundays when it was downtown [...]. And then that disappeared at some point and... at some point it was only in Schistos... We used to go there. And then it came to Eleonas, which is funny because it’s coincided with here where we work. And it’s funny because my father comes every Saturday and every Sunday morning, he starts from Pagkrati, he’s 81 and he starts every Saturday and every Sunday and he comes here to Eleonas. And he knows [the markets] better than I do, I didn’t expect it, because some time he hadn’t told me and I found out later. And he says I’m going to Dimaraki’s, I say where are you going? [laughs] He says “to Dimaraki”, what are you going to do in Dimaraki? And he says there are two bazaars there. He knows everything!» (Stefanou 2020)

«Εγώ πήγαινα παλιά στο Μοναστηράκι. Έχει μία παράδοση η οικογένεια μου, ο πατέρας μου από πολύ μικρός, μικροί δηλαδή, πηγαίναμε Κυριακή πάντα στο Μοναστηράκι όταν ήταν παλιά κάτω [...] Και μετά εξαφανίστηκε αυτό κάποια στιγμή και... κάποια στιγμή ήταν μόνο στο Σχιστό... Πηγαίναμε και εκεί. Και μετά ήρθε στον Ελαιώνα, που έχει πλάκα γιατί έχει πέσει με εδώ που δουλεύουμε δηλαδή. Και έχει πλάκα γιατί ο πατέρας μου έρχεται κάθε Σάββατο και κάθε Κυριακή πρωί, ξεκινάει από το Παγκράτι, είναι 81 και ξεκινάει κάθε Σάββατο και κάθε Κυριακή και έρχεται εδώ στον Ελαιώνα. Και τα ξέρει καλύτερα από μένα δηλαδή, δεν το περίμενα, γιατί κάποια στιγμή δεν μου το 'χε πει και το ανακάλυψα μετά. Και μου λέει πάω στη Δημαράκη, λέω που πας; (γέλια) Λέει στη Δημαράκη, τι πας να κάνεις στη Δημαράκη; Και μου λέει έχει δύο παζάρια. Τα ξέρει όλα!»

Ertzan Hasan states that one of the reasons for wanting to hold the markets in the center of the city is that there they could attract wealthy customers who work in the offices around. These, so Ertzan, would be the kind of good customers who would be interested in worthier items such as old books and most likely spend larger amounts:

«That is, there are so many [vendors of] old books. Where doctors, lawyers, prosecutors could descend [...] this kind of public we're talking about. So in essence these are the things we have.» (Hasan E. 2019)

«Δηλαδή υπάρχουν πάρα πολλοί (πλανώδιοι με) παλιά βιβλία. Που θα μπορούσαν να κατέβουν γιατροί, δικηγόροι, εισαγγελείς... [...] για τέτοιο κοινό μιλάμε. Δηλαδή στην ουσία αυτά τα πράγματα έχουμε.»

Regardless of personal interests and reasons of entertainment, most people come to the markets to find cheap items that they need in their everyday lives. In the course of the years a new phenomenon has shown, where many of the regular customers eventually turned into traders, Vahtet reports with certain sadness about the fact that he will be the one to seal this change in their lives with a membership into the union.

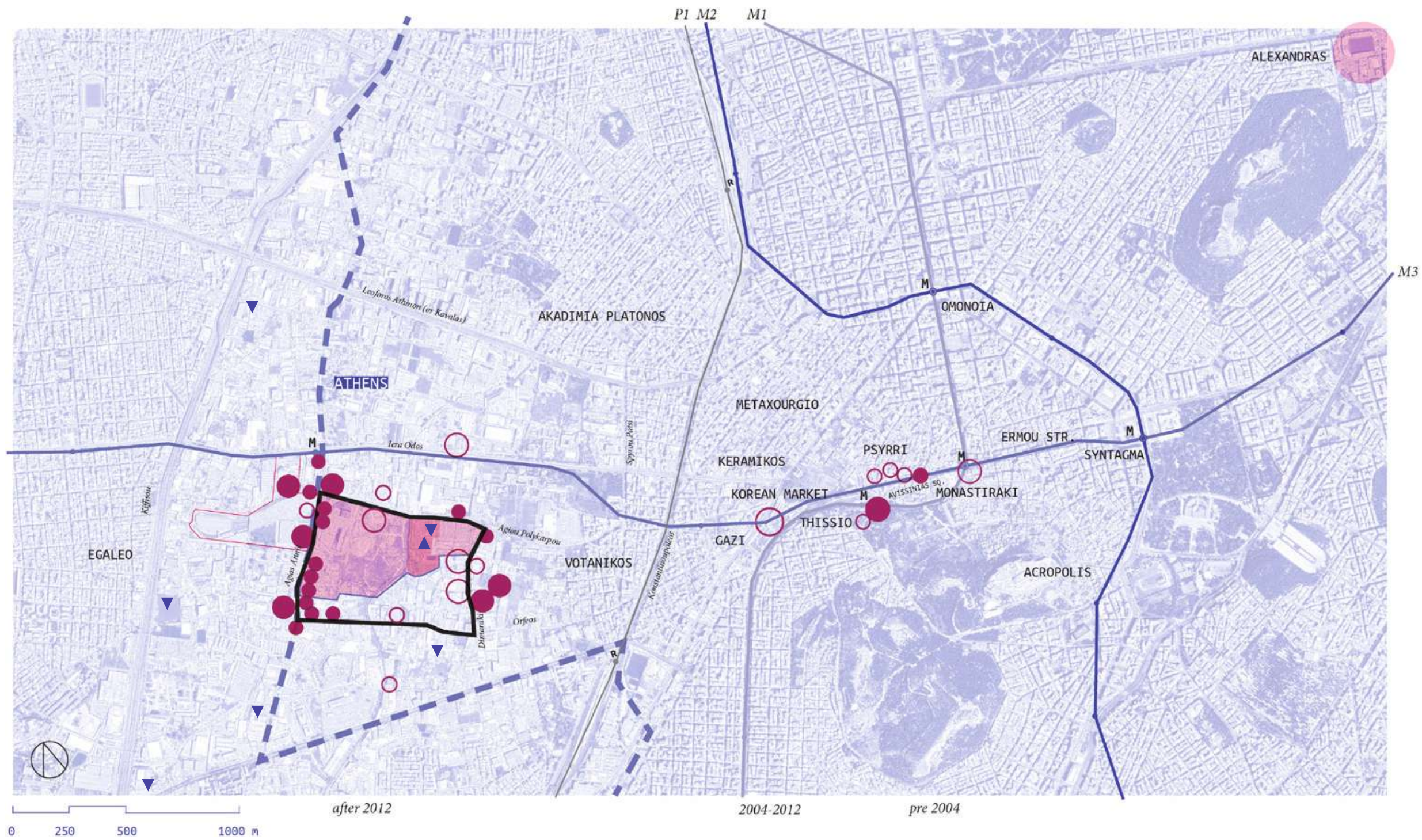
«Others came, who didn't think they would do the job. I mean, I see something, some people who are completely unpolished. I mean, some people coming out of their homes, uh, retired people, low-wage earners who used to come as customers to the bazaar now come and ask me for a place to put them in the bazaar to sell their stuff. You tell me, what are you going to do, not put them in? They came out of necessity.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Ήρθαν άλλοι, που δεν το φανταζόντουσαν ότι θα κάνουν αυτοί τη δουλειά. Δηλαδή βλέπω κάτι, κάτι ανθρώπους που είναι εντελώς άβγαλτοι. Δηλαδή, κάποιοι άνθρωποι να βγαίνουν από σπίτι τους, εε, συνταξιούχοι, χαμηλόμισθοι που έρχονταν σαν πελάτες στο παζάρι τώρα έρχονται και μου ζητάνε θέση να τους βάλω στο παζάρι να πουλήσουν τα πράγματά τους. Πες μου εσύ, τι θα κάνεις, δεν θα τους βάλεις; Από ανάγκη ήρθαν.»

These market actors, customers and traders, move parallel with the changes of location of the market sites throughout the years. An overview to the process of displacement of wastepicker markets from the city center towards the edges of the city will be given in the next chapter.



Right: Actors of Eleonas, street vendors, market traders and visitors.



- Former market site
- Active market site (2020)
- Double regeneration areas (Votanikos/Alexandras)
- Prospective intercity bus station
- - - Athens' municipality border
- ▲ Eleonas refugee camp (since 2015)
- ▼ Former Roma settlements (Tsadari 2019:63)

4.2 Το παζάρι πρέπει να είναι στο ιστορικό κέντρο/ The bazaar has to be in the historical center⁶: Chronology of displacement and market growth

Hermes (Ερμής/ Ermís), the god of merchants, patron of thieves and liars, was honoured among the ancient inhabitants of Athens as the protector of the *Agora*⁷. His symbolic figure is still one of the most frequently used around modern-day Athenian trading sites, be it the upclass shopping high street *Ermou* or the humble *Ermis* bazaar, bearing the name of the sound-like wastepicker union. Bazaars and marketplaces of Eleonas have been often coined «Ermou Street of the poor» (ethnos.gr 2019).

Hermes is thus a strong reference to those engaging with trade, indicating rooted traditions but also showing perhaps a wish for getting associated to a certain past, one that is linked rather to western modernity than to paradigms from Greece's ottoman past or the anarchic urban development of the post-war period. For a more in-depth account of orientalist perspectives in the context of the wastepicker markets' case see 4.5.3 in this thesis. However the case, wastepickers agree that a bazaar, the great marketplace – to which semantically they too belong – must be integral to the historic city center, regardless of the East/West binary:

«The bazaar is in the historic center of every city, both in the West and in the East.»
(Magalios 2019)

«Το παζάρι είναι στο ιστορικό κέντρο της κάθε πόλης, και στη Δύση και στην Ανατολή.»

Following Ermís' traces makes it possible to build the puzzle of urban trading in Athens and to contextualise its various forms and evolution in time and space. In this chapter I will present the history of urban trade that led to the formation of the market landscape of Eleonas. I reconstructed this timeline from scratch on the base of information from the interviews and informal talks I had with market actors and union representatives and extracted information from newspaper articles on Eleonas and reports covering the markets or profile stories of urban wastepickers. Also I analyzed statements and excerpts from the documentary “Scavengers’ Union” by Marina Danezi (2011)⁸ and collected information by dedicated market customers discussing the development of the markets on the web, e.g. the case of comic collector forum *greekcomics.gr*, where market aficionados who were strongly affected by the banishment of the bazaars from the center and thus conducted extensive reports, exchanging news about the new locations in Eleonas.⁹

From downtown to the edges of the city

The story of Eleonas' wastepicker markets, processes of space appropriation on its grounds and living realities of its actors is strongly affected and shaped by displacement and repression processes. This relation, which led to the current form of the markets, will be discussed in the following chapters.

Second-hand-trade in Athens has been connected with rather low-income districts. Regarding the city center, thrift shops and small and antiquary shops existed around *Monastiraki* square in downtown

Athens long before the development of the Eleonas' wastepicker markets. Monastiraki is a trade quarter traditionally known for its bazaar-like atmosphere already since the end of the 19th century. Until today, Monastiraki and its surrounding areas (*Psyrri*, *Kerameikos*, *Gazi*) have the reputation of being the epicentre for “old-wares” commerce, with several antiquary shops being located in the area.

In fact, the wastepicker markets of Eleonas are direct descendants of these traditional bazaars around the Monastiraki area. Funnily enough the story of old-wares commerce comes full circle with the majority of worthy items such as paintings, vintage home objects, rare books, etc. sold today in the remaining well-reputed antique shops of Monastiraki initially found at the wastepicker markets of Eleonas, where collectors and resellers go to find old treasures:

«They [the antiques shop keepers] go down to the bazaars [of Eleonas] and shop from us. They will get an old chair, some nice painting ... They will get it for two euros, three, ten. And in their shop, because we don't know its value, in their shop they will sell it for one hundred, two and three hundred and so on. Well, if there is no bazaar, if the bazaar is closing: the antique shops are also closing.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Αυτοί [οι παλιατζήδες] κατεβαίνουνε κάτω, στα παζάρια, και ψωνίζουν από μας. Θα πάρουν καμιά καρέκλα παλιά, καναν πίνακα ωραίο... Θα τον πάρουν με δυό ευρώ, τρία, δέκα. Και στο μαγαζί τους, γιατί εμείς δεν γνωρίζουμε την αξία του, στο μαγαζί τους θα το πουλήσουν και εκατό και διακόσια, και τριακόσια και ούτω καθε εξής. Λοιπόν. Δεν υπάρχει παζάρι, κλείνει το παζάρι: σιγά σιγά κλείνουν και τα παλατιοπωλεία.»

Back in the 1990s, according to market regular and expert Sakis Kourouzidis from the Ecological Library “Evonymos”¹⁰, the second-hand trade in Monastiraki took on great dimensions. Around 1995, the markets spread to an area many times larger than usual with “traditional” second-hand trade, meaning trade of old valuables, antiques and found objects mixing with newer forms of unauthorized trade, objects of doubtful origin, the selling of counterfeit products and other taxable wares. An incident between neighbouring stalls, so Kourouzidis, led to the drastic intervention of municipal authorities, sending riot police on several weekends in a row to clear the area. This limited the amount of illicit trade but had as “collateral damage”, so Kourouzidis, the limiting of traditional second-hand wares' trading activity (Kourouzidis 2011).

For several years this traditional exchange activity was limited to the narrow confines of Avyssiias Square and a few alleys around it. The bulk of the waste collectors were first exiled to the old landfill of Schisto and then to the alleys of Psyrri (Kourouzidis 2011). Later in 2004 the redeveloped area of the former Korean Market was granted by the Municipality until 2012; when the first relocation to Eleonas occurred. In the next chapters I will offer a detailed account of the evolution of the markets and their gradual displacement from the city center towards Eleonas and their spreading in the area during the last ten years. From the early times (before 2004) of the wastepicker business around Monastiraki in 4.2.1 to the “golden age” of the Korean market at Keramikos (2004-2012) in 4.2.2, the eviction from Keramikos (2012) in 4.2.3. The first municipal location in Eleonas in Iera Odos from 2012-2014 in 4.2.4 and the second move and operation of Allilengýi market between 2014-2016 in 4.2.5. Finally the spreading into several private locations and towards the public urban spaces of Eleonas between 2016-2020 is discussed in 4.2.7.

⁶ (Magalios 2019).

⁷ *Agorá* - Open place of assembly where in Ancient times free-born citizens could gather for civic announcements or to discuss politics. *Agora* even today in Greece means open-air or housed marketplace of a city.

⁸ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1864488/?ref_=nm_knf_i1

⁹ <https://www.greekcomics.gr/forums/index.php?topic/35952-%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%B6%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%B9/>

¹⁰ Since 1994, Evonymos is a NGO with a library dedicated to the archivation of books and material of environmental content and interest (<http://www.evonymos.org/>).



4.2.1 Monastiraki, Thissio, Psyrrí (pre-2004)

In the union's office space, many pictures hang on the wall. One of them depicts ten men, standing close to each other, shaking hands – below a date: 5.3.1963. They were of the first generations of immigrants from Thrace, ancestors of my interview partners. I ask if the people in the picture belong to the first Thracian wastepickers to arrive in Athens and I am advised that in Monastiraki this work has been going on for decades:

«Okay now, maybe they weren't first, maybe some other people were first because the junk dealing, you know, they were doing this wastepicking from before, they didn't start now. [...] but they were few, they weren't as many as now. [...] Monastiraki since when is it happening, over there? [asking colleagues] Avissinias Square, Psyrrí... [...] It's been many years, it's not, say, twenty, thirty, forty years, whatever. That's it, but they weren't as many, they were less, more close, you know? It wasn't so, this mess, it was different.» (Ibrahim 2019)

«Εντάξει τώρα, μπορεί να μην ήταν πρώτοι αυτοί, να ήταν πρώτοι κάποιοι άλλοι γιατί το παλιατζή, ξέρεις αυτό το ρακουσλλέκτη το κάναν από παλιά δεν το κάναν από τώρα. [...] αλλά ήταν λίγοι, δεν ήταν τόσο πολλοί τώρα. [...] Το Μοναστηράκι από πότε είναι, μέσα εκεί πέρα; Πλατεία Αββησυνίας, Ψυρρή... [...] Είναι πολλά χρόνια, δεν είναι, ας πούμε, είκοσι, τριάντα, σαράντα χρόνια, που να είναι. Αυτά είναι, αλλά δεν ήταν τόσοι πολλοί, ήταν πιο λίγοι, πιο μαζεμένοι, κατάλαβες; Δεν ήταν τόσο, που είναι το χάλι, ήταν διαφορετικά.»

Ibrahim refers to today's situation as a mess because of the boundless expansion of the wastepicker markets. In the markets' early days however, traditional trade centers existed in Monastiraki and Thissio and wastepickers started becoming active there, taking advantage of the area's fame as a traditional trade quarter with well-reputed antiquary shops, increasingly since the 1990s (Kourouzidis 2011). Spyros casually mentions a story according to which sometime in that era he was selling at an impromptu bazaar on a disused parking yard in Psyrrí. (Magalios 2020) It seems as if markets were held wherever possible in the period 1990-2000, on the street and often also in abandoned lots or public spaces. Even to this day, spontaneous trade is happening in the alleys around Thissio and its surroundings, particularly during the weekends.

Adrianou Street is a commercial street in the area of Monastiraki/Thissio, located on top of what used to be the ancient Agora of Athens. Today, it is a pedestrian zone and well-known touristic

Left: Top to bottom.

Trade quarter, Monastiraki square, Ermou and Athinas Str. corner around 1910 (Photographer unknown, xiromeropress)

Photograph from the Proodos wastepicker union office. Immigrants from Thrace in Athens, 1963.

Adrianou Street, ca 1980 (lifo, from the archives of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens)

area. Following the rail tracks, it is framed by restaurants and small shops with unobstructed views to the Acropolis. During the late 20th century the whole area, including the particular street, was known for its commercial character, with improvised market stalls being a common phenomenon. Anyone having goods to sell would start looking for customers here. For Raif Hasan the pay was good in the beginning:

«So you see, since then, since '84. Well, it was sweet then, there was some money. I mean, I used to go to the bazaar; those who worked all week at the factory or in the workshop earned, how much? Two hundred drachmas a week? In one Sunday I was making four-five hundred.» (Hasan R. 2019)

«Και που λες από τότε, από '84. Ε, γλυκάθηκα εγώ τότες, είχε χρήμα. Δηλαδή πήγαίνα στο παζάρι, αυτοί που δουλεύανε και όλη την εβδομάδα εργοστάσιο που λέει ο λόγος, παίρνανε, βιοτεχνίες, διακόσιες δραχμές την εβδομάδα; Εγώ σε μία Κυριακή έπαιρνα τετρακόσιες, πεντακόσιες.»

Fellow wastepicker Spyros interjects that selling at the market always had its risks, even during the “good” years:

«No, that is not absolute. You could go to the market and make no money. We don't lose our heads there.» (Magalios 2019)

«Όχι δεν είναι απόλυτο αυτό. Μπορεί να πας στο παζάρι και να μην κάνεις και σεφτέ. Δεν παίρνουν τα μυαλά μας αέρα.»

According to Hasan, later the earnings worsened. The occupation was still only an alternative to other jobs he was able to get:

«Well later, you know, I found a job, I got fired again, started all over again. So that's how we started. I've been working here at Carrefour lately [large supermarket chain]. I passed nine years here at Athinon Avenue. Then Marinopoulos took over¹¹, it didn't work out, we were fired and since then I've been unemployed again. And necessarily, the same job again.» (Hasan R. 2019)

«Ε μετά ξέρεις, βρήκα δουλειά, μετά πήρα απόλυση πάλι, ξανά άρχισα. Δηλαδή έτσι ξεκινήσαμε. Τώρα τελευταία δούλευα εδώ στα Carrefour. Έκανα εννιά χρόνια, στη Λεωφόρο Αθηνών, εδώ. Μετά πήρε Μαρινόπουλος, δεν πήγε καλά, μας απολύσανε και από τότε πάλι άνεργος. Και αναγκαστικά πάλι την ίδια δουλειά.»

It has to be said, that the informants' statements about specific dates, actors and details on events from the past of wastepickers' organizations were sometimes contradicting each other. This seems to be because wastepickers adapt historical narratives to their individual perspective, often making abstract or obscure statements, something I believe unintentional and has more to do with the fact that the market timeline is a complex arrangement. The same issue is found in reports or newspaper articles in which information is based on interviews or verbal accounts. This has made the process of collecting accurate data challenging because each information, name or date had to be cross-checked several times.

4.2.2 The Korean market era—Keramikos (2004-2012)

Following a period of transitory participation in various locations (including out-of-city sites such as Schisto, an industrial area at the western outskirts of Athens) in the early 2000s traders found a common *topos* in central Athens. Represented primarily by the at that time unified and influential Ermis union wastepickers reached a deal with the municipality of Athens to hold an open-air weekly flea market in an area of Kerameikos known as “Korean market”, named after a conglomerate of old warehouses that used to be there. The area was part of a redevelopment plan relating to the inner city revamp in preparation of the Athens Olympics 2004. In the years before the Olympic Games several street pedestrianisations were carried out in the city center, affecting also the part of Ermou Street connecting Thissio/Keramikos and Gazi, the café and bar district-turned old gas works complex.

The weekly market of Ermou/Pireos Street functioned from 2004 to 2012—a period of prosperity and growth with a constant annual rise of visitors. According to Kourouzidis, these were “golden years” for the wastepicker markets. The responsibility for the organization of the bazaar was taken over by the “Union of Wastepickers for Athens - Piraeus”, namely Ermis. There was order, designated places for all the vendors, who were also members of the association, compliance with the rules, i.e., only second hand items are dealt with, the “origin” of the products was checked, the area was guarded and cleaned and people from the union's administration intervened in any problem arising. The total cost of organising the Sunday bazaar (rubbish bins, chemical toilets, security, etc.) according to Kourouzidis made up a total of about 2.000 euros per Sunday, which the union collected from the approximately 300 petty traders who ‘spread out’ their rags and stands each week at the bazaar. (Kourouzidis 2011)

Allilengýi, the organisation of Roma wastepickers responsible for the welcome banner described in the introduction of this chapter, already existed during that time and was participating at the market in Keramikos. Kamper Vahtet recalls the coexisting at the Korean Market, expressing resentment during our interview about what he thinks was the source of many of the wastepickers' problems with the authorities, e.g. the constant expansion of the markets:

«When Ermis was working as a union there at the Korean Market [i.e. Thissio] *Allilengýi* came and stuck there. That is, their president moved people, that is, he created a crowd over there. The ones I was telling you before that they were sticking one on top of each other and so on. Well, they got together and created a union, an association/club, a union I don't know exactly, they called it *Allilengýi*.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Όταν δούλευε ο Ερμής σαν σωματείο στην Κορεατική αγορά πάνω [σσ. στο Θησείο] υπήρχε, ήρθε και κόλλησε η Αλληλεγγύη πάνω. Δηλαδή ο πρόεδρος τους μετέφερε τον κόσμο, δηλαδή έφτιαξε κόσμο εκεί πέρα. Αυτούς που σου 'λεγα πιο πριν ότι κολλάγανε ο ένας πάνω στον άλλον και τα λοιπά. Λοιπόν... Αυτοί μαζευτήκανε και κάνανε ένα σωματείο, ένα σύλλογο, σωματείο δεν ξέρω πως... το ονομάσανε “Αλληλεγγύη”.»

In 2012 the municipality of Athens decided the operative discontinuation of the Korean Market wastepicker bazaar. One could say that the eviction from Keramikos was the starting point of an unintended albeit successful “conquest” of Eleonas—driven and conditioned by restrictive measures applied by authorities. Parallels in the development of Athens, Eleonas and its markets can be observed in the timeline presented in the following page.

¹¹ Large supermarket, joint venture with Carrefour markets that was bought by Sklavenitis Group in 2017.

4.2.3 Eviction from Keramikos (2012)

«From 2004-2011 the Sunday Bazaar was happening at the Korean Market, at Thessalonikis street, near Gazi. However due to some events there was a police intervention and the bazaar stopped.»

«Από το 2004-2011 το Κυριακάτικο Παζάρι πραγματοποιούνταν στην Κορεάτικη αγορά, στην οδό Θεσσαλονίκης, κοντά στο Γκάζι. Ωστόσο λόγω κάποιων γεγονότων παρενέβη η αστυνομία και το παζάρι σταμάτησε να πραγματοποιείται εκεί.» (Memis 2018 in amna.gr)

Former Ermis president during that time Fehridun Memis explains in a press interview the reasons of the bazaar's eviction from Keramikos. Excessive and uncontrolled expansion of the market area, traders taking up too much space, and conflicts between stall owners that would cause interventions of law enforcement are frequently used accusations in the everlasting conflict between the City administration and the market actors and representatives. The city explained the clearance of the market for reasons of public safety, since, as reported, there was no control over the goods being sold and there were repeated violations of public order. (skai.gr 2012) In a press release it is stated that the municipality of Athens would look for another place where the Sunday bazaar could be relocated (ibid.). It also indicates that from now on, permits would be issued by the municipality of Athens in cooperation with the Ermis association of wastepickers, who at that time had the most wastepicker members, at the same time centralising the organisation and communication scheme. Memis seems sceptical and, in another interview that he gave after the eviction, states his lack of understanding about the reasons that got the markets expelled from the city center:

«It has been said that our bazaar was bothering the neighbouring clubs. [...] No reason, no excuse, they [officials] just said to us "this Sunday you stop!"»

«Ενοχλούσε, λέει, τους Συλλόγους της γειτονιάς το παζάρι μας. [...] Χωρίς λόγο, χωρίς καμία δικαιολογία απλά μας είπαν 'Αυτή την Κυριακή σταματάτε!'» (Memis 2014 in vice.gr)

Despite the problems related to conflicting interests and the expansion beyond the limits of the available area, Vahtet believes that the inner-city location of Korean Market was ideal for a wastepicker market:

«Well. This place you say is in - it belongs to Thissio - it is above Piraeus Street, it was the old Korean Market. For me, that's where the market should be.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Λοιπόν. Ο χώρος αυτός που λες είναι στο - ανήκει στο Θησείο - είναι πάνω από την Πειραιώς, ήταν η παλιά Κορεάτικη Αγορά. Για μένα, εκεί πρέπει να πάει το παζάρι.»

Vahtet accounts about the fact that the market had grown disproportionally and attributes responsibility to both the municipal police and the union for this situation:

«There could be better communication between them [the union] and not let others sell [at the market]. That is, they [vendors] would come, and they would stick side by side next to each other. Yeah, but the union went and got paid by them [the additional traders]. [...] That was the union's mistake, was taking the dues.» (Vahtet 2018)



Right: Top to bottom.

The market space at Iera Odos 94, 2013. Sign reads "Wastepicker union Ermis - our bazaar is here. Entrance". Translation by the author. (pazari-athens)

Overview Iera Odos market. (lifo)

Overview of the Korean market area in Keramikos. Technopolis/Gazi is visible in the background (Enodios Ermis facebook).

Keramikos market on the Ermou pedestrian zone. (pazari-athens)

«Μπορούσε να υπάρξει μία συνενόηση μεταξύ τους και να μην αφήσουνε άλλους να πουλάνε. Δηλαδή ερχόντουσαν, κολάγανε και αυτοί δίπλα δίπλα δίπλα δίπλα. Ναι, το σωματείο όμως πήγαινε και πληρωνόταν από αυτούς. [...] Αυτό ήταν το λάθος του σωματείου. Ότι έπαιρνε τη συνδρομή.»

The needs of the wastepickers thus grew and space was not sufficient anymore. According to Vahtet the union did not focus enough during that time on controlling who would be joining and what items were being sold, while he is admitting mistakes in the management of member fees. The popularity of the market was on the rise and traders would spread the word mouth to mouth, leading to even bigger growth:

«They [vendors] were saying to each other, ‘come on, over there, come over there, come over there, come over there’ and suddenly within a period of thirty days what was six hundred people became thousand six hundred. The situation went out of control. Whoever wanted sold whatever they wanted.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Έλεγε ο ένας στον άλλον ‘έλα ρε, εκεί, έλα εκεί, έλα εκεί, έλα εκεί’ και ξαφνικά μέσα σε ένα χρονικό διάστημα τριάντα ημερών εκεί που ήτανε εξακόσια άτομα γίνανε χίλια εξακόσια. Ξέφυγε η κατάσταση. Όποιος ήθελε πούλαγε ό,τι ήθελε.»

This very argument, that market coordinators had «lost control» over the quantity and identity of traders would be often used by officials in future attempts to limit the spreading of the markets.

4. Moving to Eleonas–Iera Odos 94 and surroundings (2012-2014)

«So the only thing that the area of Eleonas had in the last forty years was agencies, transport companies and such things. [...] Well, an uninhabited area. For the last six years, this area has come to life, it has come to life, on Sundays.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Η περιοχή λοιπόν του Ελαιώνα, το μόνο που είχε τα τελευταία σαράντα χρόνια ήταν πρακτορεία, μεταφορικές και τέτοια πράγματα. [...] Λοιπόν, μια περιοχή ακατοίκητη. Τα τελευταία έξι χρόνια, η περιοχή αυτή έχει ζωντανέψει, έχει ζωντανέψει, ε, τις Κυριακές.»

Following negotiations with the municipality of Athens wastepickers were granted permission to hold the market at number 94 of Iera Odos Street in Eleonas, – ironically a car depot of the city of Athens which was simultaneously used as parking spot for waste trucks. The site is about 1,7 km to the west from the old location at Keramikos. Wastepickers were allowed to use the waste truck depot during the weekends, when the garbage trucks would be moved aside to make space for the trading stalls.

«Eventually, with the disturbance, we were given a space on Iera Odos, which was not municipal; it was rented by the Municipality. And they stored, they used it as a warehouse, parked the “garbagers” [garbage trucks]. And on the weekends they would take them, they would move them right, left, and at noon when the bazaar closed, they would bring the cars back, that was the way.» (Magalios 2019)

«Τελικά με την ενόκληση, μας παραχωρήθηκε ένας χώρος στην Ιερά Οδό, ο οποίος αυτός δεν ήταν δημοτικός, ήταν νοικιασμένος από το Δήμο. Και αποθήκευε, τον χρησιμοποιούσε ως αποθήκη, έκανε

πάρκινγκ δηλαδή τις σκουπιδιάρες. Και το Σαββατοκύριακο τις έπαιρνε, τις πήγαινε δεξιά, αριστερά, και το μεσημέρι που έκλεινε το παζάρι, έφερνε τα αυτοκίνητα, κατ’αυτό το τρόπο.»

The many changes of location would not affect the faithfulness of its visitors (Memis 2014) which shows the essential need for a bazaar accessible to the masses. This devotion ensured that customers would find out where the market has been relocated and the space soon became crowded again. An entertaining proof of this loyalty can be found in the detailed documentation of the markets’ changes of location in the online forum of Greek comic collectors (greekcomics.gr). Comic fans rely heavily on wastepicker bazaars to serve their hobby and find the desired strips to complete their collections, so when the Korean Market site was shut down members of the community went out to search for the new locations, informing about their appearance, type, quality of products via the online forum. Going through this account I could find valuable information on the markets’ evolution during the first years in Eleonas, like for example instructions on how to reach the new location in Iera Odos:

«Let me make it clear that there is no way you can miss it, as you will see the vehicles of the waste collectors and a banner informing you that you have arrived. The site is completely controlled (sic), as it is an old factory (from what I heard from FAGE or DELTA, but I don’t swear), which is now in ruins. Although there is no roof, it certainly gives the impression of an enclosed space. And although at first the space might seem small, you’ll find that it’s a lot bigger than it looks, but again, the comparison with the old bazaar in Thiseion is overwhelming, and clearly not in favor of the new place.» (greekcomics.gr)

«Να ξεκαθαρίσω ότι δεν υπάρχει περίπτωση να το χάσετε, αφού θα δείτε και τα οχήματα των ρακοσυλλεκτών, αλλά και ένα πανό, που θα σας ενημερώνει ότι φτάσατε. Ο χώρος είναι απολύτως ελεγχόμενος, αφού πρόκειται για ένα παλιό εργοστάσιο (από όσο άκουσα της ΦΑΓΕ ή της ΔΕΛΤΑ, αλλά δεν παίρνω κι όρκο), που είναι πλέον ερείπια. Αν και δεν υπάρχει σκεπή, σίγουρα δίνεται η εντύπωση του κλειστού χώρου. Και αν και στην αρχή ο χώρος ίσως να σας φανεί μικρός, θα διαπιστώσετε ότι είναι αρκετά μεγαλύτερος από ό,τι φαίνεται, αλλά και πάλι η σύγκριση με το παλιό παζάρι στο Θησείο είναι συντριπτική, και σαφώς όχι υπέρ του καινούριου μέρους.»

Other forum users would give graphic accounts of the decadent market atmosphere. Unpaved areas that would turn into muddy fields and the unfinished Agias Annis and Agiou Polykarpou street would exacerbate the already difficult conditions in the area. The space allocated by the municipality proved too small to contain all, so already during that time, satellite markets would start popping up in the vicinity of the main site at Iera Odos. One comic forum user reports:

«Today I saw a second bazaar in a building just above the big bazaar on Iera Odos. It’s 300 metres further up the same road towards Egaleo and it’s half the size of the big one. I asked why there were two bazaars and they told me the big one was the Ermis waste collectors and the smaller one was the Dias waste collectors. Anyway, the ancients are all over at the wastepickers’.» (greekcomics.gr¹²)

12 Punctuation added by author.

«[Σ]ήμερα είδα και δεέτερο παζάρι σε ένα οικόπεδο λίγο πιο πάνω από το μεγάλο παζάρι στην Ιερά Οδό. [Ε]ίναι 300 μέτρα πιο πάνω στη ίδια μεριά προς το [Α]ιγάλεω και είναι το μισό από το μεγάλο περίπου. [Ρ]άτση γιατί 2 παζάρια και μου είπαν το μεγάλο είναι οι ρακοσυλλέκτες σωματείου [Ε]ρμής και στο πιο κάτω ρακοσυλλέκτες σωματείου [Δ]ίας. [Π]άντως οι αρχαίοι κάνουν θραύση στους ρακοσυλλέκτες.»

The same user three months later gives an update on the extension of this smaller market and informs about architectural interventions that were made in order to enlarge the space:

«[A]nd something else the bazaar in question has grown a little more and has expanded to the adjacent plot they broke down a wall and there is a bazaar there as well.» (greekcomics.gr¹³)

«[Κ]αι κάτι ακόμα το εν λόγω παζάρι μεγάλωσε λίγο ακόμα έχει επεκταθεί και στο δίπλα οικόπεδο σπάσανε μία μεσοτοιχία και έχει παζάρι και εκεί σαν συνέχεια.»

More testimonies of the scattered expansion of market sites can be found in the comic collector forum (the thread on wastepicker markets was active from 2007 until 2018). These traces indicate that parallel to a main market site, which was formally authorized by the municipality and officially managed by Ermis, other minor markets and trading spots existed, making the situation more of a cluster type arrangement. The main space at Iera Odos 94 quickly proved unsuitable. It was small and the premise's primary use meant that unsanitary garbage leftovers and bad odour were brought in by the service cars, a situation Vahtet describes as unbearable:

«August 2012, that is when they transferred us to Iera Odos 94, at a municipality-owned ground where on Saturdays they would take out the waste trucks and we would enter to hold our market. That means all these fluids, all the bad smell, the junk... Everything stayed there for a week till Saturday, spilled all over. And we would come on Sunday to lay our stuff on the ground to hold our market, right?» (Vahtet 2018)

«[Τ]ον Αύγουστο του 12, είχαμε, μας είχανε πάει εδώ στην Ιερά Οδό 94, σε χώρο του Δήμου το οποίο βγάζανε, Σάββατο, τα απορριματοφόρα και μπαίναμε να κάνουμε παζάρι. Που σημαίνει ότι όλα τα ζουμιά, όλα... αυτή η μυρωδιά, όλο το σκουπιδαρι... έμενε όλη τη βδομάδα εκεί, το Σάββατο δηλαδή τα ζουμιά τρέχανε. Και εμεις πηγαίναμε την Κυριακή εκεί και στρώναμε πάνω σ'αυτά για να κάνουμε το, το παζάρι. Εντάξει;»

Additionally the time frame that wastepickers had to get organized, prepare their stalls, sell their products and pack everything up was tight and conditioned by the management of the depot (Magalios 2019). The result was that the majority of wastepickers demanding help and support from the MoA started anew negotiations with the mayor. In 2014 a division of the unions started, resulting in the foundation of seven to eight clubs. A widespread narrative of the Ermis board, also reproduced by Vahtet, is that their union remained the most numerous and the one with the highest grade of recognition by the municipality of Athens.

13 Punctuation added by author.

4.2.5 Second move in Eleonas–*Allilengýi* Market. Agiou Polykarpou 95 (2014-2016)

The union's demand was to move to a site with better conditions and good accessibility. Eventually, they were offered a site upgrade at number 95 of Agiou Polykarpou Street in Eleonas, a plot owned by the municipality of Athens and located within the borders of the double regeneration area and next to the Eleonas refugee settlement (at number 87) which was established in 2015. Ironically the new market site was also amongst those affected by evictions of Roma families' houses a few years earlier. Possibly the same people (among others) returned as traders to the site that became known as *Allilengýi*¹⁴ market. Since the regeneration project had been laid on ice the site had no use other than serving as an intermediate storage/parking site subordinated to the cleaning directorate of the municipality of Athens (Magalios 2019). The space was initially in a terrible condition, a plain earth-floored field filled with junk. Dissatisfaction is clear in Kamper Vahtet's description of the first days at the new place and the interaction with city officials:

«Yes, well I [talking about the union] did not go there by myself, you [the municipality] brought me there. You gave me this place over there, which was full of germs. When we went there it was full of mud, full of dirt.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Ναι εγώ δεν πήγα μόνος μου εκεί, εσείς με πήγατε. Εσείς μου δώσατε αυτό το χώρο εκεί πέρα, που ήταν μες στο μικρόβιο. Όταν πήγαμε ήταν μες στη λάσπη, μες στο χώμα.»

However, the responsible authorities of the Municipality of Athens were not eager to help the wastepickers in the improvement of the space. Vahtet points out the reluctant reactions of Municipality officials, after the union's complaints about the space's condition:

«Again with actions of ours, of the union, with evidence, with photos - I went and threw them at the desk of a deputy mayor, ee, of road construction [...]. That was our first acquaintance then. I went and threw some pictures at his desk and I told him 'Mr. Apostolopoulos, I do not know you and you do not know me. Tell me if I can hold my market in this place you have taken us, in the dust and mud?', 'I,' he says, 'didn't even know they had given you space. And what do you want from me?' I want you to come and throw tar in the area or to - do something over there so that a person can, let's say, walk, or eat a souvlaki or drink a beverage over there.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Και με ενέργειες πάλι δικές μας, του σωματείου, με αποδεικτικά στοιχεία, με φωτογραφίες - πήγα και τα πέταξα στο γραφείο ενός αντιδημάρχου, εε, της οδοποιίας [...]. Τότε η πρώτη μας γνωριμία ήταν έτσι. Πήγα και του πέταξα κάποιες φωτογραφίες πάνω στο γραφείο και του λέω 'κύριε Αποστολόπουλε, δε σε ξέρω δε με ξέρεις. Πες μου εσύ, αν μπορώ εγώ να κάνω το παζάρι μου σε αυτό το χώρο που μας έχετε πάει, μέσα στη σκόνη και στη λάσπη;' 'Εγώ, λέει, δεν ήξερα ότι σας έκουνε δώσει χώρο. Και, τι θες απομένα;' 'Θέλω λέω να έρθετε να ρίξετε πίσσα στο χώρο ή να το - κάτι να κάνετε εκεί πέρα να μπορεί ένας άνθρωπος, λέω, να περπατάει ή να τρώει ένα σουβλάκι ή να πίνει ένα νεράκι εκεί πέρα.»

Vahtet goes on, speaking about the ignorance of the elected officials at that time, denied responsibilities of which went all the way up to the mayor of Athens:

14 Meaning Solidarity.

«First of all, I am certainly one hundred percent sure that the mayor of Athens, George Kaminis, did not know and does not- okay, now he knows, then he did not know where the bazaar was taking place. If it was done in a place of his own, etc. He did not know, I am one hundred percent sure. We are talking about such irresponsibility.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Κατ'αρχάς, είμαι βέβαιως πλέον εκατό τις εκατό ότι ο δήμαρχος της Αθήνας ο Γιώργος ο Καμίνης δεν γνώριζε και δεν γνω- εντάξει τώρα ξέρει, δεν γνώριζε που γινόταν το παζάρι. Αν γινόταν σε χώρο δικό του κλπ. Δεν το γνώριζε, είμαι εκατό τις εκατό σίγουρος. Μιλάμε για τέτοια ανευθυνότητα.»

Despite being met with denial and incomprehension from city officials, wastepickers were making big efforts to improve the space given. Fehridun Memis and Kamper Vahtet – former and current presidents of Ermis respectively – both emphasize on their people's individual initiative to ameliorate working conditions on site. Wastepickers transformed the former junkyard into a functional space, installing chemical toilets and organising the garbage collection and the guarding of the space (luben.tv 2016; amna.gr 2018). Another big problem was the lack of shelter or weather protection, with the site being exposed to all climate conditions. In the case of rain, normal operation of the market was not possible because there was no drainage system and the area would transform into a swamp. In the meantime, tensions started showing between certain groups of wastepickers and first cracks appeared in the overarching union structure. Some complained that the Ermis board, who was leading the negotiations with the Athens Municipality at that time, did not manage members' contributions as they should.¹⁵ With time and the wastepickers' collective effort to improve the site's conditions the market grew and expanded, eventually showing that the space was limited for the needs of the increased number of wastepickers. Traders were occupying the pavement and spread towards the surrounding streets, leading to problems and complaints in the neighbourhood. An eviction order came in 2016 under the mayoralty of Giorgos Kaminis. Wastepickers claim that no warrant was issued before the eviction:

«We have not been told anything before, only that there have been some allegations of delinquent behavior.» (Vahtet 2016 in avgi.gr)

«Δεν μας είχαν πει τίποτα πριν, μόνο ότι είχαν γίνει κάποιες καταγγελίες για παραβατικές συμπεριφορές.»

After pressure to the competent authority of the City of Athens, union representatives found out that a general complaint had been made that did not refer anywhere to the waste collectors' unions. (Vahtet in avgi.gr) Kamper Vahtet's assessment of the situation, a few years later, is that the basic reason that got them kicked out of the municipal property on Agiou Polykarpou was the growth beyond the premises of the market, which however was not in the power of the union to control:

«Well, that's where we were taken out of there and the reason was this, the only explanation was that there were too many bazaars. When I said to them, "What's my fault if there were too many bazaars? [...] [You mean that they spread beyond this area?] Yes, they spread, outside, you know, outside the area where we were, yes. The street vendors went there, the street hawkers from here, from the right to the left, and they organized themselves, they took a street in a

¹⁵ Vahtet thinks that money given by each stall owner in order to improve the condition of the new space was not spent carefully (Vahtet 2017 in newsbeast.gr).

row and had their bazaar. What's my fault? They say "If it wasn't for you..." Yes, I didn't go there alone, you took me there!» (Vahtet 2018)

«Ε, από κει μας βγάλανε και ο λόγος ήταν αυτός, η μόνη εξήγηση, ότι γίνανε πολλά παζάρια. Όταν εγώ τους είπα "εγώ που φταίω αν γίνανε πολλά παζάρια; [...] [Δηλαδή το ότι εξαπλώθηκαν και πέρα από αυτή την έκταση;] Ναι εξαπλώθηκαν, έξω, ξέρεις, απο χώρο έξω που ήμασταν εμείς ναί. Πήγαν εκεί πλανόδιοι, παρεμπόριο απο δω, δεξιά αριστερά και οργανωθήκανε κι αυτοί δηλαδή, πιάσανε μια σειρά έναν δρόμο και κάνανε το παζάρι τους. Εγώ που φταίω; Ε μου λένε "αν δεν ήσουν εσύ...". Ναι εγώ δεν πήγα μόνος μου εκεί, εσείς με πήγατε!»

4.2.6 Eviction from Agiou Polykarpou 95 (2016)

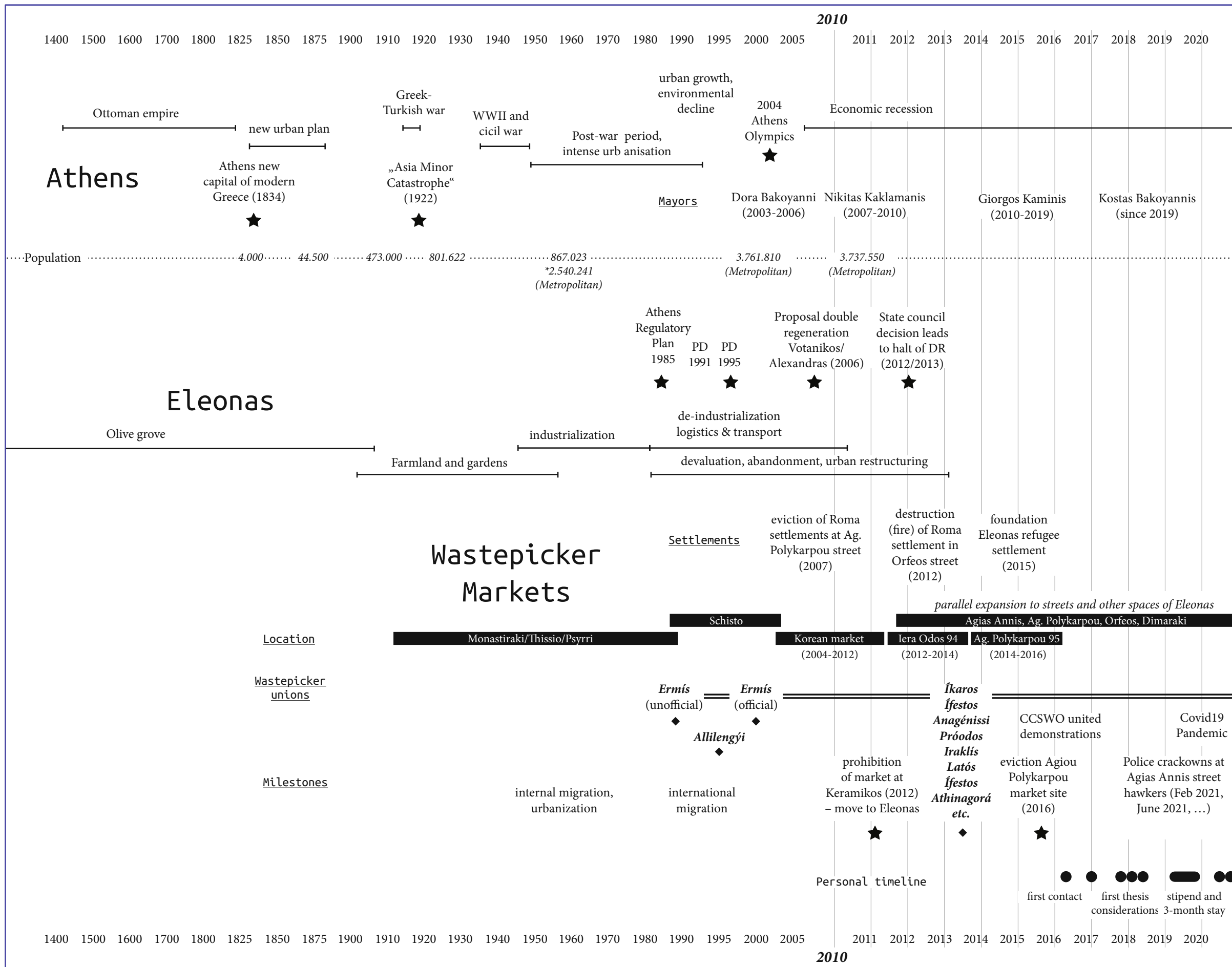
The clearing order was issued and the police operation that followed brought several anti-riot units to execute it. Police came equipped with bulldozers and were accompanied by employees of the Athens Municipality. The eviction was held on a regular market day, while visitors were trying to approach the site and instead ended up watching service cars carrying away the wastepickers' destroyed items. The force that was used did not seem proportionate to the nature of the operation and drew the attention of monitoring groups and political organisations (e.g. KEERFA, Antarsia¹⁶). Press covering the incident criticized that the Municipality and the Prefecture preferred to choose the violent dissolution of the bazaar instead of an arrangement in collaboration with wastepicker associations over finding new places for a larger market (luben.tv 2016).

The forceful eviction of Allilengýi eventually led to the dispersion of market sites into several spaces across Eleonas. Also, it appears to be a pivotal moment for emerging wastepicker mobilisations and political activation. One defining aspect of this development has to do with what Asef Bayat calls the formation of a "passive network" (Bayat 2010: 63) among users of public space and people that operate in it. According to Bayat passive network means: "[...] an instantaneous communication among atomized individuals that is established by a tacit recognition of their common identity, and which is mediated through real and virtual space" (ibid.). (cf. 4.3.2)

In that logic, due to a recognized common identity and in the face of an eviction, traders would create bonds of solidarity. This had as a side-effect both the strengthening of wastepicker associations and the creation of new affiliations. A process that had started earlier, at least since 2014 as mentioned in 4.2.3, in the aftermath of the Solidarity market eviction Ermis definitely divided into several splinter groups and associations. Most of these new groups record continuities until today. While some associations are legally listed with operating statutes and other documents, others possibly lack an official registration. All of them are operating markets with the acquiescence of the Municipality and the police.

Ermis, Allilengýi, Ikaros, Enodios Ermis, Proodos, Anagenissi are unions that were active over the years and were all part of the Coordinating Committee of Struggle of Wastepicker Organisations (cf. 4.3.1.) after the eviction of Agiou Polykarpou 95 (Vahtet 2018). Iraklis, Ifestos, Athinagora/Rom Bazaar, Latos are some other markets that appeared in Eleonas, some seized to exist and other names keep reappearing throughout the years. Various forms of protest and organisation emerged within the different unions and associations. I dig deeper into the aspects of political organisation and resistance within or around the wastepicker unions of Eleonas in chapter 4.3.1. Next I will show how the market landscape evolved after 2016 into one extended field of scattered markets, covering both private and public spaces of Eleonas.

¹⁶ <https://antarsiagetoniesathinas.blogspot.com/2016/11/47-5.html>



4.2.7 Spreading into several locations in Eleonas (2016-present)

The de novo displacement forced the emerging unions and involved individuals to once more go on new quests for spaces to hold their market.

«After several splits of our union then, and with the decision of the Municipality to close our bazaars, we decided that each association should rent private premises so that we could continue our activities.» (Memis 2018 in amna.gr)

«Έπειτα από αρκετές διασπάσεις του σωματείου μας τότε, και με απόφαση του Δήμου να κλείσουν τα παζάρια μας, αποφασίσαμε το κάθε σωματείο να προβεί στην ενοικίαση ιδιωτικών χώρων ώστε να μπορέσουμε να συνεχίσουμε τις δραστηριότητές μας.»

This came as a response to the city administration's intransigence and unwillingness to support the wastepicker unions by providing a free and public location with basic infrastructures (running water, electricity, WC facilities), where there would be enough space for the increasing number of traders and where traders and visitors would be protected from bad weather conditions (Vahtet 2019). Disillusioned unions started turning to private solutions:

«[...] they took us out from that space and now we are forced to rent another space, private this time, and to hold our market there.» (Vahtet 2017 in Epitelous Savvatokyriako)

«[...] μας βγάλαν απ'τον χώρο και τώρα έχουμε αναγκαστεί και έχουμε νοικιάσει έναν χώρο δικό μας πλέον, ιδιωτικό, και πάμε και κάνουμε το παζάρι μας εκεί.»

The daily hustle of waste and scrap collectors found an oddly and unexpectedly “welcoming” environment in Eleonas. The weekly wastepicker markets are concentrated primarily in the northern part of Eleonas, in the district authority of Votanikos (Municipality of Athens) and Egaleo (Municipality of Egaleo). These two Municipalities are divided by Agias Annis Street, one of the few vertical (north-south) axes cutting through Eleonas. On both sides of this main road one can find several improvised markets in leased spaces. Agias Annis, the road leading to and from the Eleonas metro station at Iera Odos Street is basically the backbone of the marketplaces. Basically the wastepicker «high street», Agias Annis functions as a binding element between the different trading spots. It can be perceived as a main «boulevard» cutting through the area:

«[1] Do you know Agias Annis Street?

[2] Yes, the Boulevard.

[1] Yes, indeed it is a boulevard!»

(Dialogue between Magalios (1) and the author (2), 2019)

«[1] Την ξέρεις την Αγίας Άννης;

[2] Ναι. Την λεωφόρο.

[1] Ναι, πράγματι είναι λεωφόρος! »

During the first months after the eviction of the Solidarity marketThe terrain of Eleonas is mainly morphed by large plots with industrial buildings in varying grades of decay – warehouses, guard barracks, old factory shells etc. – and open spaces such as parking lots or abandoned construction sites.

Working out deals with owners of such spaces gave wastepickers the confidence of holding markets on their own terms and of being independent from the favour of politicians. An expression of this situation is Vahtet's categorically negative statement on the outlook of supporting candidates running for the, at that time upcoming, municipal elections¹⁷:

«Don't even, no, it's finished. Since I am in a private space - I pay, you [referring to city administration] forced me to pay rent! You forced me, where I could do my Allilengýi [the former bazaar] instead...» (Vahtet 2019)

«Δεν έχει. Όχι. Τέρμα. Αφού είμαι σε ιδιωτικό χώρο - πληρώνω, με αναγκάζεις να πληρώνω ενοίκιο! Με αναγκάζεις, εκεί που μπορούσα να κάνω την Αλληλεγγύη [το παζάρι] μου... »

Even though most plots around the double regeneration area today are in public hand, other private proprietors or subtenants (former factory owners and their heirs, hauling companies, retail chains etc.) are willing to say yes to private agreements on the use (absolute or partial) of spaces. Both Ermis and other wastepicker associations chose to bypass the obstacle of superimposed plans and to pursue their livelihoods by either working out deals with local companies and landlords or by appropriating public areas (e.g. streets):

«Apart from my own union, well, others have come out and made bazaars too. And without [having] unions. [...] Some leaders came out, worked their brains out, rented some spaces. And they are having their market like we are having ours.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Πέρα από το δικό μου σωματείο, ε, έκουνε βγει και άλλοι και έκουνε κάνει παζάρια. Και χωρίς σωματεία. [...] Κάποιοι αρχηγοί βγήκανε, δούλευε το μυαλουδάκι τους, νοικιάσαν κάποιους χώρους. Και κάνουν και αυτοί όπως κάνουμε και μεις το παζάρι τους.»

On the question of how such an agreement comes into being, Vahtet points out the role of companies (mostly haulers) which are subletting their premises to traders. Agency employees work on site from Monday to Friday, giving the company owner the chance to work out an extra deal for the weekend. Company managers appear as profiteers in this situation, adding to the complexity of the relationship web behind the markets, so Vahtet:

«He [the manager] is the one who's the dupe in this case. Well. He's rented a space and he's doing transfers, relocations and such. An agency, huh? Well done. Now he goes and sublets the space to make a bazaar there, for the other guy [wastepicker] to make a bazaar. No papers [e.g. contract], no nothing. They go there and pay by the month, by the week - they pay. Every week he says I want five hundred euro in order to make the bazaar. And they go and give him five hundred euro - the amount is an example, right - five hundred euros, and the man goes every week and does the market. That.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Αυτός, το λαμόγιο της υπόθεσης είναι αυτός. Λοιπόν. Έχει νοικιάσει έναν χώρο και κάνει μεταφορές, μετακομίσεις και τέτοια. Πρακτορείο, έτσι; Μπράβο. Πάει τώρα και κάνει υπενοικίαση για να γίνει ένα παζάρι, για να κάνει ο άλλος το παζάρι. Χωρίς χαρτιά χωρίς τίποτα. Πάνε εκεί με τον μήνα, με τη βδομάδα τον πληρώνουν. Κάθε εβδομάδα λέει εγώ θέλω πεντακόσια ευρώ για να κάνει το παζάρι. Και αυτοί πάνε και του δίνουν πεντακόσια ευρώ - πχ τώρα τα ποσά έτσι - πεντακόσια ευρώ, και πάει ο άνθρωπος κάθε βδομάδα και κάνει το παζάρι. Αυτό.»

¹⁷ A common practice among local politicians is to ask for the union members' support in upcoming elections, offering favourable treatment in return (Magalios 2019; Kamper 2018). (cf. 4.3.3)

From the eviction of Allilengyi in 2016 till today¹⁸, bazaars stretched over a great area of plots, streets and buildings of approximately 50 hectares, revolving mainly around the block of the DRP. Perpendicular to the main axis of Agias Annis when moving from the metro station north-to-south we find Agiou Polykarpou Street and Orfeos Street. On both of these roads scattered market sites are located. Dimaraki Street is one parallel towards the east where one can also find major marketplaces and several hawker sites. On Saturdays and Sundays, from early in the morning till noon, the block becomes busy with stands, stalls and carts of all sorts. The markets attract thousands of vendors and visitors each week from all over the region.

It can be distinguished between market sites in privately owned spaces (industrial buildings or open-air spaces), usually centrally operated by a wastepicker association or union and clusters or zones of street trade (public areas such as roads, pavements, green spaces) where hawkers organise individually.

Dynamic transformatory situation

However, the markets of Eleonas are constantly evolving with new sites popping up and old ones disappearing in a short period of time. This fluctuation depends on the internal dynamics of the unions, changes in the owner's intentions or demands, better deals coming up or the shift in visitor flows towards a specific corner of the market field (perhaps because of the better reputation of one of the sites). The expansion into several spaces and areas produced an organic market landscape that reacts to external influence and changes as a whole. Personally I have witnessed several changes in the layout of the market landscape which makes me want to emphasize that the setting is in a constant dynamic process of development and transformation. Despite the impossibility of pinning down the many changes it is important to show this transformation in time in order to gain a better understanding of the various ways in which space appropriation by market actors happens.

As discussed earlier, uneven urban development led to a gradual relocation of the wastepicker markets from principal and historic, central areas towards the city's outer edges such as the "blind spot" of Eleonas. However, part of the wastepicker unions that seek recognition by the state also advocate for their right to hold their market in a representative central spot such as Monastiraki and Thissio and demand to return to such areas. Ertzan Hasan for example states that his union (Proodos) should be permitted to hold their market in the historic center as, he thinks, it is in many European cities:

«So what I think belongs to us (inaud.) could be Kotzia square, or Zappeion...» (Hasan E. 2019)

«Δηλαδή αυτο πιστεύω που μας ανήκει (ακατ.) θα μπορούσε να'ναι η πλατεία Κοτζιά, το Ζάππειο...»

Considering the form of this ideal market Ertzan Hasan describes solid fixed stalls and covered areas, assessing these infrastructures as particularly essential:

«The best would be with benches, in covered spaces. Something like the book fair taking place at Zappeion. Something like that, but with (inaud.) wastepickers. » (Hasan E. 2019)

«Το καλύτερο θα ήταν με πάγκους, στεγασμένους χώρους. Πως είναι η έκθεση βιβλίου που γίνεται στο Ζάππειο; Ένα τέτοιου είδους, αλλά με (ακατ.) ρακοσυλλέκτες.»

18 Interrupted by the Covid19 pandemic outbreak in March 2020.



Right: Traces of (former) market sites on the walls of Eleonas. Top to bottom:

Wall inscription at Orfeos/Dimaraki Street corner.

Wall inscription at former Proodos site (side Street of Agiou Polykarpou).

Inscription on one of the refugee camp walls. "Bazaar" and an arrow pointing to the former Allilengyi market site.

Inscription in Dimaraki, informing about the change of location 1000m in both directions (perhaps because the new site is on the back side of the block).

The importance of an old-wares-market location is highlighted as well in Spyros Magalios' bold statements in the same collective interview. The bazaar should be in the center, those that are located in the periphery are nothing but "para-markets" (παραπάζαρα) (Magalios 2019). Magalios stretched this argument several times during our interview, putting even more emphasis on the point of good accessibility. He mentions Monastiraki, which is easily accessible even on foot, something essential for the market's good operation:

«And the bazaars, I repeat, this is the second time I've said it, are held in the historic centre of the city. They're not on the outskirts of the city. What am I supposed to do? Take the bus, then take the subway to get to the bazaar, no. For the bazaar to be accessible, it has to be nearby. And therein lies its success. As far as wares are concerned, they will always be found.» (Magalios 2019)

«Και τα παζάρια το επαναλαμβάνω, είναι η δεύτερη φορά που το λέω, γίνονται στο ιστορικό κέντρο της εκάστοτε πόλης. Δεν παν στις παρυφές της πόλης. Τι να κάνω; Να πάρει ο άλλος το λεωφορείο, να πάρει μετά το μετρό για να πάρει στο παζάρι, όχι. Για να είναι προσβάσιμο το παζάρι πρέπει να είναι κοντά. Και εκεί είναι η επιτυχία του. Όσον αφορά για τα πράγματα, όλο και θα βρίσκονται.»

A notable action of Ermis, which exemplifies the importance of good accessibility, was done during the first months after the 2016 eviction from Agiou Polykarpou Street, when the union was subletting a space in Salaminias Street, some one and a half kilometres away from the metro station of Eleonas and a bit off the area where most traders had settled. What the union did to compensate for the disadvantage of bad accessibility, is to appoint a shuttle bus that runs at regular intervals, bringing customers from the metro station to the market site (Ermis union website 2016). The measure however did not solve the location problem and the disadvantage over other sites that were closer to the metro, and the union very soon moved the market to another site at Agias Annis Street.

An important aspect that shapes the field of wastepicker associations is that different unions have different approaches regarding the extent to which wastepickers should be acknowledged and supported by public authorities. While some unions demand help from the municipality, others rather avoid it and prefer to be tolerated without receiving much attention, relying to anonymity for better going upon their business. A deeper account on the aspects of strived/avoided visibility/invisibility and relation to authorities can be found in chapters 4.1.1 and 4.3.3.

The timeline presented in this chapter was previously unwritten and is a valuable depiction in its complex wholeness. As presented in the chapter introduction, I have pieced together information from interviews, newspaper articles and film excerpts. However, the statements of my interviewees and others expressed in articles have sometimes contradicted each other. The topic is multi-layered and complex, as parts of the wastepicker community demand visibility (as in being seen and the value of their work being recognized with e.g. the granting of a central market location), while others prefer maintaining their anonymity (being off the radar for authorities). For some, visibility might even pose a threat to their everyday practices. However, the grade of invisibility there is for people who were driven into the margins, shows the necessity of acknowledging these realities as an important aspect of the city's everyday life. An open question is, what value is attached to these realities and why the stories and traces of the subaltern remain unseen, even though they play an important role in shaping the urban environment of Athens. Being careful and aware of the different needs in regards to visibility/invisibility, it is important to have this overall picture and being able to study it, as it can explain the processes of displacement and how Eleonas' markets came about in the first place.

As has been shown in this chapter, the history of the wastepickers of Eleonas is marked by repression and displacement and a relation to gentrification processes in the Athenian context can be argued. Eleonas as a liminal, residual space becomes host of individuals, whose right to public space and the city is denied. Nevertheless, the excluded develop strategies of resistance and consolidate their presence in Eleonas through practices of space appropriation, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

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4.3 Ήταν χωματερή και το κάναμε σαράι / It was a dump and we made a saray out of it¹⁹. Turning Eleonas' contested land into a bottom-up trading field

In this chapter I will on the one hand point out the continuities that have influenced the spreading and settling of the markets in the area of Eleonas and on the other hand I will illustrate the struggles connected to the defending of those newly claimed spaces. For one, some wastepickers are content with the spaces Eleonas has to offer, including Kamper Vahtet whose opinion is that the area can serve the needs of wastepicker markets. When asked if he would say that Eleonas is a solution to their year-long struggle for space he has an unambiguously affirmative answer, referring also to the advantages of the nearby metro station:

«Sure. And... it's an ideal place I think. There's also the subway there...» (Vahtet 2018)

«Βέβαια. Και... είναι ένας ιδανικός χώρος πιστεύω. Είναι και το μετρό εκεί...»

For other parts of the wastepicker community there is also quite the contrary position, as reflected in Ertzan Hasan's graphic statement:

«For us there are no interesting things (in Eleonas), there is the junk of Athens. And it is, and it has become the dirt pit of Athens, now it's the dirt pit of Athens. You could find much better things and not this rotten situation. I mean this is third world, third world images. It's not nice.» (Hasan E. 2019)

«Για μας δεν υπάρχουν ενδιαφέροντα πράγματα (στον Ελαιώνα), υπάρχει η σαβούρα της Αθήνας. Και είναι, και έχει κατακτήσει η χαβούζα της Αθήνας, πλέον είναι η χαβούζα της Αθήνας. Θα μπορούσες να βρεις πολύ πιο καλά πράγματα και όχι αυτή τη σαθρή που βρίσκεται [κατάσταση]. Δηλαδή αυτό είναι τριτοκοσμική, τριτοκοσμικές εικόνες. Δεν είναι ωραίο.»

These views and differing positions will be further discussed and analyzed in the following chapters. First, in 4.3.1, I will look at the struggles and strategies of defending acclaimed spaces related to dispossession and eviction of marketplaces. Next, in 4.3.2, I will dig into the concepts of *quiet encroachment* (cf. 4.3.3) in the context of space appropriation at Eleonas' markets. Finally, in chapter 4.3.3, I will discuss questions of legality/illegality, dependency/autonomy and relations with authorities.

4.3.1 Defending claimed spaces: the market struggles

«But "street politics" has another dimension, in that it is more than just about conflict between authorities and deinstitutionalized or informal groups over the control of public space and order. Streets, as spaces of flow and movement, are not only where people express grievances, but also where they forge identities, enlarge solidarities, and extend their protest beyond their immediate circles to include the unknown, the strangers.» (Bayat 2010: 12)

Relocation, eviction and expulsion have been discussed as common experiences of the street traders of Athens. The ultimate eviction from Agiou Polykarpou Street happened on Sunday November 13, 2016, after weeks of harassment by municipality employees and the police (Antarsia 2016). It sparked a wave of protests and mobilizations. The repeated banishment of trading activities radicalized groups of wastepickers and their organizing bodies, resulting into spontaneous acts of protest. Spyros Magalios recalls this time during our interview:

«I don't remember exactly specifically what the reason was for closing [the market] down. But we took to the streets afterwards. We were occupying roadways, right to left. [...] Then, no, uh, they said they were going to chase us, they were going to bring riot police [MAT]. Now, we are family people, we are professionals, we didn't want to risk getting into fights with the police. We made a march, where had we gone, to the city council? [Asking Ertzan Hasan who replies "yes"] And then we decided rough and ready and rented this space.» (Magalios 2019)

«Και δεν θυμάμαι ακριβώς συγκεκριμένα ποιά ήταν η αιτία που το κλείσανε. Και βγήκαμε στους δρόμους μετά. Κάναμε κατάληψη οδοστρωμάτων, δεξιά αριστερά. (...) Μετά, δεν, ε, είπαν ότι θα μας κυνηγήσουν θα φέρουνε τα MAT. Εμείς τώρα είμαστε οικογενειάρχες είμαστε επαγγελματίες δεν θέλαμε τώρα να το διακινδυνεύσουμε να παίξουμε ξύλο με την αστυνομία. Κάναμε μία πορεία, που είχαμε πάει στο Δήμο; [Ερτζάν Χασάν: Στο Δήμο ναι.] Και μετά αποφασίσαμε εκ των ενόντων και νοικιάσαμε αυτό το χώρο.»

The political fermentation on the street and the heat of political debate between the different unions quickly led to the foundation of a "Coordination Committee of Struggle of Wastepicker Organisations", short CCSWO²⁰. Kamper Vahtet, who headed Ermis' board of representatives for two years at that time, reports on the committee's early stages and first conflicts:

«It was Ermis, Allilengýi, Ikaros, Enodios Ermis, Proodos, Anagenissi. Six unions. Can they be represented by five people? It can't be. Six still can't. Three will vote in favour... So we thought we'd make it a seven-member board. And to commonly appoint someone who knows five things more than we do. Grammar knowledge, for example, or not just grammar.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Ήτανε ο Ερμής, η Αλληλεγγύη, ο Ίκαρος, ο Ενόδιος Ερμής, η Πρόοδος και η Αναγέννηση. Και η Αναγέννηση. Έξι σωματεία. Μπορούν να εκπροσωπηθούν από πέντε άτομα; Δεν γίνεται. Από έξι πάλι δεν γίνεται. Οι τρεις θα πούνε ναι... Και είπαμε να βάλουμε, να το κάνουμε εφταμελές. Και να βάλουμε από κοινού κάποιον που θα ξέρει πέντε πράγματα παραπάνω από μας. Γραμματικές γνώσεις ας πούμε, ή και όχι μόνο.»

Two years after the mobilisations, Vahtet appears rather disappointed with how the alliance project turned out and emphasizes on his primary motivation for joining the committee, which was to help the members of his union who were in existential need. He also refers to the early tensions concerning participating clubs and their joint representation:

«Proposal by Enodios Ermis. [...] I respected it. Because, I thought, first of all, let's drop the bullshit, I say, let's drop all that and let's look, I say, at the people who need to make a living. What do you want? Let's have a steering committee. Good, which will consist of? Five people. How can it be five people when there's six unions?» (Vahtet 2018)

¹⁹ Vahtet 2016 in avgj.gr.

²⁰ Συντονιστική Επιτροπή Αγώνα Συλλόγων Ρακοσυλλεκτών.



Left: Top to bottom.

Gathering in front of the General secretariat of the Municipality of Athens. The banner reads: "Dourou and Kaminitis, give us peace/give us now the market". (ergatiki.gr)

Protest action in front of the Athens City Hall. Wastepickers in neon vests. (ergatiki.gr)

March on Pireos Street as documented by a user of the greekcomics.gr forum from the windows of the comic fan associations' offices. (greekcomics.gr)

Banner by Roma wastepicker association Allilengyi. (ergatiki.gr)

Protes march on the streets of Eleonas (Iera Odos). Banner reads "Mayor, find a solution to our problem", signed "Coordinating Committee of wastepickers". (ergatiki.gr)

«Πρόταση από τον Ενόδιο Ερμή. [...] Το σεβάστηκα. Γιατί, σκέφτηκα, πάνω απ'όλα ας αφήσουμε λέω τις μαγκιές, ας αφήσουμε όλα αυτά κι ας κοιτάξουμε, λέω, τον κόσμο που έχει ανάγκη να βγάλει ένα κομμάτι ψωμί. Τι θέλετε; Να κάνουμε μία συντονιστική επιτροπή. Ωραία, η οποία θα αποτελείται από; Πέντε άτομα. Πως θα αποτελείται από πέντε άτομα ρε μάγκες, απο τη στιγμή που είμαστε έξι σωματεία;»

There are many explanations given by wastepickers about the separation of the once united Ermis union (and by extension the united market, Solidarity/Allilengyi, at Agiou Polykarpou Street). Speculations about the potential benefits of certain figures of power were roaming. Vahtet finds that the whole undertaking was a fraud, and claims that the Athens Deputy Mayor of sanitation and recycling had great influence on the fracture of the market and the creation of several autonomous sites (Vahtet 2018). Spyros Magalios, first president of Proodos Union alludes to the involvement of the Municipality official in the following account:

«Look, the responsible deputy mayor in charge for cleaning/sanitation, the one that had taken us under his protection, he was the one who eventually took the bazaar apart and instead fourteen bazaars were created. And I personally have heard things, but I can't prove it so I can't talk about it.» (Magalios 2019)

«Κοίταξε να δεις, ο συγκεκριμένος, ο καθ'ύλην αρμόδιος αντιδήμαρχος της καθαριότητας, ο οποίος αυτός μας είχε αναλάβει ύπο την προστασία του, ο οποίος αυτός διαμέλησε το παζάρι και δημιουργήθηκαν 14 παζάρια. Και εγώ προσωπικά έχω ακούσει διάφορα, αλλά δεν μπορώ να το αποδείξω και δεν μπορώ να το λέω.»

During the interview with Vahtet and also through the discussion with board members of Proodos, it became clear that in the aftermath of the Ag. Polykarpou eviction internal conflicts came up framing the continuous separations within the unions. This development shaped further relations of wastepickers between each other and with the Municipality Cleaning and Sanitation Office and the respective Deputy Mayor²¹. The escalated situation, threatening the livelihoods of thousands of wastepickers and their families, contributed in cultivating a climate of dispute and argument but at the same time one of cohesion and togetherness in a common cause. Despite getting caught up in internal arguments and eventually dissolving, the Coordinating Committee for the Struggle of Wastepicker Organisations (CCSWO) was an ambitious and powerful project in support of wastepicker mobilizations. Nevertheless, the CCSWO was active during winter 2016 staging greater demonstrations in Eleonas and organizing picket marches in front of the Athens City Hall (CCSWO 2016). The Sunday after the eviction, wastepicker of all ages came out on Iera Odos Street for an organized protest, carrying pickets and banners while marching up Piraeus Street, shouting "Bread-Pazari-Freedom"²² and "Hands off the bazaar" (Ergatiki Allilengyi 2016; greekcomics.gr). All along the route they handed out flyers to passing cars on an effort to inform the public (ibid.). The main demands of the committee were:

«To live in dignity - No to hunger and poverty - Not all for the big wealthy - dignity for wastepickers - Re-open the bazaar in Eleonas - No to police targeting - No to punitive fines - Bazaar means culture and saving the environment» (CCSWO 2016 in KEERFA)

²¹ Andreas Varelas was Deputy Mayor for Sanitation and Recycling from 2011 to 2014 and responsible for the areas Waste Management from 2014 to 2016. Finally, from November 2016 to 2019, Mr. Varelas has been Deputy Mayor of the City Center and Municipal Police, always under the political authority of Mayor George Kaminitis (2011-2019)

²² Bread-Education-Freedom (Ψωμί-Παιδεία-Ελευθερία) was a popular slogan of the Greek anti-dictatorship movement of the 1970's. It is a distinct chant, the wastepickers' variation is most unlikely a reference to the antimilitarist protests, rather an effort to connect to a widely respected and established social struggle.

«ΘΕΛΟΥΜΕ ΝΑ ΖΟΥΜΕ ΜΕ ΑΞΙΟΠΡΕΠΕΙΑ - ΟΧΙ ΣΤΗΝ ΠΕΙΝΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΕΞΑΘΛΙΩΣΗ! - ΟΧΙ ΟΛΑ ΓΙΑ ΤΟΥΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΚΑΡΧΑΡΙΕΣ ΤΟΥ ΠΛΟΥΤΟΥ - ΑΞΙΟΠΡΕΠΕΙΑ ΓΙΑ ΤΟΥΣ ΡΑΚΟΣΥΛΛΕΚΤΕΣ - ΝΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΗΣΕΙ ΤΟ ΠΑΖΑΡΙ ΣΤΟΝ ΕΛΑΙΩΝΑ - ΟΧΙ ΣΤΟ ΚΥΝΗΗΤΟ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΑΣΤΥΝΟΜΙΑ - ΟΧΙ ΣΤΑ ΕΞΟΝΤΩΤΙΚΑ ΠΡΟΣΤΙΜΑ - ΘΕΛΟΥΜΕ ΝΑ ΖΟΥΜΕ ΜΕ ΑΞΙΟΠΡΕΠΕΙΑ - ΟΧΙ ΣΤΗΝ ΠΕΙΝΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΕΞΑΘΛΙΩΣΗ - ΠΑΖΑΡΙ ΣΗΜΑΙΝΕΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΔΙΑΣΩΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΠΕΡΙΒΑΛΛΟΝΤΟΣ»

Further, in the founding declaration of the CCSWO one can read the wastepickers' concerns and indignation for the unresolved situation of their work environment and about the way they were treated by the police. They further criticize the stance of the Municipality of Athens (Mayor Giorgos Kaminis) and the regional prefecture of Attica (governor Rena Dourou) who according to critics both pushed away wastepicker requests, refusing to take responsibility for the space problem²³:

«The decision of the Police, of the Athens Municipality and the Attica Prefecture to stop the bazaar at Agiou Polykarpou Street in Eleonas with riot police and bulldozers caused us sadness and pain for our families who were left without a living, without bread and milk. Did anyone think that a child could sleep in the wrapped blankets that the bulldozers collected?» (CCSWO 2016 in antarsiageitoniesathinas.blogspot.com²⁴)

«Η απόφαση της Αστυνομίας, του Δήμου Αθήνας και της περιφέρειας Αττικής να σταματήσουν το παζάρι στην Αγίου Πολυκάρπου στον Ελαιώνα με ΜΑΤ και μπουλντόζες μας προκάλεσε θλίψη αλλά και πόνο για τις οικογένειες μας που έμειναν χωρίς ένα μεροκάματο, χωρίς ψωμί και γάλα. Σκέφτηκε κανείς άραγε ότι θα μπορούσαν μέσα στις τυλιγμένες κουβέρτες που μάζεψαν οι μπουλντόζες να κοιμόταν κανένα παιδί;»

The Coordinating Committee also mentions the urban poor who, as customers of the market, rely on it for covering their basic needs. According to the announcement, over seven thousand people based their livelihoods on the markets of Eleonas at that time:

«They also deprived of the poor who come here with a few euros to buy what they cannot buy elsewhere. More than seven thousand people live with dignity from this bazaar.» (CCSWO 2016 in antarsiageitoniesathinas.blogspot.com)

«Στέρησαν και από τους φτωχούς που έρχονται εδώ με λίγα ευρώ να αγοράσουν αυτά που δεν μπορούν να αγοράσουν από αλλού. Από αυτό το παζάρι ζούμε με αξιοπρέπεια πάνω από επτά χιλιάδες άνθρωποι των οικογενειών μας.»

The announcement goes on, strongly condemning the stance of the Athens Municipality and the Attica Prefecture, who according to the CCSWO did not care in finding a solution for the obvious space problem of the market, instead calling traders responsible for it:

«Neither the municipality of Athens nor the region of Attica cared to bend down and give a solution for the proper operation of the bazaar in a closed area and not in the muddy streets and sidewalks. They were comfortable to accuse the collectors that they are not cooperating. They promised a solution with a discussion in an interdepartmental committee of the

23 "Mr. Kaminis says he will provide a solution and asks the region to build three bazaars throughout Attica. And until then they send the police. They are such cowards that no one dares to take responsibility. And yet they all sent the police together, both Kaminis and Dourou and the government. We call on the workers of the municipality not to participate in these racist operations" (Konstantinou 2016). Translation by the author.
 24 <https://antarsiageitoniesathinas.blogspot.com/2016/11/blog-post.html>

Municipality of Athens that has not met in the last 3 months.» (CCSWO 2016 in antarsiageitoniesathinas.blogspot.com)

«Ούτε ο Δήμος Αθήνας, ούτε η περιφέρεια Αττικής φρόντισαν να σκύψουν και να δώσουν λύση για την σωστή λειτουργία του παζαριού μέσα σε ένα χώρο κλειστό και όχι στα λασπωμένα δρομάκια και πεζοδρόμια. Βολεύτηκαν να κατηγορούν τους ρακοσυλλέκτες ότι τάχα δεν συνεργάζονται. Υποσχέθηκαν λύση με συζήτηση σε διαπαραταξιακή του Δήμου Αθήνας που δεν συνεδρίασε τους τελευταίους 3 μήνες.»

According to the above statement and also the leftist municipal faction "Antarsia stis geitonies tis Athinas"²⁵ reporting from the City Council assembly, a special committee in order to discuss the wastepicker demands was announced, which however failed in calling in regular meetings:

«The invocation of 'legality' in this particular action is a denigration of the operation of the Athens City Council which discussed the issue of the wastepickers' bazaar and set up an inter-party committee to resolve it. Under the responsibility of the Kaminis administration and the deputy mayor Andreas Varelas, it met only once, this was months ago.» (Konstantinou 2016²⁶)

«Η επίκληση της "νομιμότητας" στη συγκεκριμένη ενέργεια αποτελεί διασурμό της λειτουργίας του Δημοτικού Συμβουλίου της Αθήνας το οποίο συζήτησε το ζήτημα του παζαριού των ρακοσυλλεκτών και συγκρότησε διαπαραταξιακή επιτροπή για την επίλυση του. Με ευθύνη της διοίκησης Καμίνη και του αντιδημάρχου Ανδρέα Βαρελά συνεδρίασε μόνο μία φορά πριν από μήνες.»

Another point made by Antarsia councillor Petros Konstantinou is that the November 2016 police sweep operation resembled models of expulsion of migrants and street vendors from the city center that were carried through during previous city governments. This is a reminder of the processes of displacement from the downtown of traders and waste collectors that have been discussed in chapter 4.2, which preceded the evictions and bans in Eleonas. Konstantinou states:

«Athens of the poor, the unemployed, the minorities has its own bazaar and this is not liked by racist circles that have campaigned in the area and of course by the bigwigs of the city who, since the Olympics, have been pushing for the expulsion of all these people from the "historical and commercial centre of Athens". Now they won't even tolerate them in Eleonas!» (Konstantinou 2016)

«Η Αθήνα των φτωχών, των ανέργων των μειονοτήτων έχει το δικό της παζάρι και αυτό δεν αρέσει σε κύκλους ρατσιστικούς που έκαναν εκστρατεία στην περιοχή και βέβαια στους μεγαλοκαρχίους της πόλης που από την εποχή της Ολυμπιάδας σπρώχνουν για την εκδίωξη όλου αυτού του κόσμου από το "ιστορικό και εμπορικό κέντρο της Αθήνας". Τώρα δεν τους ανέχονται ούτε στον Ελαιώνα!»

Meanwhile responsibilities were attributed in a ping pong between the local and regional government. At an Athens City Council meeting following the eviction of "Solidarity", mayor Kaminis set as a term for further operation of the market the designation of suitable sites by the Attica Prefecture, Konstantinou reports (Konstantinou 2016). In a second statement a few weeks later, Antarsia condemns

25 Ανταρσία στις γειτονίες της Αθήνας: Rebellion in the neighbourhoods of Athens. Municipal faction represented by Petros Konstantinou in the Athens City Council.

26 <https://antarsiageitoniesathinas.blogspot.com/2016/11/25-1.html>

the views of certain members of the City Council, calling them out as racist. More specific, Andreas Varelas, the deputy mayor of the Municipal Police and the Centre of Athens on said meeting set two conditions for the future operation of the market. First condition would be the exclusion of “Albanian associations” as Varelas called some of the Roma associations according to Konstantinou, who asks: «Is it true that Mayor Kaminis accepts an ethnic criterion for participation at the site to be established for the wastepicker bazaar, or not?» (Konstantinou 2016²⁷)

The statement continues by clarifying that the Roma association in question has been operating in the wastepicker bazaars for over 15 years with “some of its members being immigrants from Albania, their children attending public schools and most of them having already acquired citizenship”(Konstantinou/Antarsia 2016).²⁸ Konstantinou continues his report about the deputy mayor’s positioning and the second condition he poses, which is that the associations affiliated to the Muslim minority of Thrace (Ermis, Proodos and others) should purge their memberships and provide a list of members consisting only of Athens district residents or persons belonging to vulnerable groups who hold an official certification. Konstantinou comments that “such interference in the internal affairs of the wastepicker clubs raises many questions about the mayor’s attitude and is totally unacceptable” (ibid.) and concludes by urging the municipality to re-open the bazaars “there is a need to end any “bargaining” about the bazaar of waste collectors and the committee has to announce the day of its reopening, without racist exclusions and interventions within the wastepickers’ associations” (ibid.).

Conclusion

The *Coordinating Committee for the Struggle of Wastepicker Organizations* was a milestone for the wastepicker rights movement as no such unifying project had been attempted before. As discussed in this chapter, through common actions and campaigning the committee managed to draw the attention of politicians and media towards the repressions wastepickers were facing in Eleonas and throw light on the ongoing site problem. Allyships with partisan political organizations and factions (like Antarsia) were established or reinforced. At the same time, internal conflicts threatened the coherence of the unions and limitations of formal tools were revealed. Strategic means and formal ways of struggle, in order to play by the terms of the local government challenged the unions, who were not always able to perform accordingly in a system used and designed to exclude them. Certain associations were overly exposed in this process and became even targeted, like in the case of the Albanian Roma wastepickers. Common reactions of reservation and caution regarding the degree of visibility and exposure towards authorities (cf. 4.3.3) that can be generally observed among some of the wastepicker organisations might have been further shaped and strengthened during this period.

Next I will discuss the rather discreet forms of dispersed, “collective actions of non-collective actors”(Bayat 2010: 19), that significantly shape the practices of individualized appropriation of space at the markets of Eleonas, leaning into Asef Bayat’s theoretical concepts of *nonmovements* and the *quiet encroachment of the ordinary*.

4.3.2 Resistance, encroachment and space appropriation

Except formal tools of engagement such as the CCSWO, wastepickers also used spontaneous acts of individual resistance against evictions, fines and police harassment and accordingly established their presence on the grounds of Eleonas. Atomized street traders and vendors formed passive networks

(Bayat 1997), where various actors due to their common identity and interests were drawn together in a joint struggle for their right to space, in order to pursue their livelihoods through their trading practices. In this chapter I will explain the concept of nonmovements, of quiet and bold encroachment and how these relate to the wastepicker markets in order to discuss in which ways resistance and space appropriation shaped the wastepicker markets of today’s Eleonas.

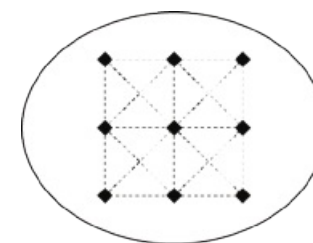
Occupying pavements, erecting makeshift stalls, spreading out carpets and rugs in the street, squatting or renting (half-)built buildings and industrial units are some of the ways traders operate in Eleonas. Marginalized individuals use various ways to appropriate urban spaces in order to support their livelihoods, thus forming passive networks. According to Asef Bayat, a passive network occurs when atomized individuals with similar positions are brought together through space, a common identity and common interests:

«Tenants, spectators, vendors, squatters (...) even though they do not know each other, may act collectively because common space makes it possible for them to recognise their common interests and identity (see Figure 4)—that is, to develop a passive network.» (Bayat 1999: 64)

Further, public and private spaces are being appropriated and transformed into alternative marketplaces in a manner that can be understood through the concept of *quiet encroachment of the ordinary* (Bayat 2010):

«Quiet encroachment refers to noncollective but prolonged direct actions of dispersed individuals and families to acquire the basic necessities of their lives (land for shelter, urban collective consumption or urban services, informal work, business opportunities, and public space) in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion.» (Bayat 2010: 45)

Quiet and unassuming illegal fashion is an apt description for many of the trading activities undertaken in Eleonas. For Bayat, the most interesting part of these activities lies in their “seemingly mundane, ordinary and daily nature” (Bayat 1997: 55). In this context, a *nonmovement* refers to the “collective action of noncollective actors” (Bayat 2010: 14). That means embodiments of shared practices of ordinary people whose fragmented activities are rarely ideologically backed or guided by distinct leaderships and organisations (ibid.). In this sense, encroachers form a nonmovement of the urban dispossessed, which encloses the quiet ways of the poor to better their lives by tapping from the resources of the powerful and society at large (ibid.).



Right: Schematic depiction of a passive network. Illustration by the author based on Bayat 2010: 23.

²⁷ <https://antarsiaageitoniesathinas.blogspot.com/2016/12/blog-post.html#more>

²⁸ Without being explicitly named, by the context *Allilengyi* - the association of Roma wastepickers most probably best fits the description of the targeted organisation.

In Eleonas' streets and pavements are occupied, abandoned sites are squatted, urban infrastructures (fences, poles, traffic signs etc.) are being used as displays and parking spots become car sale stands. Although the outward impression is a busy hustle and bustle, a noisy and lively situation, in the background things happen silently, with market sites coming and going in a way that market visitors sometimes might not even realize that a certain site has closed down or moved a few warehouses away. Bayat argues that such practices are not destructive or dangerous but they rather represent "natural and logical ways in which the disenfranchised survive hardships and improve their lives" (Bayat 1997: 55).

The aspects of individual acts of everyday space appropriation (quiet encroachment) that happen in Eleonas as well as the phenomena of collective action for defending wastepicker rights (unionizing, formal struggles), which both occur in the case of Eleonas, can be conceptually bridged through the notion of *bold* encroachment introduced by urban geographer Tom Gillesbie, who adapted Bayat's concept for his research about contesting dispossession of informal street traders in Accra, Ghana. Gillesbie examines everyday strategies of urban traders in Accra arguing that: «[...] processes of appropriation have been enacted "quietly, individually and gradually", rather than through organized social movements, and are justified as acts of necessity in a context where the state has failed to provide employment or housing.» (Gillesbie 2017: 982)

Gillesbie expands the understanding of encroachment with a "loud" component, an aspect of the disenfranchised visibly claiming spaces, resources and commons. He does so in order to examine: "to what extent squatters and street traders have moved beyond individual acts of quiet encroachment to take collective action to defend their access to urban space from state-led dispossession" (Gillesbie 2017: 975). Gillesbie argues that the squatters and Accra's hawkers have proceeded to bold acts of encroachment, taking "collective action to contest dispossession and defend their access to urban space as a vital means of reproduction" (ibid.). Unlike the desire for autonomy and invisibility displayed in Bayat's examples from the Middle East, Ghana's multiparty system has the effect of enabling wastepicker and hawker organizations to display political power, which increases the importance of urban trader associations in regional politics and electoral outcomes. This has implications for the hawker organizations' engagement and dialogue with authorities (ibid.).

Similarities can be observed with the case of Eleonas where a broad public of atomized individuals engage in quiet appropriative practices while there are also organizations/unions preferring vocal acts of demanding their rights and claiming urban spaces. Thus, the notion of bold encroachment offers a motive for understanding the operative framework of the wastepicker unions in Athens:

«Which is why I'm telling you, these people (local politicians) are impossible to deal with. To do their job they have asked for my help more than ten times and I have given it to them. But from now on I'm not going to help anybody, nothing. No one who hasn't offered me something. Nothing. These people, stay away...» (Vahtet 2018)

«Για αυτό σου λέω, με αυτούς τους ανθρώπους δεν βγάζεις άκρη. Για να κάνουνε τη δουλειά τους έχουν ζητήσει πάνω από δέκα φορές τη βοήθειά μου και τους την έχω δώσει. Αλλά από εδώ και πέρα δεν πρόκειται να βοηθήσω κανένανε, τίποτα. Κανέναν που δεν μου έχει προσφέρει κάτι. Τίποτα. Αυτούς τους ανθρώπους μακριά...»

Vahtet is aware of the power the unions have. Close to the time of the interview the date for the upcoming municipal elections was announced and Vahtet playfully contemplated about the possibility of running for deputy mayor in order to radically change the fate of the wastepicker markets:

«Now I'm telling you, since they've got the election for the fifteenth, don't give me a hard time and I'll find another list and run too. Why not? I have so many people. That's the only way. [...] But I would also like to become, um, oh, not a city councilor, deputy mayor. To be assigned this part. And then I'll tell you if a European bazaar is possible or not.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Τώρα σου λέω, αφού έχουν κυριχτεί και οι εκλογές για το 15, μη μου τη δώσει και βρω έναν άλλον συνδιασμό και κατέβω και εγώ. Γιατί όχι; Εγώ έχω πάρα πολύ κόσμο. Μόνο έτσι. [...] Αλλά θα ήθελα και γω μετά να γίνω, μμ, α όχι δημοτικός σύμβουλος, αντιδήμαρχος. Για να μου αναθέσουν αυτό το κομμάτι. Και θα σου πω τότε εγώ αν γίνεται ή αν δεν γίνεται ένα ευρωπαϊκό παζάρι.»

Vahtet envisions a formally approved and supported market framework, merged with his image of the socially and legally accepted flea markets of the European West (cf. 4.5.3). Implications related to this vision are discussed in 4.5.2.

In the context of informal markets, the relation of the strategies of urban dwellers and traders and the notion of the commons is also interesting (general aspects have been addressed in chapter 3.1). Gillesbie argues that acts of quiet or bold encroachment evoke the creation of urban commons: "Due to their exclusion from formal wage labour and housing markets, Accra's informal proletariat have engaged in everyday acts of quiet encroachment to appropriate urban space as a means of reproduction, creating urban commons in the process." (Gillesbie 2017: 989) Gillesbie reports that "establishing a collective property claim" (ibid.: 982) over Accra's public space and undeveloped land through extensive encroachment, meaning through "sustained patterns of collective use and appropriation" (ibid.) caused an aggressive response from the city authorities, who see these urban commons as an obstacle to their plans of turning the city into a business and tourist-friendly city. The Accra district authority therefore engaged in "violent processes of dispossession in order to enclose the urban commons and expel the informal proletariat" (ibid.: 989).

In conclusion, displacement, dispossession and relocation in the context of (non-)collectively appropriated, "commoned" spaces can be observed as well in the case of Eleonas' wastepicker markets of Eleonas. Acting individuals, traders and wastepickers form passive networks and engage in practices of quiet encroachment as part of a non-movement (silently claiming street spaces, passively cooperating in information exchange, etc.) and bold encroachment (collective organizing through unions and their alliances). In the following chapter, I will discuss how individual actors and wastepicker associations navigate the challenges related to balancing-out relations between each other and the authorities.

4.3.3 Relation with authorities, dependency and autonomy

«Public relations, our strength is that we hang out and network.» (Magalios 2011 in Danezi)

«Δημόσιες σχέσεις, εμείς η δύναμη μας είναι ότι κάνουμε κονσορσσιόν.»

There has been an ambivalent relation between wastepickers and representatives from the municipality and the state. Distrust towards- and dependency from authorities are inscribed in the wastepicker community, which is no wonder given the contradicting situations experienced, such as being offered help and then confronted with unkept promises. There is an understanding of this relationship as one in which wastepickers should try to get out most benefits for their people, but be aware that they are relevant as long as they are being useful to the powerful and stay on their agenda.

«Because they make alliances, false friendships with each other, we'll back you up, I've got my people, I'll get you...» (Magalios 2019)

«Γιατί αυτοί κάνουν συμμαχίες, λυκοφιλίες μεταξύ τους, θα σε στηρίξουμε, έχω δικούς μου, θα σου φέρω...»

In Vahtet's case his suspicion regarding the willingness of officials to hold their promises shows through his persistence on keeping protocol of every interaction with authorities since his election on the Ermis board in 2016:

«Before 2014, well, there had been a concession from the Municipality of Athens to the union -by my action- to the Ermis wastepickers' union with me as president, there had been an action, on paper now. Because when I took over the union, all my, all my conversations, I wanted them to be done on paper - conversations with the Municipality, at the Prefecture, etc. I want to know what's going on. Because when there are papers, there is a protocol number and the other person can't say "but no", "I said it, I didn't say it"... It's not, it's written.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Πιο πριν το 2014, ε, είχε γίνει μια παραχώρηση από το Δήμο της Αθήνας, προς το σωματείο -με ενέργεια δικιά μου- προς το σωματείο ρακοσυλλεκτών του Ερμή με πρόεδρο εμένα, είχε γίνει μία ενέργεια, εγγράφως πλέον. Γιατί όταν ανέλαβα εγώ το σωματείο, όλα μου, όλες μου οι συζητήσεις, ήθελα να γίνονται με χαρτιά -συζητήσεις στο Δήμο, στην Περιφέρεια κλπ. Θέλω να ξέρω τι γίνεται. Γιατί όταν υπάρχει ένα χαρτί, υπάρχει ένας αριθμός προτοκόλλου και δεν μπορεί ο άλλος να σου πει «μα όχι», «το χα πει, δεν το χα πει»... δεν έχει, είναι γραμμένο.»

However, things would change after the last eviction from Agiou Polykarpou Street, where the union fractures in the kick-out aftermath, caused several dispersed markets to appear across Eleonas. The practice to rent private spaces prevailed during that time and soon became the most common way for wastepicker associations to hold a market in order to avoid fines and persecution by municipal or state police (Vahtet 2018).

Gaining independency from the will and favour of the local government meant that the unions also had to lose important benefits like no rent, which on the one hand exacerbated the situation of union site traders who had to cover the rent with their per stall participation fee²⁹. On the other hand, autonomy brought new advantages, like for example the liberty to take certain decisions without needing to take into account top-down imposed regulations. This of course did not completely eliminate the fear of police intervention (on the legal base of i.e. violations of the law regarding outdoor trade). However the acclaimed independency offered a new sense of self-determination to the wastepickers, which is connected to the confidence related to the unions' political power (cf. 4.3.2). This also shows in Kamper Vahtets answer on the question of how relations with the Municipality of Athens are nowadays (Vahtet 2018):

«The wheel is turning... They have declared elections in May. Yes. Even if Kamper does not have the best relations with the Municipality of Athens at the moment, they will want to have them. [...] But no, not anymore, finished! I am at a private space now, I pay, and you forced me to pay rent... You forced me, when I could just hold my Solidarity (the market) instead.» (Vahtet 2018)

²⁹ According to an interview of newsbeast.gr with Vahtet Ermis' rented space has a 4,000 euro rent, which, how he claims, is difficult to collect now that the space is not provided anymore by the Municipality. (Vahtet 2017 in newsbeast.gr)

«Γυρνάει ο τροχός... Έχουν ανακηρύξει εκλογές τον Μάιο. Ναι. Κι ας μην έχει ο Καμπέρ τώρα τις απόλυτες σχέσεις με τον Δήμο της Αθήνας, θα έχουν αυτοί, θα θέλουν αυτοί τώρα. [...] Δεν έχει, όχι, τέρμα! Αφού είμαι σε ιδιωτικό χώρο, πληρώνω, με αναγκάζεις να πληρώνω ενοίκιο... Με αναγκάζεις, εκεί που μπορούσα να κάνω την Αλληλεγγύη (το παζάρι) μου.»

Another conclusion from Vahtet's statement is that the fear of voter loss from within the wastepicker communities exists and is a respected concern of local governments. Gillesbie's account on the street politics of urban traders in Accra also teaches a lesson about the ways competitive multiparty systems affect the management of urban space, especially in areas with electoral importance (such as dense capital districts with populous communities). Testimonies from the conducted interviews in this thesis confirm a pattern of exchange of interest, like for example according to the experience of the Proodos board. Spyros Magalios for instance reports that former mayor Nikitas Kaklamanis, who is considered by many a friend of the wastepicker markets (Magalios 2019), asked wastepicker unions to support his party's representative Dora Bakoyannis with their vote:

«We also offered him power. [...] We voted for, what is the name of his mother, of this mayor (i.e. current mayor Kostas Bakoyannis), what is his mother's name? (asking Ertzan Hasan) Bakoyannis. Dora, Bakoyannis. He came there and told us to help. And we told him do not be afraid.» (Magalios 2019)

«Και εμείς του προσφέραμε ισχύ. [...] Βγάλαμε, πως την λένε τη μάνα του, αυτού του δημάρχου πως την λένε; Τον Μπακογιάννη. Την Ντόρα, την Μπακογιάννη. Αυτός ήρθε εκεί και μας είπε βοηθάτε. Και του είπαμε μη φοβάσαι.»

In the documentary "Scavengers' union" by Marina Danezi (2011) – a portrait of Ermis union and the wastepicker market when it was still in the city center (Korean market) – there is a scene where former deputy mayor Andreas Papadakis sits with a group of wastepickers at a tavern in Avissinias Square. In between drinking and eating they discuss politics, bilateral agreements and problems and in the end Papadakis asks the wastepickers to promote his candidacy in return for his support with their issues in the City Council. (Danezi 2011: 00:45:00) During the collective Proodos interview with me, to the question if they see that institutions and the Municipality support them, the negative responses remind of the above mentioned situation:

«Spyros: No, no, no, nobody supports us.

Ertzan: Everybody wants us to be close to them.

Ibrahim: But to be close to them just for the election, right? [laughter]

Author: for their needs, so to speak.

Ibrahim: Yes, when they need it, then they know us, they ring phones, call, do.» (Spyros, Ertzan, Ibrahim, 2019)

«Σπύρος - Όχι, όχι, όχι, κανένας δεν μας στηρίζει.

Ερτζάν - Όλοι θέλουν να είμαστε κόντα τους.

Ιμπραχίμ- Να είμαστε κοντά τους όμως μόνο για τις εκλογές έτσι; (γέλιο)

Μαρτίνα: Για τις ανάγκες τους ας πούμε.

Ιμπραχίμ: Ναι, όταν είναι, τότε μας γνωρίζουν, χτυπάνε εδώ τηλέφωνα, κάνουν, ράνουν.»

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In Accra's case, Gillespie reports that the pace of dispossession has slowed down "due to fears of the electoral consequences" (Gillespie 2017: 975) "Competitive partisan political culture" (ibid.) led to the empowerment of Accra's hawker associations to enter into dialogue with authorities. Their engagement albeit was limited in effect due to inherent exclusionary mechanisms in the formal world of urban governance (ibid.: 989). The path described here is similar to what happened in Athens, where collective associations of wastepickers were driven by the system of municipal politics to participate in a formal way of conflict resolution and debate about the future of the markets. However, despite their best efforts they have been repeatedly met with ignorance or even hostility by officials. Vahtet has been disillusioned after leading Ermis for many years, as he says no discussion is possible with Municipality officials since wastepickers are not even perceivable by them:

«First of all, I tell you, from the beginning of our conversation, they don't see us, they see us as second-class people. That's it. When you can't look a man in the eye and see him equal, you don't, uh, don't get along. You don't. That's what I saw, that's what I've seen, and it's made me sad all these years.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Καταρχάς σου λέω, από την αρχή της κουβέντας μας, δεν μας βλέπουν, μας βλέπουν σαν ανθρώπους δεύτερης κατηγορίας. Τέρμα. Όταν έναν δεν μπορείς να τον κοιτάξεις στα μάτια και να τον βλέπεις στα ίσια, δεν κάνεις, εε, χωριό. Δεν κάνεις. Εγώ αυτό, αυτό είδα και με έχει στεναχωρήσει τόσα χρόνια.»

Solidarity alliances with certain oppositional political groups have been possible, as revealed previously (cf. 4.3.1) for e.g. the case of Antarsia, one of the left factions represented in the City Council that supported CCSWO and rallied for wastepicker demands. Ertzan Hasan mentioned during our interview that certain parties and political organizations have been consequently showing their solidarity to wastepickers so they can rely on them. To the question of how support is shown, he answered:

«Both in practice and at the City Council. Whenever we asked them to bring up an issue, to be granted- to make the unanimous decision - they supported us, while the others who played friends to us, in fact they were not friends. That is, as usual, the centre-left... That is, the left. [...] KKE, Syriza, ANTARSYA³⁰, all of them... are on our side. That is, this has always been so. And Kaklamanis too, one of the few people. Like the Deputy Regional Governor Giorgos Dimopoulos.³¹» (Hasan E. 2019)

«Και στην πράξη, και στο δημοτικό συμβούλιο. Όσες φορές τους ζητήσαμε να αναπτύξουν θέμα για να παραχωρηθεί- για να πάρουμε την ομόφωνη απόφαση - μας στηρίξαν, ενώ οι άλλοι που μας το παίζαν φίλοι, αλλά στην ουσία δεν ήταν φίλοι. Δηλαδή ως συνήθως η κεντροαριστερά... Δηλαδή οι αριστεροί.[...] Το ΚΚΕ, ο Σύριζα, η ΑΝΤΑΡΣΥΑ, όλοι αυτοί... είναι στο πλευρό μας. Δηλαδή ανέκαθεν ήτανε. Και ο Κακλαμάνης, από τους λίγους ανθρώπους. Όπως και ο Αντιπεριφερειάρχης ο Γιώργος ο Δημόπουλος.»

30 KKE=Communist Party of Greece, Syriza="Alliance of the radical left" (Government between 2015-2019), ANTARSYA (or Antarsia)= coalition of leftist organizations (represented on a local level in the city council, not represented in the parliament)

31 Nikitas Kaklamanis (New Democracy) was the Mayor of Athens with the conservative party during a time when the wastepicker market was happening in the city center (Korean market) from 2007-2010. Giorgos Dimopoulos (New Democracy) was Deputy Mayor before becoming Regional Governor and is responsible for setting up the recycling and waste processing programme of the city of Athens.

Relation to law, understanding of legality

Ertzan Hasan explains, while showing me the union registration form (cf. 4.4.2 Rules of conduct), that one of the most important rules is not trading with anything that is new. The aspects of legality, the union's attitude towards the law and taxation issues and the relation to authorities regarding these topics are of special importance and gravity for wastepicker representatives. Kamper Vahtet emphasizes on the aspect of selling only used products as being essential to the wastepicker job. In the context of interacting with law enforcement this becomes a valuable argument:

«And when the police had come and said "who are you, who's in charge here?" and I said "it's me", "who are you?" "here, I'm Kamper, the president of the union". Ok. "Your lease, here it is... the statutes of the union, here. The minutes, here". "Everything's perfect, okay, yes, well done" uhm "You must have", he says, "cash registers". I say cash registers, we can't have cash registers, officer. He says why? Well, "because the stuff we find is found from the junk." So the dumpster can't give me an invoice or vouchers. And that's why I can't have receipts either.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Και όταν είχε έρθει η αστυνομία και μου είπε «ποιός είσαι, ποιός είναι υπεύθυνος εδώ;» λέω «είμαι εγώ» «ποιός είσαι;» ορίστε, ο Καμπέρ είμαι, ο πρόεδρος του σωματείου» μάλιστα «το ενοικιαστήριο σας, ορίστε... το καταστατικό του σωματείου, ορίστε. Τα πρακτικά, ορίστε...» «Όλα είναι, τέλειος εντάξει ναι, μπράβο σας» ε... «πρέπει να έχετε» μου λέει, «ταμειακές μηχανές». Λέω ταμειακές μηχανές δεν μπορούμε να έχουμε κύριε Αστυνόμε. Λέει γιατί; Ε, «γιατί τα πράγματα που βρίσκουμε εμείς είναι έυρετα από τα σκουπίδια». Δεν μπορεί λοιπόν ο κάδος εμένα να μου δώσει κάποιο τιμολόγιο ή παραστατικά. Εγώ δε, αυτός είναι ο λόγος που δεν μπορώ να κω και γω αποδείξεις.»

To be understood as people who are dealing with found or old goods and thus cannot be taxed same as retailers is a long-standing position of the unions. Emphasis on this character is to strengthen the unions' demands to be exempted from regular taxation. This is feared to mean the end for the markets as it would extinguish the base of existence for thousands of people who cannot afford taxation neither have the resources to navigate through the bureaucratic system in order to collect all licenses and registrations necessary (cf. 3.2). Magalios criticizes this logic on the base that legality does not always equals rightfulness:

«I have turned 72 years old and I have not yet realized what is legal and what is illegal. [...] And in the name of law, all of humanity has paid a high price. There have been dictators, there have been kings, emperors, politicians, and they all spoke of rightfulness. What right is that, that's debatable (laughter). And as the poet says, "right is what I like". (laughter) That's how it is. No honestly I say that, why not let the other guy sell his little things? Go check him out to see if they're stolen, this ok. But why [not letting him sell].» (Magalios 2019)

«Εγώ έχω γίνει 72 χρονών. Δεν έχω συνειδητοποιήσει ακόμα τι είναι νόμιμο και τι είναι παράνομο. [...] Και στο όνομα του δικαίου η ανθρωπότητα όλη έχει πληρώσει ακριβό τίμημα. Υπήρχαν δικτάτορες, υπήρχαν βασιλιάδες, αυτοκράτορες, πολιτικοί και όλοι για το δικίο μιλάγανε. Ποιό δικίο, αυτό είναι αμφιλεγόμενο (γέλιο). Και όπως λέει και ο ποιητής, το δικίο είναι αυτό που μου αρέσει. (γέλια) Έτσι είναι. Όχι ειλικρινά το λέω αυτό, γιατί να μην αφήσει τον άλλον να πουλήσει τα πραγματάκια του; Να πάει να τον ελέγξει αν είναι κλεμμένα, ναι. Αλλά γιατί [να μην πουλήσει].»

I ask him if he thinks it should be a vested right for vendors to have a space where they can sell things they collect, that means anything which is not new or bought for retail:

«Yes! But they are now making “things and miracles” with their minds. They say [you need] Taxpayer Identification Number (AFM), why AFM? They say you’re trading. I’m not trading! No, we don’t accept it because it’s an issue for us. Because the term “trade” is subject to certain rules of the civil code, you have to have a VAT number, you have to have a cash register, you have to be registered with the chamber of commerce, you have to be registered with the Revenue Service and a bunch of stuff like that. So those who are asking for all of that want to obstruct us. And I have at times fought against it. How come? We don’t trade. Trade is buying for resale. We don’t buy, we sell the findings. These two are apples and oranges.» (Magalios 2019)

«Ναι! Αλλά αυτοί τώρα φτιάχνουν με το μυαλό τους πράγματα και θαύματα. Λέει ΑΦΜ να πούμε, γιατί ρε ΑΦΜ; Λέει κάνεις εμπόριο. Δεν κάνω εμπόριο! Εμείς δεν δεχόμαστε γιατί μπαίνει θέμα. Γιατί ο όρος εμπόριο υπόκειται σε ορισμένους κανόνες του αστικού κώδικα. Πρέπει να έχεις ΑΦΜ, πρέπει να έχεις ταμειακή μηχανή, να είσαι εγγεγραμμένος στο επιμελητήριο, πρέπει να είσαι γραμμένος στο ΤΕΒΕ και μία σειρά τέτοια. Άρα όσοι τα ζητάνε όλα αυτά θέλει να μας αποτρέψει. Και εγώ κατά καιρούς έχω δώσει μάχη για αυτό. Από που κι ως που; Δεν κάνουμε εμπόριο. Εμπόριο είναι αγορά προς μεταπώληση. Εμείς δεν αγοράζουμε, εμείς πουλάμε τα εύρετρα. Άλλο το ένα, άλλο το άλλο.»

On another layer of the political debate, left-wing council party Antarsia condemns these considerations of city authorities to limit the scope of action of the unions, because they assume politics of persecution and political interest behind it: “These are policies of annihilation of both wastepickers and artisans in order to give space to profitable corporate exploitations” (Antarsia 2020³²).

Antarsia, in a statement at the next city council meeting following the police operation of February 2020, criticized the demand of deputy mayor Vasilis Koromantzos³³, that in the future bazaars should only be accessed by those wastepickers who proceed to register a profession based on Law 4497/17³⁴. Koromantzos’ proposal would have traders obliged to have cash registers and issue receipts for items they collect from the garbage, something which Antarsia condemns (Antarsia 2020). The faction’s critique overlaps with that of wastepicker representatives as stated earlier by Magalios. Law 4497/17 has been besides critiqued for its ineffectiveness in formally covering the case of the wastepicker markets, here e.g. by Vahtet who deems the law inexistent and expresses his discontent about the limbo state wastepickers are in:

«The law does not exist. They have made a law, which is not enough. In one paragraph it says, uh... in Law 4497 it’s this, paragraph... Yes, 4497 of 2017. This law has revealed itself problematic. For many things. In one paragraph it says for us simply that... “Sunday flea market, wastepicker bazaars and so on... antique dealers and so on”. (Vahtet 2018)

Ο νόμος δεν υπάρχει. Έχουν φτιάξει ένα νόμο, ο οποίος δεν είναι αρκετός. Σε μία παράγραφο λέει, ε... στο Νόμο 44/97 είναι αυτός, παράγραφος... ναι, 44/97 του 17 (2017). Έχει βγει προβληματικός αυτός ο νόμος. Για πολλά πράγματα. Σε μία παράγραφο αναφέρει για μας απλά ότι... «Κυριακάτικη υπαίθρια αγορά, παζάρια ρακουσλλεκτών και τα λοιπά... παλατιοπάλες και τα λοιπά».

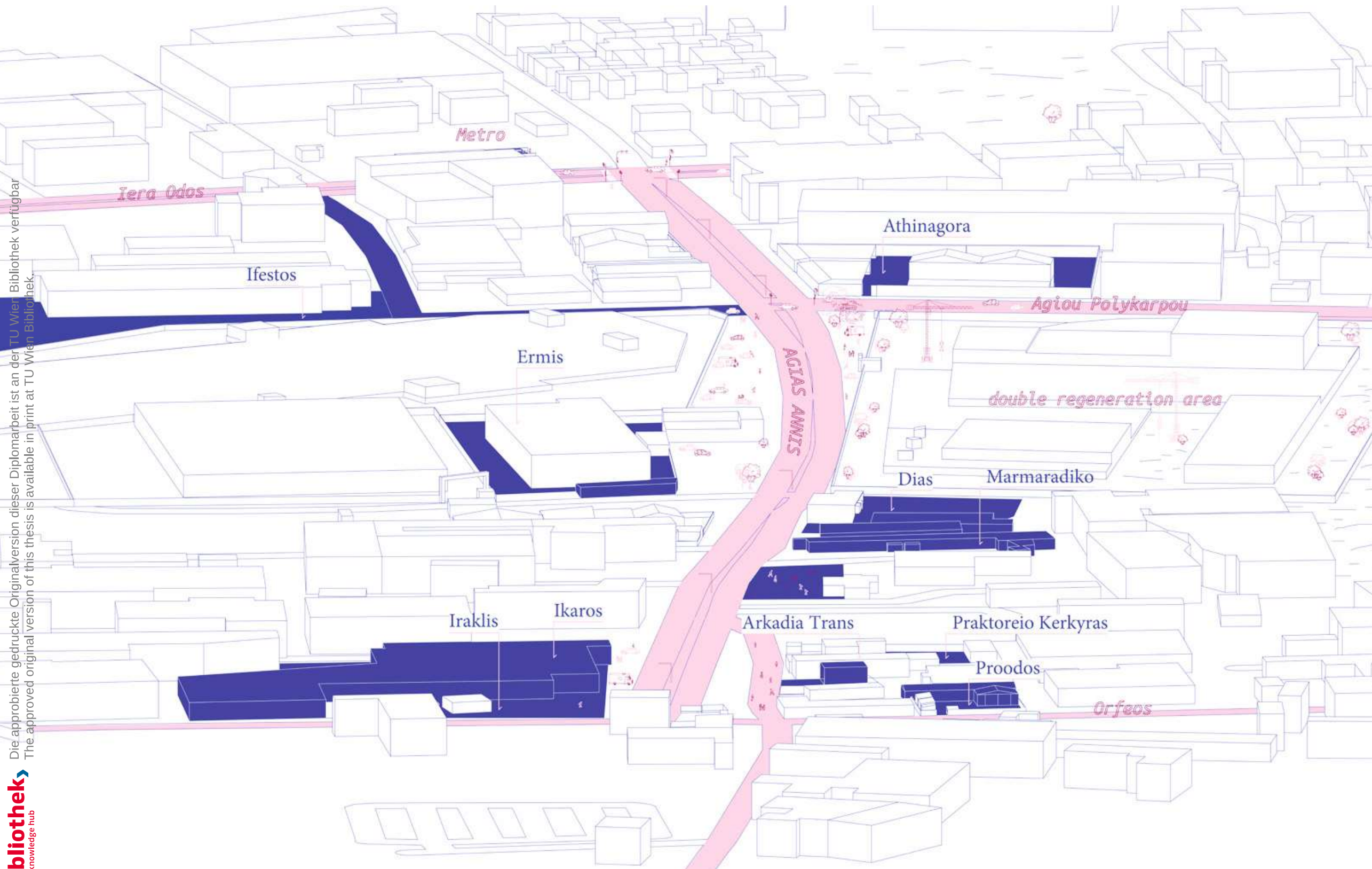
³² Greek original. Translation by the author.

³³ Deputy Mayor of Municipal Police and Public Spaces since 2019 in Athens under the political authority of incumbent Mayor Kostas Bakogiannis (Nea Dimokratia). His office took over the responsibility for outdoor trade and markets from its predecessor, the mayoral department for Sanitation and Cleanliness.

³⁴ “Exercise of open-air commercial activities, modernisation of chamber legislation and other provisions”

In conclusion, in chapter 4.3.3 I have illustrated the complexity of the relational web between wastepickers and the local government and between wastepicker associations. Navigating through this multi-layered field requires much effort and skill. Support of institutions to the wastepicker cause cannot be guaranteed as it depends much on the key political figures of the Municipality who offer their favor in return for voter support. On the other hand, wastepicker unions are aware of their power over voter influence and play it out when the possibility is given. Alliances with oppositional factions and actors are intended and strengthen their positions. On the restrictive level, not only police means (physical violence) are used for obstruction of wastepicker activities but also laws. By raising bureaucratic barriers, exclusions are reinforced, while inventing laws creates new spaces of illegality. The same applies for regulatory frameworks with requirements that are impossible to be kept by traders of the wastepicker markets.

In the following chapter I will discuss wastepicker strategies of coping and survival and I will further illustrate essential elements of trading spaces and commoning practices on the base of concrete examples from the marketscape of Eleonas.



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Top: Partial view of the market-places in Eleonas. Bazaars in blue, streets in pink.

4.4 Elements of trading spaces and commoning practices

In this chapter I will discuss ways of getting-by and strategies of survival of the wastepicker markets' acting individuals. These strategies will be connected to key characteristics of the markets in relation to the urban environment of Eleonas. Elemental spaces, which are fundamental for processes of commoning and appropriation practices at the wastepicker markets will be outlined. Finally, I will show in greater detail few of the major marketplaces and their main characteristics. These are sites that either my discussants are affiliated to or which have otherwise been important for this thesis (e.g. because of their structure, special features etc.).

While these lines are written, the covid19 pandemic has brought the markets of Eleonas, as spaces where public life unfolds and social clustering happens, to a stop – a temporary break as wastepickers hope³⁵. The serious effects this disruption had on the lives of thousands of wastepickers and their families is yet to be evaluated. Before the outbreak, Vahtet talked to me about the amount of people whose lives are centered on the markets of Eleonas, emphasizing the fact that not only vendors' livelihoods depend on them but also the crowd supplying basic commodities from their stands:

«The way I'd put it, about 9000 people are eating a piece of bread around this job. [...] So it's me, selling. We are in total, all the markets if you add them up, we are not more than a thousand, but we are not below that number. [...] People. A thousand stalls. So I now have, let's say, around 250 stalls. Uh... 250 and 100 the other one, 350, 450, 500 [...] There are other bazaars too... I don't know the exact number. But from what I believe they must be gathering a number, all together, somewhere around 400 people, I believe they do.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Πως το κοστολογώ εγώ ότι, περίπου 9000 κόσμος τρώει ένα κομμάτι ψωμί γύρω από αυτή τη δουλειά. [...] Δηλαδή είμαι εγώ, που πουλάω. Εμείς είμαστε στο σύνολο, όλα τα παζάρια άμα τα μαζέψεις, δεν ξεπερνάμε τα χίλια, αλλά δεν είμαστε και κάτω από αυτό τον αριθμό. [...] Άτομα. Χίλιους πάγκους. Δηλαδή εγώ τώρα ας πούμε, έχω γύρω στους 250 πάγκους. Ε... 250 και 100 ο άλλος, 350, 450, 500 [...] Υπάρχουν και άλλα παζάρια... τον ακριβώς αριθμό δεν ξέρω. Αλλά από ότι πιστεύω πρέπει να μαζεύουμε έναν αριθμό, όλα μαζί, κάπου στα 400 άτομα και τα άλλα, πιστεύω να μαζεύουμε.»

The total number of wastepickers engaging at the grounds of Eleonas has been estimated between one and three thousand by my discussants. Vahtet's evaluation is moderate in relation to others. Estimates by the Proodos union speak about the trader numbers more likely reaching the three thousand mark, in any case definitely more than thousand, so Ertzan Hasan (Hasan E. 2019). According to an account by traders Aggeliki and Marina from Ikaros market, six hundred of the "old wastepickers"³⁶ remain in Eleonas, and the total number of traders has quadrupled over the years, making their estimate about 2400 people (Aggeliki/Marina 2018).

4.1 Wastepickers' strategies of survival

The bazaar space is a key field of wastepickers' activities and is not alienated and isolated from human action, but a structural element of wastepickers' everyday practice (Kouzas 2017: 246). The users of the space are actively involved in processes of production, management and operation of the site in multiple ways, always with the aim of making the best use of it (ibid.). Within this framework, a series

of strategies are developed in relation to the weekend wastepicker bazaars. Social anthropologist Giorgos Kouzas explains in his research about everyday life and strategies of survival of urban wastepickers in Athens that market individuals are far from acting without programme and planning. The strategies wastepicker follow, without always being completely planned, come as a response to the circumstances or challenges that come their way, in order to survive, so Kouzas. However they are more about everyday choices, practices chosen by the wastepickers in the context of social and temporal circumstances in order to solve problems and make ends meet. In Kouzas' research strategies of survival are grouped into four main categories: a) strategies related to the right use of space, b) strategies for the organisation of time, c) personal strategies developed within the framework of collective action of the union, and finally d) strategies related to networks of acquaintances and contacts, through which acting individuals actually promote their labour interests on their daily struggle in the streets of Athens (Kouzas 2017: 259).

I found this categorisation useful and relatable and will work with it for the next chapters. Related to my research there are two levels of looking at this frame, which however are interconnected. One focuses on the actions and lived experiences of wastepickers. The second layer concerns spatial interventions and characteristics of the marketplaces and space appropriation practices.

4.2 Marketscape characteristics

«Three X's³⁷, time, money, space. That's the junk-dealing, nothing else.»

(Magalios, written memo from December 2019)

«Τρία Χ, χρόνος, χρήμα, χώρος. Αυτό είναι το παλιατζιλίκι τίποτα άλλο δεν είναι.»

Magalios expressed the essentials of the wastepicking profession in a simple and straightforward way: Time, money, space – parameters which are most decisive for the market business and a successful wastepicker routine. Furthermore, the influence of these elements on the overall trading practices is imprinted in the spatial layout of the market sites.

A morphologically heterogeneous mix, always characteristic to the old ware second-hand market sites of Athens, is displayed too in Eleonas with individual traders and collective wastepicker associations showing skills in adapting to different urban settings. The various market sites come together to form a bigger whole; one can schematically picture the marketscape of Eleonas as enclosed entities (union/association marketplaces) connected in a network (street trade) inside a permeable fluid space (urban environment of Eleonas).

The borders between urban open and private spaces are blurred, with bazaars adapting to their spatial container, be it the public street, its extension into private parking lots, or the interior of a building. Most common typologies in Eleonas are industrial architectures or their remnants (steel frame sheds, concrete building skeletons, timber shacks and barracks as well as company warehouses and parking spaces of industrial units and hauling companies) expanding over a great surface. For the average market visitor the duration of a stroll through all of the sites is estimated between three and five hours, depending on whether or not any type of transportation is used.

³⁵ Shortly after the end of my three-month research stay in Athens, the Covid19 pandemic broke out, bringing the wastepicker markets (unlike farmer's markets) to a total halt, with a period of exception during summer 2020.

³⁶ This distinction relates most probably to the "golden" period of the Keramikos wastepicker market (cf. 4.2.2).

³⁷ All three words begin with X in Greek.

In the following pages I will make an evaluation of the urban setting and essential characteristics shaping the marketplace of Eleonas. These can have both tangible i.e. material and intangible expressions, such as time.

Rhythm, time and seasonality

One of the important intangible aspects of the markets is directly inscribed in the chapter's opening quote: time. Certain rhythms and temporal variations shape the way the markets work. There is a significant difference in appearance, use and atmosphere of the urban environment of Eleonas between weekday and weekend, summer and winter, day and night:

«In the last six years, this area has come alive, has come alive, uh... on Sundays. [...] 2012, 2013 there about. Uh, it's come alive on the weekend. That is Saturday let's say they start the preparation for (the markets on) Sunday and the area has been enlivened by the rag pickers, the bazaars. Otherwise there, on a weekday, after ten o'clock, for you to go and spend time there, there is no way.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Τα τελευταία έξι χρόνια, η περιοχή αυτή έχει ζωντανέψει, έχει ζωντανέψει, ε... τις Κυριακές. [...] 2012, 13 εκεί. Ε, έχει ζωντανέψει το Σαββατοκύριακο. Δηλαδή Σαββάτο ας πούμε ξεκινάνε την προετοιμασία για την Κυριακή και έχει ζωντανέψει από τους ρακοσυλλέκτες, τα παζάρια. Αλλιώς εκεί, καθημερινή, μετά τις δέκα η ώρα, για να πας να περάσεις έτσι εσυ εκεί πέρα, δεν υπάρχει περίπτωση.»

Market sites are used as such during the weekend (when they have “regular” uses during the week, e.g. hauling companies like in the case of *Arkadia Trans* and *Dias*). Sometimes however, when there is no weekday use, wastepickers work out a deal where the space is used exclusively (Proodos, Athinagora, Ikaros). In this case, during the week market sites become storage places and will otherwise turn quiet. Sometimes there will be a chatty guard, threatening looking but mostly bored dogs and the large vehicles frequenting the haulers and other industries, an image which on the contrary is very rare on weekends. Christos Stefanou, a teaching coordinator at the Eleonas refugee camp in Agiou Polykarpou Street, is very familiar with the area. His schedule brings him to Eleonas during school days. In our interview he contemplates about the contrast:

«Say I just worked here and had nothing to do with the bazaars as a customer, hey, it gets your attention. Now you can't know that every weekend the place is transformed into a huge market... and of course you don't feel it on weekdays, so now if you pass by here you don't know what's going on at the weekend. That's awesome. And here in front of Agiou Polykarpou is where it's happening.» (Stefanou 2020)

«Πες ότι απλά δούλευα εδώ και δεν είχα καμία σχέση με τα παζάρια ως πελάτης, ε σου τραβάει την προσοχή, τώρα δεν μπορεί να γνωρίζεις ότι εδώ μεταμορφώνεται ο χώρος κάθε σαββατοκύριακο σε μία τεράστια αγορά... και βέβαια δεν το νοιώθεις τις καθημερινές, δηλαδή τώρα αν περάσεις από εδώ δεν καταλαβαίνεις τι μπορεί να γίνεται το σαββατοκύριακο. Αυτό είναι φοβερό. Και εδώ μπροστά στην Αγ. Πολυκάρπου γίνεται.»

The market happening has a certain rhythm which is also imprinted in the habits and behaviour of its visitors. Specific temporalities have shaped the markets and traders certainly are aware of this, says Mrs. Eleni³⁸, a lady who has adapted her shop based on the weekend working hours. She was thinking

38 Pseudonymized.



Right: Different times and seasons at the marketplaces. Top to bottom:

Empty Agias Annis as summer storm approaches at noon, August 2018.

Winter sun on a weekday (entrance to Marmaradiko market), January 2020.

A man gazes over packed wares and stalls at the end of a cloudy day, January 2020.

Nighttime in Eleonas, May 2007 (Ioanna Katsarou).

about having another open day mid-week, but her husband disagrees, because then customers “will know another way”, meaning there would be confusion about the opening hours, since now they know that they should come on weekends. Depending on the type of the customer, one will be expected early in the morning to find the best and rare items (collectors and professionals) or late in the evening for the cheap prices and the leftovers (low-income and poor people).

Another important temporal aspect concerning the markets is that, according to wastepickers Aggeliki and Marina, many members of the unions who sell on weekends in Eleonas during the week go to Alipedou street in Piraeus (next to the railway tracks) where an old wastepicker bazaar is held during the week (Aggeliki/Marina 2018). Opposite to Eleonas, the second-hand bazaar in Piraeus is a normal *laiki* (cf. 3.3) on Sundays. Wastepickers who go there by dawn during the week face harassment by police and high fines, so Magalios, since the mayor of Piraeus has declared “war” against the unauthorized market (Magalios 2019).

Weather conditions

It is a particularly hot summer day, 30 degrees in the shade, end of July 2019. The city empties during the first weeks of August, the rhythms at the markets are slow, less shouting of vendors, instead the deafening sound of cicadas from Eleonas’ hinterlands. I wander around the sites with a wooden folding stool in my arm. It was acquired earlier that day from a marketplace in Agias Annis. Until I reach Orfeos Street I need a rest; I enter Proodos market and sit in the shade next to a middle-aged vendor named Ilias³⁹. We start talking about the heat and I end up staying an hour on the spot and returning next week to continue the talk. Ilias tells me that he is not permanent at the market, he shares a space with his colleague and took over for the summer. His children and grandchildren went on vacation, he prefers to stay in the city as it is calmer during the summer high season.

Most bazaars happen at least partially open-air, something that brings challenges regarding unstable weather conditions. Shade is a bigger issue than rain, as on sunny and hot days visitors will still arrive but will need protection. However, in the case of rain it is more likely visitors will not show up in the first place or try to leave as soon as possible, so why bother turning up, Spyros remarks:

«If we’d open, with such rain why would the customer come? No customer would show up. You being there, to do what? [...] But usually it doesn’t rain like that. Is it 54 weeks? It’s 52. You could lose ten Sundays. Not even. And the rains here in Attica in particular are not torrential.» (Magalios 2019)

«Και να ανοίξεις, ο πελάτης με τέτοια βροχή που να έρθει; Δεν έρχεται πελάτης. Να είσαι εσύ εκεί, τι να κανείς; [...] Αλλά συνήθως δεν βρέχει τόσο. Είναι 54 οι εβδομάδες; 52 είναι. Άντε να χάσεις δέκα Κυριακές. Ούτε. Και οι βροχές εδώ στην Αττική συγκεκριμένα δεν είναι καταρακτώδεις.»

However, this is not the case for all kinds of sites. Very specific customers with concrete needs such as the women that go to Mrs. Eleni’s diaper and hygiene products shop will not be held back by bad weather conditions:

«They don’t have that issue; they come, whether it’s very sunny or rainy, they come.» (Mrs. Eleni 2020, voice memo)

«Δεν έχουν αυτό το θέμα, έρχονται, είτε με πολύ ήλιο είτε με βροχή, έρχονται.»

Former site use

Many cases exist where the former use was a small- to medium-sized manufacturer that closed down due to conditions of crisis of the recent decades on a local level or as an effect of globalization and economic restructuring on a global level. In the case of Proodos market, the site used to be a small wire plant. Asked about what kind of craftsmanship used to be practiced formerly on the site Magalios replied:

«Wires. That is, they were doing extrusion. They took great diameters and made it as many millimeters as you wanted. But that, because of the Chinese market no, there was a lot of damage. They can’t compete.» (Magalios 2019)

«Αυτό, σύρματα. Δηλαδή εξέλαση έκανε. Έπαιρνε κοντρό το φι και το έκανε όσα χιλιοστά ήθελες. Αλλά αυτό, λόγω κινέζικης αγοράς δεν, κάναν ζημιά μεγάλη. Δεν μπορούν να ανταγωνιστούν.»

The current site of Ermis market used to be warehouses and supply truck parking space for a large supermarket chain:

«The part that I’ve rented, it was, it’s Veropoulos’ warehouses - now My Market has taken it.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Το κομμάτι που νοίκιασα εγώ, ήτανε- είναι αποθήκες του Βερόπουλου - τώρα το ’χει πάρει η My Market.»

Size and location

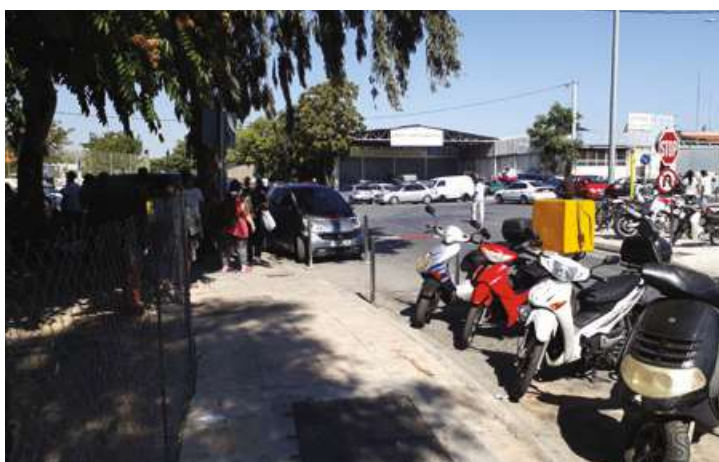
Location is described by wastepickers as one of the most important aspects of a good market. Choosing the “right” site plays an important role for two reasons: a) to obtain greater profits from passers-by, as markets that have a “good” position (i.e. close to public transport, on junctions etc.) are much easier to be chosen to buy from and b) to circulate the information that is important in the market landscape in order to attract more customers, i.e. which bazaar has the best products, what kind of products, etc. The information is disseminated by the traders as a way of internal advertising. On an individual, market site level the same applies: the better the location the more the profit. The centrality of the wastepickers’ stall or how strategically well the location is (e.g. next to entrances, on crossroads etc.) can play a decisive role in gaining profits (Kouzas 2017: 232).

Magalios stretched the importance of accessibility during both the collective interview with the Proodos board and our many other informal talks behind his stall at the market or at the street in front of his home. He thinks that proximity to the metro is crucial and expressed concern about the downsides of the Proodos site which is about a kilometre from the station:

«How is somebody going to come here to shop, something heavy let’s say how are they going to carry it? They can’t». (Magalios 2020, voice memo)

He is the one who took over the search of an adequate space because he is considered literate by the other union members so he does the “bureaucratic stuff” (Magalios 2020, voice memo). He further mentions having a hard time to find a better place for the union market near the metro station, since there are not enough free spaces in the area.

Kamper Vahtet knows as well that choosing the right space and best location is of great importance as it influences the market’s success to a great degree. Having asked Vahtet about the availability of



sites he says that there is not exactly scarcity, the problem rather is that available sites do not fulfill the union's requirements regarding size:

«Well, yes [there are spaces] but... it depends on what you want. I couldn't find the perfect space because I had over 400 members setting up at the bazaar. And the reason they left me [Ermis union] was that... the space was always small. Where to find, I mean...» (Vahtet 2018)

«Ε ναι [υπάρχουν χώροι] αλλά... εξαρτάται τι θέλεις. Εγώ δεν μπορούσα να βρω τον ιδανικό χώρο γιατί εγώ είχα πάνω από 400 μέλη, που στήνανε στο παζάρι. Και ο λόγος αυτός δηλαδή που φύγανε απο μένα ήταν ο λόγος που... ο χώρος πάντα ήταν μικρός. Που να βρούμε, δηλαδή...»

Thus, Vahtet attributes the loss of members to the insufficient size of the sites available. Elsewhere he states that the limited availability of adequate sites has to do with the fact that, as he says, the Municipality of Athens has bought up all the big plots:

«[...] all that has been taken by the (Athens) Municipality over there. It's all taken by the City... They may not know it themselves, but the City's got it all. I know better than they do. Because I was looking for the land, and where I was looking, I wasn't looking like, I wasn't going like "Hey Mitsos, I got the land"... I went to some people who opened up the plans to me and they told me these lots are all the Municipality's. 90% of Eleonas belongs to the Municipality.» (Vahtet 2018)

«[...] όλα αυτά τα'χει πάρει ο Δήμος εκεί πέρα. Όλα τα'χει πάρει ο Δήμος... Αλλά μπορεί να μην το ξέρουν και οι ίδιοι, αλλά τα'χει πάρει ο Δήμος. Εγώ το ξέρω καλύτερα από αυτούς. Γιατί έψαχνα να βρω τα οικόπεδα και όπου έψαχνα, δεν έψαχνα, δεν πήγαινα "φστ Μήτσο, πιάνω το οικόπεδο"... πήγα σε κάποιους ανθρώπους που μου ανοίξαν τα σχέδια και μου είπαν αυτά τα κομμάτια όλα είναι του Δήμου. Το 90% του Ελαιώνα είναι του Δήμου.»

This assessment was probably made, because Vahtet, like most marketplace organisers, was focused on available sites near the metro station in the north/north-eastern parts of Eleonas (Votanikos) close to the double regeneration area, where most of the land is assigned to the project. Union representatives how did the searching have been aware of it:

«But now many plots of land belong to the Municipality, the State and so on. [...] Under the mayoralty of Nikitas Kaklamanis from Dimaraki to Agiou Polykarpou, Agias Annis. From Orfeos, Dimaraki to the chapel where we are, this whole block belongs to the Municipality of Athens. All of it.» (Hasan E. 2019)

«Τώρα ανήκουν πολλά οικόπεδα όμως στον Δήμο, στην Πολιτεία και λοιπά. [...] Επί Δημαρχίας Νικήτα Κακλαμάνη από Δημαράκη έως και την Αγίου Πολυκάρπου, Αγίας Άννης. Από την Ορφέως, Δημαράκη έως εκεί στο εκκλησάκι που είμαστε, όλο αυτό το οικοδομικό τετράγωνο ανήκει στον Δήμο της Αθήνας. Όλο αυτό.»

The above statements indicates a conflict of use, with large patches of land being reserved for future urban restructuring.

«The piece of land that I've rented, the Municipality of Egaleo was also interested in renting it. They wouldn't give it to them because they were asking for a lot of rent and so on.» (Vahtet 2018)

Left: Top to bottom.

Ermis market. Former use as a car depot and cooling storage for large supermarkets (building in the background). Sign reads "Athens fridges". December 2018.

People showing up early in the morning have higher chances of finding the best bargains. Before dawn, visitors bring torches or headlights to navigate the markets and various stands. December 2018.

People hide from the sun under the Eucalyptus trees at the junction Agias Annis/Agioi Polykarpou. Markets located on this crossroad (Athinagora, Ifestos) have higher chances to be visited (closeness to metro, good access, many options, shade & WC). August 2020.

«Το κομμάτι που νοίκιασα εγώ ενδιαφέρθηκε ο Δήμος του Αιγιάλεω να το νοικιάσει. Δεν τους το δίνανε γιατί ζητάγανε πολλά ενοίκια και τα λοιπά.»

Vahtet adds that the Ermis' site is located within the borders of the Municipality of Egaleo (Agias Annis Street is the district border between the two Municipalities Athens and Egaleo) and that Egaleo City was also interested in renting the space, but could not reach a deal with the owner. His opinion is that the Municipality of Egaleo was late in reaching out to owners and that they had "lost the game" (Vahtet 2018), meaning no land has been left to develop. Vahtet explains how he succeeded by approaching the owner privately and directly:

«I went in a different way, that is, I explained to them at the beginning who I am, that I can't, I can't afford to give you this much money, I'm giving you this much money and so on. And they accepted it, because okay, it's one thing to get in touch (as a person) and another thing to talk to a Municipality, to a representative of the Municipality.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Εγώ πήγα με άλλο τρόπο, δηλαδή εγώ τους εξήγησα στην αρχή ότι εγώ είμαι αυτός, δεν μπορώ, δεν έχω τη δυνατότητα να σας δώσω αυτά τα λεφτά, σας δίνω αυτά τα λεφτά και τα λοιπά. Και το δεχτήκανε γιατί εντάξει, άλλο είναι να έρθεις σε επαφή (ως άτομο) και άλλο να μιλάς με έναν Δήμο, με έναν εκπρόσωπο του Δήμου.»

Vahtet acknowledges that agreements can be easier to discuss in person than over an institution. I would add that the informal context and higher flexibility considering times/days/conditions of use combined with the greater need of wastepickers seem to favour the procedure. The choice of an own site can have affect the internal dynamics of the unions. This is because when they did the searching and negotiations on their own, there is certain pressure to be content about the outcome, so Aggeliki and Marina⁴⁰, two traders I encountered in the Ikaros site. Because the space was their choice, the women say, it can be difficult to express discontent when there are problems. (Aggeliki/Marina 2018)

Product assortment

Market sites sometimes have a certain reputation as to the type of products that can be found. Generally and since the large majority of traders sell old collected things or discarded items there are no standardized products or things off a list. This means that the same stand today may have toys from the trash and antiques on display and next week it could be books and clothes. However, some of the markets are known for offering rather more of something specific, which might even be only the image these market sites have produced over the years. However, on a smaller scale, there are stalls that have build a reputation for being specialized in a specific type of product, as for example music instruments or work tools.

Dominant produce (e.g. antiques and small furniture in one case and clothes and appliances somewhere else), characteristics that relate to the background of the vendors (e.g. certain languages are predominantly spoken), and the former use of the site, depending on the grade in which the old environment remains (e.g. marble cutting site, welding workshop etc.), can contribute into making market sites distinguishable.

⁴⁰ Pseudonymized.

Fees

All of the organized marketplaces individually set a participation fee, which is calculated by the table/stall per day. They are by average somewhere near the ten euro mark and the amount is collected by union appointed cashiers on the day of participation. These fees are, so Vahtet, used for covering basic expenses of the market and office space of the union (i.e. rent, electricity, internet etc.). The fees also cover the reimbursements for members of the security and safety group that keep things in order. (Vahtet 2016 in popaganda.gr)

Rules of conduct

Each market is shaped by certain shared rules that are defined by the union's statutes or internal agreement. Proodos' set of rules is described in the registration form for new members and consists of the following:

1. The use and consumption of alcohol is prohibited in the bazaar area
 2. Treat our colleagues and customers with respect
 3. Prohibit profanity in the bazaar area
 4. Comply with the instructions of the union
 5. We must keep the market space clean and pick up any litter we have made
 6. No fighting with colleagues and customers in the market space
 7. We enter the bazaar area quietly, without causing problems with our vehicles
 8. Loud music, with volume such that it disturbs colleagues and residents, is prohibited
 9. We do not sell anything that is new
 10. We do not buy any item whose origin we do not know (non-legal items)
 11. We do not exchange anything without proof of identity
- (Proodos Union, member registration form)

Ertzan Hasan explains while showing me the form that one of the union's most important rules is not to sell anything that is new. The aspects of legality, regulation attempts by the Municipality, the union's attitude towards the law and the ordering pressures have been further addressed in chapters 3.4 (wastepicker unions) and 4.3.3 (relation with authorities).

Solidarity, flexibility, improvisation

In an interview with newspaper Avgi, Vahtet talks about solidarity within the union. The grade of improvisation and spontaneous adjustment possible is exalted by Vahtet and it counts as an advantage for being a member of Ermis:

«As a union we have 1,800 active and non-active members⁴¹ and 423 seats. When the bazaar fills up, we shrink the seats a bit to fit everyone, from 2.5 meters, for example, we make it 2m per stall. While, if no one comes, we use the seat as a wild card.» (Vahtet 2016 in avgι.gr)

«Εχουμε ως σωματείο 1.800 ενεργά και μη μέλη και 423 θέσεις. Όταν γεμίζει, το παζάρι, μικραίνουμε λίγο τις θέσεις να χωρέσουμε όλοι, από 2,5 μέτρα, για παράδειγμα, το κάνουμε 2 για κάθε πάγκο. Ενώ, αν δεν έρθει κάποιος, χρησιμοποιούμε τη θέση σαν μπαλαντέρ.»

The above statement was made shortly before the eviction of Solidarity market at Agiou Polykarpou Street, so the numbers are representative of that time. In 2018 however the new location of Ermis

⁴¹ In 2010 there were 723 officially registered members in Ermis (tovima.gr 2010)



Left: Top to bottom.

A trader's stall who is specialized in second hand musical instruments, 2020.

Rules of conduct by wastepicker union "Ikaros" (identical with Proodos' except one additional rule to "preserve morals and order of the union"), November 2017.

Scraps and raw marble rocks at the disused marble cutting site that is today one of the bazaars.



Right: Top to bottom.

Second hand bride's dresses on display at Agias Annis Street. The van serves

A family of traders with mixed assortment of products at one of the smaller bazaar sites, 2020.

Seasonal products during carnival season, February 2020.

market in Agias Annis had about 250 seats. (Vahtet 2018) By Vahtet's estimates all wastepicker bazaars of Eleonas would count about a thousand stalls in total during that time. He further seems to be reminiscing about the size of the former bazaar and the possibilities of spontaneously adjusting the space, as described earlier:

«There is a union called Icarus. It belongs to Egaleo, as I [Ermis] do right now, the space I have rented is in Egaleo [...] we are separated by the road [Agia Annis Street]. So this one has around 120 to 150 people, it has. And 250 I do, the two of us, we can do the number 400 to 450, it's a very nice, organized and strong bazaar.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Υπάρχει ένα σωματείο το οποίο ονομάζεται Ίκαρος. Αυτό ανήκει στο Αιγάλεω, όπως και εγώ τώρα αυτή τη στιγμή, ο χώρος που έχω νοικιάσει είναι στο Αιγάλεω [...] μας χωρίζει ο δρόμος (σσ. η οδός Αγίας Άννης). Δηλαδή αυτός έχει γύρω στους 120 με 150 ανθρώπους, έχει. Και 250 εγώ δηλαδή κάνουμε, οι δύο μας μαζί μπορούμε να κάνουμε τον αριθμό 400 με 450 είναι ένα πάρα πολύ ωραίο, οργανωμένο και δυνατό παζάρι.»

Mobile trade, street trade

Additionally to the previously described enclosed trading sites, a big part of the Eleonas marketscape is comprised by loose traders and street hawkers. There are mobile vendors who carry their produce through the streets and the different bazaars and stationary traders who occupy pavements and urban spaces mainly along the axis of Agias Annis and at parts of Agiou Polykarpou, Orfeos and Dimaraki Street. This is the case of individuals who get drawn by and calculate to profit from the mobility around the permanent market sites or around highly frequented points such as the junctions of Agias Annis/ Agiou Polykarpou and Agias Annis/Orfeos Street or the area in front of the metro station exit.

Hawkers present their produce on rags on the ground, on improvised stands, repurposed urban elements (low concrete walls, fences) or on the deck or trunk of their cars. Some are pushing carts (mainly those who sell food such as ice cream or chips, sweets and nuts), semi-professional ones or improvised, made out of i.e. baby strollers or they carry tablets with homemade snacks such as samosas. Mobile vendors that do not sell food and drinks include paper towel traders and plastic bag sellers with it being interesting that their products are intended to be bought by other traders and not necessarily by market visitors.

Motivators for selling on the street are the high grade of flexibility to choose the best spots and the wider range of customers that can be reached. Besides these issues, another big motivation is to save on the stall fee that is collected at the fenced market sites. I had a brief conversation with a couple from Albania (as they tell me), living in Athens, who sell their goods, a handful of things, outside the official bazaars because they cannot afford the fifteen euro fee required to participate. They say they can barely make that much a day. They are always on the same spot and sell whatever they can find. (Voice memo, 19 November 2019) Another memo of a testimony by a man selling umbrellas and other apparel at Orfeos Street confirms financial reasons for preferring street trade over the organized markets. The vendor also admits his own xenophobia/racism as a reason for avoiding the markets (he does not want to share space with all the “foreigners”). In an informal talk, he explains that he prefers this spot because here he can be independent, complaining about the “mafia”, as he says – the market organizers/unions, which ask for ten euros from each seller to reserve a spot, the street vendor reports (written memo, 12 November 2017). The man came to the particular spot after the eviction from Solidarity market and declared during our short talk that he is not worried about business because he has a stable clientele and feels satisfied with being on the street. Many have similar motivations for being mobile,

yet it seems that most traders choose to benefit from the safe space and stable conditions the organized markets have to offer.

Security/safety

During walks around the bazaar it is common to hear people telling you that you should take care of your belongings. “Do not keep your purse in an open pocket”, “hold your bag in front”, “take care of your bags”. This is common advice, perhaps addressed more frequently to female appearing persons. Under the tag “advice for visitors” in the blog of an anonymous market aficionado one can read more such tips: do not wear expensive clothes or brands because: they will provoke comments, they will raise prices, they will attract eyes and perhaps hands. Do not bring big banknotes, have coins with you... (agorazopalia.gr 2020) I experienced these suggestions and views often as biased and influenced by a certain image of bazaar unlawfulness.

Needless to say, I have also witnessed situations where certain third-party intervention was required. Issues of safety and security related to theft cases, disputes between traders and customers, tensions related to traffic and parking management or even regarding police checks, lead the market managing groups to the development of a security concept with designated staff. Stewards or guards wear neon jackets or t-shirts with the union's name printed on them and receive a payment for this job:

«There is also a security and safety group that is overseeing the happenings at the bazaar, clean the space after and receive a small amount for this job, so as to do it correctly and consistently.» (Vahtet 2016 in avgi.gr)

«Έχουμε, επίσης, και μια ομάδα περιφρούρησης που επιβλέπουν τις διαδικασίες στο παζάρι, καθαρίζουν το χώρο μετά και παίρνουν ένα χαρτζηλίκι, ας το πούμε, γι' αυτή τη δουλειά, ώστε να την κάνουν σωστά και με συνέπεια.»

The market staffs' responsibility is to watch out that no quarrels happen, to regulate the entry/exit of vehicles and customers at the market gates, announce the market's closing or disseminate important information. They also step in when outsiders take unauthorized photographs of faces or in some markets any type of visual recording. During a studio excursion with the urban planning department of TU Wien back in 2017 I witnessed one such confrontation, as described in a memo from Sunday 12 November 2017: While visiting the underground flea market in Agias Annis Str., my colleague got confronted by a person in a neon jacket about the fact that she was taking pictures of traders and their products. It was obvious that this was unwanted. She did not understand, he spoke Greek, so I intervened and he took us to another person without a neon jacket – Dino⁴². After talking to him and explaining that we are students we were allowed to take pictures again, because students do not want to harm wastepickers, as he says. A little while later I search Dino up and find him next to his stand. A short version of our conversation (memo) follows:

[1] Hi! Sorry again for the misunderstanding earlier, we didnt mean to do any harm.

[2] Dont worry, it's ok.

[1] Why are you worried about people taking pictures? Did you face any problems?

[2] You see, not everybody likes us here, and we are very much trying to keep things in order. But some people, journalists etc. claim that there are stolen stuff being sold here and they make us problems. But we are legal here, we even have a tax registration!

(Dino[2] in conversation with the author[1] 2017, written memo)

42 Pseudonymized.

Dino tells me the bazaar's name is *Iraklis*⁴³. The location from that early experience does not exist anymore. Without knowing for sure, another site closer to the metro station, that has been named *Ifestos*⁴⁴ and opened shortly after, must be related to former Iraklis, as staff jackets with both "Ifestos" and "Iraklis" printed on them were spotted circulating there.

[1] Aha. Tell me, how many people have a selling spot now here? Approximately.

[2] Its hard to tell, we try to regulate it, but, I would say there are around 450 spots. But there are always people who squeeze in.

[1] And the other sellers on the street? They are all independent?

[2] Yes, they just come along because of the many market visitors. We can't control what they sell.

[1] I understand. Are the sellers coming mostly from Athens?

[2] All around.

(Dino[2] in conversation with the author[1] 2017, written memo)

The popularity of union sites sometimes leads to a pattern, where due to the exponential growth of traders in public spaces around the organized markets the street stands become more frequented than the delimited areas, with large numbers of customers browsing through stalls on the street not even reaching the organized union markets. Vahtet's prediction about the official market sites attracting a high number of individual traders and their uncontrollable expansion towards the streets is accurate. (Vahtet 2018) What is confirmed in this case is the pattern of reaction by authorities, who at the peak of market expansions routinely carry out extensive sweeping actions against everything that is considered unauthorized trade.

Police interventions

Police controls and interventions are part of the everyday reality of wastepickers with the most affected, unauthorized street traders and sans-papiers, always calculating such a possibility. However, protection practices and information networks counter-act on this phenomenon. A waste collector cited by Kouzas talks about difficulties with police road checks during his day to day practice and reports on how wastepickers help each other in such cases:

«We've always had issues with the police [...] Sometimes they would catch us because they thought we were doing something illegal and other times they would catch us and tell us we were illegal and stuff like that [...] So we were doing our best and finding ways to sneak through and communicate with each other on our cell phones.» (Giorgos in Kouzas 2017:257⁴⁵)

Apart from regular checks on individuals, large scale operations against so-called illicit trade are more common in Eleonas. Disorder and micro-tensions between traders and the control on illegal trade are used by authorities and police for justifying periodical crackdowns on street trading areas, affecting to a lesser degree also the regulated market sites. On Sunday 16 February 2020, an inter-agency control and eviction operation was carried out on street traders in Eleonas in order to "tackle illicit trading" (Ministry of Development and Investment 2020)⁴⁶. I was present when the operation was executed and recall from the memos of that day: The operation started about 10am with state police (EL.AS.)

43 Hercules.

44 Hephaestus.

45 Translated by the author

46 Coordinated by the *Coordinating Centre for Market Supervision and Combating Illicit Trade* (SYKEAP), the *General Secretariat for Trade and Consumer Protection* of the Ministry of Development and Investments in cooperation with the Greek Police, the Municipal Police of the Municipality of Athens and the Cleaning Service of the Municipality of Athens.

securing the area with "Crime Prevention and Suppression" units (OPKE) by blocking off the access roads with large SUV's and police carriers while carrying out identity checks at random. Meanwhile municipal police officers were issuing fines and confiscating goods from traders on both ends of Agias Annis Street with the assistance of employees from the state financial control departments (Ministry of Development and Investment) who had set up control and registration tables. At the same time, uniformed and plain clothes police on motorcycles were riding up and down Agias Annis street, reporting on trading spots and carrying out checks as well. Confiscated were standardized products like counterfeit clothes or new items such as chairs and tables or farmer's markets produce (fruits and vegetables or flowers) that are commonly traded by Roma people. Things belonging to this category were registered and transported into vans. In the case of mixed and found goods (i.e. second-hand clothes, toys, books) the ware was directly destroyed by garbage trucks assisting the whole operation.



Right: Top to bottom.

A state police car on a regular patrol in July 2019, Agias Annis/ Agiou Polykarpou junction. Left in the back the sign of the subway depot area (adjacent to the planned bus station, cf. 2.3.3).

Public workers of the city sanitation service collect and destroy leftover items during the sweeping operation of February 2020.

Municipal police van during the sweeping operation of February 2020, used for storing confiscated products.

In the large operation of February 2020 wastepickers who have established different networks of information helped and warned each other. Affected street traders disseminated the news that police has arrived either by calling relatives and friends or by sending someone, for example their children, to inform others located in areas not yet affected. Many visitors participate too in this process of information spreading. In this way some have the chance to leave their stand and escape the fine.

Relation to neighbourhood/refugee camp

Nowadays the area inscribed between the streets of Agias Annis, Agiou Polykarpou, Dimaraki and Orfeos (overlapping with the double regeneration area), is strongly shaped by the main inhabitants of the block. These are the people living in the refugee settlement of Agiou Polykarpou Street, the actual locals of Eleonas. Refugees living in the camp and the market spaces in their neighbourhood are closely inter-connected.

Due to this relation, a shopping mile has developed in front of the refugee camps' entrance and towards Dimaraki Street. Traders locate their stalls in the vicinity of the camp, targeting its inhabitants as customers. Vending points are both mobile (vehicles) and permanent (tables) and they are displaying products which cover daily needs, such as fresh produce (fruit and vegetable) or hygiene products (toilet paper, diapers etc.). On both Saturday and Sunday the street turns into a zone of fruit-and-vegetable sellers with pick-up trucks, an improvised "laiki" of sorts (cf. 3.3). This is the basic supply of essential foodstuffs such as potatoes, onions, etc. that the settlement's inhabitants buy in large quantities.

Arin, a Kurdish teenage girl who lives in the refugee camp explains that her family buys all of their fresh food from the improvised street market. During our talk at the office container of her teacher Christos Stefanou inside the camp she speaks about her family supplying many of their home goods, electric appliances and electronics from the larger markets in Dimaraki and Agias Annis. There are good and bad deals, Arin says, mentioning a broken laundry machine, a fine fridge, a problematic laptop... (ibid.) Her older brother is interested in bicycles and spare parts. Herself, she is most happy when she can make a good bargain and is excited about acrylic nails and nail glue that she recently found in a good price. All in all, the markets are cheap and convenient because they are so close to the camp (Arin 2020).

Notable is the amount of secondary employment that springs from the trading activity at the markets. These jobs include for example unpacking/sorting items, assisting in packaging, tidying up and collecting the leftover wares, either to re-use privately or to re-sell as useful objects or as scrap. Sofia Tsadari in her work about urban transformations in the case of Eleonas poses the estimate that many members of the refugee camps' population are doing 'black' labor at the hauling companies of the area or engage in metal collection for the recycling industry (Tsadari 2019: 71). Partially this is confirmed in the interview with Christos Stefanou and Arin and as well through personal observations. We see how the happening at the markets include the broader neighbourhood and how they have become an important livelihood resource for residents of the area.

Coming into dialogue with a young man from Afghanistan selling selected items near the junction of Agias Annis/Agiou Polykarpou, he explained to me that, when he occasionally finds something valuable, he comes here to sell it. It is an important source of income. Characteristic is one case of a resident that started off by collecting leftover books for paper scrap after the end of the markets and later ended up cooperating with a bookshop in the center of Athens. Selected books entered a second round of display and if sold, the shop owner would share revenue with the collector. In essence, second-grade collectors are contributing in the smooth functioning as well as cleaning of the area after the operation of the markets. Another camp resident, an unaccompanied minor at that time, with

whom Stefanou worked and whose story the teacher documented in a short film, occasionally helped out at the market in order to earn some pocket money and pass his time. Stefanou learned that people from the camp were engaging in trading practices and he notes that in earlier days this happened maybe even more. This is because before asylum seekers were receiving a small monthly allowance that was lower than today and the rest was given in items: soap, shower gel, canned food etc. so whatever was excessive or not needed was sold at the markets. (Stefanou 2020) This has changed over the years and the buyer/trader balance in the refugee community has shifted perhaps more towards the later, according to Stefanou:

«[...] on the contrary, probably now those increased who are buying because they have, say, a greater purchasing power, yes, or they have greater needs because they don't have the products that they might have had and so they have to use a small amount of money that goes into those products to find cheap products. So the bazaar is a solution from what I understand.» (Stefanou 2020)

«[...] το αντίθετο μάλλον, έχουν αυξηθεί αυτοί που αγοράζουν τώρα γιατί έχουν πες, ένα, μεγαλύτερη αγοραστική δύναμη, ναι, ή έχουν μεγαλύτερες ανάγκες γιατί δεν έχουν τα προϊόντα αυτά που ίσως να είχαν και άρα πρέπει με ένα μικρό ποσό που αναλογεί σε αυτά τα προϊόντα να βρουν φθηνά προϊόντα. Οπότε το παζάρι είναι μία λύση από ότι έχω καταλάβει.»

Stefanou also points out the social aspects of the markets. For many refugees it was an important aspect of their social life. Markets can even be an educative environment of sorts, according to Stefanou:

«But apart from what they were earning, it was an occupation, so to speak. That is, many adults who never learned Greek at all in a normal educational context learned what they've learned over there. They spent two days a week there, I don't know, on their feet, there in Dimaraki, "how much", "what does it cost", "ten euros", "two euros", "make a discount", that's it. So it's funny, there are some people in Germany who still speak those fifteen words they learned at the bazaar.» (Stefanou 2020)

«Αλλά πέρα από το τι βγάζανε ήταν και μία απασχόληση ας πούμε. Δηλαδή πολλοί ενήλικες που δεν μάθανε καθόλου ελληνικά ποτέ σε πλαίσιο κανονικό εκπαιδευτικό τα μάθανε, ό,τι μάθανε τα μάθανε εκεί πέρα. Περνούσαν δυό μέρες την εβδομάδα εκεί ξέρω γω στο πόδι, εκεί στη Δημαράκη, 'πόσο κάνει', 'τι κάνει', 'δέκα ευρώ', 'δύο ευρώ', 'κάνε μία έκπτωση', αυτό. Δηλαδή έχει πλάκα, είναι κάποιοι που στη Γερμανία ακόμα μιλάνε αυτές τις δεκαπέντε λέξεις που μάθαν στο παζάρι.»

Mrs. Eleni, a sanitary product seller (specialized in diapers sanitary pads) at Orfeos Street explains that for her clients, many of whom are mothers or pregnant women from the refugee camp, the place is more than just a shop, it is where people can meet, rest, exchange news or just have a chat – a place of social encounter:

«It is a crossing, they know. They know it. [...] They sit here sometimes, one will breastfeed, the other will feed the baby, the next one will eat something, one woman came the other day because she is in the seventh month. We communicate, you understand? They know what they are doing. [...] They come to hang out, to rest, yes. They meet others. Yes, they leave me things until they go to the bazaar, then they come back.» (Mrs. Eleni 2020, voice memo)



Left: Top to bottom.

Solidarity with migrants, wall inscription at Agiou Polykarpou Street next to the refugee camp.

The Street in front of the camp entrance. It has been criticized that children face great danger because of the street's heavy traffic.

View from close to the settlement's entrance towards Dimaraki Street. Impromptu farmer's market.

A swim vest - evoking images of refugee arrivals on the Greek islands - on display in the Dimaraki bazaar.

«Είναι το πέρασμα γιατί έχουν... ξέρουν. Ξέρουνε, ναι, ξέρουν. [...] Κάθονται άλλες εδώ, θα θυλάσει το μωρό, θα το ταΐσει, η μία θα φάει, ήρθε η άλλη γιατί είναι τώρα στον έβδομο μήνα. Έχουμε επικοινωνία, κατάλαβες; Ξέρουν τι κάνουν. [...] Έρχονται να αράξουν, να ξεκουραστούνε, ναι. Συναντιούνται μαζί με άλλους. Ναι, μου αφήνουν πράγματα ξέρω γω μέχρι να πάνε στο παζάρι, ξαναγορίζουν.»

Replying to the question about what it would mean, if the government would decide to shut the markets down, Arin says that it would be bad for the traders because they would lose their earnings and also it would not be good for the people in the camp. On a purposefully exaggerated manner she laughs and declares that residents of the camp would go on a demonstration (Arin 2020).

In conclusion, for inhabitants of the refugee camp, helping out or selling at the markets is a convenient way to generate little income without facing greater barriers such as the lack of a work permit or of certain skills (e.g. knowledge of the Greek language). At the same time, the bazaars are a cheap and convenient source of home wares, appliances and other essential items, while being spaces of encounter and social interaction.

Distances and transport

Market sites in Dimaraki were larger and more frequented in the beginning of the era of market dispersion (ca. 2017) most probably because of to their proximity to the refugee camp and the client influx related to it. However as time passed and more people in Athens became aware of new market locations a novel dynamic came up with more frequented sites being those in the North-West, close to the metro station. At least two of the large sites at Dimaraki⁴⁷ moved to Agias Annis Street by 2019. I recall a memory from one of my Sunday strolls in Eleonas: I had just left one of the markets at Dimaraki Street, heading back to Agias Annis, when a man on a scooter drives up next to me, slows down and shouts “jump on!”. “Aren’t you going to Agias Annis?” he asks. I say yes and climb on the scooter. He says he saw me talking to that seller at Dimaraki asking about the rest of the markets having moved from the street and that the remaining bazaars had become smaller. Later I wrote in my notebook, he thinks many traders moved to Agias Annis because more people gather there i.e. the business is more profitable. He came to the markets first time after some months of abstinence and thinks as well that they have shrunk in size. He enjoys coming once in a while to have a look around. Here they have everything to sell, “you just need to enjoy the searching”. He drove me about a kilometre and dropped me off at Orfeos/Agias Annis junction (memo from July 21, 2019). This experience illustrates the topics of distances and mobility at the trading terrain of Eleonas. Distances can be long at the markets and influence greatly the popularity of the sites. This becomes clearer when imagining that the block of the Double Regeneration area (four sides: Agias Annis, Agiou Polykarpou, Dimaraki and Orfeos Streets) is about one square kilometre in surface area. It might take the whole day to visit all markets and depending on the age and physical condition it can be exhausting to move around on foot. Many visitors, like the man offering me a lift, move around with some type of motorized vehicle, scooter or car.

Trikes

At this point a special mention has to be made to one of the traders' most essential tools, the freight trike. Market people move around in many different ways, some preferring cars or pick-up trucks and some even using carrier-motorcycles, but the most common type of transport and transportation is still the motorized three wheeler. It is so iconic and omnipresent that apparently unions were even approached by investors with trading offers of providing newer vehicles for their members in exchange for using their radius of visual influence in order to promote businesses:

⁴⁷ Latos, Alexandros.

«Not to mention a name, it's been many years, we had been there, we visited him and he said that I had come to an agreement with an advertising company. The tricycles that you have, because they are old, we are going to replace them with Piaggios, new, modern ones. With only obligation that the awning that will be up will picture an advert chosen by the advertising company. I fell for it! Three hundred bikes I say, I'll get a new bike too (laughing) and I dreamed I'll get a good, high-precision cassette player to have sound... As much as you got a motorbike, I got a motorbike.» (Magalios 2019)

«Να μην πω ένα όνομα, πάνε πολλά χρόνια, είχαμε πάει εκεί, τον επισκεφθήκαμε και είπε αυτός ότι έχω έρθει σε συνεννόηση με μία διαφημιστική εταιρεία. Τα τρίκυκλα αυτά που έχετε, επειδή είναι παλαιωμένα, θα τα αντικαταστήσουμε με Piaggio, καινούργια, σύγχρονα. Με την μόνη υποχρέωση ότι η τέντα που θα είναι επάνω και θα φέρνει ρεκλάμα που θα επιλέγει η διαφημιστική εταιρεία. Εγώ το'χαψα! Τριακόσια μηχανάκια λέω, θα πάρω και γω ένα μηχανάκι καινούργιο (γέλια) και έκανα και όνειρα θα πάρω και ένα κασετόφωνο καλό, υψίστης ακριβείας για να έχω ήχο... Όσο πήρες εσύ μηχανάκι, άλλο τόσο πήρα και γω.»

The offer turned out a scam, but the semantics are clear. Trikes are handy for collecting stuff, picking up or delivering items and this is why they are widely popular. They are small but spacious, easy to handle, low-cost and low-maintenance.

Traffic and parking

On market peak hours the heavy traffic and especially the parking situation can be a big problem for moving around, or even for approaching and leaving the sites. Cars come in hundreds and try to get as close to the sites where car-owners intend to browse through. In addition to that, many street traders sell their products out of their cars' trunk or their trucks' loading platform. This hustle and bustle leads to congestion on large parts of Agias Annis street, on both directions, with peak hours being in the morning when customers are arriving and after one or two in the afternoon when traders start to leave.

Since the area has no designated public parking spots, the vehicles park wherever possible, making the flow of pedestrian movement difficult. To tackle this problem, some markets have designated their own parking spaces (cf. 4.4.3). A good way to avoid the traffic is to move around on a two-wheeler, although this has the downside that loads are more difficult to transport. Most people prefer a motorized variant (scooter, motorbike), but there are also those who use a bicycle like I often did. In any case, it needs a lot of patience and skill to move around the crowded streets with an extra challenge being that traffic areas mostly overlap with trading zones. At some segments of Agias Annis Street zoning can be observed with traders occupying the sidewalk instead of the street, but for the most part the street eventually becomes an auto-regulated shared space.

In addition to the elements discussed in this chapter, that apply on a larger scale to the marketscape of Eleonas, a closer look to the spatial characteristics shared between the different market sites is necessary. I will illustrate such attributes in the following chapter.



Right: Top to bottom.

Improvised house car at Agias Annis Street. Some traders stay over the weekend in the area for the markets (Arin 2020).

The traffic and parking space problem on market days requires creative solutions.

Spyros' "cargo scooter" at the Proodos market site.

Older model of a motorized tricycle at Agias Annis Street. In the background the abandoned double regeneration construction site.



4.4.3 Architectural elements of the marketplaces

Drawing on conclusions from the previous chapter, I have scaled down the analysis to the level of infrastructures which are essential for all wastepicker markets. I have distinguished ten main architectural elements or features, based on observations from the field research:

- A. **Access points:** Entrance areas, gates, exits, barriers
- B. **Stall upgrades/space improvements:** weather protection, etc.
- C. **Food spots:** Cantines/kiosks, (mobile food stands)
- D. **Hygiene /Sanitation:** WCs/bathrooms
- E. **Social spaces–rest areas:** meeting spots (benches, improvized furniture, etc.)
- F. **Waste collection:** Overseen disposal sites, municipal bins, garbage areas, etc.
- G. **Security and staff areas:** Guard spots, desks, barracks
- H. **Parking areas:** Park site management
- I. **Storage:** Wares and other supportive elements e.g. tools, transport vehicles, etc.
- J. **Housing**⁴⁸

This account is useful for a better understanding of those elemental areas of the markets which frame the scene of space appropriation practices. Traders may claim/encroach on these resources required for facilitating these elemental spaces and components. I use this listing to navigate and highlight these processes.

A. Access points

The entrance to a market serves the function of securing the area but also to attract and invite visitors. Usually consisting of a sliding gate, sometimes a simple fence; most of the times there is only one entrance and exit. Characteristic is the case of the Athinagora bazaar, which is also one of the few examples with two entrance points, where over the few years that I would be visiting Eleonas, the organisers enclosed the area of the market with a sheet metal fence. Delimitations of the market space are common, even if it is just the placement of bulkier objects as signifying barriers towards the edges of the area. However, in most sites the trading stalls ooze out on the street.

Visual connection to the surrounding streets should be given and the entrance must be clearly recognisable. In some cases welcoming banners have been placed to catch the attention of visitors. Sometimes banners are professionally made (e.g. Ermis, Ikaros) other times handwritten signs do the job (e.g. Proodos, Iraklis). Walls also serve as displays for announcements of a market's location – these are usually spray-painted in red or black. The neon jackets of stewards are as well visual indicators of a market's entrance. During the winter in the dark early morning hours some market entrance areas are

lit with torches, floodlights, or even decorative light chains or other objects for sale. Flashing pocket torches by early visitors searching for the best morning deals are completing this image.

All in all, it is essential to effortlessly enter and exit the area through the gates. Therefore no stalls, tricycle or other objects should stand in the way. This is supervised by the wastepicker association's staff.

B. Stall upgrades/space improvements

Most of the bazaars take place in buildings or spaces that were intended for industrial uses and do not meet most requirements of a marketplace. Infrastructures have to be invented or to be made from scratch, which means they are constantly evolving according to the needs. Magalios speaks about both the need and impossibility of making improvements while repurposing the Proodos site in the statement below:

«[...] apart from the flooding, the yard is flooding – it's also a covered space, it used to be an old craft shop and we've now adapted it and made it a bazaar from scratch. That's where the problem is. Because if we decided to have a space, we would configure it based on need. We cannot make interventions in the space.» (Magalios 2019)

«[...] εκτός απ'την πλημμύρα, η αυλή πλημμυρίζει – είναι και στεγασμένοι οι χώροι, ήταν παλιά βιοτεχνία και εμείς τώρα το προσαρμόσαμε και το κάναμε παζάρι εκ των ενόντων. Εκεί είναι το πρόβλημα. Διότι αν αποφασίζαμε να έχουμε έναν χώρο θα τον διαμορφώναμε με βάση τις ανάγκες. Εμείς δεν μπορούμε να κάνουμε παρεμβάσεις στον χώρο.»

Large-scale or permanent interventions such as drainage systems or something equally invasive might be problematic in these pre-found spaces. However, interventions on a smaller scale are expected with traders mostly carrying out makeshift upgrades and modifications on their own stalls. These can concern inconvenient weather conditions or may be focused on the better display of products and a better shopping experience in order to attract customers. Sometimes, like in the case of Athinagora where large open areas were covered over the course of a few years, space improvements are being organised by the unions.

If not taken over by the wastepicker association like mentioned before, an improvised roof tarp, a sun sail or just a simple umbrella might all serve as individual protection from extreme sunshine and rainfall. In the rather rare case of rain, traders will try to pack and store their items as quickly as possible by covering them with tarpaulins, fastened with tensioning ropes or cables. Another improvement is the upgrade from displaying products on rags on the ground to improvising a table or reinforcing the stall frame or improving the display surface. Common objects that are upcycled as stall stands are portable beds. They are convenient because they are about two meters long which is approximately the length of a standard stall, two to three meters⁴⁹. The beds are foldable which means they can easily be stored away and they are widely available – often these beds are found damaged in the trash. Another advantage is their knee high plain, which allows for a good overview and more comfortable browsing, without the customer needing to bend or kneel down. In cases where stalls are located against a wall or fence, traders do appropriate the vertical surfaces, installing hooks and hangers, putting up items or hanging wares from ropes.

Some traders reserve and use more than one stall per market day. One woman I talked to in Dimaraki market after I saw how she had just paid off her stall to the neon-jacket man collecting it, said she paid the fee for two tables, ten euros each. Usually she uses four tables and her expenses are about 200 euro per month.

⁴⁸ Non-essential. Applies in some cases of the markets,

⁴⁹ 2x3m is approximately the space available per stall.



C. Food spots

Each market has at least one food place, often there are more than one. They are usually improvised kiosks with a timber or metal frame and a corrugated sheet metal roof. In some market sites covered areas pre-exist which meet the requirements for a canteen space, in other sites they were added later. When none of this exists, a simple grill on a wheeled cart does the job as well. Characteristic for modification of pre-existing structures is the case of the Athinagora market food stand. The canteen space started as an empty concrete shell in November 2019, tarps covering the window holes, no doors, no electricity. In February 2020, the space had plywood windows, a door and even a skylight, also a grill and a fridge and indoor and outdoor sitting areas. The kiosk manager explained that his future plan was to expand the infrastructure and maybe even set up a water supply in order to offer more products.

Generally, basic equipment of Eleonas' food stalls is the charcoal grill and the refrigerator (regular electric or isolated ice box). Electricity is available sometimes, otherwise a diesel generator is used. Most of the times there is some source of music, radio or speaker box involved. The atmosphere is joyous, frolic – food stands are important places of social life in the bazaars.

Most common meals at the food stalls are grilled skewers/souvlaki and kebab on bread. Sometimes cheese pies (tyropita) or sesame rings (koulouri) are also available although these are usually part of the mobile street traders' offer. Water and refreshments are essential for market visitors, especially on hot summer days, and they can be found here too.

As considering mobile vendors, who have been addressed also in the previous chapter on wastepicker strategies and characteristics of the Eleonas marketscape, they are an important part of the food chain of Eleonas. Ice cream vendors for example often enter market spaces with their carts or stand in the entrances, moving from bazaar to bazaar. Other traders include women who sell home-brought pies or sweets and water people who carry bottled beverages in isolated bags or boxes, sometimes using a child carriage or shopping cart.

An unusual type of immobile food stall I have observed in Dias market: two women preparing and selling piroški, deep fried yeast-dough buns. The stall was unusual for the reason that it had a "private" preparation area divided from the sales desk area with a paravan. In the back, unseen by the public, the older woman prepared pies which were fried on the spot. In the front the younger woman distributed the pies and collected the payment behind a desk with a display vitrine framed by a light garland. Like many of the market elements analysed in this chapter, the particular stall only stayed at that place for limited time and disappeared for unknown reasons.

D. Hygiene/Sanitation

Sanitary facilities, toilets and bathrooms, are next in the list of essential infrastructures. Bazaars that are hosted in former industrial units and workshops sometimes have indoor built toilets. In the case of Proodos, there are three WC's on site, in the case of Ifestos, one can reach the restroom area on a second level. Some markets with built facilities and running water, hire a caretaker to maintain them clean and intact. The cleaning person receives a compensation for their work, usually payed off by the fifty cent charge per usage. The built type of sanitary facilities have a private character and are clearly attributed to the market organizers.

However, many wastepicker associations have installed chemical toilets for visitors and vendors outside the main area of their market. In the case of the Athinagora union, five portable toilets have been placed across the street from the main market entrance on the junction of Agias Annis and Agiou Polykarpou Street. This is one of the very few places in the area with natural shade. Two of once many eucalyptus trees along Agias Annis remained on this location, while others were cut down during the road widening and rehabilitation of the road network around the Votanikos urban regeneration area. This has made the place a naturally established rest area. Especially during hot days many people pause

or recollect their powers at the specific crossing. Toilets there are a common good and do not only serve the needs of the Athinagora customers and traders. Altogether, the basic sanitary needs of thousands of people frequenting the markets Saturdays and Sundays are not covered by the total amount of a few dozen restrooms provided by the unions⁵⁰.

E. Social spaces – rest areas

As mentioned earlier, meeting and rest areas, such as the eucalyptus tree spot exist in the wider Eleonas context. They are spaces with certain qualities such as shady corners or covered areas, improvised seats or surfaces, where shopping bags can be put down without getting wet or dirty. These are strategic locations where the flow of people is high. Places like this need recognizable features (e.g. trees, a high sign, etc.) to navigate friends and family to this location in case of a meeting or gathering. Rest areas often coincide with the most frequented spots of Eleonas, i.e. the street nodes (Iera Odos/Agias Annis near the metro station, Agias Annis/Agiou Polykarpou at the trees, Agias Annis/Orfeos at the little chapel and Agiou Polykarpou/Dimaraki at the farmers' market). People take a break before continuing their shopping, wait for others to meet or to be picked up after finishing their stroll around the market, especially if they have to transport a heavy item back to their place. Furthermore, certain market sites are meeting points or rest areas for specific groups of people or communities (e.g. women and mothers living in the refugee camp).

F. Waste collection

The wares sold in Eleonas underwent many cycles of repurposing and redistribution before landing in the garbage collection of the bazaars and even then, their object lifetime has not ended. Once waste from the bins of the center, they were then collected, refurbished/cleaned and redistributed in the wastepicker markets. If not sold by the trader, they are stored in their stall or storage place for some time. Unsold and old items however are at some point either brought to scrap yards by the traders themselves or discarded at the disposal sites of the markets. Vahtet speaks about the common example of somebody finding many books. After bringing them to the market a few times without any luck to sell them the trader would bring them to the scrap yard for paper processing:

«[...] but also at the bazaar, can I tell you something? The other [colleague], let's say, was given a whole library. He says take these. He brings them to the bazaar once, he takes brings them twice... He can't bring them a third time. [...] He'll take them for paper. He won't throw them away. Paper!» (Vahtet 2018)

«[...] αλλά και στο παζάρι να σου πω κάτι; Ο άλλος ας πούμε, του δώθηκε μία βιβλιοθήκη ολόκληρη. Λέει πάρε αυτά. Τα βγάζει στο παζάρι μία, τα βγάζει δύο... Δεν μπορεί να τα βγάλει τρίτη. [...] Θα τα πάει για χαρτί. Δε θα τα πετάξει. Χαρτί!»

At the end of the market the full waste bins are again thoroughly searched by scrap collectors of the area - eventually the items reach the end of their cycle. Remaining waste from the bins are collected by the garbage collection of the city and are brought to landfills or the recycling plant. Vahtet laments that the union throws away many tons of items, which he considers a waste, and he doubts that the collected waste from the glass and plastic bins are sent for recycling:

«I mean, you know what? Each week I [the union] throw away tons. I throw them in the recycling bins that they bring me, to be brought to- but I doubt they go to recycling, they won't go [...]» (Vahtet 2018)

50 An approximate calculation rule for big events is two toilets per hundred people.

«Δηλαδή, εγώ ξέρεις τι; Τόνους πετάω κάθε εβδομάδα. Τα πετάω στους κάδους ανακύκλωσης που μου χουν φέρει για να πάνε, αλλά αμφιβάλλω αν πάνε στην ανακύκλωση, δεν πάνε- [...]»

Traders Aggeliki and Marina from Ikaros market explain that waste bins (recycling and regular) have been placed in agreement with the Municipality⁵¹. Five waste bins frame the entrance to the bazaar, two blue ones, which is the color of the recycling bins, and three regular. Municipal garbage trucks empty the bins and bring away the trash at the end of the markets on Sunday in the afternoon. However, according to Vahtet the process of multiple rounds of recycling could even be stretched beyond that point. He thinks that the Municipalities lose an opportunity to benefit from the markets:

«This is also a nice discussion, eh. So there, since the Municipality will intervene to organise a European bazaar - if the Municipality can organise it itself at some point - nothing should be wasted. [...] Well, you say, if the municipality organises it, it can make many, many millions of thousands of euros a year from this recycling. Why don't you do it yourself, you will say, well because I don't have the infrastructure, I don't have the infrastructure, I don't have the comfort, I don't have the equipment to do this, but the municipality does. It has.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Αυτό επίσης είναι μία ωραία συζήτηση, εε. Εκεί λοιπόν, αφού θα μπει ο Δήμος στη μέση για να οργανώσει ένα ευρωπαϊκό παζάρι - αν κάποια στιγμή μπορεί να το οργανώσει ο ίδιος ο Δήμος - τίποτα να μην ηγηγίνεται χαμένο. [...] Λοιπόν, που λες, αν το οργανώσει ο Δήμος μπορεί να βγάλει πάρα πολλά, εκατομμύρια χιλιάδες ευρώ ετησίως από αυτή την ανακύκλωση. Να πεις γιατί δεν το κάνεις εσύ, γιατί δεν έχω, δεν έχω την υποδομή δεν έχω την άνεση, δεν έχω, ε, τον κατάλληλο εξοπλισμό να κάνω εγώ αυτές τις εε, ο Δήμος έχει. Έχει.»

In Vahtet's thinking, a proper management plan that would forecast the processing of old clothes and textiles, glass and plastic – that means the material that is considered to have no value, that is not sold to the scrap yard and is usually thrown away – would bring much revenue to the municipal funds:

«We throw away a lot of garment. Which can be recycled into tow waste. Be made into fabric, I don't know what it can be. Something can be made, no, it's not wasted. [...] Yes. Cloth! Say, tow waste for the factories there, where, to clean their hands, yes, tow waste! Is it a waste? I am buying tow waste for my work... And not to lie to you, I paid 25 euros for a bag 'that big' [gesturing]. It's not a small amount. Now imagine, tons of clothes! [...] Metal is not thrown away, they take it and sell it themselves [wastepickers] to make five or ten euros. But plastic? No, it's not sold. But plastic goes for recycling. Glass? It's not sold. Scrap yards don't take glass or plastic. Those three kinds. Never mind the paper and metal, if the (in-aud.) man sells it, he'll make something.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Εμείς πετάμε πολύ ρούχο. Το οποίο μπορεί να γίνει ανακύκλωση να γίνει στουπί. Να γίνει ύφασμα, δεν ξέρω τι μπορεί να γίνει. Μπορεί κάτι να γίνει, δεν, χαμένο δεν πάει. [...] Ναι. Στουπί! Θες στουπί να ηγηγίνεται στα εργοστάσια εκεί στα, που, να καθαρίζουν τα χέρια τους, ναι, στουπί. Χαμένα θα πάει; Εγώ πάω και αγοράζω στουπί για τη δουλειά μου... Και να μη σου πω ψέματα πλήρως για ένα σακουλάκι 'τόσο' [χειρονομεί] 25 ευρώ. Δεν είναι λίγα. Φαντάσου τώρα εσύ, τόνους σου λέω με ρούχα! [...] Σίδερα δεν τα πετάνε, τα παίρνουν και τα πουλάνε οι ίδιοι για να βγάλουν πέντε-δέκα ευρώ. Αλλά το πλαστικό; Δεν, δεν πουλιέται. Στην ανακύκλωση υπάρχει το πλαστικό. Το

γυαλί; Δεν πουλιέται. Το σκραπ δεν παίρνει γυαλιά, ούτε πλαστικό. Αυτά τα τρία είδη. Άστο το χαρτί και το μέταλλο, αφού το πουλάει ο [ακατ.] άνθρωπος, κάτι θα βγάλει.»

Even if this plan does not exist yet, organised bazaars work together with Municipalities in order to keep their spaces clean. The market staff and security groups are having an eye on how much garbage is disposed in the union bins and by whom, while they also help in cleaning up the market site.

In the case of the independent street traders the situation is different, since they have less possibilities of discarding unsold and unwanted remaining objects and rely to publicly available bins. Public waste bins are quickly full so many have no choice but to leave their trash on the street. The border fence of the DR construction site periodically functioned as a screen for big amounts of old objects and trash that were thrown behind it. Since these things were not picked up by the municipal cleaning service, they would pile up. Like so often, the lack of other solutions led street traders to take matters in their own hands with radical decisions such as burning the excess garbage.

G. Staff areas

Market safety and security groups often have their own areas in the market space where they can have a rest, chat or simply wait until their assistance is needed. These spaces, in their simplest form, can be made of a desk and some chairs in the open-air. Sometimes they have more elaborate structures, based on pre-existing guard sheds and huts. Continuities can be observed with the zoning of spaces for employees in the former industries, serving as given layout for functional areas of the markets, e.g. in the case of Ifestos where former offices have been transformed to rest areas with electricity for the market staff.

H. Parking & administration areas

Since the area has no designated public parking spots, the vehicles park wherever possible, often blocking pavements or hindering the flow of pedestrians. In order to tackle this problem, some markets have designated their own parking spaces where there is either a fee to park or the spots are reserved for traders and their trikes. Assigned parker people or the security staff of the unions manage the smooth operation in these spaces, piloting vehicles into empty spots and later helping them to pull out of a parking space.

Dimaraki market and Athinagora both have examples of parking and separate storage areas for the traders' vehicles, in order to facilitate their work and to save space in front of the market entrances for visitor vehicles. Traders enter the market early in the morning and bring their wares to their stalls. After that, trikes are parked in the adjacent parking spaces which are located at the edge of the plot, are fenced and have a locked gate. In Athinagora the gate is separate and accessible from the street whereas in the Dimaraki bazaar traders enter the parking zone from within the market space. This is perhaps because Dimaraki Street is narrow and does not offer enough road space to encroach on like in the cases of Agiou Polykarpou and Agias Annis. In order to overcome this, in addition to the trike parking zone inside the Dimaraki market, the organizers were leasing one other empty plot on the opposite side of the street only for cars and vehicles of visitors for some period in 2019. The rent was compensated with a parking fee, but most probably this venture did not go as expected because some months later the enclosed parking space ceased to exist. Continuities of certain spatial aspects become visible again, as the plot where Dimaraki market is located, some years ago used to be a parking space for cars.

In contrast to these examples, Ifestos and Ermis claim the public space in front of the markets to cover the spatial needs of the many visitors and traders. In the case of Ifestos market in particular, which is located on a secondary street connecting Agias Annis and Iera Odos, the road becomes an extension of the market and at the same time parking zone for vehicles. In cases of market expansion

⁵¹ Ikaros is located on the West side of Agias Annis which administratively belongs to the Municipality of Egaleo.



towards the public space, emerging grey zones can bring up conflicts because of competing interests. Space claims by the market association and incomprehension by individual street vendors who also claim the much frequented area, etc. must be negotiated.

I. Storage of wares

A specific need of market vendors is to store away unsold products at the end of the weekend. The most common way of doing so is to cover their own stall with a waterproof plane fastened and fixated with tensioning ropes or cables. Sometimes traders may not appear for weeks so they have to be sure that their things will remain dry. Magalios tells a story, where a trader at Proodos market was absent for many weeks and when he returned he complained to his colleagues that his stuff got wet. His colleagues would laugh and mock him about it. Magalios concludes that it was the trader's own responsibility to secure his wares.

Traders develop different techniques and methods of storing their wares. Magalios and his long-time friend and associate Kyriakos sell together at the Proodos market: motorbike spare parts, screws and bolts – mostly things that are Kyriakos' specialization. Combined with a few antique items as eye-catchers from Spyros' assortment (a watch, an old book, a decorated knife...), they are layed out on a rag on the floor, while the two wastepickers wait for customers in a canopy shade. Their storage system is organised with crates, each of which stores specific items. Many of them are stacked against the wall in the back. In the morning of every market day, three or four crates are selected to be displayed in the front. So the assortment rotates from week to week and no great effort is needed in packing up and storing away at the end of the bazaar.

J. Temporary Housing

As I illustrated in 2.2.3, the area of Eleonas has a long-standing tradition of informalized habitation with residential pockets appearing and disappearing from time to time. A neglected urban environment that has been in a process of slow urban restructuring for decades, offered the necessary grade of invisibility and a framework of public ignorance and tolerance that allowed for marginalized people to appropriate spaces, either for trade or for temporary housing purposes. In the context of the markets these two are sometimes paired. Former industrial sites with no regular weekday operator sometimes transform into residential sites, besides trading ones. In these cases, covered areas become small habitats. Structures are built in whatever existing walls can be used and are completed with scrap plywood doors, plastic elements or advertising planes. Curtains, plants and flowers are sometimes used as decoration. These units are built often by, or for somebody from the operating wastepicker group, who is to undertake caretaker duties at the site. Caretakers and their families would stay day and night on site, inhabit the place and at the same time guard the market.

Further, there are street vendors who stay for the markets over the weekend. Elaborate modifications of their vehicles allow for a comfortable nights sleep. Arin, the teenager I talked with who lives in the refugee camp, mentions these neighbors multiple times and seems to dislike the adjacency. While the examination of (unauthorized) residential areas of Eleonas is neither possible nor a purpose of this thesis, it is important to mention shelters as an essential element of quiet encroachment in the context of the wastepicker markets.

4.4.4 Cadastre of major marketplaces

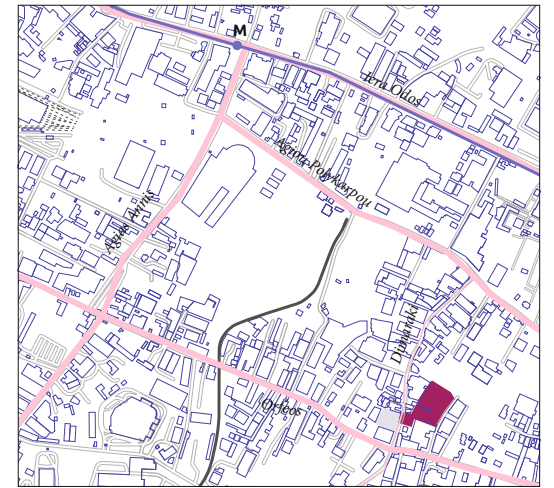
In the following chapter I will give an overview on the profiles of five of the major marketplaces of Eleonas while these serve as examples. I will further touch upon the elements and characteristics presented in the previous chapters.





Δημαράκη | Dimaráki

Size:	~8.000 m ²
Type:	Covered & open-air
Former:	Parking & trailer rental site
Status:	Permanent
Union:	Yes
Stalls:	~500 (estimated)
WC's:	Mobile
Cantines:	One
Guards:	Yes
Storage:	On-site
Parking:	Yes
Stall Fee:	Yes



Left: Top to bottom. Trike parking zone inside the bazaar area.

Central canteen on slightly elevated ground.

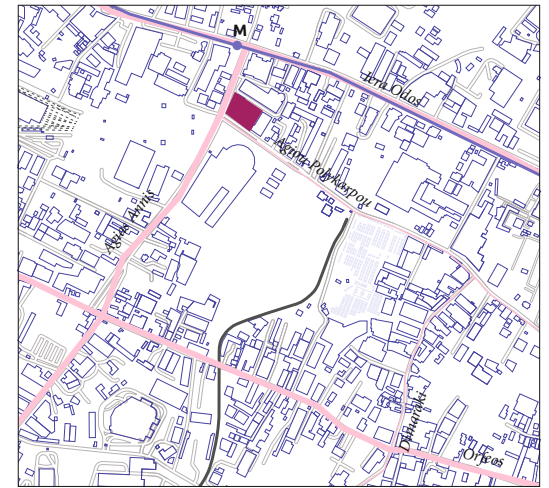
Stall spots are parcelled at about 5m² by the organizers.

Covered stall adapted according to the trader's needs and taste.

Large bazaar, one of the last in Dimaraki street (others closeby moved to Agias Annis in recent years). Close to Eleonas refugee camp, far from metro (>1km), closest to downtown in relation to other sites. Extensive outdoor areas. Active union/association with frequent space upgrades/stand expansion. Organized central canteen. Adjacent parking site on/off in use by wastepicker market (surroundings offer bad parking opportunities due to narrow street).

Αθηνάγορά | Athinagorá

Size:	~4500 m ²
Type:	Covered & Open-air
Former:	Hauling company
Status:	Permanent
Union:	Yes
Stalls:	~300 (estimated)
WC's:	Mobile
Cantines:	One
Guards:	Yes
Storage:	On-site
Parking:	Yes
Stall Fee:	Yes



Left: Top to bottom. Corrugated sheet roofing with skylights near the bazaar's entrance. The sign on the right reads "Dear customers, we would like to inform you to keep your distance and use gloves and masks" (own translation). Picture from Summer 2020, a short timeframe of operation of the wastepicker markets since the ongoing Covid19 pandemic.

The pedestrian crossing in front of the market entrance leading to the WC area with chain railings placed by the organizers. Above the entrance a sign reminding visitors to wear a mask and gloves and keep their distance. August 2020.

The separated parking zone for trader's trikes and vehicles. Adjacent to the bazaar area.

Adaptation of a building shell from the previous use into a canteen.



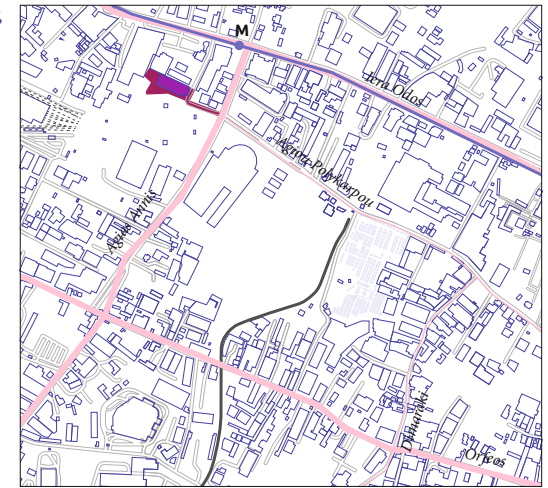
* New structures added since satellite image was taken

Athinagorá/Rom Pazar, is one of the biggest bazaars in the area and the first when approaching from the metro station via Agias Annis Street. Active wastepicker association, fast pace of space transformation/adaptation/upgrade. Highly frequented bazaar, neuralgic position at junction with shady rest area (tree canopy) across entrance. Site has been used as bazaar with different names (a.o. Anagenissi) at least since 2016.



Ήφαιστος | Ifestos

Size:	~800m ² road, 1700m ² outdoor, 2000m ² indoor
Type:	Outdoor & indoor
Former:	Warehouse & storage
Status:	Permanent
Union:	Yes
Stalls:	~300 (estimated)
WC's:	Yes (built)
Cantines:	One
Guards:	Yes
Storage:	Yes
Parking:	No
Fee:	Yes



Left: Top to bottom.

Elevated toilet spaces, indoor space of the market. January 2020.

The canteen of Ifestos, a frequented food stall among the various in the area. July 2019.

View of indoor space. The premises include storage areas and offices. July 2019.

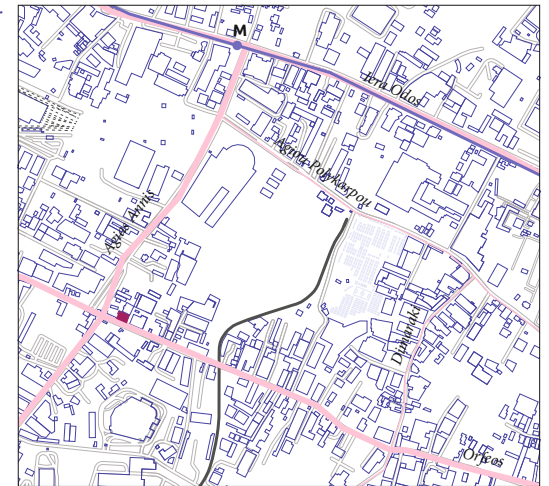
Approaching the end of the day, wares are packed and stored away on site. Folding beds used as display surfaces. January 2020

Accesible from a secondary road linking Iera Odos and Agias Annis. The access road closes on weekends and becomes part of the market: stalls occupy the pavement or it becomes a parking zone for wastepicker trikes (allocated to Ifestos). Extensive indoor areas. Located across Athinagorá the two markets form a cluster with high numbers of visitors. Plot within the borders of the prospected intercity bus station building site (cf. 2.3.3). Possible relocation of market site from Orfeos Street.



Πρόδος | Pródos

Size:	500 m ² outdoor & 250 m ² indoor
Type:	Covered & Open air
Former:	Industrial (wire plant)
Status:	Permanent
Union:	Yes
Stalls:	~70
WC's:	Two (built)
Cantines:	Two
Guards:	No
Storage:	On-Site
Parking:	No
Fee:	Yes



Left: Top to bottom.

Indoor space with characteristics of the former workshop use. Nowadays used partially as storage, perhaps because it is in the back of the market or because the air can get stuffy so not many want to place. December 2018.

Entrance to the market, outdoor area. Bazaar becomes an extension of the street. July 2019

One of two well organized canteens (not depicted on the right) with allocated sitting zone. December 2018.

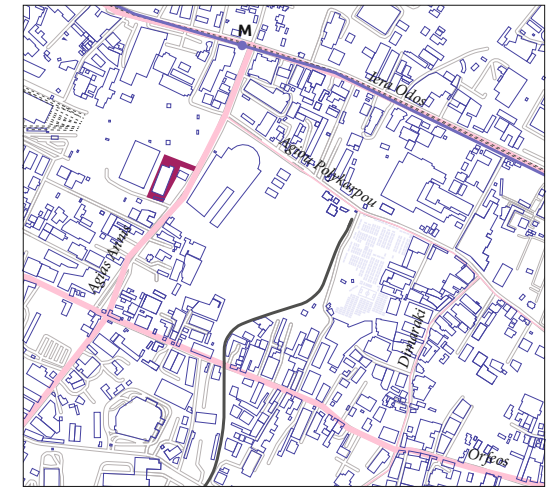
View from the inside of a stall (inbetween the markets' canteens) towards the main market space. One trader has started building a roof frame for his stall. January 2020.

Small market with a quiet atmosphere. It is compact and has a disproportionate number of food stalls (2) in relation to its size. This is perhaps because of the long distance one has to cover in order to reach the site, if on foot - the bazaar is furthest away from the metro station, at the endpoint of the market spine, when Agias Annis meets Orfeos Street. Traders are mostly veterans in the business and rely on loyal customers.



Ερμής | Ermís

Size:	3000 m ²
Type:	Open-air
Former:	Warehouse & Parking
Status:	Permanent
Union:	Yes
Stalls:	~250
WC's:	Three (mobile)
Canteens:	Two
Guards:	Yes
Storage:	On-Site
Parking:	No
Fee:	Yes



Left: Top to bottom.

Canteen area (1) in pre-existing building. July 2019.

A wall used as display and hanging surface for a trader's items for sale. February 2020.

Shade canopy for the hot summer months. July 2019.

Garbage bins near the entrance. On the right, blue and yellow bins for recycling material. In the back a member of the security team rests in the driver's seat of a trike. July 2019.

Location at Agias Annis, halfway down the street between metro station and Orfeos. Extensive outdoor area (only), access road to market is used as well. Old record player trader placed strategically at the entrance, nostalgic music attracting customers. Two well-frequented canteens in pre-existing structures. Markings of the former parking space have been complemented with white paint in order to create equal-sized trading stall areas.

4.5 *Μας βλέπουν σαν σκουπίδια/They see us as garbage*¹—challenging hegemonic narratives

Eleonas can be experienced as both a space of possibilities and inclusion as well as one of exclusion and segregation. In an understanding of informal markets as places of heterotopia, in a Foucauldian sense, as interpreted by Mooshammer, the wastepicker markets of Eleonas meet the criteria for both “heterotopias of crisis” and “deviant heterotopias”, equally “providing shelter for the excluded” while “harbouring many kinds of non-conformity” (Mooshammer 2015: 17). Eleonas’ urban restructuring process and the decades of degradation (cf. 2.2 and 2.3) happened with or resulted in the area becoming a vessel of the residual. In the previous chapter, I have shown how merchants and collectors of waste, street hawkers, and other petty traders have been gradually expelled from central squares and streets towards the “wasteland” of Eleonas. While the irony does not go unnoticed, I have elaborated on the ways actors of this wastepicker market heterotopia overcome their attributed powerlessness through quiet encroachment on the commons of public space and waste (cf. 4.3.2) and through appropriation of the urban spaces of Eleonas.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the excluded perceive their exclusion and own agency, and in what ways the wastepickers’ self-perception and self-determination contrasts with the hegemonic understanding of the marginal others in the context of urban restructuring processes in Athens.

4.5.1 Wastepickers’ self-definition and opposition to heteronomy

«I’ve never pretended to be miserable and I will not tolerate anyone else accusing me of having such a feature.» (Magalios 2019)

«Εγώ δεν προσοιήθηκα ποτέ ότι είμαι κακομοίρης και ούτε ανέχομαι να μου προσάψει άλλος τέτοια ιδιότητα.»

Six people crowd into the small office in the neighborhood of Petralona, one room, small side street, ground floor. Through a large window front, passers-by can observe the strange setting of a group interview with the Proodos board. On the walls, hundreds of pictures of former and current agents of the union and important market figures in meetings with prominent politicians, religious leaders and popular personas, smiling, shaking hands. This is a historic field, they seem to say. During the talk, my discussants often point to one picture or another, illustrating their story accordingly:

«Yes. Deputy mayors. There’s one behind you, Varelas [pointing to a photo behind me]. And he lives in your neighborhood, in Kolonos. He’s the man who did the most damage. The one holding the book. The greatest damage he created.» (Hasan E. 2019)

«Ναι. Αντιδημάρχους. Είναι πίσω σου ένας, ο Βαρελάς [δείχνει την φωτογραφία πίσω μου]. Και μένει στη γειτονιά σου. Στον Κολωνό. Αυτός είναι ο άνθρωπος που έκανε τη μεγαλύτερη ζημιά. Αυτός που κρατάει το βιβλίο. Τη μεγαλύτερη ζημιά που δημιούργησε.»

The photographs on the wall also tell a story about what they are proud of as a union. On the one hand there are connections and networks, the social capital that is an asset when the base of your economic existence is permanently under threat. On the other, it is their heritage of being descendants of a

generation of internal migrants who first engaged with the job: collecting old things from the waste, preserving the culture, while saving precious heirlooms of Greek history. This narrative contradicts the hegemonic understanding of the wastepicker’s role in society, which is well illustrated by Magalios’ indignation over a dictionary entry² on the wastepicker profession, in his opinion an insulting definition:

«Wastepicker, he who collects old objects from the trash and sells them to earn a living. The wastepicker is homeless and a clochard.» (Magalios 2019, unknown dictionary source)

«Ρακοσυλλέκτης, αυτός που μαζεύει παλιά αντικείμενα από τα σκουπίδια και τα πουλάει για να ζήσει. Είναι άστεγος και clochard.»

Magalios continues, explaining that the reason this description upsets him is the underlying generalization and the equation of waste collectors with pitiful, homeless people, a definition which he rejects:

«Pardon me, the lexicographer is an asshole! If he doesn’t know what a wastepicker is, why does he give him the status of a homeless person? Clochard’s even, in French. [...] Clochard means street punk [explaining to colleague]. It’s French. [...] Homeless, homeless, drunkard.» (Magalios 2019)

«Με συγκραείς, ο λεξικογράφος είναι μαλάκας! Αφού δεν έχει υπόψη τι είναι ο ρακοσυλλέκτης γιατί τον, του προσάπει την ιδιότητα του άστεγου; Του Clochard, και γαλλικά κιάλας. [...] Κλοσάρ είναι αλήτης, του δρόμου [εξηγώντας σε συνάδελφο]. Γαλλικό είναι. [...] Άστεγος, άστεγος, πότης.»

The narrative of wastepickers being the ones who really preserve Greece’s culture with their work of collecting old things is embraced by most unions. Many examples to support this have been told to the press by union representatives. Magalios, a particularly vocal member of the union, in an interview with daily newspaper *To Vima*, voices his thoughts on wastepicking, which is according to him:

« [...] a misunderstood vocation. Many people are unaware that Andreas Kalvos³ ‘odes’ were found in the garbage by a wastepicker and then delivered to Kostis Palamas⁴. The archives of the Macedonian Struggle, by Tellos Agras, were retrieved from the garbage by wastepickers and handed down to younger generations. These colleagues recycled culture and preserved sources of history.» (Magalios 2010 in *toVima.gr*)

« [...] ένα παραγνωρισμένο λειτούργημα. Ο πολύς κόσμος αγνοεί ότι οι ‘Οδές’ του Ανδρέα Κάλβου βρέθηκαν στα σκουπίδια από έναν ρακοσυλλέκτη και παραδόθηκαν κατόπιν στον Κωστή Παλαμά. Τα αρχεία του Μακεδονικού Αγώνα, του Τέλλου Αγρα, ρακοσυλλέκτες τα ανέσυραν από τα σκουπίδια και τα παρέδωσαν στις νεότερες γενιές. Αυτοί οι συνάδελφοι ανακάλυψαν τον πολιτισμό και διέσωσαν πηγές της Ιστορίας.»

Vahtet strengthens the same narrative referring to a different story, according to which wastepickers found the first copy of the Greek Constitution and rescued it from the trash. I found the same reference

2 Source of the dictionary is unknown.

3 Andreas Kalvos, Greek poet of the 19th century

4 Kostis Palamas, Greek poet and language reformist of the early 20th century

1 (Vahtet 2018)

in two other interviews of Vahtet, which indicates the urgent effort of the unions to change the narratives about wastepickers and their role in society:

«They say it's illegal to touch the garbage. If we don't pick it up... We've saved a lot of things. The first Constitution of Greece was found by a scavenger of this association and then the president, who was a little well-read at the time, went and handed it over to the National Library of Greece. I think in '98-'99.» (Vahtet 2017 in newsbeast.gr)

«Είναι παράνομο λείει να πειράζεις τα σκουπίδια. Αν δεν τα μαζέψουμε και εμείς... Έχουμε σώσει πολλά πράγματα. Το πρώτο Σύνταγμα της Ελλάδος το βρήκε ρακοσυλλέκτης αυτού του σωματείου και τότε ο πρόεδρος που ήταν τότε που ήταν λίγο διαβασμένος πήγε και το παρέδωσε στην Εθνική Βιβλιοθήκη της Ελλάδος. Νομίζω το '98-'99.»

Pride for providing the state's historical archives with valuable documents from the past, shows also Ertzan Hasan as he talks about his own and his father's Raif recent contribution when they found a state gazette from the 19th century and donated it to the Library of the Parliament. The story went viral for a few days, so Ertzan asks me if I have heard about it in the news. The widespread dissemination of such positive representations is very much appreciated by wastepicker representatives, who have to struggle with a lingering negative image:

«The passers-by gaze is the worst for somebody who just starts doing this job.» (Vahtet 2017 in Epitelous Savvatokyriako⁵)

«Το βλέμμα των περαστικών είναι ότι χειρότερο για κάποιον που ξεκινάει αυτή τη δουλειά»

The former president of Ermis, Fehridun Memis, speaks of the effort to alter this image. He has engaged and cooperated with *Diasozo*⁶, the “Museum for the Rescue of Thematic Collections of Tradition and Folklore”, after leaving the union.

«So we founded ,DIASOZO', wanting to show the world that we preserve the history of Greece. Most people have in their minds that a wastepicker is someone who looks in the garbage to eat, we want to change this image. By putting another title we want to show that we are saving history, tradition. We are doing the best recycling that can be done.» (Memis 2018 in amna.gr)

«Έτσι εμείς φτιάξαμε το 'ΔΙΑΣΩΖΩ' θέλοντας να δείξουμε στον κόσμο ότι εμείς διασώζουμε την ιστορία της Ελλάδας. Οι περισσότεροι άνθρωποι έχουν στο μυαλό τους ότι ρακοσυλλέκτης είναι εκείνος που ψάχνει στα σκουπίδια για να φάει, εμείς θέλουμε να αλλάξουμε αυτή την εικόνα. Βάζοντας έναν άλλο τίτλο θέλουμε να δείξουμε ότι σώζουμε την ιστορία, την παράδοση. Κάνουμε την καλύτερη ανακύκλωση που μπορεί να γίνει»

Diasozo is an initiative with the participation of agents from the “Evonymos Ecological Library”, another association dedicated to the preservation of important relicts from the Greek tradition and culture (cf. 4.2). *Diasozo*'s manager, Nomikos Zouloufos, talks about the wastepicker's contribution in this mission:

«I think the role of the waste collector is underestimated. For us it is the first line of contact to a large extent with the collecting industry. Have no doubt that waste collectors have

made a significant contribution to the preservation of cultural material of all kinds. They are the 'rescuers of our culture'.» (Zouloufos in splashmagazine.gr⁷)

Allies in this struggle are often people from the Arts like Mr. Zouloufos, who know the value of the wastepicker marketplaces and are often loyal customers of the bazaars themselves. That is also the case for the former Dean of the Athens School of Fine Arts, Panos Charalambous, who appears as a defender of the markets in Marina Danezi's documentary about Ermis union (cf. 4.1.4).

4.5.2 Of Gods and Virtues – orientalist discourses in the context of Eleonas' wastepicker markets

In the context of self-representation, the popularity of antique names among the wastepicker unions is remarkable. Hermes, Hephaestus, Hercules, Icarus, even Zeus; Olympian Gods and figures from Greek Mythology make their appearance in Eleonas. This has to do with the fact that Greek national identity is built on the invocation of an ancient Hellenic past (cf. 2.1.1 and 4.2.1). When it comes to self-definition and identity, wastepicker unions often adopt favorable positions toward European and Western values and market models, while rejecting aspects of the bazaars which resemble or recall Eastern-Oriental traditions. This is related to the fact that an orientalist discourse (Said 1978) is constitutive of Greek national identity, which has been imagined as distinct from all that is Ottoman and Oriental. With the narrative of liberation from Ottoman oppression, a national identity was also constructed that invoked the Greek Hellenic ancient past and the Byzantine Empire. Greece was portrayed as a modern, enlightened, progressive, “developed” country in contrast to the “primitive”, “undeveloped” Ottoman Empire (or Turkey) and the East. This country was imagined as Western and anything associated with Easterners or “Orientals” had to be rejected (Gauntlett 2004: 248).

That is also a rejection of the Ottoman past in terms of urban planning and architecture. However, historically and culturally, these markets often have closer ties to an oriental past than what relates to western paradigms of trading sites (cf. 2.1.1 and 4.2.1). We also see that internalized orientalist narratives are present among the market actors themselves. Twisted perceptions and power relations can be found, e.g., in the fact that some sellers “Christianize” their names, adapting them for the majority society: Ayse becomes Anna and Ahmet becomes Akis⁸. When I became aware of this and asked Spyros about it, I received a simple explanation. Akis is not his real name, but he introduces with a “neutral”



Right:

"Mercato di Atene", marketplace of Athens (Ferrario in athenssocialatl-las.gr).

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PQ0v1tv6H4>

⁶ Greek: Διασώζω=I salvage.

⁷ Date not stated.

⁸ Names are pseudonymized.

Christian name because then he is less likely to get harassed (Magalios 2020). Vahtet also addresses this kind of racism related to Muslim names:

«Anyway, let's get away from the election because you know what, it pisses me off when I enter these issues, I mind. I've seen, I mean, it's not enough, [...] the racism that we've been subjected to because we're Greek Muslims, because of our name, because of our... And we also see racism now from this side, that our people, because they are forced to go out to the bins and collect things to sell them... Even this thing.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Τέλοσπάντων, ας φύγουμε πάλι από τις εκλογές γιατί ξέρεις μου τι δίνει, όταν μπαίνω σε αυτά τα θέματα, με πειράζει. Έχω δει, δηλαδή δεν φτάνει, δηλαδή, το ρατσισμό που έχουμε φάει γιατί είμαστε Έλληνες Μουσουλμάνοι, για το όνομα μας, για για για... και βλέπουμε και ρατσισμό τώρα από αυτή τη μεριά, ότι οι άνθρωποι μας, επειδή αναγκάζονται και έχουν βγει στους κάδους και μαζεύουνε πράγματα για να τα πουλήσουνε... Μέχρι και αυτό το πράγμα, δηλαδή.»

A form of dissociation from a supposedly non-European, oriental past and its cultural heritage can also happen in spatial terms, which becomes clear when wastepickers refer to their own spaces.

«The thing is, it may be a thousand people [the amount of traders] but it's an ugly picture. And it has a third world image.» (Hasan E. 2019)

«Το θέμα είναι ότι μπορεί να είναι χίλια άτομα αλλά έχει άσχημη εικόνα. Και έχει μία εικόνα τριτοκοσμική.»

Undeniably the wastepicker markets have very real problems regarding the space, infrastructures, and organization, which have been addressed in the previous chapters. However, the implicated imaginary is a product of orientalist misconception which is both internalized and externally strengthened through society's judgment. These images stand in contrast to what wastepickers want or seemingly need to represent in order to be considered progressive and "European". Hasan Ertzan when asked what their reaction would be if wastepickers were forced to move out of Eleonas due to a future restart of the Double Regeneration project:

«We would go somewhere else, because this is the way they have made us like the gypsies in the shacks, this is what we have become. We don't want to highlight this thing. These are third world things. We are not third world people.»

«Θα πηγαίναμε κάπου αλλού, γιατί έτσι όπως μας έχουν καταντήσει σαν τουςτσιγγάνους στα τσαντίρια, ένα τέτοιο πράγμα μας έχουν καταντήσει. Εμείς δεν θέλουμε να αναδείξουμε αυτό το πράγμα. Αυτά είναι τριτοκοσμικά. Τριτοκοσμικοί δεν είμαστε.» (Hasan E. 2019)

Vahtet, in a similar vein, opens his answer to a related question (how he imagines the future might look like from a union perspective) first with a clarification about the limits of the union power in the face of a negative sociopolitical predisposition that, for him, is impossible to intervene in:

«Look, one swallow doesn't make a summer. The union alone can't do anything. First of all, we have to accept that we are not a European country. That's it. We have to accept that. [...] Yeah, I don't... uh, no. Since we are not a European country, we are only on paper, we can't,

no, there is no future. There is no future. I mean I say it, I don't want to say it but it's the reality, what I see. There is nothing.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Κοίταξε, ένας κούκος δεν φέρνει την άνοιξη. Με το σωματείο μόνο δεν μπορεί να γίνει τίποτα. Καταρχάς πρέπει να δεχτούμε ότι δεν είμαστε μία ευρωπαϊκή χώρα. Τέρμα. Αυτό πρέπει να το δεχτούμε. [...] Ναι, εγώ δεν... εε όχι. Από τη στιγμή που δεν είμαστε ευρωπαϊκή χώρα, είμαστε μόνο στα χαρτιά, δεν μπορούμε, δεν, δεν υπάρχει μέλλον. Μέλλον δεν υπάρχει. Δηλαδή το λέω, δεν θέλω να το λέω αλλά είναι η πραγματικότητα, αυτό που βλέπω. Δεν υπάρχει.»

In the above and other similar statements lies the implication that, in contrast to the very real spatial and administrative problems of the markets, there is a European paradigm that can show the way about how it could or should be done. Athens and Eleonas are impossible to be thought outside of the (West-East, progressive-backward, developed-underdeveloped) binary in the context of the wastepickers' lived experience of discrimination and exclusion.

«As a country, as Athens, as Athens, as the capital, it's not going to do anything for these people.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Σαν χώρα δεν πρόκειται, σαν Αθήνα, σαν Αθήνα, σαν πρωτεύουσα, δεν πρόκειται να κάνει τίποτα για αυτούς τους ανθρώπους.»

4.5.3 Conflict and negotiation

The core of the problem is, as so often, to be read between the lines. The relationship of the wastepicker representatives with authorities and especially in the context of the Athens city council has been discussed in previous chapters (cf. 4.3.3). In recapitulation, it can be said that conflicts of interest regarding the use of public space shape the base on which wastepickers do not feel supported in their working practices and everyday life. There was a lot of anger and frustration expressed towards the treatment and the actions of the city council and officials.

«I am telling you, the Municipality never saw us as a group of people that have certain needs to do this job. They really saw us like garbage. They are racist, racist. I have seen and experienced this.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Γι'αυτό σου λέω, ο Δήμος ποτέ δεν μας είδε εμάς σαν μία ομάδα ανθρώπων που έχουν ανάγκη να κάνουν αυτή τη δουλειά. Μας βλέπουν πραγματικά σαν σκουπίδια. Είναι ρατσιστές, είναι ρατσιστές. Το'χω δει, το'χω ζήσει.»

It is especially the perception by the authorities, reflected in their actions and in the disregard of wastepicker needs, demands and agreements, which repeatedly evoke the figure of being made invisible:

«I am telling you from the beginning, they do not see us. They see us as second class humans.»

«Καταρχάς σου λέω, από την αρχή της κουβέντας μας, δεν μας βλέπουν, μας βλέπουνε σαν ανθρώπους δεύτερης κατηγορίας.» (Vahtet 2018)

My discussants are aware of their ambivalent position as a politically and socially despised essential part for the functioning of society (cf. 4.5.1) and regularly refer to this powerful, albeit invisible function in our conversations.

«We are employees of the Municipality, unpaid and anonymous. Because how much cardboard will we get from garbage collection? Which this, cardboard, based on the City's obligation would be to take it to the landfill to bury it. Or metal or copper, cable, anything you can imagine. It has no end. We do not only recycle but we put it back on the market, a chair that holds up well, on wheels, we're not stupid to sell it for metal. We go to the flea market and sell it to a person who wants to put a computer in the house and have the chair and back and forth. Otherwise the City would be obligated to take it, throw it away.» (Magalios 2019)

«Εμείς είμαστε υπάλληλοι του Δήμου, άμισθοι και ανώνυμοι. Διότι από την αποκομιδή των σκουπιδιών πόσο χαρτόνι παίρνουμε; Το οποίο αυτό, χαρτόνι, με βάση την υποχρέωση του Δήμου είναι να τα πάρει να τα πάει στη χωματερή να τα θάψει. Ή μέταλλα ή χαλκώματα, καλώδια, ό,τι μπορείς να φανταστείς. Πόσα και πόσα. Εμείς δεν είναι μόνο ότι ανακυκλώνουμε αλλά το ξαναβάζουμε στην αγορά, μιά καρέκλα που κρατάει καλά, τροχήλατη, δεν είμαστε χαζοί να την πουλήσουμε για μέταλλο. Πάμε στο παζάρι και την πουλάμε να την πάρει ένας άνθρωπος που θέλει να βάλει ένα κομπιούτερ στο σπίτι και να έχει την καρέκλα και να κάνει πίσω μπρος. Αλλιώς ο Δήμος θα ήταν υπόχρεος να το πάρει, να το πετάξει.»

One proposal that is periodically discussed in the Athens City Council is the limiting of participation only to traders that are residents of the Athens center (cf. 4.3.1). Wastepickers I spoke with were both in favor (e.g., Proodos) and opposing (e.g., Ermis) the idea, following different schemes of thought.⁹

«So it's like saying- no, these people are members of my union! I mean what? They come from neighboring places and I won't accept them? The other guy comes to me from Egaleo and I say no, I'm an Athenian union, I don't accept you. What are you saying buddy, how is this relevant?»

«Δηλαδή είναι σαν να μου λες, τίποτα, αυτοί οι άνθρωποι είναι μέλη του σωματίου μου! Εγώ δηλαδή τι να, έρχονται από γειτονικά σημεία να μη τους δέχομαι; Μου'ρχεται από το Αιγάλεω ο άλλος να του πω όχι, τσ, εγώ είμαι Αθηναϊκό σωματίο δε σε δέχομαι. Τι λες ρε φίλε, από που κολλάει;» (Vahtet 2018)

Altogether, the power imbalance between decision makers of the Municipality and various stakeholders of the urban regeneration plan for Eleonas on the one hand, and the actors of the wastepicker markets on the other, lead to the conviction of the second that solutions have to come from within and have to be fought for, demanded or simply claimed.

4.5.4 Visions and self-determination

«It's over. If you cannot look somebody in the eye and see him as equal, there is no way to get along. No way. This is what I have observed all this years, and it saddens me.»

⁹ «We, as citizens of Athens, we have a demand, and I do not consider it unreasonable, [the Athens municipality] to support us.» (Εμείς ως δημότες Αθηναίων, έχουμε την απαίτηση, και δεν την θεωρώ παράλογη, να μας στηρίξει [ο Δήμος]) (Magalios 2019), speaking about traders coming from different areas of the country, or even across borders, to participate at the bazaars of Eleonas (cf. 4.1.3).

«Τέρμα. Όταν έναν δεν μπορείς να τον κοιτάξεις στα μάτια και να τον βλέπεις στα ίσια, δεν κάνεις, εε, χωριό. Δεν κάνεις. Εγώ αυτό, αυτό είδα και με έχει στεναχωρήσει τόσα χρόνια.» (Vahtet 2018)

Wastepickers I talked to are aware of the fact that the base of their financial existence, the wastepicker marketplaces, are built on thin ice and is directly related with future scenarios of urban redevelopment of the area. Many wastepickers, such as Aggeliki and Marina from Ikaros market, feel that the creation of the intercity bus station (KTEL/KSYL) will negatively affect them and the bazaars in general, as they will no longer be tolerated in this area (Aggeliki/Marina 2018, voice memo). Vahtet mentions scenarios for underground garbage bins, that according to him, the city thinks of installing. As he says this would be the end for wastepickers (Vahtet 2018).

All my discussants are sure that if the area's regeneration plan moves forward, the future of the marketplaces will not look bright. As a response, own scenarios are formulated and imagined. Possibilities offered by organizational structures of European bazaars were often mentioned by most of the discussants. Paradigms from Belgium and Istanbul, Germany and the Netherlands were brought up in discussions. Aggeliki and Marina mention Belgium, where customers would pay a bazaar area entrance fee of 20-50 cents, regardless of whether they shop or not. Such a structure covers basic expenses and is helping the traders' work, the two women state (Aggeliki/Marina 2018, voice memo), and they ask why not too in Eleonas?

«All over central Europe, in Germany they have bazaars, and the municipality that is responsible for the cleaning, for the garbage collection, for all of this, they put an advertisement on TV or on the radio and say on this day of the month, whatever you have in your house, take it out. Whereas other days if you take it out they fine you. [...] it's good for the City too because they don't have to move this stuff, meaning they get rid of it with no effort.» (Magalios 2019)

«Σε όλη την κεντρική Ευρώπη, στη Γερμανία έχουν παζάρια, και ο Δήμος που είναι υπεύθυνος για την καθαριότητα για την αποκομιδή, για όλα αυτά κάνει αγγελία από την τηλεόραση ή από το ραδιόφωνο και λέει την τάδε του μηνός, ό,τι περιττό έχετε στο σπίτι σας βγάλτε το απ'έξω. Ενώ άλλες μέρες αν το βγάλεις έξω σε γράφουν. [...] είναι καλό και για τον Δήμο γιατί δεν έχει να διακινεί αυτά τα πράγματα, δηλαδή τα διώχνει με το τίποτε.»

Despite the demands for support, hopes that they will receive it by the authorities are rather low, as expressed by Aggeliki and Marina, which think that the municipality is clearly against them (cf. also 4.3.3). The two women tell me that the bazaar would be considered something decadent (*παρακμιακό*) and negative wherever it would take place and that this is the reason why they have not been granted a space until now (Aggeliki/Marina 2018, voice memo). This conviction influences the quest for allies beyond the scope of the local political landscape and further shapes the relationship between wastepicker associations. As expressed in the interviews, some union representatives, like Vahtet, are determined to take things in their own hands. He has concrete ideas about how to prepare his arguments:

«I will now, er, God first, in September, make some contacts abroad. I really want to, uh, show them that really, the way we operate is the way the rest of the bazaars abroad operate. I've been gathering information about Germany, I'm talking to a guy from Germany, he happens to be Greek, uh, he's one of the organizers. The municipality of each region, Athens, Egaleo, Glyfada, Kallithea... In Germany, the municipality of each region gives them once a month to have a bazaar.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Εγώ θα κάνω τώρα, εε, πρώτα ο Θεός, τον Σεπτέμβρη, θα κάνω κάποιες επαφές με το εξωτερικό. Θέλω πραγματικά να, εμ, να τους δείξω ότι πραγματικά, με αυτόν τον τρόπο, έτσι όπως λειτουργούμε εμείς λειτουργούν και τα υπόλοιπα παζάρια στο εξωτερικό. Έχω μαζέψει πληροφορίες για την Γερμανία, μιλάω με ένα παιδί από τη Γερμανία, τυχαίνει να είναι Έλληνας, εε, είναι μέσα στους διοργανωτές. Ο Δήμος κάθε περιοχής, Αθήνα, Αιγάλεω, Γλυφάδα, Κερα-εε Καλλιθέα... Στη Γερμανία ο Δήμος κάθε περιοχής τους παραχωρεί τον μήνα μία φορά να κάνουνε παζάρι.»

There have been more stories in the interviews and informal talks, about contacts to other markets abroad, through which wastepicker arguments are strengthened, e.g. Magalios talking about no taxation being applicable for the trade of things that were found in the garbage, in reference to a discussion he had with a man who outlined the German flea market framework (Magalios 2020, voice memo). Transnational links to bazaars from other countries¹⁰ and networking with (foreign) flea market associations are considered supportive for the cause of the Eleonas wastepicker markets.

4.6 Summary

To summarize, in chapter 4 I have discussed various aspects of Eleonas' wastepicker markets, the main focus of this thesis. Starting in 4.1 with an account of the wastepicker markets' actors, I highlighted the profiles of important wastepicker unions and presented the main dialogue partners I had during this research. I further addressed the special relevance of Roma communities for the urban space of Eleonas and commented on multi-layered mechanisms of exclusion affecting them. In conclusion of chapter 4.1, I illustrated the profile of the market visitors as relevant actors of the wastepicker markets.

Continuing with chapter 4.2, I elaborated on the timeline of displacement and market growth between 2004 and the present, connecting this process with findings from the previous chapters on the urban restructuring of Eleonas, highlighting their relevance for the eventual rooting of the wastepicker markets in the area. It was argued that, despite the fact that wastepickers were driven out of the center, repression and harassment of wastepickers did not end in Eleonas.

In chapter 4.3, I addressed the market struggles relating to the defending of newly appropriated spaces for the purposes of holding wastepicker bazaars. It was illustrated that market actors choose both silent ways of encroaching on common resources such as public space and solid waste, as well as bold expressions of resistance, demanding recognition through the representative wastepicker unions and their alliances. In order to fully grasp this process, in chapter 4.3 I discussed the concepts of quiet encroachment and non-movements in the sense of Bayat, and bold encroachment as outlined by Gillespie. These were seen as aspects of urban space appropriation applied on the case of Eleonas. Finalizing chapter 4.3, I illustrated the complexity of the relational web between wastepickers and local governments, and between wastepicker associations, discussing questions on legality in the context of wastepickers' living and working realities.

Next, in chapter, 4.4, I addressed wastepickers' strategies of survival while outlining various elements of the urban environment of Eleonas in relation to the marketscape, before moving on to concrete examples of architectural characteristics relevant for commoning practices that manifest at the market sites. At the end of chapter 4.4., main bazaar profiles were introduced.

Finally, in chapter 4.5 I discussed the topics of wastepickers' self-representation while challenging hegemonic narratives and external characterization, before elaborating on orientalist discourses that find application in the context of the wastepicker markets. In conclusion, I addressed the issues of conflict and negotiation, connecting them with aspects about the relation of wastepickers with authorities in regards to the markets' future, and finally linked these with wastepickers' demands and visions in the sense of a future outlook.

¹⁰ That, in line with the discourses discussed in 4.5.2, are often from West or North Europe.

5. Epilogue

It is late in the evening at Proodos' ground floor office, the large window front is lit, the atmosphere relaxed and at the same time tense. The discussion about false wastepicker representations is close to an end, Magalios laughs and starts reciting his answer:

«Oh those lousy writers!
 What do they ascribe to us, what do they ascribe.
 Oh Babiniotis!¹¹
 Wastepicker or wastepickers
 they vanish the cartons, the rags from the waste bins
 they collect empty boxes of cigarettes
 letters that were read and thrown away
 cruelly to the streets
 objects of worship
 the models of Ziller¹²
 from the mansion houses of Athens and Piraeus
 the odes of Kalvos
 and a series of historic relicts

Wastepickers are not history and art
 they are those that recollect history and art
 so as not to end up on the cultural dumpsite
 or else they would vanish in the width of oblivion

And then they take their megaphones and they shout
 with stentorian voices to the archangels of the sky
 'we, fellow colleagues, did our duty
 the responsibility now lies at the dem-archon (mayor)
 who eagerly wants to become Athen-archon¹³'

And then the archangels answer,
 give credence to their words:
 'he will promise you the earth
 or the pie in the sky'.

This goes to the mayor.»

«αχ, αυτοί οι λεξικογράφοι του κάλου!
 Τι μας προσάπτουν, τι μας προσάπτουν.
 Α ρε Μπαμπινιώτη!
 Ρακοσυλλέκτης ή ρακοσυλλέκτες
 εξαφανίζουν τα χαρτόνια, τα ράκη από τους κάδους των απορριμάτων
 μαζεύουν τα άδεια πακέτα των τσιγάρων

¹¹ Georgios Babiniotis, linguist and philologist. Editor of several major modern Greek language dictionaries

¹² Ernst Ziller, German architect who planned hundreds of building in Athens and Piraeus in the 19th and early 20th century.

¹³ Wordplay with the Greek term for mayor, demarchos (δήμαρχος= ruler of the people) and the word creation Athenarchos (Αθήναρχος = ruler of Athens).

τα γράμματα που διαβαστήκαν και πεταχτήκαν
ανάληγτα στους δρόμους
τα αντικείμενα λατρείας
τις μακέτες του Τσίλερ

από τα αρχοντόσπιτα της Αθήνας και του Πειραιά
τις ωδές του Κάλβου
και μια σειρά ιστορικών ντοκουμέντων.

Οι ρακουσλλέκτες δεν είναι ιστορία και τέχνη
είναι αυτοί που περισυλλέγουν την ιστορία και την τέχνη
για να μην φτάσουν στις χωματερές του πολιτισμού
ή αλλιώς διαφορετικά θα χανόταν στα πέρατα της λήθης.

Και ύστερα πέρνουν τις ντουντούκες και κράζουν
με σθεντορικές φωνές τους αρχαγγέλους του ουρανού
‘εμείς συνάδελφοι το χρέος το κάναμε,
η ευθύνη ανήκει τώρα στο Δήμαρχο
που ντε και καλά θέλει να γίνει Αθήναρχος.’

Και ύστερα απαντούν οι αρχαγγέλοι,
να δώσετε βάση στα λόγια τους:
‘θα σας τάξει τον ουρανό με τ’άστρα,
ή λαγούς με πετραχείλια’

Για το Δήμαρχο.» (Magalios 2019)

Several months after this evening, while this epilogue is written, the Covid19 pandemic is imposing restrictions on many aspects of everyday life, having forced the wastepicker bazaars to a halt. Many thousands of wastepickers and their families have stayed jobless for months, with no near end in sight. March 2021 – I ride my bicycle through the neighborhood of Gazi when I see Mrs. Anna14 by chance, a food stall owner from one of the markets, sitting outside her house. She recognizes me and we chat for a while. She speaks about the lockdown situation and how difficult it is, about the fact that no one is allowed to approach the empty market sites. Her sons once tried to pick up some things from the market and were fined¹⁵. As so often, wastepickers have been left on their own with the majority being in dire situation, relying on material help (food and amenities) from NGOs and donations since there are no financial aid programs for market traders, Ertzan Hasan from Proodos union reports in a recent communication. Some wastepickers do parallel jobs in order to cover their basic needs. All hopes are for the markets to re-open.

In the meantime neoliberal political agendas are pushing forward towards the realization of the redevelopment plans for the Votanikos neighborhood¹⁶, something that will undeniably affect the wastepicker markets of the area. On this note, the general secretary of the Athens Municipality, Alexandros Tsiatsiamis, stated in a press conference in April 2021:

¹⁴ Pseudonymized.

¹⁵ During that time a strict lockdown was imposed in Greece with a written permit being required for every outdoor activity/exit of the own house.

¹⁶ According to press releases the Votanikos project is on schedule and the finalisation of the new Panathinaikos stadium in Eleonas is envisioned by 2023 followed by the demolition of the old stadium in Alexandras neighbourhood and the parallel re-development of the area.

«We want Votanikos in the next five years to stop being the backyard of the city to evolve into a new neighborhood and there is a great effort to settle urban planning issues to relocate logistics facilities and so on.¹⁷» (Tsiatsiamis in newmoney.gr 2021)

At the same time promises by the mayoral office for the dedication of a municipality space where the markets could be housed in the future have been heard much over time, and are recently on repeat (Konstantinou 202018). Regardless of the promises, whatever scenario happens next, what can be learned from past experience is that the hegemonic planning apparatus most likely will not take into consideration the living and working realities of the subaltern users of Eleonas. Wastepickers know this too, even before the pandemic, yet they seem certain about the fact that the story of the wastepicker markets will not come to an end. The example of space appropriation in the multifaceted case of Eleonas’ wastepicker markets shows that waste collectors will not give up on the common resource of waste and public urban space and will defend their proclaimed right to pursue their livelihood through their trading practice.

«Even if I do not run as a candidate, which is the most likely thing, [...] I’ll always fight and I will fight. September for me is the start of a new season for my bazaar. Uh, I’m going to be fighting to do some things that, uh, I think it’s time to do. That is to look for other bazaars, unions, I don’t know what they have abroad, collect evidence and go and shove it right in their faces and say, hey! You guys are called Europe. Take a look.» (Vahtet 2018)

«Και να μην κατέβω σαν υποψήφιος, που το πιο πιθανό σημείο είναι αυτό, να μην, [...] εγώ πάντα θα αγωνίζομαι και θα αγωνιστώ. Απ’τον Σεπτέμβρη για μένα ξεκινάει μία καινούργια σεζόν γιό το παζάρι μου. Εε, θα αγωνιστώ να κάνω κάποια πράγματα τα οποία, εε, πιστεύω ότι ήρθε η ώρα να τα κάνουμε. Δηλαδή να ψάξω κι άλλα παζάρια, σωματεία, δεν ξέρω τι έχουσε στο εξωτερικό, να μαζέψω στοιχεία και να πάω να τους τα χάσω στην μούρη κατευθείαν να τους πω, να ρε! Εσείς που λέγεστε Ευρώπη. Πάρτε να δείτε.»

Eleonas offered an example of how the demand for visibility and acknowledgement in the interest of wastepicker associations can be paired with the needs of the anonymous individuals who come and set up their stalls and lay out their rags every weekend. In case of further displacement they will most likely lead-and-follow to new locations, and will certainly not disappear in the shadows of a regenerated urban environment.

Author: And if they kick you out, where will you go?

Ilias: If we get kicked out... (whistles)

Author: Who knows, huh?

Ilias: I don’t, we don’t worry. It’s okay. (Ilias 2019)

– Και αν σας διώξουν που θα πάτε;

– Αν μας διώξουν... (σφυρίζει)

– Ποιός ξέρει ε;

– Εγώ δεν, δεν στεναχωριόμαστε. Εντάξει. (Ilias 2019, memo)

¹⁷ Greek original: «θέλουμε ο Βοτανικός στην επόμενη πενταετία να πάψει να είναι η πίσω... αυλή της πόλης, να μετεξελιχθεί σε μία νέα γειτονιά και γίνεται μία μεγάλη προσπάθεια να διευθετηθούν πολεοδομικά ζητήματα, να μεταφερθούν εγκαταστάσεις logistics κ.ο.κ.». Translation by the author.

¹⁸ Konstantinou reports that in early January, Mayor Bakoyannis promised at the city council that he would open an organized market for waste collectors on Αγίου Πολυκάρπου Street (Konstantinou 2020 in ergatiki.gr).



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INTERVIEWS & INFORMANTS

Hasan, Ertzan; Hasan, Raif; Magalios, Spyros; Ibrahim, Ali – Collective interview (2019)

Date of interview: December 12, 2019

Duration: 3:13:00

Place: Proodos Office, Alkminis 17, Petralona Athens

Vahtet, Kamper – Interview (2018)

Date of interview: August 05, 2018

Duration: 1:10:20

Place: Ermis office, Megalou Alexandrou 105, Keramikos Athens

Stefanou, Christos and Arin* - Interview (2020)

Date: January 09, 2020

Duration: 1:02:17

Place: Eleonas refugee camp, Agiou Polykarpou 87

Dino*, guard – informal talk, voice memo (2017)

Date: November 12, 2017

Place: Iraklis market

Aggeliki; Marina* – informal talk, voice memo (2018)

Date: December 02, 2018

Place: Ikaros market

Ilias* – informal talk, voice memo (2019)

Date: July 28, 2019

Place: Proodos market

Ilias – informal talk, voice memo (2019)

Date: August 04, 2019

Place: Proodos market

Mrs. Eleni* – informal talk, voice memo (2020)

Date: August 04, 2019

Place: Orfeos Street

Canteen owner – informal talk, voice memo (2020)

Date: February 16, 2020

Place: Athinagora market

Magalios, Spyros – informal talk, voice memo (2020)

Date: January 04, 2020

Place: Spyros' street, Akadimia Platonos

Magalios, Spyros – informal talk, voice memo (2020)

Date of interview: January 26, 2020

Place: Spyros' street, Akadimia Platonos

Ibrahim; Spyros – informal talk, voice memo (2020)

Date: February 23, 2020

Place: Orfeos Street

Orfeos Street umbrella vendor – informal talk, field note (2007)

Date: November 12, 2017

Place: Orfeos Street

Memo by the author of police operation – field note (2020)

Date: February 16, 2020

Place: Agias Annis Street

Conversation with man on scooter – field note (2019)

Date: July 21, 2019

Place: Orfeos Street

* Pseudonymized

LIST OF FIGURES

If not stated otherwise, illustrations and images are by the author.

P.13, right: Locus GIS mobile app

P.16-17, top: Ferdinand Stademann in: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2008/greece-and-the-levant-a-private-library-l08413/lot.196.html>

P.20, left: Hans Gerber in: ETH Bibliothek, <https://www.e-pics.ethz.ch>

P.21, top right: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d4/Louis_Fran%C3%A7ois_S%C3%A9bastien_Fauvel-athens-before1800.jpg

P.21, bottom right: Leontidou 1990: 50

P.23, right: Dimitis Charisiadis/Benaki Museum in: <https://www.lifo.gr/various/10-fotografies-me-tin-akropoli>

P.25, right: Base map in: <http://maps.stamen.com/>

P.28-29: Curtius, Ernst; Kaupert, Johann A. in: <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/curtius1895a/0003>

P.37, right: Map based on Tsadari 2017: 5

P.38, top left: Ioanna Katsarou, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/14676940@N04/>

P.38, middle left: <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/10/26/society/dipli-anaplasi-mpainoun-stis-rages-votanikos-kai-aleksandras-pote-tha-einai-etoima/>

P.39, bottom left: Google maps

P.40-42: Google street view

P.47, right: Base map by google maps

P.49, right: Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, <http://msa.ypeka.gr/index.php?lang=EN>

P.51, top right: Google maps

P.51, second from top: Bing maps

P.51, second from bottom: <https://www.sdna.gr/podosfairo/superleague/article/596009/panathinaikos-arxiko-plano-toy-votanikoy-me-gipedo-mpasket>

P.51, bottom: <https://asarchitects.gr/projects-item/new-football-stadium-of-panathinaikos-f-c/>

P.53, right: City of Athens / Evmolpidis Yannis 2017

P.65, middle right: Gianluca Beraldo personal archive 2021

P.65, bottom right: Usurum band, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrAkPhCkVCc>

P. 74, left: Townsend 1871: 47ff: <https://archive.org/details/threehundredaes00town/page/46/mode/2up>

P.90, top left: <https://xiromeropress.gr/ποιός-ήταν-ο-γιουσουρούμ-που-έδωσε-το-ό/>

P.90, bottom left: Archives of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, <https://www.lifo.gr/retronaut/spanies-fotografies-apo-tin-athina-toy-80>

P.95, top right: <http://pazari-athens.blogspot.com/>

P.95, second from top: lifo.gr

P.95, second from bottom: Facebook site of wastepicker union Enodios Ermis <https://www.facebook.com/swmateiorakosylle-ktwn.ermis/>

P.95, bottom: <http://pazari-athens.blogspot.com/>

P.114, top, second from top, second from bottom and bottom left: <https://ergatiki.gr/article.php?id=14708&issue=1250>

P.114, middle left: <https://www.greekcomics.gr/forums/index.php?/topic/35952-%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%B6%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%B9/>

P.135, bottom right: Ioanna Katsarou, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/14676940@N04/>

P.169, P.171, P.173, P.175, P.177: Base maps from google maps

P.181, bottom right: G. Ferrario in: <https://www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/an-alternative-approach-to-the-1833-plan-of-athens/>

GLOSSARY

List of abbreviations

MoA	= Municipality of Athens
AP	= Attica Prefecture
DR	= Double Regeneration
MAT	= Riot police force
PD	= Presidential decree
CCRE	= Citizens Committee for the Rescue of Eleonas
CCSWO	= Citizens Committee for the Struggle of Wastepicker Organizations

Areas/Districts

Eleónas /ele'onas/ (*Ελαιώνας*) = "Olive grove", the district of Eleonas

Market terms

Pazári , pl. pazária /pa'zari, pa'zaria/ (<i>παζάρι</i> , pl. <i>παζάρια</i>) = Bazaar, market
Rakosylléktis m., rakosylléktria f. /rakosi'lektis, rakosi'lektria/ (<i>ρακοσυλλέκτης</i> m., <i>ρακοσυλλέκτρια</i> f.) = Wastepicker, scrap collector (mobile)
Paliatzis /pala'dzis/ (<i>Παλιατζής</i>) = Junk/rag dealer (stationary/mobile)
Paleópolis m., paleopólissa f. /paleo'polis, paleo'polisa/ (<i>παλιοπόλης</i> m., <i>παλιοπόλισσα</i> f.) = antiquities trader, old-wares shopkeeper (stationary)
Laíki Agorá , pl. laikés agorés /lai'ki ago'ra, lai'kes ago'res/ (<i>λαϊκή αγορά</i> , pl. <i>λαϊκές αγορές</i>) = Farmers' street market, people's market
Somatío Rakosyllektón /soma'tio rakosilek'ton/ (<i>σωματείο ρακοσυλλεκτών</i>) = Union of Wastepickers-Wasterpickers' Union

Wastepickers' unions/organizations:

(Somatío) Próodos /soma'tio 'proodos/ (<i>Πρόοδος</i>) = Progress (Union)
Allilegýi /alile'ngii/ (<i>Αλληλεγγύη</i>) = Solidarity (Union)
Anagénissí /ana'jenisi/ (<i>Αναγέννηση</i>) = Renaissance/Re-birth (Union)
Ermís /er'mis/ (<i>Ερμής</i>) = Hermes (Union)
Ífestos /'ifestos/ (<i>Ήφαιστος</i>) = Hephestus (Union)
Íkaros /'ikaros/ (<i>Ίκαρος</i>) = Ikarus (Union)

Street names:

(Odós) Ermóu /o'dos er'mu/ (<i>Ερμού</i>) = Hermes (Street)
(Odós) Orféos /o'dos or'feos/ (<i>Ορφέως</i>) = Orfeus (Street)
(Odós) Agíou Polykárpou /o'dos a'jiu poli'karpu/ (<i>Αγίου Πολυκάρπου</i>) = Saint Polykarpos (Street)
(Odós) Agías Ánnis /o'dos a'jias 'anis/ (<i>Αγίας Άννης</i>) = Saint Anna (Street)
(Odós) Dimaráki /o'dos ðima'raki/ (<i>Δημαράκη</i>) = Dimaraki (Street)
Leofóros Athinón /o'dos aθi'non/ (<i>Λεωφόρος Αθηνών</i>), same as: = Athens Avenue, same as:
Leofóros Kaválas /leo'foros ka'valas/ (<i>Λεωφόρος Καβάλας</i>) = Kavala Avenue
Leofóros Kíffissou /leo'foros kifi'su/ (<i>Λεωφόρος Κηφισού</i>) = Kifissos Avenue
Kíffissós /kifi'sos/ (<i>Κηφισός</i>) = May refer to the river Kifissos or as a toponym
Profitis Daniíl /pro'fitis ðani'il/ (<i>Προφήτης Δανιήλ</i>) = May refer to the stream of Prophet Daniil/toponym

Housing/urban terms

Polykatoikía /polikati'kia/ (<i>Πολυκατοικία</i>) = Multi-dwelling, multi-story residential house
Antiparochí /a'diparo'çi/ (<i>Αντιπαροχή</i>) = Land-to-housing system of return
Diplí anáplasi /ðip'li a'naplasi/ (<i>Διπλή ανάπλαση</i>) = Double regeneration

Notes on the Greek transliteration

As there is no unified romanization of the Modern Greek alphabet (or better, there are several), I used in the above names the most common system in use (which is also used in the romanization of most street names), although one can find several spellings, sometimes even from the same people. Most notable variations are:

- the letter Σ σ (written ç at the end of a word) is usually transillterated either as <s> or as <ss>, in oder not to confuse it with the sound /z/ among vowels.

- OI οι, EI ει, Y υ and H η are all pronounced /i/ in modern Greek, though one can find spellings with, respectively, <oi>, <ei> and <y> (however, H η is always written <i>).

- AI αι is pronounced as /e/, so one can find words either spelled with <ai> or with <e>. When written Αϊ αϊ it is always pronounced (and therefore spelled) separately: /ai/.

- The sound /u/ is written ΟΥ ou in Greek, so it can be found either written as <ou> or <u>.

- /g/ before /e/ and /i/ can also be spelled <y>.

Ευχαριστώ τους ρακοσυλλέκτες του Ελαιώνα για τις κουβέντες, τις ιστορίες, την παρέα, τον χώρο που μοιράστηκαν μαζί μου και για το έργο τους. Σπύρο, Μαρίνα, Ερτζάν, Ηλία, Ραΐφ, Αγγελική, Ιμπραήμ, Καμπέρ, Ντίνο, Ελένη, Άννα, Κυριάκο, Κώστα... Χωρίς εσάς η πόλη θα ήταν πιο φτωχή.

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