

Redesign of two incomplete interwar buildings: 32 & 34 Egnatia Str.

Restoration and reuse of Eclecticist buildings in Thessaloniki

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Project Framework

The reuse and adaption of existing buildings in the contemporary life of the city is invaluable for the reduction of the urban fabric's carbon footprint. The demolition and reconstruction of buildings in a continuous building system, influenced by neoclassicist urban planning principles, not only creates structural problems to adjacent structures, but also exponentially increases the embodied energy of the building. Thessaloniki's rapid reconstruction between 1922 up until the outbreak of WWII, has resulted in a considerable amount of Eclecticist, Art Deco and early Modernist style buildings from reinforced concrete and fired bricks, some of which survive to this day. Reinforced concrete has a lifecycle of 80 years, which have long been exceeded in this case. Thessaloniki's eclecticist heritage constitutes an opportunity to not only bring forth the historical character of the city, but also meaningfully reactivate empty shells, as the ones examined in this project.

32 & 34 Egnatia Str.

The project titled "Redesign of two incomplete interwar buildings: 32 & 34 Egnatia Str." is the design thesis of my studies in the School of Architecture, AUTh presented in July 2022. The project concerns two interwar buildings constructed in 1925 as office buildings. The buildings studied in this research were designed and partially built by two prominent and prolific architects of the mid-war era, Max Rubens and Joseph Pleyber. Out of the five and four storeys of the respective designs, only the ground floor and the one above it was realized. The two buildings are located in the burnt zone of Thessaloniki and more specifically on block no.150 in the historic centre of the city. This area throughout the development of the city has hosted commercial and office buildings. Through archival research and contemporary urban analysis, the development of the buildings and the commercial history of this part of the city is navigated.

In this project, the two buildings are restored to the level of their present completion and to each of them is added a floor corresponding to the initial project's drawings. Beyond this addition, three more floors are added in such manner that they don't impose on the interwar buildings. The added metal supporting structure is placed in such a manner as not to interfere with the existing load-bearing structure. Some of the structural and compositional elements are kept and resynthesized to create a new ensemble. The buildings' location is of particular interest, as they are in Egnatia Str., which is very close to the Roman Via Egnatia, where traditionally travellers stopped along their itinerary to rest and find accommodation. The street, to this day, connects distant locations and has many hotels and other accommodation options, keeping a trace of memory from the Roman times.

The two buildings are unified in terms of building program and are reused as a hostel. Egnatia Str. is a highly polluted street, due to the continuous car traffic flow, so in this design proposal, strategies for minimizing the pollution inside the structure are preliminarily explored. The construction of a planted roof on the roof of the building is chosen, in order to achieve on the one hand, the best possible thermal comfort on the upper floors and on the other hand to create a small green spirit to contribute to the reduction of CO₂ in the immediate environment of the building. In addition, special mobile blinds are designed on the openings of the building as an addition to control the sunlight depending on the season and time. Sunlight can be maximized during the winter months, for the full lighting and heating of the interior, while shading can be achieved in the summer months, providing a cooler micro-climate to the building and the surrounding area.

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