



The apartment building in the Eastern Mediterranean: a project funded by the ERC Starting Grant 2024

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ABSTRACT

Within a few short decades following World War II, urbanscapes in the Eastern Mediterranean changed dramatically, and indeed, in a strikingly similar manner. Central historical districts and new suburbs were rapidly refurbished through the banal repetition of a peculiar ‘building block,’ a distinctive mid-sized condominium apartment building type, known as ‘polykatoikía’ in Greece, ‘müteahhit yapımı apartman’ in Turkey, ‘al-Imara’ in Egypt, and ‘bait-Meshutaf’ in Israel. These almost identical transformation paths have largely gone unnoticed. This research frames for the first time the similarities among mid-sized condominium apartment buildings, spread in such a diverse range of geopolitical contexts—spanning from Southern Europe to the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA)—and amid serious bilateral tensions (Greece vs Turkey and Israel vs Egypt), as tangible evidence to unravel broader historical, socio-political, and cultural constructs. Such commonalities on these margins of Europe could signify both the homogenizing effects of post-war modernization within the rubrics of Cold-War conflicts and capitalist expansion, and a challenge to dominant interpretive models that favor one-way ‘exports’ from the developed to the so-called ‘developing’ regions. Tools for visualizing big data (GIS) and state-of-the-art technology such as remote sensing and machine learning, provide unprecedented opportunities for this research’s ambitious scope to deal with extensive, mostly uncontrolled, private-led house-building and urbanization phenomena. Also, the increasing engagement of architectural historians in preserving local knowledge through micro- and oral history methodologies serves as a critical guide to the challenging yet imperative endeavor of documenting the lived experiences of residents, particularly before the first post-war generation diminishes. As crises in the region continue to erupt, MCH-EsMed is expected to provide an unconventional yet nuanced perspective of their ‘pre-history.’