

# Chapter 4

## Exceptional Social Housing in a Residual Welfare State: Housing Estates in Athens, Greece



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**Abstract** This chapter describes housing estates in Athens, Greece in terms of their number, the periods in which they were produced, the public agencies involved in their production, the profile of their beneficiaries and the changes they have undergone since they were produced. It also provides a map of housing estates in the Athens Metropolitan Region depicting their various spatial patterns. Housing estates are a rather exceptional form of social housing in Athens. The fact that rented social housing has never been developed in Greece has limited housing estates not only in terms of their number but also in their social function. Thus, housing estates in Athens have never formed a sector of the housing stock serving the needs of the most vulnerable population groups. Instead, housing estates followed the dominant trend of the local housing provision system—i.e. the promotion of socially diffused homeownership—but played a relatively minor role in the whole process.

**Keywords** Athens, Greece · Housing estates · Housing policy  
Interwar refugees · Working-class homeownership

### 4.1 Introduction

Housing estates in Athens were primarily developed to cater to the housing needs of victims of wars or natural disasters. Housing for the massive wave of refugees from Asia Minor in the early 1920s led to the first batch of housing estates in the city's

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periphery, which only accommodated a small portion of the immigrant's needs. The second group of estates was produced after World War II and the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) to address the needs of refugees that continued to live in slums and other segments of the working class. Again, housing estates only covered a very small share of housing needs and not the most pressing ones. They exclusively provided access to homeownership, a political strategy of authoritarian regimes aimed at gaining political support from a broad stratum of social groups.

In more recent years, housing estates became even more scarce, while the motive for their production was even less focused on specific social housing objectives. Two projects at the fringes of the urban tissue—including the 2004 *Olympiako Chorio* (Olympic Village) that eventually transformed into social housing—were the last housing estates to be constructed in Athens. Newer projects were abandoned after the recent abolition of the Workers' Housing Organization (OEK), the biggest public housing constructor of the post-war period.

Housing estates are a rather exceptional form of social housing in Athens. The fact that rented social housing has never been developed in Greece not only limited the number of housing estates but also restricted their social function. Thus, housing estates followed the dominant trend of the housing provision system—i.e. the social diffusion of homeownership—and, despite some sporadic, ambitious plans, they played a relatively minor role in the whole system due to their small aggregate size. Moreover, the transfer of ownership to beneficiaries without any provision for future maintenance and renewal throughout the post-war period resulted in gradually deteriorating residential areas and the stigmatisation of housing estates.

## **4.2 Periodisation of Policies, Priorities and Forces at Work**

### ***4.2.1 The 1920s and 1930s***

Housing estates first appeared in 1922 at the end of the war between Greece and Turkey, which ceased the short-lived Greek occupation of territories in Asia Minor inhabited by ethnic Greeks. Following the massive ethnic cleansing imposed by the Lausanne Treaty (1923), over one million Greeks were deported from Turkey to Greece and about half a million Turks were deported from Greece to Turkey. The brutal displacement of such a large population created a humanitarian crisis, especially since the newcomers had to be integrated into a state whose population was about 5 million, representing an increase of about 20% (Guizeli 1980; Leontidou 1989).

The overwhelming increase in housing needs was only partially addressed through active policies and the construction of public housing. Initially, refugees settled in camps, and most of them eventually had to find housing solutions on their own with limited assistance from the relevant authorities. A significant share of refugees ended up in urban areas; 230,000 settled in Athens, representing a 50%

population increase. In the next census (1928), the city's population rose to 740,000, including refugees (Leontidou 1989, p. 159). The first encampments in Athens were placed outside the existing urbanised area (see maps in: Papaioannou and Vasilikioti 1975; Leontidou 2017).

A large majority of Asia Minor refugees eventually found housing solutions with little or no direct provision from public authorities (Leontidou 1990). Several factors—including the occupation of public land and the creation of slums, the public provision, or more frequently, the purchase of cheap land lots for self-promotion and self-construction—influenced the way housing for vulnerable groups was addressed in Greece over the long term. Moreover, the abrupt settlement of many poor refugees at the city's periphery radically reshaped its social geography. Both temporary encampments and different types of permanent settlements—including housing estates—accentuated the divide between the relatively affluent centre and the poor peripheral neighbourhoods which, to some extent, corresponded to the division between newcomers and the native population.

Housing estates for Asia Minor refugees were initially constructed between 1922 and 1925 by the Refugee Care Fund (TPP), an ad hoc public body established by the government (Vasiliou 1944; Leontidou 1990). The Refugee Care Fund constructed the first four refugee settlements in Athens, at the margins of the existing urban tissue. After 1925, the Refugee Care Fund was replaced by the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee (EAP), another state authority that undertook the task to allocate the loan that the League of Nations granted to Greece. The Refugee Rehabilitation Committee constructed about 13,500 new dwellings in Athens, covering about 20% of the refugee population's needs (assuming that the average dwelling corresponds to a family of four). Different types of housing were provided and only some of those were dwellings in apartments buildings (Papaioannou and Vasilikioti 1975; Papadopoulou and Sarigiannis 2006). Housing estates in Athens and Piraeus were located in the undeveloped areas at the margins or clearly outside the limits of the urban tissue, but were eventually engulfed by the city's expansion, especially after World War II (Fig. 4.3). Even refugees with a bourgeois background settled outside the city, but not in housing estates.

By the end of the 1920s and during the 1930s, the Ministry of Social Care also began constructing temporary settlements and dwellings to address the continuously growing housing needs, since refugees often relocated to large cities from the rural areas where they were originally driven. Many of these settlements were of very poor quality and brought about the emergence of vast urban slums in their surroundings. After 1930, the Ministry became the exclusive provider for the needs of urban refugees and adopted slum clearance as its basic strategy (Vasiliou 1944) (Figs. 4.1 and 4.2).

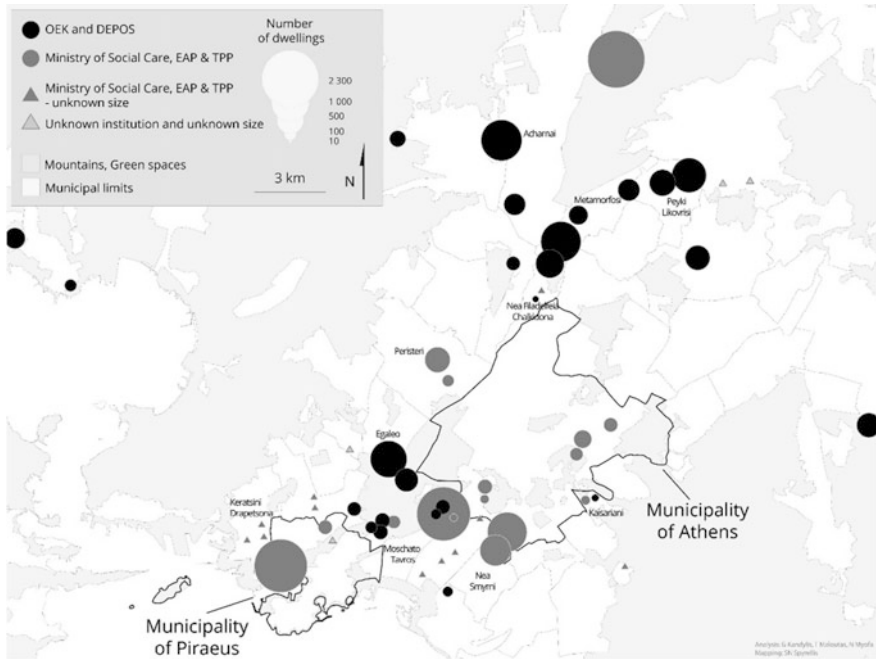
Under those extraordinary conditions, state authorities clearly opted for promoting homeownership instead of establishing a social rented housing sector, which never developed in Greece. The option of social rent was soon discarded, and refugees were granted subsidised loans for the purchase of their dwellings. The only restriction to private ownership that remained for some time was the prohibition of selling housing units to non-refugee households, even after repayment of the loan.



**Fig. 4.1** The first four condominiums in Dourgouti, part of the old public housing stock for refugees constructed between 1935 and 1936 by the Ministry of Social Care, 2016. *Source* Myofa, personal archive, 2016



**Fig. 4.2** View of the refugee housing estate on Alexandras Avenue, central Athens, 1933–1935. *Source* Maloutas, personal archive, 2009



**Fig. 4.3** Housing estates in the Athens metropolitan region by size and public agency, 2017. *Source* Compiled information from Papaioannou and Vasilikioti (1975); Papadopoulou and Sariagiannis (2006); Stavridis et al. (2009); Gouvousi (2011) and local visits by the authors

### 4.2.2 From the 1950s to the Late 1970s

The destruction caused by World War II, the Occupation (1941–1944) and the Civil War (1946–1949) caused a new very serious housing shortage in Athens, as in the rest of Greece (Doxiadis 1947). Apart from the already impoverished urban population, the metropolitan area now had to accommodate internal migrants fleeing poverty and political persecutions in rural areas (Kyriazi-Alisson 1998). The extraordinary housing needs created by wars, ethnic cleansing and natural disasters took precedence over the needs of industrial development created in other countries. The following decades (until the late 1970s) were a period of intense economic development and impressive population growth for Athens. Yet, at the same time, the contribution of public construction in the impressive reconstruction and urban expansion of those decades was of limited importance.

In place of public construction, state policies prioritised homeownership through self-promotion—often involving self-construction—by various means. This option, coming from the interwar period, was adopted even more eagerly since it was considered a way to gain political support or at least to neutralise the resistance of the electorate of the left who were vanquished in the Civil War. A decisive measure



**Fig. 4.4** Ten-storey condominiums in Tavros built between 1969 and 1971 by the Ministry of Social Care, 2016. *Source* Myofa, personal archive, 2016



**Fig. 4.5** View of the Olypiako Chorio estate, 2004. *Source* Acharnes web page, 2017

permitted the segmentation of large peri-urban properties and their sale as small plots officially destined for gardening, which ended up in irregular construction by buyers. Eventually, the latter had to become part of the clientelist regime, exchanging their political support against the legalisation of their construction. Unlike in other countries of the Southern European region, homeownership was boosted mainly through the initiative of the final users (i.e. self-promotion) and through the legal provision of a land-for-flats system (*antiparochi*<sup>1</sup>) that enabled non-monetary exchanges between small landowners and small size building firms.

Most public housing projects in Athens were undertaken by the Ministry of Social Care, carrying on the refugee slum clearance programme of the preceding period. This activity culminated in the 1960s and early 1970s (Papaioannou and Vasilioti 1975). The Ministry adopted the same policy model used for the refugees of the 1920s to address housing needs of other groups, such as victims of natural disasters. The first post-World War II housing estate was constructed in 1955 in the area of *Asyrmatos*, in the city centre not far from the Acropolis. It comprised 150 dwellings in detached and four-storey houses, replacing the shacks of a refugee settlement from the 1920s in the same area (Saliveros 1961).

The Workers' Housing Organization (OEK), established as an independent agency by the Ministry of Employment and Social Security in 1954 (Leontidou 1990), was the first institution meant to initiate a more comprehensive housing policy. The Workers' Housing Organization was a *sui generis* obligatory partnership of salaried workers, directed by the government. Workers had to contribute 1% of their salaries to fund its activity. Employers also had to contribute an additional 0.5% of labour cost. The objective of the Workers' Housing Organization was to provide housing options for its members, under certain preconditions. As with other public housing construction initiatives, the policy of the Workers' Housing Organization was to promote homeownership, in this case for working-class and employee families. Like the Ministry of Social Care, the Workers' Housing Organization constructed projects of identical condominiums and blocks of flats in different urban areas throughout Greece. Construction activities escalated towards the end of the period, but mainly outside Athens (Gouvousi 2011) (Fig. 4.4).

During this first post-war period, the number of people who catered to their housing needs through self-promotion—mostly legal, but often illegal—was incomparably larger than those who benefited from direct housing provision by the relevant state agencies. If we also take into account those who accessed housing through the private market—especially those who bought apartments during the building frenzy of the 1960s and 1970s—the share of direct housing provision by state agencies becomes much smaller.

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<sup>1</sup>The system of *antiparochi* permits joint ventures between landowners and builders, whereby the latter gets a share of the building at the end of the operation (Antonopoulou 1991; Katsikas 2000).

### 4.2.3 *From the Early 1980s to the Present*

After 1980, the Workers' Housing Organization attempted to renew and enrich its construction activities. One of the main targets was to improve quality and reduce aesthetic distance between its projects and the average housing standards of the day (Gouvousi 2011). This attempt was implemented especially in specific cases of innovative new settlements. For example, smaller housing blocks on a large land plot and low-density settlement, allegedly preferred by the beneficiaries, were constructed in the mid-1980s in the north-western part of the suburban ring of Athens (in the working-class municipality of *Acharnai*), equipped with local centres for commerce and recreation.

In the northern suburbs (municipality of *Pefki*), the settlement of *Iliako Chorio* (Solar Village) was constructed in the same period, in proximity to middle-class residential areas. It was planned to use solar energy for heating but the renewable energy system collapsed a few years later. More recently, the settlement of *Olympiako Chorio* was constructed for the 2004 Olympic Games to serve as the accommodation centre for athletes during the Games. As initially planned, it was transformed into a social housing residential compound after the Games, albeit facing several problems regarding the completion of public and private amenities that should accompany its residential function.

A total of 62 settlements were built by the Workers' Housing Organization in metropolitan Athens since the mid-1950s, with a total of 610 settlements throughout Greece.<sup>2</sup> The Workers' Housing Organization remained the main public housing constructor in Greece until its abolition in 2012 (Gouvousi 2011), following policies to reduce the size of the state after the burst of the sovereign debt crisis. The abolition of the Workers' Housing Organization, apart from the negative impact on other housing policies such as subsidised rent, led to the abandonment of new construction projects. No other institution has taken over the Workers' Housing Organization's function (Fig. 4.5).

## 4.3 Physical Form

Most housing estates in Athens are rather small areas in the midst of more important residential areas that surround them. Only four estates exceed a population of 3,000 people: two of the more recent estates at the peri-urban fringe (*Olympiako Chorio* and *Acharnai*) and two older estates in the working-class western suburbs (*Nea Filadelfia* and *Tavros*) that were initially constructed to house refugees from the

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<sup>2</sup>The Workers' Housing Organization's activity has been targeted much more towards mid-sized Greek cities. The number of settlements produced in Athens represents about 10% of the total, while the share of Athens in the country's population was about 31% in 1981 when the activity of this agency culminated.



slum areas around Athens. No estate exceeds a population of 10,000, and from this perspective Athens is a marginal case among the other cities in this book. However, their average size of 1,340 residents is significant for a city where there are no private housing estates and the only comparable unit is the much smaller typical Athenian residential building. The Greek term *sygrotima* that is used to describe estates can be translated as both compound and estate, and denotes their 'big' size in relative terms. Moreover, there are no considerable urban zones exclusively characterised by public housing. This is compatible with the very small portion that housing estates account for in the city's total housing stock (about 1.5%, see the section on the demographics of housing estates). The small size of the estates may also mark an effort to construct coherent local communities.

Different types of estates had already emerged in the pre-war period, including independent and semi-detached houses (either with one or with two storeys), rows of two-storey houses and larger estates consisting of multilevel condominiums (Papaioannou and Vasilikioti 1975). The latter prevailed especially after the war, although never entirely, since clusters of two-storey houses continued to be produced in the first years of the Workers' Housing Organization's activity. Influences of garden city planning and modern architecture (CIAM, Bauhaus, ville radieuse) were clear on street layouts and on buildings' forms (Filippidis 1984; Stavridis et al. 2009).

Most of the blocks of independent and semi-detached houses do not exist anymore, as they were demolished and replaced by privately built blocks of flats during the decades that followed, as their owners eventually had the opportunity to exploit the land and increase their property's size and value through the land-for-flats system (*antiparochi*) mentioned above. However, some of those houses were either abandoned or (more rarely) renovated and continue to appear occasionally among other higher buildings. In a few cases, relatively large remnants of the initial blocks of independent and semi-detached houses have been transformed to commercial or recreation spots, aided by their rare architectural form.

Pioneer Greek architects found the opportunity, especially in the 1930s, to implement the functionalist principles of modernist architecture in the layout of the buildings and the new settlements. In the case of blocks of condominiums, the provision of common open and green space marked a difference from the dominant pattern of continuous construction, which prevailed in the vast majority of privately constructed residential areas of the city. However, these advantages were increasingly compromised. Many among the settlements are situated at the borders between municipal authorities, witnessing the peripherality of their initial position. The production of housing estates often led to creating isolated areas, poorly connected with the rest of the city. With time, these disadvantages decreased as public housing areas were rapidly engulfed by the expanding city, but other disadvantages emerged.

In several cases, especially in older settlements where architectural innovation was more 'tolerated', some building characteristics mark a clear difference between the estates and the regular building types considered acceptable by the same social strata. For example, the absence of the provision of very small balconies was a

sacrifice in order to increase common space, but an important disadvantage for Athens's climatic conditions. Lacking domestic space led to the closing of small balconies and their incorporation into the apartment interior. Open and/or common spaces were often appropriated by residents situated next to them for private use (addition of rooms, private gardens) simulating similar practices in the surrounding areas. At the same time, some features like the small common entrances of the buildings or the open staircases tended to create a kind of symbolic inferiority, as well as feelings of insecurity.

Various plans have been experimented for the common-use space of the estates (Stavridis et al. 2009). Some of them adopted innovative (for Athens) ways to promote community life, especially through the creation of community markets, the provision of space for indoor and outdoor community activities and experimental solutions to promote the relationship between private and public use of space. These attempts have mostly led to failures and progressive abandonment of such innovations. This outcome can be mainly explained by the fact that all housing estates in Athens were rapidly turned to condominiums, where the low-means beneficiaries who were able to become apartment owners did not have the resources or any assistance to maintain and upgrade the quality of their property, let alone that of the common spaces of the estates. In recent years, maintaining and upgrading housing properties was not a priority, especially for low-means households, since many Athenian households have been struggling to even pay for heating their apartments during the winter.

#### **4.4 Allocation Process and Tenure**

Housing estates in Athens were initially produced under exceptional conditions which contributed to their particular character. Providing housing units and settlements for victims of various disasters, especially for Asia Minor refugees and their descendants, initially produced a homogeneous profile of housing estates, especially since state authorities tended to segregate different strata of the refugee population (Guizeli 1980). The policy decision to promote homeownership over home rental made this initial homogeneity a more permanent feature, further sustained by restrictions to selling outside the refugee population.

The process of housing allocation by the Ministry of Social Care comprised initially the inventory of families who lived in shacks. The allocation of apartments to beneficiaries was based on the number of their family members and on the condition that the beneficiaries' families were not homeowners or landowners in some other area. During the demolition of the shacks and the building of the new estate, beneficiaries were given a rent subsidy. Allocation of apartments was implemented through a lottery among potential beneficiaries, who did not have the option to choose apartments according to the features they wanted. In many cases, households were relocated from the neighbourhood in which they used to live. The transition from shacks to apartment buildings, in spite of the improvement of

housing conditions, brought about significant changes in other aspects of everyday life affecting the neighbourhoods' social cohesion and the sense of solidarity among residents.

The establishment of the Workers' Housing Organization in the 1950s marked a significant turn in public housing policy. Focusing on providing housing for salaried workers, it followed what happened in industrial countries in Europe and elsewhere and, by that, became a symbol of modernization. Eligibility for beneficiaries depended always on their work record, which they had to prove. This meant that a large part of workers and employees working informally or with interrupted contracts were excluded. It was salaried workers and employees with the higher potential of repaying for their access to homeownership that were eligible; in other words, the part of these groups with relatively high and steady income. Different types of lottery were used, since a much larger number of potential beneficiaries applied for the relatively small number of housing units supplied. Restrictions for transferring the apartments to third parties applied until repayment, and subletting was also restricted, but the rule about the latter has often been transgressed.

It took many years or even decades before homogeneity started to decline as a consequence of new major demographic changes combined with the progressive decline of living conditions in housing estates. The large internal migratory movement of the 1950s to the 1970s and, more recently, the settlement of transnational immigrants since the early 1990s brought new low-means households to the city. The latter found shelter in the most affordable sector of the existing housing stock, including in apartments in declining housing estates, rented by their initial owners or their descendants.

Like housing estates in other cities around the world, the Athenian ones were initially desirable residential spaces for the upper layers of salaried workers and employees, but their desirability declined rapidly in parallel with the fast improvement of housing conditions throughout the city and their own rapid deterioration. Today, despite the existence of estates produced in different periods and characterised by different standards, housing estates in Athens are marked by their residual character and stigmatisation, especially due to their very limited and haphazard maintenance and improvement. Residents generally have limited capacity to undertake such tasks by their own means. Estates are further affected negatively by the presence of abandoned dwellings and dwellings with ambiguous legal status (for example, due to non-repayment, bureaucratic obstacles in the procedure of legal transfer or disagreements among multiple inheritors).

Public housing projects in Athens were always meant to produce dwellings that would end up as owner-occupied—either destined to satisfy the housing needs of the victims of natural and human disasters or destined to house salaried workers—after a subsidised housing loan was paid off by the beneficiary household. After repayment, the beneficiaries became homeowners of their dwellings with full rights and were also generally free to rent or sell them in the market. In this way, distributed dwellings became an asset for the beneficiaries or their descendants who were able to use them to generate money income, if they decided not to live in

them. This has been a widespread practice, especially in the older and deteriorating estates, among households that experienced upward social mobility (mainly inter-generational) and relocated outside the estates. In some cases, the apartments were rented to non-beneficiaries in the shadow private rented sector even before repayment (and before beneficiaries became full owners).

As a result of these processes, tenure structure in the census tracts that contain housing estates is almost identical with the tenure structure in the entire metropolitan area (Table 4.1). Households in owner-occupied dwellings account for 70% and households in privately rented dwellings for 25% of the total. The similar tenure structure in and outside housing estate areas is enough evidence that the privately owned dwellings in housing estates are generally integrated into the housing market in a similar way to other parts of the housing stock.

## 4.5 Demographics and Social Profile

Calculation of population in housing estates in Athens is necessarily based on approximations, since there are no official records for the estates and the dwellings they comprise. Moreover, there are multiple agencies responsible for part of the estates and some of these have been recently abolished, leaving no responsible authority that could provide such data. This is partly explicable, since most housing estates by now are simple condominiums, absolutely independent from the public agencies that produced them.

The most reliable available source is the national census. However, even the most detailed geographical level of the census tract (CT) does not usually coincide with the limits of the estates, due to their rather small surface. Estates often constitute only part of a census tract, while in some cases even small estates are split into different census tracts. Under these conditions, and after identifying on the map, the 106 census tracts containing publicly funded housing estates (in a total of 3,185 census tracts in the metropolitan area of Athens),<sup>3</sup> we estimated the share of the local population in each census tract that lives in the estates, using the estates' surface and the number of floors.<sup>4</sup> We thus estimated a population of about 61,000 persons in 49 housing estates in 2011. Similar results were obtained for 2001 and 1991 (58,000 and 54,000 individuals, respectively). These figures mean that the

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<sup>3</sup>The spatial unit we use in this chapter is a derivative of the official census tracts, with a minimum population of 1,000 and an average population of 1,200 individuals.

<sup>4</sup>Satellite images from Google Maps were used in order to visually identify the proportion of the estates' surface in the total built surface of their census tracts. The estimated shares vary between 0.08% and 100%. All census tracts with any proportion of publicly constructed residential buildings are included in the housing estates statistics that follow.

share of people living in housing estates in the Athens metropolitan area was about 1.6% in 2011, almost identical to that in 1991 and 2001 (1.5%).<sup>5</sup>

In terms of basic demographic characteristics, the population of census tracts with housing estates does not differ significantly from the total population of the metropolitan area. The average age of residents in census tracts containing housing estates was 41.5 years in 2011 compared to 41.1 years for the whole metropolitan area; and 17.6% of this population was over 65 years compared to 17.3% for the metropolitan area; and 15.8% of housing estates' residents lived in households with no family nucleus, compared to 15.5% in the whole metropolitan area. The proportion of single-parent families was 14.1%, slightly higher than that for the metropolitan area (12.2%).

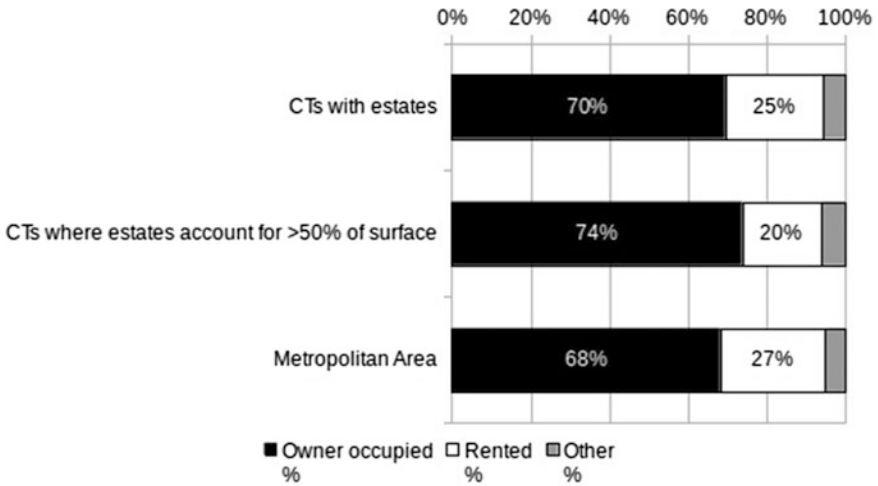
The share of immigrants from less developed countries in census tracts containing housing estates was 10.8% in 2011, slightly higher than their share in the metropolitan area (9.5%). However, there are noticeable exceptions in some cases of older (refugee) estates in central Athens, where the presence of immigrants is much higher (21% in *Dourgouti* and 25% in *Alexandras Avenue*). Immigrants are more present in the estates where the filtering-down process has been long-lasting and more pronounced (Fig. 4.6).

Figure 4.7 summarises certain differences between areas containing housing estates and the rest of the city. The unemployment rate is considerably higher in housing estate areas and especially in areas with higher concentration of housing estates (of more than 50% of the respective surface). The socio-professional distinctiveness of the estates is indicated by the relative absence of professionals (major group 2 of ISCO-08). These occupations almost disappear in higher concentrations of estates. Professionals were not eligible for the estates in the beginning and their meagre presence should be attributed to intergenerational mobility rather than to some form of gentrification process for which there is no other corroborating evidence. On the other hand, the relatively stronger presence of routine occupations (major group 9 of ISCO-08) is evidence of a filtering-down process in the estates. Furthermore, the presence of the broader category of manual workers (major groups 7, 8 and 9 of ISCO-08)—comprising the traditional skilled working-class and the unskilled routine occupations—is higher in the broad areas containing estates and considerably lower, even than the city's average, in areas where housing estates prevail. This might mean that the filtering-down process attained the better-off part of the salaried workers who probably moved away from the estates but not from the surrounding traditional working-class areas.

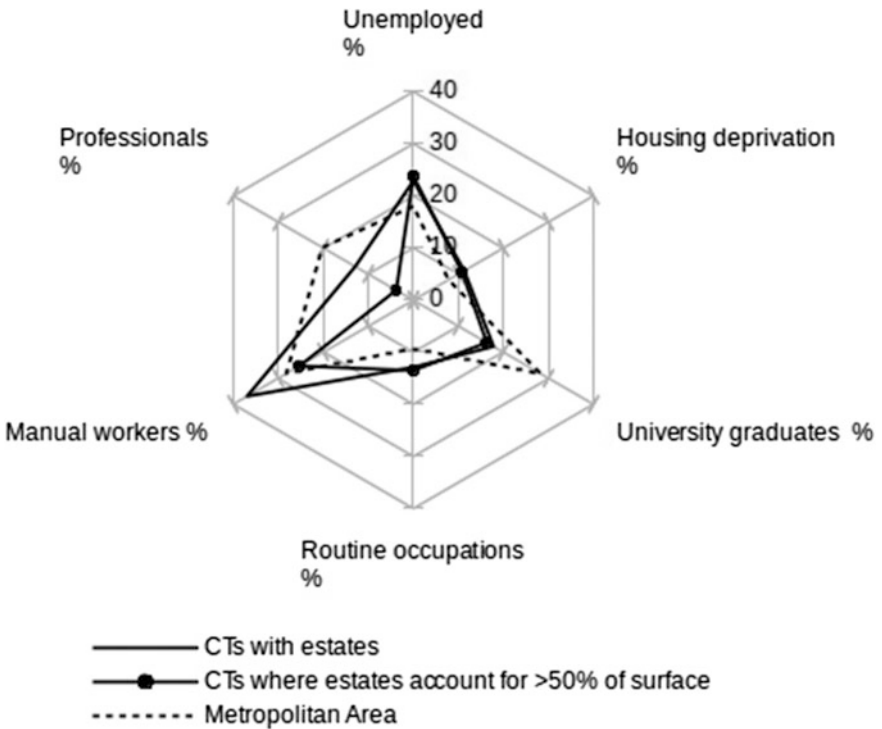
The social differentiation of the estates is also reflected in the educational level of their inhabitants. Among residents aged over 25 in census tracts with estates, 17.8% were university graduates in 2011, in comparison with 28.3% in the metropolitan area. However, there is a much lower difference in regard to current participation in

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<sup>5</sup>These figures may represent a minor underestimation, since some dispersed houses of the pre-war refugee settlements that have not been demolished are not identifiable amidst the newer residential buildings. In any case, their identification would not alter significantly the whole picture.



**Fig. 4.6** Tenure structure in housing estate areas and Athens Metropolitan Area, 2011. *Data Source* Panorama of Greek Census Data



**Fig. 4.7** Sociodemographic characteristics in areas containing housing estates, Athens Metropolitan Area, 2011. *Data Source* Panorama of Greek Census Data

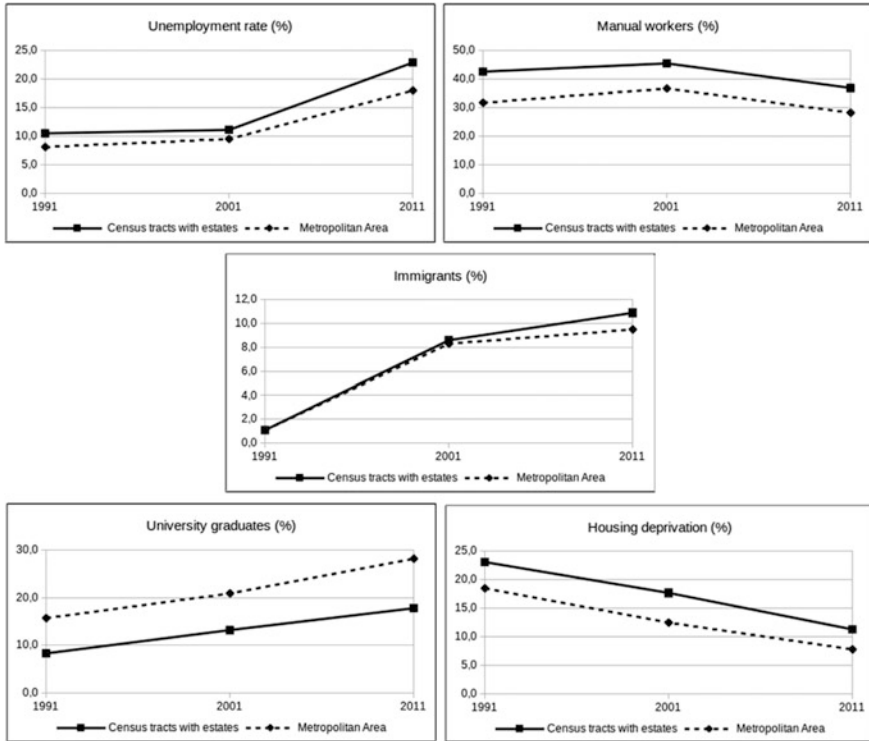
tertiary education: the proportion of adults in tertiary education was 4.2% in census tracts with estates and 4.7% in the whole metropolitan area, an indication that the older education disparity is not reproduced in recent times.

Another variable which expresses living conditions in a direct way is available housing space per capita. Residents in census tracts with estates live in dwellings with an average surface of 29.1 square metres per person, while the metropolitan average is somewhat higher at 32.4 square metres per person. Census tracts with estates also show higher rates of housing deprivation, defined as living in dwellings with less than 15 square metres per person: 11.3% of estates' residents live in such dwellings, while the respective proportion for the entire metropolitan area is 7.8%. Since the average household size in census tracts with estates and in the entire metropolitan area is almost identical (2.53 members per household), these figures indicate slightly disadvantaged housing conditions in the former.

Interestingly enough, this landscape of differences seems to be quite stable over time. Figure 4.8 presents the comparative dynamics of some of the above sociodemographic variables. In general, census tracts with estates seem to follow the general trends of the metropolitan area between 1991 and 2011. As a consequence, both relative disparities, as in the cases of manual workers (ISCO-08 major groups 7-8-9), university graduates and housing deprivation, as well as similarities, as in the case of immigrants, tend to persist. The only exception is the unemployment rate, which increased slightly faster in census tracts with estates than in the metropolitan area between 2001 and 2011.

The comparison of census tracts comprising housing estates with their immediate surrounding residential areas (i.e. in adjacent census tracts not containing estates) generates a more complex picture at the microscale of the Athenian neighbourhood (Table 4.1). The unemployment rate and the proportion of routine occupations are generally higher, while the proportion of tertiary education graduates is lower in the estates than in their surrounding areas, even when the differences are quite small. In regard to immigration, except in older central city estates where some concentration is observed, the proportion of immigrants is generally very close or even lower in the estates in comparison to the surrounding areas. In some cases, this might indicate the existence of native working-class enclaves in the estates and in other cases the rather recent production of the estate—e.g. the Olympiako Chorio settlement that was transferred to beneficiaries in the mid-2000s—which precludes high rates of mobility.

Moreover, this comparison illustrates the importance of the social profile of the broader areas in which estates are located. In the traditional working-class suburbs of western Athens and Piraeus, most housing estates present sociodemographic characteristics almost identical with those of their neighbouring areas. On the contrary, estates located in middle-class areas in the northern suburbs are socially much more distant from their surroundings, especially concerning occupational composition, the proportion of tertiary education and to a lesser extent unemployment rate. Older estates in the city centre also differ substantially from their surroundings, especially regarding access to tertiary education and the proportion of immigrants from less developed countries.



**Fig. 4.8** Comparative evolution of census tracts with housing estates and the Athens Metropolitan Area. *Data Source* Panorama of Greek Census Data

### 4.6 Ongoing Degradation and New Planning Initiatives

There are two main parameters which affected the evolution of the socioeconomic and demographic profile of the housing estates of Athens. The first is that all the estates—regardless of the period they were produced—were destined for owner occupation and, thus, did not make much difference in the city’s housing market and the social profile of the particular neighbourhoods where they were located since they followed the dominant housing mode. The second parameter is that the responsible public agencies were only involved during the production, allocation and repayment period. Taking into account that beneficiaries comprised exclusively low-means households, it was inevitable that housing estates started to deteriorate from day one due to the perpetual lack of resources for maintenance and upgrading. Moreover, housing estates were produced during an era of impressive population growth and of rapidly improving housing conditions. Therefore, living in housing estates seemed as a kind of entrapment to increasingly lower housing standards, especially for estates not adjacent to working-class areas.



**Table 4.1** Comparison of population characteristics in census tracts comprising housing estates (est.) with their surrounding residential areas (area)

	Unemployed (%)	Professionals (%)	Manual workers (incl. routine occupations) (%)	Routine occupations (%)	University graduates (25 over) (%)	Housing deprivation (dwellings of less than 15 sm <sup>2</sup> per person) (%)	Immigrants (%)
<i>City centre</i>							
Dourgouti (est.)	21.5	13.3	36.1	13	19.3	13.7	20.6
Dourgouti (area)	19.4	18	31.6	11.7	25.6	8.6	17.4
Alexandras (est.)	25.9	16.1	31.2	14.7	24.7	8.4	24.8
Alexandras (area)	15.3	25.5	25.2	10.8	33.8	9.2	13.2
<i>Northern suburbs</i>							
Iliako Chorio—Kifisia (est.)	21.2	20.8	29.3	11.3	28	7.2	8
Iliako Chorio—Kifisia (area)	13	28.3	19.1	4.9	37.9	3.8	3.5
Pallini (est.)	22.6	6.5	44.3	15.8	10.4	3.1	5.3
Pallini (area)	13.3	22.4	25.7	8.3	31.6	4.9	7.2
Olympiako Chorio (est.)	23.2	7.8	42.6	13.9	14.2	4.7	2.7
Olympiako Chorio (area)	21.5	21.3	32.3	12.4	31.1	11.7	6.6
<i>Western suburbs</i>							
Tavros (est.)	26.1	8.8	40.8	13.9	13.2	12.4	12.8
Tavros (area)	21.2	11	35.7	11.5	17.4	11.1	11.1
Egaleo—Renti (est.)	23.5	8.7	41.2	14.7	13.3	12.6	12.6
Egaleo—Renti (area)	22.8	9.2	41.3	14	13.5	13	12.8
Aghia Varvara (est.)	24.9	7.8	40.8	14	10.9	19.7	6.3
Aghia Varvara (area)	22.7	12.3	33	9.3	16.1	10.3	5.1
Keratsimi (est.)	22.9	11.8	35.6	9.3	14.1	10.8	7.5
Keratsimi (area)	22.1	11.9	32.5	8.9	15.8	7.1	8.2
Nea Filadelfia (est.)	20.1	15.5	31.3	9.3	20.5	7.6	9.4
Nea Filadelfia (area)	17.8	15.5	31.1	8.2	21.8	7.9	8.8

Properties in housing estates eventually followed the fate of the rest of the housing stock, since after they were repaid they became ordinary apartments. Shifting and sorting of the housing market relegated most estate properties to lower positions of this market's hierarchy, and processes of filtering-down deprived estates from a considerable part of the skilled working-class and salaried employees who were the main beneficiaries at the time they were produced.

New policies about old housing estates were rather scarce, since they constitute private properties where the state or local authorities have no greater vested interest than anywhere else. The link with the public sector is, therefore, mainly historical and symbolic, but it is true that residents of housing estates feel much more entitled to public assistance than others (Myofa [forthcoming](#)). Such new policies were mostly driven by cultural rather than social considerations—i.e. preserving the city's architectural patrimony—as were most of the planning interventions since the 1980s, including the regeneration of the old neighbourhood of *Plaka* and other areas near the city centre, like *Gazi* and *Metaxourgheio* (Alexandri 2013). Interventions related to housing estates were often ineffective, as in the case of the renewal project for the centrally located estate on *Alexandras* avenue (dating back to the 1930s), which never materialised (Fig. 4.2). Various regeneration plans were proposed, including the demolition of part of the estate that was opposed by the residents (Tzirtzilaki 2014). In 2009, the responsible state agency decided that the estate should be preserved because of its historical and architectural significance.

A completely different outcome resulted from the much more active and efficient intervention in Tavros. The estate was radically renovated by DEPOS—the planning and housing agency under the Ministry of Public Works—with the contribution of the Municipality of *Tavros* following the active agreement of current residents and former residents who left due to degradation. This estate comprised several groups of buildings from the 1930s and the 1950s, the first produced by the Ministry of Social Care for Asia Minor refugees and the second by the Ministry of Reconstruction, with a total of 140 dwellings (Papadopoulou and Sarigiannis 2006). The majority of them were about 25–30 m<sup>2</sup>, reflecting housing standards at the time they were built, and a smaller number of dwellings were bigger (30–50 m<sup>2</sup>), but the real situation was much worse according to Kostas Varelidis, former manager of the consortium DEPOS-Municipality of Tavros:

there was a kind of ghetto area (...) too degraded, a tragic situation. There were apartments of 50 sq.m. in which lived 10 people. (...) And the social status (of residents) was too low. Because those who had made money (...) had left and had gone elsewhere. (...) (interviewed by Myofa, 06/10/2015; Myofa [forthcoming](#)).

Over the years, initial owners were replaced by new residents (internal migrants mostly) who settled in as tenants or as new owners. New poor residents were generally unable to renovate their apartments. Moreover, several apartments remained closed or abandoned because their owners were unable to rent or sell them. According to Aristidis Romanos, former director of the design and research department of DEPOS, the regeneration

was an initiative of a group of apartment owners (...) who, through the Mayor of the Municipality, came to DEPOS and said, “here is an issue, what can you do since you are the public agency of planning and housing?” (...) The Mayor became the intermediate between the public agency and the citizens (interviewed by Myofa, 21/10/2015; Myofa [forthcoming](#)).

These managing practitioners of DEPOS were wholeheartedly involved in the project. Varelidis discusses ‘complete participatory planning’ and Romanos believes that the contribution of DEPOS was much less architectural than social. Moreover, a great effort was deployed in order to provide housing space according to effective needs in the new estate, even if the supplementary space in many cases had to be provided below the construction cost (Myofa [forthcoming](#)).

However, this was an exceptional case. Most estates have never been renovated since they were first built, in spite of the effort of DEPOS to use the positive experience from Tavros in other cases. In *Dourgouti*, for example, the old stock of public estate building consisting of eight condominiums was constructed during the 1930s for Asia Minor refugees. These buildings followed a similar degradation process and their population increasingly comprised new poorer households as the position of the estate in the city’s residential hierarchy deteriorated. However, there are still many descendants of Asia Minor refugees—sometimes fourth generation—who reside in the old building stock for practical (proximity to the city centre), as well as sentimental reasons. It is mainly these old residents who resist regeneration projects for the old estates. They believe that due to the country’s financial situation and the lack of social policy, the compensation they could get from expropriation would be very small, while they would lose the economic security that home-ownership provides. Eventually, DEPOS was abolished in 2010, 2 years before the Workers’ Housing Organization was also terminated.

## 4.7 Conclusion: Current Challenges for Housing Estates

The first thing about housing estates in Athens is that they no longer represent a particular challenge for public policies at the metropolitan level, if they ever did. They are a small part of the city’s broader housing stock to which they were integrated a long time ago in terms of property relations, while the agencies that produced them have either been abolished or are no longer responsible for their fate. However, estates experience a number of particular problems that should be addressed by public policies, since they appear to follow a trajectory of perpetual decline. The main problem leading to this decline is the inability of their residents—usually owner-occupiers—to maintain and upgrade the private and collective spaces of the estates.

At the same time, there is a much broader challenge than existing housing estates: it is the absence of housing solutions for social groups most in need, to which the currently existing housing estates and the policy that produced them were never an adequate response both in quantitative and qualitative terms. In terms of

quantity, housing estates have a capacity of about 60,000 inhabitants in a city with a population of 4 million. In terms of quality, the production of housing estates in Athens has primarily been related to facing exceptional situations and events—from the refugee crisis of the 1920s to the Olympic Games of 2004—rather than to cater in a systematic way for the housing needs of the part of society which persistently does not have access to decent housing. Moreover, this production aimed exclusively at promoting homeownership and, therefore, targeted households with a level and security of income that made them reliable for repaying the subsidised loan they obtained to become apartment owners in the housing estates.

It may sound paradoxical that with such a small and ill-targeted provision of public housing in a rather poor European country, there was no major housing crisis since the end of World War II. This is even more paradoxical for Athens, whose population almost tripled since that date and housing needs escalated at least until the 1980s with the settlement of internal migrants, and again in the 1990s and 2000s with the important inflow of immigrants from poorer countries. The absence of housing crisis, as well as of social movements related to housing (Siatitsa 2014), can only be understood in the South European context of residual welfare states, where public assistance in terms of various social services was different from their form in the classic West or North European welfare states, while other institutions—and primarily the family—worked as a substitute for their organization and provision (Allen et al. 2004). The state has not been absent in the social reproduction process in this region. Regarding housing, in particular, it has not been particularly involved in direct housing provision but followed policies that indirectly lowered substantially the cost of access to homeownership and made it effectively more affordable to much broader social strata than in the rest of Europe (Arbaci 2018).

The real challenge is that the ineffectiveness of the South European residual welfare model has become more pronounced in Greece in a period of severe economic austerity, recession, mass unemployment and precarisation. The traditional ways for lower status social groups to access homeownership—i.e. self-promotion and self-construction—are no longer an option and working-class as well as lower middle-class groups are limited to defensive strategies for managing the properties they already have. New property-less groups have been increasingly present with increased difficulty to emulate the local dominant housing model in a period when access to homeownership becomes increasingly unequal in terms of class. Homelessness—which was marginal during the post-war period—has been rising (Arapoglou and Gounis 2018) and the most deprived groups—usually combining the lowest category in the occupational hierarchy (routine occupations) with an ethnic identity related to subaltern social positions—have been relegated to the worst part of the private rented sector. As a result, the latter have been experiencing acute housing issues—enhanced by the effect of the sovereign debt crisis which increased unemployment and poverty and by the new refugee crisis from Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan—and are increasingly concentrated in particular neighbourhoods in the city centre and part of the periphery, creating potentially new spaces of segregation.

On the other hand, important resources remain untapped, especially the very large number of vacant houses which, partly at least, are situated in areas where needs are the most pressing (Maloutas and Spyrellis 2016). For the time being, these broader housing issues are not tackled by the relevant central or local administrations, which have no know-how and tradition in housing and area-based policies. On the contrary, regressive steps were taken with the abolition of the few available institutional resources following the imposed reduction of resources for social services. Under these circumstances, the problems of existing housing estates may appear as a small glitch on the screen. However, new policy tools that would allow for the improvement of the deteriorating housing stock and the expansion of housing opportunities for those facing risks of housing deprivation seem to be matters of urgent priority in the immediate future.

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