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## **Public Space in the Greek Island Village**

### **Proposal for the Olsen & Messinas Travel Fellowship to Greece**

#### **1. Architecture without architects**

"Using materials native to a region, a way of building consonant to the techniques of an age, a way of thinking belonging to a period of civilization, architecture creates coherent systems of organization..."

*(Le Corbusier, Almanach de l'Architecture moderne, 1926)*

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially as modernism's paradigm began to disintegrate, architecture has begun to seek for inspiration in the broad built material known as "Vernacular Architecture". Central research works such as Rapoport's "House Form and Culture" and Rudofsky's "Architecture without architects" have laid the foundations for a great amount of research to follow.

Why is this "Architecture without architects" so meaningful for us? What are its main values that we seek so much to achieve in our studios?

Some of the virtues of the vernacular architecture are its natural functionalism, its climatic response, and its simple and efficient building technology and use of material. But it seems to me that the main issue, often not clearly stated, is the way the built units agglomerate into a rural/urban tissue, creating a multicolored though homogeneous whole.

This "vernacular built tissue" not only provides a picturesque view from a top of a mountain, but actually creates the public spaces between the dwellings. Streets, squares, waterfront promenades etc. are all defined by the houses surrounding them. These spaces are in the focus of this proposal.

## **2. Intention of research**

Rabbi Nachman of Breslav introduces the notion of a “second innocence”. In his thought, this innocence can never be as spontaneous and clear as the first one; nevertheless, some of the primary innocence can be reconstructed.

The main interest of mine is to try to discover, experience and understand the qualities of the public spaces of the villages. To uncover the rules behind this "order of the disorganized" could help us in taking those qualities with us into the design studio. Our aim should not be to imitate specific places or structures but to adapt the basic spatial ideas contained in them into our modern Israeli reality.

The area chosen for the research is the Island group of the Dodecanese. The main reason of choosing the Dodecanese is in its offering an expansive diversity of village typologies, combining traditional and colonialist influences. (Furthermore, it seems to be the best choice in order to avoid masses of tourists, and achieve a certain serenity and concentration needed for the intake of this experience.)

One exception to the focus on the Dodecanese will be a visit to the Island of Santorini, being a landmark of great importance.

## **3. Israel's lost vernacular**

The state of Israel's great building project in the years of 1948-1973, known as "The Israeli Project" (Efrat 2004), has generally denied the existing built fabric of traditional Arab architecture. At that time, its intention of creating a new narrative demanded that. Now, 57 years later, we look back, yearning for roots.

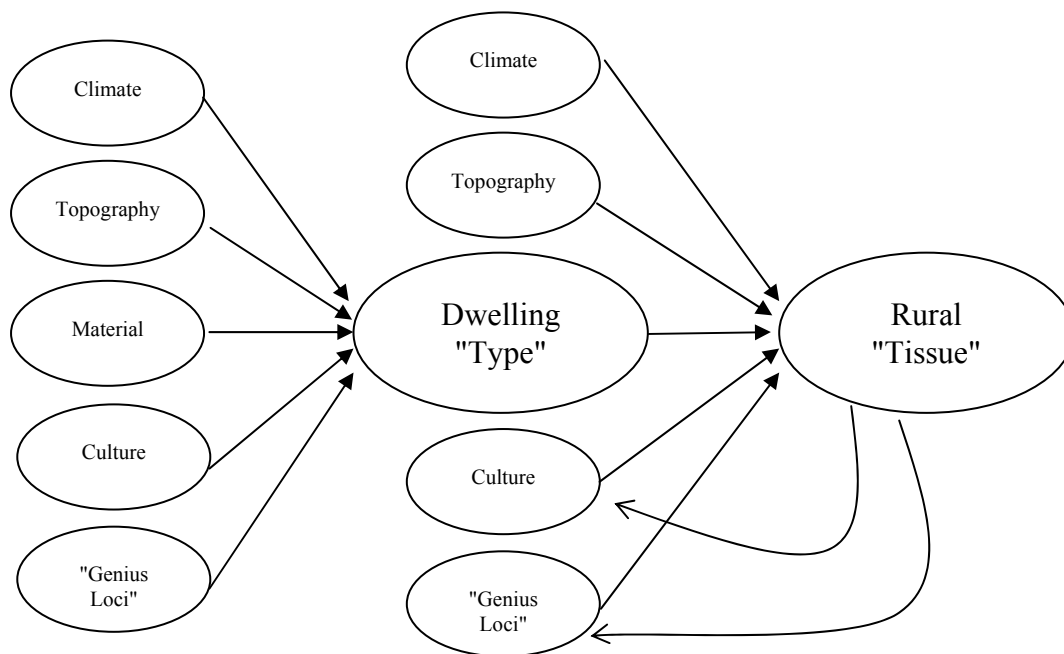
What we mostly miss is not a model for a dwelling. Obviously the cultural demands of the information age cannot be provided by the traditional dwelling types such as the Arab "Leewan" house. But there is a deep need for a built environment that provides living public spaces and which interacts with the natural environment in an organic way.

In this search, lacking continuity in architectural tradition of our own, it is of value to us to get acquainted with the vernacular architecture of our neighbors around the Mediterranean.

#### 4. Greece's living vernacular

In our global world of images, likely the first to occur to us in response to the notion of vernacular architecture would be of Santorini's whitewashed dwellings. There is no doubt of the Island's magical Aura, which enchants tourists and scholars alike. But Greece's vernacular is much broader.

From Zagori to Thrace, from Thessaly to the Peloponnesus, from the Cyclades to the Ionian Islands Greece seems to concentrate one of the widest diversities of dwelling types. This built material, of course, assembles greatly differentiated streets and public spaces.

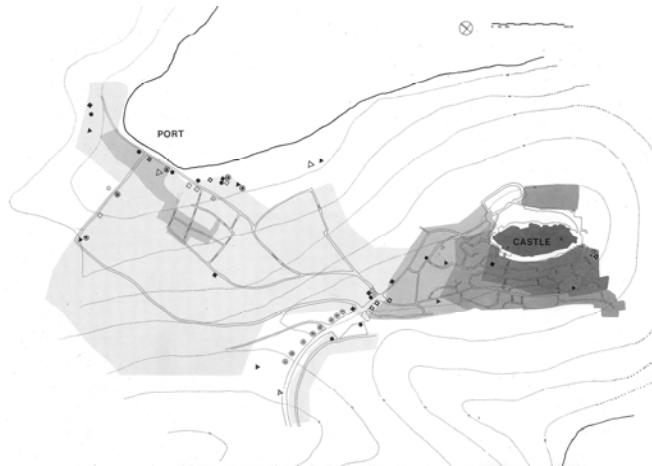


Scheme of the main processes in the evolution of the Rural "Tissue"

Even in the chosen area of the Dodecanese, we find great difference between settlements. The first example is the differentiation of typologies between villages which agglomerated around a bay and villages which adhered to a central focus such as a fortified castle. Kalymnos and Astypalaia are representations of these two types. The basis for the village of Astypalaia is the "*Kastro*", a Venetian castle of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. To defend them against pirate attacks, dwellings were first build only inside the fortifications or in great proximity to them. The whole street system derives from this need.

Only much later, some houses were built in the port, and a "spine" connected the two parts.

In Pothia (Kalymnos) the evolution of the village was not from the mountain top to the seashore, but the other way around. The beginning of the village was formed in a natural amphitheater – a bay which is the main port of the island. As the population grew, the settlement began to climb on the slopes of the adjacent hills.



Scheme of the development of Astypalaia



Map of Pothia, Kalymnos

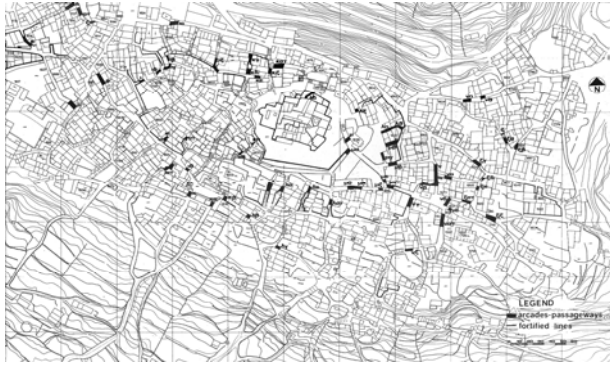


Astypalaia – Adhering to a castle



Pothia, Kalymnos – Agglomerating around the bay

Another example of a unique characteristic are the many arched passageways in the village of Chora, Patmos. This phenomenon in which the private space reduces itself, permitting passage for the public and creating a semi-private zone, introduces a three-dimensional richness and an experience full of surprises and mystery.



Chora, Patmos - Map of arched passageways



Chora - An arched passageway

## 5. Former research done

I have begun to investigate the theme of vernacular architecture prior to the beginning of my studies. My first project was a series of about 1,500 pictures, taken in the Arab neighborhood of Wadi Saleeb (Haifa). These pictures formed the basis for a later photography and sculpture solo exhibition in the "Fattoush – Café/Galley" in Haifa. The exhibition was successful and highly appreciated by the local press.

The theme of the organic built tissue was further investigated in last semester's design studio dealing with "Hatikva" neighborhood in Tel Aviv. The houses of the neighborhood succeed well in forming a homogeneous whole; however do not create well defined public spaces. My project, nominated for the excellence prize competition, proposed an integration of a new grid, creating curved streets, public squares and courts of new quality. Much of the inspiration for the project came from organic built tissues such as in the villages of Santorini.

## 6. Methods of research

I intend to work mainly by drawing, as a way to study the three-dimensional relationships of built volumes and the space between them. A second method is photography, conceived as a process of examination rather than being outcome oriented.

The analysis of the drawings, photographs and other impressions and documents collected on the travel is an important stage. Differentiation between the various villages and islands are likely to encourage thoughts about the connection between man-made to natural spaces. Also the editing process itself is valuable as an

opportunity to extract the most important parts out of the given material and to discover connections between different parts of the work.

## **7. Conclusion**

Greece offers almost unlimited grounds for research of public vernacular space, and this proposal can only include a limited perspective. However, the ideas experienced by us when visiting an outstanding place will continue to keep us busy, emerging and disappearing alternately, finding their way into realization.

## **Appendix I. Proposed travel schedule**

Preliminary Phase: Gathering and analysis of plans and written material.

Main Phase: Documenting by drawing and photography

Day 1 – Arrival at Rhodes, Ferry to Karpathos. Karpathos - Pigathia.

Day 2 – Karpathos – Olympos.

Day 3 – Ferry to Astypalaia (via Rhodes). Astypalaia.

Day 4 – Astypalaia.

Day 5 – Ferry to Santorini. Santorini – Phera.

Day 6 – 7 Santorini – Oia, Phoinikia, Phera

Day 8 – Ferry to Kalymnos. Kalymnos - Pothia.

Day 9 – Ferry to Patmos. Patmos - Chora, Skala.

Day 10 – Ferry to Rhodes. Flight Back to Israel.

Remark: The Island of Kos will not be visited due to the lack of buildings prior to 1933, when an earthquake has destroyed most of the Island's buildings.

Final Phase: Analysis of the material collected, and preparation of its presentation.

## **Appendix II. Proposed Budget**

Flight Ticket: Tel Aviv-Rhodes-Tel Aviv - 289\$ (Currently no Ferry service available. If service will reopen till September, journey by sea would be preferable.)

Expenses:

Accommodations – 100 € (Camping)

Ferries – 120 €

Meals – 100 €

Transportation – 20 €

Travel Insurance – 20 €

Total – 360 €

### Appendix III. Preliminary Bibliography

- Greek traditional architecture (series), Athens 1986-1996. Volumes:  
Astipalaia, Kalymnos, Karpathos, Patmos, Santorini.
- Rapoport, Amos – House Form and Culture, London 1969.
- Rudofsky, Bernard – Architecture without architects, London 1964.
- אפרת, צבי – הפרוייקט הישראלי: בנייה ואדריכלות 1948<1973, תל-אביב 2004.