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[1] This image of the refugee housing at Prosfygika in Athens is taken shortly after completion (1936). The dire circumstances of the urgent need for housing can be deduced from this image. The buildings were set up in a short matter of time due to extensive prefabrication and standardisation.

You know, it is always life that is right and the architect who is wrong'. 1

# Introduction

In the light of the European post-war housing shortage, the Modern Movement developed one of its most important ambitions: collective housing. The focus was on high-density living in which hygiene in the sense of air and (sun)light, combined with comfortable and functional living conditions, was promoted. As the dwellings were designed according to the 'existenz-minimum', complementary shared functions such as green areas, sports facilities, playgrounds for children, or cultural activities were introduced; this was closely linked to the idea of the 'neighbourhood unit'. This concept, which implied functional, self-contained residential developments, was initiated by Clarence Perry (1872–1944) in the early 1900s but was further developed by the modernists more progressively. One of the best-known examples of this modernist utopia is *Unité Habita*tion in Marseille (FR) by Le Corbusier (1887–1965), built in 1952. The modernist vision of improving the living conditions of the masses was realised through the industrialisation process of the building practice. The extensive exploitation of the model also led to insufficient building production because of its strong focus on mass fabrication regarding standardised building structures and layouts, while the individual preferences of inhabitants were barely considered. Eventually, this top-down approach resulted in limited variations of dwellings, varying only in size and the number of bedrooms - for families with or without children.

Several architects and architectural theorists started to question the modernist dogma and the top-down development strategy associated with it. In her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*,<sup>2</sup> activist

Jane Jacobs argued for the essence of respecting the needs of the city-dwellers. Her work has led, among other initiatives, to the more substantial involvement of residents in the design and building process and the management of housing areas. In addition, architect and urbanist Philippe Boudon has opened up new perspectives with his analysis (1972) of Quartiers Modernes Frugès in Pessac, designed by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret (1896-1967) and completed in 1926.3 The tension between the architect's initial intentions and the residents' reception was put forward through extensive documentation of the inhabitants' 'vernacular' adaptations,4 or appropriations, of their houses. Boudon's studies emphasise the inhabitants' need to be able to individualise their homes. Hereafter, new housing typologies were developed, which on the one hand, adopted the modernist principles on the mass production of housing units, but on the other hand, created an opportunity for the inhabitant to extend or adapt their dwelling according to their personal needs or preferences. Pritzker Prize-winning (2016) architect Alejandro Aravena (born in 1967) initiated the revival of this more socially oriented architecture with his Quinta Monroy project in Chile. The notion of collectivity in Aravena's project combines comfortable living for the masses with serving greater social and personal needs by making individual infills possible.

During recent decades, interesting types of 'collective housing' appeared in which a group of (primarily middle-class) people jointly developed a housing project tailored to their specific needs as a group and as individuals. They share specific spaces and facilities but have their own private spaces as well. Shared spaces can vary from a garden, a storage space, or a guest room to a kitchen or a living room.

- Philippe Boudon, Lived-in Architecture (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1972)
- Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (New York: Random House, 1961)
- Philippe Boudon, Lived-in Architecture (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1972).
- 4 Bie Plevoets, 'Vernacular Intervention', Vademecum Minor Terms for Writing Urban Places, edited by Klaske Havik, Kris Pint, Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner (pp. 164–165). Rotterdam: NAI 010, 2020, forthcoming.
- Marie Moors, 'Reviving the modernist utopia', 'TRACE Notes on Adaptive Reuse 2, 2019: 45–54. https://sites.google.com/ uhasselt.be/trace/cahier/issues.
- Anna Papageorgiou, 'When Life Proves Architecture Wrong - Rereading Refugee Housing in Athens' (Master's Thesis, Hasselt University, 2019).
- Diana Mosquera, 'Modern Battles Disappearance of Modern Heritage in Kuwait'
   (Master's Thesis, Hasselt University, 2019)
- 8 The Treaty of Lausanne was a peace treaty between the British empire, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, and the

Successful examples include recent projects such as Spreefeld in Berlin (DE) (2013) by Carpaneto, Fatkoehl, and BAR, and the renovation of the building block Kleiburg by NL Architects and XVW Architectuur in Bijlmermeer (NL). Kleiburg illustrates how the notion of collectivity has changed over the years, as the applied 'do it yourself' (DIY) principle is the ultimate reflection of the aspect of participation.<sup>5</sup> The notion of collectivity in such a project is very different from the notion of collectivity in the context of top-down planned modernist housing schemes: Whereas in the first case, collectivity refers to 'the collective whole' in which each individual is seen as a part of the mass, in the latter case collectivity is perceived as a quality, the experience or feeling of sharing responsibilities, experiences, and activities.

The changing notion and perception of collectivity in the context of dwelling over time - moving away from a very determined and imposed organisation of living, towards a place where the inhabitants define the spaces themselves – has been addressed in the Master's projects and theses of several students who were part of the 'Master of Interior Architecture programme' at the Faculty of Architecture and Arts of Hasselt University (BE). Here, we focus on two projects in particular: the refugee housing blocks Prosfygika in Athens by Anna Papageorgiou<sup>6</sup> and the Al Sawaber housing complex in Kuwait by Diana Mosquera.<sup>7</sup> Both housing estates were constructed for a specific need but have undergone a critical shift in meaning, not only because of cultural-historical events but also because of the loss of the initial ambitions concerning collectivity.

Today both projects are in a vulnerable position. The students draw attention to these projects by demonstrating their potential for future use. They want to 'reinvent' the lost aspects of collectivity by addressing current needs and values. Their research and adaptive reuse proposals are generally based on the adaptations carried out by users, and new architectural answers are found in qualifying the 'public space'. The students position themselves as 'civic' architects by building upon the individual needs of the current occupants.

# From temporary refugee housing to contemporary collective housing

The Prosfygika (Greek for refugee) neighbourhood [1] is located in Athens and was constructed between 1933 and 1935, according to a design by architect Kimon Laskaris (1905–1978) and civil engineer Dimitris Kyriakou (1881–1971). Eight blocks of 228 apartments of 50 m² each should provide shelter for circa 600 refugees fleeing Turkey. The Asia Mi-

nor Disaster, the defeat of the Greek Army in the Greco-Turkish War in 1922, meant the expulsion of Greek presence from Asia Minor. Subsequently, with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923,8 the compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey followed, involving the movement of approximately 1.5 million people.

Almost 100 years after the construction of Prosfygika, the housing complex still accommodates people in need. Every fourth inhabitant is a descendant of the first generation of refugees. In addition, other refugees, homeless people, drug addicts, and immigrants inhabit the complex. It is perceived as an eyesore by the Greek government, which literally hid the harsh living conditions of the current inhabitants behind a tarp during the Olympic Games in 2004 to avoid political embarrassment [2,3]. Surprisingly, only a few years later, in 2008, the government listed Prosfygika as an architectural and cultural heritage site.9 Hereafter, the residents proposed to buy and renovate the vacant apartments. Their initiative was, however, rejected by the government because of the buildings' protected status. Over the years, inhabitants have nevertheless



[2] Hiding the 'harsh living conditions' of the current inhabitants behind a tarp during the Olympic Games in Athens, 2004.



[3] The building blocks of Prosfygika in Athens are currently in poor condition, 2014.

Serb-Croat-Slovene state on the one hand and Turkey, signed at Lausanne on July 24, 1923. This pact ended the conflict and closed the state of war that existed since 1914; it also defined the borders of the modern Turkish Republic. The Greek-Turkish population exchange was made possible again as well as (non-military) unrestricted civilian passage through the Turkish Straits.

9 'Prosfygika', Atlas Obscura, accesse March 30, 2020, https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/prosfygika.



[4] On the different elevations of the buildings of *Quartiers Modernes Frugès* by Le Corbusier in Pessac (Boudon, 1972), the vernacular adaptations of the inhabitants (such as shutters, coverings, different colours) can be deduced from the image.



[5] Inspired by the image of Quartiers Modernes Frugès in Pessac [4], Papageorgiou, A. (2019) took a picture of the façade of the Prosfygika housing project in Athens (2019), in which the vernacular adaptations (such as conversions of windows, the transformation of balconies, making versus removal of openings, and the addition of sunshades) appear.

made minor adaptations to interiors, exteriors, and communal spaces. <sup>10</sup> Recently, in 2018, the Ministry of Culture approved the rehabilitation of the project, aiming to repair and restore the facades and communal spaces such as the staircases and roofs of all eight blocks. The future functions focus on temporary housing for patients' companions at the nearby hospitals, social housing, and exhibition spaces to remember the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922. The original 39 owners of the 53 apartments have been allowed to continue to live in the complex. <sup>11</sup>

The buildings are constructed according to the Greek *polykatoikia*, which is basically a reinterpretation of Le Corbusier's flexible Dom-Ino principle and was included in general building regulations and property laws since 1929. <sup>12</sup> The building system combined progressive industrial techniques with

10 'What is going on with the Refugee Build-

ings? Propaganda', Adamaki-Trantou, ac-

cessed April 23, 2019, https://popaganda.

gr/stories/ti-simveni-sta-pros- figika/2/.

Anaplasis accessed March 8, 2019: Platon

Issaias, 'Beyond the Informal City: Athens

and the Possibility of an Urban Common'

(PhD dissertation, Technische Universi-

teit Delft, 2014) accessed July 14, 2020,

11 'The refugees of Alexandra Avenue', Athens

- $https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid:93d641ff-403c-44c4-b19b-d4a\\66b6b250d?collection=research.$
- 66b6b250d?collection=research.

  Platon Issaias, 'Beyond the Informal City:
  Athens and the Possibility of an Urban
  Common' (PhD dissertation, Technische
  Universiteit Delft, 2014) accessed July 14,
  2020, https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid:93d641ff-403c-44c4-b19
  b-d4a66b6b250d?collection=research.

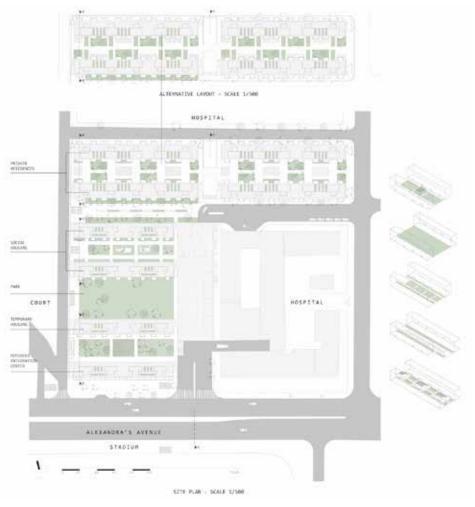
a low-skilled manual workforce, which resulted in adaptable building structures. In addition, the 'horizontal ownership' property law allowed individual ownership of an apartment – combined with the joint ownership of the land. This separate ownership could only be regulated with a notarial act (tax-free). This initiative stimulated the bottom-up practice of self-building and enabled citizens to reach a higher standard of living, raising their social status via their integration into a human-scaled assemblage of properties.<sup>13</sup>

Anna developed her vision for the site through the analysis of the 'vernacular adaptations' [5], involving the conversions of windows into doors, the transformation of balconies into interior spaces, the creation of private gardens at the ground level, the creation versus removal of openings, the addition of sun-

shades on the rooftops combined with the appropriation of personal space, and the transformation of open spaces into parking lots.

Inspired by Boudon's research on the *Quartier Frugès* [4] in Pessac, the analysis of the modifications at Prosfygika and the interviews with residents that Anna held herself, she created a new strategy for the future development of the Prosfygika neighbourhood. The building blocks maintained their collective character since the residents themselves created common facilities, such as shared kitchens and living spaces. Therefore, her goal was to preserve the co-housing aspect of the complexes but

strengthen it by adding the function of affordable and temporary housing. As a result, the project will provide shelter for newly arrived refugees and immigrants, in line with the original ambition of the project. The flexibility of the building's structure makes it possible to intervene in the interior and change the layout of the apartments, which allowed the creation of a variety of housing typologies. Subsequently, the buildings will be able to accommodate people from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The vernacular alterations were used as a guideline in this process. In general, Anna has focused on 'public space', suggesting pedestrian areas in the streets and the addition of stairs around



[6] The site plan of the project proposal by A. Papageorgiou (2019) of Prosfygika in Athens explains the pedestrianisation of the streets due to the integration of stairs into the surroundings, and the diverse programme of private residences, social housing, temporary housing, and a refugee integration centre, combined with a public park.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> 'From Dom-ino to Polykatoikia', Pier Vittorio Aureli, Maria S. Giudici, and Platon Issaias, accessed April 1, 2020, https://www.domusweb.it/en/architecture/2012/10/31/from-dom-ino-to-emnolykatoikia-em- html



[7] One section of the project proposal by A. Papageorgiou (2019) of Prosfygika in Athens: the different housing typologies and the pleasant collective space in-between the buildings is demonstrated.

the site to avoid cars passing through and parking throughout. She also created private gardens and public outdoor spaces for socialisation (e.g. on the rooftops) that could be used as playgrounds for children or for gardening [6]. The pursued concept for this Master's project was to reintegrate the buildings into the city's urban fabric, with the human scale of the blocks and the open green spaces in-between the blocks being the main advantages in the dense city life of Athens [7]. By reopening the programme to contain various collective forms of living and transforming the street level and roofs into public places to gather, the project will regain its positive meaning.

# Re-introducing the vibrant Arab city life

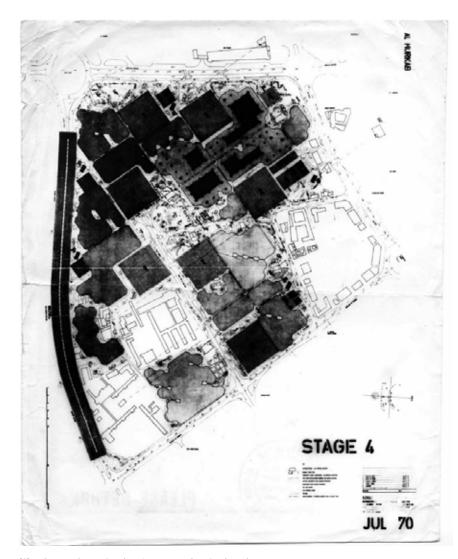
To understand the establishment of the unique Al Sawaber housing complex, it is crucial to frame the history of Kuwait in relation to its boundaries. The discovery of oil in 1938 determined the urban development of the city of Kuwait. Functioning as a fishing village with a small trading harbour in 1610, the area transformed into a 'modern' metropolis from the 1940s onwards. This transformation resulted in a *tabula rasa* of the historic city centre<sup>14</sup> and the need for a general urban development strategy. From the 1950s until the 1980s, a series of master plans were developed for the city. <sup>15</sup> After a difficult first period of trying to relate the modernist infrastructure with traditional city life, the Kuwait Municipality changed its perspective in 1960. The

regret over the demolition of the old city resulted in a new vision and strategy focused on 'restructuring' the old town and enhancing the social life and public atmosphere in the centre of the city. Prominent members of the TEAM X<sup>16</sup> generation, like Georges Candilis (1913–1995), Alexis Josic (1921–2011) and Shadrach Woods (1923–1973) (F), Reima Pietilä (1923–1993) (FI), the office BBPR with Team X member Ernesto Nathan Rogers (1909–1969) (I), Jørn Utzon (1918–2008) (DK), and Peter Smithson together with Alison Smithson (UK) were commissioned to rethink Kuwait's masterplan.<sup>17</sup>

Diana mainly was inspired by Smithsons' proposal [8], basing their plan on the notion of 'adaptive reuse' of the relics of the largely demolished old town. They focus on the value of Kuwait as an inherent city in direct contact with the waterfront. <sup>18</sup> Their design built further on a concept that they developed during their time in the Team X movement (1956): The Mat-building. The concept of the Mat-building is based on the interconnectedness and interchangeability of buildings through the smart infill of open spaces and the introduction of a variety of functions. The general idea of the Smithsons was to reintroduce the vibrancy of old Arab city life. <sup>19</sup>

Over a decade, Kuwait's urban landscape developed from a small cellular settlement consisting of traditional Arab dwellings to a metropolitan city. The original boundaries were formed by a city wall that had a defence and security purpose but also limited further building and development. Due to the grow-

focusing on different topics and aspects of modernist (urban planning) architecture. The last CIAM congress in 1956 (CIAM X) (HIR) was led by the most recent members. This group has since been known as TEAM X. They explicitly sought greater connection between the physical space and the socio-psychological needs of people, in particular by challenging CIAM's doctrinaire approach towards urbanism.



[8] Alison and Peter Smithson's Kuwait Urban Study and Mat-building project, developed in 1970. The variety of functions and typologies can be deduced from the expressivity of the drawing, referring back to an older, vibrant Arab city life.

ing population, the expansion of the city was necessary, resulting in a second (1811) and a third (1921) wall to accommodate the continual growth. After 30 years, the third wall was demolished to make room for the 'advanced' Kuwait.<sup>20</sup> Oil production generated this rapid development of modern Kuwait.<sup>21</sup> From the 1950s to the 1980s, the state promoted the single-family detached house. However, the population increased tremendously (from 250,000 in 1954 to 1.35 million in 1980), so that the single-family houses, which were organised concentrically and disconnected from the city centre, were no longer a convenient answer to the growing housing shortage.

In this light, the Al Sawaber housing complex was one of the new typological experiments. In 1977, the government commissioned the Canadian architect Arthur Erickson (1924–2009) to design a residential neighbourhood consisting of high-rise buildings with apartments ranging from 100 to 300 sqm for 4,950 people, located in the old city of Kuwait. <sup>22</sup> In a second phase, further revisions of the master plans for the city have been discussed from 1997 onwards. The booming economy and population increase defined the city's expansion, resulting in the creation of commercial hotspots and high-rise buildings. <sup>23</sup> As a consequence, a large number of properties are

- <sup>17</sup> Sharifah Alshalfan, 'The Aftermath of a Masterplan for Kuwait: An Exploration of the Forces that Shape Kuwait City', Coleccion Monografias CIDOB 2018, London School of Economics (LSE), London and Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Kuwait.
- Asseel Al-Ragam, 'Critical nostalgia: Kuwait urban modernity and Alison and Peter Smithson's Kuwait Urban Study and
- Mat-Building', The Journal of Architecture 20, 2015: 1–20.
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- eccion Monografias CIDOB 2018, London School of Economics (LSE), London and Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Kuwait.
- <sup>11</sup> Saba George Shiber, The Kuwait Urbanization: Documentation, Analysis, Critique (Pennsylvania State University: Kuwait Government Printing Press, 1964).
- <sup>2</sup> Asseel Al-Ragam, 'Strategies for Adaptive Reuse: High-Density State Housing in Kuwait', 14th DOCOMOMO International

<sup>14</sup> Mohammad Khalid a Al-Jassar, Constancy and Change in Contemporary Kuwait City: The Socio-cultural Dimensions of the Kuwaiti Courtyard and Diwaniyya (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 2009).

Saba George Shiber, The Kuwait Urbanization: Documentation, Analysis, Critique (Pennsylvania State University: Kuwait Government Printing Press, 1964).

<sup>16</sup> In the zeitgeist of industrialisation, economic planning, and the rationalisation of the construction industry, the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) was organised. The members of CIAM wanted to promote modern architecture as a more technological, economical, hygienic, aesthetic, and ideological form of architecture, emphasising aspects as light, air, and standardisation. From 1928 until 1953, various congresses took place, each one

currently threatened with demolition or even in the process of demolition, including the Al Sawaber complex.

It is also important to mention that due to cultural, ecological, and economic aspects, the original design Erickson had in mind was never accomplished. The density of the project has been reduced from 900 to 520 residential units in order to increase the size of the apartments. Furthermore, the commercial facilities, the green public space between the buildings, and the additional communal places were not constructed according to the original plans. Moreover, due to the first economic crisis in 1980, Al Sawaber was not completed until twelve years after the commission. However, many of the initial principles remained, such as the strong architectural language of the A-shape stepped buildings, which was inspired by the hillside villas, and the connection with the old cemetery which is now appreciated as a valuable open green space.<sup>24</sup> These principles define the predominant heritage values today.

Diana draws attention to this vulnerable modernist heritage, in particular, because the complex is threatened with demolition – probably caused by the asserted lack of architectural value, the inadequate size of the apartments, and the lack of (fire) safety. There is an important underlying political reason for the demolition plans, also detectable in the Prosfygika project in Athens: the deteriorated state of the buildings. This appearance is caused by the multiple physical transformations executed by its users. However, these modifications inspired Diana in her design process because the spontaneous adaptation



[9] The open green spaces in-between the buildings of the Al Sawaber Complex in Kuwait in their current condition (2019). The public character of the ground floor is perceived through the columns, as they form a shaded walkway.

Conference 'Adaptive Reuse. The Modern Movement Towards the Future', 14th DO-COMOMO International Conference, 2016.

Wuwait Oil History', Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, accessed April 7, 2020. www. kpc.com.kw/InformationCenter/Pages/ Kuwait-Oil-History.aspx; 'Master Planning, Infrastructure, Building Design and Construction Supervision', SSH, accessed April 7, 2019. www.sshic.com.

- <sup>24</sup> Roberto Fabbri, Sara Saragoça Soares, Sara Saragoça, and Ricardo Camacho. Modern Architecture Kuwait: 1949–1989 trans. Mohamed M. Moustafa (Niggli, 2016).
- 25 These alterations happened often in modernist projects in Africa, where the architects who came from other cultures did not (always) understand the local dwelling needs, although they made sincere attempts to take these into consideration.
- Michel Ecochard's (1905–1985) plan for Casablanca (1946–1952) is an illustrative example of the phenomenon: Tom Avermaete, 'Framing the Afropolis Michel Ecochard and the African City for the Greatest Number, 'ASSE 82, 2010: 77–89
- 26 Assed Al-Ragam, The Destruction of Modernist Heritage: The Myth of Al-Sawaber, Journal of Architectural Education 67, 2013: 243–252.

of someone's place is an indirect communication of the shortcomings of the property, which are linked to unfulfilled individual needs. Further, Diana's proposal aims to preserve the heritage value of the site and even strengthen this value, as she is convinced that Al Sawaber is a remarkable piece of modernist housing that fulfils an essential part of Kuwait's history and heritage.

The proposed interventions are based, firstly, on clearing the later alterations of little quality and, secondly, on adapting the layout of the apartments to the local housing culture and traditions. Many residents made some (far-reaching) adaptations to improve their living conditions, from blocking windows for privacy and controlling sunlight to converting private terraces into interior spaces.<sup>25</sup> From the 1990s onwards, the complex became a place of neglect as many of its apartments were vacant, and others were rented out to migrant workers at low rents.<sup>26</sup> Thirdly, Diana developed the public space between the blocks as a (public) garden for the housing estate. By redefining the ground floor as a green carpet for pedestrian life, she reconnects the buildings at a public level. Due to the extreme climate, shaded areas are necessary [9]. Thanks to the existing enclosed form of the buildings, covered spaces could be easily recreated. In addition, Diana combined this with a carefully considered selection of newly planted vegetation. In general, her approach focuses on 'reinventing' the public space [10], which can benefit not only the inhabitants of the housing complex but the surrounding neighbourhood as a whole, aiming to bring back the vibrant Arab city life as envisioned by the Smithsons in their Mat-building project.<sup>27</sup>

# Conclusion

In conclusion, we focus on the fact that two projects that differ geographically, functionally, and in time and space face not only similar challenges but also generate similar solutions. The strength of the adaptive reuse approach is found in the reaffirmation of the initial (positive) ambitions while avoiding the negative top-down (anonymous) effect. The students recovered the collective values of the projects in which they invested new added values, closely related to Jane Jacobs and Aravena, who also suggested solutions to the problems linked to the performance of modernist architecture.

It is striking that the vernacular modifications which define the negative political image of Prosfygika versus Al Sawaber – and which in the case of Kuwait are the specific reason for the government to demolish the buildings – are at the same time



[10] Site plan of the project proposal by D. Mosquera (2019), Al Sawaber housing complex in Kuwait. This is a representation of her analysis and design explorations. The emphasis of this drawing is on the re-designed (public) green spaces and the newly planted vegetation. The conservation of the building blocks can also be the indirect justification for conserving this unique green landscape.

Anna and Diana's response to the regeneration of both projects. Their design attitude further builds on Boudon's approach and is linked to Aravena's housing developments, which struggle with the decreasing collective building value (after construction) and for which he proposes vernacular adaptations in response. It is a matter of regaining this positive meaning, in particular by designing the (green) 'space-in-between' the structures, already touched upon by the Smithsons' Mat-building typology and put forward by Jacobs in her analyses of the problems with modernistic public spaces and her appreciation of 'streets'. This method of re-connection and opening up the building's exterior and interior to public life and facilities is an interesting approach to re-invigoration. Additionally, both projects aim to

<sup>27</sup> Diana Mosquera and Marie Moors, 'Disappearance of Modern Heritage in Kuwait, Adaptive Reuse of Al Sawaber Housing Complex', Paper presented at the 16th DO-COMOMO International Conference Tokyo, forthcoming 2021.

diversify the inhabitants in terms of socio-economic background. Diana reinvested in the initial link of the A-shaped enclosed buildings with open public squares to hillside villas in Kuwait. In Athens, luxury rooftop bars are combined with affordable housing. This mixed-use contributes to the social sustainability of the rehabilitation process. While the inhabitants in Kuwait were calling for the Kuwaiti Jane Jacobs during the demolition of the old city town, we hope to echo her open vision to pay attention to the quality of the residents' everyday life, their cultural environment, and general well-being; particularly because the general aim of adaptive reuse is to give projects a second life.

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[1] Map of Antwerp by Virgilius Bononiensis in 1565; the location of the beguinage is indicated.

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### Trace

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