



H.F.R.I.
Hellenic Foundation for
Research & Innovation

Description of the funded research project
1st Call for H.F.R.I. Research Projects to Support Faculty
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Research Equipment

Title of the research project: CONSTRUCTIONS OF HOMELAND: ARCHITECTURE, IDENTITY AND MEMORY IN THE GREEK COMMUNITIES OF ODESSA AND MARSEILLE, 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES



Principal Investigator: KONSTANTINOS TSIAMBAOS



Reader-friendly title: ODEMARS

Scientific Area: HUMANITIES & ARTS

Institution and Country: NATIONAL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS, GREECE

Host Institution: NATIONAL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS, GREECE

Collaborating Institutions:

1. HELLENIC FOUNDATION FOR CULTURE IN ODESSA
2. PAUL VALERY, MONTPELLIER III UNIVERSITY

Budget: 146,367.00 €

Duration: 24 months

Project webpage: <http://odemars.ntua.gr/>



The Greek communities that flourished around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea have created several important public buildings. Through their public architecture, these communities have expressed their strong social and economic position, but also their cultural identity and historical memory. Each community declared its presence in the city through emblematic works (temples, schools, community centers, monuments, sculptures of architectural scale, etc.) claiming recognition and participation through the 'silent' language of architectural constructions. Despite what has been written about these communities, however, their architectural production has been very little researched. How can the history of architecture help us re-approach the identity of these communities? How can we describe more accurately the ongoing effort to connect with place and history? How can we better outline the alternative 'memories of Greece' in western and eastern Europe? The research will aim at highlighting the ways in which architectural production of the 19th and 20th centuries co-formed and co-codified the geographical origin as a cultural identity. Focusing on Odessa and Marseille, two important port cities located at an opposite geographic location in relation to the 'birthplace', and bringing to the surface architectural projects and constructed buildings that were realized over the past two centuries at the initiative of the Greek communities, this research will contribute to a more accurate mapping of a dynamic network whose nodes are the different cities, stories, memories, identities and architectures relation and constant reference to the same homeland. At a time when new mass shifts of populations are recorded on the same more or less routes, memory, as a relationship with the former, seems like an essential function. The construction of homeland, through architecture, into another place signs the beginning of a new constitution of both persons and communities.

Despite the evolving literature about these communities, their architectural production has been barely researched. Vassilis Colonas recently opened a path with his original work on the cities of the Azov and the Black Sea (Colonas 2013, Colonas 2015), a research that is already looking fertile. Athina Vitopoulou and Alexandra Yerolympos have also expanded the study on the scale of urban design of Odessa (Vitopoulou and Yerolympos 2013). In general, however, the study of the architectural history of Greek communities is disproportionately absent although it is certain that this history is both rich and interesting. Indeed, the study of architecture can contribute to a better understanding of a predominantly kaleidoscopic cultural field. How can the history of architecture help us re-approach the identity of these communities? How can we more accurately describe the on-going effort to connect them with both space and national / imperial histories? How does the host city refer back to its Greek origins and how does this city 'read' its Greek community? How can we better outline the uses of 'memories of Greece' as part of an understand of these cities as nodal points connecting the western and the eastern in Europe? The research (archival and on-site) will aim at highlighting the ways in which the architectural production of the 19th and 20th centuries co-formed and co-authored the geographical and historical contours of a cultural identity.

On a practical level the research seeks to activate a small network of cities and sites, having as its main hubs the cities of Odessa, Marseille and Athens. Through a primary research in the cities and through the dissemination of its results (announcements, publications, a website), new discussions will be launched between the historians dealing with the Diaspora (Greek or other) about the underestimated importance of architecture.

But also at an interregional - transnational level, this research will produce insightful material that can be used in shaping a future strategy on the emergence of cultural heritage in major cities - ports such as Odessa and Marseille, a strategy that aims to make the history of the presence of different groups and communities within the same city more apparent and clear. An open society that seeks the sustainable integration of both the foreign and the 'other' should seem ready to follow such a path.

Our research, as a historical - critical review of what has been done so far, will also contribute to the realization of the value of public architecture as a lever of sustainable development (institutional, cultural, financial, environmental etc.). It is clear nowadays that investing in a public space of design quality and functional complexity is a necessary element in the development of every contemporary city. And only a city that recognizes its memory and history is an open and inclusive city, a city that creates values and meaning for its inhabitants.

As the funding of public Universities and research centers has been considerably diminished during the last years, H.F.R.I. is really important as it supports original research of high quality and young researchers. Considering our research project specifically, and in a broader context, the research seeks to activate a small network of cities and sites, having as its main hubs the cities of Odessa, Marseille and Athens. Through a primary research in the cities and through the dissemination of its results (announcements, publications, a website), new discussions will be launched between the historians dealing with the Diaspora (Greek or other) about the underestimated importance of architecture. But also at an interregional - transnational level, this research will produce insightful material that can be used in shaping a future strategy on the emergence of cultural heritage in major cities - ports such as Odessa and Marseille, a strategy that aims to make the history of the presence of different groups and communities within the same city more apparent and clear.



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