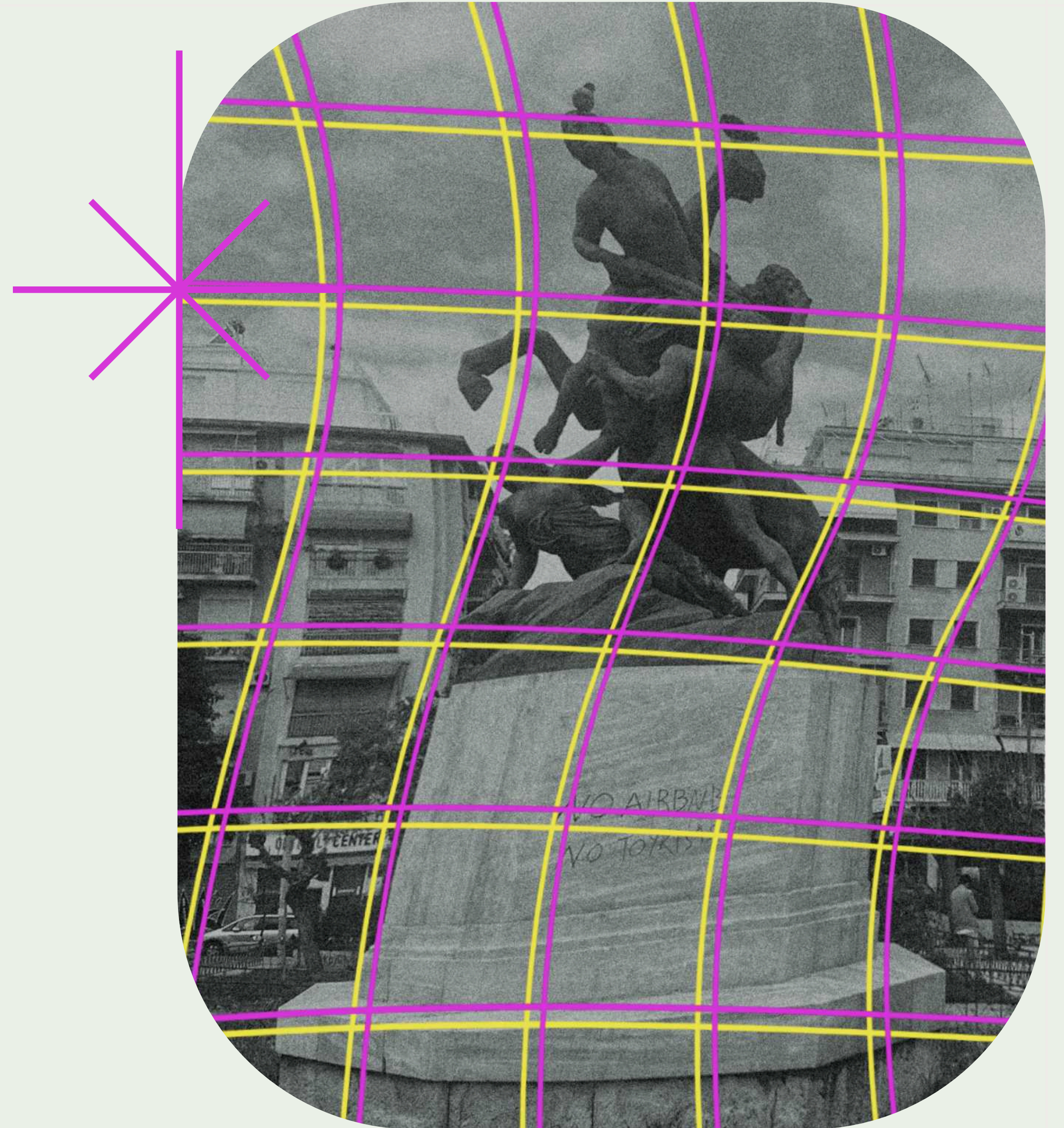


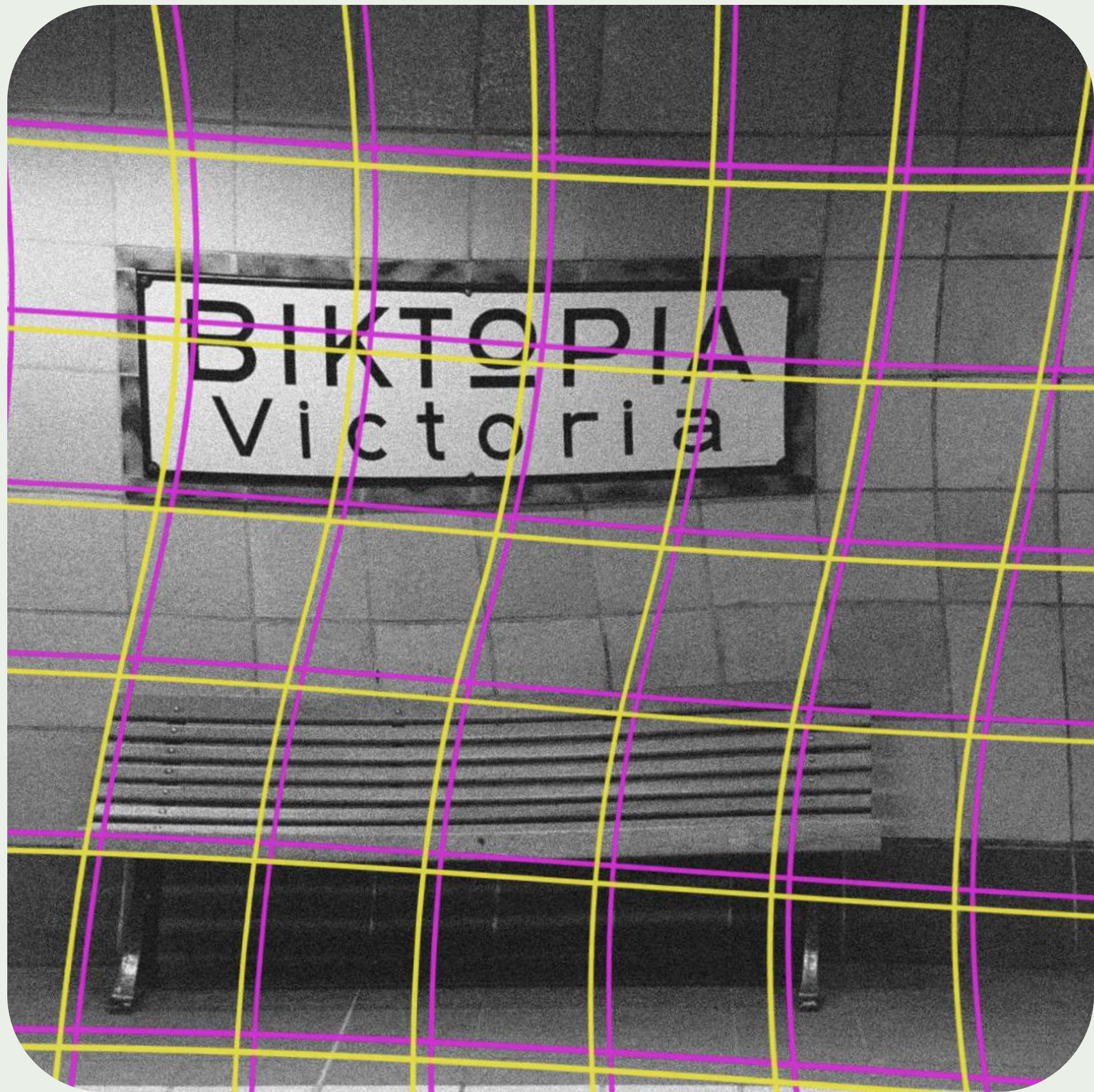
DSI522 SUSTAINABLE DESIGN FUTURES

Queer Dérives in Viktoria Square

Memory, Visibility & Resistance

PETROS ANTONIOU
MA DESIGN FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION





PART ONE

Background Information

Viktoria Square: A Layered Urban Crossroads

Viktoria Square's identity developed alongside the expansion of modern Athens. Its early history connects public space, transport infrastructure and middle-class urban life.

The square was not only a decorative open space, but part of the city's growing everyday network.

- Designated in 1867
- Named after Queen Victoria in 1901
- Administratively also known as Kyriakou Square
- Approx. 60 × 45 metres
- The central sculpture became a recognisable landmark
- A major urban node with the metro station below
- Links Kypseli, Omonoia and Patission Avenue
- Cafés, residences and public life shapes its identity



From Bourgeois Neighbourhood to Urban Node

After the Second World War, the area's social identity gradually shifted. Suburbanisation, ageing housing stock and migration changed who lived around the square.

This transformation made Viktoria **less socially homogeneous** and **more layered**.

- Middle-class residents moved towards the suburbs
- Older housing became available to lower-income groups
- Migrant communities reshaped local streets and services
- The square became a point of orientation for newcomers
- After 2015, its role as an arrival space intensified



2015 Refugee Crisis

The 2015 refugee crisis intensified Viktoria Square's role as a visible arrival point in Athens. The square became a place where displacement, exhaustion and the failures of reception systems appeared directly in public space.

This moment also changed how the square was seen: as a stage where **migration**, **identity** and **politics** intertwine.



Land Use and Spatial Tensions

The square's edges are active because everyday services sit directly around it. This gives the space energy, but also creates tension between public access and private use. Its layout shows that “public space” is not always equally available.

- Café seating occupies parts of the perimeter
- Three central green areas remain fenced
- Kiosks act as everyday micro-nodes
- Recycling booth adds another programmed function
- Open space is visually present, but partly restricted





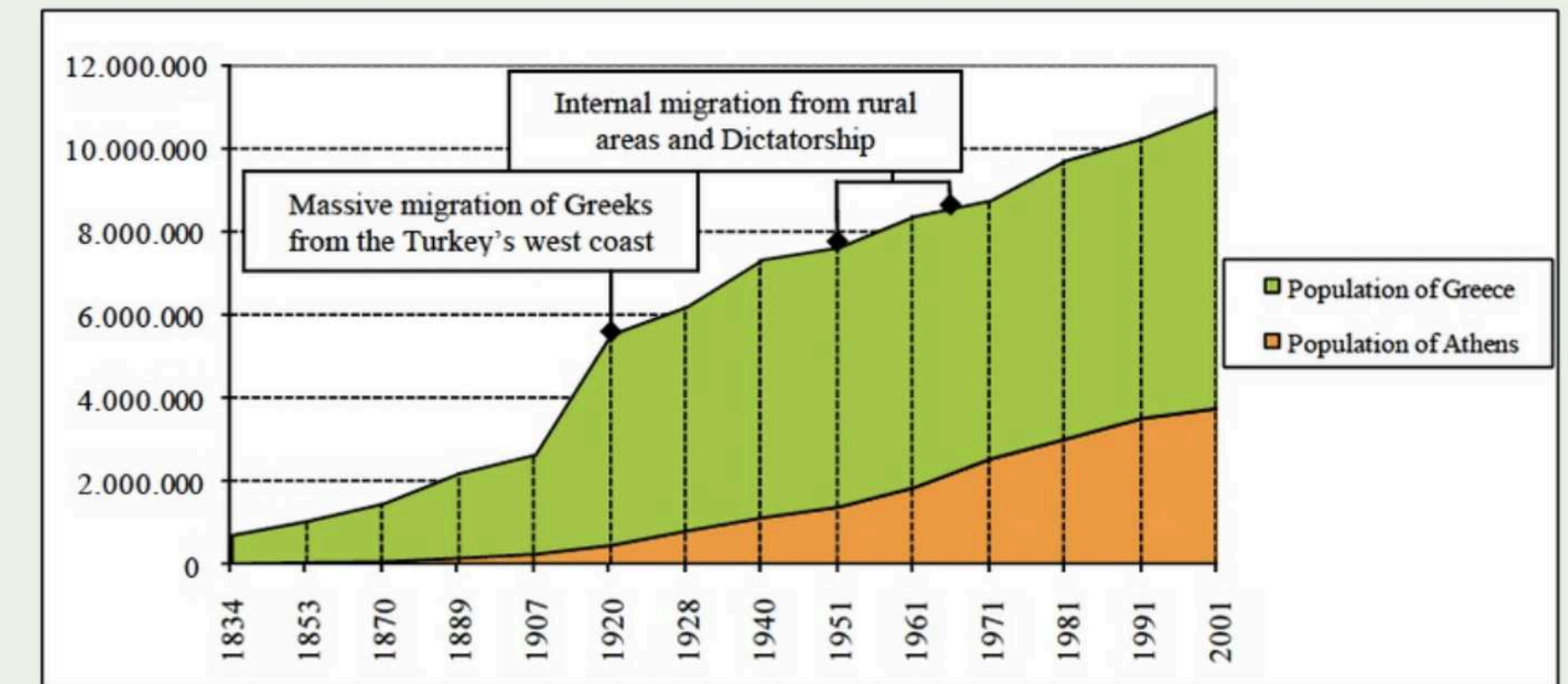
Athens Built Through Waves

Athens grew rapidly due to successive population waves. From a city of less than 150,000 in the late 19th century, Athens expanded dramatically due to:

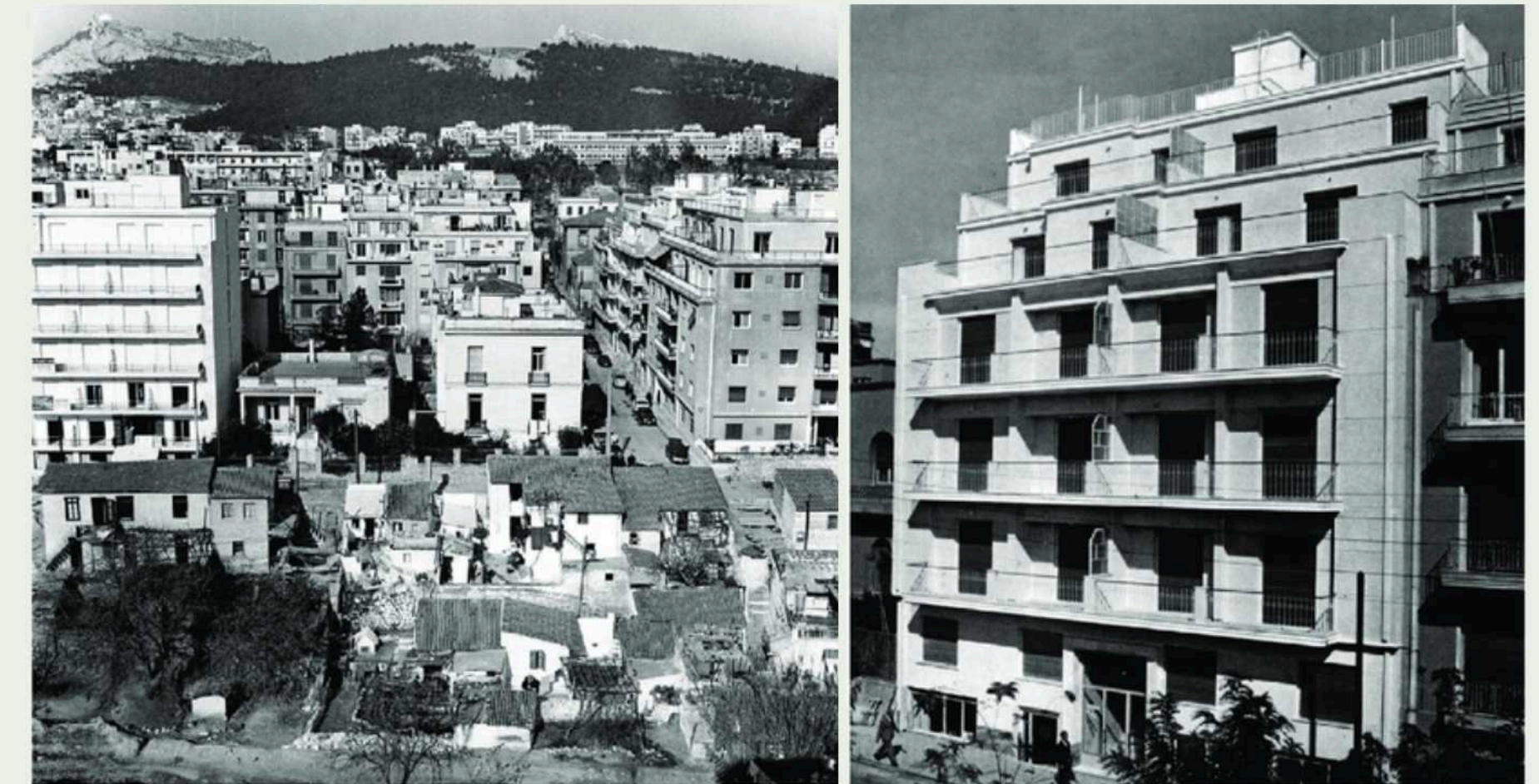
- Refugee arrivals
- Post-war urbanisation
- Rural-to-urban migration

This growth happened largely **without a centralized** master plan. Housing emerged through incremental, distributed construction.

The polykatoikia became the mechanism through which Athens absorbed demographic waves.



Population growth and historical landmarks from 1834 till 2001 in Athens



Photos of the post-war building boom in 1960s Athens. Apartment buildings replacing older vernacular houses and an example of the typical polykatoikia designs that were built in the 1960s

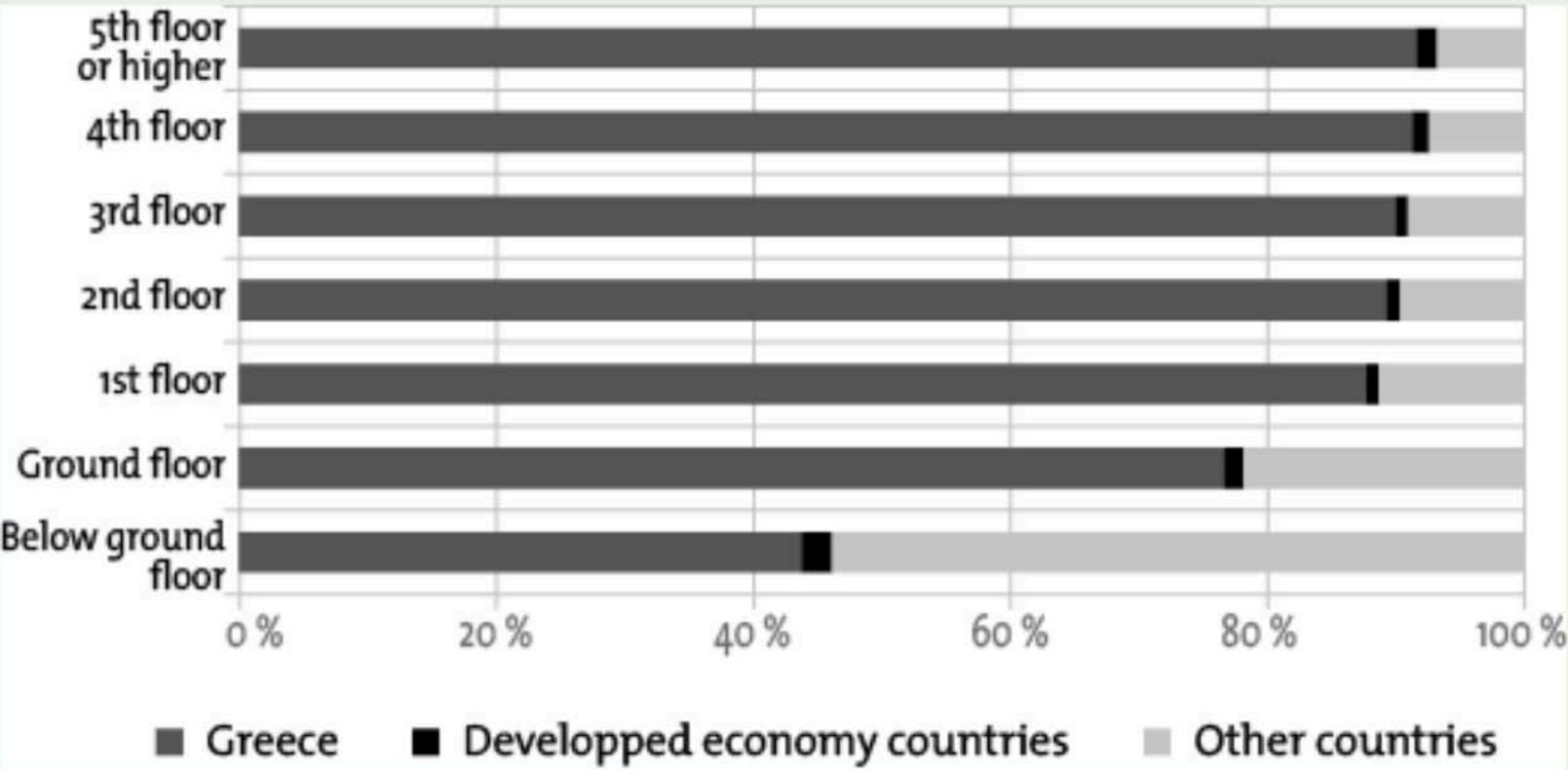
The Polykatoikia

Viktoria Square is part of a larger housing system composed of surrounding *polykatoikias*. These buildings and the square form a continuous spatial and social network. This project understands Viktoria Square as a field of waves, where housing, migration, and everyday life intersect.

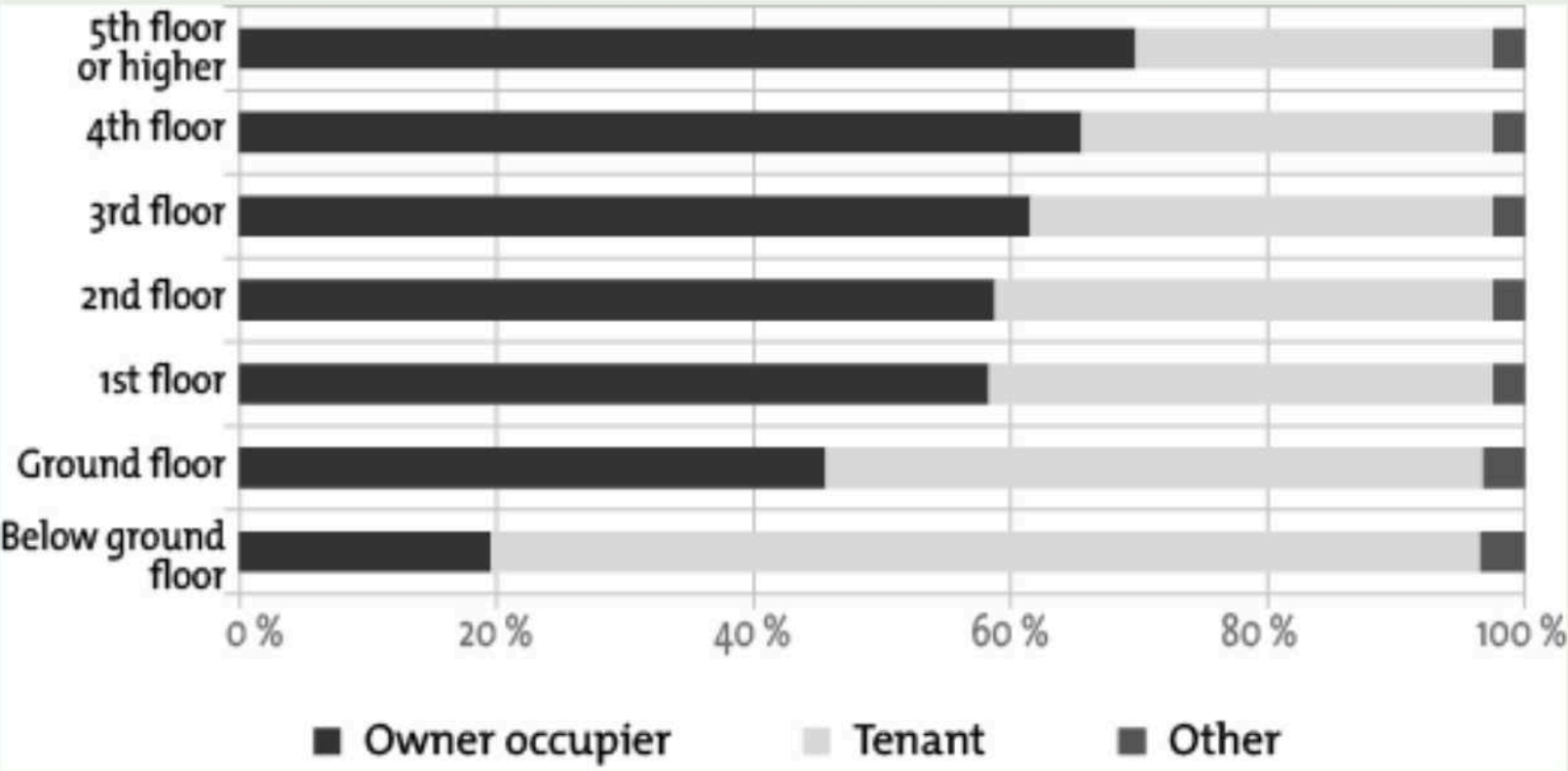
The *polykatoikia* is the dominant housing typology of Athens.

- The term literally means “many dwellings.”
- Multi-storey apartment buildings
- Built mainly between 1930–1980
- Mixed residential and commercial use
- Reinforced concrete construction
- Continuous balconies connecting private and public life
- Enabled rapid urbanisation through *antiparochi* system
- It became the primary housing infrastructure of the modern city.

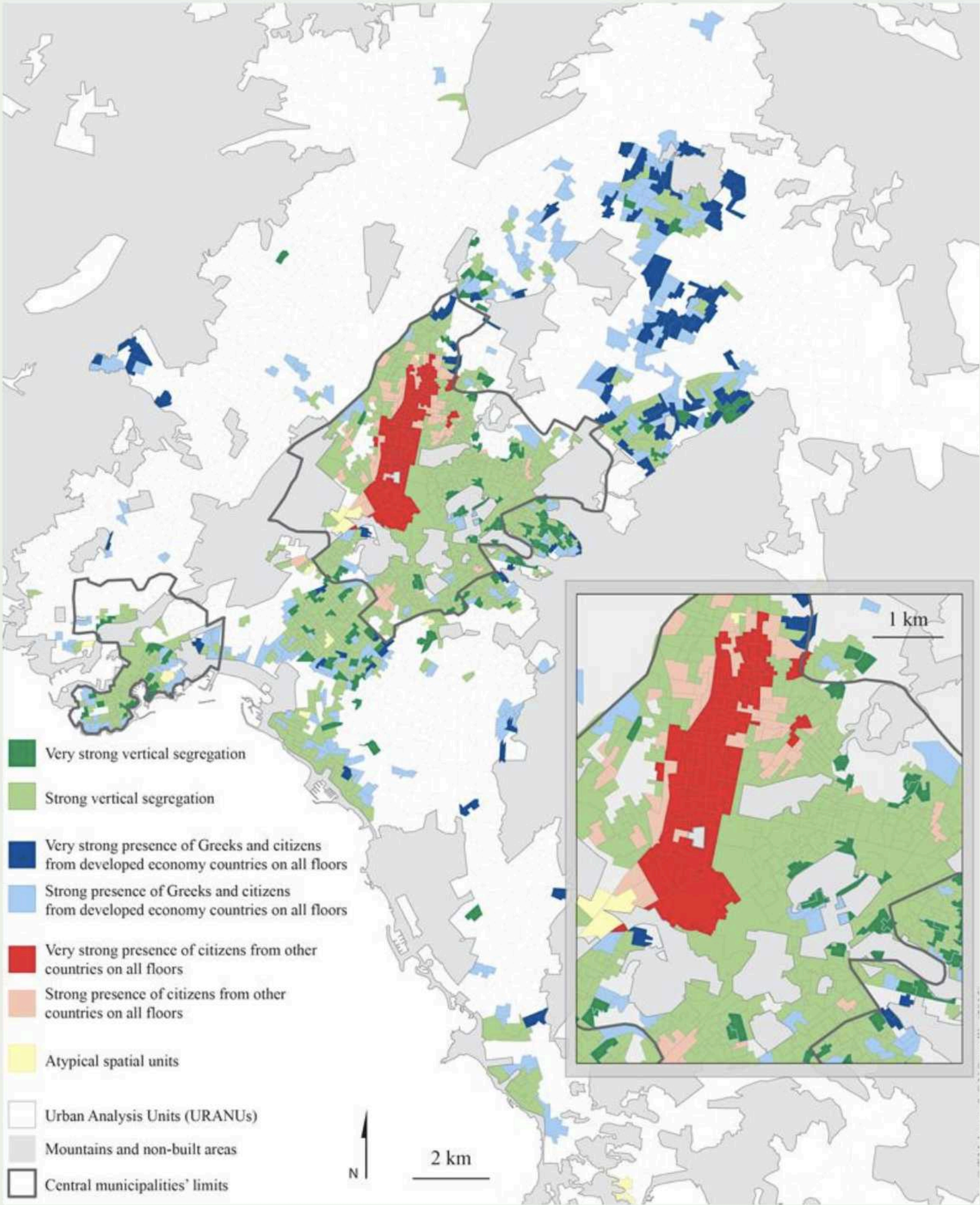




Percentage of residents in apartment buildings built between 1946 and 1980 by broad category of citizenship and by floor in the municipality of Athens



Percentage of residents in apartment buildings built between 1946 and 1980 by tenure and by floor of residence in the municipality of Athens

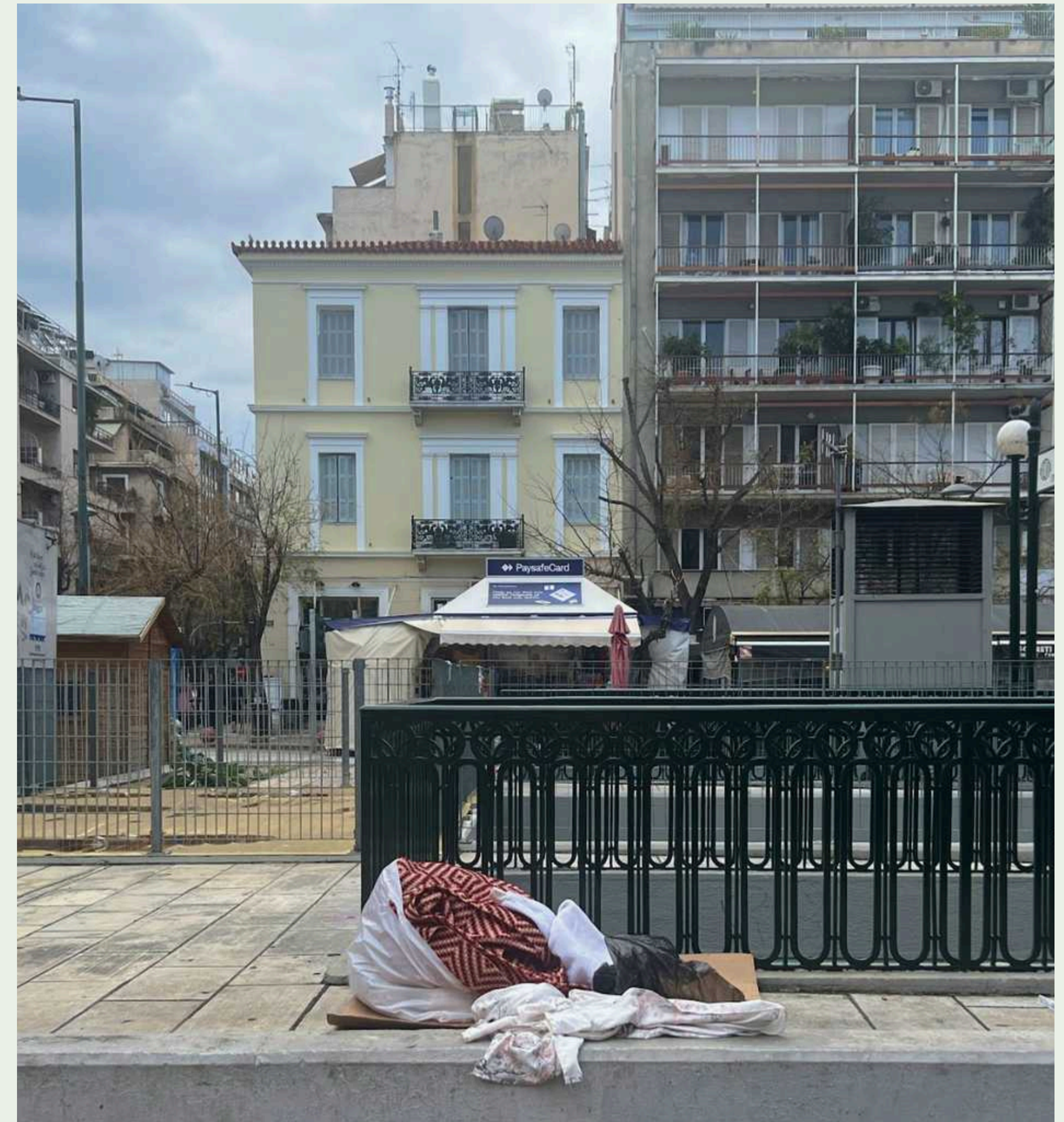


Areas of vertical ethnic segregation and ethnically homogeneous areas Athens 2011

Public Space & Vulnerability

Occasionally personal belongings belonging to homeless individuals appear on the square during the day. Frequently one can see people searching in the trash cans for food or other precious items.

Viktoria functions as a shelter within the city. Various elevated structures of the square act as temporary areas of rest for homeless people and refugees.



Social Kitchens and Solidarity

Viktoria Square also functions as a point of activism and solidarity. Beyond the commercial food economy of cafés, restaurants and kiosks, the square and its surrounding streets are connected to social kitchens, free meals and food distribution practices.

This includes formal and informal forms of support:

- social kitchens and collective cooking and free meal distribution
- dry food and basic goods accessed through community services
- NGO and grassroots support for refugees, migrants and homeless people
- food as care, survival and social contact



Grassroots Spaces

The social life of Viktoria Square extends beyond the square itself. Nearby queer, artistic and grassroots spaces create alternative forms of belonging and support.

LALA and **Zizania** show how informal spaces can act as cultural and social infrastructure.

- LALA: queer art, culture and community space
- Hosts screenings, workshops, residencies and archives
- Zizania: squat and social centre near the area
- Includes communal activity, events and shared resources
- Both challenge formal ideas of who the city is for



The Economy of Sex Work

Viktoria Square sits close to one of Athens' most visible sex-work geographies. Fylis Street is part of a wider concentration of brothels south of Omonia, within an area roughly framed by Tritis Septemvriou, Agiou Meletiou, Liosion and Ioulianou streets.

Within this zone, Athens Social Atlas identifies an even denser cluster around Fylis Street, framed by Heyden, Aristotelous, Feron and Acharnon streets. Fylis itself is described as having more brothels than the adjacent streets.

This places Viktoria within a broader local economy that is not limited to cafés, kiosks, housing, tourism or renovation. Sex work forms another layer of urban activity, spatially concentrated in particular streets, buildings, ground floors and thresholds.



Memory, Violence and Social Visibility

The neighbourhood also contains traces of violence, mourning and remembrance. Faded flyers for Anna Ivankova, a black trans woman murdered near her home, remain visible around the area. This shows how public space can carry social memory, especially for communities often excluded from official narratives.

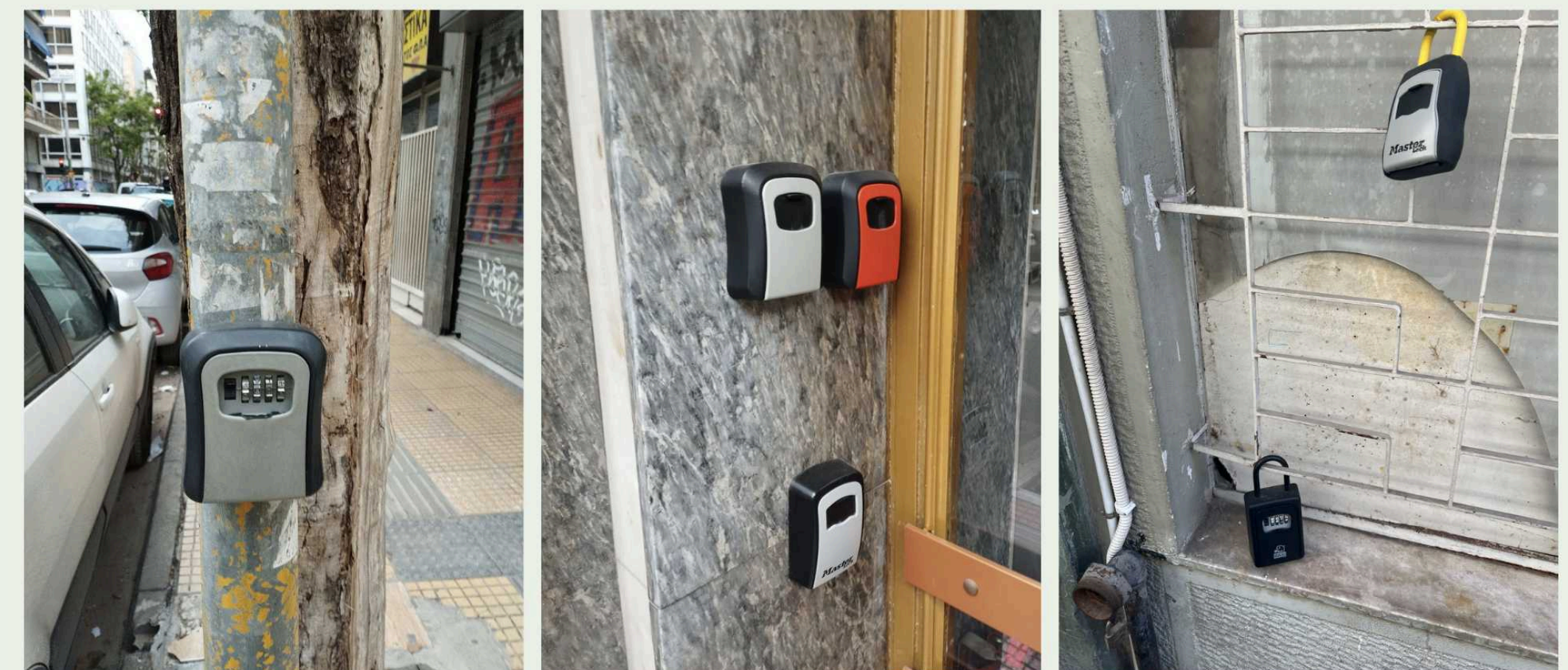


Gentrification as a New Wave

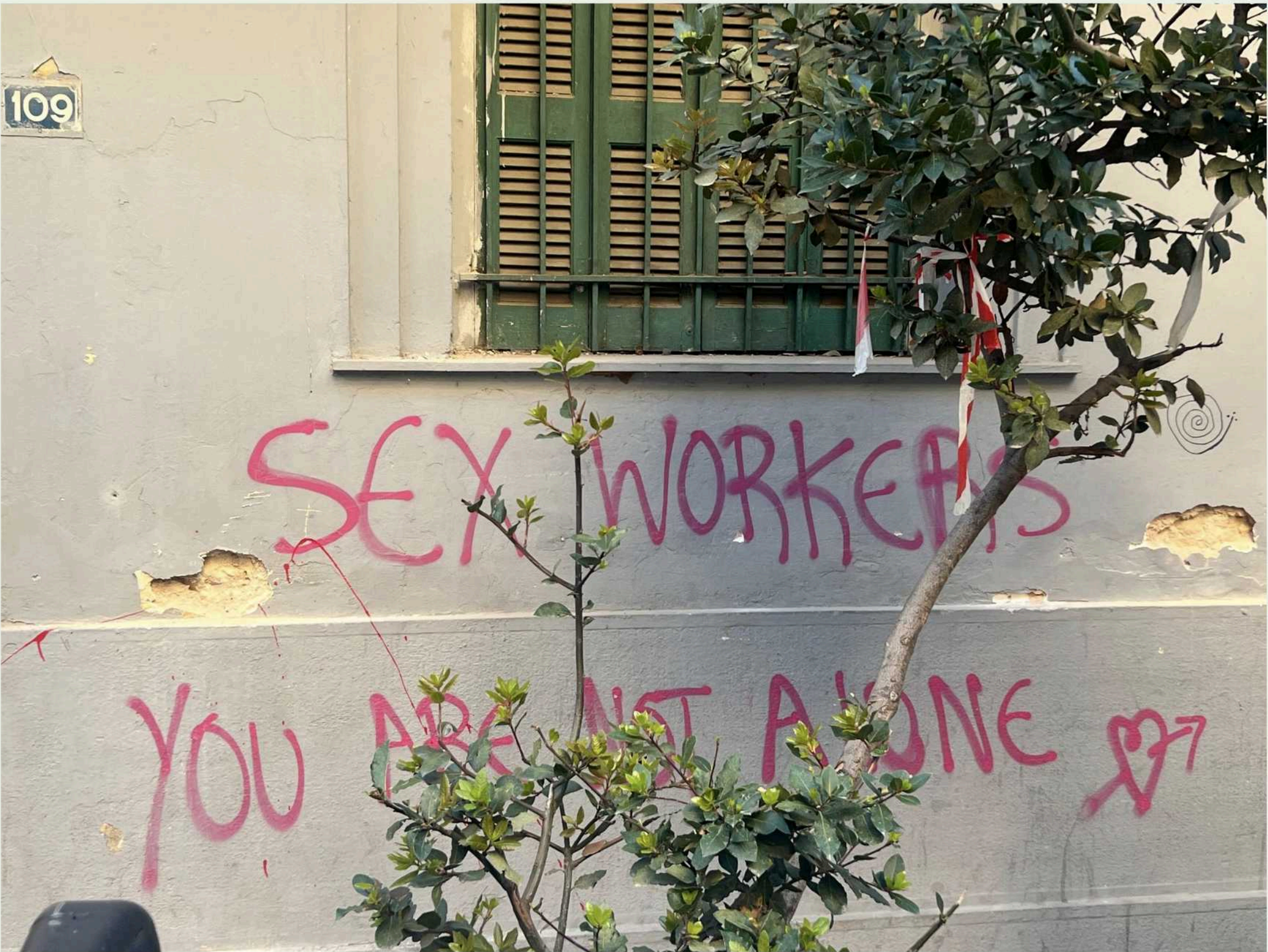
The latest wave affecting Viktoria Square is driven by **real estate**, **tourism** and **investment**. This changes the role of housing from a living system into a financial asset.

The danger is that the area loses the social mix that made it adaptive in the first place.

- Short-term rentals increase pressure on housing
- Rents rise near transport and active public spaces
- Migrant and lower-income residents face displacement
- *Polykatoikia* units shift from homes to assets
- The square risks becoming polished but less socially open

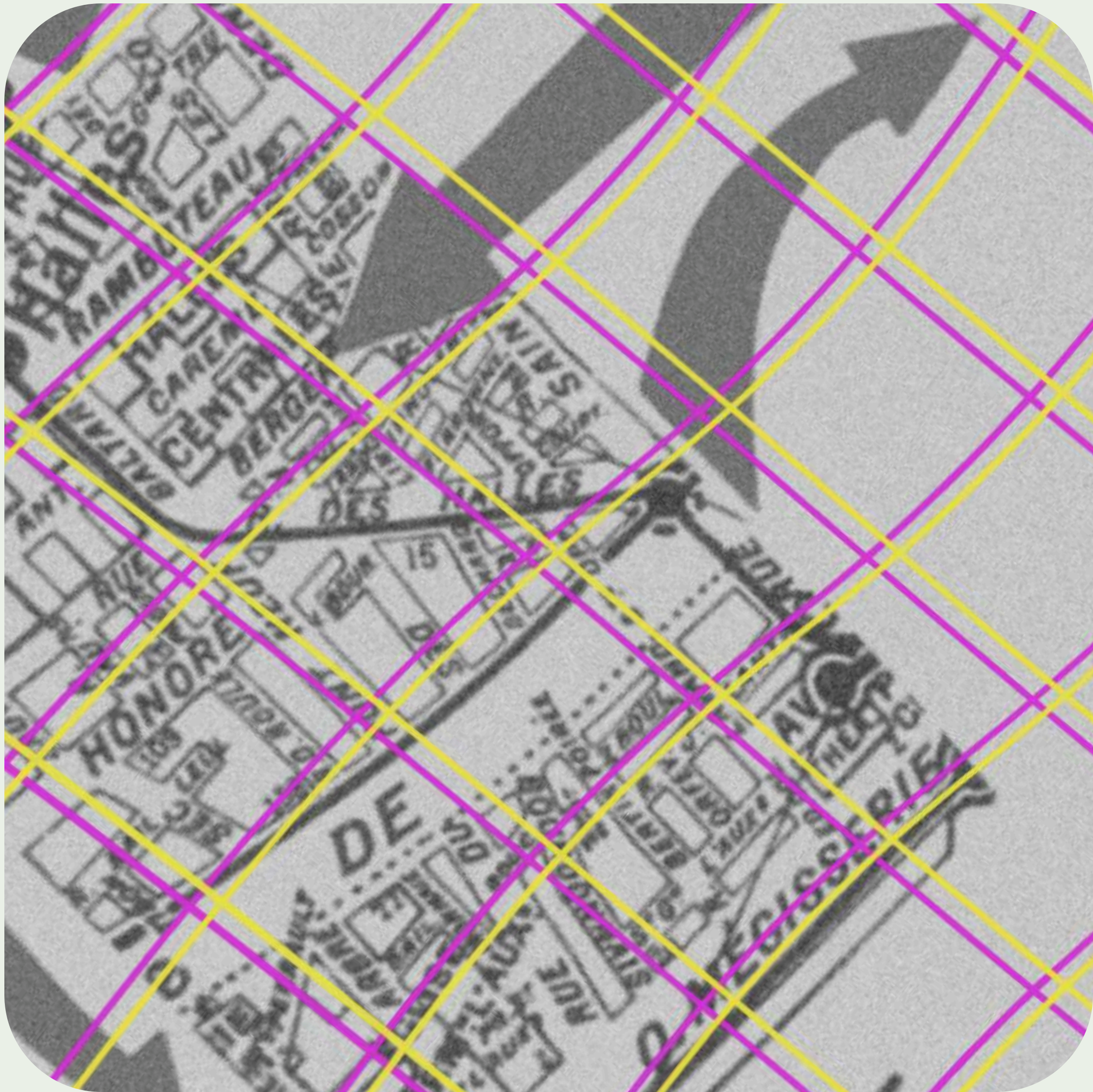








Backstage photo from “Avant-Drag!”, a film by Fil Ieropoulos exploring queer identity in modern-day Athens



PART TWO

The Drift

Debord, Situationists and Psychogeography

Psychogeography comes from the **Situationist** critique of the modern city. **Guy Debord** and the Situationists argued that urban space shapes behaviour, emotion and social relations, rather than simply organising movement.

Their approach challenged cities designed around routine, consumption and passive use. Instead of treating the city as a fixed grid, they read it as a field of atmospheres, attractions, exclusions and hidden emotional currents.

- Situationist International active from 1957 to 1972
- Linked art, politics, urbanisation and everyday life
- Critiqued capitalist cities as alienating and overly functional
- Used mapping to analyse how the city is experienced
- Led to the *dérive*, drifting through the city by following feeling rather than function
- Produced emotional and experiential maps instead of conventional cartography





Mémoires by Guy Debord and Asger Jorn

From the Flâneur to Psychogeography

Psychogeography also draws from the older figure of the **flâneur**: the urban stroller who moves through the city without a fixed destination. This connects the *dérive* to a longer history of walking as a way of reading urban life.

Walter Benjamin's reading of **Baudelaire** adds an important distinction: the tourist sees the city as picturesque and consumable, while the local experience of the city is closer to memory, habit and lived biography.

- The flâneur comes from 19th-century urban culture
- Linked to Baudelaire's writing on modern city life
- Walter Benjamin reframed the flâneur as a critical urban observer
- Tourists often see the city through surface images
- Native accounts carry memory, routine and personal history
- This supports a shift from sightseeing to lived urban experience

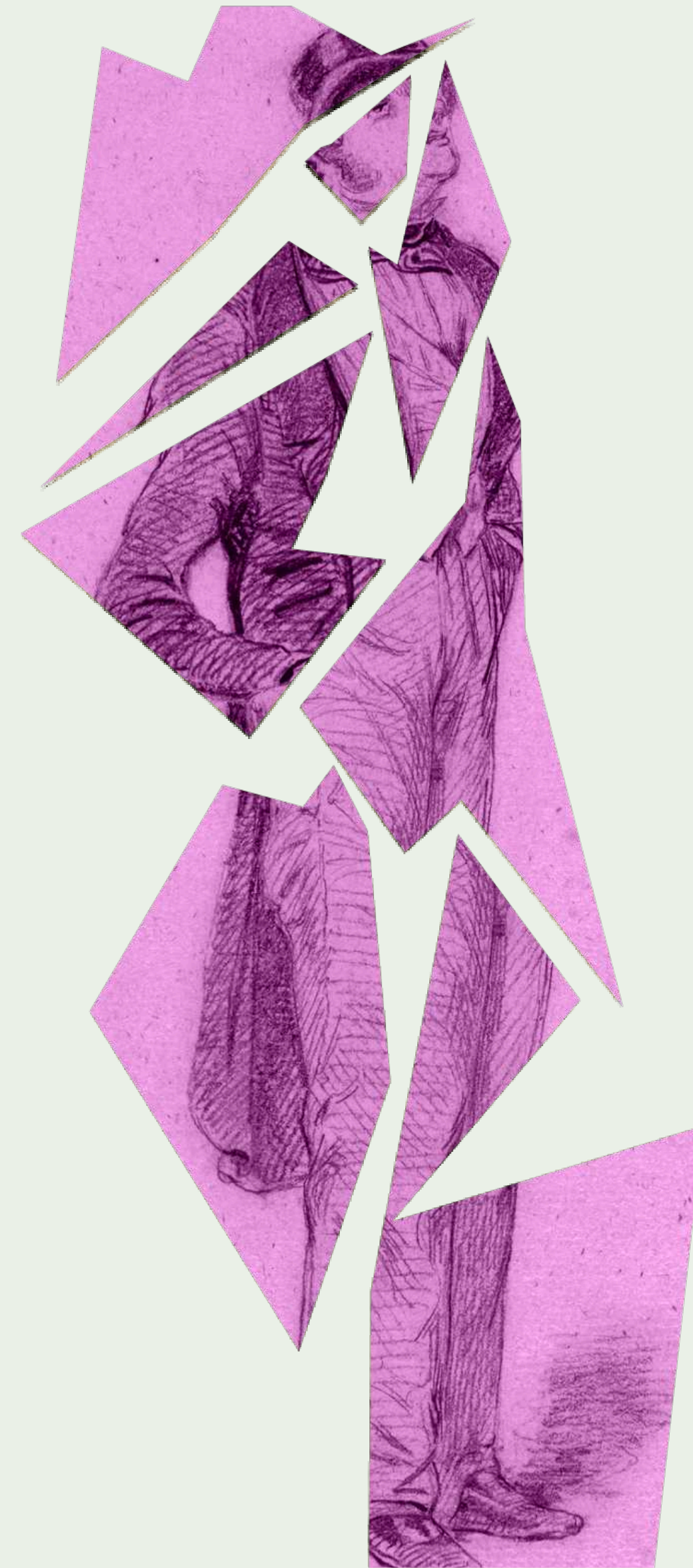


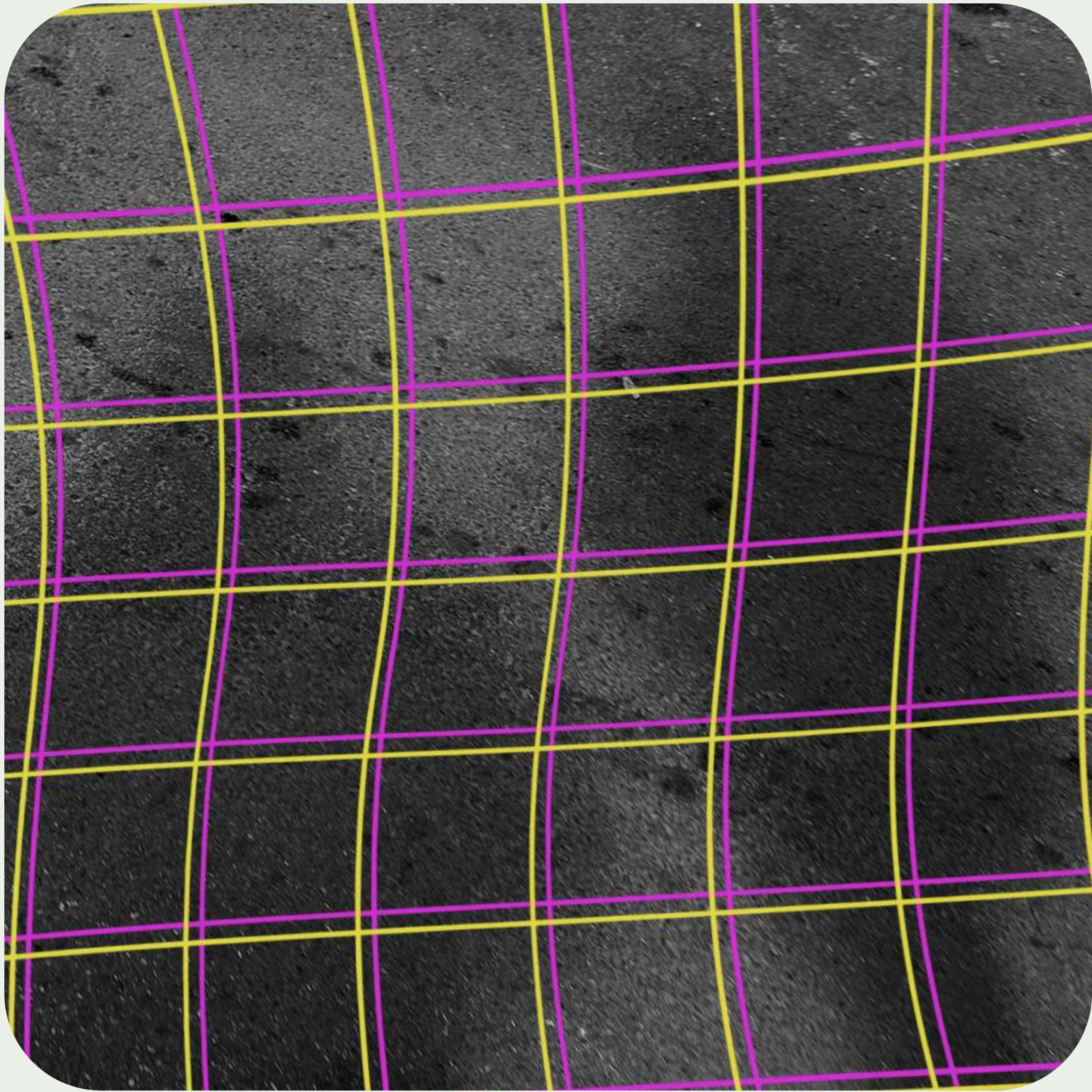
Queering the Dérive

The *dérive*, or drift, is a method of walking through the city by following atmosphere rather than routine. A queer *dérive* reframes this as a way of navigating spaces shaped by visibility, desire, fear and safety.

This makes walking an embodied research method. The route is shaped by memory, attraction, avoidance and risk.

- The *dérive* abandons predictable routes and daily habits
- Emotional response becomes a form of spatial knowledge
- **Ivan Chtcheglov** connects drifting to psychological and therapeutic processes
- **Juan Antonio Suárez & Juan Francisco Belmonte-Ávila** frame queer psychogeography as a material practice of urban navigation
- Walking becomes both research method and act of reclamation





PART THREE

Queer Psycho- geographic Walks

The method

The research was based on **8 interviews** with people connected to Victoria Square, including one session with two participants. Each meeting began at the square and unfolded through walking, conversation and memory.

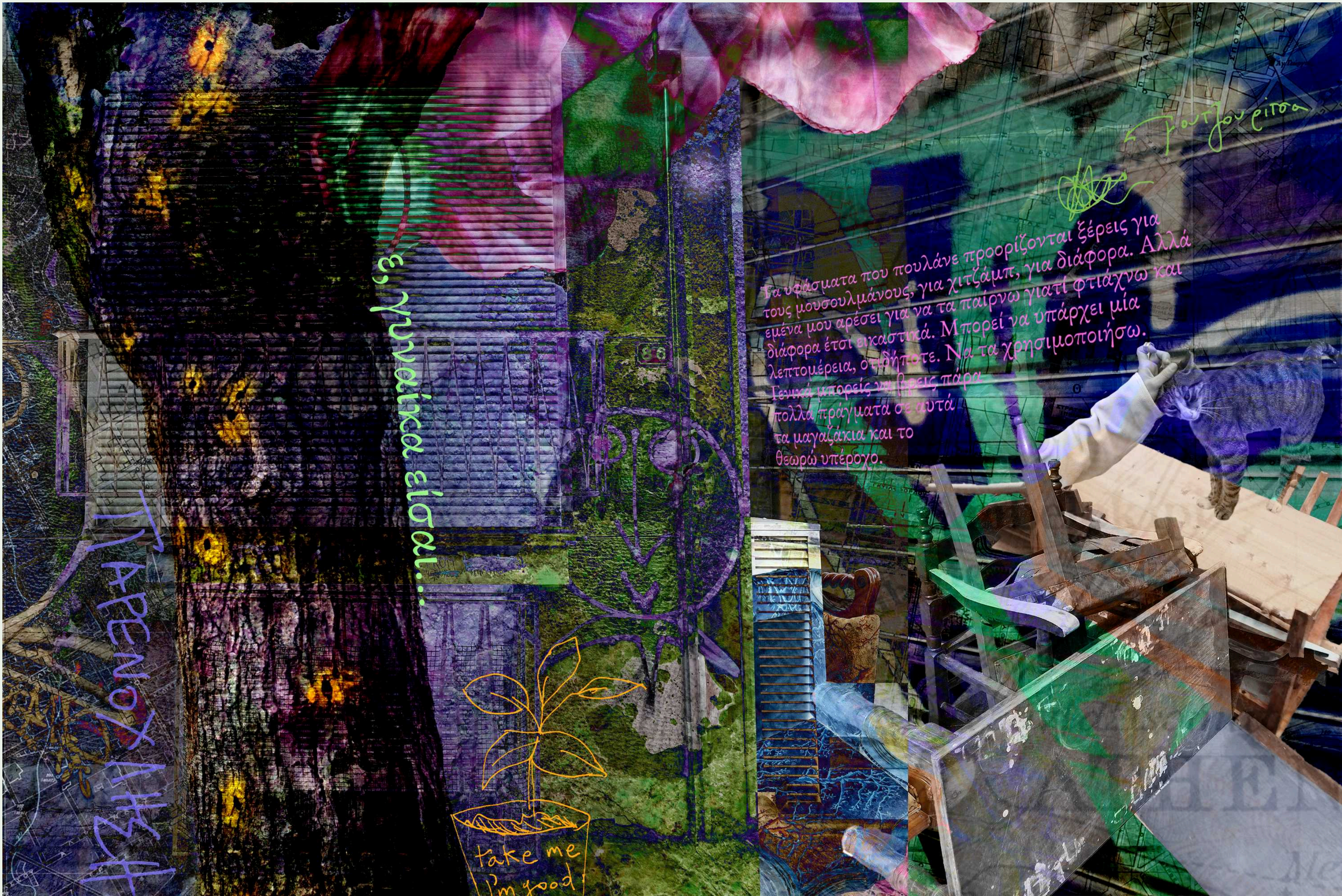
Participants were asked not to prepare anything in advance. Instead, they guided the route through the neighbourhood, allowing the walk to follow personal associations, spatial triggers and remembered experiences.

The walks were participant-led, but also environment-triggered: streets, buildings, cafés, bus stops, laundrettes, bars and memories shaped what was discussed. The method captured both actual routes and remembered routes: people describe where they walked during the session, but also past routes from everyday **habits, therapy, dating, nightlife, commuting, work and crisis**.

Each discussion was later translated into a digital psychogeographic collage. These collages combined interview quotes, photographs taken during the walk, maps, visual patterns and spatial relationships mentioned by participants.

- 8 interviews / 9 participants
- Acquaintances or recommendations by acquaintances
- Starting point: Victoria Square
- Format: walking interview / guided *dérive*
- Average duration: 1 hour 5 minutes
- Participants chose the route spontaneously while discussing the area
- Recorded on phone for the entirety of the conversation
- Focus on memory, identity, movement and emotional attachment





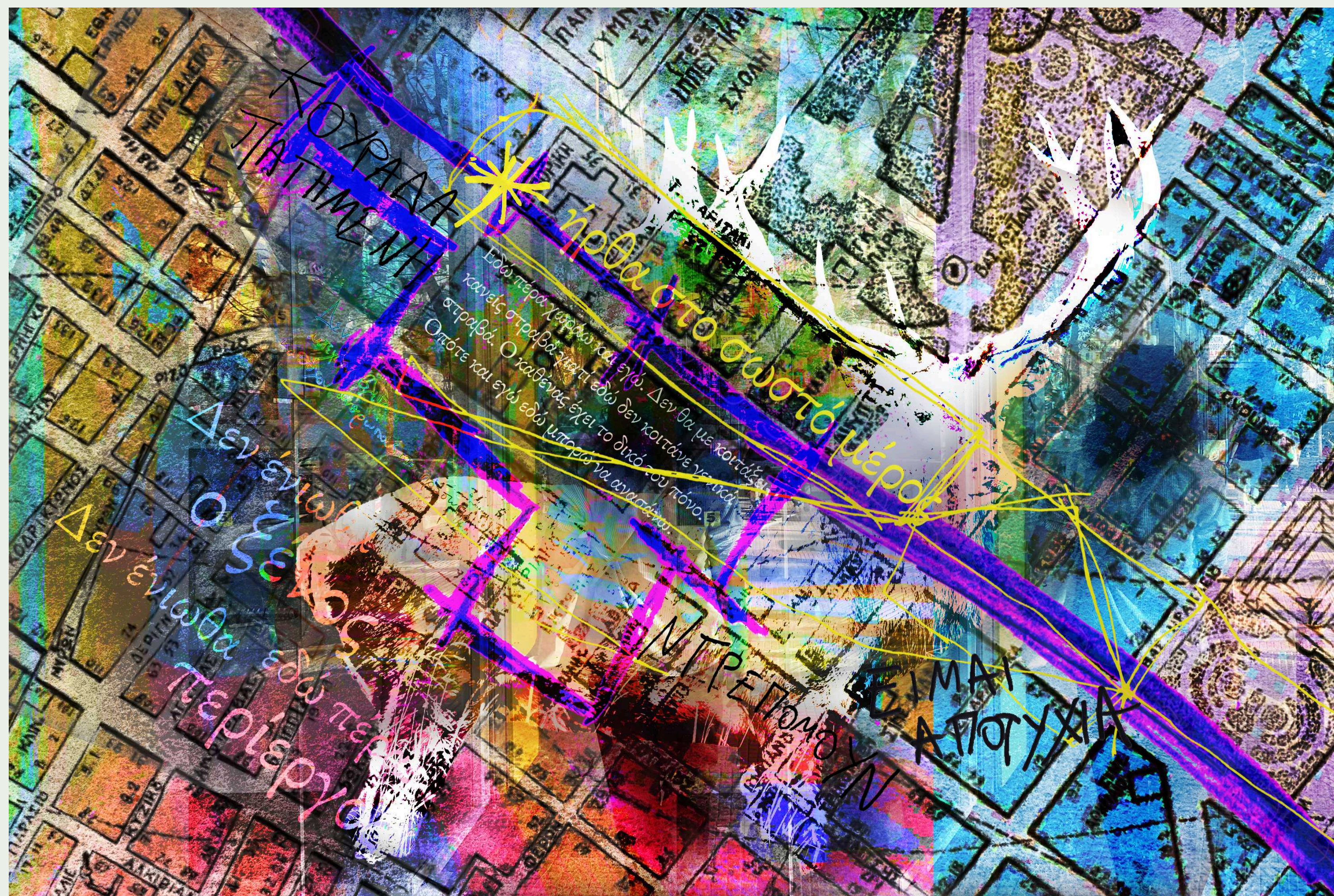
ε, γυναίκα είσαι...

ΠΑΡΕΝΟΧΑΗΣΗ

take me
i'm good

Γα υφάσματα που πουλάνε προορίζονται ξέρεις για
τους μουσουλμάνους, για χιτζάμπ, για διάφορα. Αλλά
εμένα μου αρέσει για να τα παίρνω γιατί φτιάχνω και
διάφορα έτσι εικαστικά. Μπορεί να υπάρχει μία
λεπτομέρεια, οτιδήποτε. Να τα χρησιμοποιήσω.
Γενικά μπορείς να βρεις παρα
πολλά πράγματα σε αυτά
τα μαγαζάκια και το
θεωρώ υπέροχο.

Εργαλεία









Key results

VICTORIA AS MOVEMENT, DENSITY AND METROPOLITAN LIFE

Participants describe Victoria less as a fixed neighbourhood and more as a field of movement: arriving, passing through, waiting, working, returning and drifting. The area matters because it holds many different rhythms at once: commuters, migrants, residents, students, queer people, artists, sex workers and precarious workers.

This creates a metropolitan feeling that participants often compare, directly or indirectly, to migrant and queer districts in cities like London or Berlin. Victoria is valued because it is not polished or homogeneous. Its density of languages, bodies, shops and social types gives it the feeling of a “real city”.

QUEER LIFE IS INFORMAL, DISPERSED AND TIED TO EVERYDAY INFRASTRUCTURE

Queerness in the interviews does not appear as a clear “gay village” identity. It is more scattered and unofficial: homes, cafés, squats, laundrettes, streets, first-date places, sex-work geographies, cheap rents and small cultural spaces.

This is important because queer infrastructure is not only made of explicitly LGBTQ+ venues. Ordinary places become queer through use, memory and repetition. A laundrette can become a social point, a café can become a discreet meeting place, and a route can become part of someone’s queer biography.

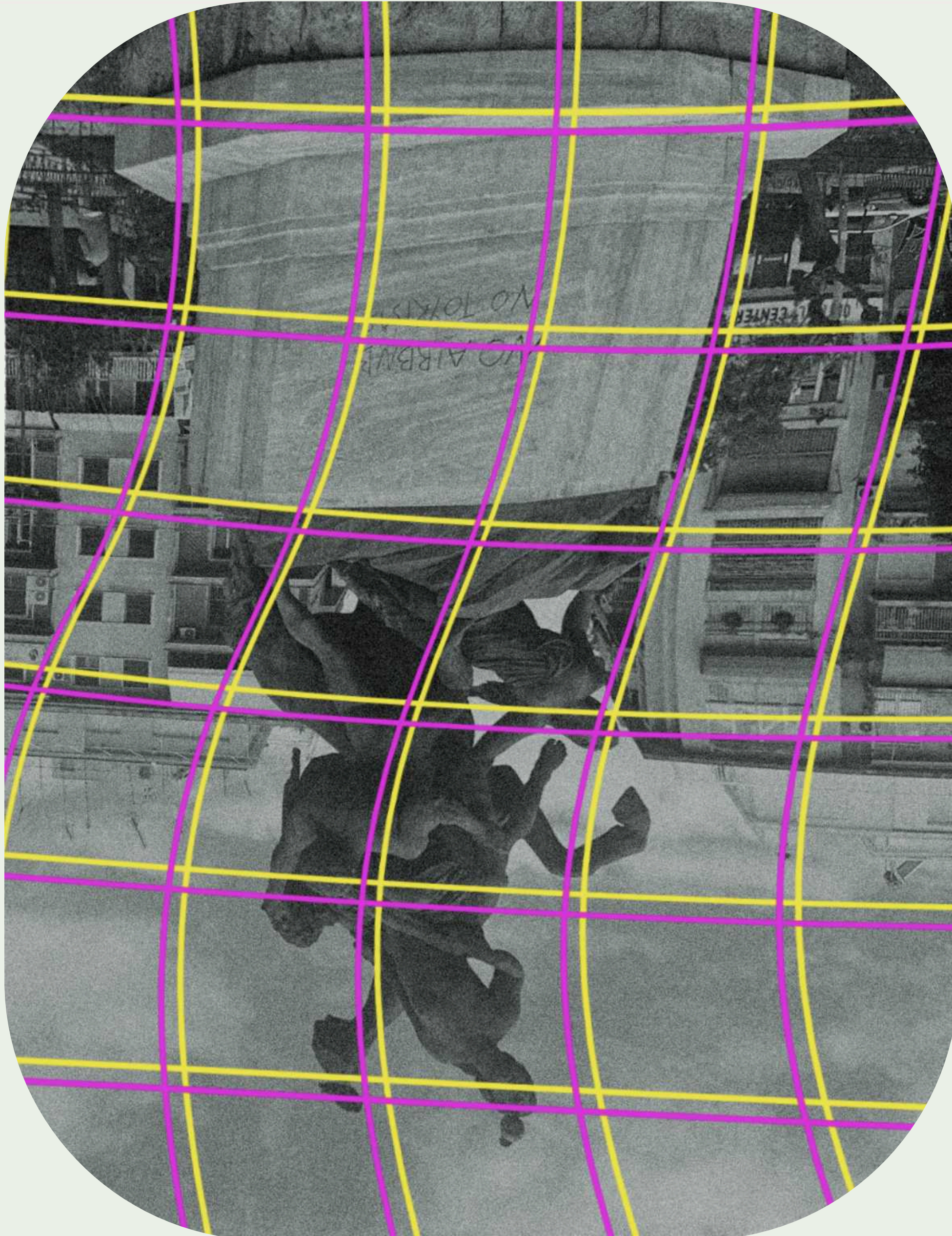
Key results

AFFORDABILITY CREATES COEXISTENCE, BUT ALSO SHARED PRECARIETY

Cheap rent is a major reason why queer people, migrants, artists and precarious residents are able to live or gather in the area. This produces coexistence, but the interviews do not romanticise it. Participants describe coexistence as sometimes warm, sometimes awkward and sometimes forced by economic conditions. People are near each other because the area is still relatively accessible, not necessarily because the city has created equal or comfortable conditions for living together.

2015 TURNED VICTORIA INTO A STAGE OF CRISIS, CARE AND VISIBILITY

The refugee crisis appears as a rupture in the memory of the square. Participants remember Victoria in 2015 as full of people, children, clothes, food, songs, donations, energy and sadness. This moment made displacement visible in public space, but it also revealed solidarity networks. Victoria became a place where the failures of formal reception systems were exposed, while informal care, hostels, food, clothes and local support tried to fill the gaps.



PART FOUR

Action / Inaction Plan

Action/Inaction Plan

RADICAL INACTION: RESISTING A VISIBLE QUEER BOHEMIAN NEIGHBOURHOOD

Queer psychogeography and the *dérive* can reclaim hostile urban landscapes, but they risk being instrumentalised if visibility becomes a commercial “rainbow” aesthetic or pinkwashing.

In a review of **Avant-Drag!** (Phuong Le) queer artists in Athens are described as lighting up the streets with “joy and resistance”. Yet when this embodied presence is upscaled into institutional or corporate spectacles, it can become a cultural vanguard for gentrification.

As Sarah Schulman argues in **The Gentrification of the Mind**, the cultural fabric, joy, and resistance created by queer communities are often repackaged by capitalist developers to market an area.

CREATION OF DISCREET QUEER HUBS

In a rapidly gentrifying city, maintaining a discreet presence can become a queer strategy of spatial resistance.

Jasbir Puar’s **Terrorist Assemblages** warns that hyper-visibility and state-sanctioned recognition can become traps of neoliberal inclusion, where only certain queer subjects become acceptable.

This is the logic behind **ΛΛΛΛ**, a queer house near Victoria Square, which deliberately chooses to be housed in an apartment building rather than a gallery space with a window display. Its manifesto describes this as a choice to “keep a low profile in the neighbourhood”.

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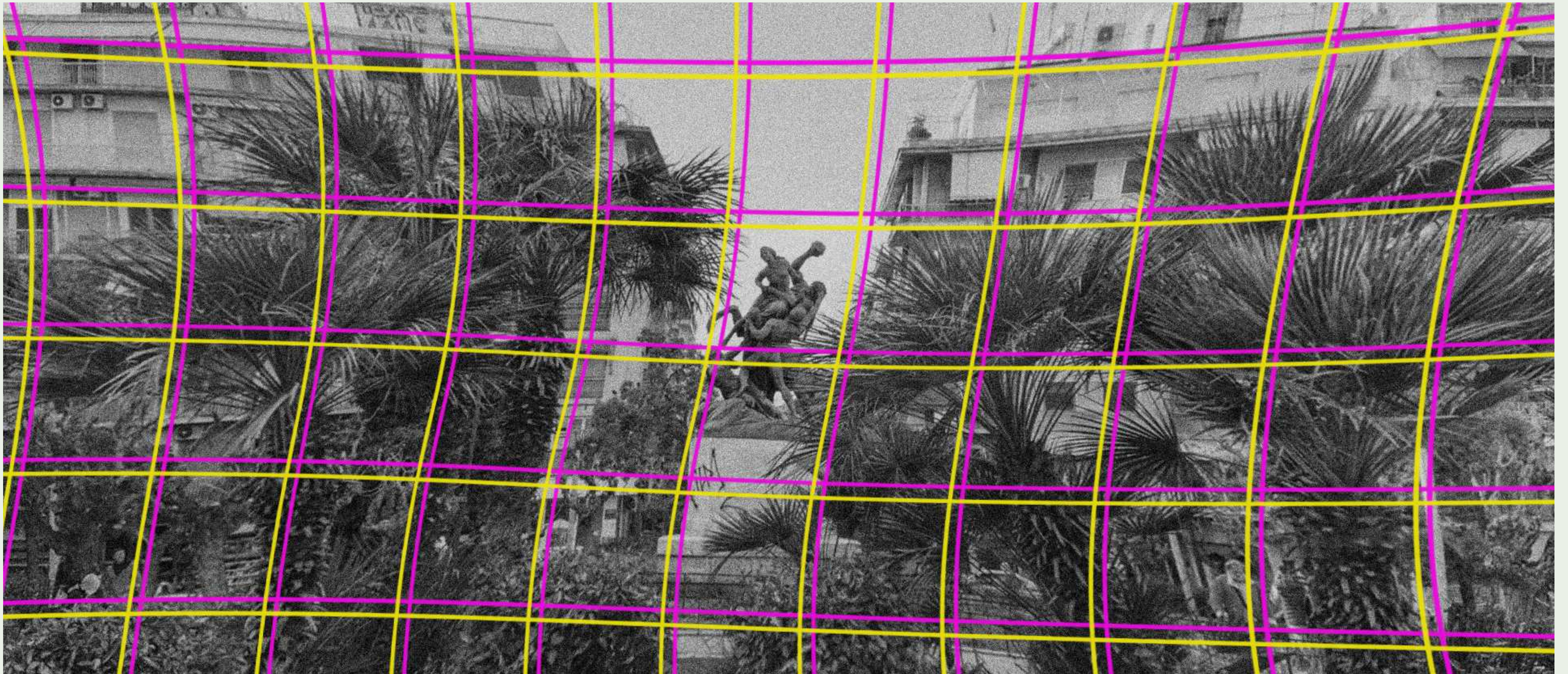
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Thank you