

# DISPATCHES FROM THE TRANSIENT CITY

by Grigori Enikolopov

B.A. Science in Society Program  
Wesleyan University, 2008

Submitted to the Department of Architecture  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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# Dispatches from the Transient City

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And to Jan Casimir whose expertise and acumen in all things related to visualization I called upon heavily. Thank you for all of your time as well as for a being a true friend when I needed one.





# Dispatches from the Transient City

by Grigori Enikolopov

## ABSTRACT

Unprecedented levels of migration, displacement, and expulsions mark the contemporary moment. With the increase of protracted conflicts and environmental crises, the numbers of displaced persons fleeing war, famine, disease, or poverty has now surpassed levels seen previously only after WWII. As the world urbanizes, rural populations are moving in greater numbers to cities and in the developed world, gentrification reshuffles historical settlement patterns.

The spatial technologies that surround this mass movement of persons have been inadequately explored and represented. A new form of urbanism is emerging; not static cities of migration, but conduit cities of populations in motion. This new form of transient urbanism will not replace the static city. Instead it is superimposed upon the existing city, and emerging from its obsolete artifacts.

The city of Athens, Greece, a gateway into Europe and confluence on the migrant route from the Middle East, is taken as a case study for architectural speculations into the ways transience alters the experience of cities. Athens poses numerous difficulties and opportunities as the state's ability to formulate meaningful action is challenged by the ongoing government-debt crisis which began in 2009. Another consequence of the crisis has been

a hollowing out of the center of the city with vacant building stock increasing into the tens of thousands (Baboulias).

This thesis takes the form of a manifesto that aims to replace the camp imaginary with correspondences from the transient city. The proposal projects not a utopian vision of the future but a provisional project already in the process of becoming. Drawing is used as a tool to heighten and amplify the transformations now underway.

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on January 19, 2017 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture.

**Advisor:** Timothy Hyde, MArch, PhD  
Associate Professor of Architecture



# **INTRODUCTION**

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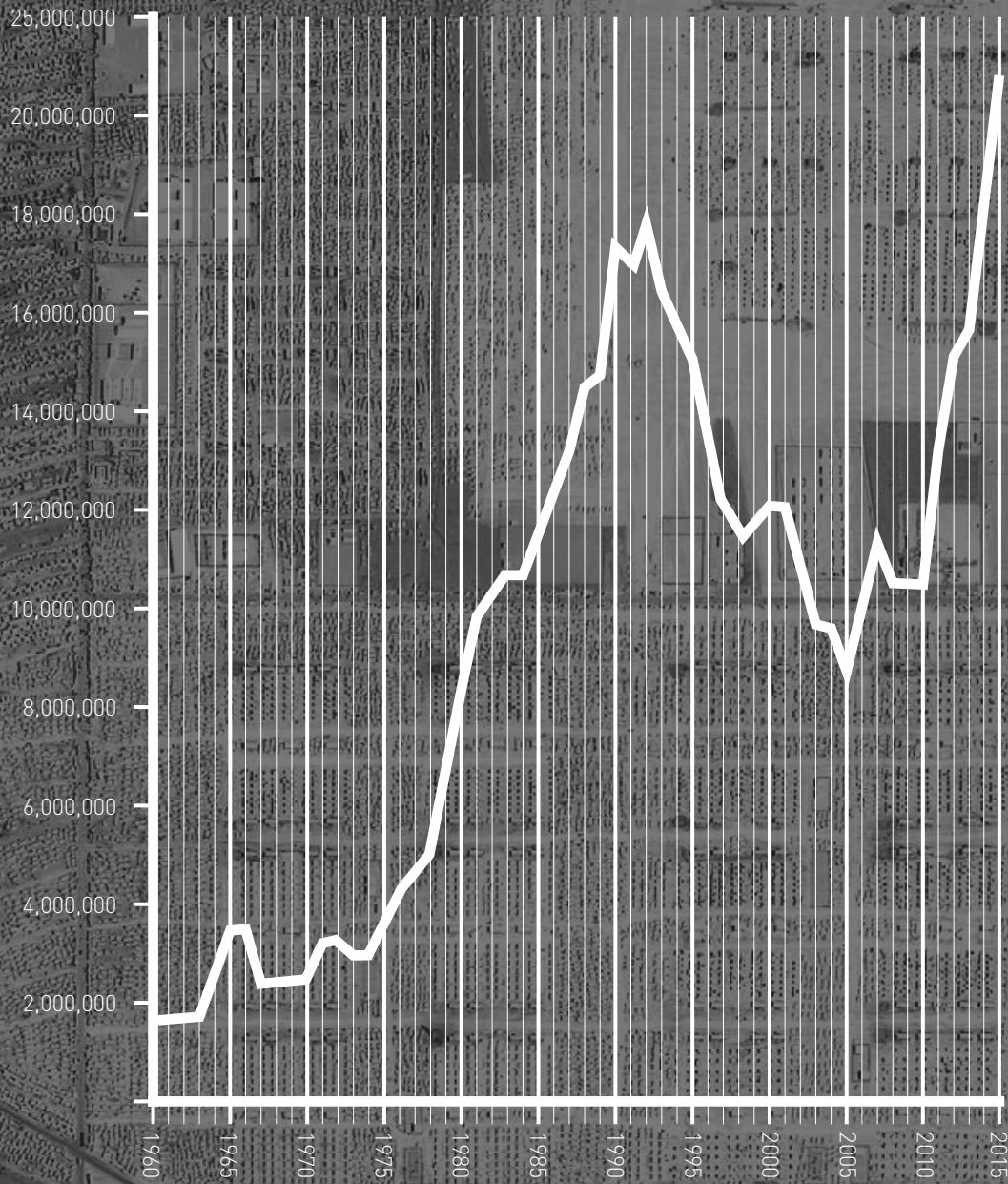
Architecture  
After Expulsions

# Transience is a quintessential 21st-century condition.

The world's population is churning. The contemporary moment is marked by unprecedented levels of migration, displacement, and expulsions. With the increase of protracted conflicts, the numbers of displaced persons fleeing conflict, famine, disease, or poverty has now surpassed levels seen previously only after world war II.

As the world urbanizes, rural populations are moving in greater numbers to cities and global economic processes are expressed on the ground in the form of land grabs. In the developed world, gentrification reshuffles historical settlement patterns and the rise of freelance labor has created a workforce untethered to geographical locations. Transience has become a quintessential 21st-century condition.

# GLOBAL REFUGEE POPULATION



# MIGRATION ROUTES



## THE HUMANITARIAN PARADOX

Spaces of displacement pose a fraught challenge to the agency of architecture. While camps, borders, and displacement present problems that are clearly spatialized, they beg for political and social, not spatial, resolutions.

Though well-meaning, humanitarian aid, often has unintended or paradoxical outcomes. By focusing on issues of “bare life” such as the provision of shelter, food, and medicine, rather than political empowerment, humanitarian spaces serve as a band-aid to prolong state inaction.

Thus conceived, camps can be seen as indefinite “waiting rooms on the margins of the world” to manage and diffuse the perceived risks posed by displaced populations (Weizman, 56).

Rather than engaging in an architectural solutionism, this thesis invests in representation as a instrument to unpack the spatial technologies that mediate a life in transit as well as to expose political potentialities and consequences of the emerging transient city.



Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan.  
Photo: Reuters/Mandel Ngan/Pool.

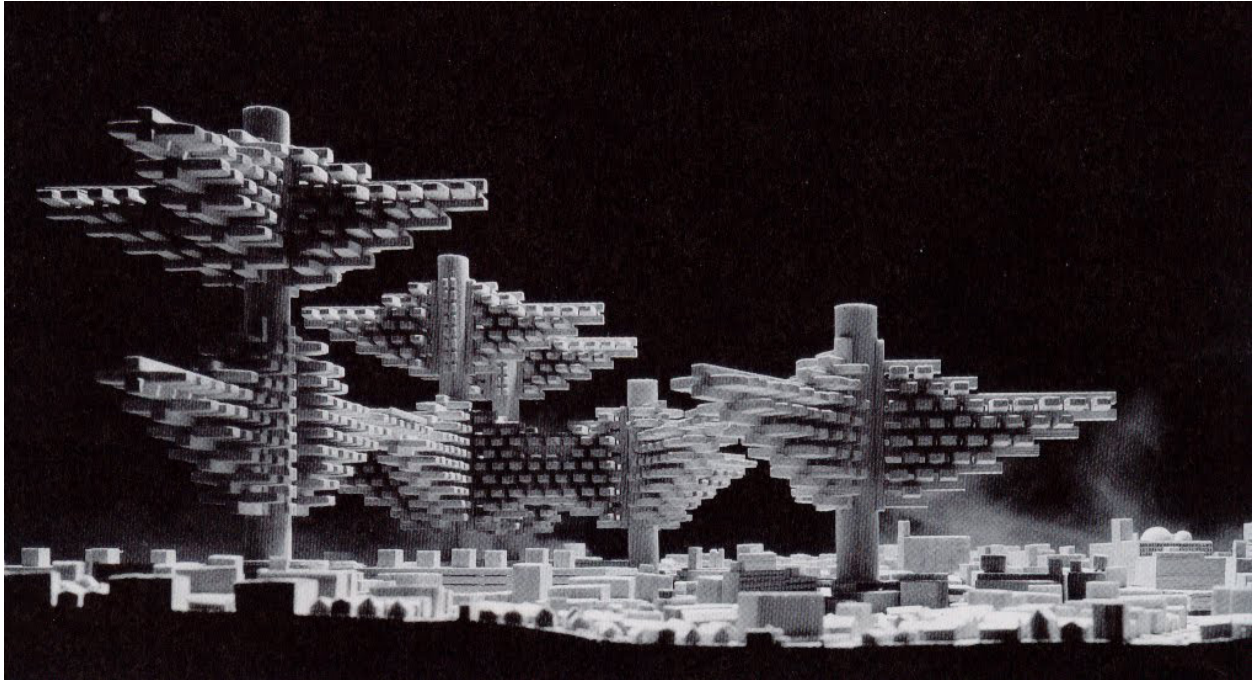
## THE CAMP IMAGINARY

When discussing spaces of displacement we tend to think of camps. With these spaces comes a powerful camp imaginary in the image of thousands of tents arranged in a grid across an empty and arid expanse, this condition though is exceptional and not generalizable. In fact, most of today's refugees live not in camps but instead occupy agricultural land and inexpensive or abandoned apartments within cities



A new form of urbanism is emerging; not static cities of migration, but conduit cities of populations in motion.

This new form of transient urbanism will not replace the static city. Instead it is superimposed upon the existing city, and emerges from its obsolete artifacts.

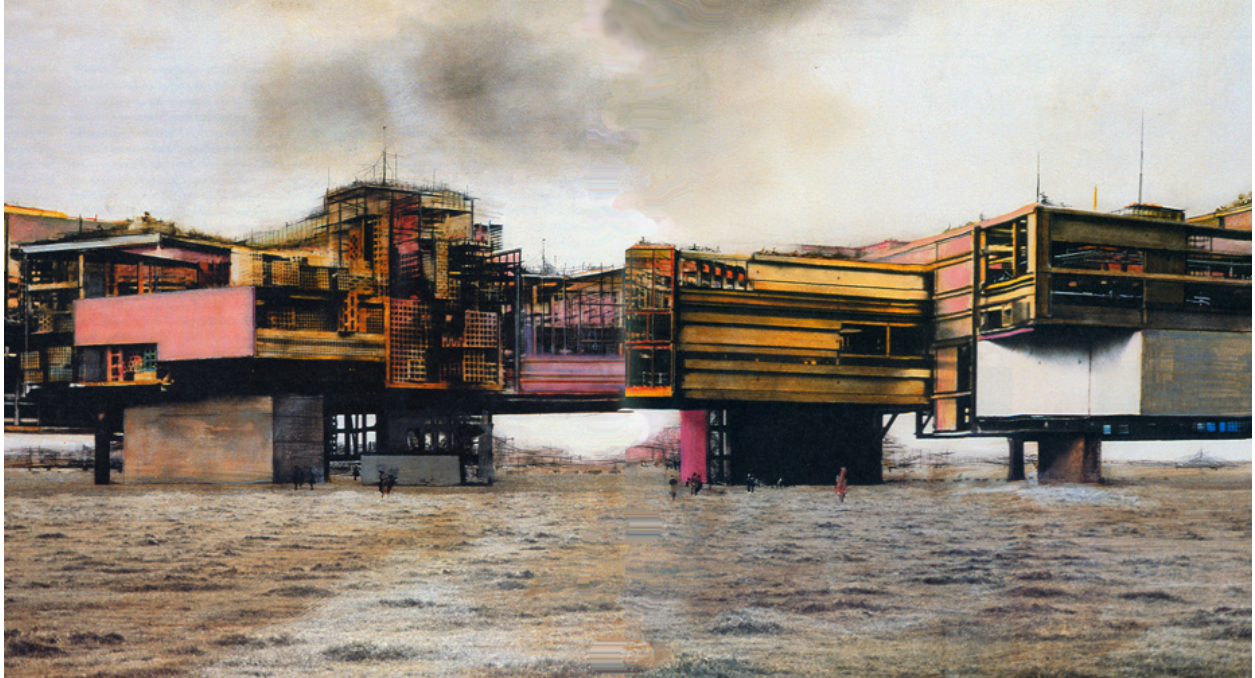


Clusters in the Air, Arata Isozaki, 1960-62.

## UTOPICS

A related conception of the city was put forward but the radical utopian projects of the 1950's and 60's. Propped above the past on megastructures, reconfigurable via mechanical cranes, and traversing territories that challenged state borders, these projects proclaimed the eminent arrival of a mobile urbanism.

While sometimes dismissed as products of a delimited historical moment, this thesis contends that these visions may have in fact been actualized, but in ways never predicted, and for that reason have not been recognized or represented.



View of New Babylonian Sectors, Constant Nieuwenhuys, 1971.

Their images predicted a world in which architecture framed a new found freedom, unfettered by the shackles of wage labor, the control of states, and the isolation of nationalism.

But the 9-5 grind is replaced not by the endless play of homo ludens but by the rise of the precariate class on one hand, and the dispossessed on the other. Instead of the erasure of borders, today we find forced migrations and securitized checkpoints. Rather than liberating utopias, or oppressive dystopias, the emerging transient city presents a more contaminated reality, an existing space that is at once a break from the historical and still a very familiar expression of the logics and logistics of neoliberalism.



Dimitris Philippidis, Typical View of Athens, 2000.  
Source: Dimitris Philippides, Modern Architecture in Greece,  
Melissa, Athens 2001.

## ATHENS: CITY OF MIGRATION

The thesis is sited in Athens, Greece, a gateway and confluence on the migrant route from the Middle East and North Africa into Europe. Athens is also the birthplace of the Agora, and an understanding of public space an agonistic space.

In the second half of the 20th century this understanding receded in favor of private real estate speculation, which took shape through informal development and the decentralized construction of polykatoikias, Athens' distinctive housing typology.



40,000 leftist protesters march in Athens against EU/IMF austerity measures.

Photo: Yorgos Karahalios/Reuters



Golden Dawn far-right demonstrators at rally.

Photo: Yannis Kolesidis/AP

## REEMERGENCE OF AN AGONISTIC SPACE

Following the global financial crisis of 2008 the importance of public space as a venue to express political struggle has reemerged.

In the wake of the meltdown of the Greek economy, any prior faith in the capabilities of the state have been shaken to the core. Today's Athens is a global city, in the sense that sovereignty has been forfeited to supranational organizations, the European Union, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund.

In response Greece has seen the appearance of Golden Dawn, a far right political party that has carried out extreme violence against immigrants and minorities, as well as leftist resistance to neoliberal austerity measures.





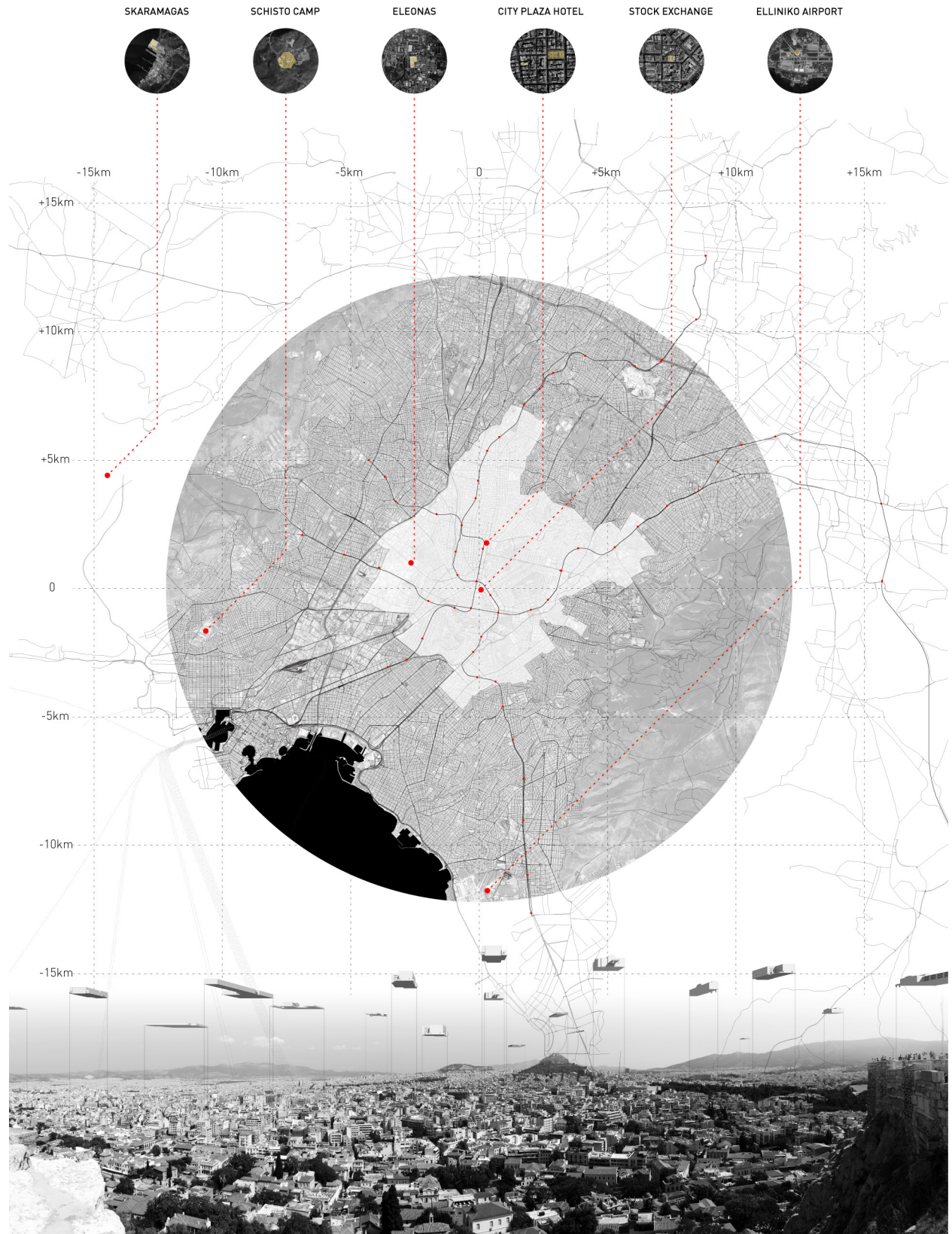
# **FIELD RESEARCH**

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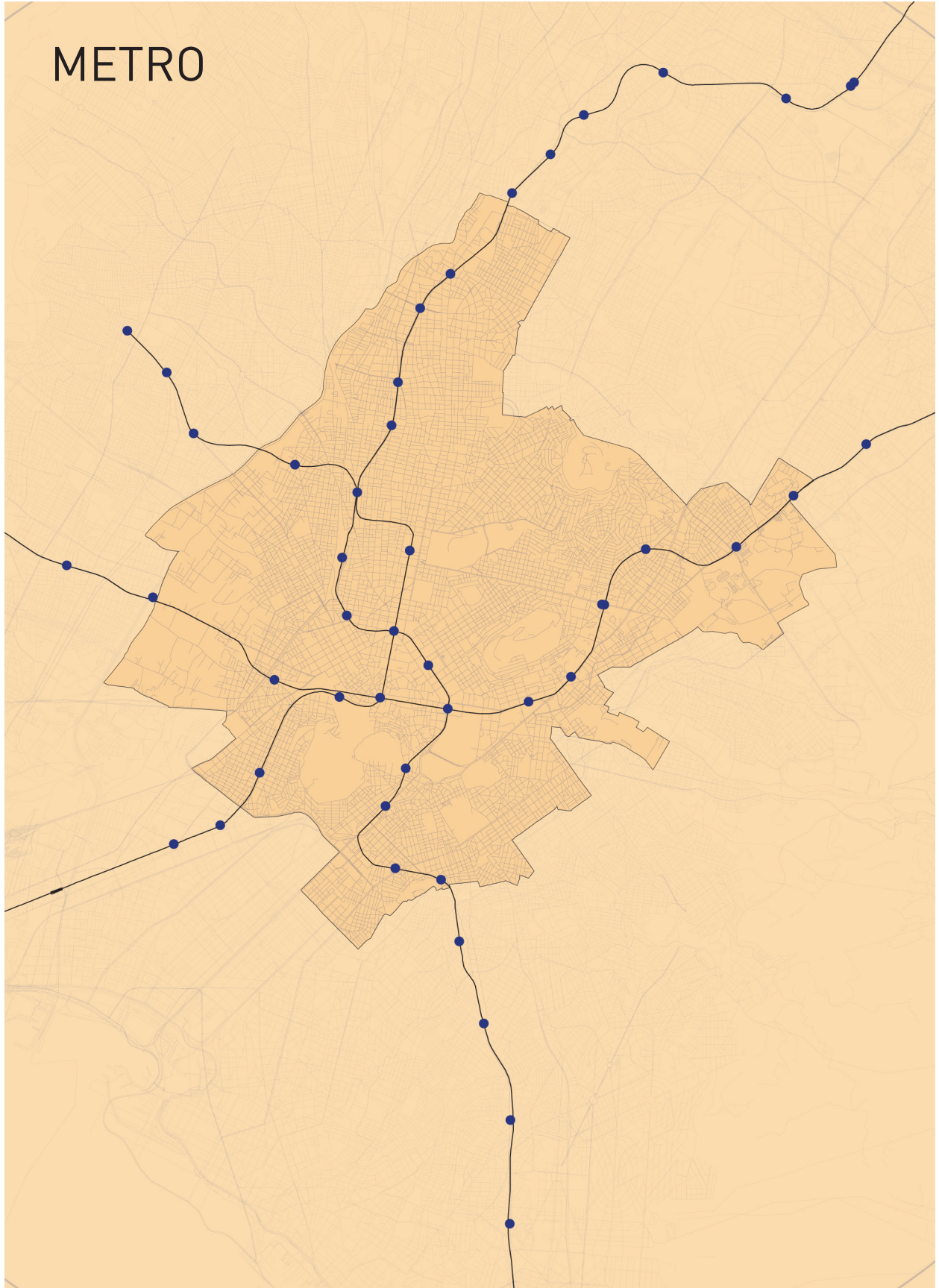
Athens, Greece



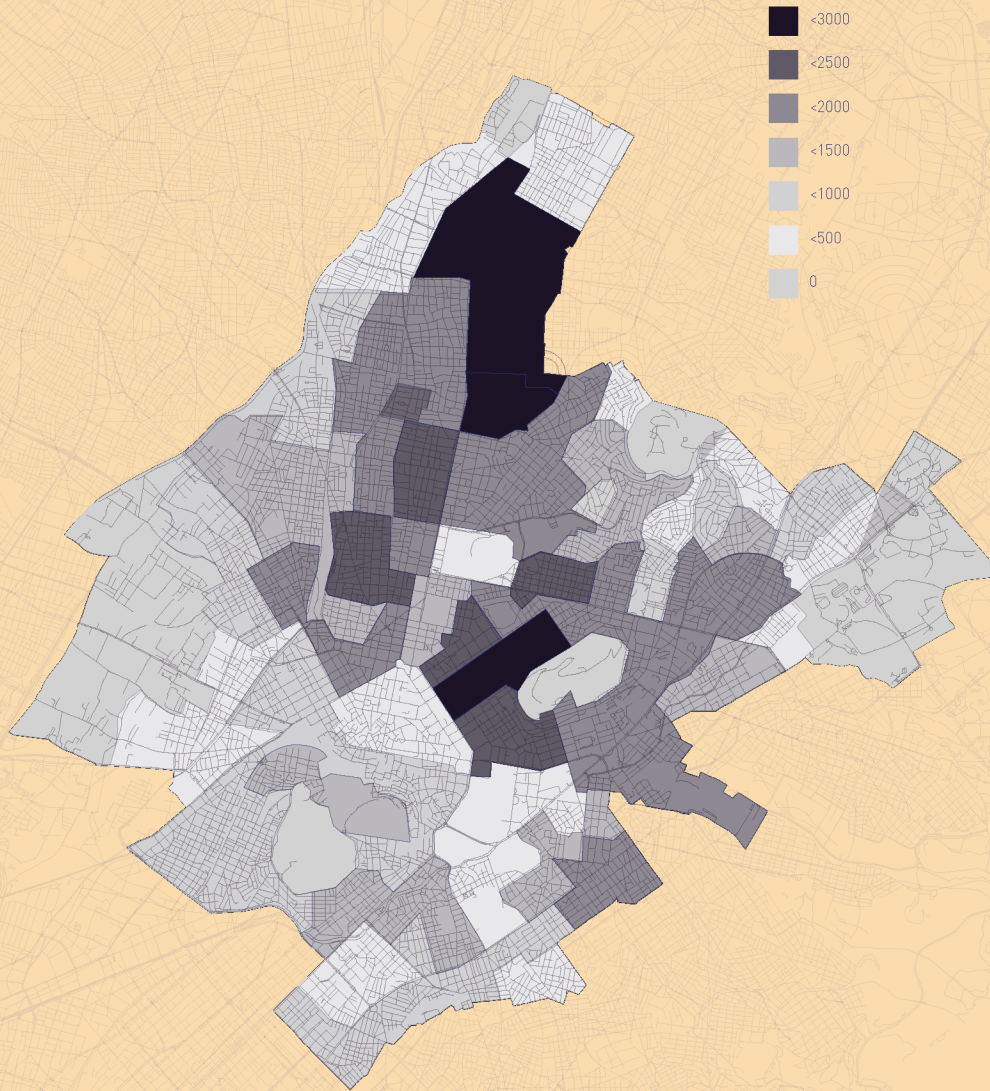
# ATHENS, GREECE



# METRO



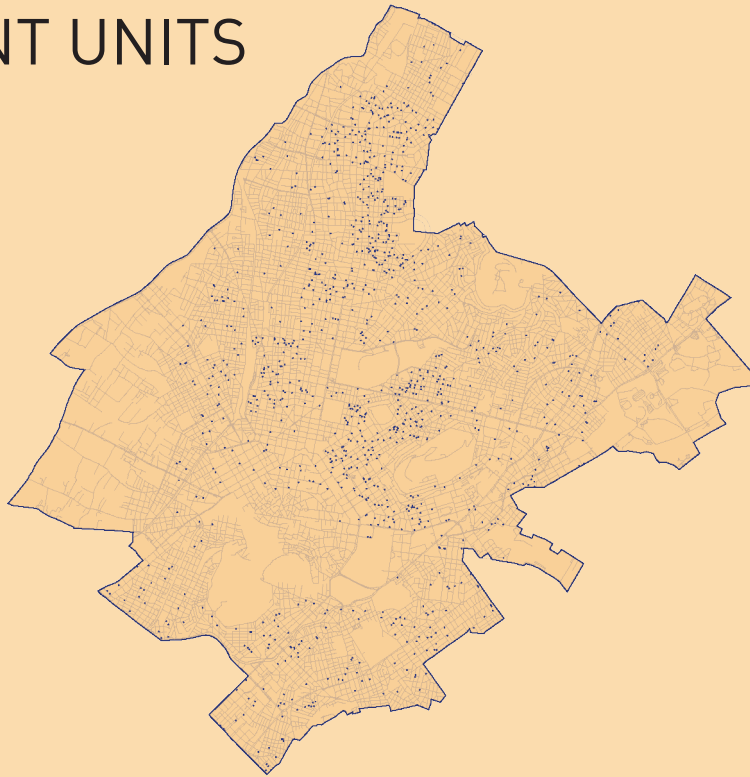
# VACANT UNITS



Following the financial crisis, Athens experiences a hollowing of the city center, with residents moving out and leaving behind thousands of abandoned buildings (Baboulias, 2015).

# VACANT UNITS

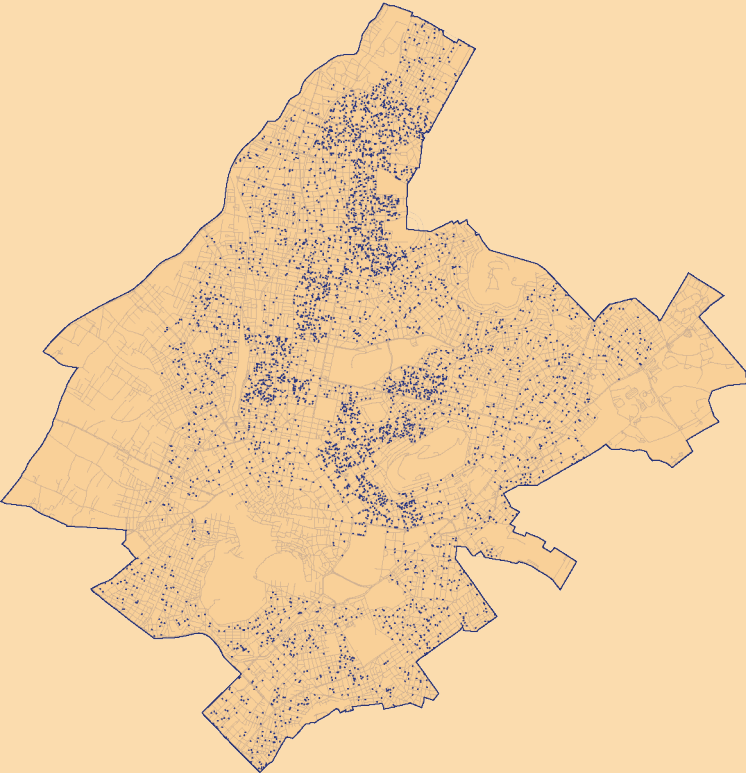
2008



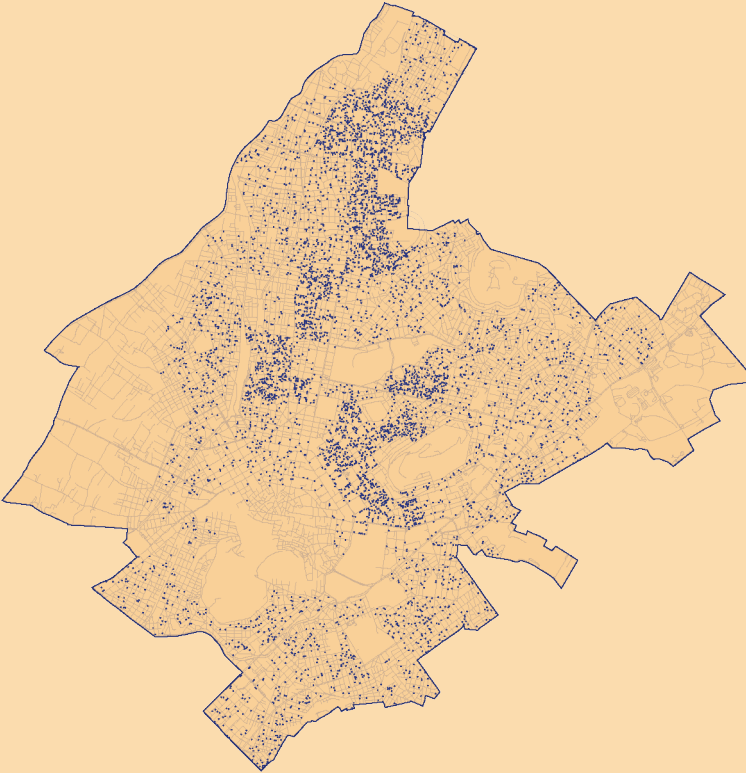
2010



2012

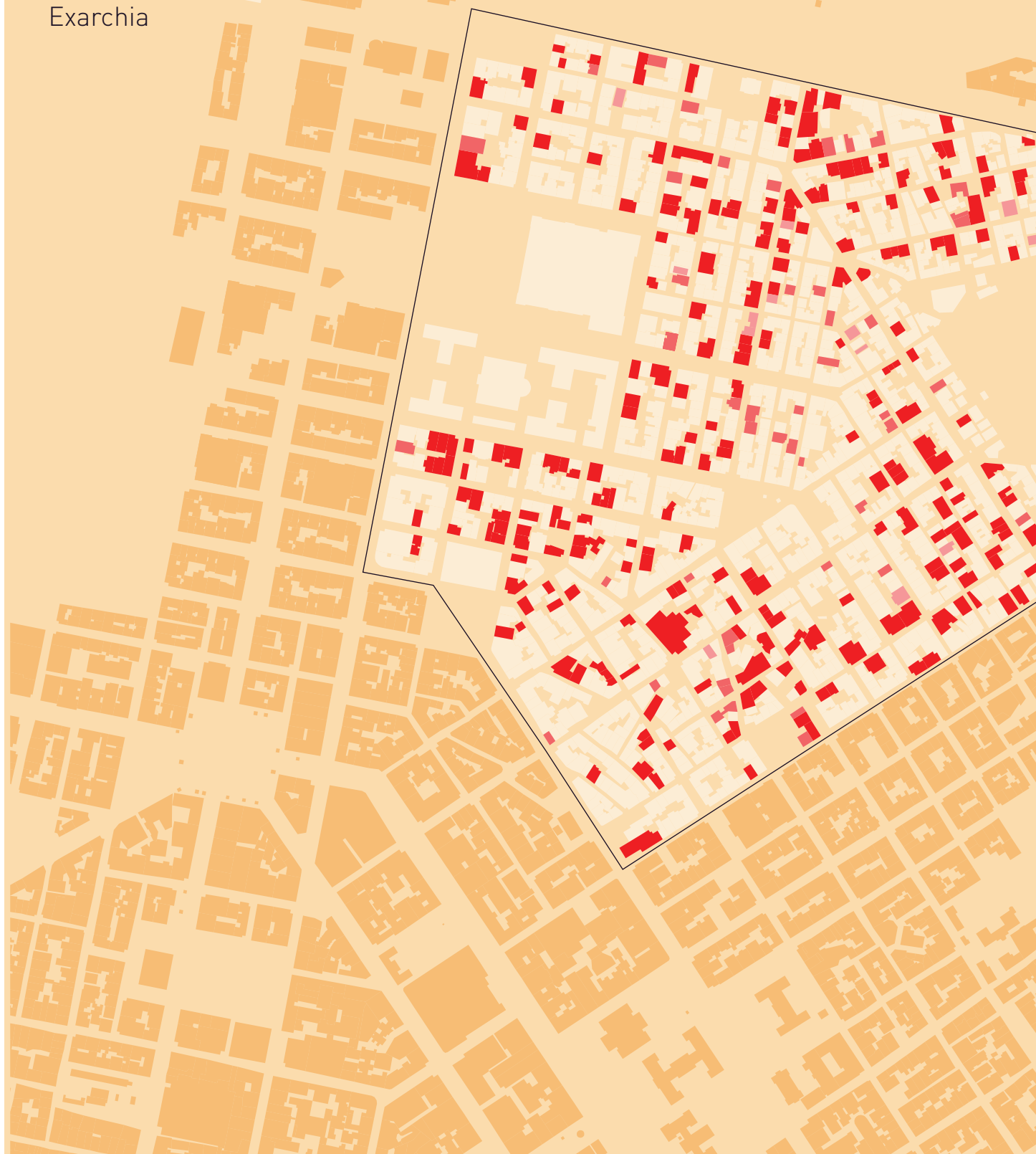


2014

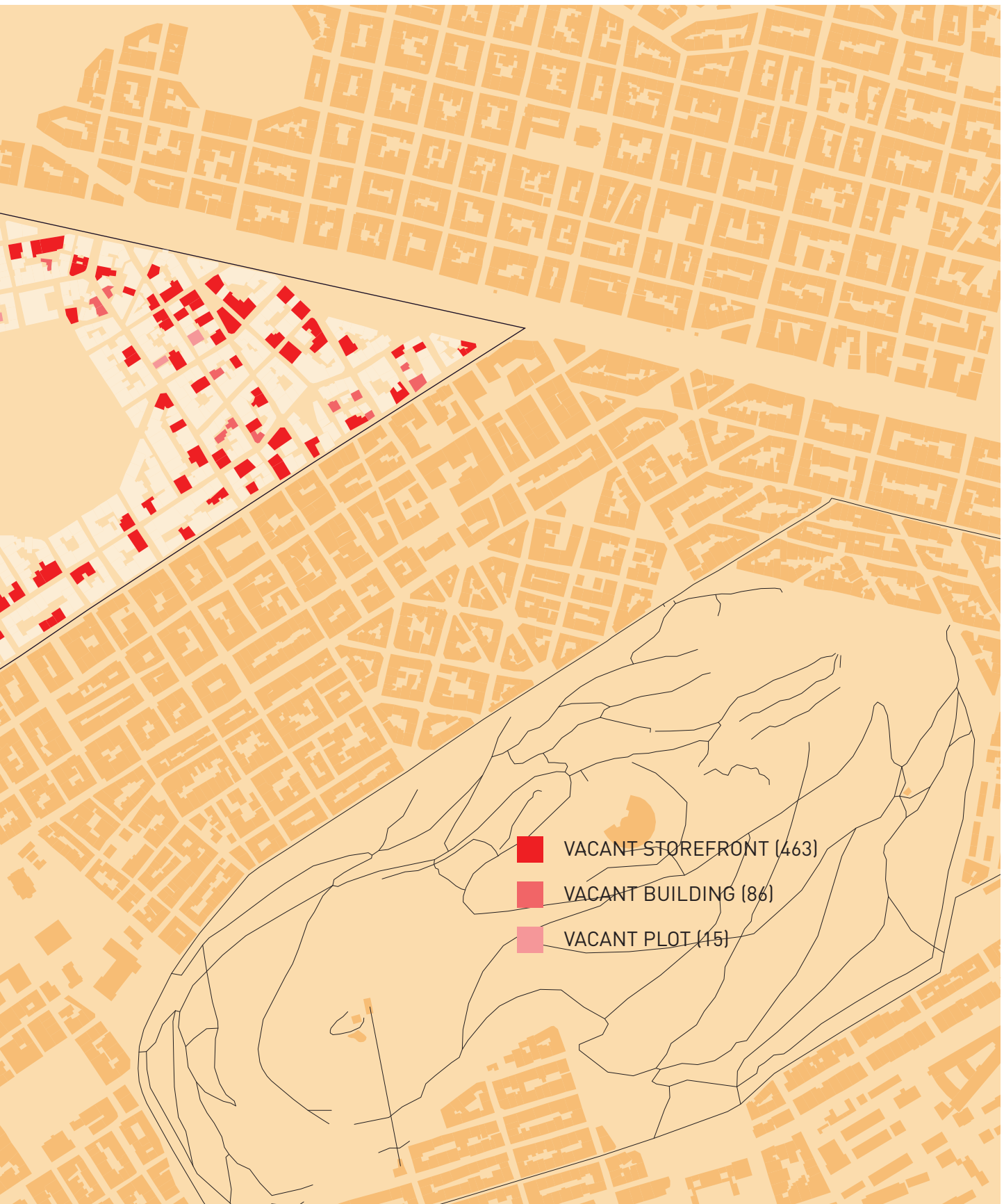


# VACANCIES

Exarchia

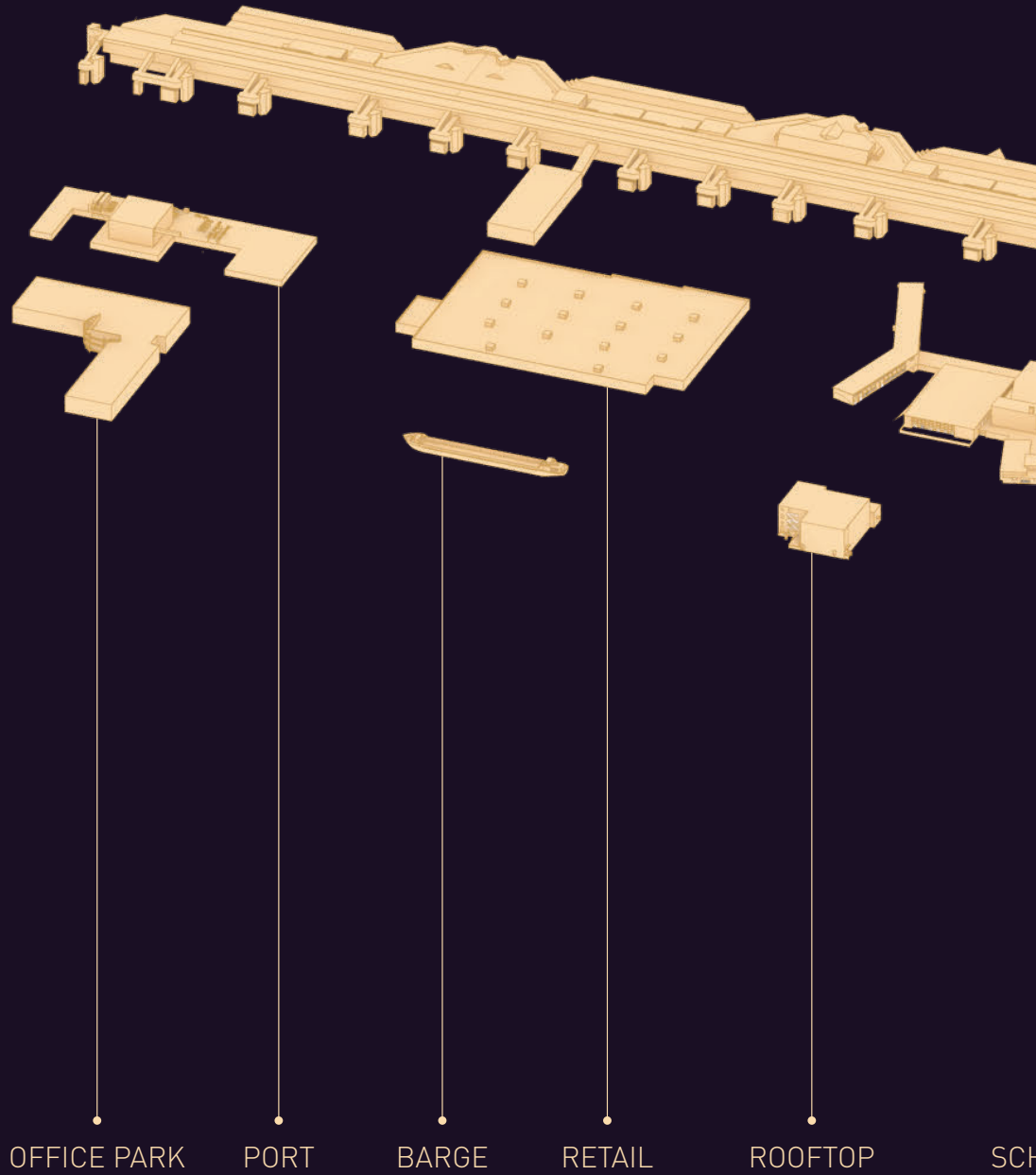


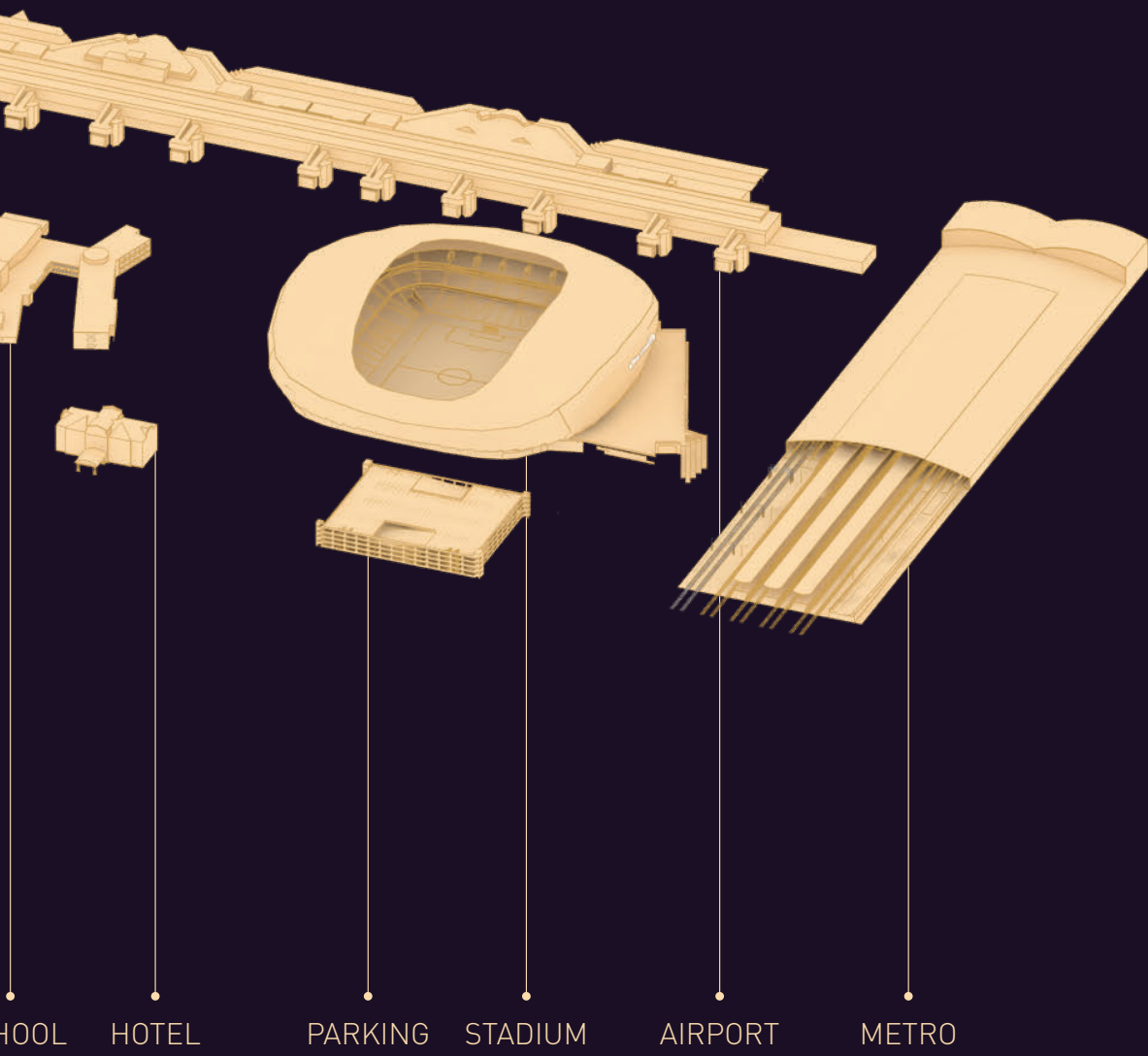




# URBAN GRAFTS

## URBAN GRAFTS





# ELEONAS REFUGEE CAMP



Established by the Greek Authorities in April 2016, the camp is managed by the UNHCR and houses ~2000 refugees mostly from Afghanistan and Iran. Eleonas is located in a western largely industrial suburb of Athens. Originally used for short-term stays while the Northern Border was open, the camp now houses more permanent residents waiting for asylum claims to be processed. Container homes have running water and sleep 4.



Eleonas Refugee  
Camp. August 02,  
2016. Image by the  
Author.



Eleonas Refugee  
Camp. August 02,  
2016. Image by the  
Author.

# ELLINIKO OLYMPIC COMPLEX



The Elliniko site is a palimpsest of past uses. Inscribed into the airstrip of the now decommissioned international airport, is the site of the 2004 Olympic Games including stadia for field hockey and baseball. These structures have been re-appropriated as refugee camps run by the UNHCR.

Elliniko Olympic Complex. Photo credit Joanna Kakissis.



Elliniko Olympic Complex. Photo credit Joanna Kakissis.





Elliniko Olympic Complex, Field Hockey Stadium. August 01, 2016. Image by the Author.





Elliniko Olympic Complex, Field Hockey Stadium. August 01, 2016. Image by the Author.



Elliniko Olympic Complex, Baseball Stadium. August 01, 2016.  
Image by the Author.



# ELLINIKO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT



The arrival terminal at the decommissioned Elliniko Airport terminal has become an unofficial, makeshift camp with over 2,000 refugees, mostly Afghan, squatting in tents pitched in the hall. Conditions are very difficult with cramped quarters, little ventilation, lack of privacy, and few bathroom & shower facilities. Food distribution and medical services are provided by volunteer organizations on a daily basis.

Arrival terminal,  
Elliniko  
International  
Airport. August  
01, 2016. Image by  
author.



Arrival terminal,  
Elliniko  
International  
Airport. August  
01, 2016. Image by  
author.





Prayer area, Elliniko International Airport. August 01, 2016. Image by author.



Arrival terminal, Elliniko International Airport. August 01, 2016. Image by author.

# SKARAMAGAS PORT



Skaramagos Camp is located in an industrial port city 11 km west of central Athens and is accessible by public bus. Established in April 2016, the camp now houses about 1500 residents and is managed by the Greek navy. The camp provides adequate shelter in the form of conditioned “isobox” container housing, however, is quite isolated from the rest of the city where refugees may have easier access to goods and information.



Skaramagas  
Camp. August 05,  
2016. Image by the  
Author.



Skaramagas  
Camp. August 05,  
2016. Image by the  
Author.





Skaramagas Camp. August 05, 2016.  
Image by the Author.



Skaramagas Camp. August 05, 2016.  
Image by the Author.

# CITY PLAZA HOTEL



City Plaza Hotel is a squatted, abandoned, hotel that currently houses about 400 refugees (100 families) and is run by an alliance of local leftist local activists/community organizers and refugees. It is located a block west of Victoria Square, an important transit node for migrants traveling to Western Europe. In addition to 8 floors of dorms, the hotel comprises a reception desk, small classroom, cafe, dining hall, medical center with visiting doctors, pantry, media center, and 24 hour security. The squat has operated since April 2016 with relative tolerance from the authorities.



City Plaza Hotel.  
August 06, 2016.  
Image by the  
author.



Converted  
classroom, City  
Plaza Hotel.  
August 06, 2016.  
Image by the  
author.

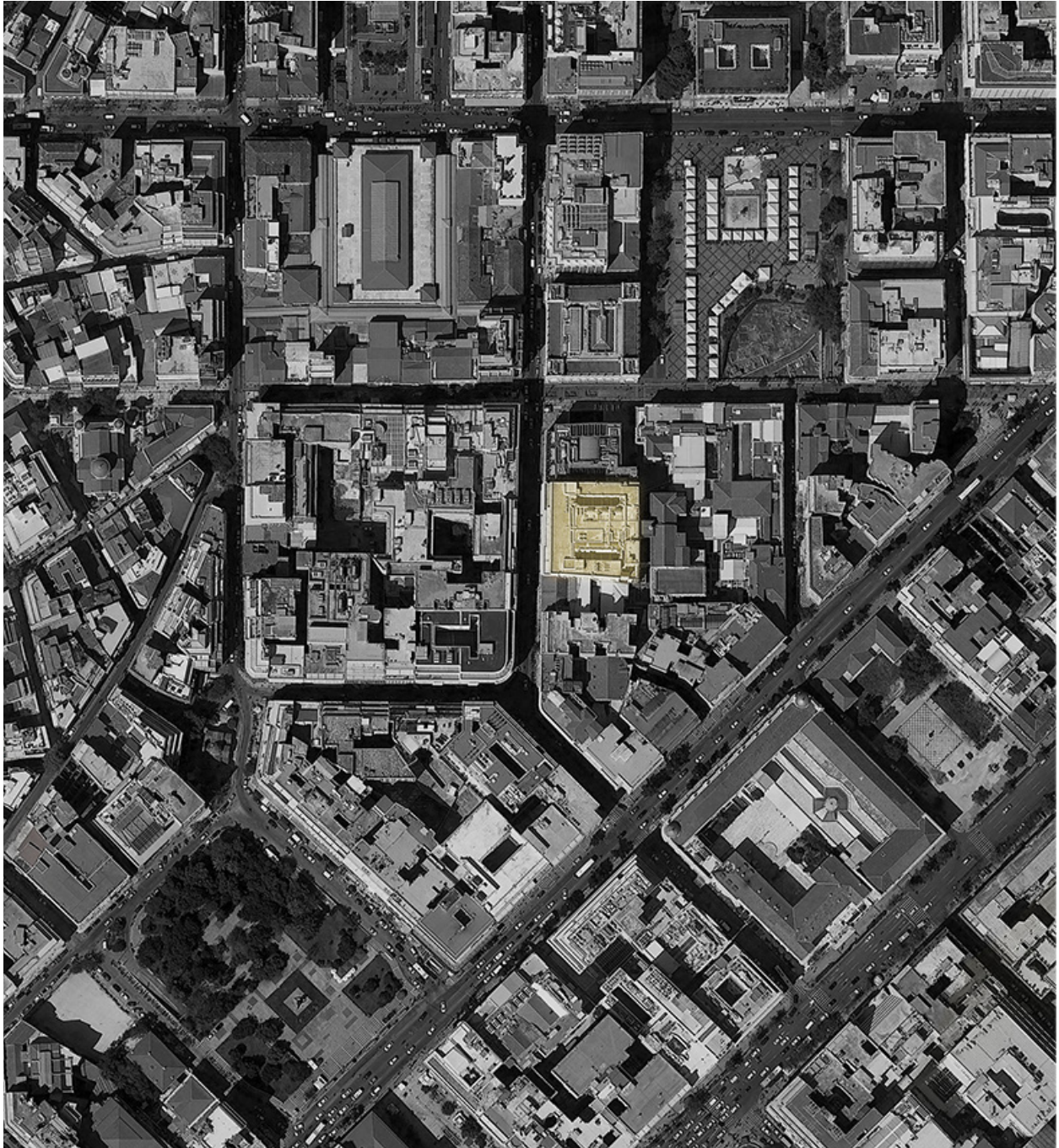


Reception Desk, City Plaza Hotel. August 06, 2016. Image by the author.



Squatted Hotel Rooms, City Plaza Hotel.  
August 06, 2016. Image by the author.

# ATHENS STOCK EXCHANGE



Until the financial collapse of 2007, 10 Sophocleous St housed the Athens Stock Exchange. The main trading floor occupies a coffered, barrel-vaulted double-height space and has lied vacant for the last decade. It has occasionally housed special events including a bar night and the Athens Biennale 2013.





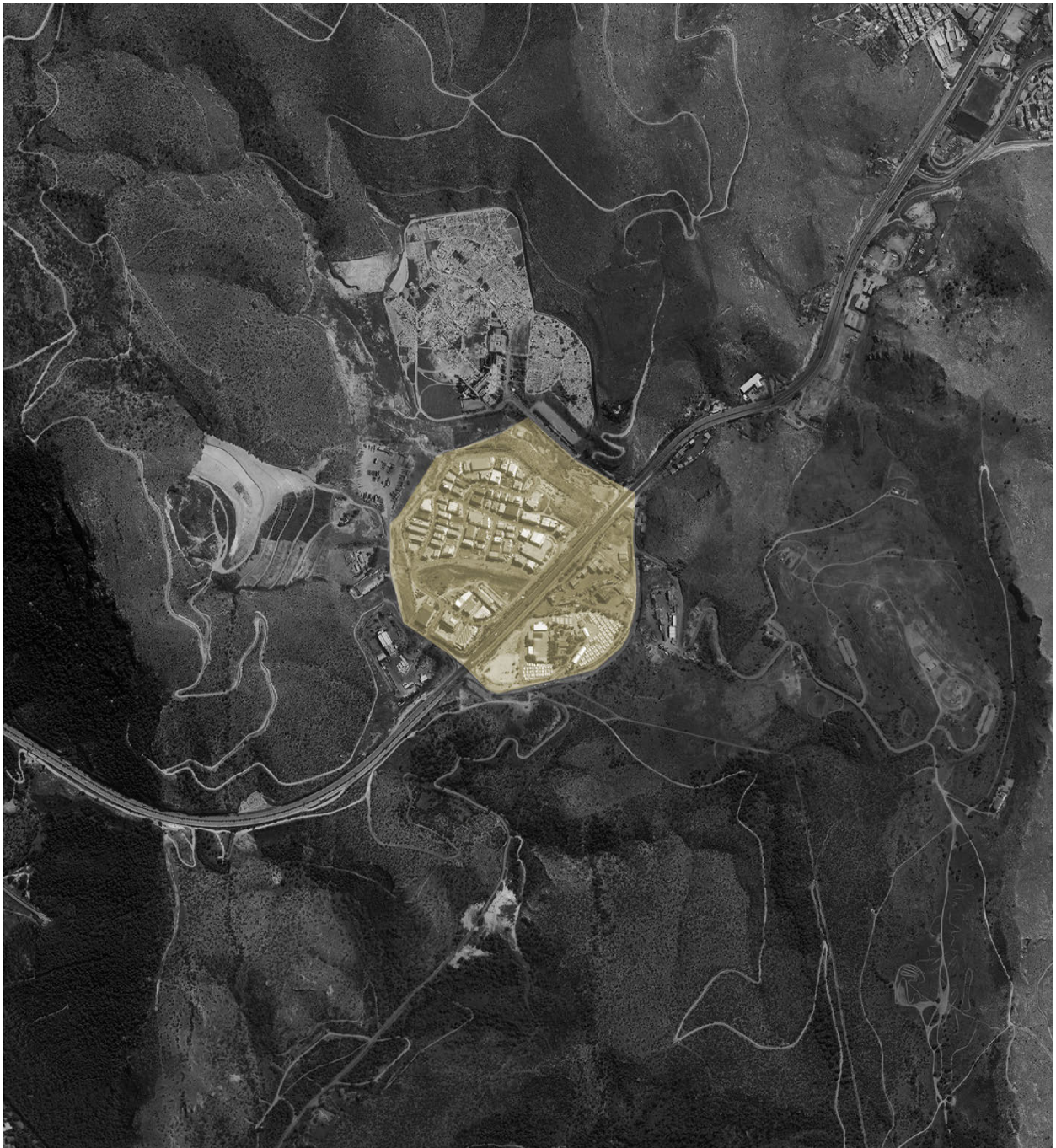
Athens Stock Exchange, 10 Sophocleous St.  
Photo credit Mariana Bisti.

# PIRAEUS PORT



At its peak in the spring of 2016, close to 14,000 refugees had informally camped at Piraeus, Athens' largest passenger ferry terminal. In advance of the oncoming tourist season, the port was cleared.

# SCHISTO REFUGEE CAMP



Schisto camp is located in the outskirts of Athens and was established after the closing of the border between Greece and Macedonia. The camp houses 1,300 refugees, most from Afghanistan, who were relocated from the informal Idomeni camp.



# **PLATES**

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Dispatches from the  
Transient City

# THE CONTAINER & THE CAMP

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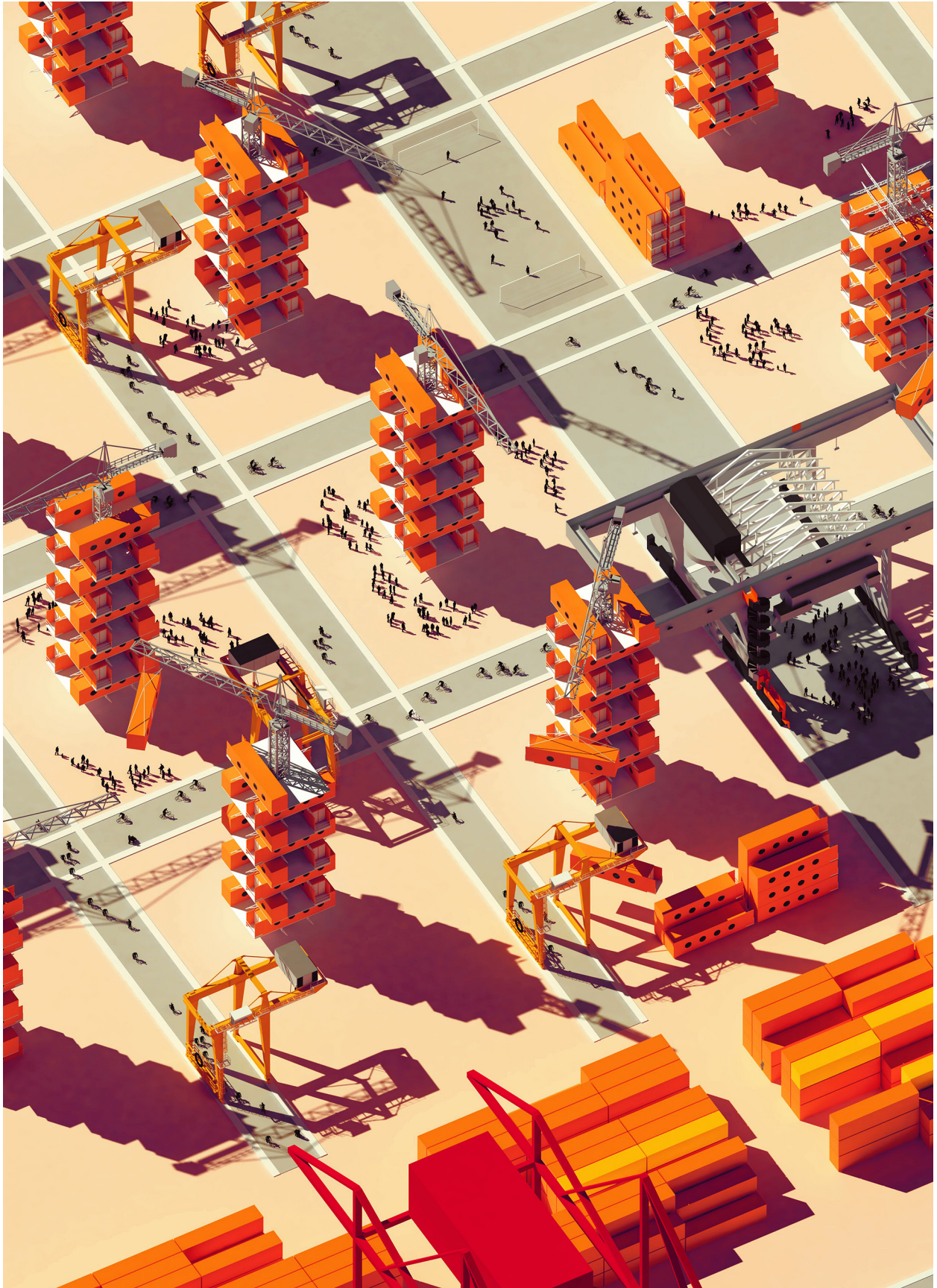
## Skaramagas Port

With the closing of the Northern Border in May, the Greek state dismantles informal camps and sends refugees to the port of Skaramagas, 11km east of central Athens, to await processing of asylum claims.

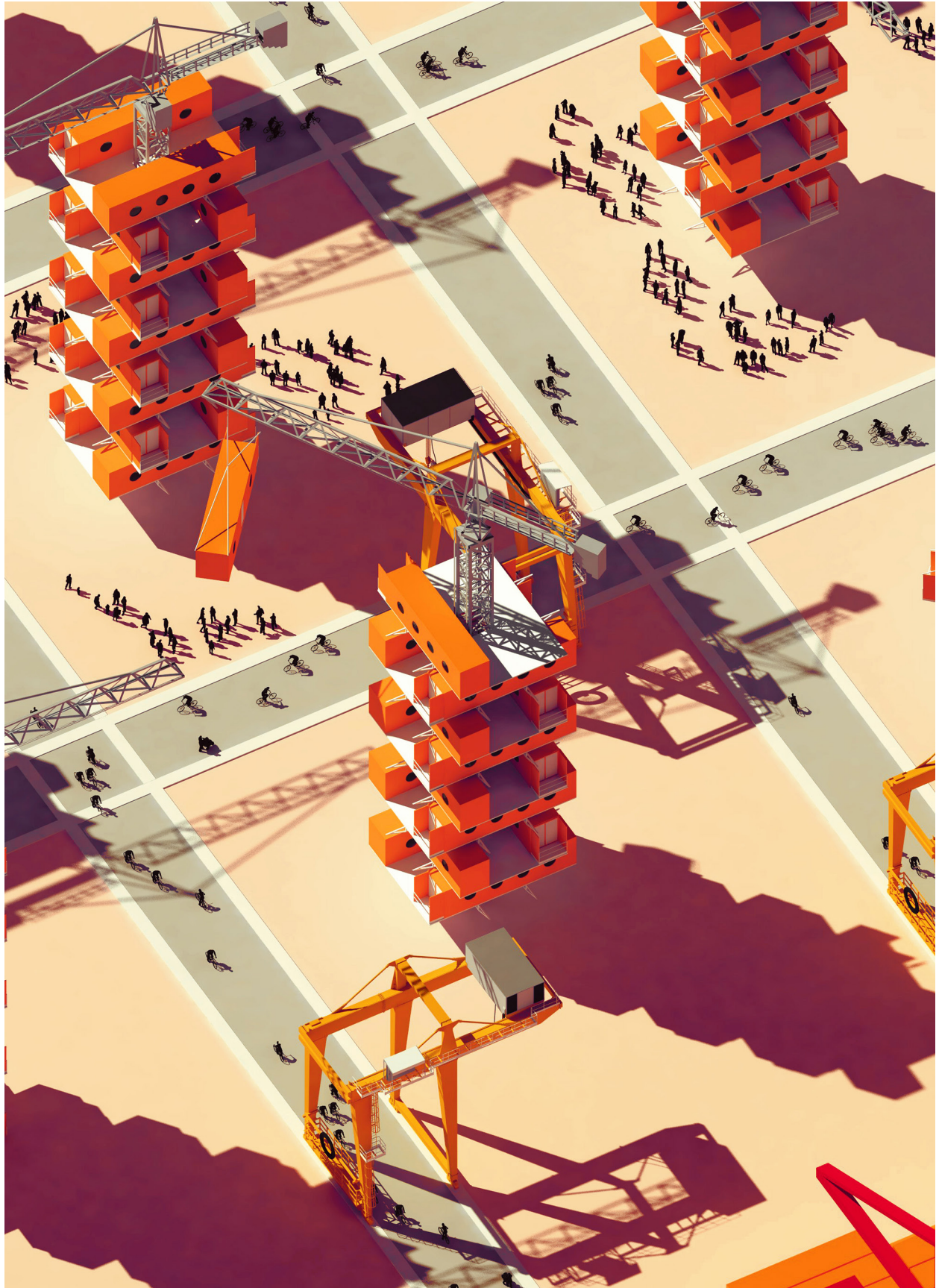
The port is undisturbed. Container homes are shipped in on the same barges used to bring in electronics from China. The containers are unloaded and dispatched with existing gantry cranes as per usual. As more refugees arrive to the camp, and space gets tight the houses stack vertically into towers.

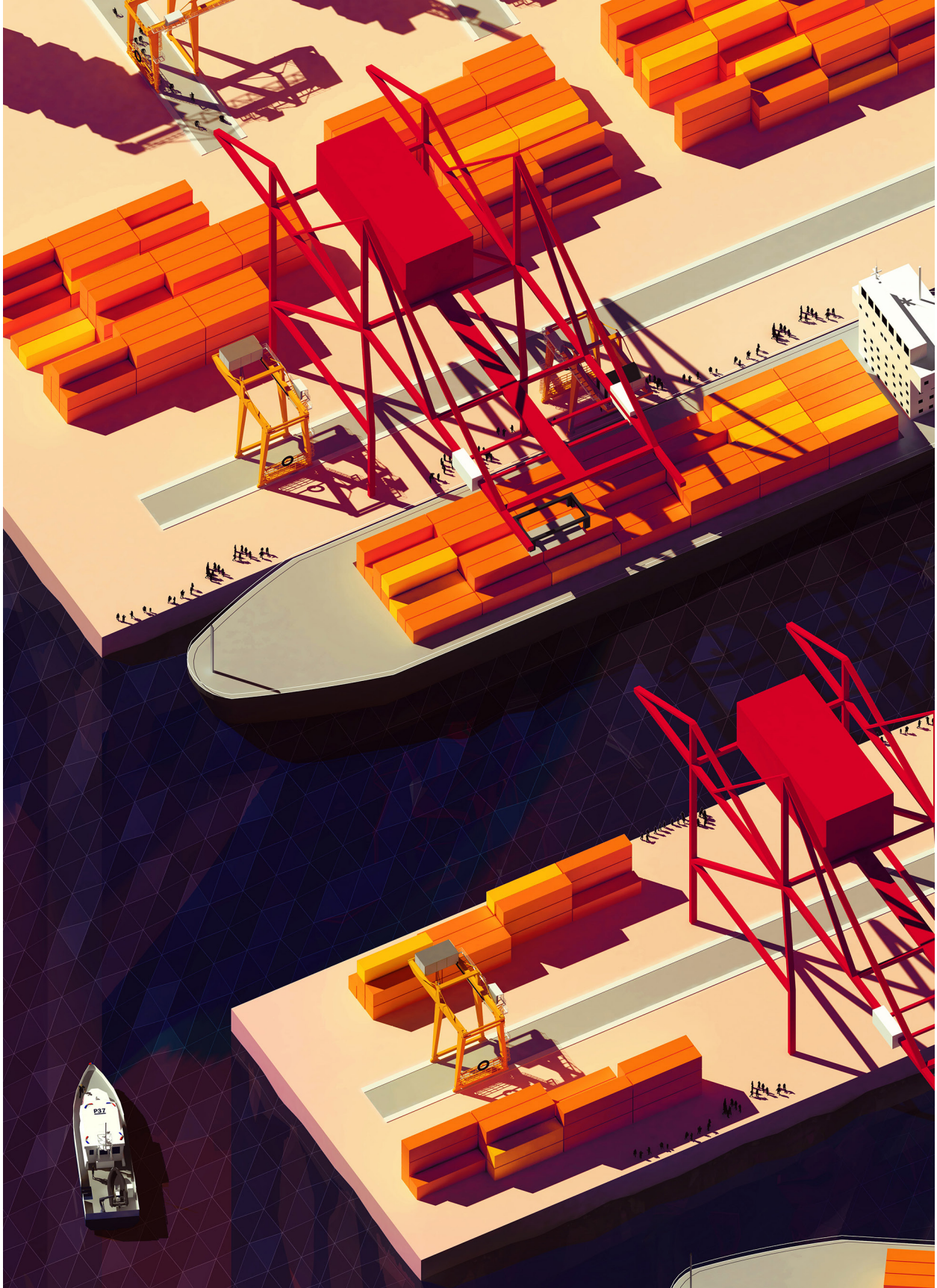
Whether the containers hold people or tomatoes, the logistics of the port is indifferent. Passing their time in legal limbo, refugees stroll between sweeping cranes and dip in the harbor when the heat become unbearable. The container camp provides shelter but remains an island.

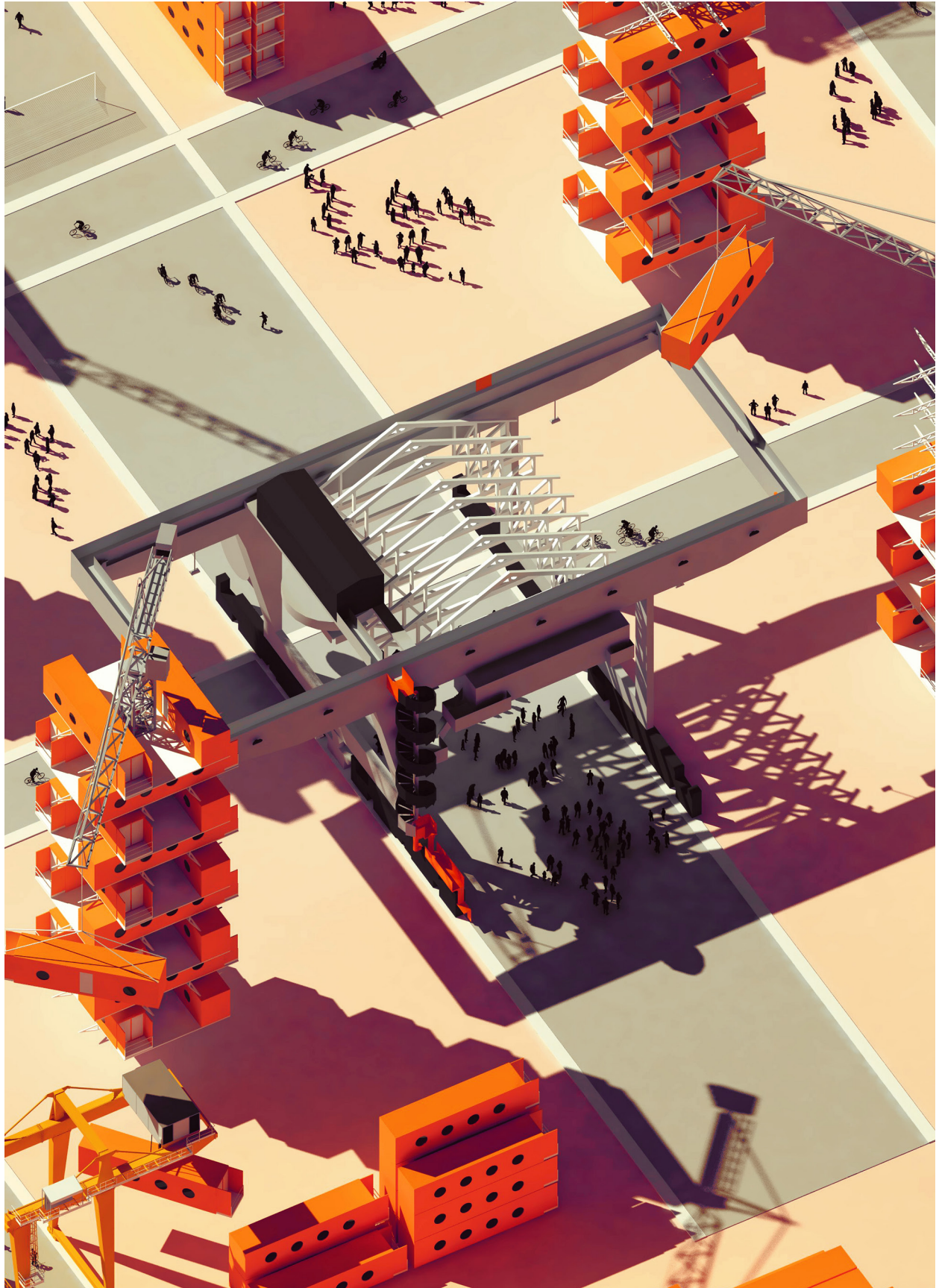












# SUPPLY LINES

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## Elliniko Olympic Complex

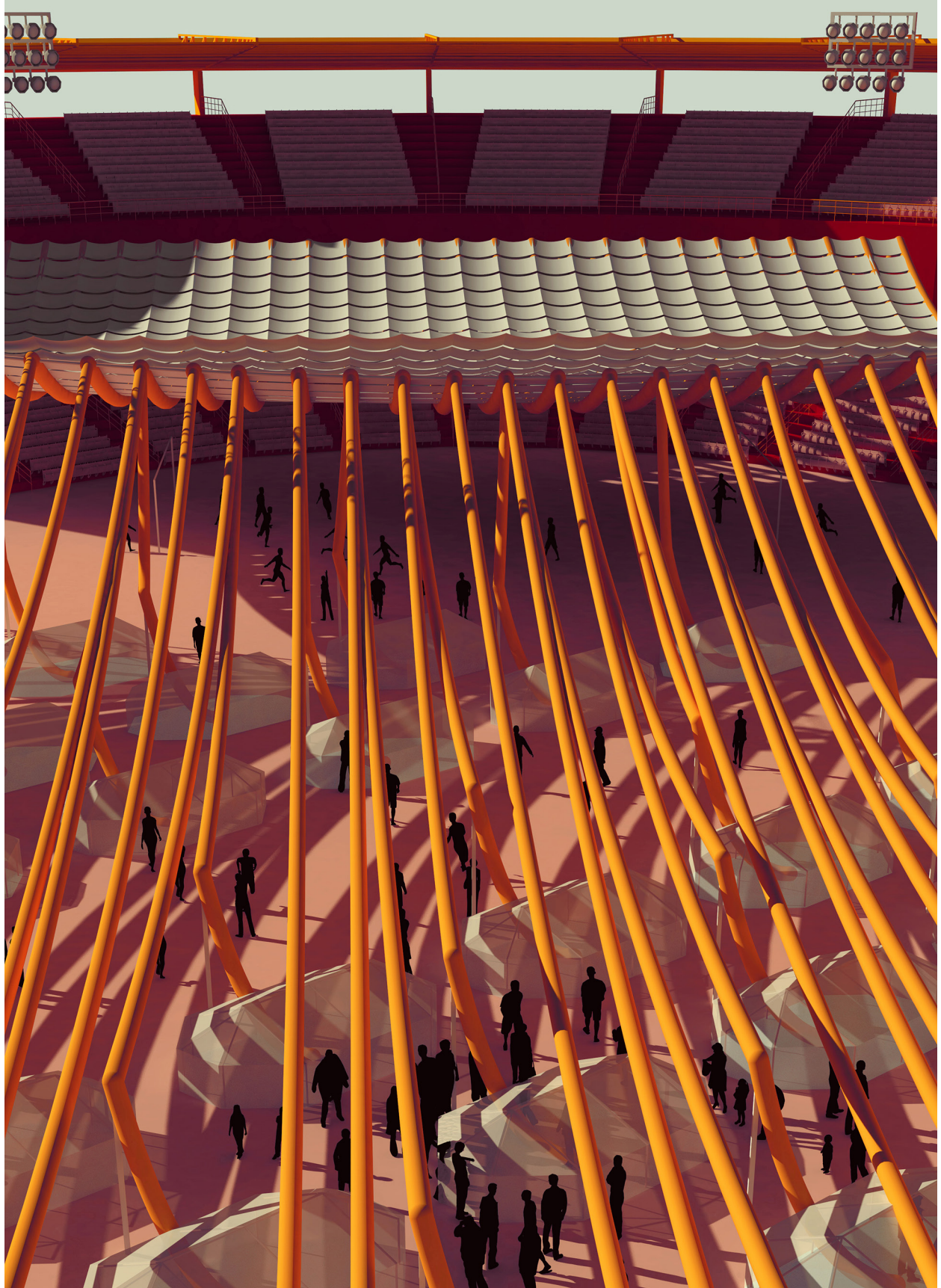
Southeast of the city, in the suburb of Elliniko, exists another island. In the middle of a decommissioned airstrip, in a country that doesn't play the sport, lies an abandoned baseball stadium, a relic of the 2004 Olympic Games.

The oversized structure makes for ungainly housing and instead operates more as a resource, providing air conditioning and electricity, which is then siphoned off into individual tents. To meet the needs of the those camped outside, lines extend, like umbilical chords, from the stadium to each tent on the field.

The hanging tubes create much needed shade and support a canopy to cover a new pitch for a sport which people from all of the world play, namely soccer.

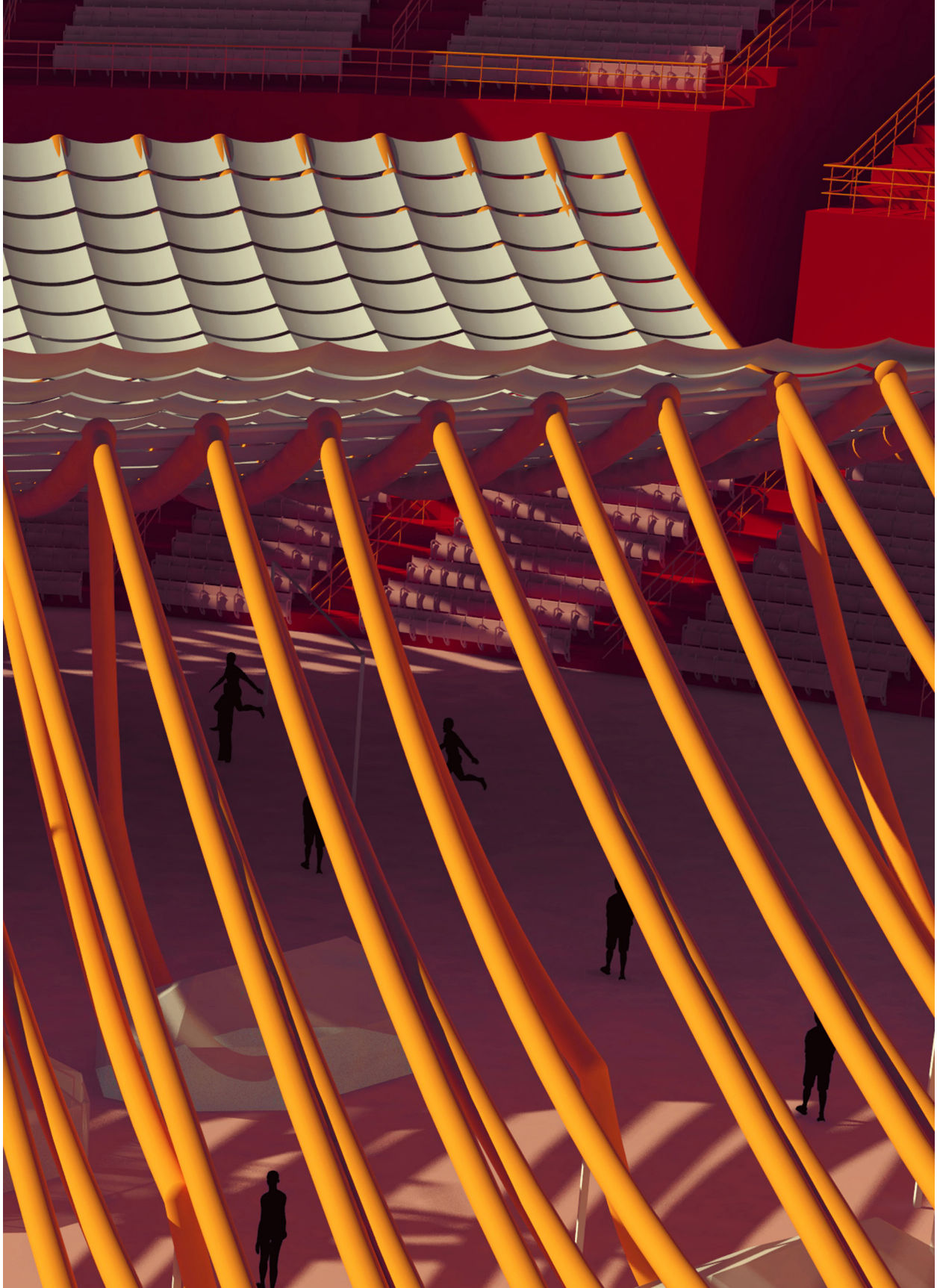












# ABOVE THE PAVEMENT

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## Exarchia

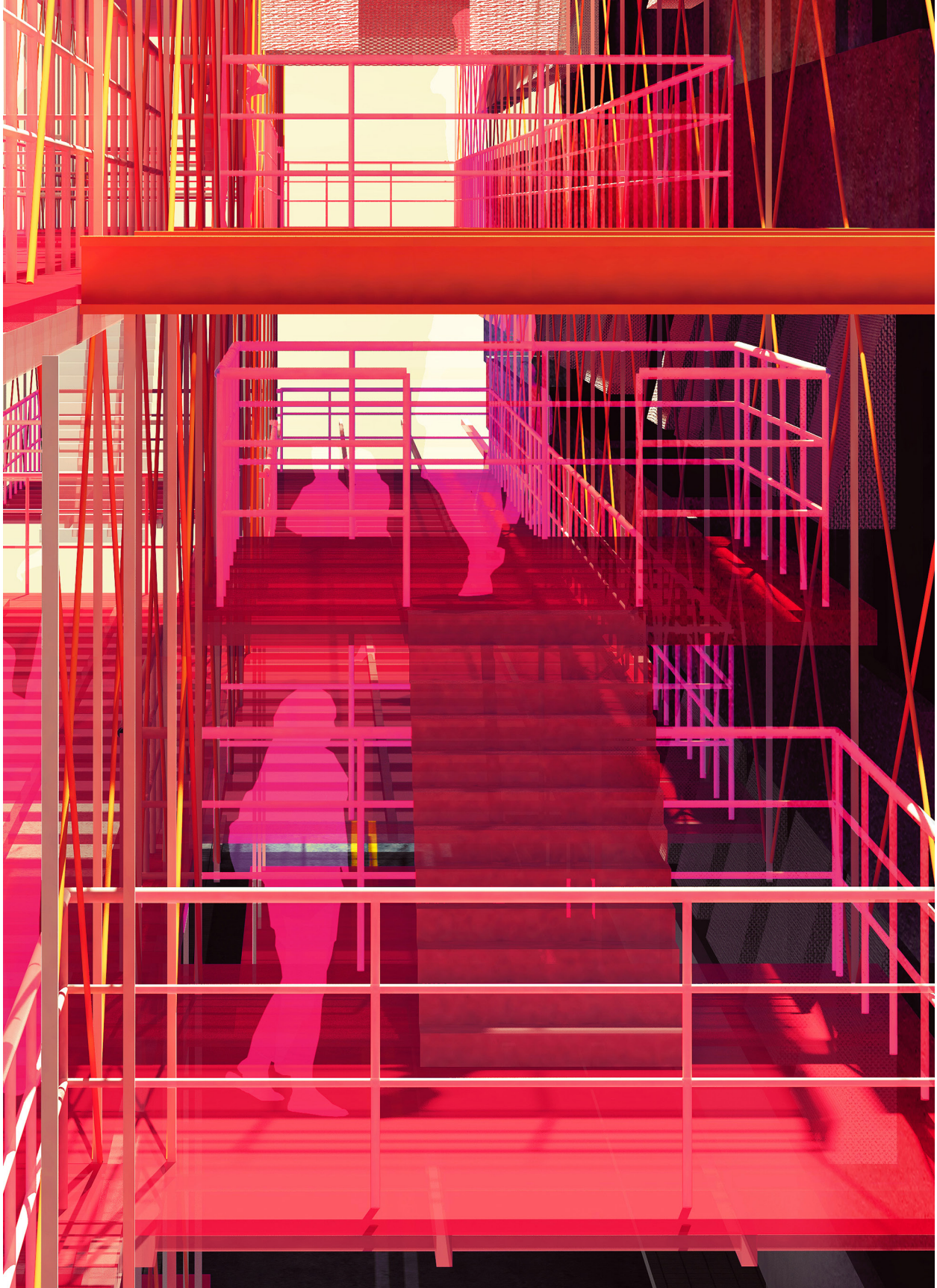
Following the financial crisis, Athens experiences a hollowing of the city center, with residents moving out and leaving behind thousands of abandoned buildings. In Exarchia, a neighborhood known for its active anarchist community and squatted buildings, more than 400 residences and storefronts are unoccupied. Taken together these vacant units form a 3-dimensional matrix to be exploited by the new population.

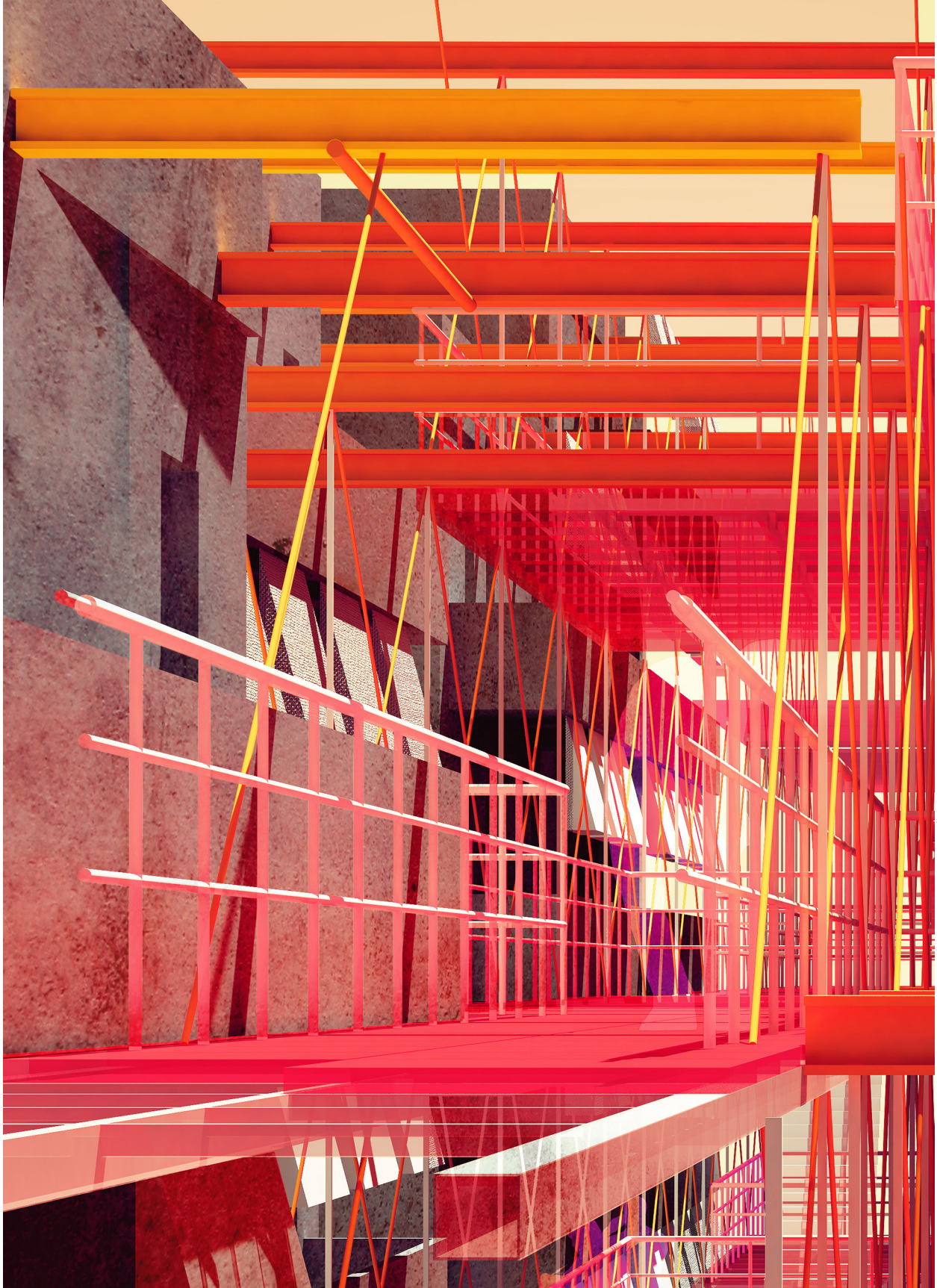
A series of platforms suspend from beams connected to the existing structures of the polykatoikia apartment blocks. The infill acts as a connective tissue, stitching together the vacant housing and commercial stock currently lying dormant and available for small scale commercial and productive ventures.

The structure thickens the public ground by colonizing the space above the street.











# MARKET FOR A FOAM CITY

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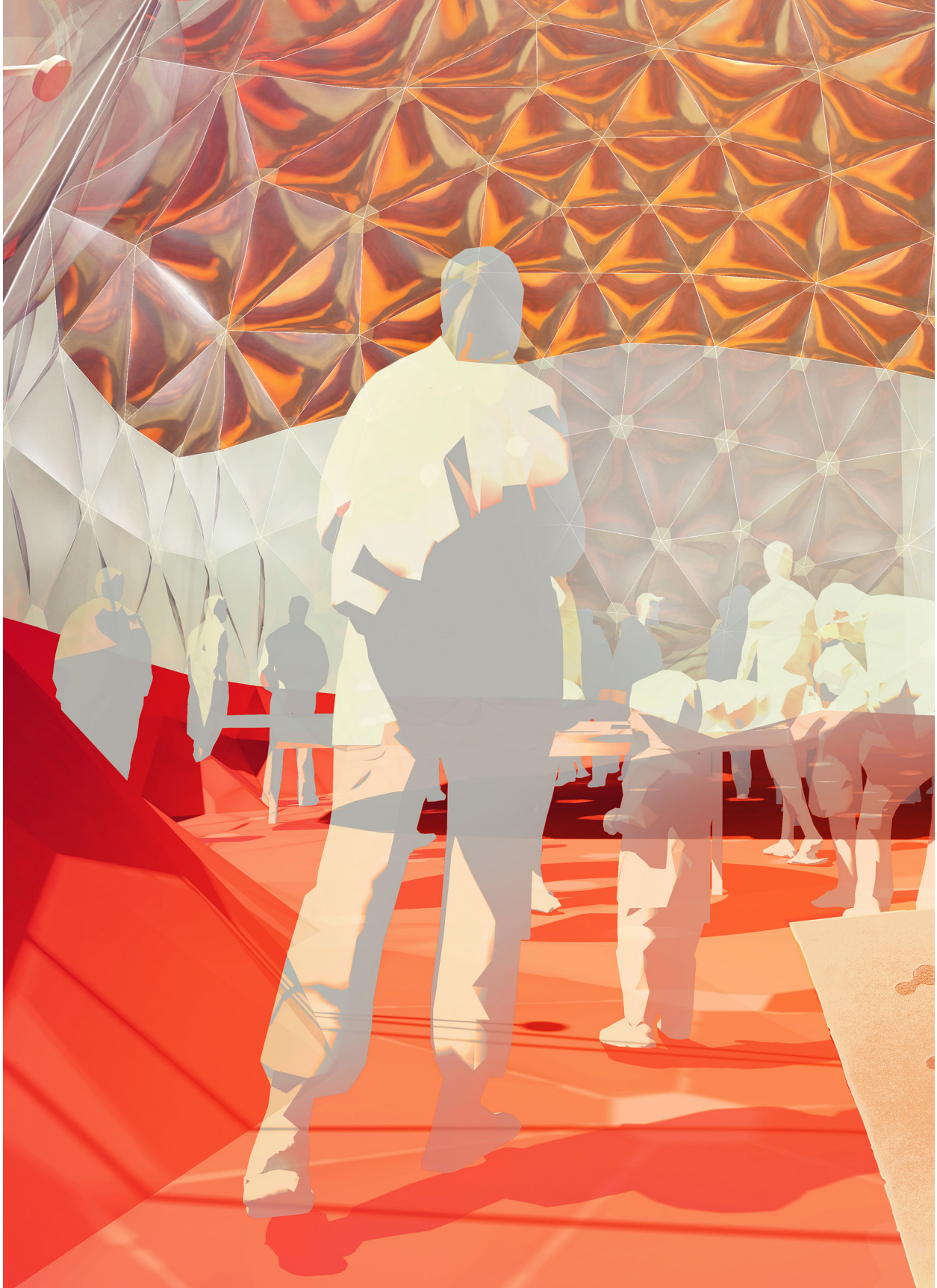
## Panepestimio Metro Station

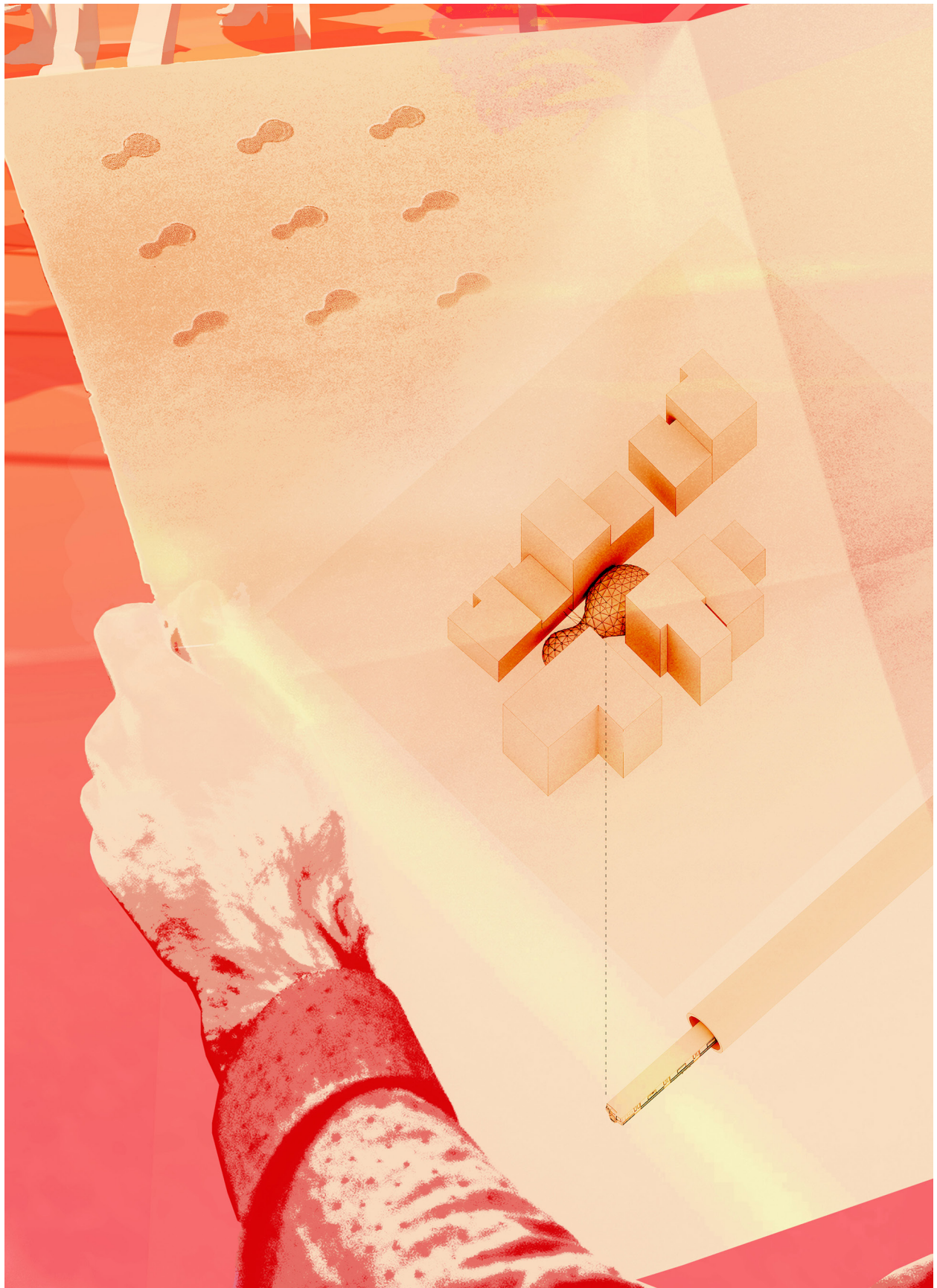
The transient city exploits the surplus of the static city. In this case, a large inflatable structure is connected to the ventilation grates which stand beside each metro station. As it is deployed near metro stations throughout Athens, the market bumps awkwardly but with a light foot print, into the city that surrounds it.

Without the legal right to work or rent buildings, migrants can use the market to create a deployable public space to house informal economies and facilitate the exchange of information.













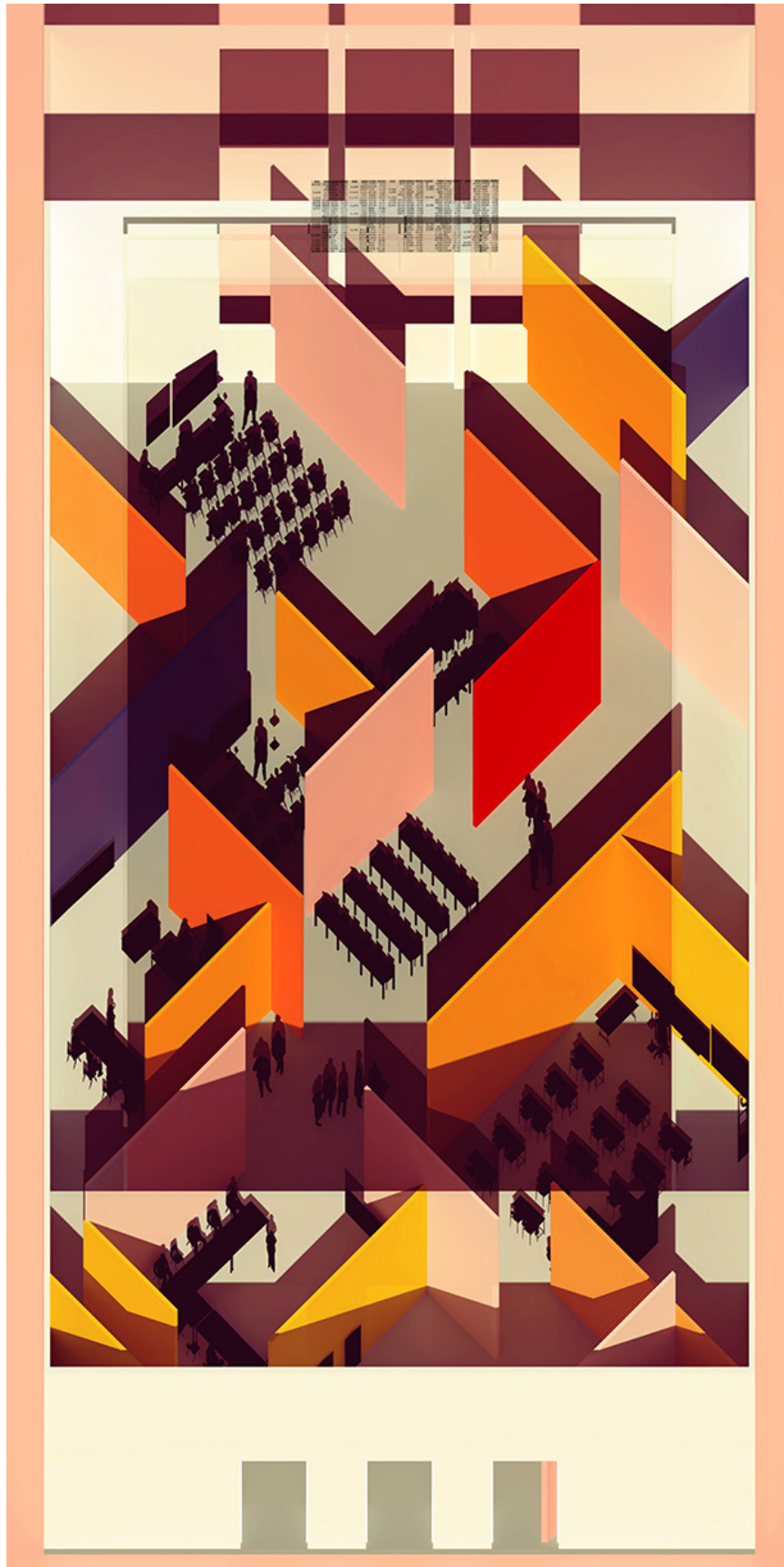
# PLATFORMS OF EXCHANGE

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10 Sophocleous St

10 Sophocleous Street, in Omonia, housed the Athens Stock Exchange until 2007 and lies empty, a stock ticker board attesting to its former program. The vaulted clear span trading floor is subdivided with panels to create classrooms for a language school, open to locals and migrants alike.

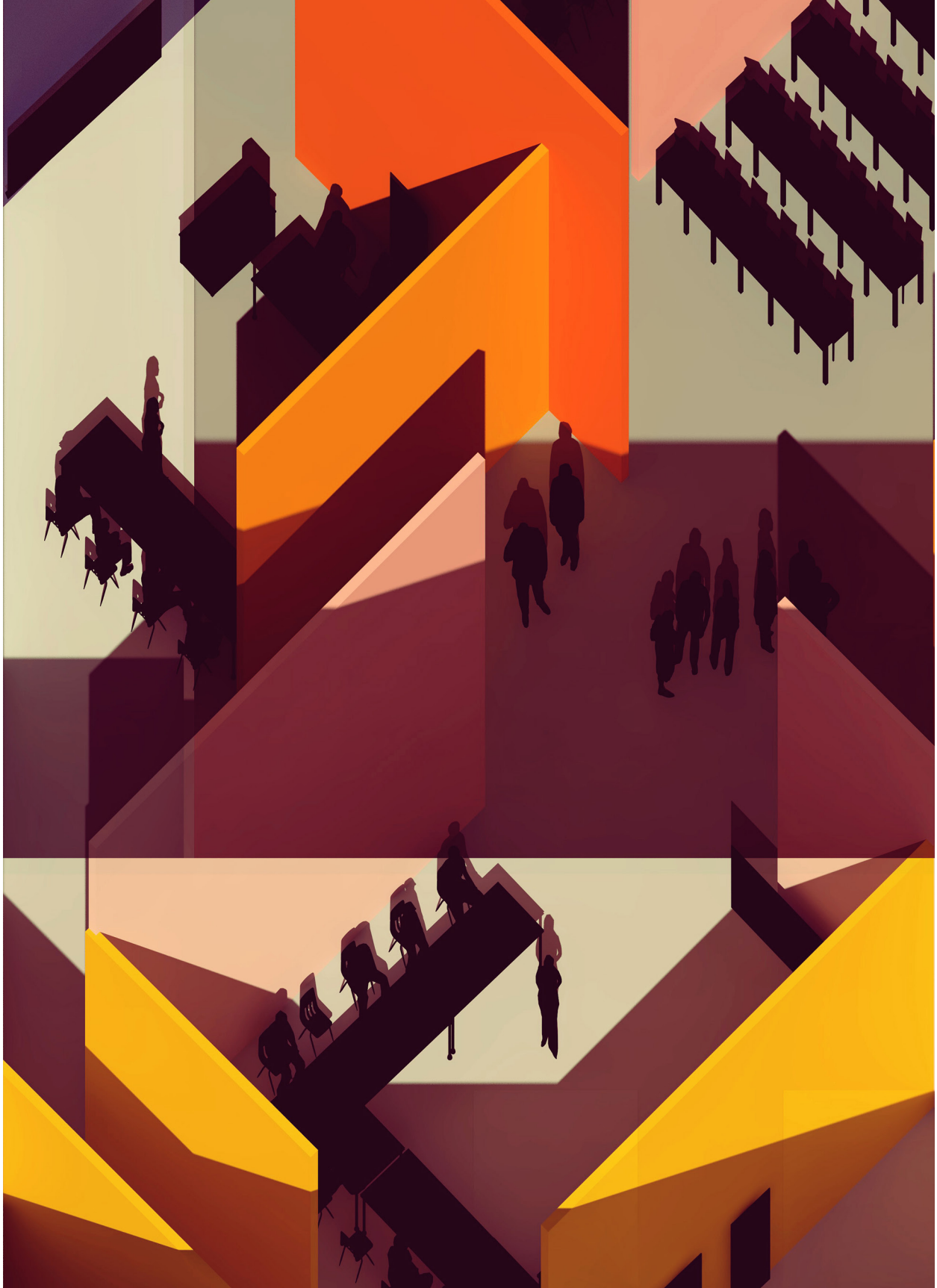
Here migrants can learn the Greek to use while in the country, but also have the opportunity to share their own knowledge and be valued as a resource rather than a burden. The stock exchange, implicated in the financial crisis, is reoriented to foster a new form of exchange.













# APPENDIX

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## Thesis Defense

December 22, 2016

**Guest Critics:**

Antonio Furgiuele

Mark Goulthorpe

Mariana Ibañez

Florian Idenburg

Mitch McEwen



Final thesis presentation. December 22, 2016.  
Photo credit Sarah Wagner.



Final thesis presentation. December 22, 2016.  
Photo credit Sarah Wagner.



Final thesis presentation. December 22, 2016.  
Photo credit Sarah Wagner.

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