

Fetishizing the road

Syngrou Avenue in Athens at the turn of the 20th century.

Berlin, 6-9 October 2011

Evangelia Chatzikonstantinou (*)

Paper that will be presented at the 9th International Conference of the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (T2M), 2011

Transport and Mobility on display

Session: Motorways as Museums

(*) PhD Student, National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), vg11@hotmail.com

Abstract

It is generally accepted that roads and mobility infrastructures have a major effect on economic and spatial development, and, in many cases, this effect is considered to be a positive and, furthermore, a causal one. This implicit assumption has also a great impact on the cultural and aesthetic perception of road infrastructures. The objective of this paper is to show that the perception of road infrastructures differs in countries of the European periphery such as Greece, where, for years the discussion on road infrastructures went along with the rhetoric of progress and modernization and was, in most cases, presented as a national issue. The paper explores the technological, social and cultural changes that have occurred in relation to the construction of new road infrastructures in Greece. More specifically, it examines the changing attitudes towards urban road design from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th.

Taking the emblematic case of Syngrou Avenue in Athens as an example, this paper examines the story of roads, how they were conceived, planned and constructed and the impact they had on urban form. At the same time, it analyzes the transfer of technique and technology, their reception and appropriation, as well as the road - making practices in Greece during that period. The final aim of this paper is to define the social dynamics and the spatial characteristics that made Syngrou Avenue a symbol of Greek modernization.

Introduction: the starting points

The economic and operational role of mobility and the social implications of infrastructural change have been largely addressed in scholarship. Scholars from different disciplines, such as economic geography, history of technology, transport history and lately, history of mobility, have studied road and mobility infrastructures from a variety of perspectives, mostly relying on their own research agendas, theoretical approaches and tools. Some of these studies focus on the economic aspects of road construction, arguing whether roads are a prerequisite or a consequence of national and regional development. Other pay attention on evolution of transport technologies, or shift the emphasis upon the social and institutional actors that are involved in their production. In the recent years, though, the construction of road and mobility infrastructures has received much attention, as part of the “rediscovery” of the role of the networked urban technologies.¹ Similarly, the rise of new interdisciplinary, comparative and transnational research strategies in history has encouraged the appearance of new theoretical approaches and perspectives on urban and mobility studies.²

¹ For a critical focus on networked urban infrastructures see David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, New York, Routledge, 2003, Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw, “Fetishizing the Modern City: The Phantasmagoria of urban Technological Networks”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24.1, 2000, pp. 120-138, Paul Edwards, “Infrastructure and modernity: Force, time and social organization in the history of sociotechnical systems”, in Thomas Misa, Philip Brey and Andrew Feenberg (eds.), *Modernity and technology*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2003, pp. 185-225 and Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering urbanism: technology, infrastructure and the 21st century city*, London, Routledge, 2000. For the social imagery of technology see Peter Wagner, “Sociological Reflections: The Technology during the first crisis of Modernity”, in Michael Hard and Andrew Jamison, *The intellectual Appropriation of Technology. Discourses on Modernity, 1900-1939*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1998, pp. 225-252.

² For the paradigmatic shift in Transport history see Gijs Mom, “What kind of Transport History Did We Get? Half a Century of Journal of Transport History and the Future of the Field”, *Journal of Transport History*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2003,

Building on some of these recent studies, this paper examines road infrastructures as constitutive parts of the urban environment and aims to indicate the mutual shaping of transport technologies and urban development in Athens at the turn of the 20th century. The large scale public works program of the period and the ways infrastructures were perceived, are studied through a European periphery perspective, as processes and products of the global circulation of people, ideas, capital and power between different cities and regions.

In order to rethink at a conceptual level the construction of a major Athenian road and to describe the channels through which the infrastructural and technocratic ideal arrived and took root in Greece, three points are considered as theoretical starting points: the multiple co-existing temporalities that shape the city, the spatial interconnections that make the city part of the global, and the issue of networks as actors in urban change.

Road and mobility infrastructures stand in between these several spatial and temporal scales as they produce “new territorial configurations, by harnessing the social process in a new geography of places and flows”.³ As Thomas Bender claims, “to the extent that the city is materially unified, one must look at infrastructures. It is more than a background. Making it, and making it work is a remarkable achievement”.⁴

Road construction in Greece: the origins

Studying the different ways that communication and mobility networks were developed through a historical perspective can reveal many salient features that are important for understanding the processes and the social dynamics that produce and reproduce the economic, technological and institutional asymmetries in space.

As Maria Synarelli shows, from the moment Greece came into contact with the other European countries, the idea of the road was connected with the idea of development.⁵ Road infrastructures were regarded as agents of modernization and the Greek state promoted their construction in order to transform the traditional spatial relations and to encourage the communication and development of the sectors of production.⁶

The late 19th century capitalism has often been described as an era of technical innovation, mostly connected with the development, growth and establishment of new forms of transportation.⁷ Industrialized countries, expected technical innovation to express economic and social need. Even though posed early in agricultural Greece, road infrastructure construction was based on ideological and geopolitical concerns and was not really connected with the social and economical reality of the country. In 1882, Greece had only 1122 km of carriageways, aside from the 667 km of roads that had been constructed in the Ionian Islands during the

121-138. Recent examples of transnational and comparative road and mobility studies include, Gijs Mom and Laurent Tissot (eds.), *Road History. Planning, Building and Use. Collection History of Transport, Tourism and Travel*, Alphil editions, Suisse, 2007, and Frank Schipper, *Building Europe on roads in the 20th century*, aksant, Amsterdam, 2008.

³ Erik Swyngedouw, “Communication Mobility and struggle for power over space, in George Giannopoulos and Andrew Gillespie (eds.), *Transport and communications in the New Europe*, London, Belhaven, 1993, pp. 305-325.

⁴ Thomas Bender, *History, Theory & Metropolis*, Centre for Metropolitan Studies Working paper Series, No. 005-2006, 23/8/2011, <http://cuma.periplurban.org/media/Bender.pdf>

⁵ Maria Synarelli, *Roads and Ports in Greece, 1830-1880*, (in Greek), Cultural Foundation of Greek Bank of Industrial Development, Athens, 1989, pp. 7-15.

⁶ Between 1833 and 1880 the construction of roads absorbed the half of the Greek state’s investments in public works. See George Dertilis, *History of the Modern Greek State. 1830-1920*, Vol. B, Athens, Estia, 2009, p. 746.

⁷ Peter Wagner, p. 231.

British rule.⁸ Established in 1867, the “Road Construction Fund” that was responsible for the construction of roads went into operation after 1882. Prime Minister Charilaos Trikoupis (1882-85, 1887-1890, 1892-1895) was the first to put into practice an ambitious program for the construction of large public works. Trikoupis was a reformist liberal determined to modernize the country. Through a series of economic measures, he succeeded in regulating the national debt, which permitted Greece to secure development loans and introduced a new period for road construction. By 1892 the road network in Greece had almost trebled in size, reaching the 3288 km of roads. However, Trikoupis’s efforts would not have been as effective, had they not coincided with a second arguably more important process: the repression of western economies.⁹ Decreasing demand for investment and falling domestic interest rates in Western Europe turned investing abroad into an attractive option and “Greece became a fertile site for western capital in search of spatial fix”.¹⁰ Most of these capitals were exported with the form of loans from big banking houses to the countries known as “European periphery” and part of them was used for the construction of new road and mobility infrastructures.

Although the debt-financed infrastructural investments were related to the international capital, the reception of the new technics was a space located social process. Infrastructure meant much more than building roads and bridges. Infrastructures needed people to run and use them, so social relations, every day practices, and individuals had to be “developed” too. As Maria Synarelli notes, in order somebody to supervise a modern technical work, like a road, has first to be convinced about its real use and function and accept the conceptual frame that supports it.¹¹ For the implementation of the ambitious program of technological and institutional modernization of Greece, Trikoupis drew upon his contacts abroad and tried to take advantage of the technical expertise that was accumulated in some European countries. In 1883, a French Engineering Mission of the Corps des Pont et des Chaussées, arrived in Athens commissioned to reform the Greek technical services. They supervised the execution of works by Greek engineers and technicians, and henceforth they played an important role in the dissemination of technical innovation and knowledge.¹² Greece, like other Southeastern European and Middle East countries, imported the western technology and its ideology from France.¹³ On the other hand, French Engineers, influenced by the Saint-Simonian ideal of progress, realized and implemented the alliance of capital and science in many different places and became an important group of transnational

⁸ Law Report, Historical Archive of the National Bank of Greece. Miles were transformed to kilometers. Edward Fitzgerald Law, *Report on the Present Economic and Financial Position in Greece*, London, 1893, p. 26 and table F.II. For the roads that had been constructed to the Ionian islands during the British rule see Lydia Tricha, *Charilaos Trikoupis and the Public Works*, Athens, Kapon, 2001, p. 56.

⁹ Maria Kaika, “Dams as Symbols of Modernization: The Urbanization of Nature between Geographical Imagination and Materiality”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 96, 2, 2006, pp. 276-301.

¹⁰ David Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985, quoted in Maria Kaika, 2006, p. 284.

¹¹ Sinarelli, p. 62.

¹² Christina Agriantoni, “Greek Economy. The Constitution of Greek Capitalism, 1870-1909” (in Greek), in Vassilis Panagiotopoulos (eds.), *History of the New Hellenism*, Athens, Ellinika Grammata, 2003. For the French Mission see also Evi Papagiannopoulou, *The Corinth Canal. Technical achievement and economic venture* (in Greek), Cultural Foundation of Greek Bank of Industrial Development, Athens, 1989 and Aliko Vaxevanoglou, *The social reception of novelty: The example of electrification in Greece during the Interwar Period* (in Greek), Athens, Centre of Modern Greek Studies, National Research Foundation of Greece, 1996.

¹³ Sinarelli, p. 80

modernizers.¹⁴ Even if it is difficult to say whether the technical modernization as a political decision radicalized the social processes in Greece or recreated the economic and technological dependencies, I argue that it was promoted through an eclectic process and it was appropriated with different and selective ways.

Maria Kaika, building on Daniel Headrick, uses the term “selective modernization” to describe a process characteristic of the 19th century colonial practices, which favored the development of transportation and telecommunication over other types of infrastructures, such as water supply and irrigation projects, as the later were expected to yield neither money nor symbolic power for colonial regimes.¹⁵ Even though Greece was not a colony, its economic and political dependence on advanced economies during the 19th century determined the way technology was appropriated.¹⁶ This might explain why in Greece, as in other periphery countries, the development of transport was identified with the transfer of development and road infrastructures became the main embodiments of progress and the material supporters of the ideology that a better society was to come”.

The road from Athens to Phaleron: the broader frame

The decision to use Syngrou Avenue as a case study made the original research an important part of this study. In the relevant literature the references to the road that connected Athens to Phaleron were limited, with the exception of some studies about the road’s ancient history or its symbolic meaning in 20th century’s novels and poems about the Greek and Athenian society. Most urban history books claim that the new road from Athens to Phaleron was planned and constructed by Ioannis Genisarlis, an engineer of the Army Corps between 1876 and 1878.¹⁷ Although this information is not yet confirmed from the archival research, it appears that during that period an important amount of money was spent for the road’s improvement.¹⁸ This paper is based on an on going research on the Greek State Archives, the Historical Archive of the City of Athens and on a selective research on the digitalized archive of newspapers of the National Library of Greece.

In order to find an interpretation of how Syngrou Avenue in Athens became a symbol of Greek modernization, we must study both the geographical visions and plans that were connected with this road and its materiality. But first we have to place Syngrou Avenue in a broader frame. As Fernand Braudel long ago insisted, “the Mediterranean city is part of many interconnected histories and geographies [...] the city is the creator and the

¹⁴ For social identity of French engineers see Antoine Picon, “French Engineers and social Thought, 18-20th Centuries: An Archaeology of Technocratic Ideals”, *History and Technology*, vol. 23. No. 3, 2007, pp. 197-208. For the technical identity of Greek state see Yiannis Antoniou, *Greek Engineers, Institutions and Ideas* (in Greek), Athens, Vivliorama, 2006, Yiannis Antoniou and Michalis Assimakopoulos, “Notes on the Genesis on the 19th Century Greek Engineer. The School of Arts and the Military Academy”, in Konstantinos Chatzis and Efthymios Nikolaidis, *Science, Technology and the 19th Century State: the Role of the Army*, Athens, National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2003.

¹⁵ Maria Kaika, 2006, p. 278.

¹⁶ For the appropriation of technology in European periphery see Kostas Gavroglou, Manolis Patiniotis; et al. “Science and technology in European Periphery: Some Historiographical Reflections,” *History of Science*, vol. 46, pp. 153-175.

¹⁷ It was originally stated in Kostas Mpiris history of Athens (first edition 1966), but without mentioning the records that it was based on. Kostas Mpiris, *Athens from the 19th to the 20th century* (in Greek), Athens, Melissa, 2005.

¹⁸ Between 1876-1878 there were spent almost five times more money in the maintenance of the road from Athens to Phaleron comparing to the years 1872-1874 and almost 3 times more comparing to the years 1878-1880. Ministry of Internal Affairs, Central Committee for the Construction and Maintenance of National Road Network, Pivot Tables of Road Construction 1867-1887, Athens, National Printing Office, 1889.

creature of the roads that stop at its gates connecting it with other cities through the countryside, the desert or the sea [...] cities and roads are one and the same, they are the human structure of geographical space”.¹⁹

Describing the several co-existing spatial and temporal scales of the Athenian geography is difficult. Athens is at the same time a very old and new city. Some of its important streets, some land uses and, certainly, some of the monuments may be traced back to antiquity.²⁰ The market place and specific production sites are located around the same locations from ancient times, while the housing areas are successively organized at their periphery. Even the walls that were surrounding the city through its history, despite their variant outline, kept their basic entrances at the same locations, usually on the axis of the same roads²¹.

However, what we now call Athens originates in the 19th century, when the city became the new capital of the Greek State. From that time Athens had to measure itself against its past, ancient and recent. Town planning and regulation, like other processes of integration promoted by the State became key components and agents of modernization. The new plan of Athens signaled a break with the recent past of Ottoman rule, rejecting anything that could possibly question the continuity with antiquity.²² It followed the standards of neoclassical design and tried to create a new image and identity for the city through this relationship. It proposed a road network in the form of a triangle, linking Acropolis with the square where the royal palace was to be located. This structure determined the patterns of urban development and remained almost unchanged until today.

But, in Athens, as in most cities, the new plan was not vaguely “implemented”. The city and its surroundings were already “marked” with their history. A careful comparison between a contemporary and an older city map can prove that the road network (basic arteries, but sometimes even small rural roads) that used to cross and connect the city with its hinterland and thereafter with the rest of Attica and Greece were not lost or erased by the modern city. Their trails remain “incorporated” in city’s irregular but not casual urban tissue²³.

The road that connected Athens with Phaleron and Saronic Gulf, named Syngrou Avenue at the beginning of the 20th century, is a historical artery of Attica. In antiquity it used to be the main road that linked Athens with its port at Phaleron. In the mid 19th century topographical maps of Attica, one can clearly see the trails of this ancient road coexisting with the old city and with the urban areas that were built by the new city plan. Based on these trails, the new road axis was first conceived at the end of the 19th century as a straight line starting at the temple of Olympic Zeus, ending at the Ilisos estuary and offering a pleasant stroll to the sea.

¹⁹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the age of Philip II* (in Greek), vol. 1, Athens, Educational Institution of National Bank of Greece, 1993, p. 341- 390.

²⁰ Dina Vaiou, “Milestones in the Urban History of Athens”, *Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia*, vol. 53-54, 2002, pp. 209-226. For the Greek model of urban development see also Maria Mantouvalou and George Patrikios, “Athens’ Narrative of Regulation Processes and Models of Urban Growth”, *INURA*, 18th Meeting, 3-10 October 2008, Athens, 25/8/2011, http://inura08.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/mantouvalou_patrikios-athens.pdf, Dina Vaiou, Maria Mantouvalou, Maria Mavridou, “Social Inclusion and Urban development in a United Europe, *Social Sciences Forum*, vol. 16, 1995, pp. 29-57, Maria Mantouvalou, *The Urban Planning of Athens 1830-1940* (in Greek), 25/8/2011, http://courses.arch.ntua.gr/el/metallages_tvn_idevn_gia_thn_polh_ston_20o_aivna/ekpaideytiko_yliko.html

²¹ Eugenia Melampianaki, *The squares of Athens. 1834-1945. The process of urban formation, the function and their urban role* (in Greek) , PhD Dissertation, Athens, National Technical University of Athens, 2006, p. 38.

²² Stamatis Kleanthis and Eduard Schaubert, students of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, drafted the first plan of Athens in 1833.

²³ For the ancient roads of Attica see Manolis Korres (eds.), *Roads of Attica. The ancient Roads of Attica* (in Greek), Athens, Melissa, 2009.

The road from Athens to Phaleron: modern visions and reality

The first geographical visions and plans related with this new road were found in the official correspondence between the Minister of Internal Affairs and the State engineer Ioannis Sechos dating from 1874.²⁴ In one of these documents, the Greek Minister admits that the road to Phaleron is in a state of neglect despite considerably reducing the transportation cost of the city's products. At the same document, the road is described as an ideal place for walk both at summer and winter due to the marine breeze and its orientation.²⁵

In a report written in 1874, Sechos explains that he was planning to alter the axis of the old road to Phaleron so as to form a straight line starting at the city's exhibition hall, which was built at the mid 1880s next to the temple of Olympic Zeus and opening new and interesting views to the sea.²⁶ In the relevant correspondence, there is a number of reports on the road to Phaleron, written from Sechos, including cost estimations, technical information about the roadway construction, detailed descriptions of the sidewalks (that should not be less than 8 meters) and of the trees that should be planted, so as the new road to be "adequate for the modern needs of the promenade".²⁷ After all, the new road had to provide not merely transportation, but recreation and enjoyment of nature. The new road axis, though, was only constructed at the beginning of the 20th century as a product of a favorable social conjuncture that transformed geographical visions and plans into reality.

In late 19th century, Athens was growing through a multitude of public and private transactions and locational decisions.²⁸ Population from all over the country was migrating to the new capital in search of a livelihood. At the same time, wealthy Greeks from abroad returned to Greece looking for new investment opportunities. Between 1870 and 1880, Piraeus, the developing port of Athens, took the form of an industrial city. More than 2500 workers, mostly women, were working in manufacturing activities and in the new factories that were extending along the road and railway that connected Athens with Piraeus. Most of them were living in small houses or in temporary hutments without water, heating and proper drainage. As more and more people were arriving the situation became much worse. Newspapers hosted in their pages debates involving rapid urban transformations, social divisions and progressive polarization of the living conditions of rich and poor.

The southern edge of the old Athens also changed a lot during the 19th century. At the first half of the century, fields of barley, olive trees and vineyards covered the area, attended by farmers from Plaka and Brahami. The first buildings located outside the city limits were the Military Hospital and the house of an important Greek General, Yanni Makrigianni.²⁹ The area around Ilisos River and near the temple of Olympic Zeus became gradually a popular place for recreation and many modern breweries and patisseries were located there.

The idea of a wide and straight road that will connect this area with the sea providing both transportation and recreation became gradually connected with the urban development of Athens. After all, the late 19th century

²⁴ Ioannis Sechos finished the Greek Military School in Athens, the only educational institution in Greece that was providing engineering training until 1787, and continued his studies at École Nationale des Pont et Chaussées in Paris.

²⁵ Ministry of Internal Affairs, File 67, August 1873, Greek State Archives.

²⁶ Ministry of Internal Affairs, File 68, 15 June 1874, Greek State Archives.

²⁷ Ministry of Internal Affairs, File 67, 9 May 1874, Greek State Archives.

²⁸ Vaiou, 2002, p. 212.

²⁹ He was one of the big property owners of the area and his family participated in the debates about urban development.

was a period of experimentation in urban planning and the new urban models were also gaining ground in Greece. Engineers, planners and landscape architects in different countries were seeking to articulate the new order of the industrial city. Cities were for the first time studied as organisms and a lot of alternative visions were proposed in order to “open the city” and redefine the traditional relationships between rural and urban.

This process altered the conceptualization of the street, which by the end of the 19th century, “started to tie in closely with the expanding demands for mobility and circulation”.³⁰ During that period new kinds of roads were also proposed. The archetype was, of course, the Parisian boulevards that tried to cut across old city and connect the old and new poles of urban development. In the relatively new cities of North America though, an alternative version of the multi-way boulevard emerged. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux introduced the term parkway in 1868 to describe a complex street type that connected the suburban parks with the urban centers. Parkway was intended to provide a framework around which suburban neighborhoods would be built. They supported their plan for Brooklyn with a detailed theory that linked the progress and civilization to the evolution of street types.³¹ Although Sechos’s plan for the road to Phaleron can not be compared with the Ocean Parkway that Olmsted and Vaux designed to connect the Prospect Park with the Coney Island beach, its scale was immense compared with the twisting streets of the old city or even with the neoclassical Boulevards of the new Athens’ plan and it became an important structuring element in the city’s modern geography.

But this plan had first to overcome the social and spatial resistance and, as it has been argued, “in the case of cities resistance precedes and collaborates in the constitution of power”.³² The debates on urban land and development in Athens had a long history. These old debates increased considerably in the second half of the 19th century and were mostly connected with the issue of urban expansion. In 1864 the establishment of a new settlement for farmers at the southern edge of the city and along the road to Phaleron had been approved, but this plan was never implemented, mostly because the big property owners demanded large compensation.³³ The City Council had intensively discussed the issue between 1864 and 1884. During the same period numerous plans were also made, some on behalf of the City of Athens, but met again the opposition from the owners and the lack of funding.³⁴ In the records of the Municipal Council discussions, there are some episodes that reveal the controversial relationship between the Central Government and the Local Authorities, every time issues of land expropriation emerged. The most characteristic episode includes the rejection of the plan that the French engineers made in 1884 for the expansion of the city. In this plan one can see a new wide road that connects Athens with Phaleron. This new road incorporates Sechos’s vision and is almost the same with the first part of the road that would later be named Syngrou Avenue. Even though some members of the City Council expressed their admiration for the wide roads and squares of the plan arguing that it has “what the city lacks and mostly needs” in an area where “stroll is now days a customary”, the local antagonisms over space

³⁰ Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, 2000, p. 53.

³¹ For the history of Parkways in Brooklyn see Elizabeth Macdonald, “Structuring a Sense of Place: The Enduring Complexity of Olmsted and Vaux’s Brooklyn Parkways”, *Journal of Urban Design*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2002, pp. 117-143.

³² Thomas Bender, p.5.

³³ Official Gazette, folio 31, 23 June 1864, The establishment of a rural settlement at the east of the Military Hospital.

³⁴ In 1880 an expansion plan for the southern part of the city was made from the engineer P. Sambeau. Historical Archive of the City of Athens, City Council Archives, Book 13, 4 (595), 12 February 1880.

prevailed. Besides, the overall development of the city allowed for a constant land price rise, which in turn served as the basic means of wealth creation and maintenance. And, as it usually happens in urban planning in Greece the plans remained waiting for the appropriate economic and social conditions to materialize.

In the surrounding areas of Syngrou Avenue we have at that time the first attempts to introduce modern, capitalistic modes of urban space production. Kallithea is the first officially planned and organized settlement at the periphery of Athens. The idea of establishing a new settlement belonged to the Building Company S.A., a private construction company that became a big property owner of the area.³⁵ Kallithea's plan was prepared by the French engineers and was approved by the Minister of Internal Affairs in 1884.³⁶ The Building Company S.A. built the first houses in 1885 and collaborated with the Belgian company that exploited the first tramways in Athens in order to create efficient urban infrastructure. Building Company's plans were never fully materialized. It has been argued though, that the establishment of Kallithea reflects the first attempts of the new bourgeoisie of Athens to set up its power in the urban development.³⁷ The settlement of Phaleron has a similar story. Here the development was related with the construction of Athens - Piraeus railway and it engaged, besides the local owners and bankers, the large French bank Crédit Mobilier.³⁸ Kallithea and Phaleron are paradigms of late 19th century's ambitious program of modernization, connected to the basic infrastructure of the time, the railway. However, they remained marginal, as the production of the Greek city was, and still is, based on small land ownership and capital and on the construction of road infrastructures.

Syngrou Avenue, the wider road Athens ever had, opened up at the beginning of the 20th century. It is one of the few straight arteries of the city and the only one that begins at its historical center. Syngrou Avenue took the name of an important member of the Greek diaspora, Andreas Syngros, whose endowment funded part of its expropriation and construction costs. The new road was finally constructed under the supervision of the State engineer Nikolaos Gazis and became a place of technical experimentation.³⁹ Once it was established, Syngrou Avenue acquired new contextual meanings and had unanticipated spatial, social and cultural effects. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were numerous articles in the newspapers praising the 5 km long, 35 m wide, avenue that "looked like a real park of a modern metropolis".⁴⁰ During the Interwar period Syngrou Avenue became the main framework of urban development, as a lot of new settlements, mostly for the refugees from Minor Asia, were located there. It was a period that Athens had to deal with major transformations and Syngrou, with the form of a motorway, became once again the symbol and the agent of change. At that time the road was also "re-invented" by the Greek novelist George Theotokas who used the

³⁵ See Giorgos Gianakopoulos (eds), *Kallithea. A Greek - English edition of the city's history* (in Greek), Municipality of Kallithea Cultural organization, Athens, 2006.

³⁶ Official Gazette, folio 3, 31 December 1885.

³⁷ Theodoris Psalidopoulos, "Kallithea, one town, one history" (in Greek), *Epta hmeres*, Kathimerini, 13 April 2003, p. 4.

³⁸ Christina Agriantoni, "Building Athens. The construction companies at the first half of the 20th century" (in Greek), *The Greek urban space*, scientific symposium, Athens, 2003, pp. 241-258.

³⁹ For the construction of Syngrou Avenue see Scrip, 21/11/1904. In 1910 the Greek State Engineer Dimitios Kallias took out a patent from the French Government for a new road material called scorie - tarmacadam. The experiments were done on Syngrou Avenue during 1908-1910, *Archimedes*, vol. 5, September 1910.

⁴⁰ Neon Asty, 28/12/1901

“paradigm of Syngrou” in order to introduce modernism in Greek literature.⁴¹ After this short presentation of Syngrou Avenue’s history, it can be argued that the special character it gradually gained comes from its active role in urban development that can only be understood in the several spatial and temporal scales of the urban process.

⁴¹ Fotini Margariti, “Syngrou Avenue and the in 1930s literature” (in Greek), in *Eleftherios Venizelos and the Greek city*, National Foundation and research Center Eleftherios Venizelos, National Technical University of Athens, National technical Chamber, Athens, 2005, pp. 311-323.