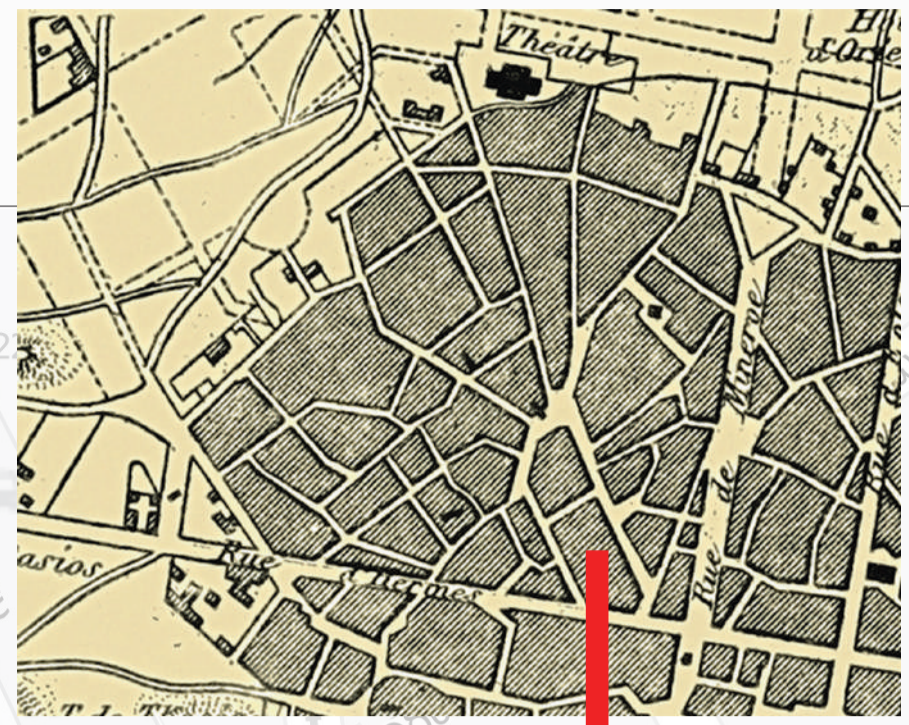




# the case of Embros Theatre a free, self-managed theatre in the historic Psirri neighbourhood, in central Athens.



The town planning network is fully maintained and it coincides with the free layout of the ancient city.

1860's  
Demolition of many neighbourhood's old houses replaced by masonry buildings for commercial and light industrial uses

1930's  
settlement of small industries and crafts workshops in the neighbourhood (rapid incrementation of population in the area).

1979  
Psirri area declared part of "Athens' Historical Center"

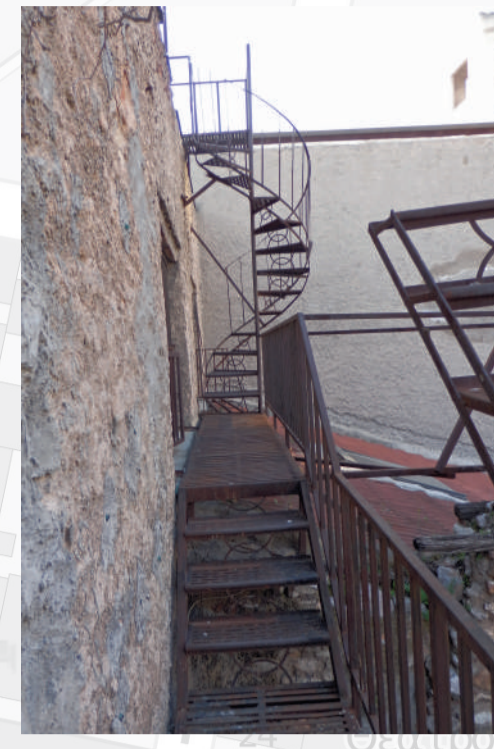
1998  
Land uses defined in the revised General urban development plan. Psirri is described as "congested with leisure activities"

1999  
Earthquake in Athens  
Beginning of the first phase of gentrification of the area

2011  
Psirri Neighbourhood Movement  
Local assembly of inhabitants and workers

2012  
Operation "Xenios Zeus"  
extensive police sweep operations

Free Self-managed Theatre Embros run by the community through an Open Assembly



1933

Printing house and office of "Embros Newspaper"

1985

Closed down, housing no activities

1988

1989

1998

1999

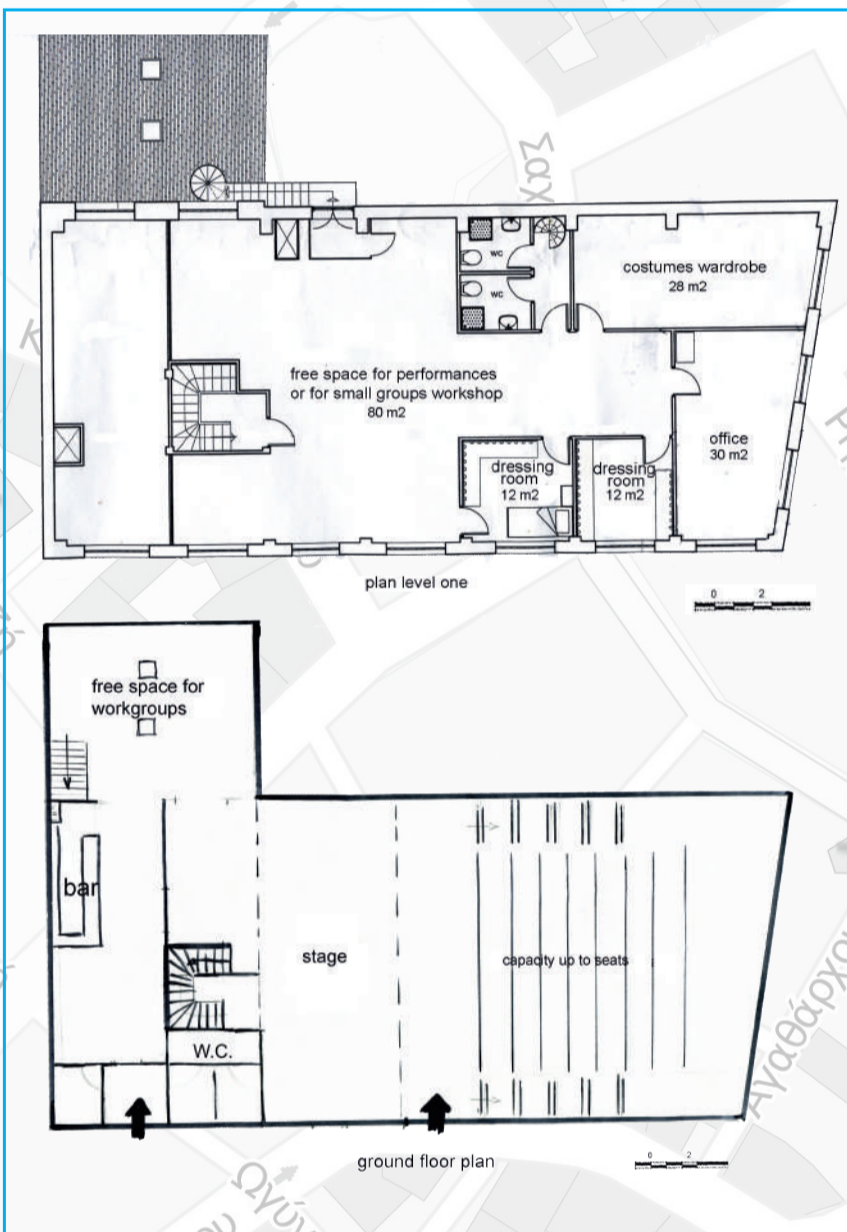
2007

2011

2012

**Declaration of the Building and Letterpress Equipment as Monument. The reasoning of the Designation Act**

Αριθ. 24 Ιουλίου 1989



### Towards a Community

A group of inhabitants and people working in Psirri, with raised awareness in the identification and in the safeguarding of the historical neighbourhood, launched an open call to form a local assembly.

During the most recent gentrification phase, Embros Theatre, and Psirri area, had gained a short-lived efflorescence of culture and arts. This memory affected the local community and motivated initiatives to reclaim Embros, demanding from the local institutions to contribute in the reopening of the derelict building in order to create a vivid and vibrating space in the heart of the deteriorated Psirri neighbourhood.

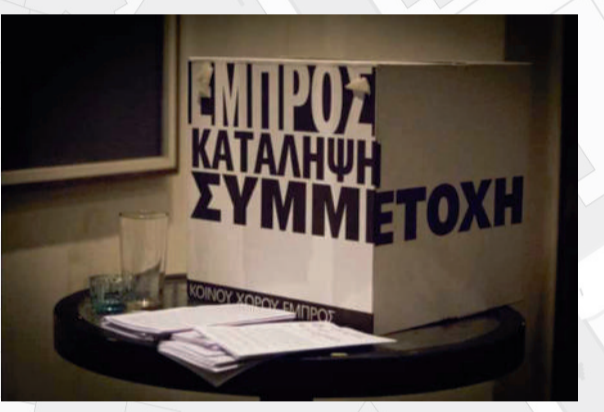
At this point, it should be noticed that since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008, the decline and deterioration of the Athens city center, made clear and visible to more and more people the falsity of the previous years' wrong development projects. Projects that were aiming only in the immediate profit, speculating on the historic environment, selling "cheap" night life entertainment were distorting the traditional aspect of a neighbourhood. At the same time, the social fabric of the neighbourhood multiplied exponentially turning Embros into a node of broader social convergence.

### Embros as a -living- Monument

The historical building of Embros is one of the major landmarks of Psirri facing Agion Anargiron Sq. next to an 11th century Byzantine church bearing the same name.

Built in 1933 and till 1985 the building housed the printing facilities of EMBROS newspaper. In July 1989, the building -including its mechanical infrastructures- was declared monument under the Designation Act by the respective peripheral service of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. In 1988 Embros was turned into a theatre, safeguarding and respecting though the architectural typology of the building and its previous use. For 18 years it housed first the Theatrical Organization "Morfes" and later the Theatre Company "Embros".

The theatre closed its doors in 2007 and it remained closed and deserted for almost five years, until it was re-activated in November 2011 by the "Mavili Collective" with the participation and support of the local community (Psirri Neighbourhood Movement), and various artists and theoreticians of the performative & visual arts and music scene. After a year of rich artistic and social actions, during which the authorities attempted twice to close down and seal the theatre, responsibility of the theatre's operation and function turned over to its weekly open assembly.



### Embros as a Community

Since 2012 the weekly assembly is the sole body responsible for the decision making concerning all activities, or problems that may come up. The assembly is open to all. Anyone, regardless of her/his residence, can participate in the theatre provided that she/he acknowledges the occupation as a common good for the neighbourhood and the city. The goal is to create a free and self-managed space for social and cultural productions, free of administrative governance and the logic of marketable profit. The participating local community is trying to raise awareness for the protection of the urban and social fabric.

In other words, the Embros Community is trying to spread awareness among the public of the importance to safeguard the building as it is. Not only because it represents a milestone in the country's editorial history -as mentioned in the formal declaration- but also because the same community recognized the unique experience of intrinsic sense of the interior of the building's shell. The experience of a space in which people lived and created mixed with the traces they left in the body of the fabric and perceived in every single small wall crack or in every single timber decay. This singularity became a true visual and tactile experience, celebrating the profound sense of the space, which, after all, constitutes the very essence of architecture.

In doing so, the community is organizing workshops, residencies and conferences regarding the heritage of the neighbourhood, in order to enrich the local involvement and spread the knowledge among the inhabitants.

### Characteristics of Psirri Neighbourhood

Traditionally a light manufacture neighbourhood, Psirri is one of the oldest neighbourhoods of Athens. It is lying, on a smooth level ground covering an area of about 26.000 m<sup>2</sup>, north-west of the Acropolis.

The medieval urban tissue is clearly evident even today in the street plans, narrow perplexed roads and the plethora of small byzantine churches scattered later during the 19th c. A large part of the building stock still carries strong reminiscences of the minor architectural heritage mixed with modern multistory buildings and warehouses built mainly in the '60s and '70s.

Its immediate vicinity to the market, the administration center of the old city and the major archaeological sites, could perhaps explain the special character of Psirri, seen by some as a transit space in the heart of the metropolis. Its border limits could be described as an "osmotic" membrane. It is not a "closed-defined" neighbourhood as its activities traditionally -and still today- addressed the needs and concerns of the broader Athenian and national population.

Psirri has undergone violent transformation in the last decades, with the intrusion of entertainment, leisure and tourism activities and the displacement of its inhabitants and merchants. The shift in the character and in land use is registered in a wider transformation process of the urban fabric, where large scale attempts of urban regeneration are implemented by big investors in concert with public bodies in the direction of an equally marketable "embellishment" that is ideologically guised the cloak of "gentrification". These processes have become more intense since 2008, and the outburst of the financial and social crisis, rendering the territory a fierce battleground.



www.embros.gr  
vimeo.com/embrotheatre