



Shifting over Athens: A Deep Dive into the Inner Mechanics of CIAM IV

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This study explores the Fourth International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM IV), focusing on Athens' selection as the host city for the 1933 meeting. While recent research has uncovered complex frameworks and hidden narratives within CIAM's inner circles, the reasons for holding the congress aboard a cruise ship traveling the Marseilles-Athens-Marseilles route remain enigmatic. Investigating the factors influencing CIAM IV's planning and location choice, set against the backdrop of interwar modernity, reveals overlooked dynamics; Greece's modernization efforts, which leveraged its diaspora to enhance cultural identity and tourism potential, played a crucial role in Athens' selection – a perspective often neglected in post-CIAM IV narratives. An analysis of CIAM's internal networks and power dynamics offers a reassessment of Greece's position within the CIAM discourse, providing new insights into the decision-making processes of this influential architectural movement.

Keywords: NEPTOS; *SS Patris II*; CIAM leaders; interwar modernity; Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO); Greek diaspora; Athens Charter



Introduction

How and why did the Fourth International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM IV) take place in Athens? What were the pivotal factors that influenced the planning of CIAM IV and how did the organizers relocate the congress venue from Moscow to Athens? While extensive discussions among scholars have revolved around the rejection of Moscow as the initial venue and the subsequent pursuit of an alternative, the rationale for convening the congress as a cruise on the route from Marseilles to Athens and back has remained elusive.

The choice of Athens is illuminating in the context of interwar modernity. In the late 1920s, despite Greece's socio-economic challenges and political turbulence, Athens transformed itself into a modern capital, concurrently embracing its cultural heritage as the cradle of Western civilization. These efforts resonated deeply within avant-garde circles, significantly shaping modern narratives, especially through the exploration of antiquity. Not only did the fourth meeting of CIAM align with Greece's momentum towards modernity, but the networks within CIAM and the power dynamics among its leaders heavily influenced the selection of Athens as the host city. In particular, the strategic activities of the Greek diaspora in Paris played a pivotal role in advocating for Athens as both a focal point of modernity and a compelling tourist destination.

Existing studies either investigate the architectural and urban principles established during the congress (CIAM 1943; Mehaffy, Low 2018; Mumford 2019) or examine the circumstances surrounding the event (Steinmann 1979; Ciucci 1981; Gold 1998; Mumford 2000; Somer 2007; Van Es et al. 2014). Examinations of CIAM leaders such as Le Corbusier, Cornelis van Eesteren, and Sigfried Giedion also contribute to a detailed perspective on the function of the organism (Cohen 1992; Somer 2007; Kousidi 2016). Recent studies have begun to explore further complex frameworks as well, such as the role of smaller groups within modernity and the CIAM circle (Kohlrausch 2019; Flierl 2016; Bokov 2017; Crawford 2022). However, the Greek CIAM team has yet to receive such scholarly attention.

The relationship between Greece and CIAM has been explored mostly in terms of the country's role within CIAM modernism. The impact of ancient Greek culture on shaping modernist thinking in architecture and aesthetics during the interwar period has been largely documented and analyzed, particularly the notions of 'primitive' and 'antiquity' as foundations of modern civilization (Tournikiotis 2018; Giacumacatos 2016: 34–42; Baudin 1999; Blencowe and Levine 2019: 150–156; Stavroulaki 2018). However, these readings perpetuate the concept of an 'archaic spirit' as the main driving force behind the selection of the Athens venue, even though such a narrative is primarily supported by documentation that mostly emerged *after* the congress

was implemented, following the breakdown of relations between the USSR and CIAM (*Quadrante* 5 1933; *20eme siècle* 1933; *Cahiers d'art* 1934; *Le voyage en Grèce* 1934).

Bringing to the forefront the interpersonal dynamics shaping the ties between CIAM and modern Greece, I argue that the Greek impact on CIAM modernity was, at least in part, a product of powerful Greek and French networks based in Paris, which actively promoted Greece as a tourist and cultural destination. By examining these networks and the latent influences that shaped CIAM narratives, we can better understand the hitherto unacknowledged role Greece played in CIAM planning and reposition the nation's significance within modern ideas and aesthetics.

Greece as a Latent Influence: Human Networks and the Building of Tourism Potential

The reality of interwar Greece was far from the idealized image of a classical past that had been cultivated in the 19th century. In the aftermath of World War I and the influx of refugees from the Greco-Turkish war, the country faced a series of economic and political challenges that further undermined its fragile social cohesion. In response to the need for recovery, structural social and economic development strategies were undertaken. The relatively new 'industry' of tourism, for example, emphasized the country's existing potential, such as its rich culture, arts, and antiquity, while recognizing the critical role Western support could play in terms of soft power. Both state-run and private initiatives were welcomed, including a proposal by the French-Swiss photographer Fred Boissonnas: to use photography as a tool for cultural and commercial promotion of the country (Boudouri and Sideris 2002). Boissonnas' proposal was in line with the political leadership's vision, and with the Greek government's support, he used his camera to capture the multidimensional beauty of Greece, with a particular emphasis on the landscapes of the Cyclades and Crete, Athens, and the Peloponnese.

These promotional efforts were further consolidated and systematized in 1929 with the establishment of the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) (Bonarou 2009; Vlachos 2013; Athanassiou et al. 2019). The GNTO aimed to redefine Greek identity and promote the country as a modern destination, while simultaneously emphasizing its classical past and leveraging the Grand Tour tradition (Boukouras 2023). Its target was those tourists who typically visited the coastal zone of the Atlantic and the remnants of classical culture in southern Italy and Greece (Vlachos 2013:218). The organization's advertising poster thus featured the Parthenon, the iconic symbol of ancient Greek civilization, presented in a modern style through Nelly's lens.¹ This campaign showcased Greece's cultural heritage and natural beauty, highlighting the country's unique identity as both ancient and modern, both cosmopolitan and under-explored.

Boissonnas' gaze and Nelly's artistic framework underscored the GNTO's endeavors in favor of the Greek landscape. These endeavors were anchored upon the concept of *ellinikotita* (Greekness), which emphasized the cultural continuity and metaphysical richness of the country's terrain (Vlachos 2013: 40–43), commonly referred to as 'Eternal Greece' (Mazower 2008; Bonarou 2009: 285–290). The emergence of seascape tourism, along with the exploration of urban spaces and cultural landmarks, contributed to the discourse of the unique characteristics of the Greek landscape, while the emerging need for leisure enhanced Greece's potential as a tourist destination (Vlachos 2013: 44–45; Bonarou 2009: 288–290). However, the operational potential of the GNTO was limited during this period, and the lack of GNTO offices abroad necessitated the delegation of representative duties to correspondent offices.

The correspondent offices of the GNTO in Paris and Marseilles were the offices of Société NEPTOS (Figure 1). The Société NEPTOS was founded in 1921 by the prominent Embiricos family,² a well-known ship-owning family associated with political power in Greece. The company was active in shipping, transport, and trade and represented the Hellenic Railways, the National Shipping Company, and the National Transportation Company, playing a significant role as a national delegation of Greece in Paris. The visual identity of NEPTOS was established under its logo 'Xenios Zeus',³ reflecting Greece's tradition of demonstrating hospitality to foreigners, rather than linking to marine or relevant references in Greek mythology, as would be expected from a steamship company. The director of Société NEPTOS was Iraklis Ioannidis, who

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s/y "Kyma" — s/y "Afros" — m/y "Flisvos"

à la disposition des personnes désirant visiter les Iles grecques par petits groupes

Figure 1: *Comœdia illustré*, April, 1935. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

was also a writer using the pseudonym Petros Afthoniatis and was part of the avant-garde circle of Paris.⁴ While the Embiricos family's political influence is indicated in several accounts,⁵ excavating their precise role across business, media, and governing circles requires further investigation.

NEPTOS promoted cruises in Greece, as is evident from coverage in the French press. This promotion capitalized on the contemporary exploration of ancient Greek culture and the harmony of the Greek landscape, offering a unique combination of classical pilgrimage, intellectual ascendance, and leisure. NEPTOS's promotion strategy primarily targeted the avant-garde circle, those with a proclivity for travel and the financial capacity to support it. The cruises NEPTOS offered were supported by the Greek government and were extensively advertised in whatever publications the target audience was likely to read. For instance, the French newspaper *Le Figaro* published an article titled 'In Olympus in Search of the Gods' in 1927, written by Georges Bourdon, who was invited by Ioannidis and Boissonnas (Boissonnas acted on behalf of the Greek government) to join a cruise on the SS *Patris II* that left from Piraeus (Bourdon 1927). It included the opportunity to climb up Mount Olympus, a journey that celebrated the Greek landscape and was directly linked to the mythological references of Greek culture.⁶

In the late 1920s, NEPTOS launched a series of Mediterranean cruises, primarily to the Greek archipelago. Some cruises were for avant-garde groups to Athens, Crete, and the Cyclades, including cultural groups such as the Association Guillaume Budé and the École du Louvre, but also smaller groups such as the audiences of *Comœdia illustré* (*Comœdia* 1931) and members of the Automobile-club de France (*Bulletin officiel/ACF* 1931). A further illustration of the company's extensive promotional efforts is that at the same time as the Cyclades cruise that the company organized for the École du Louvre, the company also contributed 17,500 francs to the school, as part of an 'enrichment of national museums' initiative (*Les enrichissements* 1933). This contribution transcended the typical advertising campaign of a shipping company, and supports the notion that a modern Greek narrative was being deliberately crafted that highlighted the country's cultural heritage and diverse landscape.

Deepening the Networks: The Greek Diaspora and the Avant-Garde Circle

The foothold established by the Greek efforts in reshaping the country's identity was further emphasized by the modern shift to the ancient simple structures and the exploration of prehistoric Greek civilizations, mainly those of the Minoan and Mycenaean periods. Relations between the Greek and the French enhanced the country's tourism aspirations, and the Parisian avant-garde played an instrumental

role in shaping this vision, its networks of notable Greeks facilitating the avant-garde's connections to the modern movement. The influence of the Greek circle on European and particularly French affairs can be documented in various publications that feature Greek publishers, columnists, and editors. In 1934, NEPTOS launched *Le voyage en Grèce*, a magazine primarily aimed at European tourists, particularly the French. While the publication could be considered simply a way to advertise travel, it was much more than that. The mobility and extensive network of contacts of its creators and authors meant that the publication served as a reference point for the avant-garde of the time. The project was undertaken by Iraklis Ioannidis, with the intent to create a common ground between Greece and its travelers (*Le voyage en Grèce* 1934). In eleven issues over five years, *Le voyage en Grèce* merged art, architecture, literature, and archeology and featured collaborations with Le Corbusier, Giorgio De Chirico, Georges Braque, Roger Vitrac, Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger, Jean Cassou, Henri Matisse, and others. The publication aimed to create a new landscape of Greece that was inspired by the country's culture, archeology, and light, building on historical and mythical references.

The artistic director of *Le voyage en Grèce*, and a key collaborator in Ioannidis' endeavor, was Stratis Eleftheriadis, also known as Tériade. Tériade, a renowned publisher within avant-garde circles, was affiliated with *Cahiers d'art*, published by Christian Zervos (Figure 2). This art magazine, recognized for its pioneering typography and photographic documentation, began in 1926, preceding *Le voyage en Grèce* (Derouet 2011: 29).

Beginning in the late 1920s, Zervos, originally from Kefalonia, Greece, played a pivotal role in advancing both Greek and French avant-garde movements. While Zervos had established connections within the Parisian circle earlier, his network expanded during his philosophy studies at the Sorbonne in the late 1910s (Zervos 1919). Through his

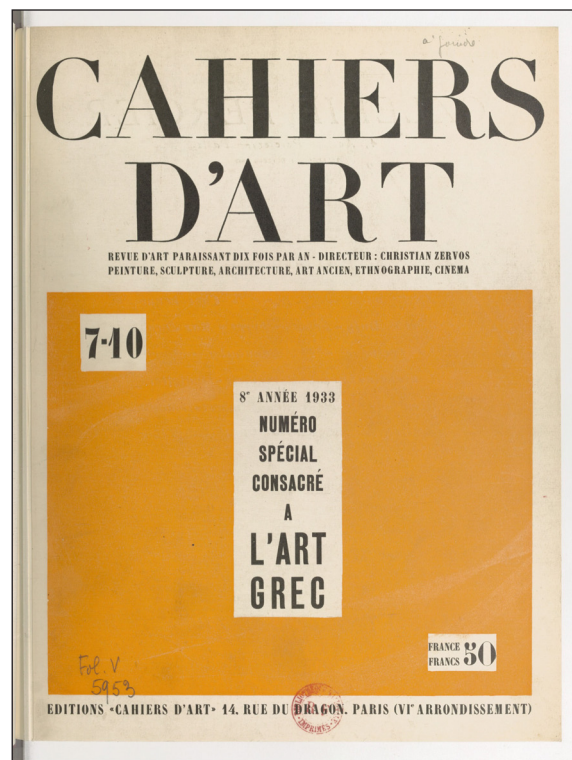


Figure 2: Cover of *Cahiers d'art*, 7-10 (1933).
Source: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

acquaintance with Jean Badovici,⁷ a Romanian architect who since 1923 had been editor of *L'architecture vivante*, Zervos was introduced to Albert Morancé, publisher of art and architecture magazines like *L'art d'aujourd'hui* and *Les arts de la maison*.

The magazine *Cahiers d'art* also boasted contributions from renowned artists and creators, such as Le Corbusier, Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky. In this publication, Tériade focused on art, while Sigfried Giedion critiqued architecture. Zervos championed prehistoric Mediterranean cultures and fostered a dialogue between ancient and modern art, significantly influencing the intellectual circles of Paris; the Minotaur stands as a prominent example of this discourse. Throughout the 1930s, the magazine pivoted towards exploring prehistoric and ancient Greek culture and beginning in 1933 gradually integrated references to modern Greek art and architecture (Stavroulaki 2018). The first and second issue of 1932, presented as a double issue, documents Zervos' research pursuits and aspirations.

The Greek expatriate community in Paris was a closely knit network that included people such as the sculptor Michalis Tombros and the painter Nikos Hatzikyriakos-Gikas. Tombros, who as early as 1919 was an associate professor of plastics at the School of Architecture at the National Technical University of Athens, had resigned in 1924 and relocated to Paris, where he immersed himself in the French avant-garde scene (Pavlopoulos 1996: 30).⁸ His friendship with Ioannidis dates to the mid-1920s, while his correspondence with Zervos began in 1932.⁹ Hatzikyriakos-Gikas had been studying in Paris since 1922 and by the late 1920s had begun exhibiting his works in Athens and Paris (Hatzikyriakos-Gikas 1987).¹⁰ Ioannidis was also closely associated with Zervos' brother, Stamos, who was employed in the NEPTOS offices.¹¹

Zervos' profound fascination with the prehistoric art and archaeology of the Cyclades is evident in his meticulous research from the early 1930s. In a letter addressed to Giedion, he discusses his articles in *Cahiers d'art* and outlines plans for an 18-day cruise to the Cyclades, mentioning the intent to admire the housing landscape of Santorini.¹² A year later, Zervos decided to produce, with Tériade and Ioannidis, a documentary film of a geographical nature, whose purpose would be to introduce the Parisian audience to a renewed Greece, with an emphasis on the Cycladic islands. Directed by Jacques-Bernard Brunius, with photography by Eli Lotar, script by Roger Vitrac, and music by Albert Jeanneret (Le Corbusier's brother), *Voyage aux Cyclades* premiered on March 9, 1932, in front of an audience of the Paris avant-garde (Amao 2011: 75). The film's artistic and poetic form harmonizes Lotar's modern yet primal images with Jeanneret's music, a creative intervention in an area, the Cyclades, yet to be fully explored (*Cahiers d'Art* 1932). The film encapsulates the explorations of the Cyclades — a hint of the forthcoming CIAM cruise.

A Sea of Ideas: Charting a Course for CIAM IV

During the 1930s, deep within a fluid yet dynamic environment, the ideas of modernism flourished, and the modern movement ultimately shaped the vanguard. In the USSR, the vibrant discourse on the form and function of an ideal city coincided with a period of profound transformations, both at the political and social levels.¹³ The Soviet Central Command sought Le Corbusier's consultation in the late 1920s for the design of the new Soviet city, drawing upon the Five-Year Plan (Mumford 2009: 237–254), thus marking a significant phase in the Western–USSR relations. Soviet–German exchanges also reached a peak in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as evidenced by architectural visits and shared priorities (Crawford 2022: 186–216). This dynamic, complex, and rapidly changing environment seemed to foster a state of utopianism. At the forefront of a social and architectural revolution was the new social model that abolished private land and building ownership, following the October Revolution and the Decree on Land, creating a fertile ground for the development of a completely new form of urban planning.

The CIAM meetings followed the momentum, and the fourth one was to be held in the USSR. By June 1931, the subject of that congress, the 'Functional City', had been finalized, as had its location in Moscow and the date of September 1932.¹⁴ However, in late February the work for the upcoming congress halted abruptly, upon the announcement of the results of the architectural competition for the Soviet Palace in Moscow (**Figure 3**). The qualification of the design by the American architect Hector Hamilton, who proposed an imposing building with neo-Gothic features, created intense concern. The international community's reaction, primarily among advocates of the new architecture, was noteworthy, with allegations focused mainly on the leap between the discourse and the actions of political power. The CIAM administration's reaction was equally strong, escalating in intensity in response to public demand.¹⁵ To address the crisis and resolve the problems related to the planned conference in Moscow, CIAM decided to convene the delegation in a meeting held in Barcelona on March 29, 1932.¹⁶ In the months that followed, tensions between the West and the USSR began to escalate, ultimately culminating in a complete breakdown of relations within a year (Somer 2007: 117).

The shift in Soviet political ideology created a less receptive environment for Western architects, which became apparent in early 1933, when the planning for CIAM IV was obstructed. Scholars have analyzed the circumstances and reasons that led to the cancellation of the Moscow congress, but a common conclusion has not yet been reached (Mumford 2000; Flierl 2016: 19–33; Somer 2007). In the circular distributed to CIAM delegates on April 27, 1933, informing them about the cancellation of the

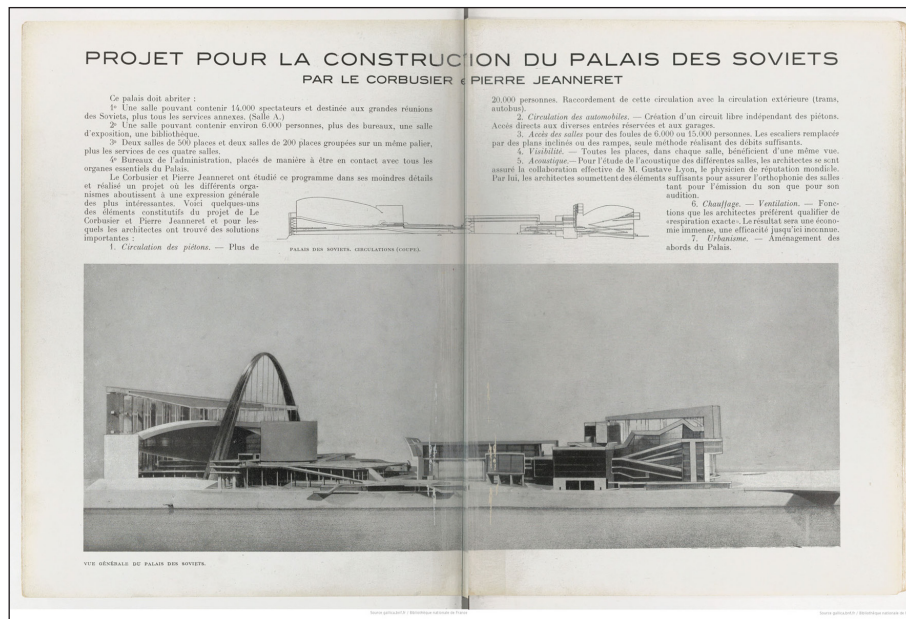


Figure 3: Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret. Project for the Construction of the Soviet Palace. *Cahiers d'art*, no. 1–2 (1932): 74–75. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

CIAM meeting in Moscow, the reason given was Russia's constant postponements.¹⁷ While this paper does not delve into further documentation concerning the exact circumstances of the conference's cancellation, it is clear that both the observed shift in Moscow politics and the steady establishment and dispersal of modern ideas heightened awareness of cultural differences and led to an unbridgeable gap in USSR–CIAM relations. The modern utopia stumbled over politics, censorship, different pursuits, and contrasting constructed identities.

After the congress adjourned, a tense atmosphere persisted, leading to the assembly of delegates at Le Corbusier's office in Paris on April 23 and 24, 1933.¹⁸ On the agenda were decisions about a new venue and date for the fourth congress, as well as an assessment of the national teams' analysis of cities. The administration was also tasked with examining the status of new national teams and the potential formation of others, the creation of an organization of friends who would be close to the congress, and crucial financial issues that could affect any creative movements and limit choices. The decisions made at this meeting, as is well known, were the way out of the negotiations with Moscow.¹⁹

Initially, the decision to postpone the congress was widely accepted among members. However, the advanced work done by the national teams prompted a sense of urgency in determining a new venue. The administration feared losing the foundation for an unprecedented development of scientific urban planning, and that

the work of the national teams might be considered outdated if the meeting was further postponed. Thus, the call was made to hold the congress by any means necessary. At the meeting, attended by Le Corbusier, Victor Bourgeois, Marcel Breuer, Cornelis van Eesteren, Rudolf Steiger, and Sigfried Giedion, the Polish team proposed Warsaw as an alternative venue, while Breuer, who was standing in for Gropius due to political developments,²⁰ suggested holding the congress on a ship. Le Corbusier immediately called Christian Zervos, who had a ready-made plan the following morning.²¹

The decision to convene the congress on a cruise ship was disseminated through a five-page circular to the delegates of the national group, which outlined the logistics of the conference over the upcoming four months. Delegates were informed about a meeting to be held in Athens, an initiative of the Greek team, to which CIAM friends were invited, as well as accompanying trips. The SS *Patris II* was designated as the venue for the congress, with departure from Marseille set for July 29, 1933, the whole journey to last 17 days.²²

The immediacy of the decision, and lack of time for written communication, has made Giedion's account the only primary source of information regarding the decision-making process. The circular did not provide a clear rationale for the choice of venue, but it does mention that several cities, including Warsaw, Algiers, Milan, and Chicago, were considered but ultimately rejected due to logistical constraints, such as inadequate infrastructure and insufficient preparation time. Warsaw would still be a feasible option for a future meeting or to ameliorate USSR-CIAM relations, while Algiers had yet to form a national working group.²³ Additionally, Milan was considered as a potential destination for the Triennale, but the organization of a CIAM congress in that city would require extensive preparation, as would a meeting in Chicago in connection with the World's Fair.²⁴

The choice to hold a congress at sea was driven by a desire to promote closer relationships among the delegates. As stated in the circular, previous congresses did not offer sufficient opportunities for members to engage in conversations.²⁵ By convening the congress on board a ship, delegates would have ample time to discuss the proposed topics and other relevant issues, as well as to address current problems that fell outside the scope of the congress. The circular adds that the venue would provide an opportunity to rest in favorable conditions and to visit Athens, where members could connect with the Greek team. Moreover, it reveals that 9 days of leisure time in Greece and the Greek islands were included as a means of restoring 'the situation created by the postponement of the congress by Moscow'.²⁶

However, two aspects of the announcement warrant further examination. First, the purported 'initiative of the Greek team' to hold a special meeting in Athens requires scrutiny. According to a letter from Giedion, Stamos Papadakis, the representative

of the Greek team, was informed about the conference in the Greek capital three days after the circular was sent.²⁷ It is unlikely that Papadakis received the circular addressed to the delegates of the national teams as he was not yet an official delegate of the team,²⁸ despite the Greek team having been formed since the end of March.²⁹ Therefore, the reference to the Greek team in the circular may be misleading, and the 'initiative' may in fact belong to the same Greeks who advocated for the idea of a conference on board. The circumstances in which the final venue was chosen also requires further investigation. It appears that Breuer's proposal to embark on a ship was made in response to the difficulties encountered during negotiations with the Soviet government, which had left many delegates feeling disenchanted. The proposal was thus viewed as an opportunity to circumvent the challenges associated with organizing a traditional conference, such as extensive communication requirements with the political capital of the host country, instead allowing effort to be focused only on preparing a productive congress. The only organization of a venue required would be the chartering of a ship, reducing normal requirements of communications and logistics with the political and technical delegates of the host country. However, the proposal of a cruise implies not a simple, linear connection with Greece as the host destination but rather the involvement of a broader range of actors, the most prominent ones being the Greek circle in Paris.

Steering the Athens Venue

The final venue of The Functional City congress resulted from complex processes and fortunate circumstances amid political and social instability. While it may be tempting to view the Athens venue as a mere response to challenges faced during negotiations with the Soviet government or as a means to foster stronger relationships among delegates, a closer examination of primary sources reveals a more nuanced understanding.

Athens seems to have been an unexpected option. Several cities had been considered and dismissed, but the circular CIAM delegates received does not explicitly explain the rationale for choosing Athens. In fact, the Greek CIAM team was still in the process of formation and was not particularly active at the time. Moreover, Greece was grappling with a complex economic and political situation, characterized by frequent changes in government that disrupted social cohesion. Despite these challenges, notable initiatives by the Greek government were intended to address these issues and integrate Greece into Europe through bilateral agreements.

The interwar era witnessed a significant increase in tourism, and the Greek government and diaspora endeavored to establish Greece as a favored tourist destination. Significant cultural groups in France played a crucial role in promoting

Greece, particularly the Greek diaspora in Paris, who contributed extensive advertising efforts, a strong presence in the avant-garde press, and networking skills. This support further aided the Greek National Tourism Organization's endeavors, and at the same time propelled NEPTOS' prosperity, solidifying Greece's identity as a cradle for both classical and modernist aesthetics, as well as an extraordinary landscape waiting to be explored.

NEPTOS played a decisive role in shaping Greece's position, not only within the CIAM modernist movement but also within the overall Western interwar status quo. The company acted as a key network in promoting Greece's cultural and natural assets, which were vital to the modernist movement's intellectual and aesthetic pursuits. While the choice of Athens as the CIAM IV venue was partly influenced by the cultural exploration of Greece, many people in avant-garde circles liked to go on Mediterranean cruises. While it may have been Breuer who suggested a congress on board, as the literature suggests, the connection between the cruise and Greece can be better understood by unfolding the role of the avant-garde circles centered around Giedion and Le Corbusier.

The Greek network of the Paris diaspora was successfully integrated with the core circle of modernists, providing extensive exposure for Greece and its cultural and ideological legacy that emerged from classical antiquity and revived during the Renaissance. Zervos, in particular, gained access to a broader network after founding *Cahiers d'art* in 1926. By teaming up with Tériade and Ioannidis, they presented Greece as a mythical yet modern place, one with viable cultural and tourism industries that shaped the country's new identity. When excavations of prehistoric cultures began to increase in the 1900s, appropriately advertised by the Greek diaspora in Paris, the avant-garde circles turned to them in a search for ideas and primordial influences consistent with modern standards.

The fourth meeting of CIAM 'was the plan of the shipping company NEPTOS', wrote Giedion, 'and here we are', he says. 'If we travel to Greece now, it is not an escape. We do not want to escape from the difficulties of reality, but rather, always mindful of the deep problems that develop, we want to introduce a moment of reflection'.³⁰ This reflective process was a conscious effort to realize the concept of a cruise that could promote new forms of architectural and social thought — a journey that would symbolically become a historical common ground for modern architecture in the 20th century. A series of publications by CIAM members post-congress (*Quadrante* 1933; *Cahiers d'art* 1934; *Le voyage en Grèce* 1934) expand upon this idea, emphasizing Greece as the cradle of civilization, rooted in fundamental principles of living and aesthetics (**Figure 4**).

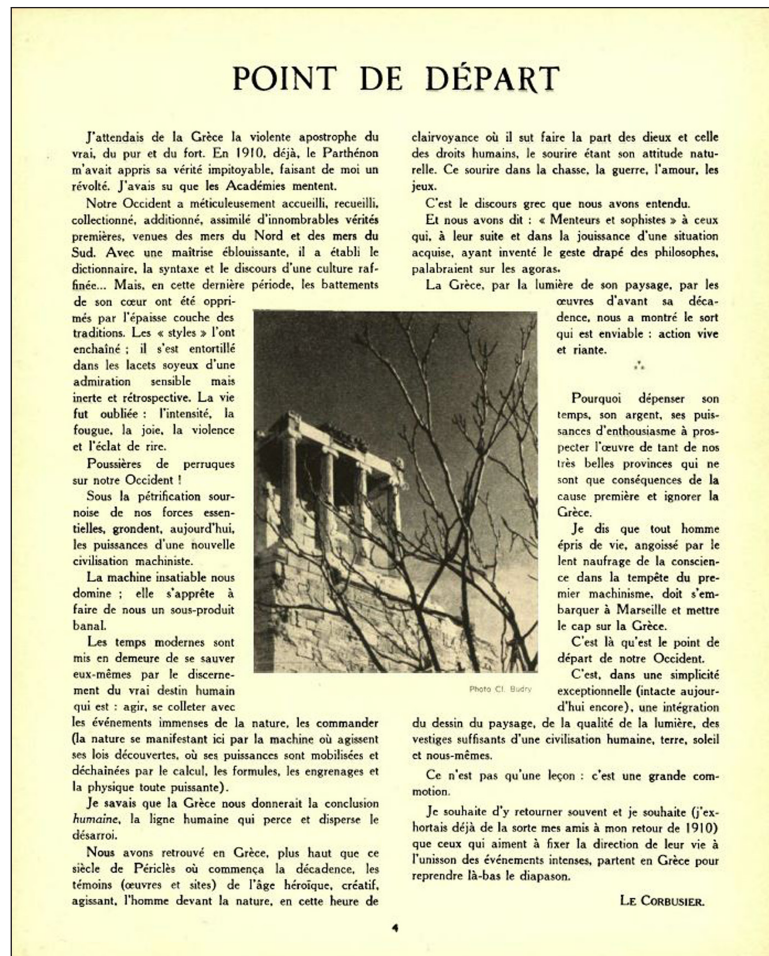


Figure 4: Le Corbusier, 'Point de départ'. From *Le voyage en Grèce* (1934: 4). Source: Lekythos, Institutional Repository of the University of Cyprus.

If we consider that the shift from Moscow to Athens was not a deliberate choice, then it appears to have been made associatively, along with an acknowledgment of the cultural disparities between Western and Soviet societies. The journey to Greece, however, significantly influenced the discourse of modernism because it redirected the focus of the avant-garde toward antiquity and away from classical Rome. The decision to travel to Greece by boat also affected the political and national trajectory of the modern movement, aiding in transitioning the leadership axis from Germany to France and positioning Le Corbusier as a central figure in these developments. The close association of the Greek diaspora's human network with Le Corbusier guided the concept of cruising and exploring the 'Greek Sanctuaries' of the Archipelago,³¹ propelling the group's 'moment of reflection' and rendering the voyage to Athens a unique opportunity to assert the Greek role in CIAM's discourse on modernity (Figure 5).



Figure 5: 'Minotaur'. The same form of the minotaur is used in NEPTOS brochures advertising the cruise in Greece on board the *SS Patris II* for the Ecole du Louvre (as found in Le Corbusier's archive [FLC]). AC. *Documentos de actividad contemporánea*, no. 11 (1933): 13. Source: Collections of the Biblioteca Nacional de España (bne.es).

Conclusion

Situating detailed history within the broader context of interwar politics, Greece's nation branding and its promotion of tourism reveals complex networks, demonstrating how consolidated efforts by influential groups can shape ideological narratives and promote agendas irrespective of turbulent political phenomena. NEPTOS's promotional activities were those of a company that actively propagated national interests aligned with the company's economic growth. In the case of CIAM, mapping interconnected, contextually embedded actors that shaped the modern architectural discourse theoretically affirms the continued salience of strategical activities of key actors within purportedly universalist movements. This advances a contextual view of how ideas and, eventually, movements evolve, beyond well-established narratives.

In theories about the soft power and cultural diffusion that began during the First World War, national policies spread culture to specific social spheres where governments had limited participation. This was done to enhance their identity and

attract investment, tourism, and talent (Paschalidis 2009; Zamorano 2016). In this study, situated within an architectural framework, informal intellectual exchange and travel preceded and enabled formal institutions and events, such as that of CIAM, among others. Understanding the significant role of cultural and leisure tours in promoting modernist objectives throughout Greece's cultural heritage and tourism potential to avant-garde circles leads to a new perspective on power dynamics and the cultivation of personal affiliations affecting strategic decisions. The Greek diaspora in Paris leveraging cultural legacy is as an example of strategic essentialism — the employment of identity constructs (the notion of antiquity within modernity) to achieve representational power within a movement.

These networks of avant-garde proponents had tangible impacts on the history of CIAM IV, a history that challenges the prevailing notion that Athens was randomly or conveniently chosen as an alternative to Moscow. Instead, it was a deliberate decision that reflected a shift toward embracing antiquity and Greece's enduring cultural influence. Bringing CIAM members to Athens via a cruise signaled a change in latent dynamics within CIAM's inner mechanics, influenced by human networks and the shift in the direction of dominant modern ideas. These shifting internal dynamics within CIAM were documented at a pivotal time, challenging historical depictions of a consistent leadership and direction across the early congresses. Personal affiliations and networks played a determining role, as did contextual factors. The new discourse of modernity, shaped between antiquity and modernity, faced the neo-historical turn in the Soviet Union, where classicism was oriented more towards Rome than Greece, striking at the same time a delicate balance between the socialist ideals of the USSR and the democratic principles rooted in Greece. This further solidified the enduring influence of Greek culture, transcending into the modern context and firmly establishing Greece within the realm of CIAM's modernity.

Eventually, the spatial examination of modernist architectural discourse in local contexts allows us to make the case for regional studies that shed light on cross-regional influences as modernism spread globally. The planning of the fourth CIAM congress marks a critical juncture, both symbolically, in terms of its ideological orientation, as well as operationally, regarding CIAM's internal power dynamics. The journey of reaching and exploring Athens, akin to a modern revival of the Grand Tour, set the stage for a historic gathering. The extent to which Greece, as a place, destination, and culture, resonated with the modern spirit coincided with the national cultural interests and private initiatives of Greeks and correlated with the professional and personal maneuvers of the CIAM leaders. This eventually marked a historic convergence of a heterogeneous network of human actors, circumstances, and ambitions, which would be manifested in the Athens Charter and would shape the 20th-century historiography of architectural modernism.

Notes

- ¹ Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO), brochure, 1929. The work of Elli Souyioltzoglou-Seraidari (Nelly) (1899–1998) on the Greek landscape was financially supported by the Greek government, before she was officially appointed as photographer for the Greek Press and Tourism Office in 1935 (Bonarou 2009: 325–329).
- ² NEPTOS was founded on May 2, 1921, in Paris by Leonidas-Andreas Embiricos, Michail-Andreas Embiricos, and Ioannis Vassilopoulos (*Journal general de l'Algerie et de la Tynisie*, Sept. 4, 1921 (accessed through BnF Gallica)).
- ³ The word *xenios* originates from the Greek word *xenia* (*filoxenia*), defined as 'guest-friendship'. The word is derived from *xenos*, which translates to 'stranger'. Xenios Zeus, the Greek deity who is the protector of strangers, personifies the ethical obligation of showing hospitality to foreigners and guests. The company's logo appears in its official correspondence papers (Greece_Organization: NEPTOS S.A., gta ETH).
- ⁴ Related to his origins, from Afthoni (Asmali) of Marmaras.
- ⁵ Andreas Embiricos was a supporter and personal friend of Eleftherios Venizelos, serving as a minister in Venizelos' government in 1917–1918.
- ⁶ Mount Olympus is the highest mountain in Greece and the home of the Greek gods, according to Greek mythology.
- ⁷ See centrepompidou.fr (Christian Zervos – Un Editeur face à l'Art de son Temps) and fondationzervos.com
- ⁸ Stamos Papadakis, the Greek CIAM delegate, who was Tombros' nephew, was in Paris from 1925 to 1929 to study architecture.
- ⁹ This information emerged from a search of the archives of Nikos Hatzikyriakos-Gikas, housed at the GHIKA Gallery, Benaki Museum.
- ¹⁰ Nikos Hatzikyriakos-Gikas was on board the *Patris II* for the journey to Athens with the CIAM IV congress. His testimonies suggest a prominent role for himself in implementing the congress in Athens; however, this research could not verify his claims (Hatzikyriakos-Gikas 1987).
- ¹¹ Stamos Zervos was Christian's younger brother (see Giedion-Neptos correspondence, gta ETH).
- ¹² Zervos to Giedion, 14 February 1931 (43_K_1931_02_14, gta ETH).
- ¹³ Connected to the 1917 October Revolution until the beginning of 1930s.
- ¹⁴ Letter from Hans Schmidt to CIAM members in USSR, Feb. 12, 1932 (FFA).
- ¹⁵ Letter from Cornelis Van Eesteren to Ernst May, Hans Schmidt, and Fred Forbat, Aug. 5, 1932 (FFA).
- ¹⁶ Letter from Van Eesteren, Giedion, and Bourgeois to Joseph Stalin, April 19, 1932 (FFA).
- ¹⁷ Circular from the general secretary to the CIAM delegates (42-04-2-6, gta ETH).
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Agenda of the CIRPAC meeting, Sunday, April 23 (documentation wrongly mentions April 21), 10 am, at Le Corbusier's place in Paris (4-1-71D, gta ETH). Algiers and Argentina are mentioned as the teams under formation.
- ²⁰ Circular from the general secretary to the CIAM delegates (42-04-2-6, gta ETH). Hitler came to power in January 1933, while the police suspended Bauhaus on April 11, 1933.
- ²¹ According to Giedion in his introductory speech at the opening of CIAM IV, on board of the SS *Patris II*, July 29, 1933 (D2(4)82, FLC).
- ²² Circular from the general secretary to the CIAM delegates (42-04-2-6, gta ETH).
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Letter from Giedion to Papadakis, April 30, 1933 (42_K_1933, gta ETH). In a letter from Fred Forbat to Sigfried Giedion on May 12, 1933 (FFA), he also states that on May 4, Stamos Papadakis acknowledged the fact that the congress would take place in Athens, as did Forbat and Ioannis Despotopoulos (member of the Greek CIAM team) on May 9, via the local press.
- ²⁸ Papadakis was voted as the Greek team's CIAM Delegate during the opening session of CIAM IV, on July 29, 1933 ([D2(4)86, FLC).
- ²⁹ The Greek, English, Algerian and Yugoslavian team were officially voted as CIAM members during CIAM IV.
- ³⁰ Giedion's speech on the opening session of the IV CIAM, according to proceedings in the archive (D2(4)82, FLC).
- ³¹ Research on Le Corbusier's personal archive revealed a brochure on the itinerary of S/S PATRIS II in the Mediterranean, entitled '*Croisière aux Sanctuaires Grecs*' [D2(4)70-001, FLC].

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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