

ILLEGAL BUILDING BOOMING THROUGHOUT CRETE

By Lou Duro and Sofia Klidi

Inefficient town planning services, excessive bureaucracy and selective enforcement of existing laws have amazingly resulted in 2.5 million illegally built structures across the country, and countless more buildings that have been illegally modified.

While specific figures were unavailable for Crete, government and industry sources say that the number of illegal buildings here is immense, probably surpassing the national average.

Of some 25 million buildings in Greece, 10 percent are totally illegal, while 90 percent of the remainder have been extended or embellished in some way that is also unlawful. In many cases, owners with permits for private homes build nightclubs or other businesses.

According to reports compiled by public administration inspectors, the country's 173 town planning offices are among the most inefficient and corrupt state services. Of the thousands of citizens' complaints received by the inspectorate every year, one fifth is about town planning offices.

In a recent interview, the country's general inspector of public administration, Leandros Rakintzis, proposed the creation of three separate agencies to tackle the scourge of illegal construction. According to Mr. Rakintzis, a more efficient approach would be to have one service issue the building permits, a separate office for inspections and a third with responsibility for demolitions.

As for demolitions of illegal structures, he said they could be carried out if the "political will" existed. He stressed there was considerable funding available for the demolition of existing "illegal buildings, but proposed that this cash be used instead to set up a third service to oversee demolitions, which would be "autonomous, self-sufficient and not politically dependent."

In our local townships, the situation is considered so bad that, according to local officials, it could

"undermine" the future of our communities.

"Illegal building and, consequently, devaluing our urban environment is perhaps the biggest culprit in the aesthetic and functional depression of our coastal areas," said Hersonissos Mayor Spiros Danellis.



Mayor Danellis

"Unfortunately, a culture of illegality has been shaped which is intensified due to not enforcing an already loose legal framework regarding the confronting of illegal building. The ineffectiveness in confronting it and an exceptionally tedious bureaucratic process in land planning intensifies the problems to such a degree that it undermines the future of our regions."

Gouves Mayor Yiorgos Nikolakakis feels that this situation is a "Modern Greek crime" against the landscape.

"The significance of illegality in Greece has many dimensions that are difficult for someone to rate or to find the thread which unravels the yarn," he explained.

"It is a phenomenon which has lasted through the times which has to do with the urbanization in the 19th and the 20th century. However, while this was observed mainly in the city, with the appearance of the tourist economy and after (1960s decade) it began to extend itself in the countryside."

The mayor went on to say that the responsibilities of the state and its services, as well as the control mechanisms, are essential.

"The citizens themselves are not without responsibilities, and with their actions they participate in this Modern Greek crime against the landscape, the nature, the

environment.

"I am not optimistic about the solutions that are proposed, but hardly enforced," he concluded. "Unfortunately the 'illegal' buildings in Greece are a problem of identity, and consequently it is entered in philosophical questions of our very existence and our perpetuation. If we do not change our ways there is no hope!"

According to Manolis Stratakis, an Iraklion MP, there are more than 40,000 illegal buildings in the Iraklion Prefecture alone.

"This situation was created due to the weakness, or even the unwillingness, of the state, until 1982, to cover the population's expanding housing needs with the necessary extensions to the city planning," he stated. "This resulted in changing the economic parameters, followed by the prevailing urbanism.

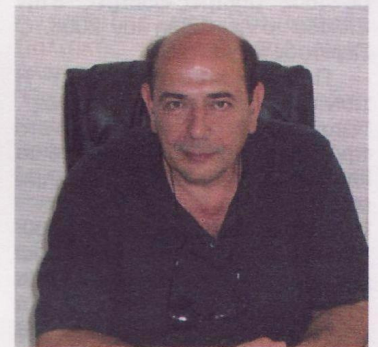
"Today the situation concerning illegal structures is stagnant, and six months ago the Iraklion Municipality proposed to the Ministry of Environment Planning and Public Works to regulate the structures built without a permit in the wider metropolitan area of Iraklion."

With a local town official, who wished to remain anonymous, as a guide, this reporting team was staggered by the number of illegal

homes and commercial buildings being pointed out in the Gouves, Malia and Hersonissos townships everything from one-family homes to villas to apartment complexes . . . and most seaside tavernas.

Unfortunately, under advice from legal counsel, we were not able to photograph any of them, except for one or two long-abandoned sites.

(Editor's note: Mayor Vangelis Sisamakias of N. Alikarnassos was unavailable for comment at the time



Mayor Nikolakakis

of this writing, but, demonstrating his concern for this problem, he emailed a statement just under deadline. It can be read on page 12. However, the secretary for Mayor Lagoudakis side-stepped our inquiry by saying "it's a matter for other agencies.")