



Circular Locomotive Shed, 2023 (photo author)

## GREECE

### VIDA'S EVALUATION STUDY OF THE PIRAEUS – ATHENS - PELOPONNESE RAILWAYS (SPAP), HISTORIC BUILDING COMPLEX AS ELEMENTS OF GREECE'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

*Hercules Fassourakis, Vault of Industrial Digital Archives (VIDA)*

After the liberation and the creation of the independent Greek state, Athens was proclaimed capital in 1834. Immediately afterwards, Piraeus was designated as its official seaport, becoming a commercial and maritime centre and the first purely industrial city in the country, which acquired a formally designated industrial zone in 1892. Piraeus was directly connected to the Peloponnese, which was the most developed and productive

region of the country before the annexation of Thessaly, with important ports and growing industrial centres such as Patras and Kalamata.

Within this framework, a contract was signed with the General Credit Bank on April 19, 1882, for the construction of a single-meter-gauge railway line. This line, starting from Piraeus, would connect the port and Athens with Corinth, Patras, Argos, Nafplio, and the village of Milous. The construction and operation of this network was undertaken by the joint-stock company 'Piraeus-Athens-Peloponnese Railways' (SPAP in Greek), founded on 17 October 1882.

Construction of the new line began from Piraeus on 8 November 1882. The Piraeus-Patras section was completed in December 1887, Kalamata was connected by rail in 1899 with Tripoli and Athens, while the railway network of the Peloponnese was completed in 1904 with the extension of the line to the port of Kalamata.





SPAP Old Railcar Depot, 2024 (photo by author)

The SPAP's metric network reached a total of approximately 750 km, making it the largest metric railway network not only in the country but also in Europe. The regime of Ioannis Metaxas put the network under state control in 1939. Nationalised in 1954, SPAP was integrated into the Hellenic State Railways (SEK) in 1962, which evolved into the Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE) in 1971.

### HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEFKA REGION RAILWAY FACILITIES

The first locomotive depot of SPAP was constructed within the premises of the Piraeus Station between 1884 and 1886. The facility comprised two sheds: one designated for steam locomotives and the other for rolling stock. The facility, later known as the SPAP Central Piraeus Factory, located in the Lefka district, was completed in 1888.

In 1912, the Circular Locomotive Shed, now known as the Roton-da, was constructed to accommodate light maintenance operations for steam locomotives. The structure was built around a turntable, which was installed during the same period.

In 1937, SPAP entered the era of diesel traction. The operational requirements associated with this new technology necessitated the construction of a dedicated depot for housing and maintaining the network's first diesel railcars.

During the German Occupation and World War II, the Circular Locomotive Shed sustained significant damage, while the turntable was destroyed. Despite extremely adverse conditions and severe material shortages, SPAP succeeded in restoring the railway network's operation by 1946.

The further development of the Lefka railway complex began in 1951 with the addition of a second New depot, a new 37-meter-long conveyor table, a new canteen, and a two-storey building intended for staff accommodation.

The New Railcar Depot was completed in 1959. Around 1958, a modern turntable manufactured by the German company Windhoff was installed in front of the Circular Locomotive Shed. This 20-meter-long installation was designed to accommodate the newer steam locomotives introduced into service between 1947 and 1951.





SPAP Central Piraeus Factory, 2024 (photo by author)

The SPAP Circular Locomotive Shed and Railcar Depot ceased operations on August 7, 2005, while the majority of the historic Peloponnese railway network was decommissioned in 2011. The former Central Piraeus Factory of SPAP, now isolated from the remaining meter-gauge network, continues to operate as part of the adjacent Piraeus Factory Complex, constructed in 1903 for the maintenance of standard-gauge rolling stock. As a unified facility, the Piraeus Factory is currently operated by Hellenic Train, a member of the FS Group, following its separation from OSE and the privatisation of the Rolling Stock Maintenance Sector.

#### METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION STAGES OF THE VIDA PROJECT

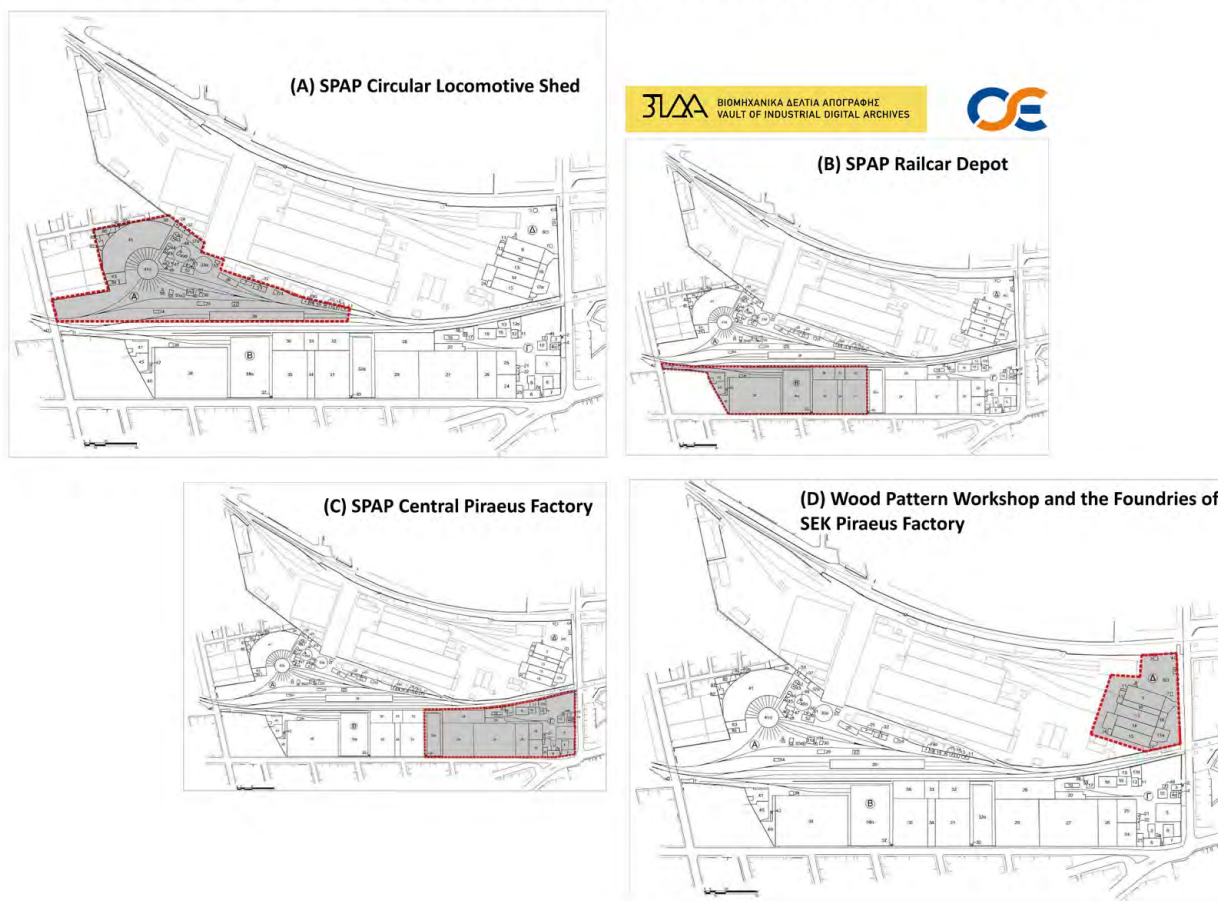
The VIDA project aims to conduct a historical and architectural evaluation of the SPAP complex and part of the SEK Factory (19th–20th centuries), from the perspective of industrial archaeology. This documentation will provide OSE with a key tool to highlight and promote the complex as a whole. The present study focuses on the survey and evaluation of the buildings comprising the SPAP Circular Locomotive Shed (A), Railcar Depot (B), and Central Piraeus Factory of SPAP (C), along with their associated industrial equipment. It also includes the section of the SEK Piraeus Factory surrounding the Wood Pattern

Workshop and the Foundries (D). The project adheres to the principles of industrial archaeology and employs internationally recognised best practices for documenting and assessing industrial heritage. It fundamentally views the buildings as part of a historic ensemble, assessing them collectively rather than individually.

The project proceeded through the following methodological stages:

1. Conducted on-site inspections, field surveys, and photographic documentation to identify the distinctive features of each building and structure.
2. Developed a specialised “Historic Buildings/Structures Documentation & Evaluation Survey Report” for OSE assets, integrating field data with archival research and providing a standardised tool for nationwide application.
3. Performed bibliographic and archival research, including review of the OSE Historical Archive.
4. Survey Reports for each Building/Structure with data from on-site inspections and research findings.

**V.I.D.A.'s EVALUATION STUDY OF THE  
"PIRAEUS – ATHENS – PELOPONNESE RAILWAYS («SPAP») Co."  
HISTORIC BUILDING COMPLEX AS ELEMENTS OF GREECE'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE**



SPAP topographic plans (plans by Nefeli Andrioti)

5. Architectural and historical assessments based on predefined criteria: Functional role within the complex and production workflow, Authenticity, Structural integrity, Architectural and Morphological Significance, Preservation & Evaluation of Equipment, Social and Historical Value. Each criterion was scored on a 1–5 scale. A preservation recommendation is provided for each building following the evaluation.
6. Initial proposal for reusing each building/structure to highlight the historic complex, suggesting possible uses such as a Museum, an Exhibition, Operational, Educational, and Recreational purposes.

The entire landmark complex of SPAP-OSE in Lefka, Piraeus, constitutes an exceptionally significant industrial monument and, in particular, a foremost landmark of the country's railway heritage. The complex's inherent historical, social, economic, technological, and architectural values apply to both the whole and its parts, forming OSE's unified heritage, which it must protect and promote. The complex is also distinguished by its notable contribution to the port city of Piraeus, as well as to broader industrial development. The

workshops and maintenance facilities established for servicing rolling stock played a significant role in the field of Greek Mechanical Engineering and Manufacturing.

Within this context, the evaluation of industrial structures, as dictated by the principles of industrial heritage conservation, is conducted by considering both the Architectural Fabric and its functional use, i.e., its industrial equipment, as an integrated operational unit. Although the adaptive reuse proposals in this study represent an initial approach, evaluating the structures is crucial—and in some cases, mandatory—for any future use. Specifically, for buildings where functional or other elements must be preserved according to the evaluation, any new use must incorporate these elements as specified in the corresponding Survey Reports.

**VIDA** (Vault of Industrial Digital Archives) is a Civil Nonprofit Organisation dedicated to recording, preserving, and safeguarding Greece's industrial heritage.

[Contact the author](#)