

Building a Bi-Communal Bridge

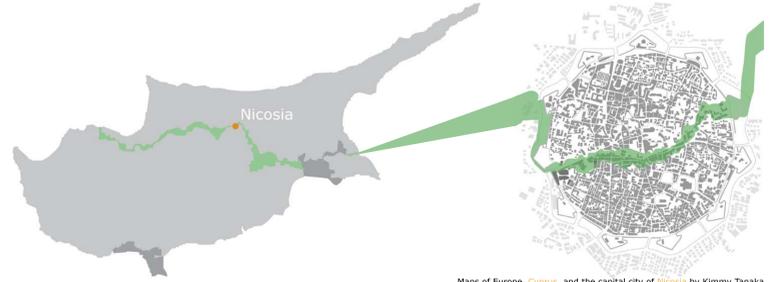
Nicosia, Cyprus

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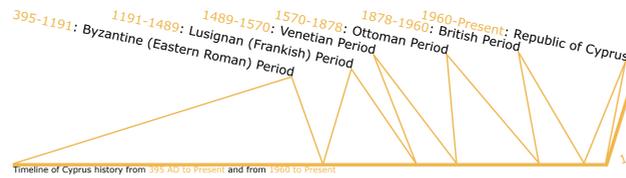
Abstract

The passage of centuries of foreign influence through the Mediterranean Sea developed a unique urban fabric on the island of Cyprus, which acts as a global link from Christianity to Islam, and Eastern to Western civilization. In response to an attempted coup backed by a Greek military junta in 1974, Turkish troops invaded Cyprus resulting in a United Nations-controlled Buffer Zone that separates Turkish-speaking, military-occupied northern Cyprus and the Greek-speaking Republic of Cyprus. The Buffer Zone slices through the island's capital city of Nicosia and compromises the condition of hundreds of buildings dating from the fourteenth century.

Municipal leaders came together to salvage the devastated Cypriot identity and formed the Nicosia Master Plan (NMP), a "bi-communal" effort to preserve and restore buildings as a heritage preservation method of conflict resolution. During July and August, I met with Nicosia Master Plan team members, architects, planners, and Nicosia residents on both sides of the Buffer Zone. The numerous social spheres I became involved with allowed me to understand the conflict in Cyprus from many different perspectives. My field study focused on two neighborhoods as case studies for community development in places of ethnic division. The NMP has revived centuries of Cypriot history and has paved the way for "reconciliation". Division in the urban landscape has disrupted communities internationally, and the preservation of their built environments is required to salvage their identity. The Nicosia Master Plan is an important precedent study as an urban planning approach to drawing people together through heritage preservation.



Maps of Europe, Cyprus, and the capital city of Nicosia by Kimmy Tanaka



Photographs of the architectural variety in Nicosia (From top left to bottom right: St. Sophia Cathedral, 13th c; Fanagoussa Gate, Venetian, mid-16th c; House of Hadjigeorgakis Kormesios, Ottoman, 18th c; Leventis Museum, Colonial, early 20th c.)

A Country of Unique Heritage

The history of the small eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus is embedded with layers of history contributing to its rich heritage. Located at the crux of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Cyprus has been strongly influenced by the intersection of eastern and western culture, as well as Christianity and Islam. Byzantine, Lusignan, Venetian, Ottoman, and British rule over the island produced an urban fabric which has been used as the foundation of Cypriot identity and culture. The modern countries of Turkey and Greece approximately 50 and 500 miles away respectively, continue to have the strongest influence on the island since it gained sovereignty from the British in 1960 (Tofallis 1983).

At the island's core stands the Venetian fortification that has defined the boundaries of the capital city of Nicosia since the sixteenth century. Within the bastions and gates of the city lie Cypriot monuments of medieval, gothic, ottoman, neo-classical, and colonial styles accessible only through the dense network of labyrinthine streets.

A Country Divided

In 1974, following what is commonly considered an unauthorized invasion of a sovereign nation by the Turkish Military; a British Major General drew green pencil lines across the map of Cyprus. Those simple lines drawn on a map acted as a 112 mile long ceasefire line that infamously became labeled as the "Green Line" has divided the island of Cyprus for the past 35 years (Calame 2009). The destruction of Cypriot heritage tore directly through the political and cultural capital city of Cyprus, which remains the last divided capital in Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The Venetian fortification originally constructed to protect the city fell victim to violence that had been brewing since the island gained sovereignty as the Republic of Cyprus only 14 years earlier. The area within the lines drawn by Major General Young became the site of a United Nations-controlled Buffer Zone which sliced the island into separate enclaves: Greek-speaking Cypriots in the South, which remains the Republic of Cyprus, and Turkish-speaking Cypriots in the North, which is considered land of the Republic of Cyprus under Turkish military occupation.



Drawings of the "Green Line" in the Arabahmet and Chrysaliniotissa neighborhoods

Plan for Reconciliation: Nicosia Master Plan

The collaboration of the Nicosia Master Plan grew out of infrastructural necessity of a divided city. By 1977, engineers from both north and south Nicosia came together to resolve sewerage problems tied between the two communities. The successful collaboration on infrastructural issues across the Buffer Zone led to the development of the Nicosia Master Plan, a collaborative effort formed under the United Nations Development Programme that brought political leaders together to face issues that were ruining their city (Nicosia Master Plan 2003).

The Buffer Zone has swallowed hundreds of buildings within or adjacent to it, stands as the end of about twenty streets, and contains formerly valuable commercial property that is now flanked by low-income or abandoned residential and industrial neighborhoods as well as a red light district (Nicosia Master Plan 1984). The physical decay of the urban core of Cyprus that reaches throughout the capital has since become the site of major rehabilitation to salvage their capital city's urban landscape which proved that despite political, religious, and societal differences, logistical reasoning could prevent further decline in Nicosia. The logistics of a problem as primitive as wastewater sparked a multi-decade rehabilitation program to reunite their city through its built environment (Nicosia Master Plan 2003).

The project evaluated the abandonment of the central area bordering the Buffer Zone and the unrestrained centrifugal growth towards the outskirts of town. The Nicosia Master Plan handed over plans on January 18th, 1985 which instituted a long-term physical plan for greater Nicosia as it grew toward the new millennium (Nicosia Master Plan 2003). The preservation and rehabilitation efforts drafted in the original plans continue to stimulate physical, social, economic, and cultural revitalization of the walled city of Nicosia to this day with over 130 completed projects (United Nations Development Programme 2007).



Map of all of the Nicosia Master Plan projects since 1985 by Kimmy Tanaka, and a photograph of metallic paver at a Nicosia Master Plan project

Acknowledgements

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My Experience

This summer I had the opportunity to travel to Cyprus to understand the efforts of the Nicosia Master Plan team as a heritage preservation approach to conflict resolution. To narrow the focus of my research, I spent most of my time in the Arabahmet and Chrysaliniotissa neighborhoods. Renovations on the abandoned housing stock began in these neighborhoods when the Master Plan was drafted in 1985 and continue to this day with the development of community centers for the new residents (Nicosia Master Plan 2003).

I spent my time exploring the buffer zone as it tears through Nicosia on the former path of the ancient Pedieos River, on which the city was founded, and later the commercial and social center of Ermou Street. The Arabahmet and Chrysaliniotissa neighborhoods were vibrant parts of the walled city prior to the division with rich architectural heritage, which were then devastated by their direct adjacency to the buffer zone. Abandoned properties were refurbished and redistributed to young families at lower costs while religious institutions and public spaces were rehabilitated to allow the area to grow as a community (Petropoulou 2009).

However, the realities of the Nicosia Master Plan are not always successful, which I discovered through my exploration of the neighborhoods and conversations with architects, businesspeople, academics, and Nicosia Master Plan team members on both sides of the Buffer Zone. Those who I've spoken with south of the Buffer Zone have said that it is the preservation of these buildings that will attract Cypriots away from the concrete sprawl which has begun to consume the surrounding villages. The plan has also moved away from the formerly "collaborative" approach to saving the city. According to Ali Guralp, leader of the north Nicosia Master Plan team, the revitalization of north Nicosia has fallen far behind that of the south. The entire Arabahmet neighborhood, for instance, was supposed to be completed in 5 years, on a budget of 5 million dollars, but funds were not raised and only one building was completed a year. The effect of the Turkish Military occupation in northern Cyprus has been crippling, which is unrecognized by every country in the world except for Turkey and Pakistan. Despite an internationally funded stimulus package in recent years aimed to keep both sides of the island growing at a similar rate, the conditions of residents in the north continue to deteriorate (Guralp 2009). Stucco continues to peel off the walls that enclose an incredibly poor standard of living for immigrant workers in slum-like conditions.



Map of all of the Nicosia Master Plan projects, highlighting the Arabahmet and Chrysaliniotissa neighborhoods by Kimmy Tanaka, and photographs of some underdeveloped pieces of the Arabahmet neighborhood... There is a long way to go.

Conclusion

The violence during the division of Cyprus is unparalleled here in the Twin Cities, but conflict occurs within the urban landscape frequently throughout the world. The dynamic exchange of culture in the urban setting heightens the importance of an agreeable solution to conflict and devastation. My position as a designer of the urban landscape imparts upon me the responsibility to act positively on the built environment while preserving the heritage of communities and welfare of their citizens. The manner in which the Nicosia municipalities have responded to the changing circumstances of Cyprus should be used as a model of conflict resolution for planners working with divided landscapes in the future. Its successes have brought the city closer together which has strongly encouraged the peace process. Although the differences between people are what divided Cyprus, it is the preservation and rehabilitation of the built environment that has revived the centuries of Cypriot history uniting them.



Photograph from an apartment rooftop toward the Phaneromeni neighborhood highlighting the rich architectural variety that exists within the walls of the city.



Panoramic view from an apartment rooftop across the buffer zone from south Nicosia to north Nicosia