

# Cyprus State of Art Report

## Cultural Heritage Issues in Relation to Urban Planning Workshop

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This Report highlights the importance of preserving and enhancing heritage in Cyprus and its considerable contribution towards the quality of life in urban areas. It identifies the hot contemporary problems, it assesses the impact of planning measures on cultural heritage and refers to the achievements in cultural heritage conservation in relation to social and economic development and the protection of the environment.

Heritage preservation and enhancement forms a major component of town and country planning policies in Cyprus, aptly reflected in the planning legislation. The Town and Country Planning Law (enacted in 1972 and put into operation in 1990) is, in fact, an important tool for the protection and enhancement of all physical manifestations of the Cypriot heritage, be it archaeological, architectural or natural.

The first serious threats to heritage of Cyprus came with the post-independence economic boom of 1960s. On the one hand the urbanisation process accelerated the abandonment of inner cities, while at the same time unplanned urban development heralded extensive demolitions of old buildings in historic cores.

With the Turkish invasion in 1974 and subsequent military occupation of a sizable portion of the island, apart from the immediate and compelling physical threats to the island's heritage and monuments, enormous strains were also placed on the housing stock as well as to the natural resources and to the land availability. The grave situation necessitated the construction of large modular housing estates and brought on the acceleration of existing urbanisation trends. Although the rabid expansion of the tourism sector since 1980s brought about additional threats to heritage preservation, the urgent needs for resettlement and revitalisation were undoubtedly relieved, in the short term, through this much-needed economic recovery.

In fact these needs had been so pressing that the legal system concerning preservation was rather slow to respond to the new and compelling threats of tourism development. Another reason for the delay in the enactment of the necessary preservation legislation appears to be related to generally low levels of public awareness on the issue. Although there has been a consistently positive change in the attitudes of the general public concerning preservation, the concept has often been regarded with suspicion, especially in the earlier days of the rabidly modernising society which identify the traditional buildings as symbols of backwardness. Even with increasing levels of public awareness, further threats have to be confronted, resulting from the lack of expertise of several related professionals, both in the public and private sectors. The importance of training architects and public works or utility engineers, as well as administration officials to respond sympathetically to existing historic cores cannot be underestimated. Moreover, the adequate training of craftsmen on heritage restoration skills is another important issue that has to be confronted.

To address these problems, the Government and more specifically the Department of Town Planning and Housing which comprises the major Planning Authority, has taken action in various ways, thus creating new opportunities for the preservation and enhancement of Cyprus Heritage.

Through this action, public opinion in Cyprus has been progressively embracing the view that heritage is not a burden, but rather an asset for economic development and global competition, as well as the quality of life and social cohesion within local communities.

Sharing European values on heritage, Cyprus has adopted a contextual approach to heritage protection and enhancement through interdisciplinary planning. The Town and Country Planning Law provides clear guidelines for integrated conservation planning of both cultural and natural heritage.

Although there is still room for improvement, especially in areas such as participatory planning and information dissemination, the expected role of government agencies responsible for the heritage policies revolves around the formulation and execution of regulatory, information and awareness-raising strategies for cultural heritage within a democratic sustainable development model.

In this model 7 policies and actions are considered to be the most important:

- a. **Documentation of architectural heritage.** The Department of Town planning and Housing manages the architectural heritage inventory of Cyprus. This consists of over 10. 000 index cards describing an equal number of historic structure in all towns and 75 selected villages all over the government-controlled part of Cyprus, accompanied by a series of cadastral maps (2500 buildings are in urban areas).

The inventory is continuously upgraded through an on-going process with the aim of covering all areas of the island, following the specifications of the Granada Convention. A pilot study for the computerisation of this inventory in cooperation with University of Cyprus is planned for the academic year 2000-2001. Archaeological inventory of Cyprus is carried out by the department of Antiquities.

- b. **Legal protection of architectural heritage.** Following the Architectural heritage Inventory, 70 Preservations Orders have been issued to date, encompassing over 2.500 historic structures all over Cyprus (1300 in urban areas). This is also part of a continuing process, in an effort to cover all government-controlled areas. For restoration work, as well as any alteration carried out on listed buildings, a special consent is required, in addition to the regular planning and building permits, with well over 1000 such Consents having been granted since the 1980s (500 in urban areas). Restoration work is regularly inspected, while appropriately trained personnel of the Department periodically provide on-site guidance during the progress of work.

- c. **Incentives.** To encourage restoration and revitalisation of listed buildings, a package of incentives has been introduced since 1985. Incentives provided through the listed building Law of 1992 are upgraded periodically to accommodate inevitable rises in restoration costs and other needs that arises. The last package (recently revised), includes:

- direct cash grant for up to 40% of restoration costs, with a maximum ceiling of CYP£25.000 (43.500 EURO)
- generous tax deduction, including the exemption of restoration costs and rent obtained thereupon from income tax, the refund of property registration fees, and the exemption from the property tax
- the provision of low interest loans, in case of low income owners, to facilitate restoration costs
- the transfer of development rights (the most innovative measure), this measure gives the owner the right to sell the remaining permitted plot ratio of a listed property within local plan areas to specified commercial and tourist zones all over the island
- an additional incentive, now available for all listed buildings anywhere in Cyprus, is the «provided plot ratio», a bonus square meters of such an amount that when sold, will yield half of the restoration cost
- moreover, direct intervention by local authorities for urgently needed stabilisation work in abandoned listed properties in danger to collapse is subsidised through a preservation Governmental Fund.

These measures have been very effective and have resulted in creating owners interest for preservation works. Up to now, approximately 500 buildings have benefited from these incentives, while a further 100 applications have been approved for restoration projects currently under way.

d. **Local Plans – Area Schemes.**

In spite of the above actions, significant numbers of historic structures still remain abandoned and continue to disintegrate and sustainability is threatened by the social change, the change of employment patterns, the loss of cultural identity and heritage, the traffic nuisance and deteriorating infrastructure and built environment.

In order to reestablish sustainability and to ensure the protection and enhancement of the urban heritage, the government in cooperation with the local authorities prepared local plans and more detail area schemes where new tools of planning were introduced to achieve sustainability in the longer term and to ensure greater citizen participation in the planning process. It was recognised the need for new planning and decision making to: incorporate and protect cultural heritage in the urban context; take into account citizen's lifestyle for cultural enrichment; to manage risks while being accessible to a growing public; to assure the economic benefits of sustainable tourism. The memory of culture heritage must be preserved while integrating it into the changing city.

In this context important Area Schemes were prepared for the historic centre of Old Nicosia, Old Limassol and other urban cores, with innovative planning strategies: conservation intervention planning; prevention planning (integrating environmental and urban management; promoting rehabilitation of cultural heritage and use of public spaces).

The implementation of these Area Schemes is not yet initiated, so that one cannot evaluate the success of the proposed strategies, except of certain projects.

e. **Projects**

***Old Nicosia Case Study***

It is generally accepted that housing renovation may be an effective mechanism for stimulating the conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage in deprived or potentially declining urban neighbourhoods.

In this context, a variety of conservation schemes and programmes were undertaken through the provisions of the Planning legislation (the most important being that of Old Nicosia) which focus on the rehabilitation of the historic cores by revitalizing the socioeconomic structures and enhancing the existing environment

The buffer zone, which runs through the middle of the historic city and keeps the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot inhabitants of Nicosia apart, has split their town into two separate parts. These parts have been developing independently of each other, thus causing the transformation of the city's structure and the disintegration of its entity. Suburbanisation and the political circumstances, which caused the division of the town, have had unfortunate effects on the economic and living conditions in the old core.

A bi-communal multidisciplinary team of national and international experts was formed in 1981 in order to handle the difficult task of preparing a joint Master plan of Nicosia under the auspices of the United Nations.

For many years, the historic Centre has been subject to physical decay and socio- economic decline, conditions which resulted in loss of population and employment and deterioration of its architectural and environmental quality.

The conservation policy aims to arrest these trends and re-establish a role for this area in relation to the overall development of the central area and Nicosia as a whole. This integrated conservation policy, is seen as a multi-dimensional process.

incorporating architectural, planning, social, economic objectives and is realized through concrete investment projects, which are already completed or are under implementation.

These projects represent the backbone of the policy for the walled city.

***Crysaliniotissa Revitalisation Project*** was selected the first to be implemented because of the outstanding architectural character and social merits of the area.

It covers an area of 25 ha and concerns the renovation of 27 vacant traditional houses which were acquired compulsorily, the construction of 15 new housing units on vacant sites and the conversion of several other old houses into a community centre, a kindergarten, a municipal local market and a youth hostel, improvement of infrastructure, the pedestrianisation, the provision of parking places and a local park with playground. The whole Scheme is co-financed by international funds (United Nations) (85 % Of the total budget), the Government of Cyprus (10 %) and the Municipality of Nicosia (5 %). This Scheme had already a very positive impact, by the provision of the community facilities and public amenities, the improvement of the residential environment, the integration of, these neighbourhoods into the traffic system of the wider area and the provision of greater opportunities for employment in these quarters, enriching the pattern of land use with functions that compliment the predominant residential use.

### ***Pedestrianisation***

The pedestrianisation project, which has already been implemented, aimed at the rehabilitation and the environmental improvement of the business area in order to allow it to compete with the new commercial centres of the modern part of the city. The main components of this project are the pedestrianisation of the main commercial streets, the creation of short term parking areas in selected locations and the introduction of mini-buses which move in the periphery of the pedestrian area providing free of charge optimum facilities to the people.

### ***New uses in old cores***

The introduction of new uses in the historic centres resulted the regeneration and the enrichment of the activities of the area.

Examples: Famagousta Gate in Old Nicosia (which became a cultural centre), Old warehouses in Larnaca (which became Museum and Art Gallery), Old Mansions in Limassol and Paphos (Libraries etc ).

These new uses had a very positive impact on the life of their areas.

### ***Cultural tourism***

The tourism sector has become a major pillar of the economy of Cyprus. Nevertheless, mass sun and sea tourism has put enormous strains on the society, nature and heritage. It is clear that such activity cannot be sustainable in the long run since it causes depletion of the very resource it is based upon. At the same time, cultural tourism has emerged as an important component of tourist activity, based on the island's rich cultural resource base. The sustainable development of cultural tourism was therefore promoted in response to these challenges.

### ***Aesthetic Control***

A systematic research has been made for the historic areas in order to establish design guidelines, which will be used by the architects as a tool for restoration work and especially for new buildings in empty plots of the historic centres.

These design guidelines were considered necessary because in several cases many new buildings failed to harmonise with the traditional environment.

Furthermore in order to achieve a dialogue between architects and authorities, the government has suggested the establishment of Advisory Committees with the

participation of experts from NGOs in order to ensure a wider acceptance on the aesthetic values of any structure in the historic cores.

f. **A wareness**

Lack of awareness has been identified as a major threat to heritage preservation Efforts. To handle this issue, the Department of Town Planning organises and supports several conferences promoting the understanding of heritage preservation and enhancement. In addition, a number of heritage related events are organised within the framework of the Council of Europe's European Heritage Days, through which public awareness has been raised, especially among the youth.

Over the past decade, through the operation of the Town and Country Planning Law, great headway has been made in the field of heritage preservation and enhancement. Relevant policies have to a large extent been streamlined along the European prototype, while Cyprus has been actively involved at the European level in the exchange of ideas, experiences and the programmes of action regarding heritage, mainly through the involvement of the Department in the Cultural Heritage Committee of the Council of Europe. Yet, there is still a lot to achieve: Early results and policies must be scrutinised and feed back mechanisms provided to enriched and improve them accordingly. Moreover, we must find ways of further involving NGOs and citizens at the grass roots level, both in the decision-making process and the management of heritage preservation and enhancement.