

Documentation, Interpretation and Presentation of the Architectural Heritage of Cyprus

Phaedon ENOTIADES

BSArch, MArch, MCRP

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HERITAGE DOCUMENTATION

1.1 TOWARDS A HERITAGE-FRIENDLY SOCIETY

Despite the obvious need for further sensitisation, a lot has been done in recent years towards the establishment of a more heritage-sensitive planning system. The contribution of pioneering inventory and documentation efforts in the 1980s of the non-monumental built heritage towards this reality cannot be overstressed. Notwithstanding, the establishment of a national institution responsible for the co-ordination and promotion of research and publication relevant to cultural heritage of Cyprus, along with the creation of a detailed geographic database of cultural resources in order to bring together the work of several public and private agencies and institutions, are steps that would immensely benefit preservation efforts on the island.

1.2 THE EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK

Through the operation of Cyprus' Town and Country Planning Law over the past decade, great strides have been made in the field of architectural heritage preservation, including its inventory and documentation. Relevant policies have to a large extent been streamlined along the European prototype, while Cyprus has become actively involved at the European level in the discussion and exchange of ideas regarding heritage inventory and documentation, through the participation of the Department of Town Planning and Housing in the Cultural Heritage Committee of the Council of Europe and other institutions. Most importantly, Cyprus is signatory to the (Granada) Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, which was ratified by the Republic's parliamentary institution, the House of Representatives, in 1988 (Law 165/88). In fact, the spirit and principles of the Convention, concerning for example permit control and conservation policy, were already present in the then proposed Town and Country Planning Law.

2. THE CASE OF CYPRUS

2.1 THE LEGAL AND PLANNING CONTEXT

Following the provisions of article 38 of the Town and Country Planning Law of 1972,¹ Preservation Orders are issued by the Minister of the Interior, on the recommendation of the Department of Town Planning and Housing, where it is "deemed appropriate to guarantee the preservation of an individual building or structure, group of buildings or site of special social, architectural or other value." Since 1978, over 70 Preservation Orders have been issued, covering more than 2500 buildings in all urban and rural areas of the island.² This has become an absolute necessity after the devastation that the architectural heritage of Cyprus has undergone in the second half of the twentieth century.

¹ The law has been implemented only since 1990, due to the immense social and political upheaval that followed the Turkish invasion of 1974

² There is no reliable data on areas under Turkish military occupation.

2.1.1 ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION: A CASE OF TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?

In the early 1950s Cyprus was described in an American magazine as the “idyllic island in a troubled sea¹.” The first serious threats to the island’s traditional architecture and cultural landscapes came with the post-independence economic boom of the 1960s. While urbanisation accelerated the abandonment of rural settlements, unplanned urban development caused extensive demolitions of old buildings in traditional cores. The mood of the time is best expressed through the concepts of “development” and “modernisation;” yet, it should not be overlooked that during this very period a large proportion of the population escaped the poverty and grim conditions previously associated with traditional architecture, and saw the making of a “brave” new modern landscape dotted with electricity pylons and gleaming factories. With the 1974 Turkish invasion and subsequent military occupation of a sizeable 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 natural resources, economic activity and land availability; the grave situation brought on the acceleration of existing urbanisation and industrialisation trends. Although the rapid expansion of the tourism sector since the 1980s brought about additional threats of a different nature 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 tourist development. A second reason for the delay in the enactment of 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 rapidly modernising society.

2.1.2 THE NEED FOR HERITAGE-SENSITIVE PLANNING

To address these threats, it had become imperative for the Department of Town Planning and Housing to take action in various ways through the planning process, thus creating new opportunities for the preservation and enhancement of the heritage of Cyprus. In this sense, heritage issues and preservation policies have been integrated into Local Plans throughout the island, while revitalisation projects have become crucial components of Area Schemes. More specifically, an Architectural Heritage Inventory has been set up, through which hundreds of buildings and structures have been included in Preservation Orders, requiring official protection; at the same time, a rather generous package of economic incentives is being provided for their restoration. A series of sensitive areas have furthermore been identified where development control and design guidelines are particularly stringent. Yet, 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 local administration officials to respond sympathetically to existing traditional cores and landscapes cannot be underestimated. Moreover, the adequate training of craftsmen on heritage restoration skills is another important issue that has to be addressed.

2.2 HERITAGE INVENTORY AND DOCUMENTATION IN CYPRUS

There are two main inventories of the island’s built heritage. The first is managed by the Department of Antiquities and includes over 1200 Ancient Monuments², of which approximately 200 are state owned (Schedule A), whereas the remainder are either

¹ Jean and Frank Shor, Cyprus, Idyllic Island in a Troubled Sea, *The National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. CI, No. 5, Washington, May 1952

² Ancient Monuments is a legal term as specified in the Antiquities Law (1935) and describes protected sites, monuments, churches, fortifications etc.

ecclesiastical or private property (Schedule B). There are additional minor inventories, such as the computerised *Traditional Watermills Inventory* of the Archaeological Research Unit of the University of Cyprus, while the Public Works Department has completed a survey for the production of a series of architectural documentation drawings of several historically significant government buildings, mostly colonial structures dating from the end of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries. The other main inventory stems from the Granada convention and is managed by the Department of Town Planning and Housing as the *Architectural Heritage Inventory of Cyprus*.

2.2.1 THE CYPRUS ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE INVENTORY

Following the provisions of Cypriot heritage legislation, the Department of Town Planning and Housing has been carrying out inventory surveys in several traditional settlements. As a result of this on-going process, the Cyprus Architectural Heritage Inventory currently consists of about 80 colour-coded reference maps that accompany over 10,000 index cards corresponding to an equal number of buildings and traditional structures. It must be clarified here that this is a basic core data survey with minimal index cards, albeit for the great majority of traditional settlements in the government-controlled areas of the island. Its aim is to aid planning authorities in their efforts to ensure and facilitate the preservation, restoration, enhancement and revitalisation of non-monumental heritage where scant, if any, published information exists. Its guiding principle is that non-monumental heritage preservation can only be addressed through a holistic approach, where the architectural ensemble, indeed the entire traditional settlement in the case of villages, is seen as one entity, at least on the conceptual level, during both physical planning and development control processes. The danger for short sighted decision making, of which the existence of a multitude of conflicting individual property rights inevitably threatens, can thus be contained. Consequently, the Architectural Heritage Inventory does not seek to address rigid academic standards necessary for scientific publication, but is instead a pragmatic tool for the efficient management of the country's non-monumental heritage assets.

2.2.2 THE CYPRUS INDEX CARD

Given the nature of the survey, the inventory's index cards register information on individual building location, type and use, as well as owner and legal status information, where available or applicable. Importantly, each card includes a brief description of architectural form, typology, construction principles and materials used in the indexed structure. Moreover, the condition of each structure surveyed is evaluated, while any incompatible interventions and later additions are noted. A cadastral map of the property concerned and relevant photographic documentation accompany this information.

2.2.3 INVENTORY OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS: ANÖGYRA, A CASE STUDY

The village of Anogyra is a case in point. It is located in the southwestern part of Limassol district, in a region with declining population. The settlement is associated with St. Helena, the archaeologist queen, while during the Frankish period it formed the fief of La Noyère. Although not far from the coast, local economy had been inward looking, centred on the surrounding agricultural area with its carob and vine products. The survey of the settlement and surrounding area was contracted to a qualified architect and was carried out in 1995¹. As a result, about 250 index cards were prepared for all buildings in the village core, as well as special structures and constructions such as pavements, fountains and enclosure walls in the surrounding area. These are complemented by a colour-coded reference map of the traditional settlement, a series of photographs, and a typed brief containing information on local history and geography as well as an analysis of architectural styles and construction methods encountered. This information is available to central and local government personnel in charge of development control and physical planning, as well as private professionals who may be working on restoration projects in the area.

¹ Elli Constantinidou, *The Architectural Heritage Survey of Anögyra*, Department of Town Planning and Housing, Nicosia, 1995.

2.2.4 AN ATTEMPT AT COMPUTERISATION

As a result of co-operation between the Department of Town Planning and Housing and the University of Cyprus, the first phase of a pilot study for the computerisation of the Architectural Heritage Inventory was completed in August 2001. The result is the creation of a new database index form, based on the existing index card. The new system will additionally allow for cross-reference, as well as research on construction type, architectural form and typology through a number of preset keywords. Moreover, important management information can be entered by system users, in relation to the structure's legal status or the execution of restoration work in each case. The project is far from being completed, yet the foundation has been laid for the future development of the Inventory.

2.2.5 PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE: THE EXAMPLE OF LIMASSOL

Architectural heritage inventory in urban areas has necessarily been of a more selective nature, where only traditional structures were included in surveys. Two examples from among several revitalisation success stories from the robust commercial town of Limassol illustrate what can be achieved through a combination of heritage-friendly planning policy, responsible local initiatives, and the encouragement of private investment and volunteer contribution. In a port city where the traditional seafront was practically erased during the difficult post-invasion period when the society of Cyprus seemed to lose its sense of direction and purpose, public opinion regards commercial development pressures in the traditional urban core with great suspicion. Supported by sensitised citizen groups and local authorities, the restoration of the the Turkish Market Hall on Bazaar Street was the result of an initiative by the Limassol Chapter of the Cyprus Civil Engineers and Architects Association. Restoration work was carried out by volunteers, while construction materials were donated by local business. In a second example, encouraged by supportive legislation and central government policy that includes an attractive package of economic incentives, private investment has recently effected the conversion of a dilapidated townhouse on Gunther Street, previously declared dangerous for public safety, into the headquarters of a successful local law firm¹.

3. A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

3.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL TOURISM

It has been seen that the fortunes of cultural heritage in Cyprus have been inevitably tied to the changing realities of the island's economy. Over the past few years, there has been much discussion locally about the dangers inherent in the current supremacy of the tourism sector, invariably suggesting diversification and promotion of cultural tourism. The development of sustainable cultural tourism opportunities is more the result of a wider policy on the preservation of cultural heritage and promotion of cultural activities, rather than a single defined project. Strategies on the presentation of historic sites and monuments, the conservation of traditional settlements and historic urban centres, the revival of the cultural landscape, the protection of nature, the development of human resources, are all interdependent efforts necessary to prepare the conditions in which cultural tourism can thrive.

3.2 HERITAGE RESEARCH AND CULTURAL RESOURCES DATABASE

In order to successfully integrate the preservation of the island's heritage in all fields of planning – physical, social, economic etc., as well as provide a stimulus for the generation of new ideas, it is necessary to have scientific information readily available on all aspects of cultural heritage. A good amount of such information on historic and cultural issues is already available in published or unpublished form, yet it is rather difficult to use, being at best

¹ Project Architect: Niki Hadjilyra; owner: Gramaro Holdings Ltd; location: Hagia Triada Quarter, Limassol; restoration dates: September 2000 – May 2001.

scattered and at worst inaccessible. The establishment, therefore, of a national institution responsible for the co-ordination and promotion of research and publication relevant to cultural heritage is a step that would immensely benefit preservation efforts. Another tool in the same direction would be the creation of a detailed geographic database of cultural resources in order to bring together the work of several public and private agencies and institutions. This would combine the Department of Town Planning and housing protected buildings list, the Department of Antiquities ancient monuments schedules and other official and unofficial lists, as well as define historic urban centres and traditional settlement cores, delineate special or fragile cultural landscapes, and integrate culturally significant aspects of the natural environment. The availability of this information to local authorities and citizens' groups would strengthen planners' efforts through both the generation of ideas and proposals, and the support of preservation lobbyists' efforts. The development of cultural tourism will thus become a natural extension of the ideas of conservation, as just one among several uses of cultural heritage.