Eleftheria Square: The Legacies and Dichotomies Woven into Nicosia's Urban Fabric

Alex Ioannou[1]

Abstract

The redesign of Eleftheria Square was imagined to be the spearhead of a new era in Nicosia's urban identity. However, the capital of Cyprus is still struggling with a complex decision-making process and a weak planning system. Rapid urban change, coupled with urban sprawl, are raising questions about the future of Nicosia, and other Cypriot cities. The aim of this paper is to position the redesign of Eleftheria Square within Nicosia's urban historical context. The paper explores the Ottoman and British approaches to the city's development, exposing how their legacies manifest in current ideologies and values about urban space. The redesign of Eleftheria Square is presented as an example of a third 'glocalised' approach, exacerbating the existing dichotomy between the Ottoman and British approaches. The article concludes by questioning Eleftheria Square's legacy and advocating for a wider discussion about what constitutes, influences and drives urban change in Nicosia.

Keywords: urban design, identity, Cyprus development, British imperialism, Ottoman Cyprus

Town Planning in Cyprus: An Outcome of Imperial Legacies

Every power that conquered Nicosia continued their mission by embedding their own beliefs within local minds –this included urban design practices which led to altering the city's structure. Post-independence governments and nationalist agendas have also partaken in the 'almost obsessive efforts to inscribe the national Self on the landscape and erase the Other' within the capital of Cyprus.[2] This paper explores how the contemporary urban design approach taken by the Municipality of Nicosia, and by extension the government of the Republic of Cyprus, has its foundations in Ottoman and British imperial understandings of urban spaces.

---

[1]   Doctoral Researcher, School of History, Law and Social Sciences, Bangor University
[2]   Yiannis Papadakis, 'Nicosia after 1960: A River, A Bridge and a Dead Zone' (2006) *Global Media Journal: Mediterranean*, Vol.1 (1) 1-16.

Figure 1: Architectural features and details found in Nicosia's streets, 1949

During the Ottoman period (1570–1878) Nicosia remained contained within the Venetian walls, but was to be refashioned into an Ottoman capital -'a reimagining of Istanbul on Cyprus'.[3] Architecturally, the Ottomans recreated what was known to them, converting churches to mosques and adapting many of the grand Venetian buildings, still standing after the conquest, into public buildings and private elite housing (Figure 1). The capital was 'stamped' with koranic plaques above private and public doorways, which acted as reminders to the capital's dwellers of the new social norms and customs expected.[4] The Ottomans used,

---

[3]   Colin Breen, 'The Early Ottomanization of Urban Cyprus' (2019) *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, Vol 53 (1), 21–37.

[4]   Breen (2019) states that within Nicosia the Ottomans recreated 'components perceived to be essential for a regional capital, directly mirroring the morphological characteristics of Istanbul.' It should be noted that Ceylan İrem Gençer and Işıl Çokuğraş (2016) explain that the beginning of 19th century saw approaches to urban planning in Istanbul being influenced by European thinking.

deliberate architectural production and modification... to represent the new political and social norms of the... regime and its mode of governance. This constructed visual language was used extensively across both the island's urban and rural landscapes to overtly demonstrate the shift in power that had taken place.[5]

This 'constructed visual language' complemented the gradual assimilation taking place all over Cyprus, allowing Ottoman culture to embed itself into decision-making processes and influence longterm thinking about matters, such as urban development. Stefano Bianca describes a traditional Muslim society and its approach to urban planning decisions, once found across the Ottoman Empire, including Cyprus.[6]

In traditional Muslim societies, the shared values, the social consensus and the interdependence between the members of the community were strong enough to hold together the mosaic of individual decisions in a natural and flexible way. The inbuilt social constraints allowed for a certain amount of 'laisser-faire', while still producing an organic whole out of the sum of individual acts of building. There was no formal scheme which would pre-define forthcoming developments in terms of rigid and comprehensive structures... 'Planning' was thus limited to a simple act of consultation, in order to prevent possible individual infringements on the rights of neighbours and on the interest of the community. Due to the strength of customs and self-evident tacit agreements, there was no need for the explicit building codes, which are now governing the life in modern cities.[7]

This attitude to urban decision-making is reflected in the government structure of the Republic of Cyprus today. The following extract, from Richard Sharpley, outlines the current system of government and its approach to urban development.

Local political structures do not facilitate central control on the island. At the national level, formal structures for the implementation of policy do not exist; rather, there is a reliance on informal contact and agreement between political and industry leaders which, arguably, allows for political deals which circumvent official policy whilst also permitting conflicts of interest. At the same time,

---

[5]   Breen, C. (no 3)

[6]   Michael Given and Marios Hadjianastas (2010) write that Cyprus was 'distinctive for its *timar*-holders staying in place rather than being rotated round different provinces, and so putting down roots in what became their own landscape...' becoming involved in local disputes and ways of increasing the 'local standing, wealth and belonging'.

[7]   Stefano Bianca, *Urban Form in the Arab World: Past and Present*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

a complex, multi-layered democratic system delegates a significant degree of authority to the local level. As a result, decisions regarding planning applications, infrastructural investment and development and other tourism-related activities are made by local politicians who, for electoral or other reasons, may not always make decisions in the wider regional or national interest.[8]

This is substantiated by Ermis Klokkaris, who states that the culture surrounding building and development in Cyprus 'operates through acquaintances to safeguard personal interests and not the public good...'[9] When read alongside Stefano Bianca's work, current attitudes towards urban development in the Republic can be likened to those during the Ottoman era. From the two extracts, three key resemblances can be ascertained, 1) informal building agreements, 2) authority of decision-making being held at a local level and 3) a national strategy which is weak or lacking.[10] These resemblances offer a historical precedent to current decision-making processes and can be seen as the remaining legacy of the Ottoman era.

Figure 2: Panoramic view of Nicosia, 1900

The British occupation of Cyprus (1878–1960) brought about a significant change in Nicosia's urban structure (Figure 2). The building of Metaxas Square (now Eleft-

---

[8]   Richard Sharpley, 'Tourism, Modernisation and Development on the Island of Cyprus: Challenges and Policy Responses' (2003) *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol.11 (2-3)

[9]   Ermis Klokkaris, 'Urban Planning and the Concept of the Compact City: The Cypriot Reality', in Nikolas Patsavos, Ioannis Pissourios (eds), *The Cypriot City Paradigm: Urbanity Issues in Design and Planning*, Athens: Domes, Cyprus Architects Association, 2018, 76-95.

[10]   It is possible that due to Cyprus being a great distance from important strategic concerns, the Ottoman Empire's exercise of tight regulations on land was weak. Michael Given and Marios Hadjianastas (2010) offer this as a reason to why land and the administration villages on the island became hereditary to Cypriot *timar* holders.

heria Square), reoriented the capital, providing space to expand beyond the Venetian walls.[11] The British Empire was known for its structure and strictness regarding urban development, the existence of the 'Grand Model' is a testament to this.[12] The concept of a 'Grand Model' developed and evolved during the practice of British colonial rule into a strong and easily employable model which sought to create 'a sanitary/commercial/administrative space that was uniform, predictable, and manageable'.[13]

Strong axial and functional master planning relied on the premeditated arrangement of spaces and zones, as well as simplicity and a predetermined vision for future development. Such an approach brought about a substantial shift in the attitudes towards urban living 'where local conditions and the mentality of the population [were] completely different'.[14] At the time, development was led as described under Ottoman rule, and carried out by the immediate and individual requirements of the people who used a space either without a predefined plan or without consulting a map or a clear drawn up plan.

Horatio Kitchener's map of Nicosia (Figure 3) and subsequent land surveys of the whole island (published in 1885), signified the 'authority of the base map...' and its integral role to the British as a tool to 'improve' Cyprus.[15] Additionally, the surveys allowed the British to more effectively collect taxes.[16] Planning in the mid-19th century

> ...was essentially seen as a technical activity, exercised by government. Its reformist ambitions were captured in abstract maps, also termed master, blueprint or layout plans. These showed a detailed view of the built form of a city (an ideal end-state), which would be attained once the regulatory mechanisms introduced into government had ensured that the population and its activities had been distributed in the proper way. While planning was seen as a technical

---

[11]   The first cutting occurred in 1879 at the end of Victoria Street, at Paphos Gate. More importantly the British wanted to separate themselves from the unsanitary conditions present within the walls. Sir Garnet Wolseley in fact stated that he found Nicosia to be 'one great cess-pit into which the filth of centuries has been poured' in his 1878 journal.

[12]   Robert Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities*, Routledge, 1996.

[13]   John Archer, 'Paras, Palaces, Pathogens: Frameworks for the Growth of Calcutta, 1800-1850' (2000) *City & Society*, Vol.19 (1).

[14]   Christodoulos Demetriou, 'Nicosia Urban Area', in Geneviève Dubois-Taine (ed.), *European Cities: Insights on Outskirts – From Helsinki to Nicosia*, Vol. 4, Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Housing, PUCA, Paris, 237–66. See also, Diana Makrides, 'Nicosia Under British Rule 1878-1960' in Demetrios Michaelides (ed), *Historic Nicosia*, Rimal Publications, 2012, 329.

[15]   Denis Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World*, 12, New York; London: Tauris, 2008. 178.

[16]   Makrides, D. (no 14) 331.

activity, its reformist origins helped to portray it as a normative task, driven by particular values...[17]

From the outset, Nicosia was to be moulded into a British model colonial space.[18] Spending money and time, the British set up many fundamental necessities on the island, including roads, communication links and sanitation. Values and ideologies about 'public good' and notions of 'modernizing and civilizing' formed the context within which colonial authorities decided and implemented changes to the urban environment. [19] Apart from material changes, the British enacted laws and policies which set about defining and instilling a Western ideology of urban development on the island. This ideology and approach remains a legacy of British rule in Cyprus and in many other ex-colonial republics.[20]

Figure 3: Map of Nicosia by Lord Kitchener, 1881

[17] Vanessa Watson, '"The Planned City Sweeps the Poor Away...": Urban Planning and 21st Century Urbanisation' (2019) *Progress in Planning*, Vol.72 (3) 151–193.

[18] According to Diana Makrides (2012) 'Lord Salisbury, hoped that by providing in Cyprus the prototype for an efficient British-administered Ottoman territory, he would extract approval from the sultan for the British administration of Ottoman territories in "Western Asia" and thus secure a land-route to India'.

[19] UN-HABITAT, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities*, London, Earthscan, 2009.

[20] Anthony D. King, '"Exporting 'Planning": The Colonial and Neo-Colonial Experience' (1997) *Urbanism Past & Present* No.5, 12-22

In the 1940s urban development was regulated by the Streets and Buildings Regulation, until the colonial government created the Department of Town Planning and Housing, led by W. Windyer Morris. In 1959 a Planning Report, known as the Morris Report, was published, which 'consisted of a series of spatial indicators and descriptions, which related to problems and conflicts, and resulted in policies and legislation aimed at the remedying of uncontrolled practice'.[21] After independence, the British planning law specialist Vaughan Neil was enlisted to help draw up a new Town and Country Planning Act for the island. The Act took several years to develop and faced many objections 'from development companies... and from landowners who feared that the Law would set limits to the chaotic development'.[22] The Act was approved in 1972, but formally enacted 18 years later, in 1990.[23] When enacted, there were minor revisions or updates to the town planning legislations, meaning that the Act is a remnant of British colonial law, having little to no modifications to suit the modern Republic.[24]

A dichotomy exists within Nicosia's urban fabric. The capital's urban decision-making process and planning laws find their routes in divergent approaches to urban development. The current urban decision-making process is greatly influenced by an Ottoman legacy of development, shaped by locally-led informal building agreements that are unconcerned with a national strategy.[25] The existing laws and regulations regarding urban development, upheld by municipalities and the government, maintain a legacy of British planning principles. The presence and influence of these two legacy approaches has resulted in the capital lacking a shared understanding, across all levels of society, of what sustainable and equitable urban development means. Developing a shared understanding has been hindered by the fact that, before 2004, 'planning focused more on making land use plans and planning zones with

---

[21] Byron Ioannou, 'Post-Colonial Urban Development and Planning in Cyprus: Shifting Visions and Realities of Early Suburbia' (2016) *Urban Planning*, Vol.1 (4) 79-88.

[22] Konstantinos F. Ioannides 'A Brief Review of the Evolution of Planning in Cyprus from the End of World War II to the Present', in Nikolas Patsavos, Ioannis Pissourios (eds), *The Cypriot City Paradigm: Urbanity Issues in Design and Planning*, Athens: Domes, Cyprus Architects Association, 2018, 50-73.

[23] Department of Town Planning and Housing of Cyprus, 'History', available at http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/tph/tph.nsf/page13_gr/page13_gr?OpenDocument, (last accessed 1 June 2021).

[24] Demetriou, Ch. (no 14)

[25] It is recognised that market forces also play a large role in urban development. For various reasons, planning decisions made at a local level usually align with market interests. See Allmendinger (2009).

no transparency or accountability' limiting public participation in decision-making processes.[26]

The first consolidated regional plan, the Nicosia Master Plan, was developed under the auspices of the United Nations. The Plan included the Greater Nicosia Area on the Greek Cypriot side and the Turkish Cypriot municipal area. The bicommunal plan was completed in 1984 and supported 'a compact development model' while rejecting a dispersed development model.[27] However, these were ignored, as the five Municipalities followed their own policy, leading to a dispersed model of development, exactly what the Plan had advised against. This divergence from the Plan can be explained by the fact that there '...is a tendency towards accommodation and rationalisation of urban sprawl... under a debatable "localism" argument of offering opportunities for strengthening the local identity of suburban Municipalities...'[28]

The inability to control urban sprawl and implement a regional plan for the island can be better understood when the 'forces underpinning' current attitudes to urban development are sited within their historical context.[29] This paper illustrates how desires to implement top-down urban masterplanning (British legacy) have long existed alongside Cypriot society's decision-making processes which are grounded in social pressures and overprotected property rights (Ottoman legacy).[30] With no attempt to reconcile this dichotomy, future development on the island could find itself repeating mistakes that don't benefit Cypriot society as a whole.

The Significance of Eleftheria Square

When the Venetian walls of Nicosia were constructed, in 1567, the only access points were through three gates, Porta San Domenico, Porta Giuliana and Porta del Proveditore; which are now called Paphos Gate, Famagusta Gate and Kyrenia Gate, respectively (Figure 4). Following just over 300 years of Ottoman rule, when there was no expansion beyond the walls, the British set out to change this and 'modernise' Nicosia.[31] There were however,

---

[26] Ioannou, B. (no 21)

[27] Ioannides, K.F. (no 22)

[28] Glafkos Costantinides, 'Reasons for and Consequences of Urban Sprawl', in Nikolas Patsavos, Ioannis Pissourios (eds), *The Cypriot City Paradigm: Urbanity Issues in Design and Planning*, Athens: Domes, Cyprus Architects Association, 2018) 118-147.

[29] Costantinides, G. (no 28) A significant reason given for the lack of implementation of a regional plan is the ongoing division of the island.

[30] Demetriou, Ch. (no 14)

[31] Britain made an agreement to pay tribute to the Ottoman Empire for administration over the island.

...nooks and crannies both in the mind and in the city that, as if caught in a time wrap, resisted change and provided a thread of continuity from the 19th century Orient to the 20th-century West.[32]

A new wooden bridge was constructed shortly after 1879, spanning the moat linking Makrydromos (now Ledra Street) to the Secretariat, expanding the city limits beyond the walls. This decision provided the British with more space to build grand properties and to separate themselves from the unhygienic conditions within the city walls.

Figure 4: The 'Channel Squadron Gate' 1878 (now Famagusta Gate)

The construction of the new bridge, named Metaxas Square, altered life and movement within the walls.[33] The three gates became secondary entry points as the Square gained popularity, while the two straight roads that crossed the city from South to North (Ledra and Onasagorou Streets), which had been solely residential, soon be-

---

[32] Makrides, D. (no 14)

[33] Metaxas was the dictator of Greece at the time who refused Mussolini's military advances. Diana Makrides (2012) writes that the municipal council renamed Serai Square to Ataturk Square to counterbalance the action.

came the main commercial arteries of the city. Until the creation of the bridge, the commercial centre had 'consisted of a network of narrow lanes... [that] developed along a unifying axis that crossed the town from East to West, from the Famagusta to the Paphos Gate'.[34]

Historically the area around Faneromeni church, located within the Venetian walls, was the central gathering point for the city. However, as shifts and realignments occurred, Metaxas Square became more than a bridge, as it 'increasingly came to be perceived as the town centre'. [35] The Square developed to be the main unification point between the 'modern' Nicosia, outside the walls, and the 'historical' one, within them. Metaxas Square became a meeting point for friends, a landmark for travellers, and a central point for political protests. In 1974 the Mayor of Nicosia held a public vote resulting in Metaxas Square being renamed Eleftheria Square (Freedom Square).

This choice of keeping 'square' in the name is a testament to the site's role in people's lives and as a place of community interaction. Marc Augé gives four characteristics of a square, being that it is: 1) historical; 2) imbued with human identity; 3) relational; and 4) charged with symbolic meaning.[36] Since its construction, until its demolition in 2012 to facilitate the new Zaha Hadid redesign, Eleftheria Square was primarily a bridge, but had adopted characteristics of a square.[37] As Michel de Certeau writes, squares take on a 'second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal', becoming more than a faceless, nondescript piece of the urban fabric.[38] Eleftheria Square was the backdrop for protests against British occupation, a space to hold large gatherings, such as regarding the coup against the government, assemblies concerning the 1974 invasion, music concerts, New Year's Eve events, celebrations for joining the European Union and simple everyday meetings of citizens. The Square was imbued with 'local meanings and stories... different from those intended by the

[34]   Euphrosyne Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou, 'Nicosia Under Ottoman Rule 1570-1878' in Demetrios Michaelides (ed), *Historic Nicosia* (Rimal Publications, 2012) 300.

[35]   Makrides, D. (no 14) 337. Makrides also writes that Emile Deschamps described the tree-planted avenue beyond the wooden bridge as the Champs Elysees of Nicosia.

[36]   Marc Augé, *Introduction à une Anthropologie de la Surmodernité*, Paris: Seuil, 1992.

[37]   Interestingly, according to Nadia Charalambous and Christos Hadjichristos in their essay 'A Square of a Bridge?', one of the points of contention by those opposing the new plans saw Eleftheria Square primarily as a bridge and thought the redesign would force it 'to behave more like a square'.

[38]   Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984.

higher authorities.'[39] Eleftheria Square was, in function a bridge, built to be a space of movement but through time it has become a place of pause.[40]

A Piecemeal Approach:
Contextualising the Redesign of Eleftheria Square

In 2005 the Nicosia Municipality and the European Union launched an international architectural competition for the redesign of Eleftheria Square. The project was co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the Republic of Cyprus and the Nicosia Municipality. Its mission was to 'adjust the functionality and upgrade the aesthetic image of the square in such way in order to serve primarily pedestrians, as a place for relaxation, social gatherings and public venues, as well as the promotion of the Medieval Walls'.[41]

The winner of the architectural competition was Zaha Hadid Architects. The practice informed the public on its website that their approach to the design of Eleftheria Square 'constitutes an "architectural intervention" – the creation of an urban plaza which forms the spearhead of a much broader and ambitious urban planning gesture. One that aspires to organize and synthesize the entire urban wall, surrounding moat and modern city fringes beyond within a unified whole'.[42] A bold intervention was always intended as the final outcome, with a knock-on effect of giving a designed element to the city centre (Figure 5).

The plans for Eleftheria Square were criticised as ones that could have been implemented anywhere in the world, and not tailored to the specific needs of Nicosia. In an interview with the Cypriot online newspaper *Parathyro*, Hans Stimmann expressed a concern that the winning architectural practice 'produces sculptured buildings', adding that 'architects, like Zaha Hadid... are not in touch with the city they are building in'.[43] Stimmann's observation was amplified when Zaha Hadid was asked about her decision not to visit Eleftheria Square before embarking on her design. She stated that 'there was no fixed rule on this and that it depended on the project.

---

[39] Yiannis Papadakis, 'Walking in the Hora: "Place" and "Non-Place" in Divided Nicosia' (1998) *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 8 (2)

[40] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997.

[41] Nicosia Municipality, *Architectural Competition for the Redesign of Eleftheria Square and the Surrounding Area (Terms of the Architectural Competition)*, Nicosia Municipality, 2005.

[42] Zaha Hadid Architects, 'Eleftheria Square', available at https://www.zaha-hadid.com/masterplans/eleftheria-square/ (last accessed 1 June 2021) (No longer accessible).

[43] Meropi Moises, 'This is not Bilbao, this is Berlin!' *Parathyro* (24 November 2013) 4.

Figure 5: Areal view of Eleftheria Square, 2021

- "sometimes it's better when I don't see it first, and when I start the project quite abstract. If I go, I might change my mind and start again", she quipped'.[44]

According to the revised 2005 Nicosia Local Plan, Hadid's design was to be integral to a planned new and exciting future for Nicosia; one fit for the European stage. The Local Plan states the desire for a 'substantive connection of the redesign area with the planned redesign of the old GSP stadium area, and the axis extending to the Presidential Palace, with the ultimate goal of strengthening the connection between the Town within the Walls and the newer Urban Centre'.[45] (Figure 6) However, the plans were criticised by archaeologists and academics who warned that 'the capital is in danger of irreparable mutilation'.[46]

---

[44] Stefanos Evripidou, 'Hadid Defends Controversial Eleftheria Square Plans' *Cyprus Mail*, 29 November 2008.

[45] Nicosia Municipality (no 41)

[46] Stefanos Evripidou, 'Archaeologists Petition Mayor to Block Old City projects', *Cyprus Mail*, 30 December 2008.
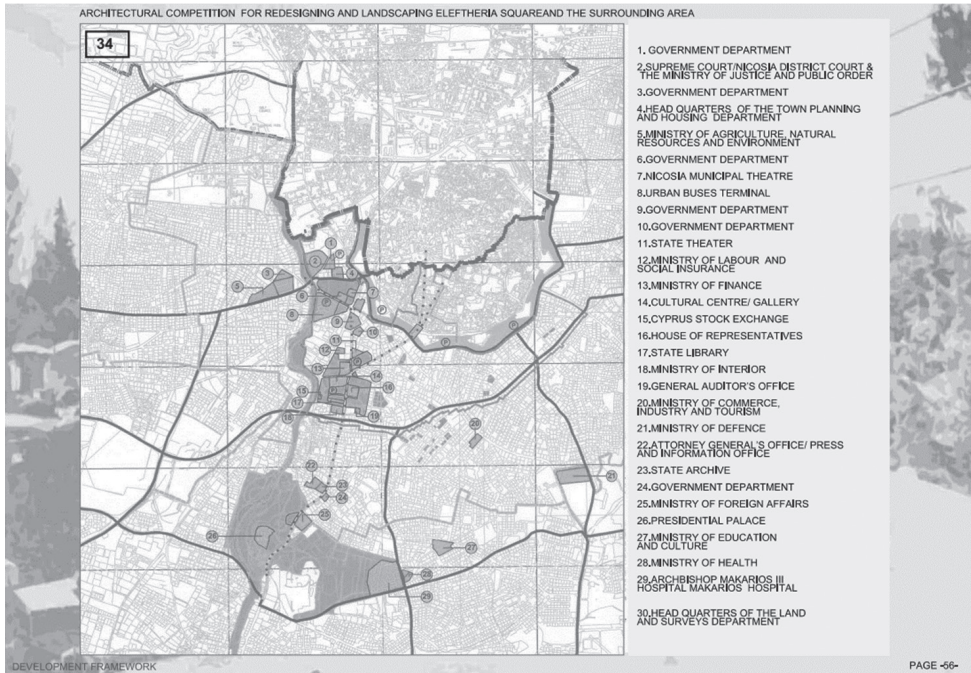
Figure 6: The 2005 revised Nicosia Local Plan.
Map showing the creation of a strong linear connection through the city,
linking various green spaces and municipality buildings.

In light of a more globalised and integrated Europe, 'cities are being reshaped and urban landscapes are rapidly transformed to address economic globalization, to handle intercity competition and to meet the requirements of postmodernity'.[47] This intercity competition is prevalent on the island, as Nicosia, Larnaca, Limassol and Paphos all seek to draw European, national and private investment. The 2005 revised Local Plan infused Nicosia's heritage with contemporary design, rendering it a commodity that can be manipulated and moulded for specific purposes. The redesign of Eleftheria Square and the ambitions of the Local Plan reveal a third approach to urban development on the island; one that promotes a contemporary 'glocalised' approach.

---

47 Aspa Gospodini, 'Portraying, Classifying and Understanding the Emerging Landscapes in the Post-Industrial City' (2006), *Cities*, Vol.23 (5), 31.

The Local Plan set the city on a certain course, with future projects in the capital following its logic. Brian Graham gets to the heart of what is occurring in Nicosia, when he states that,

> heritage is as much about forgetting as remembering the past... heritage is the contemporary use of the past, and if its meanings are defined in the present, then we create the heritage that we require and manage it for a range of purposes defined by the needs and demands of our present societies.[48]

The redesigned Eleftheria Square, the ongoing redesign of the old GSP Stadium and the construction of the new Archaeological Museum of Cyprus, reveal the adoption of a larger trend that focuses on economic drivers and creates expendable spaces. The linear Local Plan, which joins together key public buildings and spaces, exemplifies what Gospodini calls the 'high-culture epicentre'.[49] In the case of Nicosia, the outcome would be a disjointed capital where money is focussed on creating a 'glocalised' city; one which reinterprets built heritage based on present (or already redundant) demands and neglects the many other layers of the city and possibly even future needs.

The old GSP Stadium, another built heritage site, located along the Plan's line of development, is facing a 'radical transformation' according to real estate developer and construction company Cyfield Group.[50] This transformation, however, includes a 'spacious two-level underground parking for 570 cars', which is one of the project's main selling points.[51] Coupled with Eleftheria Square, which also boasts a new underground parking area, the urban fabric is being considered in a piecemeal way. These isolated sites may be able to provide a small and immediate solution to the capital's car numbers, but are they contributing to a longterm and sustainable city?[52]

Following this trend, the redesign of Archbishop Makarios III Avenue in Nicosia, a few hundred metres away from Eletheria Square, remains another isolated project. The Regeneration of the Makarios - Stasikratous - Evagorou Commercial Triangle, a priority of the Municipality, aimed to make the commercial centre 'competitive,

---

[48] Brian Graham, 'Heritage as Knowledge: Capital or Culture?' (2012) *Urban Studies*, Vol.39, (5–6), 1003.

[49] Aspa Gospodini, 'Portraying, Classifying and Understanding the Emerging Landscapes in the Post-Industrial City' (2006), Cities, Vol.23 (5).

[50] Cyfield Group, 'Reconstruction of Old GSP' available at https://www.cyfieldgroup.com/contracting/environmental/reconstruction-of-old-gsp/ (last accessed 9 February 2023).

[51] Cyfield Group (no 50)

[52] Jonathan Shkurko, 'Cyprus Third in EU for Car Ownership', *Cyprus Mail*, 22 September 2021.

Figure 7: A pocket park off Archbishop Makarios III Avenue,
including seating, shade and water feature, 2023.

attractive and friendly to people and the environment.'[53] The project has reduced through traffic, promoted shared space and created small pocket parks, making the Avenue accessible and pedestrian-friendly (Figure 7). However, the steady decline of the commercial area and the public's reliance on private transport led to shop owners protesting against the project, seeing it as a further detractor to customers.[54] Due to the Municipality's piecemeal approach, the project, and the commercial area, is suffering due to other decisions across the city. However, the project is a positive step towards local placemaking and strengthening, what Jan Gehl terms 'the human dimension' within Nicosia.[55]

The redesign of Eleftheria Square was imagined to be the 'spearhead' of a new era in Nicosia's urban identity.[56] In hindsight, Hans Stimmann might have been correct

---

[53] Nicosia Municipality, 'Ανάπλαση του Εμπορικού Τριγώνου Μακαρίου - Στασικράτους – Ευαγόρου' available at https://www.nicosia.org.cy/el-GR/municipality/projects/completed/12074/, (last accessed 2 November 2023).

[54] Gavriella, 'Makariou Shop Owners Protest Demanding a Return to Two-Way Traffic', *Philenews*, 3 December 2022.

[55] Jan Gehl, *Cities for People*, Washington: Island Press, 2010, 3.

[56] The project took many years to complete and faced a number of setbacks, due to finds uncovered by the Antiquities Department and disputes between the contractor, the municipality and Hadid's London-based architectural office.

to raise concerns about the Zaha Hadid Architects' approach and treatment of such a significant site. And maybe the warnings of 'irreparable mutilation', in light of the 2005 revised Nicosia Local Plan, ring truer today. Iraklis Achniotis warns that projects in historic urban centres aiming at exclusively cultural tourism and investment can be 'responsible for an adulteration of the history of the city [and] for the division of the local community'.[57] The development of the Local Plan, the selection process of an architectural firm and the redesign of Eleftheria Square, could have been moments in which the 'systematic forces' that underlie Nicosia's urban development were truly questioned.[58] Instead, the Municipality's ambitions introduced a third 'glocalised' approach to urban development, which is complicating the city's identity and approach to development.[59]

Conclusion

A dichotomy exists within Nicosia's urban fabric. The capital's urban decision-making process and planning laws find their routes in divergent approaches to urban development. This paper argues that the 'seemingly organic operations' embedded in Cypriot society's attitudes to urban development can be identified and traced back to historic approaches taken during the Ottoman and the British rule.[60] The current urban decision-making process is greatly influenced by an Ottoman legacy of development, shaped by locally-led and informal building agreements that are unconcerned with a national strategy.[61] The existing laws and regulations regarding urban development, upheld by the government and municipalities, maintain a legacy of British planning principles. The legacies of these two approaches continue to influence the perceptions and expectations of Nicosia's development. Recognising these underlying ideologies, exploring how they have, and how they continue to influence attitudes, as well as values, is a step towards understanding the realities of current urban development.

---

[57]   Iraklis Achniotis 'Compact Urban Development and Cypriot Urban Space: The Example of the Historic City Centres', in Nikolas Patsavos, Ioannis Pissourios (eds), *The Cypriot City Paradigm: Urbanity Issues in Design and Planning*, Athens: Domes, Cyprus Architects Association, 2018, 244-271.

[58]   Eduardo E. Lozano, *Community Design and the Culture of Cities: the Crossroad and the Wall*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

[59]   Ruth McManus, 'Identity Crisis? Heritage Construction, Tourism and Place Marketing in Ireland', in Mark McCarthy (ed), *Ireland's Heritages*, London: Routledge, 2015, 235-250.

[60]   Ann Bermingham, 'System, Order and Abstraction: The Politics of English Landscape Drawing around 1795' in William J. T. Mitchell (ed) *Landscape and Pow*er 2nd ed, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002, 77-101.

[61]   Demetriou, Ch. (no 14)

The basic idea around the project lies in the fact that Nicosia has the potential and should begin to function as any other contemporary metropolis.

Figure 8: Screenshot from the 2022 film 'Cyprus:
Nicosia Inaugurates Eleftheria Square after EU-Funded Facelift'

This paper also argues that the redesign of Eleftheria Square has introduced a third 'glocalised' approach to urban development on the island. This has exacerbated the existing dichotomy between the Ottoman and British legacy approaches. The lack of an island wide plan, coupled with a weak planning system, allows municipalities (and powerful individuals/organisations) to develop and implement urban change according to their own agenda. Cyprus has a market-driven economy, an active private sector, overprotected property rights and a growing intercity competition. This has, and could lead to significant sites, such as Eleftheria Square, being reinterpreted based on a singular agenda that includes short-sighted responses to present-day needs.

Christos Passas, Design Director at Zaha Hadid Architects during the redesign of Eleftheria Square, explains that 'the basic idea around the project lies in the fact that Nicosia has the potential and should begin to function as any other contemporary metropolis.'[62] The idea that the redesigning of Eleftheria Square would allow Nicosia to 'begin to function' and be like any other 'contemporary metropolis' ignores the

---

[62] European Commission in Cyprus, 'Cyprus: Nicosia Inaugurates Eleftheria Square after EU-Funded Facelift', 3 January 2022, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4mFstxyFXE (last accessed 27 October 2023).

complex historical dimension to Nicosia's urban development. With rapid ongoing urban changes across the island, it is apparent that there are deep societal and systematic challenges facing the achievement of a sustainable and equitable approach to urban development. However, Filippos Oraopoulos contends that Cypriot architecture of the city, with its historical, colonial and present-day associations is a…

…prototype anthropological field for a neo-Poetic study of desecrations of the contradictions and conflicts of the contemporary neo-liberal architecture of the city…[63]

This paper encourages discussions about the historical dimension of urban development, following Oraiopoulos' call to understand the *poetics* of the Cypriot city.[64] Such discussions, about what constitutes, influences and drives urban change in Nicosia, can help increase understandings, challenge existing power dynamics and question beliefs about our urban spaces. Additionally, increasing education about urban development and engaging people in the planning process can help expand the public's expectations and imaginings of their city.

When understood within a historical narrative and alongside the contemporary realities of Nicosia's urban development, the redesign of Eleftheria Square raises the question: should it be seen as a monument to Nicosia's identity crisis? If so, can it be used as a catalyst to reflect on what constitutes a sustainable and equitable Cypriot city?

Senses of belonging are allied to attachment and love, but the country must first become known and apprehended.[65]

References (53)

Achniotis, I., 'Compact Urban Development and Cypriot Urban Space: The Example of the Historic City Centres', in Nikolas Patsavos, Ioannis Pissourios (eds), *The Cypriot City Paradigm: Urbanity Issues in Design and Planning*, Athens: Domes, Cyprus Architects Association, 2018, 244-271.

Allmendinger, P., *Planning Theory*, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2009.

---

[63] Filippos Oraiopoulos 'The Cypriot Architecture of the City as Contemporary Paradigm', in Nikolas Patsavos, Ioannis Pissourios (eds), *The Cypriot City Paradigm: Urbanity Issues in Design and Planning*, Athens: Domes, Cyprus Architects Association, 2018, 329-343.

[64] Ibid

[65] Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Archer, J., 'Paras, Palaces, Pathogens: Frameworks for the Growth of Calcutta, 1800-1850' (2000) *City & Society*, Vol.19 (1)

Augé, M., *Introduction à une Anthropologie de la Surmodernité*, Paris: Seuil, 1992.

Bermingham, A., 'System, Order and Abstraction: The Politics of English Landscape Drawing around 1795' in William J. T. Mitchell (ed) *Landscape and Power* 2nd ed, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002, 77-101.

Bianca, S., *Urban Form in the Arab World: Past and Present*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

Breen, C., 'The Early Ottomanization of Urban Cyprus' (2019) *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, Vol 53 (1), 21–37.

Charalambous N, Hadjichristos, Ch. 'A Square or a Bridge? The Eleftheria Square Case', proceedings of the *7th International Space Syntax Symposium*, pp.013:1-013:10, Stockholm, Sweden 2009.

Charalambous, N., 'Spatial Forms of Ethnic Coexistence in Ottoman Cyprus: The Role of Urban Form in Patterns of Everyday Life' (2018) *Journal of Urban History*, 1-24.

Charalambous, N., Cömert, N. Z., Geddes, I., 'The Study of Urban Form in Cyprus' (2018) *Urban Morphology* Vol.23 (1).

Cosgrove, D., *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World*, 12, New York; London: Tauris, 2008.

Costantinides, G., 'Reasons for and Consequences of Urban Sprawl', in Nikolas Patsavos, Ioannis Pissourios (eds), *The Cypriot City Paradigm: Urbanity Issues in Design and Planning*, Athens: Domes, Cyprus Architects Association, 2018, 118-147.

Cyfield Group, 'Reconstruction of Old GSP' available at https://www.cyfieldgroup.com/contracting/environmental/reconstruction-of-old-gsp/, (last accessed 9 February 2023).

de Certeau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984.

Demetriou, Ch., 'Nicosia Urban Area', in Geneviève Dubois-Taine (ed.), *European Cities: Insights on Outskirts – From Helsinki to Nicosia*, Vol. 4, Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Housing, PUCA, Paris, 237–66.

Department of Town Planning and Housing of Cyprus, 'History' available at http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/tph/tph.nsf/page13_gr/page13_gr?OpenDocument (last accessed 1 June 2021).

Dubois-Taine G. (ed) 'European Cities - Insights on outskirts Report COST Action 10 Urban Civil Engineering. Vol 1: From Helsinki to Nicosia. Eleven Case Studies & Synthesis' (2004) Brussels

European Commission in Cyprus, 'Cyprus: Nicosia Inaugurates Eleftheria Square after EU-Funded Facelift', 3 January 2022, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4mFstxyFXE, (last accessed 27 October 2023).

Evripidou, S., 'Archaeologists Petition Mayor to Block Old City Projects', *Cyprus Mail*, (30 December 2008)

Evripidou, S., 'Hadid Defends Controversial Eleftheria Square Plans', *Cyprus Mail*, (29 November 2008)

Gavriella, 'Makariou Shop Owners Protest Demanding a Return to Two-Way Traffic', *Philenews*, (3 December 2022)

Gehl, J., *Cities for People*, Washington: Island Press, 2010.

Gençer, C., Çokuğraş, I., 'Regulation of Urban Space in the Ottoman State: The Case of Istanbul (1820-1900)' (2016), *MEGARON / Yıldız Technical University, Faculty of Architecture E-Journal*, Vol, 11 (1), 1-14.

Georgiou, P., '"Staged Nostalgia": Negotiating Identity through Encounters with the Landscapes of Conflict in Cyprus', DPhil thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2019.

Given, M., Hadjianastas, M., 'Landholding and Landscape in Ottoman Cyprus' (2010) *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, Vol.34 (1) 38-60.

Gospodini, A., 'European Cities and Place-Identity' (2002) Discussion Paper Series, Department of Planning and Regional Development, School of Engineering, University of Thessaly, Volos, Vol.8 (2),19-36.

Gospodini, A., 'Portraying, Classifying and Understanding the Emerging Landscapes in the Post-Industrial city' (2006), Cities, Vol.23 (5).

Graham, B., 'Heritage as Knowledge: Capital or Culture?' (2012) *Urban Studies*, Vol.39, (5–6).

Home, R., *Of Planting and Planning: The making of British Colonial Cities*, Routledge, 1996.

Ioannides, F. K., 'A Brief Review of the Evolution of Planning in Cyprus from the End of World War II to the Present', in Nikolas Patsavos, Ioannis Pissourios (eds), *The Cypriot City Paradigm: Urbanity Issues in Design and Planning*, Athens: Domes, Cyprus Architects Association, 2018, 50-73.

Ioannou, B., 'Post-Colonial Urban Development and Planning in Cyprus: Shifting Visions and Realities of Early Suburbia' (2016) *Urban Planning*, Vol.1 (4) 79-88.

King, D. A, '"Exporting 'Planning": The Colonial and Neo-Colonial Experience' (1997) *Urbanism Past & Present* No.5, 12-22

Klokkaris, E., 'Urban Planning and the Concept of the Compact City: The Cypriot Reality', in Nikolas Patsavos, Ioannis Pissourios (eds), *The Cypriot City Paradigm: Urbanity Issues in Design and Planning*, Athens: Domes, Cyprus Architects Association, 2018, 118-147.

Lozano, E. E., *Community Design and the Culture of Cities: The Crossroad and the Wall*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Makrides, D., 'Nicosia Under British Rule 1878-1960' in Demetrios Michaelides (ed), *Historic Nicosia* , Rimal Publications, 2012.

McManus, R., 'Identity Crisis? Heritage Construction, Tourism and Place Marketing in Ireland', in Mark McCarthy (ed), *Ireland's Heritages*, London: Routledge, 2015, 235-250.

Moises, M., 'This is not Bilbao, this is Berlin!' *Parathyro*, 24 November 2013, 4.

Nicosia Municipality, 'Ανάπλαση του Εμπορικού Τριγώνου Μακαρίου - Στασικράτους – Ευαγόρου' available at https://www.nicosia.org.cy/el-GR/municipality/projects/completed/12074/, (last accessed 2 November 2023).

Nicosia Municipality, *Architectural Competition for the Redesign of Eleftheria Square and the Surrounding Area (Terms of the Architectural Competition*, Nicosia Municipality, 2005.

Oraiopoulos, F., 'The Cypriot Architecture of the City as Contemporary Paradigm', in Nikolas Patsavos, Ioannis Pissourios (eds), *The Cypriot City Paradigm: Urbanity Issues in Design and Planning*, Athens: Domes, Cyprus Architects Association, 2018, 329-343.

Papadakis, Y., 'Nicosia after 1960: A River, A Bridge and a Dead Zone' (2006) *Global Media Journal: Mediterranean*, Vol.1 (1) 1-16.

Papadakis, Y., 'Walking in the Hora: "Place" and "Non-Place" in Divided Nicosia' (1998) *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Vol.8 (2).

Read, P., *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou, E., 'Nicosia Under Ottoman Rule 1570-1878' in Demetrios Michaelides (ed), *Historic Nicosia*, Rimal Publications, 2012.

Sharpley, R., 'Tourism, Modernisation and Development on the Island of Cyprus: Challenges and Policy Responses' (2003) *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol.11 (2-3).

Shkurko, J., 'Cyprus Third in EU for Car Ownership', *Cyprus Mail*, 22 September 2021.

Tuan, Y., *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997.

UN-HABITAT, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities*, London, Earthscan, 2009.

Watson, V., '"The Planned City Sweeps the Poor Away…": Urban Planning and 21st Century Urbanisation' (2019) *Progress in Planning*, Vol.72 (3) 151–193.

Wolseley Journal, 31 July 1878, 1946.

Zafersoy H., Batirbaygil, H., 'Urban Integrity: The City of Nicosia, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' (Kentsel Bütünleşiklik: Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti Lefkoşa Kenti Örneği) (2014) *MEGARON / Yıldız Technical University, Faculty of Architecture E-Journal*, Vol. 9 (4) (in Turkish).

Zaha Hadid Architects, 'Eleftheria Square' available at https://www.zaha-hadid.com/masterplans/eleftheria-square/ (last accessed 1 June 2021 (No longer accessible).

List of Figures

Figure 3: 'Map of Nicosia by Lord Kitchener, 1881' Молли, 'Kitchener's map of Nicosia 1882 - Ethnographic Museum (Hadzhigeorgakis Kornesios' House) in Nicosia, Cyprus' (CC BY-SA 4.0) via Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Etnografski-Kitchener%27s_map_1882.jpg (last accessed 6 November 2023).

Figure 4: 'The 'Channel Squadron Gate' 1878 (now Famagust Gate)' Thomson, J., 'A fortified arched gate, Nicosia, Cyprus' Wellcome Collection, United Kingdom (CC BY) available at https://www.europeana.eu/item/9200579/z9hzygaf, (last accessed 6 November 2023).

Figure 5: 'Areal view of Eleftheria Square, 2021' Hatzistavrou, I., 'Eleftherias Square' Audiovisual Service of the European Commission, available at https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/reportage/P-051256, (last accessed 6 November 2023).

Figure 6: 'The 2005 revised Nicosia Local Plan. Map showing the creation of a strong linear connection through the city, linking various green spaces and municipality buildings.' Nicosia Municipality, *Architectural Competition for the Redesign of Eleftheria Square and the Surrounding Area (Terms of the Architectural Competition*, Nicosia Municipality, 2005.

Figure 7: 'A pocket park off Archbishop Makarios III Avenue, including seating, shade and water feature, 2023' By author.

Figure 8: 'Screenshot from the 2022 film 'Cyprus: Nicosia Inaugurates Eleftheria Square after EU-Funded Facelift' European Commission in Cyprus, 'Cyprus: Nicosia Inaugurates Eleftheria Square after EU-Funded Facelift', 3 January 2022, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4mFstxyFXE (last accessed 27 October 2023).