"Shared Space in Conflict Areas: Cultural Processes of Space Appropriation in Nicosia's Walled City"

Zinovia Foka*

(*) PhD Candidate, Bauhaus University Weimar, Germany
    Bauhaus Research School
    Berkaer Straße 9, 99423 Weimar
    zinovia.foka@uni-weimar.de

Abstract

The physical divide of urban areas, often the extreme result of conflict and state contestation is considered a non-sustainable long-term solution. However, a political settlement of the conflict is, in most cases, considered a prerequisite for cooperative development. Thus, where consensus remains unachievable, this temporary situation is becoming permanent, affecting the city's physical landscape, and penetrating various levels of urban life.

Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, has been officially divided since 1974. An impermeable Buffer Zone, imposed as an emergency measure against inter-communal violence, separated its Turkish and Greek Cypriot population for 30 years. Nicosia is also the only divided city with an elaborate Master Plan facilitating collaboration between opposing parties; therefore, has been praised in literature as a successful example of cooperative action taken by professionals before official consensus is reached. However, a diagnostic analysis carried out in 2004 assessed the Master Plan projects as successful only in physical terms, but limited in mitigating the process of continuing division, which remains central to Nicosia's problems.

In 2003, travel restrictions across the Buffer Zone were eased, restoring almost overnight mobility between the city's two sectors. This shift of paradigm offered opportunities for casual daily interactions, and a unique chance for local initiatives to form. Where the top-down approach of the state had failed to play a primary role in processes of conflict reconciliation, rapprochement and integration, actors from various formal and informal groups have gradually stepped forward; their role and the impact of their actions remaining largely unexplored.

This paper is looking at local initiatives and focuses on spatial practices that contest the established notions of partition, with special attention to Nicosia's Walled City and the Buffer Zone bisecting it. The analysis, based on qualitative data collected on field, is centered on the activities and actions of NGOs, as well as the radicalized groups that produced Nicosia's own short-lived Occupy Movement in 2011. Considering the urban landscape as a medium of exerting power and control, spatial transformations through space appropriation reflect the diverse intentions of various actors.

I argue that the Buffer Zone is a dynamic social construction, and as such it induces various interpretations and discourses, while it simultaneously provides the space for their physical expression. It is there that a diversity of people, Turkish and Greek Cypriots alike, come together and negotiate their understanding of belonging, thus also renegotiating in this

context notions of identity, citizenship, and memory. In conclusion, this space is being transformed, even briefly, into 'shared space', produced by the combined efforts of civil society. This paper aims at highlighting this rarely acknowledged perspective of space production under contested state.

Keywords: space appropriation, shared space, memory, reconciliation, conflict, divided cities
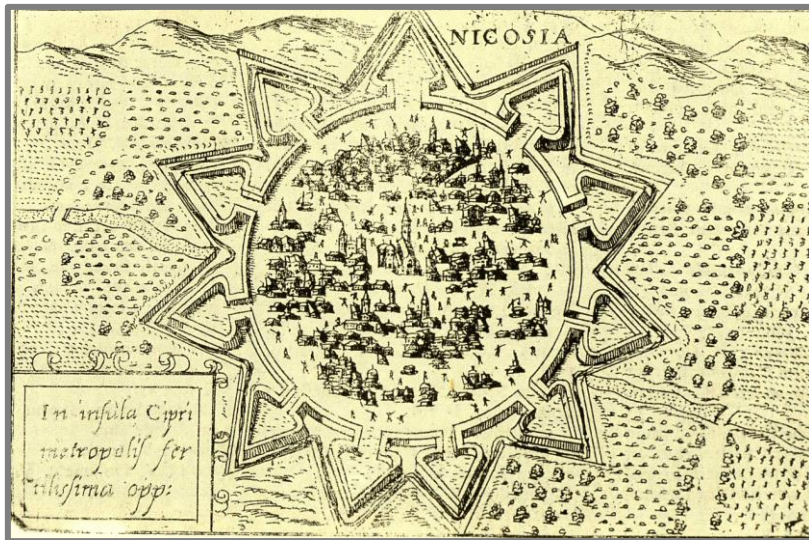

Figure 1. Plan of Nicosia ca. 1579
Stylianou, A. & J. (1989). *The History of the Cartography of Nicosia*.
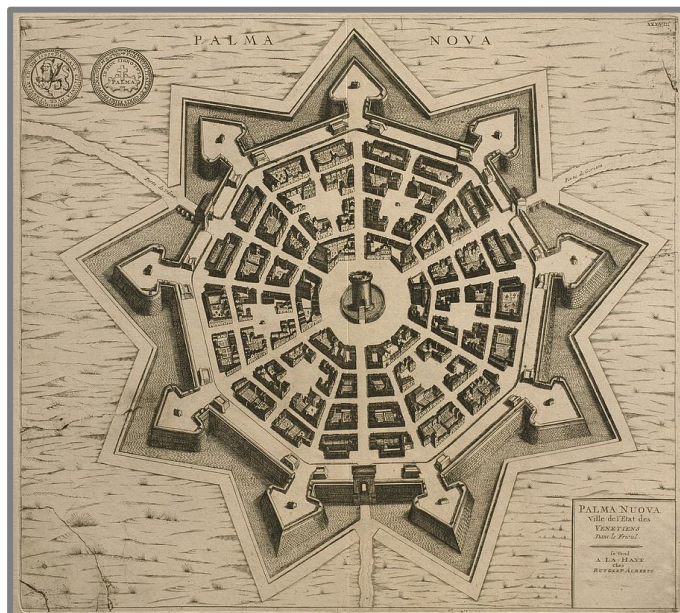Nicosia: Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia, p.40

Figure 2. Plan of Palmanova ca. 1593
Feuerstein, G. (2008). *Urban fiction: strolling through ideal cities from antiquity to the present day*. Stuttgart: Ed. Axel Menges, p. 43

Introduction

"A utopian consciousness is one that is not in agreement with the surrounding reality. Because the concrete determination of what utopia is is always effected from a particular stage of reality, it is possible that utopias of today may become the realities of tomorrow."

(Mannheim, 1965 in Feuerstein, 2008)

Does utopia represent reality's antipode, the unattainable; an ideal humanity is bound to strive for but will always remain elusive? Etymologically the term derives from the Greek words 'ου τόπος' (ou-topos), that is 'no place' and 'ευ τόπος' (eu-topos, eutopia) that means 'good place' (Feuerstein, 2008). Defining Utopia is a task undertaken by many; the concept has permeated academic and religious discourses for centuries, thus any definition used here would certainly be incomplete. Suffice is to say that the concept of utopia had always prompted change from existing conditions that were seen as problematic, corrupt, immoral, unhealthy, limiting or simply inadequate. Utopias relate to diverse visions of ideal polities based on justice and equality, often translated into urban configurations. As a result, cities have been invariably imagined and articulated, planned, shaped and reshaped by design to reflect the desired social and political change. During the Renaissance various 'ideal city' plans were developed – some of them realized; architecture becoming the allegory of good governance and good society. Hence, far more relevant than an endeavor to define utopia to match our current challenges, is to look into its timeless component, that is the interrelation between the ideal, the vision (be it a utopian polity or an ideal urban configuration) and the real society it challenges.

The exploration of this nexus is undertaken in the current paper through an analysis of a city's diverse imaginaries, born in the aftermath of interethnic conflict and consequent urban partition. Divided Nicosia in Cyprus offers an apt framework for such task as its contested spatiality has become the locus of both official planning strategies and cultural processes of space appropriation. The focus of this paper is on its medieval core, the Walled City and the Buffer Zone bisecting it. My aim is to show how diverse visions of and for the city, nonetheless ambiguous or contradictory, coexist and contribute shaping Nicosia's real urban fabric and society.

Becoming a Divided City

Nicosia's Walled City is somewhat ironically[1] linked to the 'ideal city' of the Renaissance due to its plan's prominent resemblance to Palmanova in Italy (see Fig.1 and 2). The similarity is not accidental. Nicosia, under Venetian jurisdiction since 1489, received new fortifications according to the standards of western military architecture, placing emphasis on security and robustness against invasion. The new walls in the shape of a hendecagon (approaching the form of a circle) with eleven heart-shaped bastions and three gates were the work of the engineer Giulio Savorgnano (Stylianou, 1989), who later supervised the construction of Palmanova. Venice lost Nicosia to an Ottoman siege in 1570 and by the end of the War of Cyprus in 1573 the Ottoman Empire had obtained sovereignty over the whole island. Fortified as an ideal city of the Renaissance, Nicosia's urban fabric grew organically within its walls during the Ottoman period, acquiring the morphology it has to date. Cyprus was leashed to the British Empire in 1878, and was eventually officially declared a crown colony in 1925 in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire's collapse.

It is in the island's colonial past (1878-1960), long before dividing lines were drawn and consolidated, that the origins of Nicosia's partition lie. Cyprus's population was, and still is, culturally diverse consisting of an Orthodox Christian majority and a significant Muslim minority, compounded by a small percentage of Armenian, Catholic and Maronite Christians. The gradual shift from religious to ethnic denominations as Greeks and Turks (later Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots) was largely the result of a colonial, i.e. ab extra, view of the population, as well as the espousal of nationalist doctrines on the part of the locals[2]. The transition from the Ottoman millet system to new administrative and legislative structures introduced by British reforms fundamentally changed the political, social and economic life of the Cypriot communities (Holland and Markides, 2006). British colonial policies and new centralized governance structures, away from previous self-administration and its established order, politicized and often accentuated the differences between the two communities[3]

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[1] Nicosia's walls, designed according to the Renaissance concept of the ideal city, later became the symbol of spatial unity. The irony lies in the juxtaposition of the ideal form and vested meaning with current realities on the ground. For more on Nicosia's walls, see Bakshi (2012)

[2] This process was parallel to the formation of the Greek and Turkish states in the respective motherlands. The Modern Greek state was constructed based on the two pillars of Christianity and Hellenism, thus ethnic Greeks were also culturally Orthodox Christians. Modern Turkey emerged as a Republic in 1923, renouncing claims to lands outside the Anatolian peninsula and defining its citizens as culturally Muslim and ethnically Turks (Holland and Markides, 2006).

[3] In the name of pluralism each ethnic group was granted distinct representation on the basis of racial or cultural community in order to pursue their interests (Pollis, 1973). For example, according to the 1882 constitution, the

(Dietzel & Makrides, 2009; Given, 2002; Pollis, 1973). These differences were further stressed by the formation of separate educational systems perpetuating ethnic polarization. The Greek system driven by the ideals of Hellenism facilitated the desire for *Enosis* (Union) with Greece, which was actively pursued with an anti-colonial movement between 1955 and 1959. The Turkish minority increasingly oppressed and growing fearful of a possible future under Greek rule, promoted the option of *Taksim* (Partition of the island). In 1956 the ensuing interethnic conflict escalated to open violence between paramilitary organizations in Nicosia, prompting the British to establish the 'Mason-Dixon Line', a barbed-wire fence separating for the first time the two communities into ethnic enclaves (Mallinson, 2008; Pollis, 1973; Tzermias, 2000).

Under these circumstances, British colonial rule eventually came to an end with the Treaty of Guarantee in 1960, which granted the island's independence as a compromise solution to what is known since as the Cyprus Problem. Britain, Greece and Turkey were given the right to intervene was this independence threatened. However, the newly sovereign state, the Republic of Cyprus, was inevitably contested around nascent competing nationalisms. Moreover, it was bestowed an essentially unalterable constitution, stipulating a Greek Cypriot president and a Turkish Cypriot vice-president assigned equal veto power, which was exercised frequently immobilizing the government (Tzermias, 2000; Papadakis, 2005; Papadakis, Peristianis, & Welz, 2006). Cyprus was a bi-national state on paper, but the social realities on the ground differed substantially. As a result of the constitutional deadlock, a Cypriot army could not be established, and each side maintained a small private army, reviving fears and suspicions between the two ethnic groups.

Three years into independence, in December 1963[4] tension escalated again to open violence following a Greek Cypriot proposal for changes in the constitution. This constitutional crisis, initiating a four-years-long conflict, led initially to political and administrative division, with the Turkish Cypriot members of the government resigning, and the subsequent formation of a separate Turkish Cypriot administration (Wolleh, 2001). In response to these events, the United Nations Security Council decided the establishment of United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) in 1964. Spatial division soon followed. Nicosia was once again divided over the old trace of its 1956 partition; its northern part becoming the largest Turkish

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Legislative Council counted eighteen members of whom six were appointed British officials, nine were elected by Greeks and three by Turks. A combination of British and Turkish votes could still enact legislation against Greek dissent, as the casting vote in case of draw was the Governor's (Holland and Markides, 2006; Pericleous, 2009).

[4] During the 1963 events, known as bloody Christmas, massive casualties were suffered especially on behalf of Turkish Cypriots. According to Wolleh (2001) Turkish Cypriot casualties are estimated to one thousand and Greek Cypriot to about two hundred.

Cypriot enclave. During the following period (1963-1967) of insecurity (Volkan, 1978), both Greek and Turkish Cypriot paramilitaries systematically facilitated the separation of Turkish Cypriots into ethnic enclaves, where they faced especially difficult times after a blockade in food and supplies in 1964.

Nicosia's partition became permanent in July 1974 when Turkey, reacting to a Greek-instigated coup in Cyprus, aiming at overthrowing the Greek-Cypriot leader and installing a pro-Union puppet regime, exercised its guarantor right. The Turkish invasion resulted in the island's partition and the occupation of 37% of its territory[5], massive casualties, extensive displacement of populations[6] and the establishment of an impermeable island-wide border between the two communities. This border, essentially a ceasefire line also known as the 'Green Line', is a buffer zone established, maintained and patrolled until today by UNFICYP. It stretches east to west for about 185 km; in rural areas reaches a width of more than 7 km, while in central Nicosia becomes as thin as 3.3 m (Hadjipavlou, 2007; Constantinou & Papadakis, 2001). Each flank is heavily militarized with outposts of Greek and Turkish Cypriot militia and equipped with relevant partition infrastructure, i.e. barbed wire fences in rural areas (often mine-laid), as well as concrete wall segments, sandbags and barrels serving as street barricades in Walled Nicosia[7]. The Buffer Zone's impermeability, effectively precluding intercommunal interaction for a generation, was rescinded in 2003, when controlled mobility through designated check-points was restored. Since 1974 there have been many failed attempts to resolve the Cyprus Problem, the most recent one being the 2004 Annan Plan. Following its rejection by the Greek Cypriots in a referendum[8], Cyprus became a member state of the European Union in May 2004 as a de jure whole polity but a half territory. As a result the Buffer Zone became the easternmost border of the EU, and Nicosia the divided capital of an EU country. Within this altered framework, peace negotiations were resumed in 2008, hit another deadlock in 2012, and are being at the time of writing resumed.

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[5] In 1983 the Turkish Cypriot president Rauf Denktaş declared this territory a sovereign republic, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which has been recognized only by Turkey (Papadakis, 2006).

[6] According to Wolleh (2001) the numbers of refugees are estimated to 200,000 Greek Cypriots and 60,000 Turkish Cypriots.

[7] The urban part of the Buffer Zone within Walled Nicosia covers about 10% of its area (Constantinou & Papadakis, 2001).

[8] In the referenda 65% of Turkish Cypriots favored this plan that would have brought the two parts of the island into the EU together, while a vast majority of 76% of Greek Cypriots opposed it (Pericleous, 2009).

The depoliticized vision of Nicosia's reunification

In the aftermath of the conflict the Buffer Zone acquired the status of a symbol in Cypriot imagination, accentuated by the fact that it had been inaccessible. It is central to both national master narratives that have been constructed in a self-validating way, as each side sees their own as victims and the 'other' as perpetrator. The Greek-Cypriot narrative revolves around the issue of Turkey's invasion and occupation in 1974, before which Cyprus's two communities lived peacefully, worked and prospered together. In this narrative, the Buffer Zone represents a brutal, shameful line of separation, often depicted as a blood dripping line[9], and serves as the constant reminder of people, homes and territories lost to conflict (Demetriou, 2005; Dikomitis, 2005; Kliot & Mansfield, 1997). Turkish Cypriots are presented as compatriots, citizens of equal rights under the constitution of the Republic of Cyprus[10], while Turks (and especially settlers from the mainland and Turkish soldiers) are regarded as foes. This narrative fosters the desire for the island's reunification, which is exalted to the most significant political goal.

On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriot narrative stresses the suffering of an endangered oppressed minority under Greek-Cypriot rule (Navaro-Yashin, 2012). The Buffer Zone in this narrative is a line of protection and safety from the untrustworthy 'other' (Kliot & Mansfield, 1997; Papadakis, Peristianis, & Welz, 2006; Papadakis, 2006). The focus is on the violent period between 1963 and 1967, while the events of 1974 and the consequent partition are celebrated as liberation. Similarly denouncing the pain of the 'other', this narrative legitimates division (Papadakis, Peristianis, & Welz, 2006) contending the impossibility of peaceful coexistence.

Both narratives capitalize on the Buffer Zone's spatiality, imbued with emotions and meanings, to legitimize opposing political claims, and opposing visions – reunification, division – for the future. These two visions articulate what Loizos has called "obsessive ethnic nationalism" (1998, p. 40) wherein the two communities are deceptively regarded and treated as homogenous. Papadakis (2006) further explored the notion of 'ethnic autism'[11] analyzing the construction, widespread espousal and maintenance of official state narratives. Within this framework, peace negotiations stipulating a certain level of commitment to reconciliation and

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[9] The illustration is usually accompanied by the nationalist slogan 'Δεν ξεχνώ' (Den xehno) which means 'I do not forget'.

[10] Spyrou (2006) offers an insight into the conceptual gap between the official Greek Cypriot rhetoric and history education propagating the Greekness of the island.

[11] In this context, Papadakis uses the term (ethnic) 'autism' in Ignatieff's (1999) terms as "the unwillingness to engage with others' voices and experiences" (Papadakis, 2006, p. 68).

some kind of solution to the Cyprus Problem have produced with UN mediation the construct of bi-communal, bi-zonal, federal state as a common base for future agreement[12] (Wolleh, 2001). Ostensible commitment to the eventual success of peace negotiations dictated certain ways of action (or reaction) on behalf of both administrations[13] with regard to bi-communal collaboration, by and large a taboo.

After 1974 communication between the two communities was near impossible; telephones were disconnected, postal services interrupted, crossing to the other side prohibited. Nicosia was *the place* in Cyprus most affected by partition and the urban area where the divide became an everyday experience. Its Walled City, had turned into two edges, gradually abandoned by its old inhabitants, rendered unattractive and for years considered dangerous, especially because of its proximity to the Buffer Zone and the 'other'. It was there, however, that bi-communal collaboration was initiated.

The rather pressing matter of a saturated sewage system forced the representatives of the two parts of Nicosia to seek, with the mediation of UN, a common solution. When the 1974 hostilities commenced, the sewage system renewal in Nicosia was already underway[14]. The results of de-facto partition forced the project to a halt, leaving it inoperable, its infrastructure deteriorating and accumulating debt. Thus, it was necessity for the project's urgent completion that dictated cooperation between the two communities in Nicosia. Within four years, an agreement was produced delineating the framework of collaboration based on a non-political approach wherein all participants were divested of their official capacity[15] and formalities were forsaken. A bi-communal technical team was established, which was explicitly of "no legal standing" and "outside the political process" (The Nicosia Sewerage Project, 1995, p. 8). This framework was, however, based on a groundbreaking premise; Nicosia was to be tackled as a whole.

It was during this first instance of bi-communal collaboration in the 1980s that a new vision for the city emerged, that of reunification. At a time when partition was recent and the

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[12] The two sides have not yet reached an understanding regarding the implementation of these principles into a form of governance.

[13] The term 'administration' is used here instead of 'state' to denote the governance structures, sustained by political elites, on both sides of the divide regardless of their international legal status.

[14] The Nicosia Sewage Project was initiated in 1968 as a technical assistance project under the auspices of United Nations Development Programme, and funded by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (The Nicosia Sewerage Project, 1995, p. 8).

[15] Nicosia had separate municipalities since 1958. During the agreement negotiations its two mayors, Lellos Demetriades and Mustafa Akinci, emerged as leading figures, eventually setting the basis for collaboration between Nicosia's (and Cyprus's) two communities for the years to come. They participated in this process and all consequent meetings simply as representatives of Nicosia's two communities, not in their official capacity.

two communities were still trying to cope with their traumas, a technical project envisaged Nicosia's reunification underpinned by trust-building. These two attributes were soon enhanced and embedded in the inception of Nicosia Master Plan (NMP), the second major undertaking of the two municipal authorities. With the NMP the vision of the city's reunification was consolidated. The Plan was conceived as a framework[16] that would guide and set out the overall planning strategy for Nicosia, ensuring the rational development of the city's two parts and preparing the ground for reunification (NMP Final Report, 1984). Under the auspices of United Nations Development Program (UNDP), a bi-communal technical team[17] was established to tackle planning, architectural, economic, environmental, and social problems caused or accentuated by the divide. Principal amongst them were the depopulation and degradation of the Walled City and the ensuing uncontrollable urban sprawl, also a result of refugees' influx into Nicosia, especially in the early years of partition. Following the conceptualization of the strategy, an operational plan for central Nicosia[18] was produced and twin pilot projects were launched thus avoiding asymmetrical power relations. Funded by international benefactors[19] these projects aimed at directly contributing to the economic and social revitalization of the central area, while serving as examples to engage the private sector and attract private investment ensuring the Plan's viability (NMP Final Report, 1984).

However, in the same spirit as the Sewage Project, the NMP too was relying on a non-political approach. Embedding these technical projects in local politics would subordinate them to the volatility of the Cyprus Problem negotiations, thus endangering their realization altogether (Demetriades, 1998). Hence, disentanglement from the complexity of the contested political realities became commonsense. To a certain degree outside the influence and control of local politics, these bi-communal projects would assumingly be able to continue unhindered, fostering a culture of – albeit at this initial stage technical – collaboration without involvement or stakes in politics. Nicosia's reunification was, hence, a depoliticized vision.

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[16] With a 20 years horizon (1981-2001) the NMP would be allowed to plan for the long-term, implementing in phases various proposals, also monitored by an International Consultative Panel (ICP) of professionals which would contribute with reviews and recommendations (NMP Final Report, 1984).

[17] The team consisted of Greek and Turkish Cypriot architects, planners, engineers and sociologists closely collaborating with foreign advisors.

[18] This area included the Walled City and its adjacent central business districts on its south and north.

[19] Funds were principally channeled through United States Agency for International Development (USAID) into the responsible United Nations subdivision. Annual humanitarian assistance for Cyprus from the United States of America was by 1995 amounting to 10 million dollars. From 1992 onwards the entirety of funds was dedicated to bi-communal projects (The Nicosia Sewerage Project, 1995). Local communities were not sharing part of the realization costs.

The effort to stay away from the political processes pertaining to the Cyprus Problem had, however, serious implications for NMP's expected effectivity and implementation. The Master Plan was a planning body without executive authority, established under the light of a solution soon to come, at which point the city's problems could be addressed in their entirety. Not only was the NMP expected to become fully effective *only* after a solution of the Cyprus Problem, but the implementation of its various proposals preparing the city's reunification was undertaken by local authorities south and north, thus becoming inevitably fragmented.

In this manner, first the Sewage Project and then the NMP inaugurated a practice of depoliticizing not only the planning process but also bi-communal relations ab initio. Bi-communal collaboration in these technical projects in the 1980s was soon appreciated by the United Nations as means towards trust- and confidence-building between the two communities, thus serving its mandate and qualifying as humanitarian aim per se[20]. It was consequently proclaimed a prerequisite for funding projects aiming at peace, reconciliation and societal rapprochement. Thus, depoliticisation turned from an unavoidable repercussion to an essential component of a peace strategy; in due process, bi-communal projects and activities were not only *removed from political influence* but were also *rendered apolitical* themselves.

Sporadic bi-communal meetings were organized in the 1970s and 1980s (Broome, 2005) but the surge in regular activity occurred in the early 1990s. During the period 1994 – 1997, with the agency and support of strong international actors and under the auspices of UN, various conflict resolution workshops and other regular bi-communal events were held in the Buffer Zone, which was deemed neutral ground. Main goal for the participants of these events was simply to meet, interact with the 'other', understand their hopes and fears, and construct a relationship of trust. This functioned primarily on a personal level through informal networking of interested individuals, who were expected to become in due process the foundation of societal reconciliation after a political solution to the Cyprus Problem was reached. Bi-communal activities enjoyed wider disapproval by the societies on either side of the divide, while the participants were often portrayed by the media as traitors. Moreover, participation was conditioned by the granting or denial of permissions[21] from local

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[20] *"[…] to qualify for humanitarian assistance, projects had to provide opportunities for Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to work together in a non-political manner on specific areas of concern for the overall well-being of all Cypriots"* (The Nicosia Sewerage Project, 1995, p. 10).

[21] As a rule, discouragement was facilitated by the authorities in subtle ways through various regulatory factors, including the denial of special authorization for individuals to cross to the 'other side' or to enter the Buffer Zone.

administrations to enter the Buffer Zone. In order to attract more people to bi-communal activities, the engaged participants promoted projects with a distinct cultural or educational character, while simultaneously further downplaying the political aspect[22] of bi-communalism. This surge of activity in the 1990s led to the formation of the bi-communal movement, a small but dedicated group of individuals, who kept trying to find ways to meet even after a ban on crossings, enforced by TRNC in 1997, effectively disallowed Turkish Cypriot participation in bi-communal activities.

In tandem the depoliticized vision of Nicosia's reunification and UN's peace strategy molded intercommunal interaction, delineating the framework within which it was to be understood and allowed to operate. Concurrently though, they defined as well – even if by negation – ways of resistance paved by those who wished not to abide by these established norms. Nurtured within the bi-communal movement of the 1990s, these other – albeit ambiguous – imaginaries were catalyzed by the restitution of mobility in 2003.

The ambiguous imaginaries of Nicosia's Buffer Zone

The year 2003 marks a milestone in recent Cypriot history, as it saw the restitution of mobility[23] between south and north after 29 years of official partition. Casual effortless interaction, although through designated crossing points, signified the end of an era for the bi-communal movement, raising hopes for reunification, while forcing its proponents to rethink their agendas. Initial enthusiasm was soon thwarted by the rejection of the Annan Plan; however, as political elites remained idle[24], local initiatives struggled to come forth and bring about the changes they aspired to. Their diverse imaginaries acquired spatial expression through cultural processes of space appropriation relating to Nicosia's Buffer Zone. On the

During the periods when high level peace negotiations were progressing, bi-communal activities were boosted and the possibilities to meet increased as a way on the part of political elites to show good will (Broome, 2005; Loizos, 2006; Vogel & Richmond, 2013).

[22] Bi-communal activities have been politically contested around, hence conditioned by, the issue of 'implied recognition', that is the unintentional legitimation of the 'other' state through interaction in diverse contexts. The fear of 'implied recognition' has played a primary role in vilifying participation in bi-communal events alongside official restrictions, state rhetoric and media stirring general public disapproval. For an in-depth analysis see Constantinou & Papadakis, 2001.

[23] Many analysts attribute the opening of the crossings to the massive antigovernment demonstrations in the north between 2000 and 2003; amongst their main demands had been the opening of the border and a halt in Turkey's interference in local politics (Dimitriu & Vlahos, 2006; Ilter & Alankus, 2010).

[24] The Greek Cypriot authorities' reception of and reaction to the opening of the crossings are beyond the scope of the current paper. Demetriou (2007) offers an insightful analysis of the reconfiguration of Greek Cypriot political subjectivity in relation to shifts in state rhetoric.

other hand, after the opening of the crossings, an evaluation of the Nicosia Master Plan took place as well, leading to the formulation of a new planning strategy for Nicosia's Walled City, a new vision, which for the first time incorporated proposals for the Buffer Zone. It is within the scope of the current paper to present these claims to the Buffer Zone's space, and explore the ways they reflect the involved actors' diverse intentions and associated imaginaries for Nicosia.

The New Vision Plan (NVP)

Its name is indicative of its intentions. The 'New Vision for the Core of Nicosia Project' emerged after a diagnostic analysis was carried out in 2004 by the NMP team to revisit and evaluate the achievements and shortfalls of the NMP (New Vision Final Report, 2004). According to this evaluation, the so far realized projects have had considerable success in physical terms, stimulating small scale activities and pockets of high quality residential development. However, it concluded that "continuing division is central to the persistence of Nicosia's problems, and the impacts of public policies have been limited in mitigating this process" (New Vision Final Report, 2004, p.5). The diagnostic analysis identified as main deficit the absence of **"**a common *Vision* based on the perception of the Core Area as a functionally unified entity" (Diagnostic Report Executive Summary, 2004, p. 8, emphasis in the original) that would be able to reach beyond and eventually overcome the administrative and institutional fragmentation pertaining to planning policy implementation in Nicosia. Towards a new vision for Nicosia's Core Area, four strategic alternatives were contemplated. The 'Cultural and Culture-related Regeneration Vision' was selected as the most promising amongst those proposed. This was essentially an Urban Heritage-driven strategy seeking to exploit the Walled City's neglected cultural assets to attract private investment in cultural tourism, tourism-related activities and education. Culture was, thus, seen as the prime mover for future development, heritage and environmental quality as marketable resources and centrality as a unifying factor to counter division (New Vision Outline Plan, 2005). The selected strategy relied heavily on symbolism and the Walled City's significance for both communities, qualities essential for what was aiming to become a common vision for the future.

The Plan[25] that was eventually produced remained faithful to its predecessor's values aiming at Nicosia's reunification and the Walled City's rehabilitation, while addressing for the

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[25] This was the Outline Plan consisting of an Outline Strategic Plan, serving as the overall strategic framework, and an Outline Interim Operational Plan, to address operational challenges and facilitate the gradual implementation of strategic objectives (New Vision Outline Plan, 2005).

first time Nicosia's Buffer Zone, earmarked for cultural and educational uses. Private investment was considered the main drive for regeneration, with the potential growth expected to trigger the desired social and economic regeneration[26]. However, in the time between NMP and NVP the demographics of the Walled City had changed significantly; despite the urban fabric's degradation low rents had attracted economic migrants who gave back to the Walled City some of its lost vitality. Especially in the south, young Cypriots as well had started returning to the Walled City, creating a lively alternative scene that did not match the NVP's preferred social profile. These marginal groups were primarily affected by gentrification processes instigated by NMP and NVP projects and policies that soon transformed the Greek Cypriot sector of the Walled City into a hub of cafes, restaurants and other tourism-related facilities.

Additionally, the New Vision shared with its predecessor NMP certain rather crucial shortcomings as well. This Plan's effectivity too was conditioned by a future solution to the Cyprus Problem. It was, however, more proactive in its intentions to promote and implement actions in or close to the Buffer Zone[27] that were considered instrumental for the city's future reunification. Furthermore, it proposed a new institutional framework[28], yet to be applied, for the implementation of its proposals in order to overcome the administrative fragmentation.

The New Vision inaugurated a new distinctly cultural turn in bi-communal planning practices in Nicosia, placing emphasis on the Walled City's historic character and its potential to generate economic growth through commercialization. Leading regeneration processes in Nicosia, heritage was also envisaged as a unifying factor for the two communities in both

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[26] Existing human resources, consisting of poor migrants and low income families and individuals, were deemed unable to lead the desired regeneration processes, which were expected from young Cypriot families, able to invest in housing restoration and businesses (New Vision Outline Plan, 2005).

[27] Within NVP's proposed portfolio, projects relating to the Buffer Zone were prioritized under the condition that this area would soon become accessible. Otherwise, implementation would be effectively suspended, and the projects' function would become preparatory "to stress the need for cooperation and to inform the authorities about the type of common actions to be undertaken urgently on either side of the buffer zone […]" (NVP Final Report, 2004, p.19- 20).

[28] The NVP proposed a three-step transition to a new administrative structure, the "Joint Walled City Development Board". The process involved the initial transfer of relevant responsibilities (planning, financing, implementing) from central to municipal level; in a second phase, the close cooperation of two still separate Management Boards, until the eventual establishment of a joint authority to assume all planning related functions for the Walled City as a "Special Administration Area". It was also stressed that the development of a joint Development Plan was necessary and that the strategy's effectivity would be impeded within the existing fragmented framework (NVP Final Report, 2004, p.16- 18).

spatial and social terms[29]. This, however, required a reconceptualization of heritage away from divisive ethno-nationalist connotations and towards the idea of a common or rather shared heritage. This concept was accommodated within the frame of supranational organizations and structures, and subsequently endorsed with relevant campaigns and awards. The Plan for the Rehabilitation of the Walled City was granted the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2007, which endows architectural concepts attending to the challenges faced by societies with significant Muslim presence. This award asserted the Plan's sensibility towards Turkish Cypriot needs and aspirations, while emphasizing on its capacity to bring together opposing sides "to build a shared space for all people and all faiths" (AKAA 10th Cycle, 2007, p.132). Other awards followed in the frame of Europa Nostra, an organization supported by the European Investment Bank Institute and concerned with the protection of Europe's cultural and natural heritage. The NMP survey 'The Architectural Heritage of the Buffer Zone in the Walled City of Nicosia' received the Europa Nostra Research Award in 2011, and two years later Nicosia's Buffer Zone was placed amongst the 'Seven Most Endangered Europa Nostra Heritage Sites'.

These actions reflect the unfolding of an organized attempt to claim the Walled City and its Buffer Zone as shared cultural heritage, purged of past violent and divisive memories, and reimagined as collectively beneficial resources. This process coupled with the advancing gentrification is transforming the Walled City into a rebranded product for cultural consumption, of which the Buffer Zone seems to be a key element. However, such an understanding of the Walled City and its Buffer Zone as the one dictated top-down by the New Vision obscures reconciliation processes other than through culture, disregards other interpretations that seek to renegotiate and cope with the traumatic past in different ways, and excludes the production of other kinds of 'shared' space.

Local Initiatives: Home for Cooperation (H4C) and Occupy the Buffer Zone Movement (OBZ)

These two local initiatives that represent the liberal and radical leftist forces manifested in the bi-communal movement of the 1990s have provided in recent years alternative imaginaries for the Buffer Zone, concretized through processes of space appropriation. The Home for Cooperation (H4C), founded in 2011, is the culmination of the efforts of the liberal forces within the bi-communal movement to establish a multifunctional

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[29] The New Vision underlines that "this collective historic environment", evident in the existence (and often side-by-side coexistence) of diverse monuments, religious sites and landmarks, has not been employed to boost the social and economic vitality of the Walled City (NVP Final Report, 2004).

activity center inside Nicosia's Buffer Zone (Home for Cooperation, undated). It was initiated by the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research[30] (AHDR), an esteemed NGO working towards enhancing dialogue on history education in Cyprus since 2003. Funded by European Economic Area (EEA) grants, Norway grants, and the Republic of Cyprus, this center aims at supporting bi-communal cooperation and strengthening civil society[31]. It is located at the periphery of the Walled City at the Ledra Palace crossing[32], the first to open in 2003, and housed in a formerly abandoned building, which offers office and meeting space to a wide range of NGOs developing around it.

Post-2003, H4C stands at the heart of institutionalized activism; NGOs are raising funds and organizing manifold events and actions (language courses, conferences, movie screenings, a Critical History Archive) promoting cooperation and dialogue between the two communities. Moreover, it has developed into a space for socialization as well, assessed as neutral, conveniently placed in-between, and easily accessible to both communities. With the crossings open, H4C facilitates interaction. Bringing people in the Buffer Zone it is transforming this space into a bridge, connecting the two sides of Nicosia instead of dividing them. It represents the spatialized vision of institutionalized activism, functioning as a peculiar public space[33], aiming at expanding beyond the limits of the Buffer Zone to advocate a new norm for interrelation between Nicosia's communities, one based on individual commitment, group dynamics, and interest in societal rapprochement.

Functioning through official procedures[34] and sanctioned[35] by both the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot administrations, H4C has retained the apolitical profile propagated by bi-communal activities under the auspices of UN in the 1990s. Thus, it has also become subjugated to the Cyprus Problem and its – always imminent but still elusive – solution, in

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[30] AHDR is supported by teachers' trade unions on both sides of the divide (Epaminondas, 2011).

[31] Civil society is defined as "the arena – outside of the family, the state, and the market – which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests" (State of Civil Society, 2013). In Cyprus, through the socialization of individuals in the bi-communal movement a civil society was gradually born, and organized in an aggregation of groups, institutions and non-governmental organizations concerned not only with peace and reconciliation efforts but also, within this context, with wider societal issues.

[32] The Ledra Palace crossing holds special symbolism for the bi-communal movement. The homonymous hotel located across the street from H4C, has diachronically been the locus for most bi-communal meetings, including most bi-communal activities in the early 1990s, the Nicosia Master Plan meetings and the official negotiations for the Cyprus Problem.

[33] The way H4C users and supporters relate to its space is evident in the use of the term 'public space' to characterize H4C, which was recurrent in interviews conducted by the author in 2012 and 2013.

[34] To operate in the Buffer Zone, H4C is bound by the rules of the UN regarding civilian presence and permitted activities (personal communication, 2013).

[35] Politicians have been attending bi-communal events in H4C in their individual capacity.

other words, subjected to the current status quo. Interviewed participants (personal communication, 2013) portrayed the role of their organizations as preparatory; their work pertains to societal rapprochement and reconciliation of differences to create a basis for future cohabitation when a solution is reached. Moreover, H4C has become entangled in the cultural turn in terms of projects and activities with mainly educational and cultural scope, as well as official endorsements; it received for example the Europa Nostra Conservation Award in 2014. However the still limited outreach to the wider public, the anticipated spillover effect, has evoked criticism within parts of the engaged civil society (personal communications, 2013), concerned that the bi-communal movement has become self-congratulatory and rather constricted within the Buffer Zone. A safe place for its supporters and members, H4C allows their ideas to grow and mature but obstructs their communalization. Initiatives are limited in the Buffer Zone, which despite the restored mobility, still functions as a border between communities, in spatial, political, and social terms.

Within this context, the emergence of the Occupy movement (OBZ) in October 2011 is regarded as the spatialization of a contradictory vision through reclaiming and appropriating another part of the Buffer Zone, the Ledra Street/ Lokmaci crossing[36] at the center of Nicosia's Walled City. Undoubtedly inspired by other concurrent Occupy movements worldwide, Nicosia's OBZ developed organically from protests and other events directed against neoliberal approaches to economic development of the Walled City intensifying social inequalities. Openly critical to exiting systems of governance in Cyprus, it was thus inherently and outspokenly political. The protestors, a group consisting of leftists/anti-authoritarian youth, academics, artists, and activists, from both sides of the divide and abroad, occupied the fifty-meters-long passage between checkpoints, and due to the unprecedented character of this action managed to camp there for eight months. OBZ was open to everyone and easily accessible; situated within the only crossing in Cyprus dedicated to pedestrian use, it functioned as a plaza, a public space for civic engagement direly missing from Nicosia. The occupiers organized a gamut of activities, discussions, movie screenings and workshops, while relying on and experimenting with self-organization and self-rule to shape their cohabitation (Ilican, 2013). OBZ was not conceptualized as a reunification movement in reference to the Cypriot context; it was, however, generally concerned with peace and the island's demilitarization in the frame of an open, inclusive society freed from known social norms. It

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[36] This crossing opened in 2008 and, unlike the earlier ones, was one of NVP's Spatial Development Areas (priority project).

was the first time in 37 years of official partition that people had unmediated, unauthorized, access to the Buffer Zone, a fact that frustrated both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot authorities and confounded the UN, more so due to the absence of a legal framework to evict the occupiers. When one was established, the Greek Cypriot antiterrorist squad was authorized to raid the camp and forcibly remove them.

OBZ enjoyed limited support by local media, while alleged associations with unlawful activities further delegitimized the movement in the public eye. Its significance, however, lies neither in numbers nor in widespread acceptance, but in challenging the established norm in a very real and tangible way. The occupiers proved, by performing sovereignty in the Buffer Zone, that shared space in Cyprus was possible without a solution to the Cyprus Problem and, more importantly, without the liaison of political elites. They did not simply appropriate a piece of land in the Buffer Zone; they appropriated its symbolism and significance for Cypriots as well, performing at the same time reunification and the utopian polity where this was possible. By imagining and vesting new meanings in this spatiality, they also transformed it, realizing and inhabiting even briefly, in-between the polities they renounced, their own vision for Nicosia.

Conclusion

In this paper I have explored the origins and discussed the context of three instances of space appropriation in Nicosia, relating to diverse visions of and for the city. The New Vision Plan (NVP), based on the ideal of Nicosia's reunification, has propelled physical transformations in different areas of the Walled City, seeking to regenerate it economically and socially based on a top-down Urban Heritage-driven strategy. In this sense, the New Vision does not plan for the area's current inhabitants here and now, but for an imagined Turkish - Greek Cypriot society inhabiting a reunified Nicosia at a hypothetical time in the future. Within this frame it has laid claim to the Buffer Zone, reinterpreting it as shared cultural heritage, in order to utilize it for the fulfilment of the vision of reunification. This vision is, however, conditioned by a solution to the Cyprus Problem, which remains elusive in the hands of political elites. This interpretation of the Buffer Zone as cultural heritage is challenged by local initiatives also laying various claims to its space. The Home for Cooperation (H4C) has since its foundation in 2011 functioned as shared space for institutional activists. Its locus has been reclaimed and through spatial practices transformed into a bridge of connection. Albeit restricted by its supporters' agendas, international sources of financing, and arrangements

with the authorities and the UN, it remains the result of the combined efforts of civil society to renegotiate past trauma and belonging, by renegotiating the ways they interact with the 'other'. Yet, this intercommunal interaction is also conditioned by a depoliticized approach, wherein the role of the civil society ought to be preparatory and serve the society in its capacity, i.e. through cultural or educational actions. Fundamentally challenging this perception, the Occupy movement (OBZ) revolutionized both intercommunal interaction and space production in Nicosia. Through the appropriation and transformation of space and meaning, a new kind of shared space against the established norms was briefly not only materialized but also inhabited.

Synergies between initiatives are unpredictable and complex. As people engage in multiple activities and certain socio-spatial practices are embraced by many, the lines separating them become obscured. The Buffer Zone, however, remains at the epicenter of their actions, becoming an intersection of their various imaginaries, while offering the space for their physical expression. It is there, that various practices converge or collide, where the struggle over power and control is taking place. The Buffer Zone becomes contested around competing claims to space seeking legitimization on the level of the everyday; it is thus as much the locus for compliance with established norms as for revolutionary praxis, articulation of new ideas, visions and demands. Through these processes, the Buffer Zone is being transformed, transforming along the peoples' lived experience of the city, the ways they relate to past experience, as well as the ways they imagine future urban experience, and how they articulate and pursue the realization of these imageries today. Within this frame, these three instances of space appropriation provide pregnant analytical moments to understand the Buffer Zone as a dynamic social construction, where utopian visions are not unattainable ideal constructs, but opportunities to lead the transformation of our realities here and now.

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