



New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences



Volume 5, Issue 6 (2018) 91-95

www.prosoc.eu

ISSN 2547-8818

Selected Paper of 7th World Conference on Design and Arts (WCDA 2018), 28-30 June 2018, BAU International Berlin
University of Applied Sciences, Berlin – Germany

Re-reading Nicosia's urban transformation architecturally

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Suggested Citation:

Saglam, H & Anil, G. (2018). Re-reading Nicosia's urban transformation architecturally. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 5(6), pp 91-95. Available from: www.prosoc.eu

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Siniša Opić, Zagreb University, Croatia & Prof. Dr. Ayşe Cakir Ilhan, Ankara University, Turkey.

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Abstract

All cities are transformed and changed in the time being. This change is an important database for people who work in the design area to theorize the future. Nicosia, which was on the focus of important changes as a capital city, witnessed important changes in the past and today and especially after the recent policies it started to experience rapid changes. The aim of this research is to identify the change in the Nicosia city's most important line Kyrenia Gate and Eleftheria Square and prepare a baseline for future decisions. These changes also effected from social, economic and cultural change through architecture, also we try to classify the data to reflect the predicted transformation and create sources for prospective studies.

Keywords: Urban transformation, Kyrenia Gate-Eleftheria Square line.

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1. Introduction

Although each city has differences with regards to each other, it is possible to make similar or different readings on each of them. Cultural differences of the communities that make up the city, historical background and socio-cultural products can be the topic of these readings and various hypotheses have been founded for the formation and development of urban spaces. Architects, designers and in some occasions experts from different disciplines have come up with these hypotheses. Since cities' historical development is directly reflected in the urban texture and architecture, this process is important on understanding the city and architecture. In this regard, although cities are vibrant, as it is indicated by various urban theorists, cities reflect the community's identity.

As the capital of the Mediterranean's third biggest island Cyprus, Nicosia has always had an important place due to its strategic position. Each civilisation has left its architectural culture, story and experience that we can trace today. The important aspects which constitute the city today are these structures which inspired each other and survived until today. In first periods, while the important settlements have been on the shore side, in time due to the various reasons it has pulled back to the inner parts of the island.

Nicosia is a city that founded in the currently named Kanlıdere's (historically known as Padias Stream) curl towards the east of Mesoria Plain (Gurkan, 2006).

To preserve the security of the society and protect it from outside effects, Nicosia developed inside the castle walls (Gurkan, 1996). Historically, among the civilisations existing on the island, the brightest period has been the 'Lusignan period'. The city of Nicosia has also started to attract attention from the western states due to the improvements in private and common spaces. The entrance and exits of Kanlıdere, which divided the city as eastern and western in that period, constituted the most important two gates. In that period, trade line was considered in eastern-western axis and a passage from north to south was through bridges. It is known that the mentioned river had a very important contribution to the future formation of the city (Gurkan, 1987).

In the year 1571, the Island entered into domination of Ottomans. This period has been identified with the location of 9 of the 11 bastions, which had three main trade lines and entrance and exit of the palace. The most important thing that Ottomans constructed on this line is the re-functioning of the structures and it created an opportunity to improve the line commercially. In the year 1878, the Island has been rented to Britain and British domain started on the island. City's development outside of the walled city and closure and transformation of Kanlıdere to main transportation line has been the most important practices of the period. The urban structure started to transform and remodel. This different approach and transformation of the construction material enabled the creation of a new language that can be directly read on the architectural product. With the opening of the doors on the green line again in 2003 for passage, the spaces that are present in both regions started to re-emerge and today it has become a very important workspace that changes in every aspect, witnesses different pursuits and creates different work areas in different fields of architecture. Since this change continues in a rapid pace, it might be too early to determine, understand and give meaning to the situation but identifying the current situation can shed light to what kinds of studies can be done in the future.

In this study, it was important to analyse the structures that are called elements that limit the communal spaces, in other words, streets, avenues and open spaces. Various studies also have been made to understand the elements that make a city. Analysis studies which have been done on one building, avenue or other urban elements have been based on different methods. While it is possible to read the single structures only through programs, environmental effects or body layout, it is also possible to do this reading with a couple of them. The area that is determined for the study includes the city's northern and southern part, therefore both the community's living area by starting from Kyrenia Gate and going until the end of the Eleftheria Square.

Within the scope of this study, due to the considered buildings being attached and effectiveness of the two-dimensional facades rather than body effect, the transformation of the considered buildings has been mainly done according to the function, facade, the material that has been used in facades and floor number.

To understand the city of Nicosia, it is possible to analyse how the structures in Kyrenia Avenue and Ledra Avenue changed and what functions they had. Construction materials that have been used investigated by considering the transformations on 186 buildings by including their facades on the line, that existed from past to present. Kyrenia Gate has been taken as a starting point in the considered space study. One hundred eighty-six buildings that are on the indicated line have been investigated by starting from the left side of the road according to their numbers on the street and supported by the location on the figure and images. Starting from Kyrenia gate and ending in Eleftheria Square, the line has been considered without losing its historical and spatial integrity. In general, the presence of the Courthouses, which are the significant landmarks of the city built in British period, city's first great hotel named 'Saray Otel' and the presence of first collective houses on the line emphasises the social, cultural, political, economic and various other importance of this area. Actually, the mentioned line lost its central location in the 1,974 division and became a periphery of the city. Generally, due to economic and social reasons, peripheries are more prone to collapses. The line was undeveloped due to various reasons but after the re-opening of the border in 2003, it was reborn and gained a new momentum. Line as a workspace has started to change and transform.

After the opening of the border, there was also a revival in the Ledra Street which was on the southern part of the line. Ledra street has been the most important trade line of Nicosia during and before the 1960s. Ledra street, which is an important axis with public and private spaces attracting remarkable social interaction at that time, lost its vitality with the closure of border gates because of its proximity to the Lokmaci Border Gate. Contrary to that, as it was further away from the border gate and people felt safer, Makarios street started to flourish. After the opening of the gates, tourists had also affected the revitalization of the Kyrenia and Eleftheria streets. While Makarios street was a more popular place, in time it is observed that communities slowly came closer to the border and situation has returned to its former position. It is observed that Ledra Street became more and more popular and it is even more popular today. It is noteworthy that new spaces have been opened and closed buildings have been functioning and re-used. It is also observed that parallel streets which were not frequently used have also revitalized with this effect and the current street has filled with cafes and became the centre of the social events. In the same time, on the northern side of the line, the restoration and re-opening of the buildings in the area called 'Arasta' have enabled the development of the area by tourists. It is seen that the already existing buildings which have become a rubble have re-functioned and re-introduced to the city. As the population increased in both sides, it is observed that citizens have started to move to the outer parts. In all the cities that experienced a population boom, it is known that housing areas which were on the peripheries of the city move back to the city centre after a period of time. It is noteworthy that all old trade centres transform to housing areas. This process can also be seen for the City of Nicosia.

In the framework of the study, it is seen that the general transformation in the structures that were on the line from Kyrenia Gate to Eleftheria Square was from housing to trade purposes and related to that, the number of structures that functioned as a house has reduced. It is noteworthy that construction material that has been used changed between periods and it was also effective in the building designs. As communal areas that went out from the line and shifted to the other parts of the city, we can see that the population has increased and related to that, there has been a decrease on the open and closed communal areas. In addition to that, while there was no empty (unused) building, today empty (unused) buildings emerged. It is observed that unused buildings have transformed into temporary art spaces. The inspected line has showed a development on trade and lack of parking spaces and no traffic access in the indicated area caused people to move their living areas to the

different parts of the city. Change in the infra and superstructure caused a change in the buildings and social life of the city.

2. Silhouette of buildings that are present on the line

Both fronts of the Kyrenia Gate-Elftheria Square line have investigated in accordance with the aforementioned construction materials, new materials, form, new and old functions identified and analysed. The silhouette of the structures has been showed by reaching the number of each structure. On the function maps for the determined structures on the Kyrenia Gate and Elftheria Square line, trade structures, houses, closed and open communal spaces, empty structures and green line have been indicated with different colors. As it can be understood from this, it has been observed that the housing function of the structures existing in the original function map has transformed to different functions in the new function map.

3. Graphical explanation of the structures that changed and unchanged

The graphic representation of the original and new usage of the functions of the structures on the Kyrenia Gate-Elftheria Square line has been indicated below. According to the data given on the table above, transformations alongside the line that was included in the research have been identified. This shows us that buildings that were present on the line and used as housing structures today have transformed into trade structures. According to this data, while there were 74 houses, today only 16 of these have continued to be used as houses.

4. Conclusion

It is seen that the streets, which are one of the basic elements of the existence of the cities, and street texture (architectural-urban texture) have started to change as people's world perspectives changed and developed. Streets make up the communal life space. It has been observed that unused structures in the area that included in the study has transformed into temporary art spaces and it has been seen that open communal spaces opened to usage by closing to traffic for days that have special celebrations such as new year, eid.

Structures' change on the line that included in the study has been analysed. In this context, historical processes of the buildings that are present on the Kyrenia Gate-Elftheria Square have been investigated. It has been observed that houses transformed into trade structures and in return for that structures that have been used as houses reduced. It has been seen that different periods that different civilizations ruled have affected cultural, social, economic and political changes. It has been seen that despite the increasing population there has been a decrease in the communal spaces and it has functioned by shifting outside of the urban periphery. It is noteworthy that the changes in the urban structure have transformed the structures designed as housing buildings into a variety of functions depending on the need and social change.

Usage of structures has changed due to the increasing population and needs. Because of that, transformation in the structures can be observed in the following years and especially, it is thought that depending on the changing socio-economic conditions, housing would return back to its former places.

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