

1. Urban landscape



Veria, Greece

1.1 The urban landscape: values and opportunities

Settlements are complex systems of built and empty spaces, where generations of human beings share their lives, aspirations and experiences through time. Although individual buildings are settled material manifestations, rather permanent in character, they are brought to life due to the endless flow of people through them. They are thus altered or replaced in order to accommodate the changing needs and aspirations of their residents. In this way, urban landscapes evolve over time reflecting the broader changes that affect the settlement. People sustain the settlements with their culture, social

relations and economic activity within the boundaries of the area but also through their connections (physical or virtual) with different localities or networks, whether cultural, economic or religious.

The urban landscape forms part of the historic environment of a settlement. As such, it is not only a mere collection of historic buildings, monuments, landmarks and open spaces, but encompasses a set of different values inherent in the urban fabric. These values can be found more condensed in historic centres, since they are their oldest parts, the initial cores from which settlements have expanded. Their built environments bear the traces and testimonies of all periods of their

development and of all cultures that have passed through them.

One of these values is the evidential or historical value. The urban landscape reflects, through the architecture of its buildings, the geographical characteristics of an area: the stone used traces the geology, the mud-bricks, the quality of the soil, the timber used, the vegetation species of the area. It also bears evidence of the building skills and traditions, the technological know-how of the constructors and craftsmen. The typology witnesses the way of life, the world-view or the occupations of the residents and even the specific climate conditions of the locality. The morphology reflects the aesthetic values and artistic expression of the society. The relationship of the built with the natural environment bears witness to the dependency of the economy with the land. Similarly, the open public spaces and buildings to the social relations between people.

Since the historic environment was formed and evolved over centuries, it also bears signs of the socio-economic and technological evolution. Change in the typology often means an economic restructuring, a new way of life, customs and traditions influenced by other localities. New materials and know-how are often a result of these new relationships.



Algiers, Algeria

Thus, all changes of the socio-economic circumstances of the inhabitants as well as the external influences on the settlement are reflected in the physical appearance of the urban landscape.

Besides the evidential or historical values, the urban landscape has symbolic values. It embodies the collective memory of the society that appropriates the cultural heritage inherent in the city. Spiritual values can also be attached to a place and have a considerable impact in people's perception of space. As different cultures might have co-existed in a particular area, the historic environment would have different meanings, associations and values for each group of people.

The current socio-economic and demographic situation of an area is also reflected on a site. Thus, the urban landscape bears evidence of prosperity or regression. This is evident in the built environment, such as the ageing and neglect of buildings, lack of public space, insufficient accessibility, scarcity of public transport, physical segregation with respect to the rest of the urban area or lack of basic public facilities. It is also evident at the social level, such as high concentration of marginalized, unemployed people or immigrants, loss or excessive density of population, ageing of population, demographic change or loss of community feeling. Finally, at the economic level, there

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might be decreased investment, lack of employment opportunities or lack of commercial activity.

The historic urban landscape is now considered not only as a cultural and historical asset but also as an economic asset. Culture-led regeneration is linked with an increasing appreciation of the historic environment and the architectural heritage in particular. The historic environment and the traditional architecture have been used by cities all over the globe as a strategy for attracting inward investment, especially in the tourism sector. Cities started to invest in the cultural capital that their historic environment embodied. The growth of Cultural Heritage Tourism was a significant driving force for both the preservation of buildings and also for the revival of traditional arts and crafts.

The aesthetic or picturesque quality of the urban landscape is often used to contribute in “place marketing” through image enhancement that would encourage inward investment and urban economic recovery. Thus, its image-building function leads to the need for high-profile “prestige” or “flagship” projects that are oriented towards people with higher incomes. Thus, social polarization might occur excluding the original residents of the area, a process known as “gentrification”. Often, both public and

private funds are orientated towards prestige cultural projects, ignoring the deprived areas that are in urgent need for regeneration and improvement of the quality of life. As witnessed in the failure of many culture-led regeneration projects, overdependence on the cultural sector could not be sustainable on the long term as it makes the economy vulnerable to instability and creates social polarization.

The urban landscape needs, therefore, a set of policies and actions that would address its problems in a holistic way. Sustainable conservation should integrate the physical conservation and rehabilitation of the building stock, with social policies that would allow for social equilibrium and cohesion. Economic activity should address the needs of residents and users while not putting too much development pressure on the historic environment. Leisure and tourism should be proportionate and not dominant to the general economic activity of the area.

Finally, an urban landscape is part of a wider area. Thus, considerations should be made for the economic, social and environmental impact of the actions taken on a specific site to the wider area where it is situated or it is connected with.

1.2 Urban landscape rehabilitation In Cyprus

In Cyprus, the rehabilitation of the historic environment is concentrated mainly on the individual building. The policies and incentives are applied in the territories of the island that are controlled by the Cypriot government, without area specific priorities. Thus, the urban landscape is mostly rehabilitated in a scattered way.

The rehabilitation of traditional architecture depends mainly on the private initiative and is supported by the central government through financial incentives. Two types of classifications are included in two different laws. The ancient monuments are managed by the Department of Antiquities and the listed buildings are managed by the Department of Town Planning and Housing. Financial incentives provided to owners for a complete preservation/ restoration of their listed properties include a direct Grant-in-aid, transfer of plot ration and tax deductions.

In recent years, attention has been given to a more complete rehabilitation of the urban landscape through regulatory plans, area schemes, master plans, etc. In the case of the walled city centre of Nicosia, during the last fifteen years a series of bi-communal projects have

been implemented in selected areas with funding from the government's budget, the United States Agency for International Development and the European Union through UNDP. The most important project was the Chrysaliniotissa housing rehabilitation programmes. This included the restoration of 27 vacant traditional houses and the construction of 15 new houses on empty building plots, as well as the provision of community services and the enhancement of public open space.

Other projects concerning the urban landscape include the rehabilitation of the façades of several streets. The first areas to be rehabilitated through façadism were in Nicosia through the Nicosia Master Plan. With the Cyprus accession to the European Union, more projects of this type in other historic areas of Nicosia were initiated through the Structural Funds.

Great interest was expressed by rural communities for the rehabilitation of the urban landscape. However, the Pilot Operation of the Rehabimed project in Lefkara was the first of its kind, executed outside the big urban centres, in a rural community. Up to this point, local communities often undertook the redesign of their villages' squares with governmental funding. Thus, the RehabiMed Pilot Operation gave a new breath to the rehabilitation process in the



Nicosia

rural communities. On the one hand, the works related not only to the horizontal dimension (i.e. pavement, square) as was the usual practice up to now, but also to the vertical dimension of the street (i.e. the façades). On the other hand, the Authorities responsible for the rehabilitation process at the governmental level collaborated with the local players – the local authority and the local community as well as with the private sector in order to deliver a “best practice” example through the RehabiMed methodology.