

Use of the Public Space in the Walled City of Nicosia

Urban Mapping Experience

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Abstract: The Walled City of Nicosia is divided into two with the Buffer Zone and Turkish Cypriots in the North and Greek Cypriots in the South. The study focuses on the Northern part of the city. Walled City of Nicosia is the selected case study for the research since its division led to changes in the use of public space. The Walled City was segmented and remained closed across the island after August 1974, the border was ‘opened’ only after 2003, since then, the social composition of the area had variations that have influenced in the use of public spaces. The aim of the research is mapping how are the actual situation of those areas and the perception of the inhabitants thought the “opening” of the border.

The method of the study is observation through site survey, urban mapping and comparison of different public spaces and their uses. Three main streets, which have different identity and user profile, have been selected as the field study of the research. The research is a comparative study that includes analysis of social interaction in different public spaces.

1. Introduction

The context of the research is the Nicosia, which is known as the last divided capital in Europe. The Walled City of Nicosia is also divided into two with the Buffer Zone and Turkish Cypriots in the North and Greek Cypriots in the South. The study focuses on the Northern part of the city. The change of population in the Walled City has created a different type of social composition than before. Most of the inhabitants in the area have neither cultural links nor attachment to the area. This situation can be seen as a serious threat to the conservation process of the historic area as the Walled City has lost its attraction as a desirable living environment.

The border also cuts through the capital city of Nicosia, which has become known as the last divided capital in Europe. Remaining closed across the island after August 1974, the border was ‘opened’ in February 2003 when a single checkpoint began to operate in Nicosia. The two long-separated communities had a chance to cross to the other side. Subsequently several more crossing points have opened along the length of the Line. In Nicosia the border is crossed and re-crossed thousands of times per day by both locals and visitors to the island as well as workers, students and business people; at the same time, strong views as to the rightness of making the crossing are still held by some on both sides. This context of the divided island is the focus of many researchers and much study, and the process of reunification is still in progress.

This context of the divided island is the focus of many researchers and much study. Regarding urban perceptions, the city of Nicosia is an interesting and unique context in which to develop analysis and observation of the urban environment. The users of the public space in the Northern part of the Walled City are the multicultural community.

2. Historical and political framework of the Walled City of Nicosia

The island of Cyprus became a focus of interest of many different cultures due to its geographical location and strategic position between Europe and Middle East civilizations. Consequently it came under foreign rule and settlement many times in recorded history. Eastern empires and more recently Byzantines (395-1191), Lusignans (1192-1489), Venetians (1489-1571), Ottomans (1571-1878), and British (1878-1960). Each of these has left signs and structures. Such historical layers and influences undoubtedly constitute an important part of the complex identity of Cyprus and its inhabitants. Most recent was British rule, which lasted from 1878 to 1960. In 1960 the island was granted independence as the Republic of Cyprus, and took its seat at the United Nations. One could refer here to the Cold War (1946-1991) as another significant historical layer, which played its part in the troubles that broke out in the new young republic. Whilst the beginnings of tensions between Greek and Turkish inhabitants of Cyprus predate this time, in December 1963 inter-communal fighting between the two communities began. In 1974, in response to a coup staged against the President/Government of Cyprus that was inspired and supported by the right wing military Junta ruling Greece, Turkey intervened militarily and the island was divided into North (Turkish Cypriots) and South (Greek Cypriots), separated by a border commonly referred to as the Green Line or the (United Nations) Buffer Zone. The island is not only divided horizontally into two areas but has many other sorts of internal borders and boundaries. It is a territory where conflicts have really marked the landscape and the community.

The research has been developed in Nicosia, capital of Cyprus, which is known as the last divided capital in Europe. The Walled City of Nicosia is divided into two with the Buffer Zone and Turkish Cypriots in the North and Greek Cypriots in the South. The study focuses on the Northern part of the city.

The current dynamic of immigration in North Cyprus and as a consequence the change of population in the Walled City has created a different type of social composition than before the conflict. Most of the inhabitants in the area have neither cultural links nor attachment to the area. This situation is a serious threat to the conservation process and involves meaningful differences for the use of the public space in the historic area of the Walled City.

The division, which continues to this day, is the main reason for the city's on-going problems in terms of restricting development and imposes issues for future planning. In spite of the division, there are efforts on both sides for the revitalization of Nicosia. While the division limits development and creates diverse problems for planning the city, it has created a process of growth out of the old core of Nicosia on both sides, which has also caused the neglect of the housing stock and their social value.

The Walled City of Nicosia is an historic urban quarter that has been a declared "conservation area" since 1989. It also houses trace of different cultures. Unfortunately, despite the existence of the declaration, the Walled City has experienced only a limited level of changes in terms of conservation.

The United Nations promoted a common Master Plan for the Walled city of Nicosia whose aim was "the improvement of the existing and future habitat and human settlement conditions

of all the inhabitants of Nicosia and improvement of infrastructure of the city". Nicosia Master Plan team had conducted the research by under the control of EU (United Nations) in order to identify the general problems in the city. The team developed 'Policies for the Rehabilitation of the Historic City' after having identified issues. Then, a series of integrated projects was suggested. Starting from 1986 to the present day, many projects have been conducted with the funds by The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Union through United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

3. Methodology

The method developed on these urban studies includes observation, sketching, videos, urban mapping and comparison of different public spaces and their uses. Three most used routes, which are Zahra Street, Girne Street and Yeni Camii/Kirlizade Street, are selected as the field study of the research. Firstly, these streets have been observed through site survey and urban mapping studies have been done. Then, different public spaces on the route have been compared in terms of the use of public spaces and social interaction between streets and users. Basically, the urban space of the Walled City of Nicosia has been considered a laboratory to work on an experimental way of mapping in public space and social life. The context and the character of the urban environment and social fabric is an example of adaptation and resilient community in a sensitive area of the conflict zone.

A group of students are been involved in the activities in site, divided into a small group and different areas.

The first approach was the limitation of the zones, the definition of some keyword to develop the survey, the walk together and the interaction with the local people and the inhabitants, finally the brainstorming after a visit to define the representation of the urban reading of Nicosia.

4. Public space and social interaction

"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" (Jacobs, 1961). Urban environments have changed significantly in recent years, as have ideas about how they should be designed, changed and improved (Carmona *et al.*, 2003). Public spaces are important element of urban design, which make high quality life possible in the city.

The public spaces are places where people come together to enjoy the city and each other. Public spaces allow people to meet on ostensibly neutral ground, within the context of the whole community (Holland *et al.*, 2007). Public space is the stage upon which the drama of communal life unfolds. The streets, squares and parks of a city give flow of human exchange. These dynamic spaces are essential counterpart to the more routines of work and daily life, providing the channels for movement, the nodes of communication and common grounds for play and relaxation. There are pressing needs that public space can help people to satisfy, significant human rights that it can be shaped to define and protect and special cultural meanings that it can be best convey (Carr, 1992).

Outdoor activities in public spaces can be divided into three categories: necessary activities, optional activities and social activities. Necessary activities include those that are more or less compulsory such as going to school or to work, shopping, etc. Optional activities that are, those pursuits that are participated in if there is a wish to do so and if time and place make it possible. Taking a walk, standing around enjoying life or sunbathing can be accepted as optional activities. Social activities are all the activities that depend on the presence of others in the public spaces. Social activities include children at play, greetings and conversation and communal activities of various kinds (Gehl, 2007).

In a liveable city public spaces should be well design to propose people different activities and places to socialize. In this respect, in this study public space and social interaction of the community has been searched.

5. Analysis of public space and social interaction: Urban mapping

This research has been conducted in the Walled City of Nicosia to question the changing public space and social interaction due to change in urban dynamics. In the Walled City of Nicosia, there are many renovation projects in progress; some traditional houses are reused as space for social life, like a cafe, restaurant and shops. The interesting process of reuse and adaptation includes public art events and temporary use of the public space. These events attract and involve the local community, kids and young people and are important in terms of transformation of the city. Urban life has started to change and city has started to attract the young people; in this respect, the city became alive also during the evening. This is a positive impact on the city, people feeling safer and regeneration, including micro economy has started. The research has been conducted to question the changing urban dynamic and use of the public space, to recognize the interface of the city, and its social value of the community. To understand Nicosia Walled City, in particular, the Northern part, where the public space is a mosaic of the different cultures after the division of 1974. This research has been developed by urban observations in the public spaces.

Jacobs (1961) states that "How the city working in real life because this is only the way to learn what principle of planning and what practice in rebuilding can promote social and economic vitality in cities, and what practices will deaden these attribute". Through these approach, the site visit has been organized on the to observe the social aspect of daily life in the streets of the historical part of Nicosia. The areas have been select by criteria of different use of the public space and users in the city, with the focus to understand the daily life and connections. The topic is the public spaces was not just a conduit for moving cars and trolleys through, but also a place in its own right for socializing, entertainment, commerce, and for civic expression, where the people sharing their common urban life.

According to Edward Relph, there are two major reasons for attempting to understand the phenomenon of place. First, it is interesting in its own right as a fundamental expression of man's involvement in the world; and second, improved knowledge of the nature of the place can contribute to the maintenance and manipulation of existing places and the creation of new places. The real difficulty lies, however, not in the justification of the study of place, but in the development of adequate concepts and approaches for this (Carmona and Tiedell, 2007).

The identity of the Walled City affected from the conflict between 1963-1974, the division and the adaptation of the community of immigrant to their new environment. The social aspect of this research includes the observation of the community and the cohabitation in the historical area. The demography in Cyprus changed after 1974 not only because of this ethnic homogenization of the two sides but also because of an influx of people from Turkey. The first

wave- migrants was in 1975-1979, after the division from the eastern Black-Sea, the second wave in 1980, with the liberalization in Turkey and the beginning of the University business in 1990, where many students from Turkey arrived at the island (Mete, 2017). The paper is based on the analysis for the urban perception and the screening of the public spaces, the re-use of the occupied properties and abandoned spaces. How the people adapt their space, how is the sense of place attachment?

The notion of identity is a fundamental one in everyday life, based on the philosophy of Heddinger, which became the aim of the urban studies in the selected area in the Walled City. The three entrances in the Walled City have defined the direction of this research and then urban mapping studies have been done in the selected zones. As the method for the urban analysis, comparison between different everyday life in the historical area has been questioned. The first zone includes Girne Caddesi. It is the most important retail street of the Northern part of the Nicosia, which it starts from Girne Gate and ends with the Lokmacı Gate (check point).

The second zone includes Arabahmet, which is rehabilitated area in 1998. Arabahmet represents an interesting part of the city where the University as generating a new process of life, integrate with the local community and traditional quarter. There are many traditional houses that are under restoration; the identity of the place has started to change.

The third zone of the study is a residential district that can be called as "urban ghetto". It is a district where immigrants have been replaced after 1974. There is no enough attention to the area. Many buildings are neglected and needs emergency intervention. The use of public space is also different than the first two zones that will be discussed in the following section (Figure 1).

The focused area and streets selected for the analysis are:

- Zone 1 (Kyrenia Gate to Lokmacı gate)
- Zone 2 (Arabahmet-Zahra Street)
- Zone 3 (Çağlayan District- Yenicami Street)

6. Results and Discussions

After the first observations, the participants of the urban walk have realized a graphic summary of the walk. Then, sketching studies have been done and the image of the public spaces has been photographed. At the end, synthesis of the synthesis of the mapping has been discussed.

The Zone 1 (Figure 2) nominated "Girne Gate to Lokmacı Gate", as it is mentioned is the most popular commercial street in the Northern part of the Walled City. It is the main entrance to the city, which usually the starting point for tourist routes. The street ends with a square, which is the most important squares of the city and includes Venetian column as the landmark of the district. It is a commercial district, where the tourists are stopping to buy souvenirs and the same time, the daily life of local people is going on. There are many places to socialize, sitting areas, café and traditional restaurants. The users of the streets are sharing the urban space, tourists are in transit to the classical route including the Dr Fazıl Küçük Museum, the Mevlevi Tekke and Museum, the Samanbahçe Quarter until the British Colonial Low Courts.

It is observed that, the place is the meeting point of the young people in their free time, to spend their time in the café and restaurants. There are local people, spending the daily life around, and it is also possible to see informal vendors in the street for the fresh fruit and vegetable and some art and craft.

The Atatürk square is a social space, is a meeting point for people are living there, the con-

NICOSIA SOCIAL MAPPING

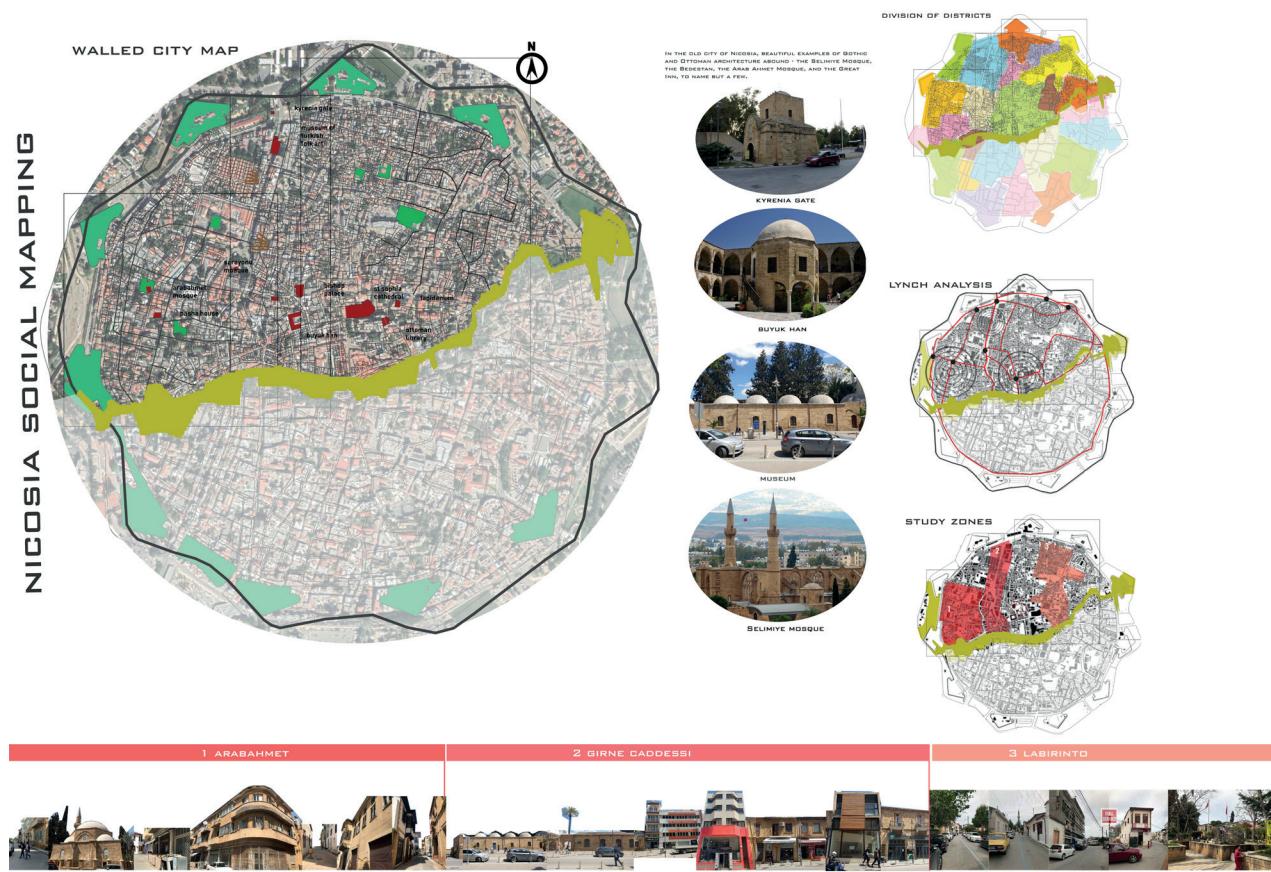


Figure 1. General analysis of Walled City of Nicosia.

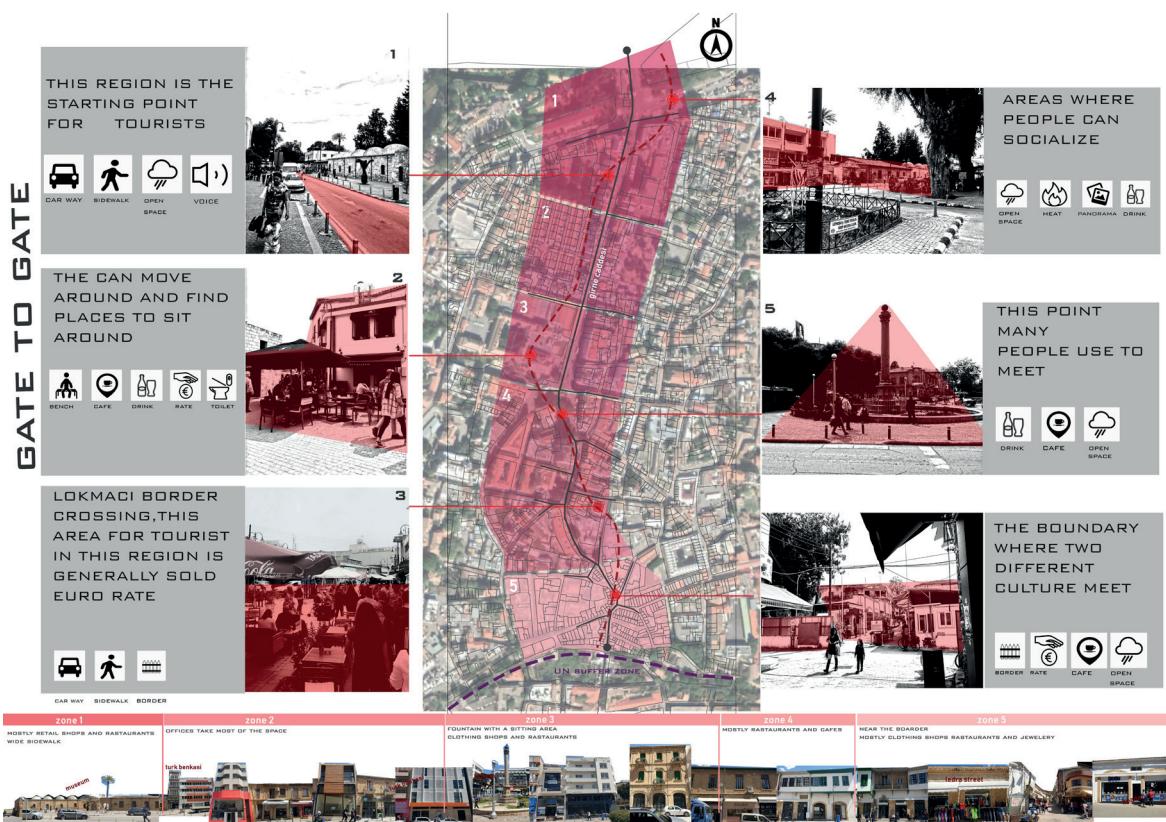


Figure 2. Zone 1 (From Kyrenia Gate to Lokmaci Gate).

nexion between the gates, the entrance and the checkpoint. It is possible to observe the daily life of the court and the people are working in the area behind the Post Office. The second part of the zone very close the checkpoint represent another dynamic and sense of place. Lokmacı gate is the checkpoint to cross to the Southern part of the island, which it is the only pedestrian gate inside the Walled City. It is a busy gate especially on the weekends and effect the urban dynamic of the city.

The Zone 2 (Figure 3) is nominated 'Arabahmet-Zahra Street' is an urban area that is accessible by the entrance in the East side of the walled city. This zone has another face of the city that more popular for the local people instead of tourists. People are using public spaces more effectively, where the kids are playing in the street every day, is running and cycling around, where the woman is gathering in front of their houses.

The route includes many different aspects of the city and the streets. Heritage buildings are in the process of restoration and are giving a new portrait of Nicosia. Zahra Street is a very unique public space since one boundary is defined by Buffer Zone and the moat.

Part of the results in the image of the city, connected with the mapping and the focus points for each area, by a collage of photos come out a montage of the life of people there, portrait of the social space. Arabahmet is a place where the sound of the city is the voice of people are in the street, kids and women, where it is possible to observe the use of the space in between public and private area.

Zone 3 (Figure 4) is nominated the "Çağlayan district and Yeni Cami Street", where the aim of the study is an observation of the use of the interface in between the habitat and the city. The third zone of the study is a residential district that can be called as "urban ghetto". It is a district

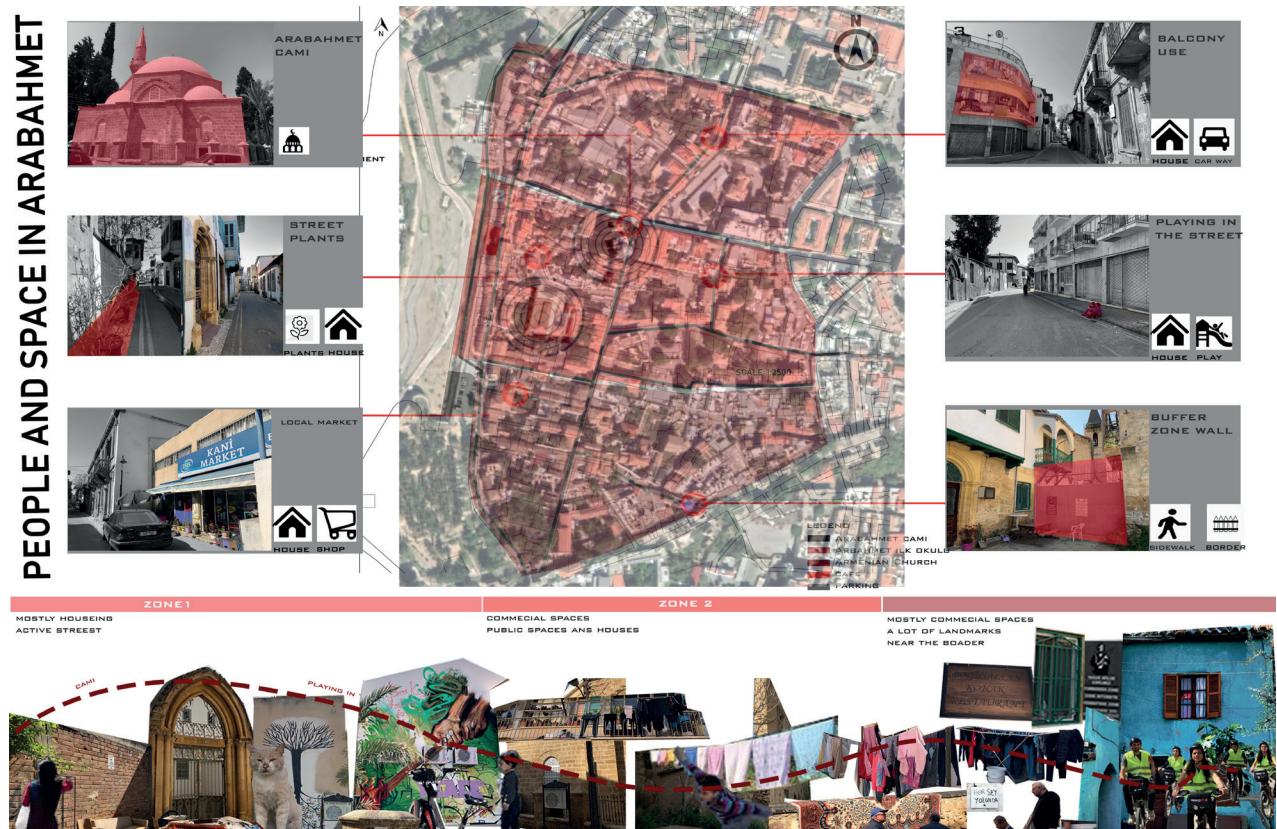


Figure 3. Zone 2 (Arabahmet-Zahra Street).

where immigrants have been replaced after 1974. There is no enough attention to the area. Many buildings are neglected and needs emergency intervention.

The entrance from the West side of the Walled City has less traffic and the transit is most for the residents. The urban pattern is more organic and there are not any connections to the gate or crossing point. The orientation in the area is not easy since there are no landmarks and the quality of the urban space is really low.

The zone has the resilient character and the image of the conflict. There are abandoned buildings with lack of maintenance and occupied area. People are living the street, are redesigning the space and the use of the sidewalls, the entrance of the houses.

Buffer zone's limit is part of the urban mosaic, where some of the houses are physically attached, seems like a parasite of the border. It is interesting to see how the cohabitation and the capacity to include in the space for living the border, or in another point of view how "resist" behind the border. In general, the streets are not good in terms of physical condition. The informality and the marginality can be read from the surface of the houses. There are interesting use of public space, where there are sofa, tables and chairs on the streets, also people are hanging their clothes on the street to get dry.

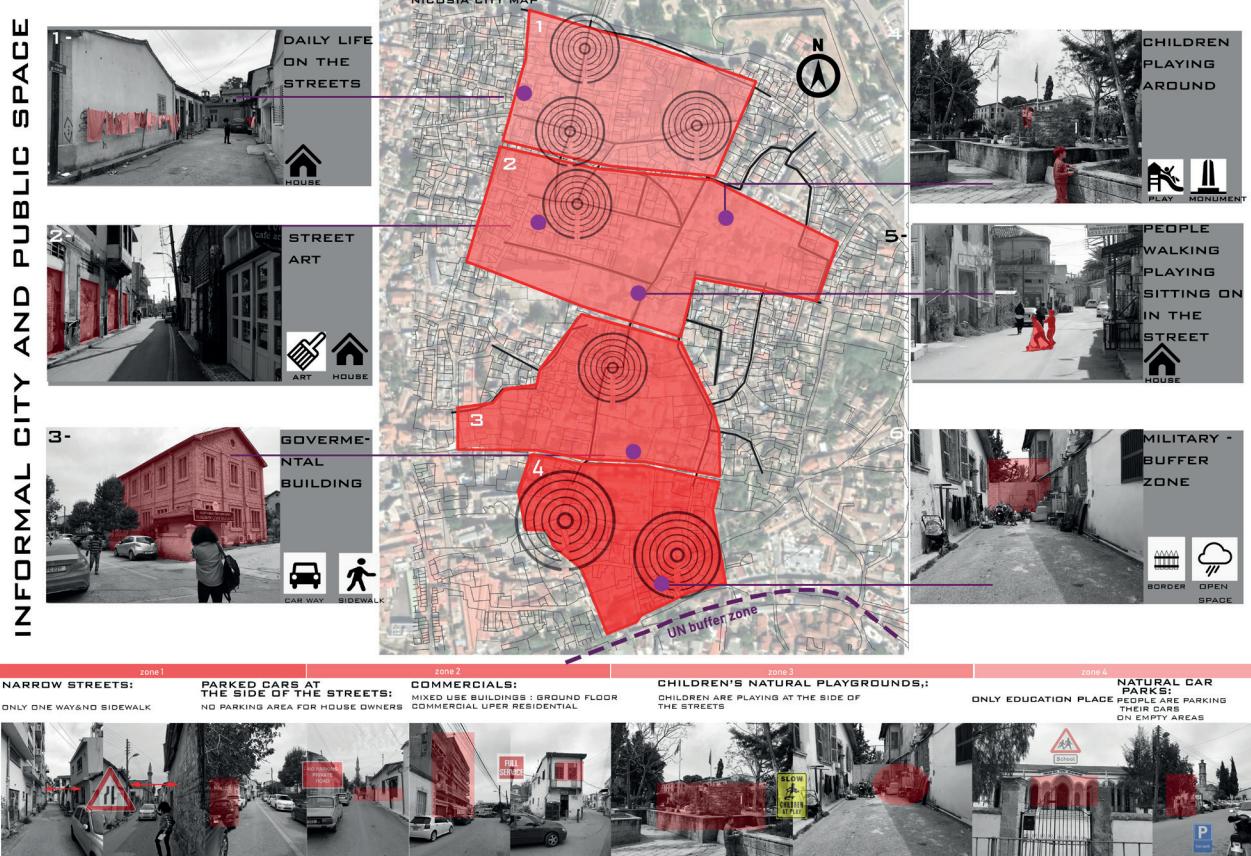


Figure 4. Zone 3 Informal Habitat.

7. Conclusion

The research was a multidisciplinary research to read the city: public space and social interaction of people. It is important to understand the urban issues of the Walled City, by questioning the typologies and land-use, questioning the residents and users of the area, to develop a contemporary urban design approach based on these interacting physical, socio-cultural, political and economic aspects.

There are three different zones with different user profile and the own urban issues. New strategies need to be developed for the possible future scenarios by considering the historical context and the sensitive social issue regarding the divided city. It is also important to become familiar with the existing Nicosia Master Plan, a joint project involving the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot municipalities across the divide, and to examine the existing streets and buildings in light of it, in their close surroundings.

The experience and results from the students are part of the materials the authors are developing to improve the method of teaching in the course of Urban Planning, History and heritage, as a basic analysis and approach to reading the city. The urban analysis a fundamental to read the city as an organism, not only on the physical aspect, like a form a volumes or traditional elements, but an interaction between people and space.

Through different experience the authors have done in Nicosia, the analysis has been integrated with the observations with a different group of students and the monitoring of the city as an experimental urban reading. The same place can be observed and read with different aims, the rules of students in this case what focused to elaborate the social activities in the area and use of the spaces.

8. Acknowledgments

In this paper, the results of the common research of the authors in Nicosia about the historical and urban space is part of many publications and contributions in progress, also international experiences in cooperation with universities from Europe.

The application of urban studies in the Walled City as work in the site is part of the activities of Urban Habitat of Assist. Prof. Silvia Covarino, during this Spring semester 2018/2019, at Girne American University. It has been a pleasure to bring them to this sensitive and contemporary urban issue of public spaces, and the interactions with the inhabitants in Nicosia.

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