

Urban spatial patterns and local identity: Evaluation in a Cypriot Town*

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Abstract:

As our image of a city is structured from memories of its different parts, the aggregates of the qualities of outdoor spaces are important in creating the local identity, civic pride, satisfying social needs and affecting economic behaviour. Indeed, the spaces between buildings have great impact on the lives of most people; they symbolise conditions, traditions and residents' aspirations.

Since the urban quarter is the main component of a city, identifiable quarters will be a major issue for the designers and the other professionals in the new millennium. In this context, well-organised and locally appropriated outdoor spaces, as the main elements of a quarter, are essential in achieving local identity, moreover promoting sustainability.

Within the light of these evaluations, this paper will assess the quality of the local environmental character in Girne (Kyrenia), a Cypriot town with unique qualities, and determine the modes by which open spaces may contribute to creating identifiable urban quarters. Since the most visible transformations occur in the residential districts of Girne, an analysis is carried out in the newer and older parts of the city through highlighting the characteristic elements of Limanarkasi, the most identifiable quarter of the town.

Key words:

Local identity, identifiable city quarters, locally appropriate spaces, Limanarkasi, Girne (Kyrenia), traditional quarters, new developments.

1. Introduction: Why is local identity important?

Identity is 'the distinguishing character or condition of a person or a thing' according to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1983). Lynch (1981) also defines identity as 'the extent to which a person can recognise or recall a place as being distinct from other places'.

Identity is one of the essential goals for the future of good environment. People should feel that

some part of the environment belongs to them, individually and collectively, some part for which they care and are responsible, whether they own it or not. The urban environment should be an environment, which encourages people to express themselves, to become involved, to decide what they want and act on it. (Appleyard & Jacobs 1982, 11)

To attract and hold people, an urban environment should cultivate a strong, independent image for which people can develop strong identification and affection. However, modern development and/or redevelopment, unfortunately, usually aim at the efficiencies of large-scale construction and maximum use of site. Accordingly, the design is oriented towards creating a monotonous, standard, 'any place' image rather than enhancing a sense of heritage and tradition that builds citizen identification and pride. Accordingly, conservation should be paid great attention as it encourages identity and control, and usually, a better sense of community (Appleyard & Jacobs 1982, Oktay 1996).

Since urban public spaces mirror our culture and time and reflect the well-being of the dwellers, we should start measuring the city by analysing them. Considering the latest modern developments that form huge interior spaces without taking the outside spaces and the sense of place into consideration, today, these spaces should be paid attention more than ever.

2. The quarter as an identifying symbol for the extended city:

The city quarter is the main component of urban design and it is also fundamental for sustainable development (Gosling & Maitland, 1984). To Moughtin (1992, 42), the design of the city quarter with a 800 m radius is the main challenge for urban design; it is at this scale that a person can fully appreciate the visual qualities of his environment.

The quarter, district and neighbourhood are terms with different meanings for different authors.

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Lynch's description of the district (Lynch 1960), however, could be considered most useful for the discussion of the quarter. "Districts are the medium-to-large sections of the city, conceived of as having two-dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters 'inside of, and which are recognisable as having some common identifying character". Indeed, how to give the area its own physical identity, and how to make it a place with its own character distinct from that of other places is the first aesthetic problem in the design of the neighbourhood or the quarter.

As a defined spatial-architectural entity, the quarter in the city is looked upon in a number of ways. Typologic analysis finds the traditional quarter a basic urban residential type which combines place and activity. It is related specifically to a unique urban entity, different from the single house and from the entire city, and is considered a modern conception, part of the modern architectural/planning effort to accommodate contemporary residential needs by the mediation of the spanning scale between the single house and the entire city (Benevolo 1968, 732).

Some of the recent approaches to the concept of neighbourhood (Kallus and Law Yone 1997) take certain themes as ordering themes for its analysis such as management, healing, welfare, association, order, participation, meaning and identity. Considering the identity theme, the neighbourhood is not seen as a means for participation but as a vehicle for strengthening the bonds between residents and those between themselves and their environment. From this perspective, the process of neighbourhood planning is seen as a way to provide for the real needs of the residents. Further, the definition of neighbourhood (its size, borders, etc.) is drawn by the requirements, expectations and lifestyles of its residents (Fig. 1).

3. The significance of public outdoor spaces in urban experience :

Recent research and observation showed that spaces between buildings have great impact on the lives of most people; they symbolise conditions,

traditions and residents' aspirations. Much of our daily experience of the city occurs within the collectively shared public spaces, or the public domain. In addition to providing for a variety of ways to get from one place to another, the public domain provides many spaces for a wide range of additional functions and activities. At root, the urban experience is, and has always been, the collective experience of places and spaces. It is the experience of places and spaces conceived for linkage between people and for social interaction.

Under the light of these views, considering the identity of a city quarter, the quality of public spaces has a significant role. This is especially true in the case of the street where people are oriented through. In fact, the 'street' is the prime exterior space of the city and an intrinsic component of the urban pattern. However, today, streets have become less an integral part of our lives, and considering its configuration, shape or form, the street has not received the detailed consideration given to the design of the public square.

The form of the street can be analysed in terms of a number of polar qualities such as straight or curved, long or short, wide or narrow, enclosed or open, formal or informal. Street form can also be analysed in terms of scale, proportion, contrast, rhythm or connections to other streets and squares. No matter which analysis is followed the street has two main characteristics directly related to form; it is, at one and the same time, both path and place (Moughtin 1992). Accordingly, any efforts to create a memorable path and a sense of place in street environment should carefully explore the mentioned qualities. However, becoming familiar with a place not only means walking through its streets, memorising itineraries, but also going beyond the barrier of the streetscape into buildings and engaging with its people. Therefore, private spaces need to be examined as well, including the analysis of public-private interface. The key term in this framework is 'locally appropriate spaces'.

In line with these evaluations, this study introduces here a case study that attempts to determine the modes by which urban spatial patterns may contribute to creating more identifiable urban quarters through the assessment of the quality of the local environmental character.

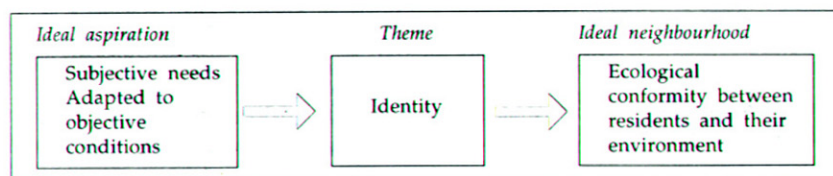


Fig. 1

Identity as the theme of an ideal quarter (partially after Kallus and Law Yone, 1997)

4. Case study: *Limanarkasi*, the old quarter of Girne (Kyrenia) in comparison with the newer developments :

Girne (Kyrenia) is regarded as the most charming town and the most popular resort in North Cyprus, a developing country in the Eastern Mediterranean area, where the urban life dates back to Hellenistic periods (Figs. 2-3)¹. It is attached to a great medieval castle, built round a miniature harbour on the north coast of the island and surrounded by beautiful scenery at the foot of the northern range of mountains, the Beşparmak Range, which have steeply slopes towards the sea (Figs. 4-5).

The urban pattern in the old core of the city still keeps its spatial quality of human scale and local identity despite some inappropriate uses in certain parts and general mismanagement. However, the newer districts of the town do not seem to follow either a local development system or a locally appropriate urban pattern. They are totally different in their urban character, and the residential buildings in these areas are kind of concrete slabs isolated in their individual plots. Consequently, local identity is completely lacking. (Figs. 6-7).

Limanarkasi quarter behind the picturesque harbour and next to the castle is one of the two areas in Girne that generally keeps its identity and therefore considered worth analysing in the context of this study². The traditional urban pattern here had a medieval and organic character with well-scaled narrow streets that ascend and descend the hillside (Figs. 8-12).

The area with its mosque and the shops around

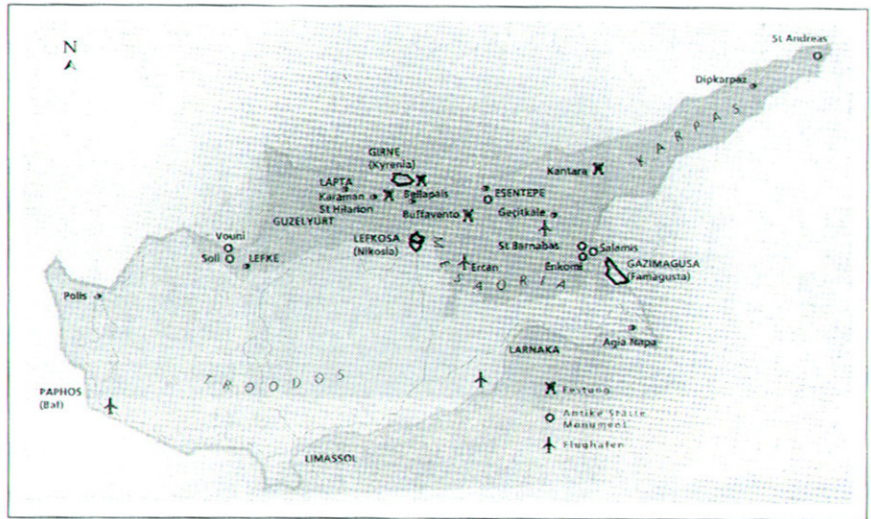


Fig. 2

Map of Cyprus

(alternative 1 : <http://www.emu.edu.tr/trnc/cyprus.gif>)

(alternative 2 : Solsten, E. (1993) Cyprus : A country study, Library of Congress, Washington.

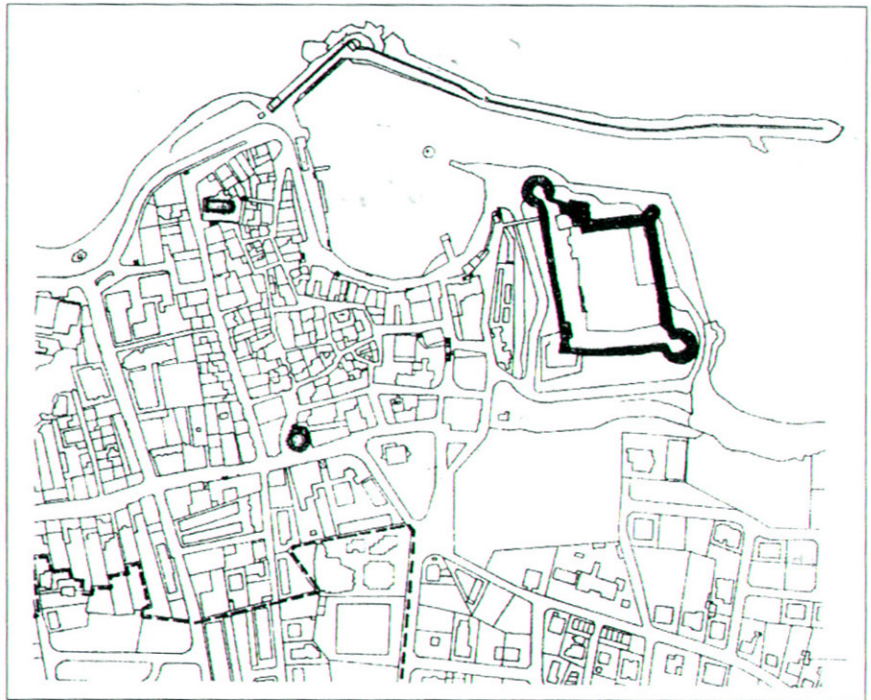
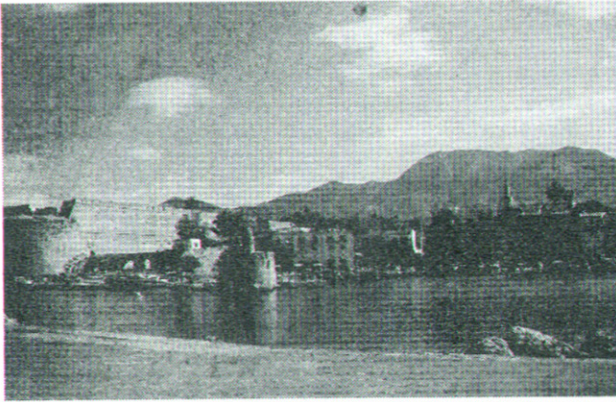


Fig. 3

Map of Old City of Girne (Kyrenia) (TRNC Ministry of Housing, Urban Planning Section)

1 The historical periods include the Roman (58 B.C.-395 A.D.), Byzantine (395 A.D. to 1192 A.D.), Lusignan (1192 A.D. to 1489 A.D.), Venetian (1489 to 1571), Turkish/Ottoman (1571 to 1878) and British (1878 to 1960) periods.

2 The other identifiable area is a residential quarter located in the upper part of the town and is called Turk Mahallesi (Turkish Quarter).



Figs. 4-5

View of Girne (Kyrenia) Harbour (Photo: D. Oktay)



Figs. 6-7

Views of new multi-storey apartment developments in Girne (Kyrenia) (Photo: O. B. Çagakan)

reflects the Ottoman character. However, after the Turkish Rule, the population composition has changed and in the last century churches have been built and the houses bought by Greeks. Today, the families living here are mainly Turkish Cypriot and elderly people; their income levels are mainly low or middle and their educational level has a similar profile — except the residents of the flats facing the harbour.

Functional analysis :

The old quarter **Limanarkasi** surrounds the little harbour, which was only used for lighters and longshore boats in the past. The harbour is now lined by old tall and massive houses, built as carob stores for the staple trade of the neighbourhood, currently used for touristic and recreational purposes and as dwellings for high- and middle-income people. The harbour place is a unique architectural heritage and currently the most popular recreation area for tourists as well as the town people (see Figs. 4-5).

The area behind the harbour generally comprised residential uses in the past, but had transformations lately. Some of the domestic functions, due to the lower social status of the neighbourhood and the residents' wishes to move to better organised places or for tourism related purposes, were replaced by commercial or recreational functions. This mixed-use character could be interpreted as a positive sign for the livability of the area for 24 hours.

The quarter is clearly defined by those larger streets that had transformations and included commercial — and some recreational uses — in the appearance of modern shopping arteries; this provides an easy access from the residential quarter to the facilities of the central city. Accordingly, the quarter does not have a problem of isolation from its surroundings.

Spatial analysis :

Like the Anatolian settlements, the old patterns



Fig. 8

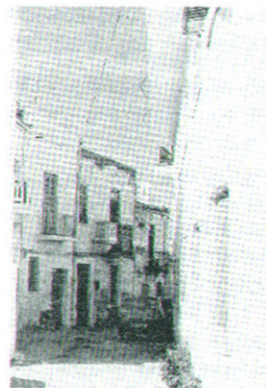


Fig. 9

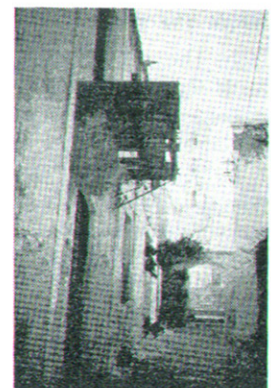


Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

Figs. 8-12 — Views of *Limanarkasi* Quarter, Girne (Kyrenia) (Photo: D. Oktay, O. B. Çagakan)

in Girne owe their positive place quality to contained outdoor spaces that are defined, ordered and scaled by an array of houses serving as a 'perimeter wall' to the street on one side, and the gardens and courtyards on the other. The role they play as an interface between public and private domains remains fairly constant throughout the *Limanarkasi* area (see Figs. 8-12).

Almost all houses, simple in size and architectural details, have a small courtyard with a number of trees at the back. The courtyard is well-defined and well-protected, and serves a variety of uses such as sitting, drying laundry, gardening, preparing winter food, cooking, storing, etc. (Oktay 1997). As such, the quarter reflects three-dimensionality both at the large scale and small scale.

Horizontal pattern :

A primary factor in the definition of 'human scale' in cities is often the ratio of building height to street width. Lot patterns in the historic residential district of Girne maintain their own narrow horizon-

tal measure through two characteristics. First, the organic pattern of nearly all streets produced irregular or L-shaped lots with narrow frontages. Second, none of the streets has a uniform width, and there is a constant play between opening and enclosure. The entire quarter is never visible at once. The transition from one area to another is fluid. However, the width of the street in some sections is so narrow that the visual continuity is broken and the space is more impelling for sitting and playing activities. In the area, as a positive quality, where possible, adjacent natural environment, the steep slope was used through introducing steps; accordingly, dramatic changes were created and the people's spatial experiences were extended. The urban pattern has some narrow openings to the harbour in a few places where the glimpse is impressive.

Thus, the old quarter of *Limanarkasi* exerts a sense of complexity, where one is confronted with an unexpected unfolding of opening and enclosure that creates a dynamic urban pattern and a positive orientation in what is in fact a small area.

Life in the street :

In the traditional urban pattern in North Cyprus, for connecting a group of houses with each other and to a larger circulation artery, the street was the most primary element that formed an intersection between the private and public domains. It was an extension of the home where a multitude of group activities was accommodated within the limits of privacy (Oktay & Onal 1998). In the case of *Limanarkasi*, the whole quarter is typically composed of rows of adjacent one- or two-storey houses that are directly linked to the street (Fig. 13).

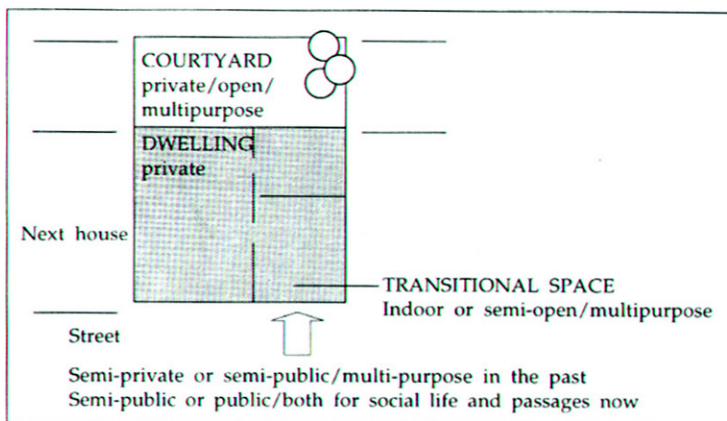


Fig. 13

Typical street-dwelling relationship in *Limanarkasi*, Girne (Kyrenia)

Street itself, in the older times, was the communal meeting place that extended itself into the house at ground floor level. Today, despite the functional transformations, social gathering among the neighbours in the street is still popular as observed in certain parts, even if the houses have private courtyards at the back (see Figs. 11-12)³. However, in some places where the vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow is dense, they sit close to the entrance inside and keep their door open to watch outside.

Three-dimensionality at the large scale	Human scale in general Organic pattern with contained outdoor spaces A sense of belonging
Three-dimensionality at the small scale	Well-defined street space Well-defined and well-protected gardens and courtyards A sense of place
Narrow horizontal frame	Dynamic urban pattern : Visual continuity in the street system A sense of complexity : Use of topography No uniform width in the street Irregular or L-shaped lots with narrow frontages
Extension of life into the street	Street as the connector of private and public domains Street as the place for social interaction Direct access to the house

Fig. 14

Identical elements in *Limanarkasi*, Girne (Kyrenia)

5. Conclusion :

To attract and hold people, cities should cultivate a strong, independent image for which people can develop strong identification and affection. However, the new urban developments, due to the local economical politics, are usually oriented towards creating a monotonous and standard image, and buildings are designed with little concern for their relationship to each other or for the global effect of the city. Spaces left between them have become undesirable, useless and unlivable. To change this, we must develop sensitivity to public space, not only in central civic and business districts, but also, and most importantly, in urban and suburban residential quarters, where the space between is becoming more important as densities increase.

Following this hypothesis, the study explored the question of what *Limanarkasi*, the old residential quarter of Girne, might offer to other places looking to enhance their identity of place. In this context, the following qualities, as outlined in Figure 14, were considered significant.

(i) *Three-dimensionality at the large scale :*

An urban spatial pattern including an organic network with contained outdoor spaces. This conveys a sense of belonging in local people.

(ii) *Three-dimensionality at the small scale :*

This firstly includes the street space that is physically contained. The other types of outdoor spaces in connection with the street are also well

³ This is characteristic to the Cypriot — and some other Mediterranean — societies, and indicates their wishes to watch the world go by in the street and be in touch with the outsiders (Oktay 1997).

defined in the three-dimensional framework. Such a framework evokes a strong sense of place in the residents.

(iii) *Narrow horizontal frame :*

The narrow street system intensifies the identity together with a dynamic urban pattern that enables one easily orient through the streets. Presence of no uniformity in the street width and the irregular lots also help create a positive effect in serial vision and enhance the identity of the quarter.

(iv) *Extension of life into the street :*

The observations, as in line with the previous studies (Oktay 1997, Oktay and Onal 1998), verify that the street is still significant in today's daily life. Therefore, design should take the street as an integral part of the dwelling, considering its components as in an outdoor room, and provide a direct relationship between the street and the house.

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