Identity Impelled Urban Transformations
A Reflection on the Cultural Identity of 'Displaced' Populations

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Abstract: Comprehensively designed housing during the last half of the 20th century often failed in several ways. Poor construction, lack of management and maintenance, tenure policies/ownership, urban models all contributed to the absence of self-sustainable renewal mechanisms necessary for the long-term retention of their value as residential environments. Some models of housing seem to have been more responsive to transformational change and regeneration strategies. A positive personalisation of space, in terms of utilisation and its role as cultural product, fails to turn estates into responsive high value contemporary mix tenure environments. The paper begins to investigate the possibility for the transformational change of comprehensively design housing, in a way it can reflect the cultural identity of populations with a coherent cultural background – common in the of displaced populations. The mapping of the 'before' and 'after' context, cross referenced to anthropological research associated with the experience of displaced populations (refugees) is a very useful empirical research methodology. The research draws understanding from two very different cases of refugee displacement, in terms of geography and chronology; the experience of refugee populations arriving in Greece from Asia Minor in 1922 and their 'placement' into the poorly serviced infrastructure of the city of Athens, and the relocation, of Greek Cypriot refugees from the north to the south of the island in the years after 1974, in housing estates modelled on European social housing at the time. Selected reference to the experiences drawn from the Angel Town Estate refurbishment (Housing Action Trust) programme in London in the late 1990s attempts to clarify some of the transformational mechanisms observed in the two former cases. The potential value of the interpretation, the place-identity of both the motherland and the new homes, the experiential discontinuities between the past and the present of displaced populations, can inform the 'design' of regeneration strategies of decaying refugee housing in Cyprus. This understanding gained from this recording of 'cultural imprints', begins to inform guidelines for the comprehensively designed transformational change in a way that does not only avail new lifestyles but emotive and cultural aspirations for personalisation and distinctiveness of place identity.

Keywords: Displaced Populations, Local Identity, Collective Memory Mapping, Self Built Housing, Appropriation.

Introduction

In recent decades, the phenomenon of globalization and transnational ideas have played a decisive role in architectural design. A common architectural language often overwhelms traces of 'local identity' and the original structural and physiognomic characteristics of place. Where the theoretical debate around issues of identity is vibrant, there are fewer references to briefing and design tools and/or implementation mechanisms which investigate locally biased responsive environments. Comprehensively designed modernist housing models built during the last half of 20th century, denying the integration to their locality and often failing to retain their value (social, economic, cultural) in several ways, due to poor construction, insufficient management, tenure policies/ownership, spatial configurations etc, have contributed to the absence of self-sustainable renewal mechanisms. Some models seem to have been more responsive to transformational change than others with positive personalisation of their architecture playing a key role in its future value and/or built in mechanisms for a perpetual self-sustainable renewal.

The paper draws from the empirical research of a diploma thesis at Frederick University (Sarra, 2021) which attempted to design and test mechanisms for the transformational change of a comprehensively designed refugee housing estate built in Nicosia in the 1970's. The thesis argues for an alternative to an institutionally driven top-down regeneration programme, opting for the design of a bottom up mechanism which can transfer responsibilities of the long-term care, maintenance and renewal of the environment to the 'individual'. Retaining a sense of collectiveness and enhancing local identity as tools for managing local relationships are seen as a key added value for low-income communities often associated with refugee housing.

In investigating issues of identity as a central preoccupation, the thesis draws from two very different cases of refugee displacement, in terms of geography and chronology (Sarra, 2021); the neighbourhood of Nea Ionia in Athens associated with the displacement of large populations from Asia Minor after the defeat of the Greek army in 1922, and a group of Greek Cypriot refugees relocated from the north to the south of the island in the years after the Turkish invasion of 1974. Both peoples were characterised by a strong coherent cultural background and a common understanding of place associated both with their original homes – cast in stone in the memories of refugees because of their abrupt uprooting – as well as the instantly contracted new homes in a comprehensively built environment.

Common identity is explored here as a design tool understood as remaining relevant in the making of the modern city as a sociocultural construct, and in the relationship between local identity and collectiveness, which is perhaps more relevant in a multicultural context. The key question is how far urban renewal mechanisms carry within them notions of commonality, shared value, shared determination and aesthetic understanding of place, all relevant for a high value transformational change.

1. How Useful is the Term 'Local Identity' in Constructing Design Narratives?

There is a very long debate around the concept of local identity within the realm of historic preservation and commonly accepted conservation mechanisms. Heritage conservation offers little to the debate on the relevance of local and cultural identity towards the design of new places. It "approaches the meaning or value of architecture in static terms" with a justifiable indifference to the contemporary status of its context (Tran, 2011). Jeniffer Tran continuous to suggest that "such timeless depictions of the built environment tend to view architectural identity as a physically defined construct; they often privilege and rely on the designer's concepts

to define a building; and articulate architectural history as a continuous narrative outlining the historical improvement of built form across time" (Tran, 2011). Architecture attempts to contextualize design, often deploying relatively simple notions of identity, images or practices which reflect realities long gone, internationalization, multiculturalism, and climate change – a token gesture more than a new way of approaching locally relevant design. This cannot sustain and service contemporary practice, which continues to regard notions of identity in contemporary architectural design as valuable. Considering the continuous and often substantial transformational change to the building fabric and the way it is perceived, as well as cultural and historical fluidity, the timeless notion of architecturally defined identity becomes more difficult to accept. Such a construct would "discount significant socio-cultural, perceptual and contextual aspects of architecture, and project idealized impressions of the built environment" (Tran, 2011). Furthermore, the new sustainability agenda calling for compactness, deployment of new technologies and the parallel but independent explorations of post-modern trends in architecture as an independent cultural product render borrowing aspects of the physicality of place as pointers toward designing a new identity attainable.

Identity is an aspect of Architectural design which implies strong reflections onto the physicality of place. The idea of meaning as an intrinsic component of culture which expresses actuality as well as intent, simplification and/or purpose, appears more as a tactile tool in narrating aspects of identity in design: "ideas of meaning open up a dynamic notion of the built environment which allow architectural identity to be understood as an unstable construct that forms and alters according to historically specific socio-cultural, perceptual, and contextual conditions across time" (Tran, 2011).

Notions of derived identity can be traced back to sociological research in the early 1900s. In the late 19th century, French philosopher Henri Bergson analysed in depth the way memory is defined in detail: the components of human perception comprising of images and movements. Our perception is our action and movements as they are formed through images, while the "actuality of our perception thus lies in its activity, in the movements which prolong it". (Bergson, 1911). In his argument, he focuses on the difference between perception and memory. Memory is an act that lacks energy in the present, done in the past and completed there. On the contrary, perception is not limited to representation. It is active and experiential. "The reality of things is no longer constructed but touched, penetrated, lived" (Bergson, 1911). More specifically, for Bergson, perception gives us information about the general picture of matter and allows us to separate the real from the ideal, while additionally emphasizing that perception and memory are two concepts directly connected as the latter introduces to the present moments with duration from the past.

With the introduction of sociology to the field of social sciences in the 20th century, a new concept was introduced, that of *collective memory*. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, in his work *Collective Memory* states that memory is attributed to a society or group, making it collective. It is emphasized that to remember, one needs others, while individual and collective memory are interconnected without being identified. For him, *space and time* are basic tools for identifying and recalling memories and recollections (Halbwachs, 1992). Collective memory differs substantially from society to society and the configuration of place is a product of different conjunctures and events that took place in each location. People seem to think that every place should have its own unique identity so that it stands out from the rest which was possible pre 19th century, with limited transportation and necessary use of local materials, techniques, and customs in order to build buildings. Despite subsequent industrialisation and internationalisation, basic identification tools and the ability to recall memories is space and time directly associated with the notion of place identity.

In the 1980s, Watson and Bently, while exploring issues of identity from the perspective of the place maker, developed the idea that the identity of place is immediately intertwined

with the identity of its people, which indirectly affects the way people perceive themselves and how they think other people perceive themselves. They deploy 20th century sociological research notions of 'collective memory' to ground an academic construct in its potential reflections for design. They suggest that collective memory differs substantially from society to society as a notion, and impacts the formation of place as a product of different circumstances and events that took part in each location constructing thus a unique place identity which is defined as "the set of meanings associated with any cultural landscape which any person or group of people draws on in the construction of their own personal or social identities" (Watson & Benltey, 1980). While buildings/roads/spaces/activities are losing their distinctiveness, meaning associated with place is still impactful both locally and often also internationally. They go further to suggest that place identity is not necessarily associated with space itself but can be a result of symbolism in collective memories of groups, making reference to the Mostar Herzegovina Bridge in Bosnia – a place associated with both a positive memory (young love) and a negative memory (civil war), independent of architectural elements which have been severely transformed during post war reconstruction. Interestingly, place identity as an expression of collective meaning is not necessarily positive or loved and cherished but simply passed on through generations.

Avoiding the complexities of the term identity, the notion of collective memory as a tool for mapping and demonstrating the commonality of values (even in relatively simple terms) as the relationship between spatial configurations and cultural contracts seems to be a more plausible tool for design and briefing. Collectiveness, derived from the rules of social interaction as a sense of ownership and belonging as well as a common memory of the norm, can be easily traced through the physicality of place, assuming spatial transformations are directly connected to social events that unfold in a place and vice versa.

2. Mapping of *Common Memories* and *Social Constructs* Associated with Design

In architectural and planning practice, the design brief often derives from the investigation of a spatial pathology, user needs research, or evaluations of users' aspirations for a better future. The investigations of the cultural identity of place or communities (often very different from the ones which established a place) are difficult to conduct and lie outside project briefs. Public consultation is a well-established investigatory tool which is often used to legitimize or evaluate ideas more than construct them through the articulation of tactile data associated with place personalization parameters. Furthermore, particularly large scale regeneration programs deploy top-down design and delivery mechanisms focusing on the delivery of physical change and very rarely its facilitation (i.e. allowing bottom up initiatives and decision making).

The Anthoupolis estate, one of the case studies reviewed here, experienced numerous very expensive public space improvement programs, attempting to activate a regenerative process of an already privatized stock of buildings and amenities, and all of them failed spectacularly. Renewal programs always include an aspect of tactical urbanism deploying assumptions of what the key drivers of change are and how they can trigger substantial urban renewal activity. As such, mechanisms are often based on trial and error activities, borrow experiences from other places and inevitably cannot be fully understood in terms of their social context and the structural ability of a place to regenerate itself (comparative case study evaluation). Even successful regeneration examples (physical and social) do seem to be derivative in nature to the collective sociality associated with the pathology of the original place and the aspiration for the future, rather than searching for a new identity based on

collective memories or a shift away from the institutional narrative accompanying collective top down renewal programs.

A typical example of a successful urban renewal program referred to by Watson and Bentley is the settlement of Angell Town in London (Watson & Bentley, 2008). The estate was built in the early 19th century and was intended for middle-income tenants and was secluded from the social and commercial amenity base of its surroundings. The estate quickly gained a reputation for its neglected and degraded environment, thus stigmatizing local society as problematic. In the 90's, the estate became eligible for renewal funding which the community in collaboration with designers capitalized on. A long consultation program aimed to redefine the place's identity by changing its spatial data based on three important suggestions (a) the connection of the area to its surroundings and Brixton centre (b) the re-engineering of urban morphology which restructures the original modernist layout with a new urbanism streets and square plan, thus altering the previous image of the estate. (c) New architecture was chosen as an expression of the new socio-economic status of the remaining residents and their distinct desire to erase traces of the past. A borrowed place identity associated more with the lead architect's portfolio prevailed in the absence of a positive collective memory or a common past – as well as associations with activism or the demand of a new future. Space acts as a container of aspirations which determines the way in which its users self-identify as a group, not necessarily reflecting existing social constructs or collective memories. Such constructs are often associated with common beliefs but derive from cultural bias and individual actions.

The issue of mapping collective memory – in the first instance – is reviewed through the experiences of two groups of displaced populations associated with two different events in the eastern Mediterranean – coming from Smyrna in Asia Minor in Turkey, and Larnaca Labithou in Cyprus, in the 1920s and 1970s respectively. Both places were associated with homogenous populations with long, culturally consistent traditions and distinct morphologically identifiable places of origin. Similarly, upon arrival at their new locations, the construction of the new place was consistent and instantaneously comprehensive in order to receive them.

The refugee settlement of Nea Ionia in Athens is associated with the Asia Minor disastrous defeat of the Greek army in 1922. Events that followed led to the exchange of populations at the scale of some 1.5 million people relocating to Greece over the span of a few months. Most of them moved to the Athens area, a city with a population of 3 million inhab-

Figure 1. *Angle town: a 'borrowed' new place identity.*

itants at the time. As expected, such an upheaval overwhelmed the city, its people and the infrastructure of the young Greece democracy (which was only established in the 1830s.) The rehousing policy suggested two initial categories of procurement methods. The first instance was the design and construction of compact, high-density, low-rise refugee settlements. The second mechanism was associated with the allocation of funds for self-built housing which took place often on illegally occupied lands in the outskirts of Athens (later legalized) or on designated lands often remote and outside the main infrastructure network. Very small plots and a basic street network form the basis of an almost makeshift morphology of new settlements, which included Nea Ionia. The names of the new neighbourhoods began with the adjective "new" (New Chalkidona, New Smyrni, New Ionia) an expression of the nostalgia for the past and the rich history of the ancestral lands, as well as to express the promise of incarnation of the lost homeland and its cultural wealth in a new place. The archetypal refugee house consisted of a one-story structure made of mud bricks with a tar paper roof, intended to accommodate two families. By adding a similarly constructed additional floor, a second type of house was created that had the capacity to house four families. The decision to establish carpet and textile factories – on an adjacent industrial zone – in Nea Ionia also reflected the wealth of trades refugees carried with them. Over the course of a few years, Nea Ionia had reached 24,000 inhabitants, with 90% of the population consisting of refugees.

This neighbourhood, despite its refugee character and shabby infrastructure quickly became very well known for its distinctiveness and for what it had to offer to the city of Athens. The economic contribution of the thriving local industries, the exotic stories of travels to faraway places, the new economy and its trade, its narrow streets full of life and activity, its sociality associated with music, food, and lifestyle all became emblems of the new yet coherent cultural identity of a place which captured the imagination and interest of the wider local population. A plethora of urban narratives formally and informally recorded the refugee identity of the Asia Minor in mainstream history and culture of Greece. This is expressed less in space, but more through the character and the lifestyles of the refugees, the gastronomy, and also the stories and especially the songs the new population brought with them.

Nea Ionia's refugee character began to fade in the following decades, spatially, socially, and economically. The wealth generated by the business success of the newcomers, and the economic immigration in the 1950-60s, inevitably generated a mix of populations and social restructurings. A particular planning regulation introduced in Greece in the 1970s dramatically changed the nature of all urban areas in Greece. The regulation set up a framework through which landowners could exchange land with partial ownership for a much higher density building with favourable tax terms. The two story shanty town was very quickly transformed into a 6 story continuous building line, flattening neighbourhoods into the rest of the Athenian plan, with the exception of a few conservation areas. By the late 1970-80s a total transformation of Nea Ionia (physical, economic, social) had occurred, with only the narrow frontage of buildings and the very fine scale of morphological patterns implied the presence of a very different past. While small business associated with food and entertainment – taverns, night clubs, music venues continued to operate, they were soon swallowed by the boundary less Athenian urban fabric.

Despite the complete change of the human geography of Nea Ionia as a product of the collective memories of the populations of Smyrna in Asia Minor, it retains its strong and disreputable identity to date. Apart from actually teaching the young generations of historic events and refugee identity, physical reminders survive in the names of streets and places, as well as through aspects such as gastronomy, crafts, literature and oral urban narratives around the commemoration of a collective identity. These continue to retain a strong identity of place and most importantly an extensive repertoire of music specific to the place and time of displacement (laika) continue to support a very strong identity of place. This retention of

Figure 2. *Nea Ionia – a strong identity despite the total redevelopment of the building fabric.*

a very strong identity over time with clear historic relevance, signals a de-territorialization of identities and life in a stateless condition. References to the new and the old generate a timeless connection through the creation of emulations/simulations of reality allowing happenings in the city: enhancing real memory over historical memory alongside the parallelism of everyday life in the present and the past in a place.

Larnaca Lapithou (today's Kozankoi) is a village that experienced dramatic demographic changes after the Turkish Invasion in Cyprus in 1974, when the Greek Cypriot population was replaced by an equally rural Turkish Cypriot community which continues to inhabit the village today, carrying through a strong cultural identity directly associated with a preserved village setting (Dicomitis, 2012). The displaced Greece Cypriots inhabitants on the other hand were relocated to an outer suburb of the capital city of Nicosia, in the comprehensively designed and built social housing estate in Anthoupoli. The estate opened for habitation in 1977 with 5000 occupying 975 homes. The neighborhood was constructed according to a modernist architectural ideal, similar to social housing in the UK at the time, designed by British architects. A looped perimeter road branches into a set of cul-de-sacs forming distinct neighborhoods of either terraced two story narrow frontage houses or 4 story blocks of flats. Ample open space (almost 60% of the plan) is associated with a central amenity core (mainly shops), a local school, extensive parking areas and an extensive network of pedestrian routes with more undefined and left over lands. On the other hand, very little private open space was allocated to units distributed almost evenly to back and front small courts. As a pattern, it absolutely reversed the space allocation of a traditional village like the one associated with the group of refugee populations. Very little public space simply facilitated movement except for a small public square and the church yard. Ample private open space was gathered at the front of the house in an entry forecourt used for socializing, interfacing with the outside and accommodating most of the house based activities of an agricultural society – in essence an outdoor workshops/living space almost around the year.

Initial observation indicated a distinctly high level of appropriation of the impoverished open space by the residents, as a functional open space for communal and private activities. This distinctive transformational change observed after 40 years of habitation of the estate seems to reflect directly the functional nature of the traditional village house semi-private courtyard. The fit out of public space was with gardens (flowers and vegetables), external cooking (wood ovens and barbeque equipment) for private and communal use, areas for

drying clothes, shading devices – plants and makeshift structures (also associated with the traditional house courtyards). This lack of essential functional space was confirmed during interviews. The expansion of interior spaces (i.e. enclosed balconies) was used for core activities such as sleeping, working living spaces etc. (Sarra, 2021). Informal discussions also highlighted interventions aimed also at the personalization of institutional uniformity, particularly of the residential terraces. The need for differentiation was reflected in the choice of materials, styles, and to some extent of interventions in relation to neighboring properties.

Interestingly and in contrast to the need for personalization, suggestions for a potential integration of the estate to the surrounding much more affluent housing of Nicosia (similarly to the Angel Town case) as a tool for ameliorating the ghetto status of the estate was outright rejected. A high level of comprehensiveness in the environment was seen more as a reflection of the social nature of relationships in the estate (as refugees) which was perceived as positive. A socially cohesive group of original tenants and their descendants extended their courtesy and support to newcomers (often from the same low-income economic background) in need of mutual support in the new environment. Surprisingly, the pride in a collaborative culture (very much transferred from the rural background of original residents) runs across generations, original and new residents, with younger people recognizing the value of membership in a collective.

This strong, distinctive identity of refugee and rural communities was very much reflected in the interior fit out of houses and flats as much as the need for more space. Not only through memorabilia in the decor but in ways of organizing the spaces, the management of the flexibility of interchangeable rooms, the relationship of sleep to living spaces as well as the way workspaces integrated into living functions, were all clear traces of surviving traditions passing through generations of collective memories.

The leniency of authorities in tolerating illegal extensions in public and private spaces created a new tapestry of building typologies. It was recognized by all that while extensions were necessary and useful and a tool for the personalization of space, they were aesthetically inconsistent and damaged the monetary value of properties. A strong identity based on collective memories and sociality was generating haphazard spatial transformations deriving from social data and vice versa.
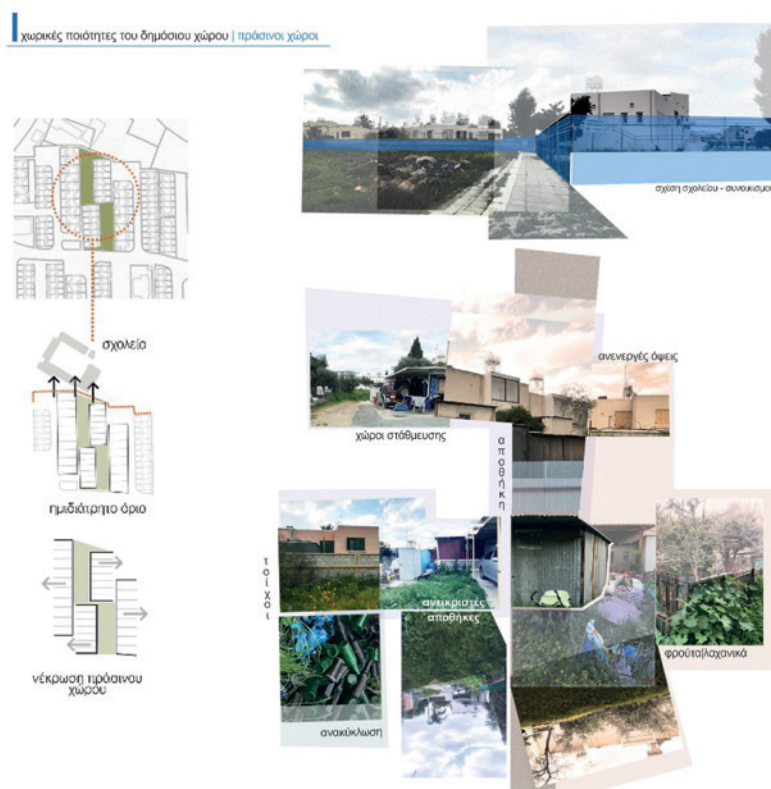

Figure 3. *Appropriation and personalization of 'unclaimed' left over space in Anthoupolis (Source: Sarra, 2021 modified extracts).*

Figure 4. *Mapping the characteristics of outdoor private space utilization (Source: Sarra, 2021 modified extracts).*

It becomes clear from the review of all cases that collective memories of place survive through generations and are not always reflected through space (i.e. Nea Ionia in Athens) which is often outside the control of individuals and collectives alike. It is also clear that not many community groups can explore the physical expression of their collectiveness on the transformational change of their environments. In Angel town and Nea Ionia, because of specific circumstances, communities settled to models of postmodern housing typologies typical in each location. Instead, collective identities were reflected through other cultural products or expressions of political activism, while there is an inevitable danger of losing the area's sociocultural identity over time. In the case of Anthoupolis, the physical traces of a lost lifestyle were only possible because of unchecked illegal interventions on the original comprehensively designed environment.

A key question remains how far the continuous renewal process of the urban fabric can retain transferals of sociocultural contracts, strongly present within communities, not necessarily as valuable/differentiated place identity for others, but as a tool of social cohesion associated with healthy, sustainable, and thriving neighborhoods.

3. Bottom-up Renewal: A Trustee Collective of Urban Narratives

Larnaca Labithou is a case study that gave the opportunity to review the potential of renewal mechanisms derived from social meanings associated with lifestyle as a sense of collectiveness and connected to some extent to a common background, but mostly linked to membership of the same economic class.

It became obvious from early surveys and previously failed schemes focusing on the upgrade of the public common space that similar refurbishment proposed by a top-down regeneration program will not create the preconditions to enhance the environmental condition of the estate. Residents felt that emphasis on the condition of the open space was not an appropriate conversation at this point in time. Pressing matters to the renewal of privately owned homes in order to accommodate expanded families and new lifestyles were seen as the key for unlocking a healthy, prosperous long-term future for the neighborhood. A controlled level of personalization was also seen as a condition which could keep the sense of a rural tight-knit community but could constrain the institutional sense of place perpetuated by a typical public sector led building renewal program. The term village was commonly used in informal conversation instead of suburban neighborhood or estate.

A bottom-up implementation of an urban code attempts to investigate the possibility of a long term continuous building fabric renewal program associated with individual unit refurbishments within a coded set of options. The investigations indicated in images 5 and

6 explore the various possibilities for expansion at ground and upper floors, including the two sets of private open space at the front and back of each unit which could be feasible without compromising neighbouring properties of climatic design parameters (Sarra, 2021). These options reflect existing illegal extensions, deriving from observations of daily activity, mappings of implicit /explicit need questionnaires and spatial references associated with urban narratives.

Key assumptions driving design prescriptions were the clear need for the establishment of permanent extensions to very small units by increasing their building volume, the need for supportive spaces– storages/parking – and the need for shaded open spaces at both ground and upper levels. Flexibility in the interchangeability of functions according to seasons and/or family circumstance, the management of a sense of privacy, the compactness of the residential unit and the active utilization of private outdoor space as an extension of the house's activities were some of the qualitative specifications. All of them very much culturally echo the traditional Cypriot village house, which despite socio-economic changes persists through generations because of its flexibility for activity and cohabitation of different generations, as well as its sensibility toward climatic design.

Extensions are seen as generative elements of new typologies with the combination of solid volumes and flexible shells to simulate the semi-private covered space of the traditional Cypriot house. Implicit and explicit needs called for the extension of private built and open space with well-defined boundaries, the transformation of public space into semi-public with informal and ad hoc investment by residents to appropriate it in a high value manner.

A morphological design code associated with the house extensions was tested against the level of personalisation and diversity it generated with new architectural elements interfering across the flat continuous facade of the terraces. A key objective was to 'regulate' the elements of choice, improve the quality and modernise the image but at the same time preserve a valued sense of comprehensiveness/expression of collectiveness still strong within the community (Figure 8).

The code focuses on the renewal of the housing stock with no references to an urban layout which could have been characterized by contemporary urban planning/design ideas as problematic. The lack of accessibility from and to the outside, the fragmentation into neighborhoods, and the retention of introversion were seen as positive conditions by the community connected to the self-perpetuated sense of social referencing and inclusiveness across old tenancies and newcomers.
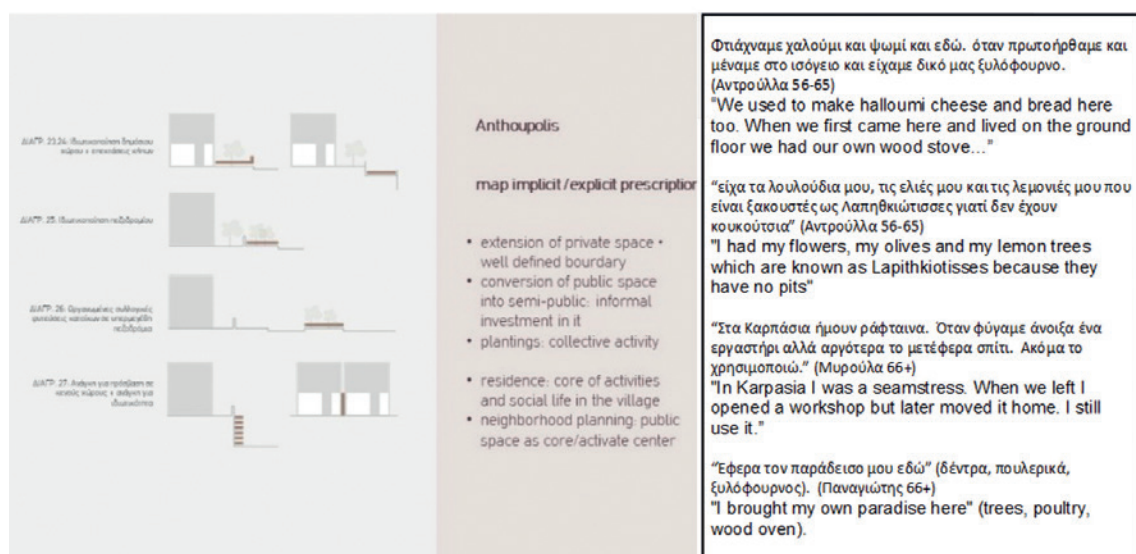

Figure 5. *A renewal urban code: investigation of unit expansions (Source: Sarra, 2021 modified extracts).*
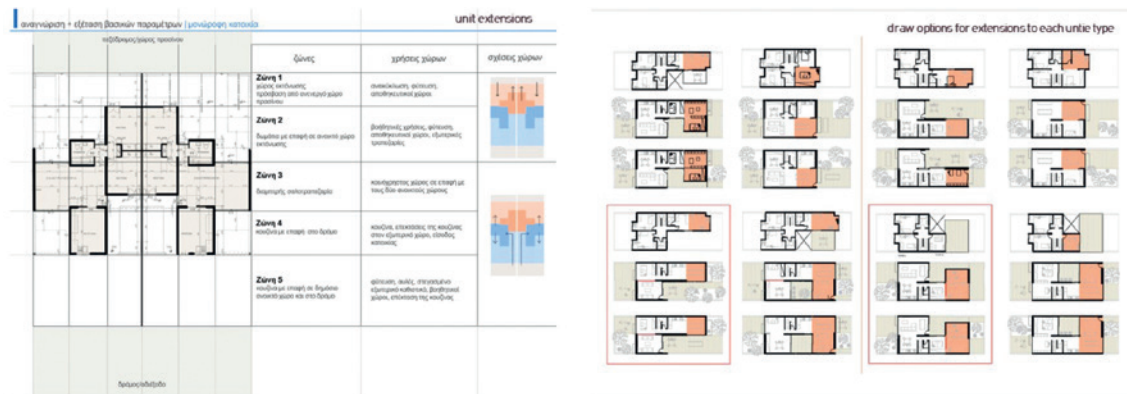
Figure 6. *A renewal urban code: the investigation of house typologies compact extensions (Source: Sarra, 2021 modified extracts).*

Figure 7. *New and old typology of open space extensions (Source: Sarra, 2021 modified extracts).*

Figure 8. *Manage comprehensiveness of renewal of image and architectural quality (Source: Sarra, 2021 modified extracts).*

The potential delivery of a long-term gradual change led by individual owners holds several challenges. Although it simulates the gradual renewal process of a typical suburbia neighbourhood, it is particular in that the change needs to take place in a coded and collective way. A mechanism for collectively applying as a community for the planning permit of the code collectivises the mechanism of approvals. The common and identical structural systems of units also implies the possibility for a similarly joint building regulations approval with works even tendered. This could lead to a community-led coded renewal programme implemented by individuals, and gradual home refurbishments over time.

It is also necessary to review collective and individual funds (still available to originally displaced refugee families).Funds associated with on-going maintenance grants or bespoke projects associated with the estate could be channeled toward a community-led allocation of mixed funding towards a bottom up but substantial regeneration plan.

A bottom-up piecemeal housing renewal does not only provide a framework for the gradual intensification and upgrade of living spaces, but shifts the long-term responsibility of the constructive maintenance of institutional environments from the public sector to the community and the individual in a way that could support and renew aspects of collective memory, a condition interwoven with the notion of local identity as a positive spatial indicator.

Concluding Note

Nowadays, due to globalization, the issue of identity exploration is emerging as a means of self-determination, in a world where identities are becoming increasingly denationalized.

The analysis of concepts of identity, movement and parallelisms in the first chapter, highlights local identity as a set of concepts which refers to the collective self-identification of a community. Notions of meaning carried through collective memories assisted – consciously or unconsciously – to transfer traditions, habits, activities to the new place where they settled.

The potential value of the interpretation of place-identity and the experiential discontinuities between the past and the present of displaced populations, can inform the design of regeneration strategies not only for decaying refugee housing but for institutional housing in general. The understanding gained from this recording of cultural imprints, begins to inform guidelines for relatively unconventional, comprehensively designed, transformational change in a way that does not only avail new lifestyles but emotive and cultural aspirations towards personalisation and distinctiveness of place identity.

What would be unconventional in urban renewal mechanisms would be the shift from a top-down to a bottom up approach for large scale interventions, allowing personal renewal of homes by preserving institutional integrity and the essence of estates not only as spatial entities but as social constructs with a strong sense of collectiveness, often deeply valued by local populations (sense of belonging, social support mechanisms, community engagement in common affairs etc.).

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