

**PRESS RELEASE**

**From: Pantheon Cultural Association**

**Subject: E-book “Building Blocks for Social Sustainability: Nicosia, Cyprus”**

A new academic e-book compiled of student projects from the Architecture Department of University of Nicosia on social sustainability in Cyprus is now available on-line.

The editors consists of practitioners and theoreticians with an extensive background on issues of sustainable design, bioclimatic architecture, sustainable urbanism and social and environmental ethics. Dr Petros Lapithis is a professor of architecture and the coordinator of the Sustainable Design Unit (SDU) at the Department of Architecture, University of Nicosia, while Anna Papadopoulou joins the SDU as adjunct faculty and special consultant. Alexandros Postekkis who masterminded the entire initiative, is a graduate of the SDU and an active practitioner. Nikolas Tsaousis and Andreas Chrysochos are also graduates of architecture from the University of Nicosia and their special interests and thesis, with Dr Lapithis as their advisor, lay well within urbanism and social sustainability.

Social sustainability extends the essence of sustainable design and combines design of the physical realm with the design of the social world in order to create successful places that promote well-being by understanding what people need from the places where they live and work. This book is a compilation of student design projects that aim to address sustainability beyond its conventional environmental component and push the boundaries of what it means for communities to thrive as part of the great infinity of civilization.

The editors of this book would like to extend their appreciation by acknowledging the contribution of all students of the Architecture and Interior Design programmes of the Department of Architecture, University of Nicosia who have participated in the Building Blocks for Social Sustainability workshops from the first years of its inception.

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## **Social Sustainability within the City**

Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, is estimated with 320,000 residents. Of those, about 50,000 live in the central part of the city, these being both migrants and locals. Migrants are distributed throughout the central part of the city but they are more present within the Venetian walls of Nicosia, an area known as the Old Town. Migrants socialise mainly with their co-nationals or other migrants, limiting the relationship between Cypriots and foreigners. The Cypriots that come in contact with migrants the most are predominantly employers. This hierarchical power does not easily allow other relationships to grow.

Multicultural education is a new theoretical and practical reaction in the transformative cultural reality. Migrants appear to have difficulties in adaptation because they face a complete unknown cultural situation. The needs, mentality and means of expression of people from different cultural backgrounds is not easily accepted. The primordial feelings that migrants feel are insecurity and lack of comfort.

Accepting different groups of people is very important for democratic societies to flourish, along with multicultural education. The ability to provide the opportunity to different groups of people to have an active participation within the general community is an important factor that can help solve some of the issues mentioned above. Basic principles for a multicultural education are the exchange of information and experiences, communication, elimination of racism, growth of sensitivity, solidarity, collaboration and general respect towards multicultural education.

The aim is to provide skills that encourage cohabitation in a multicultural society in order to enhance respect towards varying nationalities but encourage recognition of the different cultural identities through a consistent dialogue of understanding and cooperation. Creating an intellectual background allows respect for the different and fruits open societies with a multicultural harmony that are distinguished by equality, understanding, interaction and solidarity.

Social sustainability is mainly concerned with the creation and maintenance of the quality of life of people within a society. It gives emphasis to the protection of the psychological and physical health of all people, it encourages social cohesion and provides education to people who in turn have the opportunity to contribute to society as a whole and develop relationships within it. Confronting individuals equally provides equal opportunities to all while giving more emphasis to those in need, encourages and educates the diversity and provides social cohesion between people with different status. Eventually, the quality of life which has to do with basic needs, is cultivated on a personal, group and community level.

Giving opportunities to people to participate in recreational activities is vital for the well-being of societies. The good design of a city and its public spaces has the ability to increase the connection between citizens and encourage socialisation. The creation of a healthy environment, were people are aware of their society and the people living within it, is crucial to its sustainability.

Public spaces are spaces within a city where different people have the opportunity to socialise. These have to be “democratic spaces” which all people feel welcome to use and have the right to be in. They have to offer a quality of life and be able to release the creativity of citizens. The participation of people in the society can bring people together and create a sense of place and identity. When citizens have the opportunity to feel safe and actively use public spaces within a city, criminality is eliminated.

### ***The BBSS Workshops***

Since social sustainability is more of an inquiry than a definition, workshops such as the BBSS (Building Blocks for Social Sustainability) serve as an orientation device rather than a solution to a problem. Social sustainability ensures cohabitation and coexistence between all racial groups; thus this workshop aimed to accentuate cultural differences and similarities while enhancing mutual respect between communities of cultural diversity and environmental systems. The workshops targeted to explore the concept of social sustainability and to discover its placement concerning broader issues of sustainability. The four to five day workshops took place between March 2013-March 2017 at the Department of Architecture, University of Nicosia. The student team consists of students of the Architecture programme and the Interior programme of the Department of Architecture, University of Nicosia.

The workshop addresses the issue of social sustainability within a humanistic and cultural context, set on the platform of the built environment. Participants are called to consider matters of formal and informal urban structure, sense of community, social identity and ethics as those pertain to societal development in a diverse, multicultural setting. Operating under the premise that social sustainability can be attained through means of collaboration and common awareness, the workshop’s findings aim to activate urban spaces in a three-dimensional and temporal manner in order to induce values of social and egalitarian participation.

## *The Sites*

It was decided early on in the preparation of the workshop brief, that the students would be provided with a site in Nicosia. The prerequisites for the site selection were that it be urbanistically diverse so that all participants would have the opportunity to explore a group's particular interests. Also, it was important that the chosen site offer the challenge of multiple layers of history and human ecosystems. The sites chosen in Nicosia were:

1. Walled City of Nicosia
2. State Refugee Estates, Agios Mamas, Nicosia
3. Ledra Palace Crossing, Buffer Zone, Nicosia
4. Kaimakli Industrial Area, Nicosia

The **Walled City of Nicosia** is the inner city of Nicosia that lies within the Venetian walls. Following a military incursion from Turkey in 1974, the city has been divided into two parts approximately equal in area, with a United Nations administered buffer zone in the middle, running from east to west. It is a site that is rich in commercial and residential activity, with a large number of craft shops and small-scale industries such as carpentries, car-repair workshops etc. The area remains active for approximately twelve hours daily, on weekdays and on weekends. The residential units accommodate low to middle class income and houses mostly immigrant workers. Several buildings are listed and new construction is highly regulated. As a result of its multicultural and long history, the walled city of Nicosia is well known for its romanticized atmosphere and attracts a large number of tourists on a regular basis.

The **Refugee Estates of Agios Mamas** in Nicosia is a planned neighborhood built after the 1974 invasion to accommodate refugees who required immediate housing. As such, the area is rich in historical and cultural layers. One of the most prominent spatial features is a system of cul-de-sacs and temporary structures. Consequently, the greatest challenge of negotiating the site is achieving social sustainability by overcoming issues of spatial isolation.

The **Ledra Palace Crossing** is situated just outside the western top of the Venetian Walls of Nicosia. The name of the area was provided by a military checkpoint separating Nicosia's militarized and demilitarized jurisdictions. Ledra Palace, the building immediately adjacent to the checkpoint, was formerly a landmark hotel of the city, and currently provides administrative and accommodation facilities for the United Nations (UN) forces stationed in Cyprus. The rich tapestry of the area's past extends along the approximate north-south axis provided by the Wall and the Moat, which act as a spine that connects civil buildings such as the District and Supreme Courts in the south, Ledra Palace in the north, impressive sandstone colonial buildings on the west and a more humble and dense residential fabric on the east. Conditions of spatial and social isolation occur as a result of the different jurisdictions, the site's elevation challenges and the area's active historicity.

The former **Kaimakli industrial area** near Sopaz area presents a unique challenge and opportunity for exploration within the workshop's parameters. It is a site that has been an economic and cultural landmark not only for the immediate area, but for Nicosia at large, and it is also a site that is in dire need of environmental restoration because of its previous industrial use. Its historic value and prominent physical presence make Sopaz a uniquely layered area of study.