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An Overview on the Traditional Architecture of Cyprus

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One of the most important issues of today's discourse is environmental problems, which become the new realm of the world. The ignorance of environmental values that are ranged from local to regional scales in both design and construction processes, burdens the inconveniences of the "contemporary" settings. Locality bears particular values in terms of natural, built and cultural context that constantly shape the local identity throughout the ages. Exclusion of this set of values in the development of the built environment, in conjunction with the consumer oriented approaches of global trends, is mainly ended up with an unsatisfactory living milieu. The lack of environmental and socio-cultural aspects especially in the building design is the vital issue behind the questioning of existing understanding and its product; living context. In this respect, building tradition bears the opportunity to be learned from its experienced, developed and evolved architectural solutions.

Under this scope, in order to understand the current position of the traditional architecture of Cyprus, the failing of the process of traditional architecture of Island should be particularly mentioned.

Beginning with the changing norms of the colonial administration in the first half of last century and consequent emergence of modern architecture in the Island, Cypriots witnessed the continuous degradation of their traditional architecture. Especially after 1950's, the new construction of traditional buildings is negligibly observed. The continuity in traditional building activities radically ended as a result of modern social values and new building activities. New forms of architecture, which blended with new materials and technologies, are randomly emerged in the traditional fabric and silhouette.

The early years that modern materials and techniques were imported to Cypriot architecture witnessed many successful modern building forms. However, after 1960s these improvements were replaced with mainly inappropriate designs in the cultural and natural context within the pluralistic approach.

Besides the mentioned changes due to the influences of global trends and developed construction technologies, which are commonly experienced throughout the world with different intensities, Cyprus also struggles with other vital difficulties. The Island is faced with a political dispute that toughens the revealed problems resulting with the severe threats on traditional architecture [1]. As a result of the conflict for over a couple of decades between the communities resulted with the division of the Island. The socio-cultural and also historical center of traditional settlement is separated by the border and turned to no man's land.

Afterward the traditional centers of almost all urban settlement in general but capital Nicosia in particular are abandoned by the locals, and mainly settled by the transnational immigrants. The changing demographics in the traditional sectors accelerated the declining process and increased the public ignorance. Segregation between the transnational immigrants and locals spatialized through the

traditional urban quarters. Locals developed their new urban centers which have no connection to their traditional quarters and even have no reference to their traditional architecture. Therefore, traditional urban centers and also rural settlements shared the same consequences such as dereliction and deterioration.

In the last decades, traditional urban settlements of the Island are taken in the agenda of the international bodies such as UNDP, EU and USA. Series of revitalization projects are implemented in the traditional urban settlements by the sponsorships of mentioned bodies. The hope for the reunification of Cyprus is supported by the international parties in the form of revitalization of traditional urban centers which would be possible gathering areas for the separated local communities. In such cases, the projects are limited by only a point in the settlement which cannot be effective enough while the surroundings physically and socially keep on decaying. On the other hand, development of building industry due to the economic growth threatens the last traces of traditional architecture in rural settlements. In addition to political ambiguities, lack of public awareness and legislation for conserving the traditional architecture worsen this situation. In the recent years, the particular supports and encouragements for the renovation of the traditional buildings are observed in the traditional rural areas within the concept of eco-tourism. However, these attempts might not be enough for stopping the deterioration process because of weak administrative, social and financial supports.

Cyprus, the center for growing tourism attraction in the Mediterranean basin, is faced with the threat on her unique natural and traditional environments unless appropriate precautions are proposed. While answering the increase in the building demands for housing and tourism purposes; conservation and continuity of traditional environments have to be considered primarily [2].

In brief, the responsibility of designers is to find the ways of analyzing and interpreting the past building traditions for the continuity of the tried, developed and evolved design principals in the traditional architecture. Doubtlessly, the past experiences suitably respond to the cultural and environmental needs of the context. Hence, climatically responsive, environmentally sensitive, socio-economically adaptive, culturally conscious building forms can be created [3].

References:

- [1] Ozgur Dincyurek, Ozlem Olgac Turker. Learning from traditional built environment of Cyprus: Re-interpretation of the contextual values. *Building and Environment* 42 (2007): 3384–3392.
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] Ozlem Olgac Turker, Ozgur Dincyurek. Learning from Traditional Environments: Cyprus on the threshold of becoming a unified country. In: *Proceedings of XXXII IAHS - World Congress on Housing Sustainability of the Housing Projects*, September 21-25, 2004, Trento, Italy.