

Re-use of historic buildings in North Cyprus

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Abstract

Buildings are the living organisms that are affected by the rapid changes of the world. If they lose their functions or are not maintained, they can die. However, it is possible to re-use these historic buildings according to the changing conditions of contemporary life with the help of technology. In this way, it can be possible to preserve and revitalize the historic witnesses to provide references for further designs. Cyprus is an island at the crossroads of three continents; Europe, Asia and Africa. Thus, the island has achieved combining different cultures in its body and reflecting them in its architecture. Its rich architectural heritage has been composed layer by layer as the history moved from century to century. There are lots of monuments from different periods that were rehabilitated and used for various functions. On this basis, the aim of the study is to discuss re-use of the historic buildings in Northern Cyprus. The argument of the study is presented in two sections. Firstly, different architectural periods are discussed with their specific examples, which have been converted into new uses. This creates a base and presents the general structure of its architectural heritage. It starts with the beginning of the Roman Period (58 BC-330AD) and comes until the end of British Period (1878-1960). Then, related to the first stage, the general re-use strategies and processes are presented.

1 Introduction

Architecture is a symbolic creation of the culture that provides communication for future generations. Buildings know about traditions, methods, climate and living conditions of a country during their construction periods. They survive with their functions, users and environments. The developing world and its



changing conditions also affect buildings, directly. For this reason, some of them might lose their original functions, in time, with the changing life style, technology, rules – regulations, economy and environment. New needs and requirements in human life cause to arising of contemporary uses and environments. Moreover, different obsolescence of a building prevents it from serving its function.

Adaptive re-use improves the building towards modern standards and reduces the future maintenance to a considerable extent. In order to preserve the original architectural characteristics of a building, minimum alterations are to be applied. In other words, new use provides a new life to a building and avoids possible destruction and decay. Rehabilitation of historic buildings with an adaptive re-use is a common method of treatment in Northern Cyprus that has been applied for a long time. The large amount of valuable historic buildings makes it available. A discussion on the significant architectural periods with several examples and a general framework of conservation can give an idea about the adaptive re-use of the historic buildings in Northern Cyprus.

2 A discussion on the architectural periods

At different time spans, variable tendencies related to the different cultures have been effective on the architecture of Cyprus. Today, it is possible to observe lots of buildings from the previous civilizations. Roman (58BC-330AD), Byzantine (330-1191), Lusignan (1192-1489), Venetian (1489-1571), Ottoman (1571-1878) and British (1878-1960) are the most significant periods that marked their footprints. Many of the buildings from these periods have well been established and rehabilitated. The mentioned architectural periods and specific examples, which have been adapted for re-use, are discussed here below.

2.1 Roman (58BC-330AD)

In 58 BC, Cyprus entered the domination of the Roman Empire and became the first country ruled by the Christianity. Romans started building new roads, harbours, and public buildings in Cyprus [1]. Roman amphitheatres, public baths, mosaics and other architectural events were the most significant evidences from that period. Public buildings such as; market places, gymnasia, public baths, theatres, amphitheatres for gladiatorial contests and nymphaea (fountain houses) were all organised together creating a city centre [2]. Salamis is an important city inherited from the Roman Period.

Serious earthquakes occurred in Cyprus during the said period. In 15 BC, a destructive earthquake had destroyed Salamis, but the city was rebuilt in the grand Roman fashion of the time. Again, during the fourth century, Salamis was affected from an earthquake. It was rebuilt once more on a smaller scale. Thus, it could not be caused to attain its previous magnificence [1].

Today, Salamis is an open museum that presents the traces of the Roman Period and its life-style (Fig.1). Most of the buildings have been demolished. Thus, they have no chance for re-use. However, the theatre is in good condition



and survives. It is used for the important performances in such a historic atmosphere as part of it.

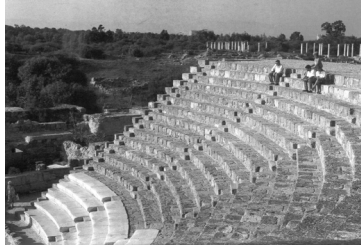


Figure 1: Theatre of Salamis [3].

2.2 Byzantine (330-1191)

The Roman Empire was divided into two parts as Eastern and Western. As a result of this division, Cyprus became part of the Eastern Roman Empire known as Byzantine Period (330-1191).

As a whole, Byzantine Period is considered to be very prolific, its art reflecting the prosperity of the age. However, not much remain of the works were carried out at that time [4]. One of the major works of the period is St. Barnabas Church and Monastery (early of the tenth century) that has still been maintained in good condition (Fig.2). Today, it is used as an icon and archaeological museum and consists of two parts. The first is the main five-domed church building inside of which wall paintings, various icons and other items are being displayed. The other part opens to a courtyard through an arcade system. Different archaeological creations inherited from various periods are exhibited therein.



Figure 2: The five-domed church of St. Barnabas.

2.3 Lusignan (1192-1489)

The western Crusaders also affected the history of Cyprus, at that time. In 1191 during the Third Crusade, Richard the Lion-heart, King of England captured the island. However soon after, he sold the island to the Frankish King of Jerusalem,



Guy de Lusignan (1192 BC). The following three centuries were the most brilliant times of Cyprus history, known as the Lusignan Period (1192-1489).

Under the influence of the Lusignans, the island would be an important place famous for its architectural creations. Generally, churches, monasteries, palaces and mansions were built at that time. During the 14th century, again earthquakes destroyed main cities. New cities were constructed after these disasters.

The common architectural style of Lusignans is Gothic. Some of the major historical buildings that belong to the Lusignan Period are St. Nicholas Cathedral in Famagusta, St. Sophia Cathedral in Nicosia, Bellapais Abbey, and Kyrenia Castle. It is possible to extend these examples. The monumental characteristics and perfect structural systems of Gothic buildings have been carried to our days. Most of these public buildings have been adapted for variable uses. St. Nicholas and St. Sophia Cathedrals were converted to mosques. However, they are visited by people in definite time spans like a museum as the most significant examples of Gothic architecture (Fig.3). Bellapais Abbey sits on the slope of a mountain in a perfect environment. Today, it is used as a cultural centre and concert hall. The most prominent art performances, especially classical music concerts are organised therein. Kyrenia Castle is also the pearl of the town on the shore. A part of it has been organised as an archeological museum.

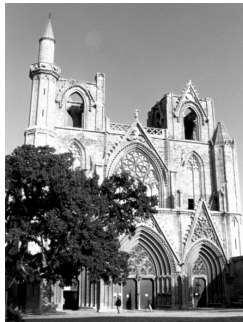


Figure 3: St. Nicholas Cathedral in Famagusta (Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque).

Examples of the domestic architecture pertaining to this period can also be found in Cyprus. Lusignan House in Nicosia is a good example that has been protected from that time till date and is currently used as an ethnographic museum.

2.4 Venetian (1489-1571)

During the Venetian Period (1489-1571) that followed, the island became an important trading post and strategic military outpost against Muslim attacks. Venetians generally displayed a militaristic character and gave importance to the defence of Cyprus. Therefore, the architecture of the island was shaped in a different way. They did not lose time and fortified their cities. In Famagusta, new walls were replaced with massive bastions. Between 1567 and 1570, they



also constructed the walls that are still standing around Nicosia. Most of the architectural buildings of that time are of military nature. However, there are also a few examples that have different functions such as; Queen's House, Bidulb Gate and some dwellings [5]. A dwelling unit inherited from the Venetian Period has been preserved through adaptive re-use. Today, it is used in Nicosia as a lapidary museum (Fig.4). The main entrance of the building, its windows, building materials and construction techniques, give some clues about its stylistic character.



Figure 4: Lapidary Museum in Nicosia.

2.5 Ottoman (1571-1878)

During this period, Cyprus lost its links with Europe by being incorporated into the rule of the Ottoman State. As a result of this change, numerous important “waqfs” (foundations) were established and for over four hundred years they gave support to the building activity in the island.



Figure 5: The Great Inn (Buyuk Han) in Nicosia.

Generally, Ottomans converted the majority of the disused existing buildings into their new uses. They also built new buildings such as mosques. It is also possible to observe vaulted tombs and small monuments in the honour of important deceased people. Moreover, during the Ottoman administration, a number of other public buildings such as inns were also built. One of the most famous inns is the Great Inn (Buyuk Han) in Nicosia. The building is of two-

storey one designed around a rectangular arcaded courtyard. The ground floor included shops, storage rooms, and chambers for business transactions. Moreover, the upper floor was arranged as for lodgings. The stables were placed outside the inn. Also, there is a small domed mosque in the middle of the courtyard. The obsolescence of the building was maintained and rehabilitated. It was re-designed as an activity and a cultural centre. Now, the building consists of shops and workshops involved in the art and traditional handicrafts. Thus, the creations on the culture are presented on other products of the culture (Fig.5).

Mostly, the effects of the Ottoman Period can be observed in dwellings. After the conquest of the Ottomans, the new settlers migrated there from the Ottoman lands. In time, other Turkish builders who used to live in Cyprus took over the job and introduced some regional differences to the vocabulary. In principle, these houses have similarities with the traditional Turkish House and architecture. Dervish Pasha Mansion in Nicosia is one of the most prominent examples from that time. This building has also been rehabilitated and re-organised as an ethnographical museum representing the family-life and culture of the Ottoman Period.

2.6 British (1878-1960)

After nearly four hundred years of the Ottoman sovereignty, British was another effectual civilization period onto Cyprus. British Empire would be a pioneer that began to apply new materials and techniques to Cyprus architecture. Also, they brought a new culture, rules and regulations to the island, which became effective on the shaping of its architecture. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a revival of the architectural style of ancient Greece and Rome. This, Neo-Classical style was used in public buildings and domestic architecture. Doorways had flat stone imitations of Roman columns and these were called pilasters. Above the door, a balcony of decorative ironwork was supported by ornamental brackets. This style was placed at the Victorian period of British. Therefore, it reached the island in 1878, via British Society [6].



Figure 6: The Department of Ancient Monuments and Museums in Nicosia.

They mostly built government buildings, offices, and houses in harmony with the changing life style and technologies of the time. Today, most of these buildings are in use. The large amount of the domestic buildings has been kept



with their original functions. There are also some others, which have been converted to new uses in harmony with the existing buildings and their environments. The public buildings of the British Period have generally been adapted to department offices such as; post office, court building and etc. The building of the Department of Ancient Monuments and Museums in Nicosia is also from the British Period. It has been re-organised according to the contemporary needs and using as an office building (Fig.6).

3 General strategies of conservation and re-use in N. Cyprus

The effects of time, users, wars, nature and environment have caused damages on the art and architectural heritage of Cyprus. Especially, earthquakes that occurred in several times have become effective on the obsolescence of historic buildings. Throughout the history, different precautions have been taken in harmony with the conditions of the time to prevent these harms. Adaptive re-use of existing buildings have been one of the oldest treatment methods. Majority of the disused buildings were adapted to new uses during the Ottoman Period. Thus, it is possible to say that the foundations of re-use projects date back to these times. On the other hand, the first legislations for the preservation of historic buildings and cultural heritage were prepared during the British Period and have been improved in different times. Today, the conservation of historic buildings by adaptive re-use has been continued to be practiced according to the legislative, organizational and financial frameworks of conservation.

3.1 General legislative and organisational framework

The conservation of historical and cultural values is based on the laws of the administration in Northern Cyprus. “Antiquities Law – Cap. 31” was the first legislative work on historic buildings and cultural values. It was firstly implemented in 1935, during the British Period and improved several times. Today, “Ancient Monuments Law - (60/94)” is the major legislation on conservation. It was reorganised in 1994 according to the contemporary life and its requirements. It consists of eight sections presented here below:

- 1- General rules and regulations.
- 2- The rules and regulations regarding the conservation of immovable antiquities and monuments and their environments.
- 3- The rules and regulations pertaining to the conservation of movable antiquities.
- 4- The rules and regulations regarding researches, boring, excavation and treasure exploration practices, permissions in these regards and the obligations on the damage related compensations.
- 5- Establishment and responsibilities of the Supreme Council of Ancient Monuments and Immovable Antiquities (SCAMIA).
- 6- Offenses and punishments.
- 7- Tentative rules and regulations.
- 8- Final rules and regulations.



In general, “Ancient Monuments Law - (60/94)” considers immovable and movable antiquities, monuments and their environments. All the rules and regulations aim at defining and listing historic antiquities (historic buildings, monuments, environments); determining the conservation areas and boundaries of immovable antiquities and monuments; sorting out the conservation areas; defining the general interventions to them; guiding the uses of historic buildings and provisions; describing the rights and responsibilities of the owners and the ownership; establishing the Ancient Monuments fund and defining the rules pertaining to the researches on these historic buildings and cultural values. It is also involved in defining the responsibilities of the SCAMIA. This committee is the top authority responsible for the conservation of historical and cultural values. It gives the fundamental decisions and controls the studies. The committee has eleven specialist members who represent various departments. The Department of Ancient Monuments and Museums is the main one that works on the conservation of historic buildings and cultural values. Thus, the head of this department is also the chief of the SCAMIA [7]. The other members are as follows:

- Head or a Representative of the Department of Measurement and Restoration.
- Representative of the Department of Culture.
- An archaeologist appointed by the relevant Ministry.
- A representative from the higher educational institutions appointed by the relevant Ministry.
- A representative from Evkaf Foundation.
- A representative of the Urban Planning Department.
- A representative of the Department of Environmental Protection.
- A representative of the Association of the Municipalities.
- A representative of the Chamber of Architects from the Cyprus Turkish Chamber of Architects and Engineers.
- A representative of the Chamber of Urban Planners from the Cyprus Turkish Chamber of Architects and Engineers.

“Cap 96 – the Streets and Buildings Regulations” and “Town Planning Law” are the other legislations that have direct effects on the conservation and re-use. It is possible to extend the list of the departments and the laws. “Law of Environment, Law of Municipalities, Law of Tourism, Law of Foundation, Law of Rent and Law of Immovable Property” are some of the other legislations that are related to the conservation and re-use.

3.2 Financial supports

As important as project, organisational and legislative framework, financial support is also necessary for successful applications. Generally, this is covered by the following sources:

- UNOPS (United Nations Project Services).
- Budget of the Conservation of Antiquities and Historic Monuments and incomes from historic buildings and ancient monuments (their rents, incomes from the museum tickets, and etc.)



-Financial contributions from Turkey (The relevant committee in charge of the Turkish aid).

3.3 General process of conservation and re-use

Various organisational groups and departments are responsible for the conservation and re-use of historic buildings. As stated above variable sections that may vary from time to time, work together in conformity within the frame of laws under the leadership and assistance of the SCAMIA. Each study is considered according to a procedure. This process of study may change with respect to the type of ownership.

3.3.1 Buildings that belong to the government

Different offices of the Administration work together on conservation and re-use projects. Usually a job is undertaken by the Department of Antiquities and Museums, Planning and Construction Office of the administration and “waqfs” (foundations). Firstly, architects and engineers from the responsible department make a preliminary study. Then, the project’s calculations, agreement and tender are prepared, in sequence. All these studies are to be presented to the SCAMIA. If the project is accepted by this council, the implementation process is initiated.

3.3.2 Buildings at private ownership

The architect of an owner prepares a re-use project. Then, this study is submitted to the Section of Urban Planning and Design of the Urban Planning Department. It is also presented to the Department of Antiquities and Museums. Consequently, it is brought to the desk of the SCAMIA. The sub-committee of this council formed by four architects examines the submitted project. They report their comments to the SCAMIA. If the re-use project is not acceptable, the sub-committee studies on the project before being resent to the council. Following its approval by the council, the implementation process is duly initiated.

4 Conclusion and remarks

The argument discussed above indicates the general characteristics of architectural heritage and re-use activities in Northern Cyprus. The legislative, organisational and financial aspects are briefly considered. The conservation of historic buildings by their re-use is the most common treatment method used in Northern Cyprus. In this way, not only the historic values are preserved but the building requirements for various functions can also be covered. This is also appealing because of economic reasons.

Cyprus is a small island in the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, the architecture related to the scale and life-style of the island has been developed. As presented above, the buildings are mostly in small scale except some of the public buildings such as cathedrals, monasteries, mosques and administrative offices. The re-use projects of these buildings are also in small scale. They are not so complicated. These buildings have been maintained with the compliance of their



original characteristics and re-designed. The alterations are mostly limited and they provide contemporary needs according to the functional use.

The large amount of the buildings that was adapted for re-use belongs to the administration in the North. Mostly, they are converted to department offices, cultural centres, museums or are rented. By this way an income is gained, which is spent again on the purposes of conservation. However, there are some buildings such as the houses that are re-designed and converted to new use. The legislative framework of a re-use project is same in case of both private and official ownership.

A depreciated historic building looks like a decayed tooth in a mouth. If it is not maintained, both the building and its environment are unfavourably affected from the negative conditions on it. In recent years, the works on historic buildings and re-use practices have been increased in Northern Cyprus. Besides, there are lots of historic buildings and districts that need preservation. Mostly, few buildings from each quarter are selected and conserved through taking into consideration of the limited economic conditions. Thus, they are considered not being effective in a large scale sense. At this point the organisational and financial support gains significance. Private organisational groups have not yet been built-up in Northern Cyprus. The participation of the local groups and national organisations are expected to encourage the conservation studies. If the public participation is increased in the future, it will then be possible to create more sensitive environments and generations.

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