

Sustainable Living Where the Immaterial Matters

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Abstract : This paper aims to explore and provoke a debate, through the work of the design studio, “living where the immaterial matters” of the architecture department of the University of Nicosia, on the role that the “immaterial matter” can play in enhancing innovative sustainable architecture and viewing the cities as sustainable organisms that always grow and alter. The blurring, juxtaposing binary of immaterial and matter, as the theoretical backbone of the Unit is counterbalanced by the practicalities of the contested sites of the last divided capital Nicosia with its ambiguous green line and the ghost city of Famagusta in the island of Cyprus. Jonathan Hill argues that the ‘immaterial is as important to architecture as the material concluding that ‘Immaterial-Material’ weaves the two together, so that they are in conjunction not opposition’. This understanding of the relationship of the immaterial vs material set the premises and the departing point of our argument, and talks about new recipes for creating hybrid public space that can lead to the unpredictability of a complex and interactive, sustainable city. We hierarchized the human experience as a priority. We distinguish the notion of space and place referring to Heidegger’s ‘building dwelling thinking’: ‘a distinction between space and place, where spaces gain authority not from ‘space’ appreciated mathematically but ‘place’ appreciated through human experience’. Following the above, architecture and the city are seen as one organism. The notions of boundaries, porous borders, fluidity, mobility, and spaces of flows are the lenses of the investigation of the unit’s methodology, leading to the notion of a new hybrid urban environment, where the main constituent elements are in a flux relationship. The material and the immaterial flows of the town are seen interrelated and interwoven with the material buildings and their immaterial contents, yielding to new sustainable human built environments. The above premises consequently led to choices of controversial sites. Indisputably a provoking site was the ghost town of Famagusta where the time froze back in 1974. Inspired by the fact that the nature took over the a literally dormant, decaying city, a sustainable rebirthing was seen as an opportunity where both nature and built environment, material and immaterial are interwoven in a new emergent urban environment. Similarly, we saw the dividing ‘green line’ of Nicosia completely failing to prevent the trespassing of images, sounds and whispers, smells and symbols that define the two prevailing cultures and becoming a porous creative entity which tends to start reuniting instead of separating , generating sustainable cultures and built environments. The authors would like to contribute to the debate by introducing a question about a new recipe of cooking the built environment. Can we talk about a new ‘urban recipe’: ‘cooking architecture and city’ to deliver an ever changing urban sustainable organism, whose identity will mainly depend on the interrelationship of the immaterial and material constituents?

Keywords : blurring zones, porous borders, spaces of flow, urban recipe

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