

Emerging Identities: A Transformative 'Green Zone'

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Abstract : There exists an on-going geographical scar creating a division through the Island of Cyprus and its capital, Nicosia. The currently amputated city center is accessed legally by the United Nations convoys, infiltrated only by Turkish and Greek Cypriot army scouts and illegal traders and scavengers. On Christmas day 1963 in Nicosia, Captain M. Hobden of the British Army took a green chinagraph pencil and on a large scale Joint Army-RAF map 'marked' the division. From then on this 'buffer zone' was called the 'green line.' This once dividing form, separating the main communities of Greek and Turkish Cypriots from one another, has now been fully reclaimed by an autonomous intruder. It's currently most captivating inhabitant is nature. She keeps taking over, for the past fifty years indigenous and introduced fauna and flora thrive; trees emerge from rooftops and plants, bushes and flowers grow randomly through the once bustling market streets, allowing this 'no man's land' to teem with wildlife. And where are its limits? The idea of fluidity is ever present; it encroaches into the urban and built environment that surrounds it, and notions of ownership and permanence are questioned. Its qualities have contributed significantly in the search for new 'identities,' expressed in the emergence of new living conditions, be they real or surreal. Without being physically reachable, it can be glimpsed at through punctured peepholes, military bunker windows that act as enticing portals into an emotional and conceptual level of inhabitation. The zone is mystical and simultaneously suspended in time, it triggers people's imagination, not just that of the two prevailing communities but also of immigrants, refugees, and visitors; it mesmerizes all who come within its proximity. The paper opens a discussion on the issues and the binary questions raised. What is natural and artificial; what is private and public; what is ephemeral and permanent? The 'green line' exists in a central fringe condition and can serve in mixing generations and groups of people; mingling functions of living with work and social interaction; merging nature and the human being in a new-found synergy of human hope and survival, allowing thus for new notions of place to be introduced. Questions seek to be answered, such as, "Is the impossibility of dwelling made possible, by interweaving these 'in-between conditions' into eloquently traced spaces?" The methodologies pursued are developed through academic research, professional practice projects, and students' research/design work. Realized projects, case studies and other examples cited both nationally and internationally hold global and local applications. Both paths of the research deal with the explorative understanding of the impossibility of dwelling, testing the limits of its autonomy. The expected outcome of the experience evokes in the user a sense of a new urban landscape, created from human topographies that echo the voice of an emerging identity.

Keywords : urban wildlife, human topographies, buffer zone, no man's land

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