

# Stapling Strategies Around the Green Line in Nicosia's Old Town



Francesco Pasta, Dafni Riga, Federico Barbieri, Wenshan Chen,  
and Wei Lyu

**Abstract** This essay outlines a theoretical and methodological framework for the proposed intervention strategies for Nicosia's walled city center presented in this section of the volume. The goal of this process, which we refer to as “stapling”, is to contribute to creating a platform for local collaborative activities across and beyond the border as a way of tackling issues of shared identity. The chapter is divided into three parts. We begin by providing a conceptual background, relating a range of subjects that are relevant to our research and intervention approach in the divided city of Nicosia, such as, e.g., the concept of a “thick” border, the ambivalent semiotics of urban space, the gap between conceived and experienced space, the materiality of everyday life, and the idea of cross-border engagement. Grounded in the theoretical framework and based on fieldwork conducted in Nicosia, the second section identifies three main themes, which can be considered as both challenges and opportunities that the proposed strategies aim to address and develop from different perspectives. These are: (1) bridging inter-communal planning with civil society; (2) re-activating under-used or abandoned spaces; and (3) building upon a shared socio-ecological system. Such macro-subjects constitute criticalities that present the potential for action and intervention. The third section introduces the methodological approach shared by the three strategies. We briefly outline the principles of community-based action planning, the key guidelines for intervention, and the community actors to be involved. Based on these elements, we discuss how the proposed planning strategies do not constitute a prescriptive masterplan, nor an inflexible vision. Rather, they compose

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F. Pasta (✉) · D. Riga · F. Barbieri · W. Chen · W. Lyu  
Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico Di Milano, Milan, Italy  
e-mail: [francescomaria.pasta@polimi.it](mailto:francescomaria.pasta@polimi.it)

D. Riga  
e-mail: [dafnitheodosia.riga@polimi.it](mailto:dafnitheodosia.riga@polimi.it)

F. Barbieri  
e-mail: [federico.barbieri@polimi.it](mailto:federico.barbieri@polimi.it)

W. Chen  
e-mail: [wenshan.chen@polimi.it](mailto:wenshan.chen@polimi.it)

W. Lyu  
e-mail: [wei.lyu@polimi.it](mailto:wei.lyu@polimi.it)

an open framework for strategic and concerted action. They are complementary but not necessarily interdependent. We conclude by defining a “stapling strategy” as a process that builds upon and develops existing socio-spatial interlinkages between the two sides of Nicosia’s historic city center, metaphorically “stapling” or “stitching” together spaces that used to be contiguous and continuous but are now severed by the Green Line. While grounded in the socio-political reality of Nicosia, this methodological approach can relate to other divided urban contexts.

## 1 Introduction

The projects presented in this book explore strategies to address issues of inter-communal urban life and heritage preservation in the Nicosia’s walled city, both in the current state of partition, as well as in the context of a possible future scenario of reunification. By focusing our attention across the Green Line in the walled city, we propose “stapling strategies” to expand the common ground between the two sides.

Our research develops complementary strategies for co-production activities of events, design interventions, and planning proposals dealing with Nicosia’s urban fragilities from different perspectives. This “stapling” process contributes to creating a platform for engagement and collaborative activities across and beyond the border, as a way of tackling issues of shared identity.

The aim of this strategic framework is to provide examples on how to activate connections across the Green Line by strengthening a twofold network of spaces and people, built through material upgrading, urban reactivation and civic collaboration on both sides of the border. To expand a citywide inter-communal network of associations, groups, institutions and individuals working towards shared urban regeneration and co-production processes, could be a way to set aside political bias and help reconcile relations across local communities and different social groups. This process could contribute to and plug into the Nicosia Masterplan, establishing connections between inter-communal planning and civil society at large, as a parallel process of envisioning a common urban future.

### 1.1 *Conceptual Framework*

In order to elucidate the key concepts that will be used as operative tools throughout this chapter, we start by illustrating the theoretical background relevant to our research and intervention approach in the divided city of Nicosia.

To understand the complex nature of the Green Line that is transecting the walled city, we started by synthetically exploring the scientific literature devoted to borders and their spatial and symbolic role in urban contexts.

In the past decades, borders have attracted increasing attention across a variety of disciplinary fields, from political geography to sociology, and from anthropology

to urban studies and planning. From various perspectives, scholars analyzed the re-articulation of borders in our globalizing “borderless” world and the contextual evolution of static territorial frontiers into a complex and dynamic apparatus of control, surveillance, and discipline (Newman 2006; Mezzadra and Neilson 2012). In Cyprus and in Nicosia, however, the so-called “border” also constitutes a very concrete presence, physically shaping the urban space and the urban experience. In fact, the Green Line is not merely a line representing an international boundary but is indeed marked by a certain “thickness”, thus creating a transitional space between the two sides of the city. This space can be characterized as a no-man’s-land, as a void aiming to create distance between two communities in conflict (Fig. 1). The fact that the thickness of the Green Line is not constant inevitably creates disanalogous spatial relations between the two sides, sometimes favoring views on the other side, oftentimes resulting in blind dead ends.

The Green Line is of interest not only in spatial terms, but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a symbol that manifests the unresolved conflict between Greek and Turkish Cypriots and their respective national, socio-cultural and spatial identities (Strüver 2018: 3). From an anthropological point of view, this “thick border” fabricates metaphors of cultural and ethnic discontinuity. According to Thomas Nail, the border is not merely a physical barrier, but rather “an active process of bifurcation that does not simply divide once and for all, but continuously redirects flows of people and things across or away from itself” (Nail 2016: 4). Thus, building upon this argument, the border is there to divide, but to also allow and orient the possibility of crossing. Nevertheless, while physical proximity to the border may result in a more pronounced perception of these narratives, it is important to highlight that the effects of the border extend far beyond its immediate vicinities.

The existence of the Green Line per se exemplifies a duality in the city of Nicosia: the border defines two sides, two narratives with more than often conflicting memories and identities. This duality is translated into, but also questioned throughout urban space, since many sites and buildings in Nicosia are at the same time places of division, conflict and separation, but also of contact and exchange, evoking a shared identity (Papadakis 2006: 3). The memory of the partition lives and breathes on both sides of Nicosia and its interwoven meanings are inscribed into space, thus resulting in spatial interpretations of identity, memory, and conflict. Papadakis (2006: 3) points out how some spatial arrangements reflect the different views on the partition, highlighting that from the Greek side the Green Line looks makeshift (thus interpreting the partition as temporary), while on the Turkish side a wall has been built, demarcating the Buffer Zone as an ostensibly stable boundary (Fig. 2). During a walking tour in Nicosia, Papadakis also referred to the fact that the flags positioned close to the Green Line represent the stance of each side: the Greek Cypriot flags are made of fabric, subject to the changes of the wind, while the Turkish ones are made of metal and thus always visible. Such a remark underlines the fact that dual meanings of partition can be reflected across different scales in material and spatial configurations in Nicosia (see the introduction to this volume).



**Fig. 1** Soldiers walking along the Green Line in the RoC. Photo by Dafni Riga, 2021

Our research examined the intangible origins of this duality and the way in which it is manifested spatially across the Green Line. By addressing the material urban dimension of immaterial meanings and narratives, as well as the role of a shared history, socio-ecological system, and material culture, the workshop and the proposals presented in this volume regard tangible and intangible heritage as an incentive for cooperation. Instead of hiding memories “under the carpet”, our objective is to encourage new spatial narratives and memories, enclosed within the material historical space.

Our research explored the social and urban nature of the “bordering” process on both sides of the Green Line. We investigated how locals inhabit these spaces and what kinds of meanings they ascribe to them, yet without excluding the stance of social actors and stakeholders with regard to the border, place-making and place-crossing. While acknowledging the existence of the border and observing the effects it produces in urban space, we do not take it for granted. This means that our research questions the border by exploring its socio-political construction and engaging with alternative narratives that challenge the static territorial division between two allegedly exclusive national spaces and communities.

In this sense, we were interested in working in the physical and figurative “crack” between the official meanings attached to urban space in the state’s hegemonic narrative, and the divergent interpretations and uses developed by people: that is, in the gap separating the conception of space from its experience (Lefebvre 1991). As it stands out in the case of divided Nicosia, space is in many ways instrumental to the materialization of authority and maintenance of domination. States invest efforts and



Northern Nicosia



Southern Nicosia



**Fig. 2** The edge of the Green Line seen from the TRNC (top) and the RoC (bottom). Photos by Dafni Riga, 2021

resources into designing, ordering and structuring their own territory; yet, the very same space is subject to the complex dynamics of use, interpretation and signification carried out by its users (Dovey 1999; Sudjic 2005; Storey 2012; van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002: 125).

Deleuze and Guattari (1988) conceptualize striated and smooth space, whereby the striated is a space of stabilized, bounded and socially controlled identities, maintained through choreographed spatial practices, while the smooth is characterized by movement and instability that make possible the emergence of new identities and upsetting spatial practices. Smooth and striated space is one twofold entity, that exists only in mixture, in a continuous process of mutual re-constitution. Similarly, for De Certeau (1984: xv), “groups or individuals already caught in the nets of

discipline” may re-appropriate space, subvert its official meaning and thus deflect—when not challenged—the power of the “maker” through “clandestine forms” of “dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity”. Focusing specifically on Nicosia, Papadakis employs De Certeau’s significant distinction between “place” and “space”, which informs different interpretations of space depending on the position and role of different individuals, collectivities, and institutions:

De Certeau’s approach places emphasis on praxis, on how social actors reinterpret, manipulate and tactically employ official constructions for their own ends. [...] ‘Place’ is what lies at the opposite of ‘proper space’ [...]. Proper space is constructed from above by officials and town planners with rationalist or political considerations. [...] Yet, local actors [...] give local meanings to ‘proper spaces’ as they walk through them, live in them and infuse them with their own memories and significations, in short, as they act through them (Papadakis 2006: 9).

Everyday life thus might be conceived as a lens through which to understand and explore the social and material practices and flows unfolding around the border, both in terms of tangible and intangible heritage, and with regards to current spatial practices and their potential to influence future narratives regarding the conflict. According to Navaro-Yashin, who examined the intertwined processes of construction of spaces and narratives in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) from an anthropological perspective, “the imagination that goes into fabricating something is part and parcel here of the materiality of this manufacture, a process of making-and-believing, or believing-and-making, at one and the same time” (2012: 6). In other words, beyond the opposition between social constructionist and materialist approaches, the material crafting of a territory and the imaginative creation of a social narrative need to be seen as a twofold process evolving in unison. Since borders are “socially produced and reproduced, and thus are always susceptible to being modified, transformed, erased, recreated, reimagined, transgressed” (Soja 2005: 34), our aim was to develop strategies focusing on material spaces along and across the Green Line, which could potentially function as generative anchors for social innovation by tackling issues of deprivation and isolation (Gaeta 2021).

In this light, the concept of “borderscaping” emerges as a useful methodological instrument for interpreting spaces on the edges of the Green Line and in the entire walled city, and a critical design tool for potential spatial interventions. As an approach, borderscaping refers to a civic border-writing process and a design method, enabling the emergence of shared practices of belonging, living, surviving, and resisting around borders (Brambilla 2015; Van Houtum and Eker 2015). Conceptually, it interprets borders both as dense “deposits” of historical layers and, at the same time, as sites for experimenting alternatives and future scenarios (Buoli 2020). We thus regard the border as a transcalar support and a spatial pivotal element that allows us to imagine future configurations of “cooperative” interaction on relevant social and urban issues. The research projects presented in this book, by proposing thematic interventions on selected sites, explore the potential of borderscapes to generate shared practices of living (Buoli 2020), which could ultimately contribute to renegotiating and reshaping the border itself.

In order to encourage and build upon existing cooperation efforts between the two communities, it is necessary to enhance the feeling of mutual engagement. According to Ker-Lindsay (2019: 27), the notion of “engagement without recognition” carries the assumption that interaction is better than isolation, but to produce results, there needs to be an underlying culture of engagement: some key strategies for achieving this are building ties and trust (breaking the culture of suspicion); finding joint solutions to common problems; and coordinating activities. Among the fundamental steps to enhance interaction across communities in Cyprus, Ewers (2018: 14) underlines the crucial role of opening more crossing points across the Green Line, and particularly the Ledra-Lokmacı pedestrian crossing in 2008, in dismantling the physical limitations between the two communities and opening up new opportunities for future collaborative development. At the same time, under the scope of border-scaping, it appears crucial to integrate bottom-up forms of “border disobedience” into planning regulation systems and standards in order to bypass institutional planning “rigidities” (Buoli 2020). Following these arguments, our aim is to suggest ways in which the urban borderland surrounding the Green Line within the walled city will become lively again as areas characterized by inter-communal engagement and interaction (Fig. 3).

Co-production may be defined as a process of strengthening participation and creative engagement among citizens, by involving them in the design, production and delivery of a project that will meet their needs. “Co-production means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighborhoods become far more effective agents of change” (Boyle and Harris 2009: 6). The goal of this process is to create a feeling of mutual support and shared responsibility between public actors and citizens. The Nicosia Master Plan is considered the first and most important joint planning effort (although not of participatory nature) carried out in Cyprus after the partition. According to Ewers (2018: iv), rehabilitation of decayed structures on both sides of the Buffer Zone promoted peaceful interaction, local economic growth, and resettlement in the historic core (Fig. 4), which led to population growth, the development of heritage tourism, and the setting of bicomunal cultural events.

The projects outlined in this book explore whether this can work on the scale of the walled city, with three different but interrelated thematic and spatial focuses. All proposals envision co-production processes encouraging the interaction among local actors and citizens. In our vision, this process of inter-communal socio-spatial engagement could eventually be conducive to the potential “opening” of the border - or even, someday, to its dismantling.

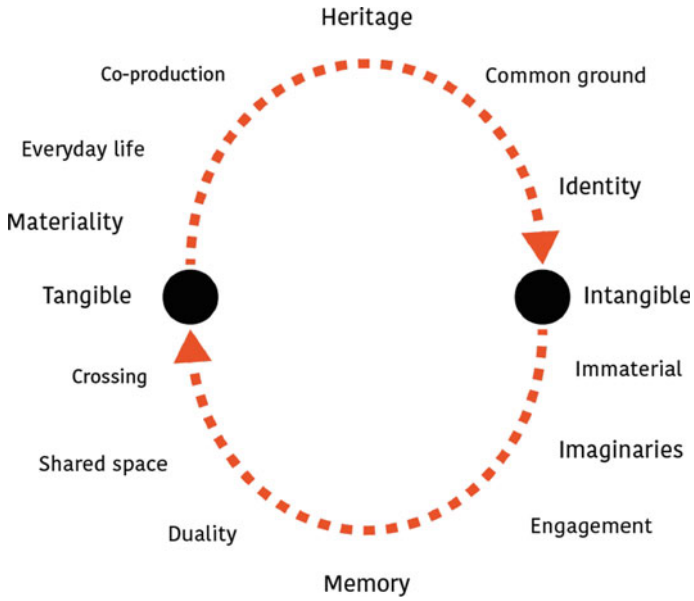


Fig. 3 Conceptual keywords. Elaboration by the authors



Fig. 4 Houses on the edge of the Green Line, TRNC. Photo by Francesco Pasta, 2021



## 2 Issues, Topics and Proposed Strategies

### 2.1 Challenges and Opportunities

Grounded in the theoretical framework previously outlined, we propose intervention strategies for Nicosia's walled city, which address, through different approaches, three main themes. The three macro-subjects discussed below can be framed as both challenges and opportunities. They constitute criticalities that present the potential for action and intervention, which the proposed projects intend to address and develop.

#### 2.1.1 Bridging Inter-Communal Planning with Civil Society

By the term “inter-communal planning”, we refer to planning processes that are jointly designed and implemented by a variety of entities across the Green Line divide in Nicosia's historic center and the city at large. Among such entities, the Nicosia Master Plan (NMP)<sup>1</sup> and the Technical Committee for Cultural Heritage<sup>2</sup> stand out. Moreover, across both sides, there are professional organizations, civil society associations, and informal groups which, although not working systematically in concert, carry out analogous projects and share a similar ethos and approaches. Our argument is that expanding the scope of inter-communal planning by bridging it with such existing realities could positively impact Nicosia's joint urban development. Therefore, in our research and fieldwork, we focused our interest on mapping out stakeholders active on both sides, exploring the effectiveness of cross-border collaboration among them, and proposing ways in which it could be scaled up.

We consider the NMP to be the cornerstone of shared strategies among the two sides, since it constitutes an extremely valuable framework for inter-communal cooperation and planning. Over the years, the NMP concretized several joint projects around the Old Town, from the shared sewage system to the restoration of neighborhoods and historic buildings, from the design of pedestrian itineraries and the upgrading of public spaces to the production of documentation, surveys, and data (Abu-Orf 2005: 46). Therefore, the NMP represents a patrimony of collaborative planning between the two sides upon which to build. The first phase of the NMP (1981–1984) dealt primarily with physical improvements, such as infrastructure or building restoration (Ewers 2018: 55). While necessary for the preservation of the

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<sup>1</sup> First established in 1979, the Nicosia Master Plan (NMP) represents an inter-communal planning endeavor, aiming at assessing the city's structure and at developing a long-term plan for its coordinated development—in the scenario of a potential reunification as well as in the prolongation of the status quo.

<sup>2</sup> Based at the Home for Cooperation and funded also by the EU and UNDP, the Technical Committee for Cultural Heritage (TCCH) is composed of archaeologists, architects, art historians and town planners from both communities, working on the preservation of Cyprus' multicultural built heritage. See also <https://tccheyprus.com/> and <https://www.undp.org/cyprus/projects/support-monuments-great-importance-communities-cyprus-phase-7>.

historic fabric and the functioning of the city, the process “did not significantly involve citizenship and was not accompanied by an attempt to overcome mistrust and prejudice” (Casaglia 2020: 177). In other words, the first phase of the NMP focused mainly on the material aspects of city-making from a programmatic point of view (Ewers 2018: 55), with less focus on the social ties and narratives constructed around urban space. On the contrary, the second phase (1985) elaborated on urban strategies for strengthening the city center on a social, commercial and cultural level (see introduction to this volume), which were further materially implemented during the third phase (1986—ongoing). Projects<sup>3</sup> carried out within the NMP framework, though coordinated across the border (Fig. 5), were mostly carried out separately on two sides, both due to restrictions on crossing the Buffer Zone in the 1980 and 1990s, as well as because of different funding coming from different administrations (Ewers 2018: 97). Furthermore, despite being rightfully celebrated as a successful instance of inter-communal cooperation, in recent years the NMP cross-border collaboration has reached a point of stalling (Papallas 2016).

In parallel, civil society actors on both sides are extremely active, and in many instances, have been pressuring governments to achieve a political solution to the “Cyprus issue”. Over the past decades, a variety of projects, actions and events has been developed, with various languages and formats, directly or indirectly tackling the division in urban space: the Buffer Fringe performing arts festival, organized yearly by the Home for Cooperation, brings together artists and audiences to “bridge the divide” and discuss themes such as displacement, otherness, and the in-between space (BFPAP 2021); the OccupyBufferZone movement, emerging in 2011 in the wake of the financial crisis, brought together activists from both sides occupying the Ledra-Lokmacı checkpoint, calling for a peaceful solution to the division and denouncing the status quo (Antonsich 2013: 170); the urban environmental Ecopolis festival, carried out in front of the Old Municipal market in 2019, discussed the issue of gentrification and urban commodification in the Old Town in the RoC, calling for “a broader participation of the city’s inhabitants in the decision-making processes” (Ioannidou 2019); the Pame Kaimakli festival, organised by the Urban Gorillas collective in the border-zone neighborhood of Kaimakli, focuses on community-based activities including residents on both sides of the border (Urban Gorillas 2022). And it should not be overlooked that the opening of the crossing points in 2003 was a consequence of a popular protest movement in the TRNC.

An existing inter-communal planning framework, then, is already in place, and civil society actors and community-based associations are actively working towards joint development in Nicosia’s urban space. However, considering the growing

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<sup>3</sup> Priority projects of the NMP within the Walled City included the Chrysaliniotissa (RoC) and the Arabahmet (TRNC) Neighborhood Conservation Projects (RoC); the Selimiye Improvement Project (TRNC); City Walls, Bastions and Moat (TRNC, RoC, United Nations Buffer Zone); the Mula Bastion Open-air Theatre (TRNC); the Famagusta Gate Open-air Theatre (RoC); the Ledra and Onasagorou Street Project (RoC); and the Kyrenia Avenue and Saray Square Project (TRNC). Other investment projects include Eleftheria Square (RoC); the Pedieos River Landscaping (TRNC); the Tripoli Bastion Parking Garage (RoC); and the Survey of Buildings within the Buffer Zone (Ewers 2018: 114–115).

**Fig. 5** NMP walking tour map: the only map we came across displaying both sides of the Old Town. Photo by Dafni Riga, 2021



energy for inter-communal action coming “from below”, it appears that there is room for scaling up coordination between professional organizations, official inter-communal stakeholders, and civil society actors. There is thus an opportunity for more structural cooperation between the groups of actors: from complementary perspectives, the proposed projects thus tap into the Nicosia Master Plan, with the aim to link official planning with civil society.

### 2.1.2 Reactivating Under-Used Spaces

The creation of the Green Line impacted Nicosia considerably. The Buffer Zone comprises about 10% of the area of the Old Town (Casaglia 2020: 71), including dozens of structures and most of Ermou street, once the city’s main thoroughfare and commercial axis (Papadakis 2006: 99), now a no-go zone. Because of its character as a militarized international border, as well as of its associated memories of violence and conflict, the establishment of the Green Line triggered a process of decay and abandonment in its proximities, affecting the walled city’s economy, infrastructure, built heritage and social fabric. Several streets became dead ends, shops and homes were abandoned, and many buildings fell into disrepair (Casaglia 2020: 68, 149). In a

sort of vicious cycle, the flight of residents stifled economic activities and prevented buildings maintenance, and the unkempt buildings and deserted streets, in turn, kept newcomers away. Indeed, during our field visits, we witnessed an abundance of residual spaces, from empty plots to abandoned and derelict buildings; not to mention the dead ends produced by the trace of the Green Line, some of which have been re-furnished and utilized by residents as semi-public extensions of their dwellings.

Following a decades-long debate, it is only recently that this process of deterioration has begun to be reversed, thanks to the efforts of both Municipalities to restore and revitalize the area (Abu-Orf 2005: 47; Welz 2017) and with the influx of young populations and migrants, initially attracted by the availability of cheap rents. This process, while raising serious concerns about the ongoing gentrification of the area (Ioannidou 2019), created new centralities on both sides of the walled city in terms of physical urban geography, but also in the collective imagination. The opening of the Ledra-Lokmacı crossing point, reactivating the North–South axis linking Girne gate in the North to Eleftheria square in the South, was a milestone in the process of rediscovery and revitalization, connecting the neighborhoods within the walls with the rest of the city, as well as transforming this dead end into a node of cross-border flows and trade. In the near future, more crossing points could be opened within the Old Town, although the timing is uncertain and dependent on volatile political circumstances—not to mention the recent pandemic-related restrictions on the crossing.

The decaying character of the Old Town, with residual spaces and crumbling structures, while posing obvious problems in terms of heritage conservation can also be considered as an opportunity (Fig. 6). The availability of void, idle or under-used open spaces with the potential for new (more or less temporary) functions, is a significant resource that the proposed projects aim to harness. The prospect of new crossing points opening, and the consequent redefinition of flows and itineraries within the Old Town and around the Venetian Walls means that buildings and spaces in their vicinities have the potential to be re-activated. In this light, the projects presented in the volume build on this promising perspective and recommend actions to counter this process of abandonment and stalling, attracting new inhabitants, functions and users.

### **2.1.3 Building upon a Shared Socio-Ecological System**

Divergent narratives exist concerning the sense of community and ethnonational belonging in Cyprus, both at present and in the pre-partition era. The two sides promote the view of Greek and Turkish “nations” as distinct communities, and some sources claim that “a shared Cypriot identity never developed” (Casaglia 2020: 133). However, there are also sources that highlight the island’s long history of multicultural living: for instance, before the rise of nationalism, “Turkish and Greek-Cypriots did not necessarily conceive of each other as distinct communities in ethnic or national terms” (Navaro-Yashin 2012). Contemporary social actors on both sides challenge the essentialist narratives, confrontational attitudes and official interpretations of history

**Fig. 6** Interior of an abandoned house, RoC.  
Photo by Dafni Riga, 2021



mobilized by competing nationalisms (Papadakis 2006: 12; Papallas 2016; Casaglia 2020: 174). Without delving into this debate, what interests us is that Cyprus' socio-ecological system, material culture, and the daily practices of its inhabitants, still hold broad evidence of a hybrid tradition and multicultural identity (Fig. 7). The built and natural environment of the island, and its capital Nicosia, challenges the existing political divide and competing narratives of exclusive heritage, pointing to “the rich living patterns and complex interactions between different Mediterranean communities and cultures over successive generations” (Pulhan and Numan 2006).

This is not to deny cultural heterogeneity within the island; quite on the contrary, we aim to highlight that such existing diversity is not articulated along rigid ethno-cultural lines. In other words, material and immaterial mundane elements—from agricultural traditions to popular beliefs, from typical food to local crafts—are not only shared between the two purportedly antithetical “communities” but refer to a much more complex and multi-layered identity. Looking more specifically at the architectural heritage, traditional construction techniques, building materials, and vernacular typologies are common across the two sides, while the coexistence of elements from various architectural traditions points to a cultural syncretism crafted over the centuries (Pulhan and Numan 2006).



**Fig. 7** Men sitting in a coffee shop in the RoC and in the TRNC. Photo by Dafni Riga, 2021

From a socio-environmental perspective, in spite of the man-made border, Cyprus constitutes one single ecosystem (Sadri 2021) (Fig. 8). The island and both “states” rely on the same natural resources and are equally impacted by climatic events (including, of course, climate change) (Hadjinicolaou et al. 2011: 442).

Working on the ecological system, socio-economic interlinkages, and material culture of everyday life in Nicosia is, therefore a way to focus on the shared tangible and intangible heritage of the city and the mixed identities of its people, eschewing divisive and exclusionary narratives. Our strategy thus aims at addressing the conflictive issue of partition and division indirectly, working on “down-to-earth” dimensions of local development. At the same time, having witnessed both heterogeneity and commonality in the material culture of Nicosia's Old Town, we intend to tackle subjects of mixed identities and suggest ways to recover the socio-economic interlinkages between the two sides.

**Fig. 8** View of Nicosia with Ledra Street (RoC) and the Turkish flag on the Five Fingers Mountain (TRNC). Photo by Dafni Riga, 2021



## 2.2 *Stapling Strategies*

What we define as a stapling strategy is a process that builds upon, and develops, existing socio-spatial interlinkages between the two sides of Nicosia. The process aims at “stapling” or “stitching” together spaces that used to be contiguous and continuous but are now severed by the Green Line. The strategy deals with three complementary macro-themes, namely: (1) the Venetian Walls as a unifying green system; (2) the water system as a socio-cultural infrastructure; and (3) food and trade as a shared patrimony and livelihood. The themes are interpreted and developed with a specific focus on public space and civic use, physically and socially articulating the dialogue between the two sides of the city. The focus of the interventions is, at the same time, on both the physical space and the social relations that evolve around it.

The proposed interventions, therefore, do not constitute a prescriptive masterplan, nor a “all-encompassing” vision for the walled city. Rather, they compose an open framework for strategic, concerted action; they are complementary but not necessarily interdependent. Based on the principles of community-based action planning (Hamdi and Goethert 1997), the projects presented in this book have been developed following an approach that is:

**Focusing on starting points, rather than on end states:** Building upon the existing patrimony of inter-communal cooperation, the projects aim at coordinating small-scale, short-term interventions conceived as steps towards a joint development of the city, without delineating a predetermined, large-scale outcome.

**Incremental, rather than comprehensive, and flexible enough to correct course along its way:** Considering the volatile and hardly predictable political circumstances, the interventions focus on the cumulative effects of interventions carried out through a “trial-and-test” method. They are not strictly prescriptive, which makes them adaptable to the changing situation in terms of scale, timing, outcome – accommodating, as the NMP itself, both an open-ended prolonging of the status quo and a possible future reunification.

**Based on achievable actions (even if less than best) driven by existing opportunities, hopes and aspirations:** the interventions build upon an existing ambitious vision for Nicosia, however, they recognize the limitations and obstacles in terms of budget, capabilities, and political will. They are thus focused on short-term localized interventions, which, however, if coordinated, could scale up in time.

**Reliant on local knowledge, skills and traditional wisdom:** The main resources that the interventions aim to harness lie in Cyprus’ society and its people. We do not intend to introduce ready-made solutions to Nicosia, but propose a framework for enabling local energy, creativity and capabilities to be channelled towards sustainable and shared urban development.

**Aiming to encourage tangible outcomes:** The interventions are conceived in such a way so as to promote the creation of concrete and visible, if small, changes in the cityscape of Nicosia. This way, the socio-political outcomes of the process will be made visible and appreciable in the everyday life of people.



### 2.2.1 Guidelines for Interventions Tackling Territorial Fragility

In order to set the framework for implementing “stapling strategies” in Nicosia’s Old Town, we developed seven guidelines for three different design proposals to tackle Nicosia’s territorial fragilities. These recommendations could be employed to orientate and develop intervention scenarios, ensuring they match the vision, aim, and ethos of the overall strategy.

In brief, the proposed interventions should be:

**Inter-communal.** Interventions should draw on the historical and contemporary multicultural heritage of Cyprus, stretching beyond “communitarian” boundaries, not only by involving both “sides”, with stakeholders from the TRNC and the RoC, but also being open to other groups, identities and possible self-ascriptions, beyond the constructed Turkish/Greek divide.

**Participatory and community based.** Projects should tap into the collective wisdom of those that know the community best—its inhabitants. This means involving both neighborhood residents and civil society actors at large in the development of the projects’ contents and design. Engaging those with a historical perspective, insights into how the area functions, and an understanding of what is meaningful for locals, will help to create a sense of ownership and ensure the success of public projects.

**Locally grounded.** This means not only respecting the existing built environment and unique heritage that gives the city its identity, but also plugging into the place-based economic circuits, drawing on traditional knowledge, resources available on-site, and, thus, contributing to local development.

**Coordinated across the border.** Interventions need to be implemented in a coordinated way across both sides of the Buffer Zone. Each intervention should have a counterpart on the other side, ideally happening synchronously. The correspondence between the two should be considered in the material design as well as in the content development and should be made explicit.

**Temporary, but not impermanent.** Interventions should leave a lasting trace in the city’s physical space. Projects can range from temporary installations to periodic happenings, from small-scale urban upgrading to cultural shows or art- and design-based interventions, yet it is encouraged that they include an enduring material component that persists beyond the event lifespan.

**Socio-economically sustainable.** Interventions should be sustainable from a socio-economic and environmental perspective. This means, on the one hand, avoiding inducing gentrification and displacement. On the other hand, it entails maintaining a simple and adaptable design, with locally available materials that can be replaced easily with low environmental impact. This way, interventions will allow for future enhancement of the space as funds become available and the community becomes more involved.

**Inclusive and accessible.** The implemented projects ought to be inclusive and open to all individuals regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, creed, affiliation, education level or age. Interventions should seek to create heterogeneous public

spaces, attracting diverse social groups. Therefore, accessibility (cultural, physical, linguistic, economic) should be considered.

### 2.2.2 Coordination of Community and Actors

We envision the projects to be ideally carried out within the Nicosia Master Plan framework, coordinated by bi-communal organizations (such as the Home for Cooperation, for instance) and supported by both Municipalities in terms of political backing and legal-administrative assistance.

The projects could possibly tap into funding from extra-state entities, such as the European Union<sup>4</sup> or UNDP, which besides having the financial capacity, can be perceived as more neutral, at least to some extent. There is a long list of inter-communal projects, in various fields, funded in Cyprus by such institutions—often jointly. These include support to inter-communal Technical Committees—such as the one on Cultural Heritage, working since 2010 on shared heritage preservation, or the one on Crossings, active since 2015 in planning new border crossings—as well as joint infrastructural projects such as Nicosia’s new Water Treatment Plant, which opened in 2013 (UNDP 2018). In parallel, civil society-driven inter-communal cultural festivals and initiatives—such as the Buffer Fringe or the Kuir Fest, to name just a few—also benefit from funding and support from extra-state institutions.

Our strategic approach aims at linking urban development planning with civil society, deepening the social embeddedness of the masterplan while also coordinating and scaling up “bottom-up” efforts towards a concerted solution. Therefore, the projects envision the involvement of organizations, associations and individual citizens on both sides in the design of the projects, in the development of their content, and in the implementation and follow-up. Both in the RoC and TRNC, Cyprus has an active civil society. Our hope is that by collaborating on practical urban interventions, non-governmental organizations, the local administration, neighborhood-based associations and professional institutions will build new links and alliances which can orientate Nicosia’s future development towards a political settlement.

In this sense, we talk of “community” on a twofold scale. On the one hand, we refer to the people inhabiting and experiencing the neighborhoods where the interventions are going to be located and the potential future crossing points will be opened (the long-time residents, regular users, and temporary dwellers who have a stake in local urban development). On the other hand, we address the broader social collectivity of the city and country (or countries), the heterogeneous polity which engages in the debate over the future of Nicosia and the political division (Fig. 9).

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<sup>4</sup> The EU’s Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community “aims at facilitating the reunification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community, with particular emphasis on the economic integration of the island, on improving contacts between the two communities” (European Commission, 2018). For further information, see [https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/support-turkish-cypriot-community/aid-programme-turkish-cypriot-community\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/support-turkish-cypriot-community/aid-programme-turkish-cypriot-community_en).

Among the sectors from where participants could be involved, we identified the following:

**Inter-communal organizations and NGOs.** There are a variety of associations, with various degrees of formality, size, and reach, which work to address the issue of Cyprus' division and campaign for a fair reunification. They do so from different perspectives and focusing on many different topics, including art, cinema, human rights, environment, public space, or progressive politics. Some of them—such as the Home for Cooperation<sup>5</sup>—are widely recognized inter-communal organizations, composed of members from both the TRNC and RoC. Other organizations, while based in one side, deal specifically with overcoming the division, tackling the conflict, achieving a rapprochement, and to this end, they interact with people and associations on the other side. Bringing in non-governmental associations (both inter-communal and not) to work towards reconciliation is fundamental for developing meaningful interventions and scaling up the social impact of the projects.

**Professional organizations.** There are many professional organizations operating in Nicosia. They are either sectoral associations, more or less linked to state institutions, or departments of the administration. Thus, they are not inter-communal, but often have a counterpart on the other side: it is the case, for instance, of the Cyprus Association of Civil Engineers (SPOLMIK) in the RoC and the Chamber of Civil Engineers (KTMMOB) in the TRNC, or the Chamber of Architects (Mimarlar Odası) in the TRNC and the Cyprus Architects Association in the RoC. All these organizations comprise professionals who could contribute relevant skills and expertise to the projects, and benefit from interacting with stakeholders on the “other side”. Bringing professional organizations across the border to work together on projects in their area of expertise will strengthen the culture of dialogue and engagement between the two sides.

**Neighborhood-based organizations and institutions.** Zooming into the Old Town, we find various locally based organizations, of different nature. They range from Municipality-run social centers to outposts of confessional groups; from community-based associations to cultural centers; from local branches of international organizations to informal meeting points (such as a bar or a teahouse). Because of their physical proximity to the areas of intervention, the variegated local stakeholders could contribute a lot to the development of projects that are contextualized in the neighborhood.

**Local authorities.** Local authorities also have an important role to play in the coordination, communication, and implementation of the projects. Relevant municipal offices could be involved at various stages of the project. Local neighborhood representatives (such as the *muhtars*, or neighborhood chiefs, in the TRNC) could also become important local actors. Involving local authorities—both as institutions

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<sup>5</sup> The Home for Cooperation, opened in 2011, is an inter-communal community center located within the Buffer Zone (in the Ledra Palace area). As stated in its website, “Today the Home for Cooperation has become a landmark building in Nicosia, acting as a bridge-builder between separated communities, memories and visions through its physical presence and its peacebuilding programs benefiting from the transformative power of arts and culture.” For more information, see <https://www.home4cooperation.info/>.

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**We invite**  
Cyprus-based  
organizations and  
individuals to submit  
their proposals for  
reinvigorating public  
spaces around the  
buffer zone in Old  
Nicosia.

**Προσκαλούμε**  
οργανισμούς και  
άτομα που εδρεύουν  
στην Κύπρο να  
υποβάλουν τις  
προτάσεις τους για την  
επιανεργοποίηση  
δημόσιων χώρων γύρω  
από την ουδέτερη ζώνη  
της Παλιάς Λευκωσίας.

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**Fig. 9** Fictional Call for Proposals: addressing the local community and actors. *Source* Elaboration by the authors

and through individuals working for them—is instrumental in ensuring the smooth execution of the projects. At the same time, bringing governmental actors into these inter-communal urban interventions is an important step to amplify the impact of the process.

**Academia.** Cyprus is an important center for higher education (both in the RoC and in the TRNC), and there are various academic institutions, such as the University of Cyprus, the University of Nicosia, or the American University of Cyprus, that offer courses on relevant topics—such as urban design, sociology, heritage conservation, architecture. In many such institutions, there are individuals that carry out research and practical work on the city and the political division. As a site of knowledge production and critical thinking, universities constitute an important source of capabilities and influence: they are a relevant stakeholder to work with. Involving university students will bring young citizens into the projects and contribute to shaping their education and future approach, as professionals and as citizens.

### 3 Towards a Common Ground

Under the overarching theme of “stapling strategies”, the three proposals for intervention scenarios presented in this book collectively address the challenges and opportunities for activating and expanding the common ground between the two sides of Nicosia’s Old Town, as presented in this chapter. The projects’ main intention is to bridge inter-communal planning policies by involving civil society and strengthening the sense of local community. By achieving this, the projects propose

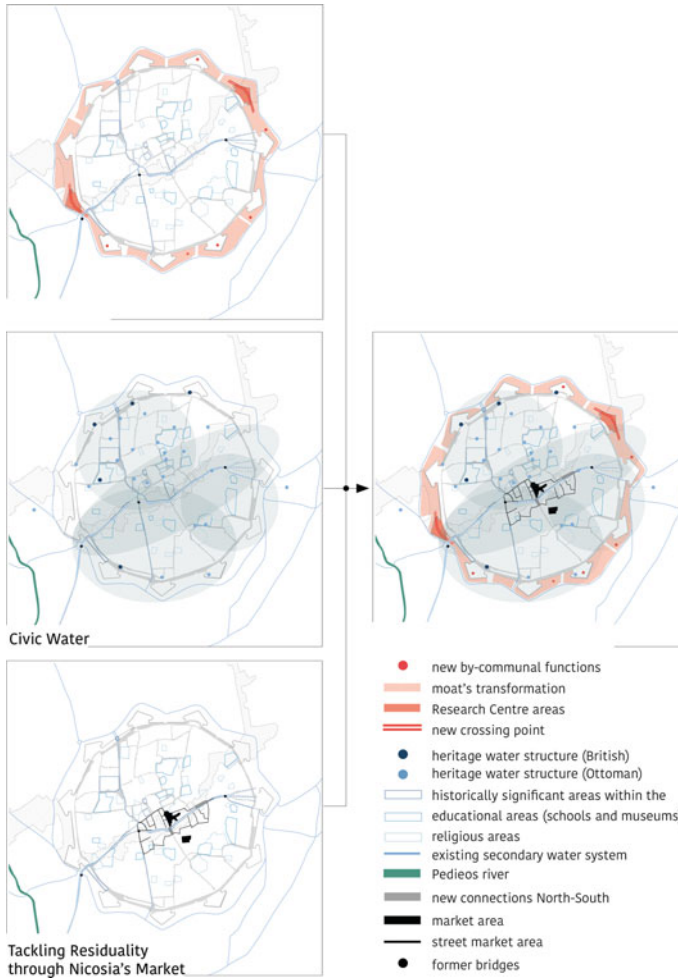
techniques that benefit from the shared immaterial values present on both sides and aim to build upon a shared socio-ecological system in Nicosia's Old Town. At the same time, and in more pragmatic terms, the projects address material values existent in the urban tissue, by proposing the re-activation of under-used spaces.

The project focusing on the Venetian Walls surrounding the Old Town presents three design scenarios for creating a unified system as a green common space that aims to breach the separation line. Based on inter-communal coordination across the border, the strategy proposes flexible, temporary interventions that can be developed in different phases, involving participatory processes and community-based synergies to be achieved through sustainable and independent governance.

By drawing on the importance of community-oriented awareness initiatives, Civic Water tackles the issue of water heritage in Nicosia's Old Town as an opportunity for bridging inter-communal material values and addressing socio-economical sustainability issues. Building on a participatory and community-based approach, this project aims to coordinate existing community and actors in order to develop inclusive and accessible awareness strategies under the theme of water.

Finally, the project Tackling Residuality through Nicosia's Market Heritage aims to bring the city together by investigating market spaces and buildings within the Old Town and proposes scenarios on their reactivation as a means for reconnecting, both materially and immaterially, the two sides. The scenarios are locally grounded, inclusive and accessible, and include a set of policy measures that seek to enhance socio-economical sustainability and inter-communal coordination.

The three projects contribute to the concept of "stapling" by developing strategies that aim to respond to the main criticalities that we have identified in the Old Town of Nicosia (Fig. 10). Each of the projects addresses a number of the guidelines for intervention presented in this chapter, while they all consider coordinating community and actors, by favoring participatory processes, inclusivity, accessibility and community awareness. Finally, the projects are characterized by a high level of flexibility and adaptability: presented in phases, they rigorously tackle temporariness, without however excluding the possibility of an accessible Buffer Zone and the opening of new checkpoints in the future.



**Fig. 10** Map of contemporary Nicosia with the three strategies superimposed, along with respective points of interest. Elaboration by the authors, re-edited with the support of Neofytos Christou, 2023

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