

New Tourism Cultures in Reused Spaces in Cyprus: An investigation through Students' Projects

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ABSTRACT

Tourism cultures change through the years, as target groups obtain new characteristics. At the same time the hosting cultures themselves besides responding to the tourism demands, react to a number of internal factors, among them economic, sociocultural, technological and environmental. Design is affected and also affects society, being closely related to its parameters. Consequently, designing for hospitality reflects those changes.

New tourism cultures are apparent in Cyprus's contemporary framework: mobile workers, who visit the island for a few days, or weeks and very often at regular intervals for professional reasons, became recently a major travel group. Cultural and experiential tourism, as well as wellness tourism also gain ground, creating a new background of touristic demands beyond the conventional holiday tourism. This affects as much the spatial demands as the location. At the same time an architectural trend for adaptive reuse of existing buildings, among them many offered for touristic activities, shows a significant growth, promoting not only heritage as a marketing tool, but also giving new life to unused urban infrastructure. Economic issues together with environmental sensitivity, supported by relevant national and EU regulations, support this trend. Sustainability is developed to a key factor that is not only sought after by managing teams, but is demanded by the tourism cultures too, and is interrelated to adaptive reuse.

In the present paper the above issues are discussed through a number of recent student projects on Hospitality Design scenarios. The ways that Interior Design students interpret these

new trends in tourism cultures and the priorities placed for utilizing unused buildings of a variety of previous uses, from industrial to institutional ones, offer a valuable reference network.

Key words: hospitality design, tourism cultures, reused spaces, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The present paper deals with the tourism cultures in the contemporary context of Cyprus. External, as well as internal factors dictate some changes that are asked through the educational process to be recorded by the Interior Design students of the University of Nicosia the last 3 years. Market research and analysis of facts related to political and economic conditions in the island and the surrounding region has recorded a considerable change to target groups and specifically the target group of mobile workers and tourists having as a major priority health and wellness services. Through the student projects some specific tools dealing with the built environment appear more intensively than others, among them significant role play the use of smart technology and the sustainable design. Adaptive reuse seems to be also a new trend in hospitality design, which besides the respect to the existing, often attempts to provide a narrative background.

CYPRUS CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORK

The Tourism Industry in Cyprus

At the opening of the 20th travel and tourism fair ‘Travel 2017’ tourism minister George Lakkotrypīs talking about the government plans to enhance the sector in order to accommodate the increasing number of tourists, noted that *“our ultimate goal, through well thought out and coordinated actions, is to enhance the quality and diversify our tourism product. To this end, we continue to enrich our experience, for example by promoting investments in major projects such as golf courses, marinas and the integrated casino resort”*.

This shows a focused attempt to lead Cypriot Tourism beyond the conventional “sea and sun” tourism culture and create a 12-month alternative touristic destination. According to the Minister’s saying, investment towards new for the island tourism cultures is the task of the governmental plans.

The reports of the recent past that follow give the reasons for these plans in order to give possibility for further development. In the Cyprus Tourism Organization (2003), 2003-2010 report it was mentioned that *“Cyprus is already present on the international Wellness Tourism “map”, as a group of luxury hotels active in the Wellness market, that possess significant experience, as well*

as international distinctions. Despite this fact, the dominance of the traditional Cypriot tourism product “sea and sun” has overshadowed the penetration of Wellness Tourism services and the possibilities for associated development for Cyprus. Nevertheless, the need to enrich and diversify the traditional model necessarily leads to a careful examination of all alternatives forms of tourism”.

Recently, the Cyprus experience in relation to special forms of tourism, is reported in a study carried out by the Hospitality and Leisure Group of PwC Cyprus and PwC’s Chair at the University of Nicosia, *Opening the vault of tourism in Cyprus*, (2013a). According to the study “*more than ten years passed since the decision of the Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO), in cooperation with the government and other partners, to adopt, introduce, diversify and enrich the Cypriot tourism product of Sea and Sun with Sea and Sun Plus*”. There it is noted that weddings, golf, conference tourism, agro-tourism, sports tourism, are relatively limited, with religious tourism to reach a high 48% in a “Yes – No’ questionnaire, being characterized as a “rising star”, health and wellbeing reaching almost 30% showing an upward trend and a great clients’ satisfaction, and cultural tourism reaching 51% of positive response. The cultural dimension of tourism in the island is certainly linked to the great past and present cultural vitality and claims a rich historical and artistic heritage, which is validated also in popular traditions, artistic creation and contemporary design. It appears though, that the “sea and sun” experience is the most dominant with 84.8%. An overall assessment in the PwC study (2013b) shows “*significant room for improvement as regards to the efforts to enrich the Cypriot tourism product with special interest tourism categories. This is evident from the percentage rates of the other special incentives forms of tourism when it comes to choosing Cyprus, which are significantly lower compared to the overwhelming 95.6% of “Sea and Sun” (e.g. cultural tourism 58.6%, health and wellbeing tourism 54.8%, sports tourism 27%)*”.

However, a number of sociocultural, economic, political, as well as environmental factors affect the parameters of tourism cultures besides the state planning and create the need of continuously reviewed official studies. Therefore, is significant to mention below the contemporary framework in relation to Cyprus in order to understand the trends.

The Contemporary Sociocultural, Economic and Political background in Cyprus

During the fifty years since independence in 1960, Cyprus has been progressively changed from a mostly closed economy, based on agriculture and mining, into a service-based, export-oriented economy. Independence did not only mark political liberty from British colonial statute, but also freed the creative spirit of the people of Cyprus, especially their commercial drive. The 1974 war events had a devastating impact on the economy, though, led by the sacrifices of the working people and the entrepreneurial skills of the business community, there was a notable retrieval of the economy. At present, the tourism, shipping, electricity and telecommunications commerce, record remarkable growth. Finally, natural gas explorations that have recently taken

place in the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus have revealed significant reserves of natural gas which are estimated to have significant revenue implications.

During the recent years it is witnessed an extended social and political upheaval in the whole area of Middle East and Northern Africa. Wars and revolutions, the Arab Spring and the Syrian case leave Cyprus one of the few safe and stable spots in the East Mediterranean area. This means that Cyprus offers a safe environment in the most east European territory, not only for tourism, but for working too, offering Companies the best alternative for a basis for their Middle East business. The relationship with other non-EU countries and their citizens, such as the Russian Community, offers also to a large number of people a safe and challenging economic basis for business and recreation purposes in a European background. A similar attitude is apparent in the Education Sector. The five Universities in Cyprus, that offer very good quality studies, offer a destination to a number of young students from all neighbouring countries. The regulations and quality assurance tools safeguard a high quality European Degree. The previously mentioned PwC Cyprus study (2013c) quite clearly states that *“this feeling of safety among tourists in Cyprus becomes of greater significance if we take into account the unrest and instability of neighbouring competitive destinations”*.

The bad economic situation in many Balkan and East Mediterranean countries the last decade, among them Greece, created a working population flow to the island where working possibilities were more promising. A large number of economic migrants and their relatives who visit them, opened a new visitor identity. The bank issue and capital controls in 2013 affected Cypriot economy to a great extent but it seems that the country overcame the problem offering again a dynamic presence. During the three years of economic crisis, the residential, retail, industry, as well as the touristic constructions were limited to renovations and reuses of existing buildings, rather than new buildings and structures. As a result the profession of the Interior Designer and Interior Architect was favoured in relation to the Architect's or the Engineer's one in the Construction Sector.

Tourism cultures in Cyprus as seen through student projects'

All the above were mentioned to clarify and support the “mapping” of the new tourism cultures that are experienced in contemporary Cyprus and explain the thinking behind the proposals of Interior Design students in relation to the thematic. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the young designers' interpretation of market demands and governmental planning, in their attempt to propose the necessary infrastructure and the appropriate design identity for a challenging touristic experience in the island.

Hospitality projects related to mobile workers

Beyond the conventional “sea and sun” travellers, other visitors such as businessmen or otherwise “mobile workers”, or visitors related to university students and to foreign working population are

very often the case. Students researched the market and addressed questionnaires to hotel owners in Nicosia. One of the case studies was that of ASTY hotel, which witnessed a change in its clientele. Mobile workers became the majority of the hosted people, mainly young professionals, who either travelled in teams or individually. Also, young foreign students and their relatives were staying in the hotel for a short term before settling for their University studies. They usually stayed there for a few days only, but they were visiting often the city.

As indicated by the Statistical Service of Cyprus (Cystat) (2017), the average length of the stay was shortened by 0.4 days to 8.4 days and the average spending per person has dropped by 0.6% to €566.79 during 2016. These young professionals besides requiring a comfortable place with facilities that enable them to work online (computers, printers, faxes, Wi-Fi), they were demanding small informal places where they could organise meetings and presentations to small audiences, but also common areas where they could communicate with each other and spend the few days of their stay productively and enjoyably. They were consequently creating a network of people experiencing the same issues and they were happy to exchange information and discuss common problems. A gym, a small spa facility, indoor and outdoor bar/lounge area. The projects below show how students responded to this target group's needs through proposals for short living that combined working and living activities. Their first task was to record and analyse those needs and transform them into material forms, objects and equipment (Figure 1).

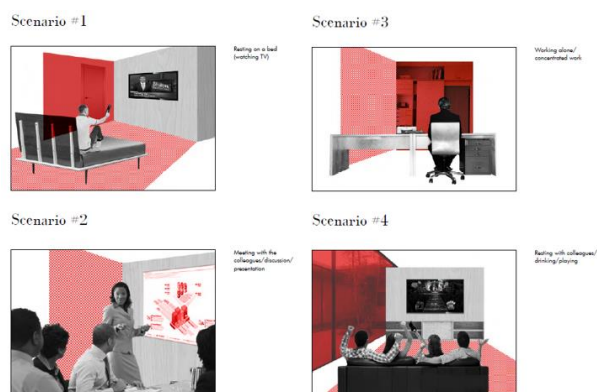


Figure 1: Scenarios of activities of mobile workers. Student proposal by D. Kochegarova

What became most apparent was the need for flexibility and adjustability of the space in order to achieve the best possible solution especially for the room layout. So, movable partitions and constructions, either by mechanisms or by smart technology, support flexibility. The changing of atmospheres due to lighting and textures was also a tool in the hands of the designers. Additionally, the common spaces were proposed also to be multifunctional with private enclosures and open spaces to reassure both working and socialising (Figure 2). Materials were mostly recycled and recyclable, and styles close to a young, fresh, simple, vivid mood.

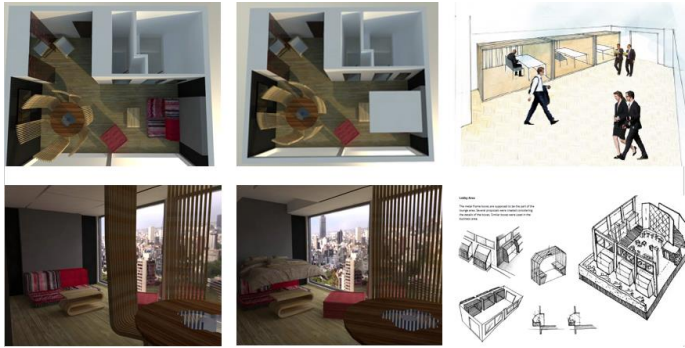


Figure 2: Flexibility in interior layout and common spaces. Student proposals by A. Goineau, A. Theodoulou, V. Christophi and D. Kochegarova

Hospitality projects related to health and wellness

The target groups and their priorities change from city to city in Cyprus in relation to the city's background. So, Nicosia, the capital, that is not in the seafront, experiences more of the new mobile worker trend in tourism, while Limassol, Larnaca and Paphos, traditionally "sea and sun" destinations, maintain more this identity. However, even there, is a significant trend of the tourists towards a focus to the individual, the wellbeing of the body and "gifts" to the self. Both the business target group and the holiday makers appreciate this input in the market. A large number of hotels add spas to their facilities looking forward to an off-season extension of the relatively long summer period in the island. Existing building complexes require from designers renovations and extensions to include "Health and Wellness" facilities.

Considerations exist in students' approaches to include outdoors sport facilities such as cycling, running, yoga and playing fields, as well as indoor spaces such as gyms and covered swimming pools (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Outdoor activities and indoor elements for health and wellness environments. Student proposals by C. Cunha and M. Kuzesnova

Students also propose health and wellbeing facilities, massages, saunas, physiotherapy, aromatherapy, art therapy among others. The rooms themselves are designed to be bigger to include space for relaxing and meditation or personal training exercises. To satisfy the mind as well as the body a lot of design elements are considered essential to the designed outcome. Lighting and colours are specifically chosen to add to the whole setting and reassure a calm and relaxing environment (Figure 4).

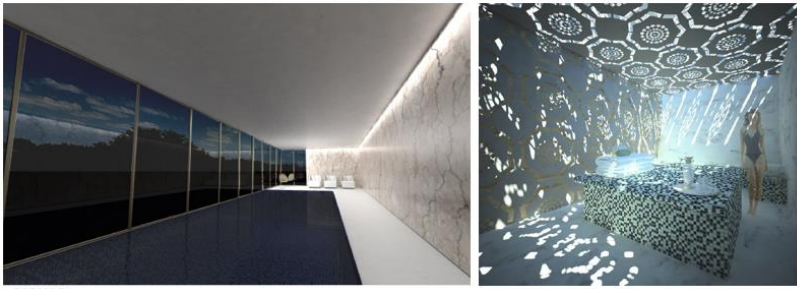


Figure 4: Lighting and colours as elements of designing calm and relaxing spaces. Student proposals by C. Cunha and V Tsioni (AAS MA student)

Since nature is considered to be the most comforting and soothing environment, an indefinite number of organic, nature inspired forms are applied in interior spaces and outdoor settings. Designs inspired by nature and biology are easily fabricated due to digital means, offering unique designs in affordable cost. Parametric design, perforated surfaces often imitating delicate laces or tree foliage, but also visual effects of light and shadows, water reflections, real or on projecting screens, create an almost virtual scenography in wellness interiors.

Hospitality projects related to Technology

Both the mobile workers' scenario and the wellness one, incorporate smart technology in many student proposals. While for the working environment of travellers it is directly conceivable the necessity for technology embedded in interior spaces, the wellness and health environment seems also to give in. Colours and patterns are able to change on demand and be controlled from distance (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Colours and patterns changing on demand and from distance. Student proposals by M. Kouttoukis

The creation of atmospheres seems to be very familiar in the minds of young designers and virtual spatial design becomes more and more expected to be applied. The “teleport-me” project of an Interior Design student proposes individual spaces-in-space where individuals and groups can experience a virtual visit to far destinations without moving from their enclosure (Figure 6).

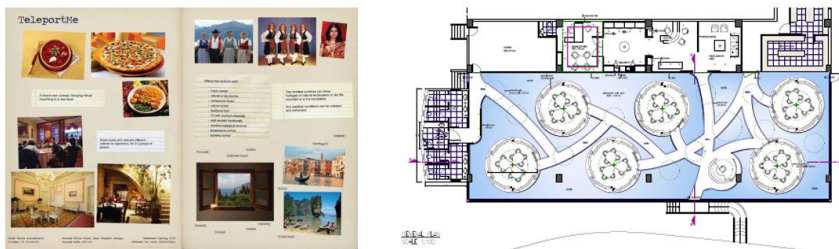


Figure 6: Design of enclosures for virtual visits to touristic destinations. Student proposal by M. Kuzesnova

Hospitality projects related to Adaptive Reuse

In the recent past a bank and financial crisis that lasted from 2013 till 2017 shocked Cypriot society and changed the social attitude towards the built environment. It introduced an architectural trend for adaptive reuse of existing buildings, among them many offered for touristic activities, giving new life to unused urban infrastructure. This same trend and the conscious rediscovery of past structures promoted heritage as a marketing tool, something that seems to be very welcome by tourists. Old buildings, industrial complexes and abandoned sites are increasingly favoured. The area near the Green Line of Nicosia which still divides the city in two, has many sites to offer. The former industrial building of SPEL, which was named after the Nicosia Cooperative Supply Association, which was housed there in the past, is one of the cases (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Proposals for accomodation services in the SPEL building in Nicosia. An adaptive reuse approach. Student proposals by E. Nikolaou, Danah Al Ghabra

It is under construction at the moment to host part of the National Gallery of Modern Cypriot Art, but students have chosen the particular building to host thematic and subject dedicated accommodation services. Besides respecting the structure the student projects emphasized to a memory recall in interior spaces maintaining colours, materials, natural light use as well as the balance between open spaces and enclosures, private rooms and common activities.

Another example is the building complex of the old Leprocy Center in Larnaca in an atmosperic, isolated spot, that was still in use five years ago by the cured old residents of this Health Institution. Besides the need to maintain and renovate the buildings, the students wanted to propmote this ideal spot near the Salt Lake of Larnaca, where the sacred muslim monument of Hala Sultan Tekke was build, in a place full of Cyprus pines and flamingos (Figure 8).

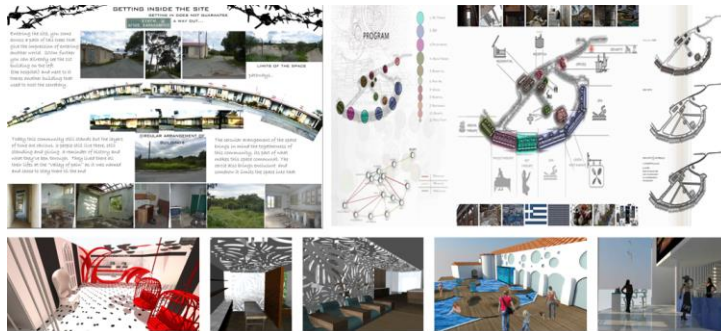


Figure 8: Hotel design proposals in the former Leprocy residency in Larnaca. An adaptive reuse approach. Student proposals by N. Poulouzasvili, C. Cunha, V. Michael, G. Abboud, M. Kouttoukis

A real life project took place in Ayia Napa, a city characterised as young people’s touristic destination, full of clubs, restaurants, and touristic accomodation. With the support of the Municipality and the University of Nicosia an attempt was initiated to promote also the cultural identity of the city, that offers a sculpture park and a street festival with graffiti artists participating from all over the world. A ResArtis accomodation was proposed by final year Interior Design students (Figure 9). ResArtis is a network of around 600 centers all over the world “dedicated to offering artists, curators and all manner of creative people the essential time and place away from

the pressures and habits of everyday life, an experience framed within a unique geographic and cultural context”.



Figure 9: A proposal for a ResArtis accommodation in Ayia Napa. Student proposal by M. Avraam

Hospitality projects related to Sustainability

Sustainable issues characterize increasingly hospitality design, to support energy saving and care for the environment, a thing appreciated by travellers. The strategic plan of the Cyprus Tourism Organisation even since the 2003-2010 report aims at the sustainable and balanced tourism development of Cyprus, through the upgrading and enrichment of the island’s tourism product. This strategy forms the context for the development of new tourism products and services, which also include the wellness tourism products and services. Mr. Marios Chanakas (2012), tourist officer from the quality assurance department of Cyprus Tourism Organisation (COT), has noted that *“The objectives of the Tourism Strategy (TS) are to be achieved within the framework of a sustainable development which respects the natural and human environment whilst at the same time, maximises the benefits to the national economy and society and protects the environment”*.

Moreover, the following suggestions have been introduced by COT to the Cypriot hotels:

- Reducing energy, water and chemical use, and the amount of waste generated.
- Training staff and having a "green team" responsible for sustainability issues.
- Sourcing local goods and services where possible.
- Promoting authentic Cypriot food and entertainment.
- Supporting local charities and community initiatives

The understanding for a sustainable development is very well embedded in a large number of students’ projects that consider the use of sustainable practices in design an essential aspect to their proposals. This understanding, is signified by the use of green roof, rainwater collection, the use of alternative energy sources, flexible and multipurpose design and recyclable materials for the interior space (Figure 10). Additionally, natural lighting, orientation, interior gardens, courtyards

and planted terraces towards a more sustainable life, characterize many student approaches. (Figure 11)



Figure 10: Sustainable materials and methods. Student proposals by A. Goineau, M. Georgiou

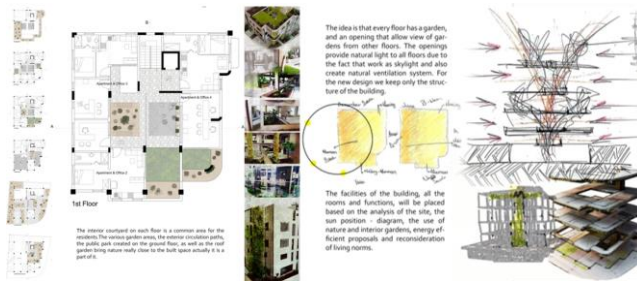


Figure 11: Interior gardens in a reused building block. Student proposal by M. Georgiou

CONCLUSIONS

Hospitality Design can be considered as an indicator of the general trends in society. Hotel owners and designers have to be aware of that. An increase in the target groups of mobile workers and tourists seeking for health and wellness centers was recently recorded. The design of spaces for these groups is complemented with the use of smart technology, and in parallel with sustainable design and adaptive reuse of existing buildings. This paper discusses these trends through student proposals of the Interior Design Programme of the University of Nicosia.

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