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Soft Networks and Emergent Topographies

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Synopsis

Research focuses on mapping of liminal space along the Buffer Zone of Nicosia and its emerging urban identity that is revealed through documentation of inhabitation patterns over time.

The process of seeing activities from the ground, through mapping and collage, expose the complex and often-invisible layers of information that exist. These processes of re-reading extend and enrich our interaction with the specific conditions of the site; the slow and seemingly insignificant and 'unseen' organic evolution of the site is acknowledged as a strong part of its identity.

Based on premise that transformation of space provokes public action, the investigation is concerned with the search for emerging and shifting topographies. Research establishes mechanisms for discovery spaces of transformation these exist at the level of landscape, and very particular conditions of forgotten edges and points of contact with the urban environment.

Key words: Mapping, Mutation, Buffer Zone, Soft Network, Architectural Pedagogy.

2. Nonlinear Process

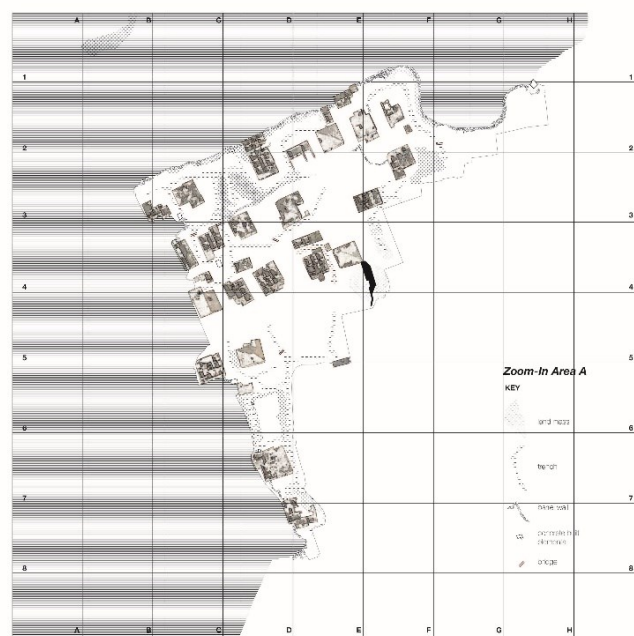
Unit 6 works in a nonlinear pedagogical process. We work simultaneously with different media that allow students to enrich their research, as they focus on different aspects of the site.

The complexity of conditions that we are searching for, often relegated to the status of ‘accidents’ or ‘boundary conditions’, are those which produce a rich environment of alternative narratives of urbanity. In the same way, the non-linearity of the change of medium is seen to unveil similar possibilities.

We start by collecting information about the site, searching for the small-scale urban conditions in the format of cataloguing. Subsequently, drawing them in the form of mapping becomes the way of connecting to place and indirectly making sense of that place. Mapping (Fig. 3) is simultaneously the process of searching for and contributing to the urban quality, essentially making invisible (relations) visible through this process. The technique of Collage is introduced as an assembly of the various fragments previously explored as a method of bringing new meaning and relations through the process of re-combining visual data and images.

3. Hybridity

We introduced the notion of Hybrid as a particular condition that we are looking for. The point at which urban qualities overlap is of interest to us, creating points or sites of intensity and often contestation. We identify these instances of intensity as sites of opportunity or hybridity.



The application of UN buffer edge conditions and the implementation of military defence zones (which act as buffer between the UN Buffer zone and the surrounding urban fabric) mutated the urban fabric. A series of additions and subtractions provide new topological conditions.

As seen in the taxonomical representation shown earlier, these come as military trenches, bunkers, pillboxes, fortified buildings, board wall, concrete elements and land masses. Additionally to serve the circulation of military personnel

there bridges connecting plateaus divided by the trenches.

Four areas of interest are selected for further investigation of this mutation. The zoom-in area represents what it used to be a neighbourhood near Vasilios Pavlou street in Katimakh. The area represented above is stripped of all its other features and it is re-made through the interventions that mutate it.

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Figure 3.

Searching for Hybrid states (Fig. 5) on the site assist us in going on to identify similar characteristics of 'fusion' through spatial, material and programmatic explorations at a later stage. Hybridity, which may have been generated out of intolerance is explored for potential opportunities. Subsequently what is sought after is a new state, which allows coexistence between various conditions and identities.

4. Site investigation

The edges of both sides of the buffer zone are examined. Penetrations and mutation (Fig. 4) of the buffer edge are identified in terms of how they affect the urban space of the city of Nicosia. Studying the relationship along this discarded and forgotten edge of the green line and the adjacent urban environment, creates a shift of focus from the built infrastructure to the soft network of multiple and complex relations of dependence and autonomy of public actors. Activities are understood in terms of their temporal and spatial structure and then seen as opportunities for change or points transformation.

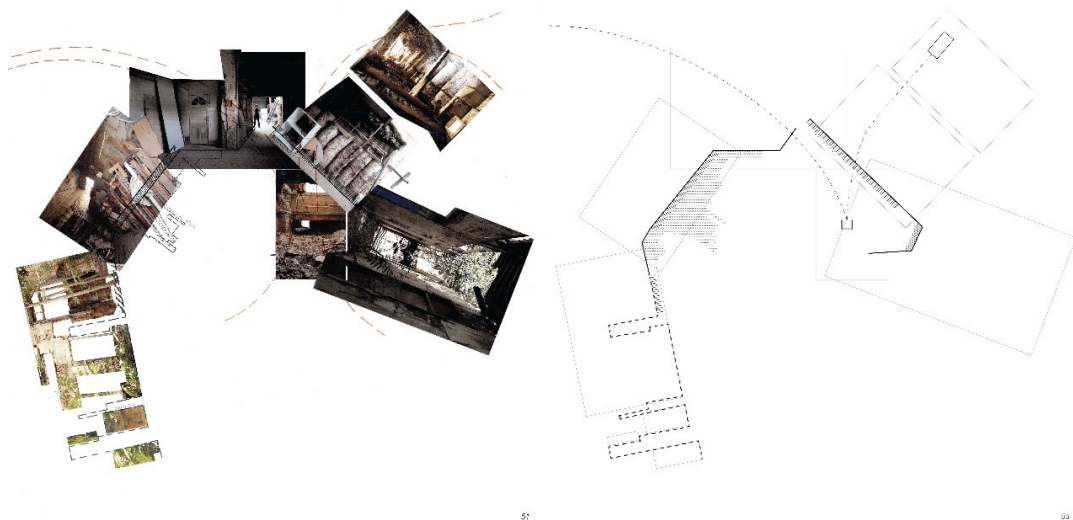


Figure 4.

Through out the buffer edge there are fragmented points that are remain as "dead zones", where in-between them "life zones" co-exist.

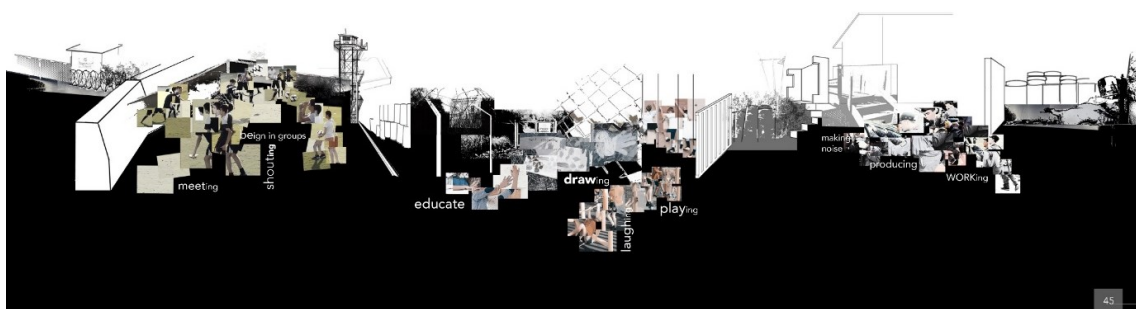


Figure 5.

5. Porosity Engrained in Resilient Boundaries

Perceiving the site through this study, we find users and activities that are excluded from the official public spaces and find their place and expression in the loosely defined edges of the buffer zone. By identifying the latent qualities of the site, we were able to recognise the potential of these existing environments by finding opportunities in the emergent topography.

This emergent topography of the buffer zone is manifested through a series of additions and subtractions, often where military fortifications meet domestic spaces. The seemingly strict buffer edge is seen to take different forms masking, extending and penetration the architectural shell as well as the surrounding landscape resulting in a mutation of the edge (Fig. 4). Organic appropriation begins to shape and mutate the existing environment; these conditions create opportunity for small-scale public activity and mechanisms for urban transformation.

5.1. 'Life' within the 'Dead Zone'

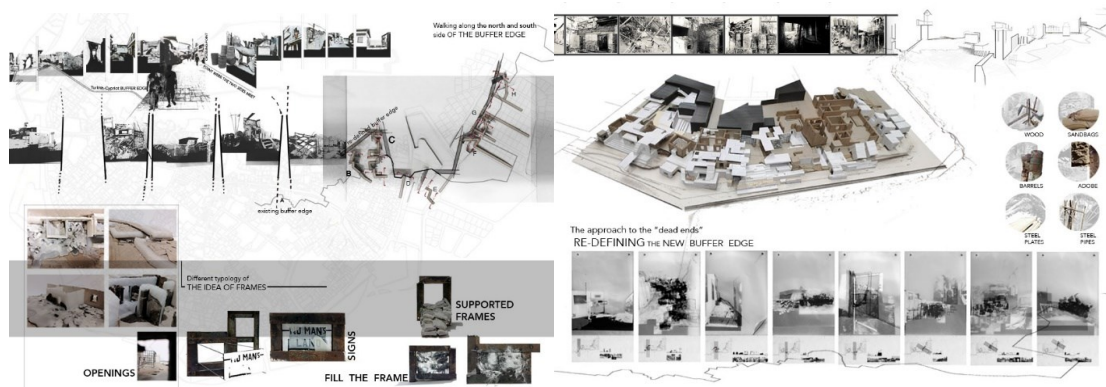


Figure 6.

The project's main purpose was determined due the discovery of existing fragments of 'Life' within the 'Dead Zone' (Fig.6) in the city of Nicosia. The discarded and forgotten edge of the green line began to take a new meaning when mappings explored how the site was informally and accidentally inhabited. The documentation of the new penetrable edge enabled the possibility of inserting multiple entry paths within the buffer zone. The collage was the main tool of investigation of this sequential movement penetration. The urban intervention had three strategies: the edge of the buffer zone, building on the porosity and permeability of the path. Communal activities initiate the re-use of the derelict buildings that maintain their architectural character and host small-scale communal areas.

5.2. Negotiating the Edge

An initial mapping investigating the user's awareness of the buffer edge identified conditions of intense urban tension at various points along the buffer edge. Absence of transitional space imposed a forced negotiation between the two edges of the liminal zone. The project (Fig. 7) proposes a new system that

can respond to the needs of the city in relation to possible future scenarios of possible political shifts.

Consisting of the two proposed edges, the system can operate as a strict or permeable boundary according to the needs of the future. The proposing strategies of the two edges are created either by enhancing or reversing the pre-existing states. The transformation of the conditions within the two edges are achieved through expandable structures permitting shrinking or expanding of the boundaries of the buffer zone, under a continuous negotiation between the inhabitants of Nicosia and the authority of the United Nations.

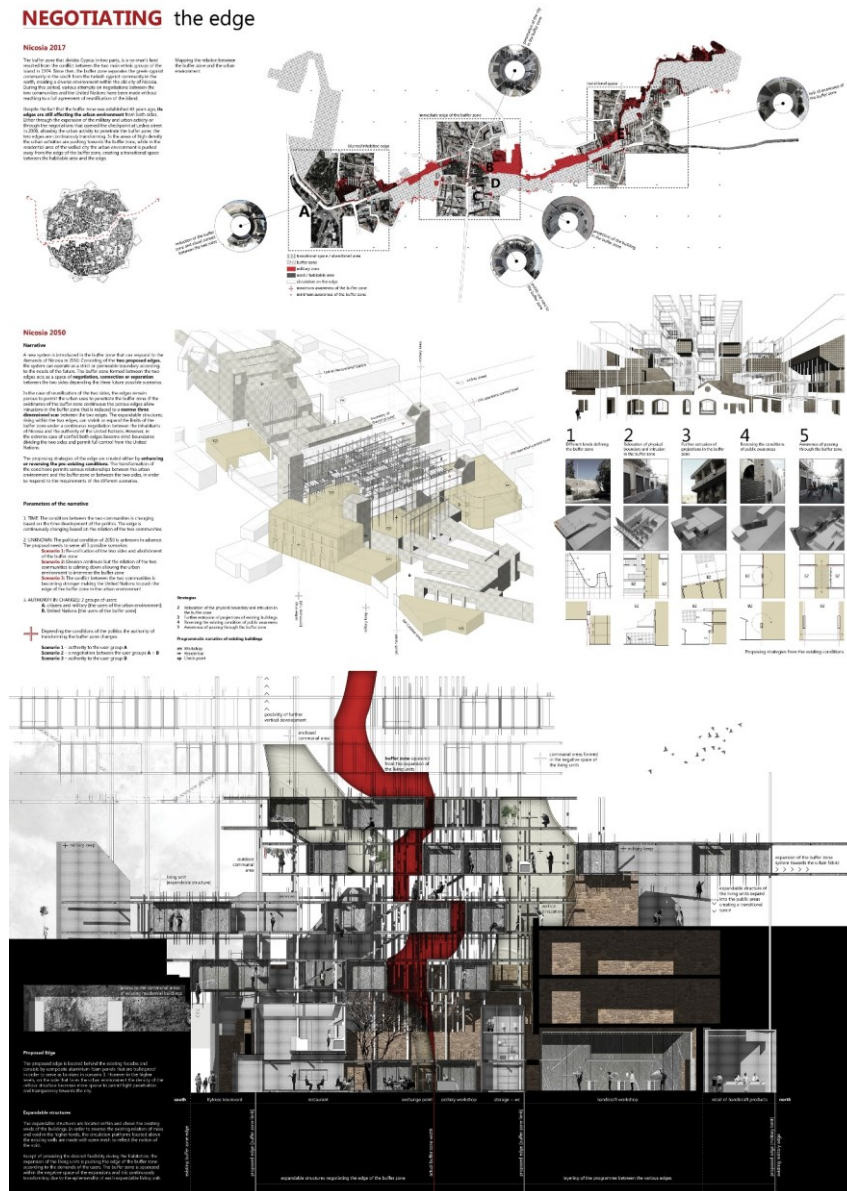


Figure 7.

6. Conclusion

Research projects and design proposals follow a bottom up methodology. Projects are defined by openness in their spatial organisation, materiality and

operation. Proposals draw upon these elements in order to construct alternative modes of occupation.

The openness of the investigations towards the evolution of sites and spaces over time, determines our design approach and eventually the kind of architecture we produce. Proposals investigate how existing organic hybrids can become manifest through “Intentional hybrids” which are then proposed as interventions in the contested urban site, generating a new contemporary urban possibility.

The significance of this research methodology lies in the use of mapping as an active form of thinking rather than a passive process of representation that allows for a new site to be discovered, giving multiple opportunities for adaptive urban strategies and socially engaged design approaches.

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Biography

Maria Hadjisoteriou. Associate Professor of the Department of Architecture, University of Nicosia. She received her Dip-Arch from N.T.U.A., Greece, and her Master in Engineering from Mie University in Japan where she was a Monbusho scholar. Maria's main focus is "research by design"; therefore parallel to her academic involvement, she has been a practicing architect since 1995. Maria has received a number of awards in local and international architectural competitions. Her current research interests include: Mapping as a design methodology, issues of perception with a focus on intangible qualities in architecture and social sustainability in an urban context.

Angela Kyriacou-Petrou. Assistant Professor in the Architecture Department at the University of Nicosia. She completed her architecture education in London, where she was born and lived until 2001. Practice work has involved an extensive range of projects and scales, in both London and Nicosia, including; Competitions, Independent practice, Project Management and Interdisciplinary design Collaborations She began teaching in 1996 at Kingston University and Southbank University in London. She subsequently taught as adjunct faculty at the University of Cyprus from 2006, joining the University of Nicosia in 2010. Research interests are focused on Theories and methods of archiving rural and city histories and activities particularly in how maps define public spatial relationships. Research work tries to identify data exploration as a process over data presentation as a product. Particular attention is given to rural land use and spatial practices of the Ottoman period in Cyprus.