

Arabahmet Neighbourhood: Historical Process and Current Protection, Use and Function Cycle

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Abstract

The island of Cyprus has a rich historical and architectural value as it has witnessed many different cultures. The main focus of the research was to study the historical, cultural and heritage houses in the Arabahmet neighbourhood of the capital city of Northern Cyprus in the framework of sustainable conservation. In line with the sustainable conservation parameters of the Arabahmet neighbourhood, it was studied in the framework of different approaches and the relationship between the old and the new is investigated. The main objective of this analytical study is to focus on the context of the historical heritage structures in the context of the inheritance crossing corridor of historical texture between the surrounding texture and the historical texture. Lusignan, Venetian, Ottoman and English culture within the structure of this neighbourhood's current plan structure and environmental texture of the past and the present relationship between the past relationships was investigated. At the end of the study, suggestions will be presented within the scope of the revitalization of the existing texture in the context of sustainable conservation and the reuse of the historical fabric with its sustainable adaptation.

Keywords: Sustainable, Conservation, Adaptation Architecture, Heritage, Culture

1. Introduction

Conducted research is on Arabahmet Neighbourhood which is located in walled city on Cyprus's capital Nicosia. Arabahmet Neighbourhood with its historic texture has a cultural heritage value of

many historical periods. It is known that the neighbourhood which carries Lusignan, Venetian, Ottoman and Britain Culture are dates back to very old times. Like everything that changes and develops in time, both existing texture and the habitants of the neighbourhood has been changed.

Within the context of Arabahmet neighbourhood study, it is found that houses in the neighbourhood are using by migrants and poor community but the very few owners. Nowadays it can be seen that the houses which are out of the NDP's revitalization studies, have get off from the actual texture based on the needs and economic conditions of their new users and have lost their current function. At the same time, it is seen that the construction materials of the houses disappeared because they were not renovated and repaired at the required rate.

Current study's scope is in the neighbourhood scale and the most important factors in choosing this neighbourhood is that it has Lusignan, Venetian, Ottoman and British cultural heritage structures together and today, this neighbourhood is under pressure, threatened to be destroyed. In addition to all these, economic factors, the factors arising from the lack of physical condition and the factors arising from the inadequacy of the transportation system are included in the existing texture.

This study carried out on the Arabahmet neighbourhood includes a field study based on the study of the historical cultural heritage in the traditional architectural texture of Cyprus. The study, which is done entirely for historical texture and its surroundings, includes ideas about how to develop a protection phenomenon in order to improve the existing neighbourhood and transfer it to the next generations.



Figure1 Arabahmet Neighbourhood's Location

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=lefkosa+haritasi&rlz>

1.1 Inadequacy of Physical State Based on Economic Factors

Arabahmet neighbourhood houses are shaped under the influence of natural and cultural factors. Climate conditions, different building materials, topography and economic factors are also affected the shape of the houses. When we look at the neighbourhood texture and organization, the change in the existing texture is observed at first glance, the plan texture of all the houses almost the same however, such as many things that have changed over the years, with the changes of new habitants and their needs it is evident that many things have changed. As a result of the analysis carried out in the neighbourhood, it is seen that while a minority of habitants is property owner, the remaining part is used by the migrants and the poor people. As can be seen in (Figure 1.1)



Figure 1.1 Arabahmet Neighbourhood Housing Layout Plan. *Source: Author*

In Arabahmet neighbourhood, due to the insufficient economic situation of the habitants, there is no real improvement in the houses renovation and repair. In addition, due to the inadequacy of the physical condition of the houses due to the needs of the existing habitants, physical interventions or additions to the houses and its surroundings have been observed to threaten the existing texture and away from the actual historical texture (Figure1.2).

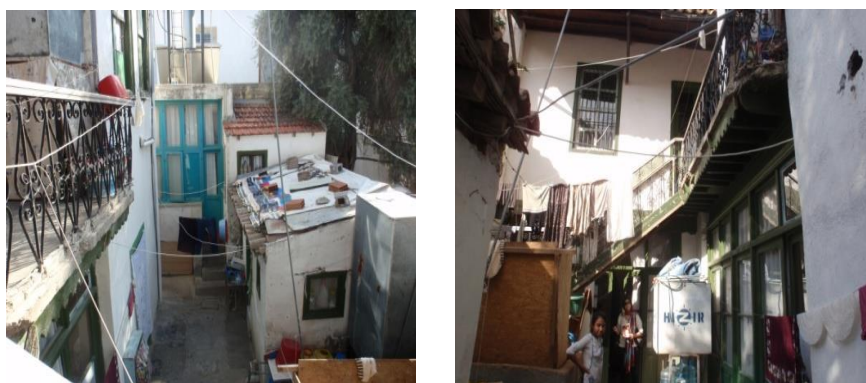


Figure 1.2 Arabahmet Houses Plan Organization Interior Courtyard. *Source: Author*

2 Inadequacy of Transportation System

Because the transportation system of the Arabahmet neighbourhood is one way traffic flow access to the existing neighbourhood becomes difficult. One of the weakest points of the neighbourhood is this one-way traffic (Figure 1.2.1, Figure 1.2.2).

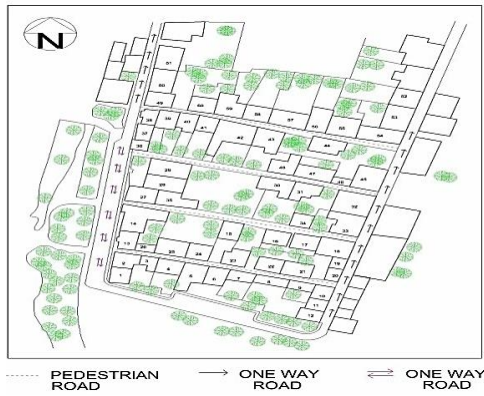


Figure 1.2.1 Arabahmet Access Road. *Source: Author*



Figure 1.2.2 Arabahmet Asphalt Road. *Source: Author*

There are narrow streets used by pedestrians in Arabahmet neighbourhood. The narrow streets that are used as pedestrian roads are in good condition and the surface is smooth. The main road material is paved with asphalt, pedestrian road material is cobblestone material (Figure 1.2.3, Figure 1.2.4).

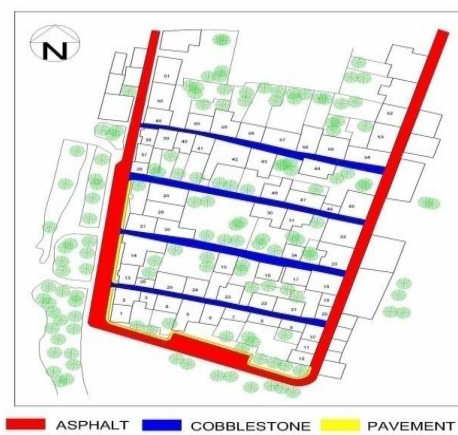


Figure 1.2.3 Arabahmet Road Materials.

Source: Author



Figure 1.2.4 Arabahmet by-streets. *Source: Author*

Author

2. Nicosia

Nicosia is located in the very centre of the island of Cyprus, where many cultures come and go, and is the capital of the island. There are various business areas, trade, management, education, culture and religious buildings and also other service units. It is also the only divided city in Europe.

Before 1974, there were regions where Turkish and Greek Cypriots lived together, as well as lived in separate groups. When the settlement plan of the island is examined, it is seen that the Greek Cypriot settlement areas are developing around the churches and Turkish Cypriot settlements are developing around the mosques. After the Second World War, Nicosia began to expand rapidly and the city developed right out of the walled city. Especially near the end of the British period, the city has become an outstanding and important settlement (Atun & Atun, 2007).

The City of Nicosia has a circular shape and has traditional streets in the organic structure, which are organized in accordance with the city's form (Figure.2). But as a result of the creation of the buffer zone, many of them have been interrupted, and therefore meaningless and long dead end streets have been formed.



Figure 2. Nicosia City Borders

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=lefkosa+haritasi&rlz>

2.1 Nicosia Walled City Analysis

In terms of history and cultural richness, it is observed that the city walls of Nicosia have a circular plan built during the Venetian period. There are 11 bastions on city walls and 3 Venetian gates are designed for entering to the city. The Kyrenia Gate is located in the north, the Paphos Gate is in the west, and the Famagusta Gate is located in the east. Later, 8 more gates were opened with the development of the city out of the walled city (Kahraman, 2008).

Today in the city, there are many churches and mansions belonging to the Lusignan and Venetian periods, which have showed strong presence in their time; many mosques, baths, inns, covered

bazaars (Bedesten), mansions, libraries, dervish lodges, tombs and fountains belonging to Ottoman period; and many administrative buildings, schools and residences belonging to English period.

The houses, which have the characteristics of the traditional Turkish house, are still in the walled city of Nicosia which has the historical texture from XIX. Century Ottoman period (Balkan, 1998:83). Houses which are built in XIX. Century and located in the walled city of Nicosia usually have two-storey and courtyard. They are lined along the narrow streets with facade characteristics formed by the wide wooden eaves, sloping roofs, rectangular windows with wooden shutters and bay windows lies beyond the streets (Turkan, 2018). The proportional relationship of architectural elements such as doors and windows on the facades, enrich the street facades with the diversity and richness of the details.

There are two main streets (axis) which intersecting at the same time, that divide the Nicosia walled city into four. One of these axes extends from north to south and the other from east to west. The north - south axis extends from Girne Gate to Kara Ismail Bastion, while the east - west axis extends from the Paphos Gate to Famagusta Gate (Zafersoy, Batirbaygil 2014). Cultural, social, public and administrative buildings are located around the intersection of these two axes. Commercial shops and recreational and recreation structures have been found to strengthen and support the extensions of the two axis. There is a residential area in the areas between the axis and the walled city.

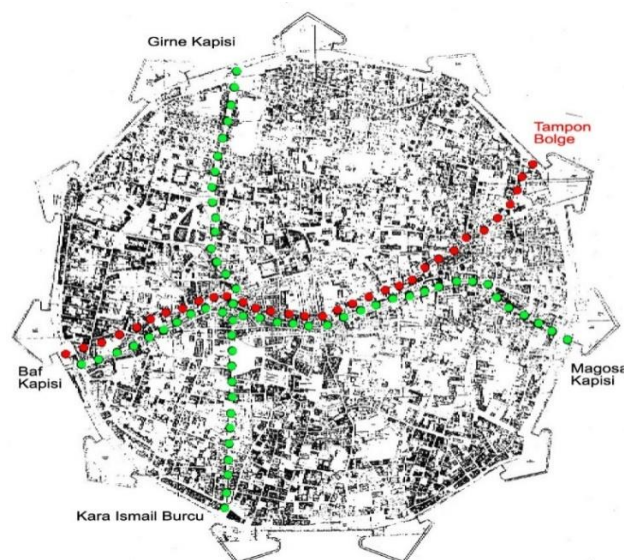


Figure 2.1.Lefkoşa City Plan – North – South Axis- East-West Axis – Buffer Zone

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=lefkosa+haritasi&tbm=isch&tbs=rimg>

2.2 Nicosia Master Plan

The Nicosia Master Plan was prepared in 1979 with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) within the framework of the common vision of the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots as a whole for the restoration and renovation of Nicosia. Their primary objective is to improve the administrative and service functions of the region and to create a decent city centre (UNDP, 2000).

In the general framework of the plan, the second phase was started in 1984 when both communities were satisfied. This phase is particularly focused on the Walled City and the business districts of the region. After 1989, mud wall-coating works were initiated. Many buildings have been repaired and still underway with the rehabilitation projects of the neighbourhoods which are Chrysaliniotissa and Arabahmet from the two parts of the island (Mimarca, 2018).

3. Evolutionary Process of Arabahmet District

Arabahmet District is located in the north west of the walled city of Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. It was one of the most magnificent places in Nicosia due to the high customs, mammoths and the rich population in the period of Ottoman rule. The name of the region comes from Arab Ahmet Pasha, who was believed to be the governor between the years of 1584 and 1587, when the Venetians were in the hands of Nicosia. Houses in this neighbourhood remained from the Ottomans, Venice and Lusignans, has been changed according to the culture and traditions of each period. These are mostly seen in Ottoman Turkish House, with the characteristic type of plan, number of storeys, courtyard, curved roof covered with wide wooden eaves, multipurpose rooms and exterior type hall plans (Eldem, 1984: 17, 18; Eldem, 1987: 60). These houses has an important place in Turkish architecture and international housing architecture literature In 1920, the Armenian immigrants who settled in the region by correcting their situation in the short-term, started to buy houses that they entered as tenants. In 1930 there were no other Turks in the Arabahmet neighbourhood except 5 to 10 families. In 1963, the Armenians who were concerned about the political development began to emigrate from the region, and the Turkish families who immigrated to the vacant houses from the various regions of Cyprus began to settle back. And after 1974 (Figure 2.1), the green line, which was divided into two with a definite border, led to regional insecurity. The migration movement started to the city's urban fringe (Mimarca, 2018).

3.1 Field Studies in Arabahmet Neighbourhood

The reflections of the historical heritage structures in which the urban environment in the architectural texture develops and changes rapidly in accordance with today's conditions are shaped by years. Within the scope of the current field study, it is seen that the neighbourhood's traditional structure was preserved in the analysis works carried out on the Arabahmet neighbourhood. Nowadays, this neighbourhood, which reflects the traces of Turkish culture, is known for centuries and has been home to different cultures and they specially bears the traces of Lusignan, Venetian, British and Ottoman periods. In the field study conducted in the neighbourhood, it was found that the houses in this area were single-story, two-story and three-story. While only a minority some of these houses are owned, it is seen that the remaining habitants are tenants whom are immigrants and the economically inadequate people. The building materials of the houses are made with four different type of material. 4 of them stone house, 11 stone and adobe house, 3 concrete, 42 stone brick (Figure 3.0).



Figure 3.0 Arabahmet Neighbourhood Houses. *Source: Author*

As a construction system, Nogged system was mostly used in the previous years and especially in the Arabahmet neighbourhood houses, where Ottoman builders were frequently used. This system consisted of two wooden frames and the walls were connected to the each other with the brick nogged system (Figure3.1, Figure3.2.). Both of these systems were connected to the members of the wood and were used extensively in Anatolia and Cyprus during the Ottoman period. The same coating was

applied on both of the outer and the inner walls (Bağışkan, 2005). But now, most of the Arabahmet houses appear to be destroyed and disappeared.



Figure 3.1 Arabahmet Houses' Wall Details.

Source: Author

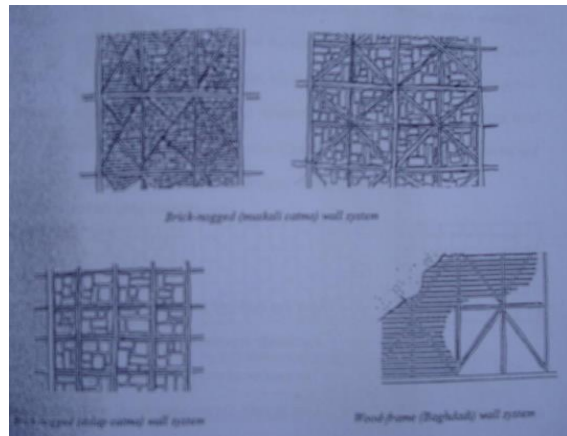


Figure 3.2 Arabahmet Houses' Wall Details.

Source: Bağışkan, 2005.

When we look at the plan and usage of the houses in the neighbourhood, the main room and bedroom were located on the upper floor in previous years, while on the ground floor there was kitchen, toilet and courtyard. The first floor was cool the main room and bedrooms was placed on the top floor. The courtyard was the most important thing of Turkish culture and the courtyard was surrounded by high adobe walls and all the functions and organizations were on the ground floor around that wall. In the Ottoman period, the courtyard reflected secrecy - in the context of cultural value, in the family, it was in the contrast position, both inside and outside, to provide social control. Roaming, resting, cooking, and the bathroom, was separate from the house as they was in the old Ottoman houses. Because the toilet was an old type toilet, it was located on the outside the house (Bağışkan, 2005). When we look at the courtyard and stairs in the houses, it shows us that the history of the house is based on the Ottoman architectural and cultural traces (Figure 3.3).

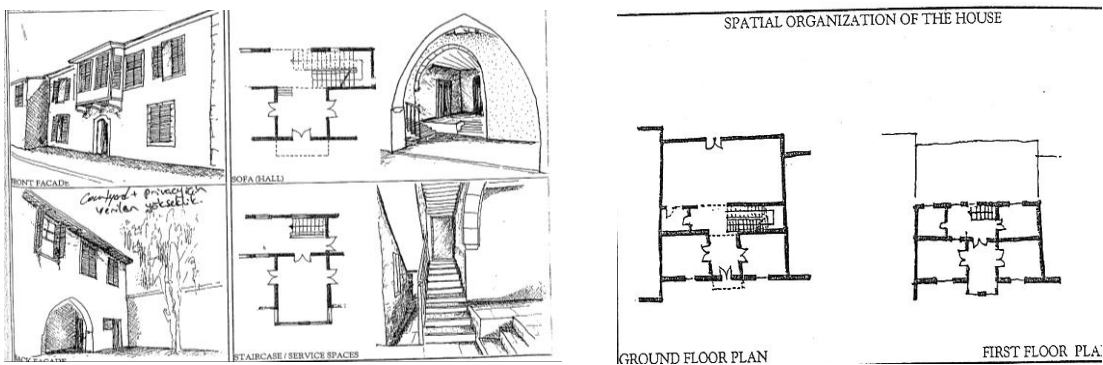


Figure 3.3 Arabahmet Houses Spatial Organization. *Source: Author*

When we look at the neighbourhood in general, it can be seen that small but high-rise windows and facades with bay windows of all houses are arranged to hide inside of the house. And there is a privacy contrast between the inside of the windows and the outside. The arch details, gypsum plasters, bay windows and wooden details on the facades of the houses once again draw attention to the reflections of Ottoman Turkish culture (Figure3.2).



Figure 3.2 Arabahmet Neighbourhood Houses. *Source: Author*

Houses on street and street texture cause both visual and perceptual density, but provide a contrast relationship. The houses facing the street in the neighbourhood, as well as the closed fronts, and the front entrance porch houses, adds a distinct mobility to the architectural texture. It is noteworthy that the open and closed houses of this neighbourhood create entirety by fusing different views on the person who sees it. On the other hand upper floors of some houses on the street with bay windows creates a visual rhythm and a relationship between the ground floor and the upper floor and represents the relationship between the first and the second story (Figure3.4). While the narrow streets that resemble a labyrinth in the neighbourhood, which reveals the different perceptions and the emotions

between the visible or the invisible, are quite interesting, it is a link between reality and lividness (Figure 1.2.4).



Figure 3.4 Arabahmet Neighbourhood Bay Window Façade. *Source: Author*

When the reflections of traditional cultural Turkish houses are examined, it is seen that geographic and cultural layers play a major role in the construction of houses. Geographical and cultural branches cause repetition of the spatial character of houses, while also connecting the lifestyle with cultural codes and mutual relations. Between the perceived world and body, it represents the ontological basis of the house, and also can be connected with the cultural layers that reflect the lifestyle of the dialogue between the inner and the outer world, between the visible and the invisible. As seen in Figure 3.5, this scientific relationship is frequently seen in the neighbourhood of Arabahmet.



Figure 3.5 Arabahmet Neighbourhood Streets. *Source: Author*

But now, when we look at the general situation analysis of the neighbourhood, we see that all the reflections mentioned above are disappearing. The neighbourhood was left to poor community who contradicted to adopt the region to their living culture and who are unaware of the value of the culture and architectural structures (Andaç, 2006, Öztekin, 2006). Although the economic poverty of this community increases the destruction of the buildings, it is advantageous for the architectural heritage to survive, as they are not able to redo building due to their economic circumstances. However, the

additions made by the new habitants according to their own requirements, removes the actual texture of the existing neighbourhood. Although the past-based organization of the house shows the traces of Ottoman architecture and culture just as in the neighbourhood, it is clear at first glance that the existing plan structures have changed in time (Figure 1.2).

4. Conclusion

It is very important to ensure the sustainability of urban identity, continuity of spatial communication, re-interpretation of cultural codes and their transfer to future generations. The historical heritage sites change over time and this change should not be destructive but a developer. The historical heritage areas that are part of the urban identity should be kept alive together with the participation of the society and they should be used functionally.

Within the framework of this understanding, a number of field studies have been carried out to develop sensitive strategies for the preservation and survival of Arabahmet neighbourhood, which is the main subject of the current study. The main purpose of this study is to save the region from its abandonment and to revitalize it by including it in the city and thus to pass the cultural heritage values to the next generation.

As a result of the analyses and data made within the scope of the field study, it is observed that the houses and the environment in the existing historical texture are deprived from their real aesthetic texture. To sustain the historical texture and carry into future can only be implemented with correct improvements. This can only be achieved by the revival of the neighbourhood project. For this reason, it is believed that there will be a real improvement by transferring families with very low income to the residential area which will be built for them outside the walled city. Nowadays, it is possible to list restoration activities in places as library, small galleries, cultural centres, folklore association, small hotels and restaurants. Although these places have been renovated according to the restoration ethics, these places should be considered as a whole in order to maintain the historical texture and ensure its sustainability. Moreover, this work must be carried out in the whole Arabahmet district.

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