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Ambivalent politics and modernist debates in postcolonial Cyprus

Panayiota Pyla, Petros Phokaides

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Introduction

This article examines the intertwined discourses of modern architecture, decolonisation and modernisation in 1960s’ Cyprus, when the aspirations of nation-building became entangled with ethnic conflict between the two main communities of the island. Casting the spotlight on the 1968–1973 international competition for designing a government administrative complex, the article interrogates the new state’s goals, the silent agendas of the competition brief, the jury’s dynamics and the socio-spatial aspirations of the winning project, to situate all these against the palpable socio-political backdrop of social conflict on the one hand, and aspirations to nurture nationhood and social unity on the other. As the epitome of the government’s aspirations for a centralised administration, and also, as one of the first international competitions in modern Cyprus, this project provides a basis for contemplating the roles of modernism in that particular postcolonial context, and the extent to which modernist aesthetics (and politics) of order, efficiency and neutrality, as they were promoted by different actors, constituted strategic responses to Cyprus’s dystopian realities of the time. The article goes beyond a critique of the competition as a grand modernisation gesture, to expose multiple histories of ambivalence in the Island’s modern architecture and politics.

The founding of the Cyprus Republic in 1960 after the end of British colonial rule brought a new state constitution that attempted carefully to balance power between the majority Greek population and the Turkish population, which represented approximately 18% of the citizenry. Internal affairs were quite difficult for a number of reasons: for one, the colonial period and what proved to be an ‘ill-thought out withdrawal strategy’ on the part of Britain had left vividly unresolved tensions between the ethnic communities.1 The Greek Cypriot dream of unification with Greece, which had formed the inspiration for the anti-colonial struggle of the late 1950s, began to appear unreachable, even if nationalist attachments towards Greece still persisted: just as the Turkish Cypriot community also nurtured competing nationalist sentiments towards Turkey.2

The new Constitution attempted to tiptoe carefully around the dynamics and desires of the two communities by distributing political and administrative powers along ethnic lines, but this often increased resentment or frustrations. For example, the Constitution’s provision that either the Republic’s President (whose office was assigned to an elected member of the Greek Cypriot community) or the Vice President (who was to be an elected member of the Turkish Cypriot community) had veto power crippled many parliamentary and governmental operations.3 These complications were made all the more difficult because the ‘guarantor powers’ determined by the 1960s Constitution, namely Britain, Greece and Turkey, were given significant powers to intervene in internal affairs. Overall, the end of colonialism left Cyprus with two British military bases, the threat of unilateral
military intervention by any one of the guarantor powers, competing nationalist postures among the population and, of course, many other influences shaped by larger Cold War realities.

It did not take long for conflict to surface in the newly established state. The first outbreak was in 1963, when Turkish Cypriots reacted against the Greek Cypriot President Makarios’s proposal for constitutional amendments. Even though Makarios proposed these amendments as necessary for improving the functioning of the state apparatus, the Turkish Cypriot Vice President Dr. Fazıl Küçük rejected them as a tactical move by the Greek Cypriot community to achieve unification with Greece.4 By 1964 the Turkish Cypriot officials had abandoned their government positions and the Turkish Cypriot population had withdrawn to enclaves.5 This was the first time the two major ethnic communities were divided along geographical lines (figs 1, 2).6 In 1967, there was a second outbreak of violence which led to Turkey’s military intervention and Greek troops’ withdrawal from Cyprus to avoid war. Soon after this incident, the Turkish Cypriot leadership announced the creation of a separate administration named the ‘Provisional Turkish [Cypriot] Administration’.7 In 1968, intercommunal talks were initiated in search of a settlement of what came to be known as the ‘Cyprus Problem.’

Despite the conflicts, the young Cyprus Republic embraced the postcolonial dream of nation-building from its very inception. Even in the midst of tensions, the end of colonial rule allowed a certain degree of euphoria and an aspiration to ‘safeguard economic and social progress’.8 A series of three five-year ‘Development Plans’ emerged spanning 1962–1976, aiming not simply to reshape the economy and infrastructure of the country, but also to nurture the creation of ‘good citizens’.9 In Cyprus, where different groups resorted to violence to express drastically different views on the country’s future, the nurturing of citizen pride had a particular appeal. Unveiled under the auspices of the United Nations and embraced by various government actors, these Development Plans were looking ahead to a future beyond conflict, when different parts of Cypriot society would jointly enter modernity.

At their launch in 1962, these plans were part of the entire government’s vision, with the participation of both Greek and Turkish officials. After the Turkish Cypriot withdrawal from the government in 1964, when their implementation fell solely into the hands of Greek Cypriots, these Development Plans appeared as a possible way of transcending inter-communal conflict. Soon after the 1967 crisis, and at the time that the second Development Plan was being initiated, the Finance Minister, who was the chief coordinator of these plans, made it a point to remind the Island’s citizens that: ‘From the very outset, when the preparation of the [Development] Plan was initiated, it never occurred to us that the Turkish community could remain aloof to, and away from, the progress of our small county’.10

Committed to the creation of a ‘highly efficient administrative machinery’ that would emerge ‘despite the political anomalies of the past’,11 the Finance Minister aspired to ‘a unitary Cyprus’ that would have ‘the unflagging support of the
Figure 1. Green-Line Map of Nicosia in 1963; Stella Soulioti, *Fettered Independence: Cyprus, 1878–1964*, Map supplement, Mediterranean and East European Monographs, 16 (Minnesota, University of Minnesota, 2006).
productive classes and of the whole of the Cypriot people’ and would transcend separatist trends, to achieve maximum prosperity.12

This article examines precisely one such modernising gesture initiated by the central government in the midst of inter-communal conflict. The spotlight falls upon the design of a government administrative complex of offices in Nicosia, which was part of the second five-year development plan. This office complex was to be the outcome of an international design competition, which was announced in early 1968. Advertised widely around the world, the competition was the greatest architectural and cultural event of the time, as it was the largest public building complex ever to be constructed in Cyprus, and an ambitious bureaucratic mechanism that aspired to house almost all the ministries and government services under one roof. The article examines how the competition brief, submissions and jury processes attempted to connect architectural production with the way that the central government (composed solely of Greek Cypriots by that time) conceptualised an ideal independent new state. It uncovers the silent politics behind the
competition brief, the ambivalences behind the siting of the project and the complex interactions between local and international players. All these factors constitute the multifaceted history of the competition. In reflecting on the winning proposal, we ultimately situate its particular set of aesthetic and social visions within these larger histories of modern Cyprus.

Seeking a new order: the competition brief

On the surface, the competition reflected the young state’s effort to eliminate aging government buildings (often inherited from the colonial administration), which were seen as ‘inadequate and in many cases, inappropriate for the government’s smooth operation and the satisfaction of public needs.’ The re-housing of the expanding state machine was to be deployed in a more centralised manner. As the competition brief stated:

It is hardly necessary to enlarge [sic] on the obvious difficulties the government has had to face as the result of the dispersal and chronic insufficiency of the adapted buildings or on the heavy burden of maintenance and repair and rent charges. ... The accommodation to be provided is to serve principally the need of a centralized government administration.

To publicise the competition call widely around the world, the government utilised its network of embassies and some international architectural publications such as the RIBA Journal, Architects’ Journal, L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui and Architectoniki, a Greek-based multi-lingual magazine. The call initially attracted 204 applications by individual architects, architectural firms or other teams who expressed interest in the competition by responding to a questionnaire regarding their experience with similar projects. The competition brief was to be distributed among selected candidates who would be invited to submit a design proposal for the second phase of the competition. The brief, competition procedures and building programme, were assembled by an ad hoc committee of government officials, which was formed in January, 1968. The main demand in their brief was for the reorganisation of the existing government services, which were widely scattered around the city, in order to create a new bureaucratic mechanism whose different parts would be centrally coordinated for the local society’s benefit.

By trying to consolidate almost all government buildings on one site and under one roof, the brief was advancing a vision of a single, unified modern administration. The concept of centralisation was coupled with an idea of efficiency both in terms of the workplace and in terms of the broader government operation. The efficiency of government workers was to be ensured by ‘uplifting the quality of the public offices’ and by providing ‘better working conditions’. The efficiency of the broader government operation was to be promoted by taking into account such factors as similarity of ‘functions’, ‘accommodation requirements and standards’ and the proximity of particular administrative functions to corresponding ministries.

Even if centralisation and functionality were crucial to the brief as ideas, their exact nature was not entirely clear. This was evident in the way various titles were conflated in different government records and reports on the competition. Each of the
titles reflected different attitudes towards the nature of the intervention. For example, the final Report of the ad hoc Committee in 1969 spoke of a ‘Ministerial buildings complex’, placing the priority on the ministries and the official government, and underlining the political dimensions of the building. Alternatively, the earlier brief of 1968 was entitled ‘Master Plan for Government Offices’, and this emphasised, as the Finance Minister put it, ‘[the] executive role of civil service, a role of offering equal service to the citizen irrespective of his social or ideological orientation’. In other words, the consolidation of the administration buildings in a single complex was part of an effort to bring competing social voices together in the local society.

Of course, the idea of reinforcing the role of a national central power was not peculiar to postcolonial Cyprus; it was a common way of ensuring the coherence of national identity in contexts that were characterised by intense religious or linguistic diversities. In a similar way, the creation of a rationalised and centralised administrative system in Cyprus aspired to the neutralisation of the political tensions tormenting the newly established state. This aim, however, proved fraught with contradictions, either because different actors had dissimilar perceptions of the country’s future or because the tough political realities kept introducing unexpected dimensions.

The most striking contradiction is perhaps the fact that the building programme prepared by the ad hoc committee in 1968 excluded the office of the Turkish Vice-President from the list of services to be relocated in the new administrative complex. This office had remained empty since 1964, when the Turkish Cypriot leadership withdrew from the government. By the time the brief was prepared, Turkish Cypriots had also declared a separate administration and the political division of the country was becoming even more intense. The future of the Cyprus Republic seemed to be moving quite far from the aspirations of the 1960 Constitution, so much so that the ad hoc committee simply described the Vice-President’s Office as ‘now non-existent’. Thus, for all the government’s desire to overcome trends of ‘separation and isolation’, the brief ironically excluded the office of the top Turkish Cypriot official from its programmatic requirements.

Transcending colonial structures: the site
The unified administration being sought by the competition brief was not only a response to inter-communal conflict. It was also set against the background of the country’s recent colonial past and the state’s decolonisation efforts. The young government was in search of a new bureaucratic system to reflect the new political and administrative realities shaped after the colonial era. Even if its concept of modernisation resonated with the colonial project, the state generally desired to distance itself from colonial traditions. This was not easy given that colonialism was vividly present: not only because colonial buildings often housed the new state’s institutions, but also because colonial laws were still in effect and administrative practices largely followed former colonial structures. The state was already promoting new legislation for increasing the efficiency of the civil service,
seeking to enhance the state’s responsiveness to the citizenry.

The competition for the new office complex was part of such efforts. The site reserved for the administrative complex was situated between the Presidential Palace and the city centre, in close proximity to both: and by virtue of its strategic location, the particular site was emblematic of the competition’s aspiration to create an interface between the sovereign central government and local society (Fig. 3). There was actually much more to the choice of site, however. It was also the site of the colonial secretariat! And the brief assumed that the area was to be cleared of all the colonial buildings to allow for the erection of the government complex (Fig. 4). Thus, the very site negated the colonial structure, as the new complex, the epitome of the new state’s administrative apparatus, was to rise up on the ruins of the colonial secretariat! The tabula rasa for the new complex was emblematic of a new beginning that the new state aspired to make, with a new administrative machine and new symbols.

The government’s attitude towards the colonial past was not always the same as identified above. An altogether different strategy was employed at the other major administrative landmark in the capital, the official residence and principal workplace for the Republic’s President. If the government office complex underlined the importance of civil service in the new state, the ‘Presidential Palace,’ as it came to be officially named, symbolised the centre of government power. The Presidential Palace was to re-appropriate the former British colonial ‘Government House’—the residence of the British Governor of Cyprus and a colonial symbol par excellence (Fig. 5). The building had been constructed in the 1930s with local limestone and its form self-consciously alluded to the Island’s Byzantine, Gothic and Ottoman past, while its carvings and decorations made eclectic references to local ancient artefacts and decorative patterns, as part of a colonial search for a ‘Cypriot motif’.21 The Presidential Palace kept the traces of colonial rule and according to some, this was encouraged by the President’s own personal concern for ‘preserving the Island’s cultural history’.22

The refashioning of a primary symbol of colonial oppression in terms of a new mode of democratic government, however, also constituted an alternative strategy towards the subversion of the colonial past. In the context of post-independence euphoria, the action of applying new meaning to the same form was a metaphor for the victory of the new state over the colonial power. Given the internal conflicts that were also marking the emergence of the young Cypriot state, the very positioning of the Presidential Palace in the former colonial symbol was perhaps also a reaffirmation of the importance of a unitary state. All in all, the two major government landmarks in the city, the Presidential Palace and the government office complex were both strategically positioned in the city; yet each followed a different tactic for reaffirming the significance of state centralisation. The government complex would raze colonial structures to the ground and rebuild; whereas the Presidential Palace opted for an approach of adaptive reuse. Such diametrically opposed strategies only underline the young state’s ambivalence towards the colonial legacy.
Figure 3. Diagram showing the location of the site reserved for the Government Office Complex in relation to the Presidential Palace and the city centre (created by the authors).
Figure 4. Bird’s-eye view of the buildings of the old colonial secretariat in Nicosia (16th November, 1968; Press and Information Office – PIO – Photographic Archive, Nicosia, Cyprus).
Renegotiating the local: the finalists

Stories of ambivalence also surface when one examines the way in which the state attempted to give the competition international prestige. Upon announcing the competition through embassies and professional journals abroad, the president of the ad hoc committee Panayiotis Kazamias, who was also the director general of the so-called
‘Ministry of Communication and Works’ (this was apparently a misnomer for Ministry of Transport and Works), contacted the International Union of Architects (UIA) as well the local professional association in Cyprus, asking them also to disseminate the call for submissions. In his response, the Secretary General of the UIA, Pierre Vago, seemed compelled to raise two issues: first, that the competition should be advertised to socialist countries and countries beyond Europe to avoid ‘discriminations’, as he put it; second, that the competition should be sure to abide by the ‘international ruling approved by the UNESCO General Conference’, which stipulated that all international competitions have an international jury. In a somewhat defensive response, the ad hoc committee’s president underlined that the competition indeed had an international and open character. It is not clear if he took further action on the UIA’s admonitions, but around the same moment, he was confronted with the opposite message from the local professional association in Cyprus, the ‘Association of Architects and Civil Engineers’.

Expressing surprise that the competition had already been announced internationally, the Association emphasised its ‘disappointment in the process’. It asserted local architects’ comparative advantage in understanding the particularities of local culture, to argue that the competition should have taken place solely among local teams of architects and engineers. It even warned that the government’s insistence on soliciting professionals from abroad was a method that should only be used by ‘underdeveloped countries which have no capacity to act differently’. Placing itself outside such dismissive categories, the local Association warned that ‘it is the government’s duty to give Cypriot architects the chance’. The desire for internationalism is good, it suggested, but it should have been pursued in the spirit of supporting the local profession. Citing cases in Brazil and Italy as good practices, the Association explained that the competition should have served to ‘promote [local architects’] work internationally’. Given that the competition had already been publicised abroad and could no longer be limited to local professionals, the Association presented another acceptable alternative: local firms could be allowed retroactively to form partnerships with international firms, which could serve as their consultants. It also accepted the idea that the competition jury would include international experts, although insisting that these experts be members of the UIA, probably in an effort to curb the government’s control in determining the Jury’s composition.

The ad hoc committee of technocrats in charge of the competition was sceptical, to say the least, of the possibility of awarding the commission to local architects, fearing that they lacked experience in projects of this magnitude. However, the Minister of Transport and Works—who also became involved with the competition process—seemed more receptive to local architects’ demands. Attempting to reconcile the Association’s desire for local participation with the ad hoc committee’s preference for international firms, the Minister suggested that the selection process might favour Cypriot firms which formed partnerships with international firms that had the required credentials. This suggestion was obviously made after the announcement of
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Figure 6. Table showing the different short lists of architectural firms during the selection process: the shading indicates the firms that reached the list of finalists who were invited to submit proposals for the second stage of the competition; see note 37 (created by the authors).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ad hoc Committee’s List of 15 Firms</th>
<th>Arhtur Ling’s 5 selections</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Norman &amp; Dawbarn (UK)</td>
<td>Studio Valle (Italy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Frederick Gibberd &amp; Partners (UK)</td>
<td>Ryder &amp; Yates (UK)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Sir Basil Spence &amp; Collins (UK)</td>
<td>Farmer &amp; Dark (UK)</td>
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<td>4 Gollins Melvin Ward &amp; Partners (UK)</td>
<td>Thompson Berwick &amp; Partners (Canada)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Sir Percy Thomas &amp; Son (UK)</td>
<td>Coordinator (Sweden)</td>
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<td>6 Casson Conder &amp; Partners (UK)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Yorke, Rosenberg Mardall (UK)</td>
<td>Arthur Ling’s common selection (28) with Committee’s list (15)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Ronald Ward (UK)</td>
<td>Sir Basil Spence &amp; Collins (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Robert Matthew &amp; Partners (UK)</td>
<td>Interplan (ITALY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Sheppard Fidler &amp; Associates (UK)</td>
<td>Kalogeras, Koulermos &amp; Amourgis (GR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 John Parkins Associates (Canada)</td>
<td>Thymopoulos &amp; Partners (GR)</td>
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<td>12 Affleck, Dimakopoulos, Lebensold (Canada)</td>
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<td>13 Shore &amp; Moffat &amp; Partners (Canada)</td>
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<td>14 Perlstein &amp; Associates (Israel)</td>
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<td>15 Interplan (Italy)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ad hoc Committee’s List of 6 Collaborations of Cypriots and Foreign firms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ad hoc Committee’s 7 Finalists and 3 Substitutes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>F. Kolakides, Tiritas, Kikkides &amp; The Architects Collaborative (U.S.A)</td>
<td>Sir Basil Spence &amp; Collins (UK)</td>
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<td>Stavros Economou &amp; James Cubitt &amp; Partners (UK)</td>
<td>Studio Valle (ITALY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vafeidis, Zembylas, Kythereotes &amp; Arieh Sharon (Israel)</td>
<td>Kolakides and Partners &amp; The Architects Collaborative (USA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippou Bros &amp; J. Zambarlowkos &amp; Raglan Squire (UK)</td>
<td>Afflect, Dimakopoulos, Labensold (CAN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roussos, Pericleous, Michaelides Bros &amp; Valentis (Greece)</td>
<td>Koulermos, Kalogeras, Amourgis (GR) and Fry, Drew &amp; Partners (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Toumazis, D. Toumazis, Ph. Polydorides &amp; Charles Pearson Son &amp; Partners (UK)</td>
<td>Economou &amp; James Cubitt &amp; Partners (UK)</td>
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the competition and thus did not affect the initial first-phase submissions, but it would affect the later stages of the jury process substantially, as we will see below.

The initial submissions to the competition were 204, more than half of which were from the United Kingdom. There were also fifteen submissions from Cyprus, all of which came from Greek Cypriot firms. No Turkish or Turkish Cypriot architects responded to the call, and the irony was thus becoming inescapable: even as the competition for the government complex (and the state’s proclaimed desire to build a unified state) successfully reached out to the international arena, the competition process failed to transcend the socio-political boundaries inside the small country.

Upon reviewing the 204 entries, the ad hoc committee produced a short list based on one key criterion: the experience of the candidates with projects of a magnitude comparable to that of the proposed government complex. The list included ten firms from the United Kingdom, two from Canada, one from Israel and one from Italy, with Cypriot professionals being conspicuously absent. Either because he was not fully confident in the ad hoc committee’s choices, or because he wanted to reaffirm the competition’s international scope, the Minister of Finance, who had been a key actor in the competition process all along, invited a foreign consultant to the ad hoc committee: This was Arthur Ling, Head of the Department of Architecture and Civic Planning of the University of Nottingham, who was already a consultant for the Cyprus Government Department of Town Planning and Housing. Ling had been a member of the Town Planning Committee for the London Plan in 1942 and also member of the International Congress of Modern Architecture with the British MARS Group. His theoretical predispositions on modernism were made quite evident in the sixth CIAM meeting in Bridgwater, when Ling chaired a discussion on ‘Urbanism’ together with Le Corbusier. There, Ling critiqued Giedion’s emphasis on architectural expression, favouring instead a more hard-core emphasis on rationalism. When he joined the ad hoc committee, Ling was presented with the full list of 204 candidates and eventually selected five firms from Europe and Canada ‘as his personal choice’, while he also indicated that he was open to including Cypriot or Greek architects, regarding whom the ad hoc committee ‘would be in a better position to decide’.

A third list was later produced, in tune with the Minister of Transport and Works’ sympathetic stance to the local professionals’ request. This list included six partnerships between international and local firms. The six Greek Cypriot firms which were included in this list were among those that submitted to the competition’s first phase independently; the six international firms (from Europe, the USA and Israel) included names from the firms that had submitted in the first phase plus two brand new names: The Architects Collaborative (USA) and Valentis (Greece). It is not clear whether these partnerships were proposed by the ad hoc committee or whether the local architects were actually asked to find their own collaborators and resubmit; but it is obvious that the inclusion of local architects in the design stage was a desire of the entire Council of Ministers (Fig. 6).
fourth and final shortlist basically combined names from the three previous lists to produce seven candidates and three alternates. \(^{37}\) By encouraging collaborations between local and international architects (and evidently, by making exceptions to competition rules and deadlines to allow for four such collaborations to be shortlisted), the ad hoc committee tried to walk a fine line between the government’s desire to utilise and nurture local resources and expertise, and its determination to present an extroverted international outlook for the modern state.

The four lists were submitted to the Council of Ministers on January 4\(^{th}\), 1969, but it was not until four years later, in February, 1973, that the jury met. By that time, the list of candidates was somewhat modified, perhaps because some withdrew due to the long waiting period. \(^{38}\) The projects the jury had in front of it were reduced to six submissions, all products of collaboration between international firms and at least one Greek Cypriot firm. Some reshuffling of previous lists took place so that some foreign firms that had so far been listed independently were now partnered with a local firm (see also Figure 6). These final submissions thus came quite close to the expressed wishes of the local professional Association! The six submissions were from the following: The Architects Collaborative from the United States, which teamed up with Kolakides and Associates from Cyprus; the office of Spence, Bonnington and Collins from the United Kingdom, which teamed up with Philippou Bros from Cyprus; Cubitt, Fello, Atkinson and Partners from the United Kingdom, who were working with Economou and Diamantis from Cyprus and Ove Arup and Partners from the United Kingdom; Kalogeras, Koulermos and Amourgis from Greece, collaborating with Fry, Drew and Partners from the United Kingdom and Levas from Cyprus; Sharon from Israel, joining forces with Vafeadis, Zembلاς and Kythreotis from Cyprus; Studio Valle from Italy, collaborating with the Leptos-Davidian Design Group from Cyprus.

**Ordering with flexibility: the winner**

The jury that began deliberations in Nicosia in February, 1973, was composed of most of the members of the ad hoc committee and three other members: \(^{39}\) the Greek Cypriot architect Pefkios Georgiadis, who represented the local Architects and Civil Engineers Association; the British architect-planner Arthur Ling, who had already acted as consultant for the competition; and George Candilis, the Paris-based architect and planner of Greek descent, who practised extensively in the Middle East (Fig. 7). \(^{40}\) Despite the self-consciously neutral and obsessively technocratic brief, the jury had few qualms about expressing particular preferences. In their deliberations, they placed great emphasis on the competition as a larger urban design project, arguing that what was being designed was not simply a building complex, but the wider surrounding area. The jury members also spoke of a need for establishing ‘an “Area Scheme” around the site’, so as to secure ‘a comprehensive layout’. \(^{41}\) This is very likely to have been formulated by Arthur Ling, who insisted on the creation of ‘area schemes’ in the work he did for the Cyprus Town Planning Department. \(^{42}\) The emphasis on totalities and the belief in the commensurability of local and district or regional scales also echoed arguments
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Figure 7. Photograph from the competition jury deliberations (6th June, 1973; © PIO Photographic Archive).
Ling made on other occasions in Cyprus, where he revealed his unwavering faith in rational and comprehensive planning.43

The jury also considered the complex’s optimal working conditions and efficient operation as a top priority, and this indirectly implied a reaffirmation of the decision to replace the old colonial buildings with new construction. In its deliberations, the jury was also quite critical of proposals with ‘long corridors which represent a high proportion of the useable space’;44 and, inversely, they praised proposals which made ‘efficient’ connections between departments (Fig. 8).45 Coupled with efficiency, flexibility was also considered a top priority, and the complex was expected to allow ‘growth and change’, both in the construction process and
during its later use. Another key criterion was ‘a civic statement in the form of a public piazza to consolidate a new dimension of the capital city’ (Fig. 9). The desire for a ‘meeting point for the people’ embodied more than an idea for a well-functioning city; it also alluded to a dream of a unified state, in stark contrast to the tough political realities of the time.

Given the massive programmatic requirements and the particular emphasis on efficiency and flexibility, it should not be surprising that the winning proposal would ultimately be a mega-structure with a systematically permissive modular system. Proposed by the partnership of Spence, Bonnington and Collins (United Kingdom) with the local firm of Philippou Bros, the modular system allowed construction to be phased over several years. This clever interpretation of the brief was welcome both for financial reasons, and for allowing the gradual relocation of government departments. The idea of phasing also alleviated anxieties about the technical success of a public building whose scale was unprecedented for the country. The basic module was a structure of a standard size of 12 metres by 7 metres, with vertical articulations that connected the modules. The module acted as both a functional and a constructional unit. Repeated horizontally as well as vertically, it allowed smaller groups of modules to be connected internally with vertical service towers, thus minimising long corridor spaces (Fig. 10). By ‘breaking down’ both the building and its functions, and by allowing for phasing, the module also emphasised an aesthetic of functionality, flexibility and efficiency that was palatable to the jury.

Functional separation extended to modes of circulation. The first floor was reserved for a ‘traffic free pedestrian spine’, which would become the key connecting element between the different government departments. This gave the street level a particular significance which received points from the Jury for increasing the complex’s civic presence. Vehicular circulation was totally segregated from pedestrians: two levels of access roads with parking for 2,500 vehicles were placed underneath, and this too promised to give the street level back to pedestrians and the city (Fig. 11). The organic metaphor of a building ‘growing’ gradually out of the needs of each Ministry reinforced the ideas of flexibility, but the desire for incremental construction also hinted at another reality: it spoke to the very heart of the young government’s uncertain future.

The coupling of functionality and flexibility was also incorporated in the way the winning project conceptualised the design of individual office spaces. The winning submission provided several alternative office typologies in order to meet the variety of needs in government departments and to accommodate future changes (Fig. 12). This attention to varying user needs and the complex’s smaller scales was praised by the Jury who hailed the proposal’s ‘conviction and consistency which [were] carried into the details of the project’.

Indeed, John Bonnington had been a vocal advocate of balancing the functional aspects of a building and users’ fluctuating needs. ‘Self sufficiency in building is often too much to aim for, or to expect’, he argued elsewhere. ‘Inherent in the design should be opportunities for adaptation or extension.’ Experiments with phased construction and expand-
Figure 9. Model of the Second prize winner, Cubitt, Fello Atkinson and Partners with Economou and Diamantis (© Economou Architects, Nicosia, Cyprus).
Figure 10. Model of the First prize winner, in public exhibition after the announcement of the competition results, showing the proposed Office Complex next to the 'module' (6th June, 1973; © PIO Photographic Archive).
ability were proposed in another competition entry
Bonnington had coordinated for his firm in 1972
for the Kuwait National Assembly (Fig. 13).54 Both
in Kuwait and in Cyprus, the key goal was to accom-
modate varying needs without, however, compro-
mising the scientific commitment to steer clear of
individualistic caprices. As Bonnington argued:
I will not sacrifice the disciplined relationships of
space, framework, and systems merely to cope
with every individual requirement, because I
believe that people and processes are bound to
change from initial intentions and that buildings
should be able to cope with different future
needs and requirements.55
In this manifesto-like statement, Bonnington
summed up his modernist sensibilities. The preoccu-
pation with abstract concepts such as programme,
structure and functionality were premised on a
belief that modernisation had the power to trans-
cend cultural contexts, local preferences and tra-
ditions.

The entire complex proposed by the partnership of
Spence, Bonnington and Collins with the local firm
of Philippou Bros was placed in a uniform natural

Figure 11. Longitudinal
Section of the First prize
winner, ‘Competition:
Government offices,
Nicosia; first prize
Spence, Bonnington
and Collins’, Bauen &
Wohnen, v. 29, n. 3
(March, 1974), p. 129.

Figure 12. Alternative
office plans proposed in
the winning project,
‘Competition:
Government offices,
Nicosia; first prize
Spence, Bonnington
and Collins’, Bauen &
Wohnen, v. 29, n. 3
(March, 1974), p. 130.
landscape that hinted at the specific context only by alluding to the neighbouring dry river. The jury recognised the potential of the proposed scheme to ‘enable the general public to enjoy the building and its landscape amenities’, but it was wary of the uniform treatment of open spaces and proposed an adjustment: ‘...it would be an improvement if [there were] a more urban approach, treating the area in front of the building as a public piazza with some paved areas, rather than as a front garden. In this way, a better design relationship with the city is likely to be established.’

In criticising the proposed complex’s front space, the jury was expressing its concern with the civic presence of the project. Inversely, the jury saw another public space more positively. This was the central, five-storey high enclosed space that was intended to be the main public space of the proposed structure (Fig. 14). Called an ‘Agora’, this large interior courtyard was to be the common meeting place for the general public. To the extent that this alluded to the administrative complex’s ties to democratic processes, it was embraced by the jury as an appropriate manifestation of the
Figure 14. Model (top) and perspective drawing (bottom) of proposed central public space, ‘Agora’, in the Government Complex, ‘Competition: Government offices, Nicosia; first prize Spence, Bonnington and Collins’, Bauern & Wohnen, v. 29, n. 3 (March, 1974), p. 130.
modern state’s aspirations. However, criticism was levelled at the hanging gardens, flying bridges, palm trees and water surfaces that embellished this courtyard’s interior in the drawings. The jury suggested to the winners ‘a reconsideration of the aesthetic expression of the … internal treatment of the Agora’ so that it would be ‘more in character with Cyprus and the purpose of the building complex.’ Similarly, the jury suggested the same reconsideration of the aesthetics of the vertical service and circulation towers that ‘dominate[d] the design’. The jury considered both features as not appropriate ‘for a building of this nature or for Cyprus’. The comments reflected the jury’s anxiety about the power of visual references and disguised symbolisms. In their search for a character for modern Cyprus, the palm trees, oversized towers, or even the fountains, were problematic. The jury was assuming a radical anti-orientalist stance, where the new state would be distanced (aesthetically at least) from any hint of regionalism.

In the end, and with these few caveats, the Spence, Bonnington, Collins and Philippou Bros proposal was unanimously selected for the winning prize. That the complex would have the formal and social logic of mega-structures seemed appealing at the time, as the dark side of this post-Second World War building type—namely its ties to bureaucracy and managerial control—was not yet transparent. As it happened, the project never materialised because soon afterwards, in the summer of 1974, a new conflict led to the violent division of the two communities. The island remains up to today with an unresolved political conflict and an open wound that is vividly reflected in the built environment, even if the project of modernisation appears to have firmly taken hold in many aspects of life.

**Competing visions of nationhood**

Soon after the completion of jury deliberations, a 1973 article in the *Architects’ Journal* summed up the architectural competition’s entanglement with postcolonial Cyprus’s political context as follows:

Despite the internecine strife among some sections of the community, Cyprus is struggling to develop a more stable and equitable form of government and a coherent national identity. As a symbol of its desire to exemplify this new order, and to gather together a scattered administration, the Cyprus Government sponsored in 1970 an international competition for the design of new offices to contain all ministries and departments on a site outside the walls of Nicosia, its capital city.

When this article was written Cypriot society was witnessing internal turmoil in even more complex ways: ethnic nationalisms were taking extreme forms; civic nationalisms were also getting more entrenched; and others became proponents of non-alignment politics. The ‘Cyprus problem’ was getting worse, and war seemed to be looming. The aspiration to a ‘more stable and equitable form of government’ and a ‘coherent national identity’ mentioned in the *Architects’ Journal* was in stark contrast to the signs of rifts that were all the more evident within the fragile social structure of the new state.

The competition for the government office complex was searching for an architectural
language in tune with the processes of founding a modern state and a centralised bureaucracy. Its modernising ambitions, tied to desires for unity and centralisation, were fraught with many ambiguities and contradictions. The competition’s search for a coherent nationhood was unveiled just as the Turkish Cypriot leadership formed its own separate administration and Greek Cypriot officials chose to move on with the design of the administrative complex unilaterally. The Finance Minister was trying to cater to both ethnic communities, even if the brief did not stipulate offices for the top Turkish official. The Minister of Transport and Works was trying to finesse disagreements with local professionals, even as the presence of foreign consultants was recognised as the key to the competition’s validity. The jury’s insistence on internationalism and rationalism represented a self-conscious search for an aesthetic of order and neutrality, just when social consensus seemed most elusive. All these were played out in the competition process, and even the winning proposal captured the contested realities of the search for nationhood. By exposing these intricate practices of negotiation between the state administration and the production of architecture, this article uncovers multiple histories of ambivalence in the advancement of modernisation and in the appropriation of modernism to highlight, yet again, the complex entanglement of architecture and politics.

Notes and references

4. The document with the suggested amendments was entitled: ‘Suggested Measures to Facilitate the Smooth Functioning of the State and Remove Certain Causes of Intercommunal Friction’ and was included in ‘Makarios Memorandum to the Turkish Cypriot Vice-President Dr. F. Kucuk’, cited in ‘The London and Zurich Agreements’, op. cit., p. 462.
5. For a description of the events that followed the Greek Cypriot President Makarios’ constitutional amendments see Stavros Panteli, The Making of Modern Cyprus: From Obscurity to Statehood (New Barnet, Interworld, 1990).
6. For an analysis of the dividing line through the Nicosia city centre, for example, see Yiannis Papadakis, ‘I Leukosia/Lefkosha meta to 1960: ena potami, mia gefyra kai mia Nekri Zoni’ [‘Nicosia/Lefkosha after 1960: a river, a bridge and a Dead Zone’], in, Nikos Trimikliniotis, ed., To Portokali tis Kyprou [‘The Orange of Cyprus’] (Athens, Nisos, 2005), pp. 265–293.
7. ‘Re-Organization of The Turkish Cypriot Administrative System’ (Nicosia, Press and Information Office, PIO, 29th December, 1967); accessible online at http://www.piopressreleases.com.cy/.
8. ‘Address of H.B. Archbishop Makarios at the ceremony held in the House of Representatives for his investiture as president of the Republic of Cyprus’ (Nicosia, PIO, 28th February, 1973), p. 3.
9. Ibid., p. 4.
10. ‘Second Development Plan: Address to the House of Representatives by the Minister of Finance, Renos Solomides, on April 8, 1968’ (Nicosia, PIO, 8th April, 1968).
11. ‘Address by the Minister of Finance, Renos Solomides at the Pancyprian Civil Servants Trade Union Congress held today’ (Nicosia, PIO, 7th April, 1968), p. 3.
13. Press release of the announcement of the competition prizes by the President of the jury, P. M. Kazamias (Nicosia, PIO, 6th June, 1973).
18. ‘Address by the Minister of Finance Renos Solomides, op. cit., p. 1.
22. In a recent interview, the director general of the Ministry of Transport and Works at that time contended that the young Republic’s first President personally opposed the removal of colonial symbols from the façade (interview by Panayiotis Kazamias with Petros Phokaides, Nicosia, 3rd June, 2011).
23. The letter sent to the UIA was signed by A. K Anastasiades on behalf of P. Kazamias, PWD Archive, n.38/68/1 (Nicosia, PWD, 7th February, 1968).
26. The representatives of the local Association met the ad hoc Committee’s President, P. Kazamias, on February
14th, 1968, and submitted a written declaration of their views, on February 19th, 1968. The Association also met the Minister of Transport and Works and the Minister of Finance.

27. Letter sent by F. Kolakides, President of Association of Architects and Civil Engineers to the General Director of the Ministry of Transport and Works, PWD Archive, n. 38/68/1 (Nicosia, PWD, 19th February, 1968).

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. This was evident from the very fact that the Committee’s clear priority had been to announce the competition in international, rather than local fora; and from the statement by the ad hoc committee’s President that ‘it is doubtful that Cypriot architects have a general knowledge and experience’: a view P. Kazamias expressed in a letter to the Minister of Transport and Works, PWD Archive, n. 38/68/1 (Nicosia, PWD, 23rd February, 1968).

31. This opinion was first recorded in a letter from P. Kazamias, dated February 23rd, 1968, summarising the views of the Ministry of Transport and Works to the General Director of the Planning Bureau. This was reaffirmed by the General Director of the Planning Bureau in his response on March 14th, 1968, where he summarised the discussion between the Ministry of Finance and the representatives of the local Association, PWD Archive, n. 38/68/1 (Nicosia, PWD, 23rd February, 1968; 14th March, 1968).

32. The submissions were as follows: 111 from the United Kingdom, 15 from Cyprus, 14 from Canada, 10 from Greece, 9 from the Lebanon, 8 from Italy, 8 from Sweden, 6 from Poland, 5 from Germany, 3 from Israel, 2 from France, 2 from Austria, and single entries from Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Finland, Romania, Ireland, Egypt; ‘Report of the Ministerial Buildings Committee,’ op. cit.

33. Ibid., p. 6: the invitation to A. Ling (1913–1995) came from the Minister of Finance on March 1st, 1968, with the justification that he would ‘act as adviser for the selection of Architects [. . .] in the event of the Committee finding it difficult to make the choice’.

34. Ling’s critique of Giedion, prompted Van Eyck to support Giedion’s emphasis on architectural expression. In agreement with Van Eyck’s reaction (and against Ling’s), Le Corbusier exclaimed ‘finally, imagination comes into CIAM!’: see Eric Mumford, The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism 1928–60 (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2000), pp. 172, 179.

35. ‘Report of the Ministerial Buildings Committee’, op. cit.: Ling initially selected 28 firms and then, upon communicating with the Minister of Finance, he narrowed the list down to five names as his personal choice, over and above the Greek and Cypriot architects.

36. The Council of Ministers’ decision was made on April 3rd, 1968: letter from P. Kazamias to the General Director of Planning Bureau, PWD Archive, n. 38/68/2 (Nicosia, PWD, 4th January, 1969).

37. The final list included three names from the ad hoc committee’s list of fifteen; two names from Arthur Ling’s five personal favourites; and four names from the list of six partnerships between international and local architects. One more team was included that did not appear on the above lists, that probably came from a longer list Ling had previously compiled. This was the partnership of Kalogeras, Koulermos and Amourgis from Greece with Fry, Drew and Partners from the United Kingdom.

38. The shortlists were completed by January 4th, 1969, but it took almost three years to notify the finalists to prepare their proposals for the second phase of the competition (April 4th, 1972) and almost one year more for the delivery of the entries (February 22nd, 1973).
39. Government officials participating in the jury were: the Director General of the Ministry of Transport and Works (P. Kazamias); the Director of the Department of Public Works (Em. Symeonides); the Director of the Department of Planning and Housing (C. Ioannides); the Representative of the Accountant General (Th. Theophilou); the Representative of the Planning Bureau (K. Spatharis); the Public Works Department Senior Architects Office (X. Ioannides). ‘Announcement of the Competition Prizes by the President of the Jury and General Director of the Ministry of Transport and Works (Nicosia, PIO, 6th June, 1973).


43. For example, ‘Lecture by Professor Arthur Ling, Ledra Palace Hotel, 22/09/1967: Town Planning in Cyprus’ (Nicosia, PIO, 22nd September, 1967).


45. Ibid.: quoted from the jury’s comments on the Third prize winner, Studio Valle from Italy with Leptos-Davidian Design Group (Entry 183934).

46. Ibid.: quoted from the jury’s comments on the proposal of The Architects Collaborative with Kolakides and Associates (Entry No 868420).

47. Ibid.: quoted from the jury’s comments on the Second prize winner, James Cubitt, Fello Atkinson and Partners with Economou, Diamantis from Cyprus and Ove Arup and Partners (Entry No 465877).

48. Ibid.: quoted from the jury’s comments on the First prize winner.

49. Ibid.


51. Ibid., p. 411.


57. Ibid.: quoted from the jury’s recommendations to the winners.

58. Ibid.