PROCEEDINGS OF THE
2ND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF THE EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL
HISTORY NETWORK

Brussels, 31 May - 2 June 2012

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CYPRUS’S GEOPOLITICAL AMBIVALENCE

On July 7 1966, a visionary project with the title, ‘World Man Centre,’ was presented in local press in Cyprus. The project was to house an international ‘art and science center’ dedicated to ‘world peace’ (Fig. 1). The proposal was championed by three high-profile figures: The President of the Cyprus Republic, Makarios; the world-renowned American architect-inventor Buckminster Fuller; and the American millionaire and patron of the project, Caresse Crosby. Crosby had initially attempted to establish the Centre of Delphi in Greece in the early 1950s. Drawing on the mythical and symbolic charge of the area’s significance in the classical Greek world, the project aimed to promote world citizenship; an idea also advanced by other organizations Crosby founded, such as ‘Citizens of the World’ and ‘Women of the World against the War’. In the end, however, the project did not materialize because the official government of Greece, which had recently joined NATO (in 1949), was unwilling to align itself with a supra-political declaration of this kind.

Crosby saw Cyprus as an alternative place for the Centre a decade later. At first glance this choice seemed curious. The island had an ideal strategic geography (in-between Europe, Asia, and Africa, lying right at the east-west divide) but it was witnessing intense nationalist antagonisms between the Greek and Turkish communities that were very far from a vision of world peace. Yet Cyprus was a good fit for Crosby’s vision. Let us examine the political realities of Cyprus more closely to see why unlike Greece (and unlike Turkey and Britain which were also acting as guarantor powers for the young state) Cyprus had not joined NATO; it was, instead, one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned movement and its ties with Afro-Asian countries went back to the island’s efforts for self-determination in the 1950s.

Even as Cyprus was self-consciously aligned with the Non-Aligned movement, it was continually in the midst of Cold War tensions: There was Britain’s extensive colonial influence, which left Cyprus with two military bases and many influences in the domains of law, education, economics etc. There were also internal tensions between the two main communities on the island, which threatened to shake the delicate balances between two NATO allies, Greece and Turkey. For this reason, Cyprus found itself at the receiving end of United States influences in an attempt to guarantee the fragile balances on the island. Simultaneously, the United Nations was already actively advancing development. From 1963 onward, when the first conflicts surfaced, the UN tied its development assistance to its peace mission to eliminate inter-communal fights in Cyprus. The territorial and social division that followed the conflicts of 1963, when Turkish Cypriots withdrew into enclaves, kept a fragile balance until 1967 when a second violence outbreak took place in Cyprus, causing a military response by Turkey. After this incident, the Turkish Cypriot leadership announced the creation of a separate administration. In 1968, inter-communal talks were initiated in search of a settlement of what came to be known as ‘the Cyprus Problem’.

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Proposed in 1966, Crosby’s idiosyncratic vision of a World Center came in the midst of these local conflicts, which also had obvious global repercussions. Her idea was firmly supported by known figures such as United Nations Secretary General, U Thant, Indira Gandhi and artists Isamu Noguchi, Salvador Dali among others. The local President Makarios met Fuller’s suggestions to donate a 200-acre property owned by the local church for the construction of the project (The land was in the vicinity of the medieval Abbey of Peace, known as Bellapais). Also following Fuller’s suggestion, the World Center would be operated by the ‘World Academy of Arts and Sciences,’ an international organization Fuller had just been elected member. The envisioned Center was going to house ‘world congresses of scientists, artists and scholars, and all those dedicated to world peace and to accomplishing a practically sustainable one world accord.’ The geodesic dome with its planetary iconography, proposed by Buckminster Fuller and Shoji Sadao for the World Man Center, symbolized the idea of ‘one world.’ Makarios, declared that the Center could become the ‘start towards the accommodation of the inexorable social trend towards world oneness.’ Fuller added that owing to Cyprus’s ‘unique geographical position,’ this project could turn the entire island into a ‘center for the development of ideas of peace’.

If the earlier proposal for Delphi, was to be built on the foundations of western civilization, the new World Centre designed for Cyprus was seen to occupy a land that had just come out from a long history of western colonialism. The Centre in Cyprus promised to become a modern symbol of many ideas: For Crosby it was declaring a commitment to peace, at a time when fears of global disasters from US/Soviet nuclear war were also very strong. For Fuller, the project was reinforcing a technocratic commitment to global rational planning. For Makarios and the local government it was much more: It did not only feed into nation-building and anti-colonial efforts. The Centre also strengthened their position that the government was ‘determined to follow a policy of equal friendship with all nations.’ Of course, this was not simply a strategy consistent with non-alignment thinking; Makarios’ support on the Centre could also be understood as an attempt to counter the international and local pressures Cyprus was experiencing in the mid 1960s. In other words, the ‘friendship with all nations’ was a means to avoid the Cold War polarities, internal social pressures and conflicts, and the complexities of regional politics. By turning Cyprus into a hub of international networks of ideas, people and capital, the Government aimed to sidestep complex sociopolitical conditions from within, and dominant geopolitical influences from without.

GOVERNMENT’S LEISURE POLITICS

The ambition to make Cyprus a hub of post-political global visions extended well beyond experimental conceptual schemes such as that for the World Centre (which itself remained unrealized). The very modernization policies that were widely implemented by the young state government of Cyprus put an increased emphasis on tourist development with a similar goal: To make Cyprus a key player in the global market. Almost since the inception of the Cyprus Republic, the country followed the lead of many Mediterranean countries, which tied their economic growth to tourist development and promoted measures for making the island an international tourist destination.

The most ambitious project for the Government’s plans for tourist development was the construction of a tourist Centre on Golden Sands coast, in Famagusta. This Government project was unveiled in 1969, just three years after the announcement of the World Centre discussed above. And just like the World Centre, the Golden Sands was also deeply connected to the new realities as they unfolded towards the end of that turbulent decade of the 1960s: In 1968 inter-communal talks between the Greek and Turkish communities on the island began. And even though this generated a brief optimism for smoother social and economic development, a

coup d’état a year earlier (1967) in Greece made things more complicated as it increased the threat of Turkey’s military intervention in Cyprus. The young Cyprus Republic was threatened even more, both by external powers and by internal turmoil. Even though tourism was vulnerable to conflict, the Government placed a great deal of hope on its economic benefits. The project of Golden Sands (supported by British Airways and Cyprus Airways) was to combine hotel and recreation facilities on a large portion of state-owned land. The Government commissioned the design to the British architectural firm of Garnett, Cloughley and Blakemore, collaborating with a local firm. The goal was to have an international hotel brand combined with a signature design so as to insert Cyprus ‘on the tourist map of the Mediterranean’. As evidenced by the active involvement of President Makarios in the entire process, this project was a high priority on the government’s modernisation agenda. The project architect for Golden Sands, Patrick Garnett, was quite mindful of creating ‘a sense of atmosphere’ that he believed was lacking in many modern hotels. The key to creating this atmosphere, according to Garnett, was to avoid standardization and to relate the building’s form and scale to sea-views and existing topography. Much like many modernist practices of the post-war era, Garnett attempted to insert local character into the rationalized design process. This was in tune with a widespread market strategy in the hotel industry that shifted towards reinventing the exotic in hotels, so as to offer an ‘escape from reality’ (Fig. 2).

There is another part to the story relating to the specific realities of Cyprus: Garnett was trying to interpret ‘the local’ in order to shape an alternative identity not only for the corporate world of the hotel industry but also for Cyprus. Having searched for clues in the local culture, Garnett concluded that: ‘There was no established architectural vernacular in Cyprus. The influences of the many conquering nations had resulted in a neutralization of building form’. Cyprus’s history was too contested and its contemporary situation too volatile for the architect to venture direct references to specific cultural preferences. Attached as he was to modernist aesthetics, Garnett’s search for local character ultimately boiled down to ‘evolving some simple new shapes in concrete which would solve practical problems such as corrosion and, at the same time, could result in giving the complex an individual architectural identification’. Thus his choice for what he called ‘neutral’ forms was trying to make regionalist illusions while steering clear of politics.

**CYPRUS’S ALTERNATIVE MODERNIZATIONs**

Much of the development and modernization processes in Cyprus were tied to the government’s complex and ambivalent geopolitical positioning. Both the World Man Centre and Golden Sands Hotel tried to sidestep external Cold War polarities by envisioning Cyprus as a hub for the international flow of capital, ideas and people. Whether designing for ‘peace’ or for ‘tourism’, both projects shared a critical geopolitical thinking: The World Centre advocated a supranational and post-political future; and the Golden Sands complex shifted the focus on economic growth and the architects’ claims to neutrality. Even if the second project materialized while the first did not, both projects were anxiously imagining ways to transcend local conflicts and to sidestep pervasive geopolitical influences.

The complexity of Cyprus’s positioning vis-à-vis Cold War politics – its oscillation between the Non-Aligned movement and the American sphere of influence—produced modernisation strategies that contemplated ways of sidestepping internal politics and dominant Cold War polarities. There was an irony of course behind the emphasis on the World Centre’s transnational and non-ideological goals, given that Fuller’s dome had many Cold War associations. Fuller’s work in general was linked, as we now know with United States national interests. One thus wonders if the dome’s ‘transfer’ to Cyprus, might also have played into the politics of Fuller’s one-world vision. Similarly, there was also an inescapable irony behind the government’s emphasis on advancing prosperity through the economics of tourism. After 1968, it was becoming clearer that the official government’s plans could only reach part of the population, as the Turkish Cypriot community formed their own separate administration. Furthermore: as the Golden Sands was claiming an aesthetics of neutrality, it was also reaffirming the spreading of corporate networks of a globalized tourist culture; and that too, was *not* beyond politics.

**Endnotes**

3. Ibid.
5. Because even if the United States regarded the island and its development small it recognized it as important segment of the global antagonism between

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6. With technical assistance of UN experts and financial support, the young Cypriot state advanced three five-year ‘Development Plans’, between 1962 and 1976, with the goal to advance economic growth and develop the country’s infrastructure. See Oliver P. Richmond and James Ker-Lindsay, The Work of the UN in Cyprus: Promoting Peace and Development (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001).

7. In 1963 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. Fazil Küçük rejected them as a treacherous move by the Greek Cypriot community to achieve unification with Greece. See Stavros Panteli, The Making of Modern Cyprus: From Obscurity to Statehood (New Barnet: Interworld, 1990).


10. The World Academy of Arts and Sciences is a nongovernmental international association, which was founded in 1960 by scientists and scholars. See World Academy of Arts and Sciences, “Manifesto In the Name of Science and the Future of Mankind,” http://www.worldacademy.org/content/history.


15. In his address to the House of Representatives for the announcement of the first Five-Year Programme of Economic Development in 1961, Makarios stated: “Your Government is determined to follow a policy of equal friendship with all nations: we are convinced that only through sincere friendship and co-operation is it possible to secure international peace and to rid humanity of the threat of total extinction.” “Address of the President of the Republic Archbishop Makarios to the House of Representatives on the 21st August, 1961.” (Nicosia: PIO, August 21, 1961).

16. For a short account of Makarios’ views on Non-Aligned movement, see “Interview by his Beatitude the President the Republic Archbishop Makarios to Mrs Sarnia Taher of the “Akbar El Yom” Newspaper of UAR (Nicosia: PIO, February 26, 1967).

17. The local firm was the architectural office of Philippou Brothers, which had extensive practice in Cyprus at the time.


19. Patrick Garnett, project architect, explained that Makarios ‘considered this new project as very significant to Cyprus’s new image.’ P. Garnett’s unpublished writings, Courtesy of Derry Garnett (London).

20. For Garnett this lack of atmosphere is connected to the repetition of the “same international block [that] seems to reappear in different countries throughout the world” Patrick B. Garnett, “A view of the sea,” Interior Design (1977 Aug.), 437.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.
