Questioning the "prototype dwellings" in the framework of Cyprus traditional architecture

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Abstract

As one of the basic narratives of culture, traditional residential architecture is an important value, indicating its relationship with its environment. Due to this, the continuity of culture in rural areas is closely related with the sustainability of traditional residential architecture. Cyprus is a Mediterranean island, which has managed to sustain her rich cultural heritage against the many economical, socio-cultural and political changes she has gone through. There is a need for new dwellings in rural areas and this demand is increasing rapidly. In these areas which are physical environments where sustainability can be maintained easily, the Social Housing Department of the North Cyprus Government has made several studies for the proposal of prototype house plans' as a solution to the above mentioned problem of a need for housing and the prevention of migration to cities. However, upon analysing the architecture of traditional dwellings; and the life-styles of the people who live in these rural areas, it has been observed that these projects, with incomprehensible, strict and totalitarian design principles, are incompatible with local culture and conditions. It is suggested that there is a need for an appropriate environment for the continuation of the life-style that is natural to the people that live within them. On the contrary, these projects form the basis of a step towards a monotonous settlement development which does not respect either the values of traditional architecture or local identities. It is extremely important that the correct steps are taken for both the conservation of the existing physical environment and for handling the issues of new settlement developments in relation to production relationships and cultural sustainability. The main aim of this paper is to draw attention to the traditional design principles that can be re-interpreted in the proposed 'prototyped dwellings' in North Cyprus. In order to achieve this aim, a case study, based on observations, literature survey and site survey techniques has been carried out.
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1. Introduction

What makes a society flourish are cultural values and traditions. These values make up the history of a society on the one hand and provide a cultural continuity to transfer it to future generations on the other. The traditional residential architecture, which is one of the fundamental discourses of culture, is also a prime indicator of cultural relations within its locality. Thus, the sustainment of traditional residential architecture is closely connected with cultural continuity. Traditional dwellings and their sur-

roundings will help future generations maintain their cultures by acting as a tool for transferring norms, traditions and values.

Rural areas are in a more fortunate position to preserve and sustain their traditional heritage. The static demographic structure of the rural areas combined with the means of production undertaken there results in the preservation of the built environment. Since production modes and dwellings are closely connected or interrelated in rural areas, production is a very important ingredient for culture. The difference in the design of dwellings lies in the fact that every society takes into account its culture, societal norms and rules while producing solutions to its needs.

Traditional settlements and dwellings provide spaces for the maintenance of societal habits. Thus, it is necessary to

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develop a synthesis integrating both local and modern values when populations migrate to newly urbanized areas. There are arguments which maintain that such proposals support harmony and reduce possible tension between social classes [1]. Gür [2], states that negative connotations associated with the design and materials used in traditional architecture feed these arguments; that the opposition by the villagers to Hassan Fathy's settlement with sun-dried bricks strengthens these arguments; that it is impossible to disagree with Sifironni who said "I totally admire the beauty and elegance of our traditional dwellings but I also believe, just like every Morrocon of my generation, that our lifestyles need to change" and adds: "There are arguments that modern architecture with its rationalist, egalitarianist and minimalist features fades memories of societies, destroys the sense of personal belonging and deprives persons from aesthetic satisfaction. It can be deduced that a dwelling is a paradox among the discussions of traditional lifestyle–modern lifestyle; traditional design–modern design; traditional technology–future technology." [2].

The limited job opportunities in rural areas, with economies based on agriculture and stock-breeding, are undertaken by each and every family member. Even such jobs are seasonal and occasional. In this respect, people living in the rural areas expect their dwellings to have a wider variety of functions than those living in the urban areas. Naturally, it cannot be expected that those dwelling designs for people living in the rural areas have the same characteristics as dwelling designs to satisfy the needs of those in the urban areas. In cases of regional architecture, dwelling functioning plans consisting of open, semi-open and closed space for living and working have been developed and perfected over time with some minor changes.

2. Factors relevant to the structuring of traditional dwellings

Rapoport defines structuring of a dwelling as a reaction between humans and the built environment. He further considers the environment around structures to reflect the unity between human beings with their biological structure, social organization, global view, lifestyle, social and psychological needs, requirements for individuals and for a group; a synthesis between built environment and climate, setting, materials and technology. The aforesaid combinations present the importance of physical, behavioural and cultural factors in determining the structuring of dwellings [3].

Researching the relationship between environment and behaviour has been the subject of many studies for a long period of time. There is a consensus on the conclusions of such studies that environment and dwellings affect human behaviour which in turn affects the environment. The environment-behaviour relations can be interpreted as a dynamic and adaptive process. Human behaviour affects the structuring of the environment and in turn, environ-ment affects human beings. Hence, one is changed and shaped by the other [4].

The lifestyles of the inhabitants of dwellings should play an important role in the planning for dwellings and their design. The success of dwelling design depends on the right place, right time and right design for the right person [2].

In researching the synthesis between dwellings—envir-onment—human behaviour, traditional dwellings are frequently taken as case studies. Traditional residential architecture can be defined as architecture that is the outcome of an anonymous design period, and objective environmental surroundings that the society forms for itself. This architectural design is fundamental in revealing the values of the society, their global views, traditions and belief, their relationship with their families and relatives, relationships with neighbours as well as their economic structure. Analysing traditional residential architecture first of all requires analysing the natural and societal environment and then the construction materials and techniques.

In traditional dwellings, environmental and socio-cultural factors that determine the design of dwellings should be taken into account. There is a transformative relationship between the design of traditional dwellings and these factors. In other words, traditional dwellings can be analysed as an agent for the user to express his geo-cultural background [3].

Factors that determine the design of a traditional dwelling include the topography offered by the geography, materials and techniques found in the surroundings, and the climate of the region. *Environmental factors* include the means and methods of production and social affluence level, family structure (relatives) and relations with neighbours, religious beliefs, lifestyles as well as *socio-cultural factors* (Table 1).

Table 1
Factors that define the design of a residence[a]

Factors defining the traditional residential architecture	
Natural and built environmental factors	Climate
	Topography
	Environmental texture
	Materials and building techniques
Socio-cultural factors	Style of living
	Economic structure
	Family structure
	Relations with relatives/neighbours
	Beliefs
	Traditions
	Social cultures values
	Ideology

[a]Developed based on Rapoport.