The revitalization of the historic centre of Nicosia with emphasis on the preservation of its bioclimatic characteristics.

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Overview
Nicosia has been the capital of Cyprus since the 10th century A.C. and reflects the island’s rich heritage. The old city, surrounded by the Venetian Walls of the 16th century, contains some of the island’s finest examples of Byzantine, French Medieval, Venetian, Ottoman and British Colonial Architecture.

Introduction
For 9,000 years the island of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean Sea has been a stepping stone between East and West, a setting for dramatic events. Backdrop for Shakespeare’s Othello, gift of Anthony to Cleopatra, birthplace of Aphrodite, Cyprus is stepping in history and has, over millennia, inspired myth, legend and the imagination.

Nicosia was established, in the centre, as capital of the island nearly a thousand years ago during Byzantine times, when the population moved to the centre of the island because of the Arab attacks at the coastal zones. Over the centuries, the city has been living legacy of the island’s rich heritage and around every corner one can find a reminder of the passage of time. Neo-Byzantine, early Cypriot and French Colonial architecture mixed with modern buildings in narrow streets.

An aerial snapshot reveals one of the most distinctive feature of the city, the massive circular 16th century Venetian Wall, which is characterized by eleven heart-shaped bastions, three gates and a ditch comprising an excellent example of the bastion system of fortifications of the time. The three gates of walls namely, Thermopile gate (west), Paphos gate (east) and Kyrenia gate (north) obtained their current names according to the major city they led to, when exiting fortified Nicosia. This significant monument is the primary landmark for Nicosia constituting an integral part of the city’s identity. But the amalgam of cultures that shaped this city, has also contributed to its turbulent history, as reflected in its capital city. Tragic events in recent decades have culminated in the physical separation of the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities. Nicosia was broken in two through its historic and cultural heart – the Inner Walled City.

In a very real sense, Nicosia is the hub of urban activity in Cyprus. The city presents today two faces: the old city surrounded by the Venetian Walls and that of a modern metropolis. Metropolitan Nicosia comprises eight municipalities (population about 240,000) and Nicosia Municipality which includes the Venetian Walls and historic city with a population of about 50,000. In the last century the city’s role as administrative, commercial and cultural centre of the island has been strengthened. The population of the city has grown from 10,000 in 1931 to nearly 200,000 from one-tenth to one third of the population of the island.

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According to the findings of the preliminary stage of the research, it has been noticed that the residents of the traditional dwellings often proceed to interventions in the building envelope, which alter some of the original typology features. Several problems have accompanied this rapid growth. One is the unplanned, uncontrolled and wasteful nature of urban sprawl that is pulling the city outward in many directions. The second is the reality of human partition. The buffer zone that cuts through the Walled City is a daily reminder of division, encouraging the unresolved growth of two separate parts.

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Endnotes
1. Department of Antiquities of the Republic of Cyprus and the European Regional Development Funds.

References
- Marina Tymvou, Architect, Nicosia Municipality
- "Revitalizing the Nicosia historic centre has been a constant challenge of achieving a successful balance between preserving the cultural heritage, overcoming the limitations of the division and leading the city towards a sustainable contemporary development."
- The above mentioned research programme has shown that vernacular architecture in the historic centre of Nicosia was mainly developed diachronically on the principle of providing the necessary temperature control and the right microclimate. The results reported below are attributable to a percentage (%) of the total sample.