

## **Workshop on sustainable and healthy urban transport and planning**

(16-18 November 2003, Nicosia Cyprus)

### **“Nicosia Master Plan”:**

A bi-communal initiative to change the image of the divided city of Nicosia

Nicosia has been the capital of Cyprus for the last ten centuries and concentrates today about a third of the island's population.

Over this long historic period the city has been a living legacy of the island's rich heritage and contains some of its finest examples of Byzantine, French Medieval, Venetian, Ottoman and British colonial architecture.

At present Nicosia is divided by the buffer zone that keeps the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot inhabitants apart and splits their town into two separate urban parts, which have been developing independently of each other thus causing the disintegration of its entity.

Notwithstanding deeply felt differences, Nicosia's two communities established a close cooperation in the late seventies in order to address the lack of infrastructures overburdened by the influx of displaced persons, and the centrifugal growth of the city, factors which have emerged as a result of the In 1978 the representatives of the two communities agreed to work together for the preparation of a common sewerage system while in 1979 they agreed to extend this collaboration to the preparation of a physical Master Plan compatible with the cultural and socio-economic aspects of Nicosia as a whole.

These bi-communal projects, which were placed under the umbrella of the United Nations Development Programme, sought to increase the capacity of the city's services and to improve the existing and future human settlement conditions of all the inhabitants of Nicosia while acted as a means of building confidence between the two communities. Underlying the projects is the idea that close and systematic technical co-operation can foster new bonds of understanding.

Both projects were planned and directed by bi-communal teams and provided opportunities for young Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot professionals to meet regularly, to work together and to be trained by international experts on specific areas.

The “Nicosia Master Plan” team apart to work in a bi-communal context presented an other innovative element, the establishment of a permanent collaboration between the Town Planning and Housing Department of the government and the Nicosia Municipality.

In 1981, the Nicosia Master Plan through a diagnostic report confirmed the sporadic and disorderly development of the city that was not only inefficient and costly to service but it was also failing to provide the social cohesion.

The first phase of this bi-communal cooperation resulted in the formulation of a common planning strategy for the Wider Area of Nicosia based on the need to concentrate and consolidate the city promoting sustainable patterns of development, while the second phase focused on the preparation of an operational plan for the central area that was very much affected by the division.

The aim of the Nicosia Master Plan was to define a general planning strategy for the rational development of the city, able to address the needs under present day political circumstances and at the same time sufficiently flexible to be adaptable in the case that political circumstance will allow the development of the city as one entity.

Within this framework particular attention was given to the formulation of a preservation and rehabilitation policy for the historic center, which constitutes a common heritage for all the communities of Nicosia and therefore was considered by the bi-communal team as the most precious part of the city.

For many years the Walled city has been subject to physical decay and socio-economic decline, conditions that resulted in loss of population and employment and deterioration of its architectural and environmental quality.

These trends revealed the strong interrelationship between the environmental, social and economic aspects of the old city and led to the awareness that sustainability cannot be regarded just as a physical concept.

Therefore, the preservation and regeneration of the historic center was seen as a multidimensional process incorporating the following objectives:

- Architectural objectives with regard to the restoration of its architectural heritage that is recognized as a cultural and economic asset to be integrated into the life of contemporary society.
- Planning objectives for the rational distribution of mixed land uses, density of development and a new traffic management in harmony with the scale and character of the historic center. Preliminary proposals have been defined for the areas adjoining the buffer zone including uses, which promote the functional integration of the city.
- Social objectives relating to housing rehabilitation and the provision of community facilities in order to attract new residents. Priority is given to the residential use because it is considered that the increase of population will benefit all the other activities.
- Economic objectives aiming to revitalize the commercial core and increase suitable employment opportunities.
- Environmental objectives for the preservation and enhancement of the environmental wealth of the city and the protection of natural resources.

This integrated conservation policy is implemented through the provisions of the Local Plan, the packages of economic incentives to the private owners and through direct public interventions. The socio-economic profile carried out at the beginning of the implementation phase showed that the private sector, given the existing conditions of the centre, was unwilling to allocate investments.

Therefore, public intervention was the only means to promote the rehabilitation process. This was achieved through twin priority investment projects in selected areas on both sides of the historic centre. These projects have a direct impact but also give the initiative to the public sector to act as catalyst and stimulate private initiative.

The United States Agency for International Development and the European Union financed all the bi-communal projects through UNDP/UNOPS, while other publicly funded projects were carried out within the framework of the Rehabilitation Programme of the Government for the areas adjoining the buffer zone.

In most of these projects emphasis is placed on housing rehabilitation, up grading or provision of community facilities, landscaping and pedestrianization schemes.

The first twin investment projects that have been implemented were Chrysaliniotissa and Arab Ahmed residential programmes. Both neighbourhoods are located next to the buffer zone and presented neglected conditions of the built environment, a high proportion of aged residents, a high percentage of single person households and a high percentage of low-income households.

The intervention policy focused mainly to the improvement of housing conditions, the increase of the available housing stock and the attraction of new families. The overall objective was to produce new simple housing units, compatible with the contemporary way of life, with the lowest possible cost in order to be accessible to the targeted population. These projects provided also community facilities and succeeded to attract young couples with children who are willing to live in these areas permanently.

These housing rehabilitation schemes met the challenge to combine conservation objectives with socio economic revitalization and stimulated the private owners to invest and reuse their own traditional buildings.

Other investment projects, designed to make an impact on specific locations, have been complementing housing rehabilitation such as the pedestrianization of the commercial area of the walled city.

Commercial activity in the walled city was gradually declining because of the constraints imposed on pedestrian movement by car traffic, on street parking, congestion, pollution and mainly the development of new commercial centres on the outskirts of Nicosia.

The main components of this project were the pedestrianization of the commercial streets, the creation of short-term parking facilities in selected locations and the introduction of mini buses which move in the periphery of the this area providing free of charge facilities to the people.

The pedestrianisation project, which has been implemented with funds from the European Union, succeeded to the rehabilitation and the environmental improvement of the business area and allowed it to compete gradually with the new commercial centres of the modern city.

Other priority investment projects are currently under implementation in the walled city, which are related to housing revitalisation or are focusing on the restoration of historic buildings and the upgrading of the existing public spaces.

Through these interventions is expected to restore the urban fabric, to enrich the historic environment, to attract new residents and economic activity and to stimulate the private initiative to invest in the old city.

These projects apart of improving the living environment of Nicosia preserve the potential of the historic centre to have a role in the future functional integration of the city. One of the biggest achievements of the Nicosia Master Plan was the development of an excellent communication and joint decision-making by the technical people of the two communities. This constitutes the basis for future cooperation for the benefit of the harmonious development of the city and its people.