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“Urban-A-Where?” or “Where is the Urban?” How is it manifested between physical, temporal and pragmatic contexts? “How much Awareness about the Urban?” regarding the city as an arena for everydayness. The aim of the “Urban-A-Where?” project (the “U-A-W?” project in its nickname) lies across these facets of the title by bringing to the surface in a creative and critical manner the processes of making the urban and the need for public engagement of all sorts. The “Urban-A-Where?” project seeks to contribute to the construction of an active urban society, emphasising the increasing importance of urban environments all over the world. “Get playfully public engaged” is a critical play method (Flanagan 2009) that has encouraged teams of architects, visual artists and urbanists from Cyprus and other European countries to assist and criticise everyday processes of making the urban through a diversity of actions. What kind of tactics (De Certeau 1988) to employ for supporting spatial practices that resist the urban status quo?

1. Critical Spatial Practice

It seems that most of the fields of action that address urban spatial practices, begin to reconsider their scale of intervention, the issues at stake, plus the way urban knowledge is constructed through creative management of conflictual priorities of citizens’ engagement (Miessen 2010). It is becoming quite clear that one needs to create all sorts of dynamic connections between scales, from the “one to one” scale to the territorial one, reassembling all sorts of urban actors, both humans and non-humans (Latour 2005). The limitations of the disciplines that have the city as object of interest are also becoming apparent, consequently some are seeking active synergies amongst them in a spatial agency manner (Awu, Schneider, Till 2011). A sort of critical spatial practice (Rendell 2006) emerges that deals with alternative forms of urban everydayness. Furthermore, the receptor (Findelli 2007) gets a key role, since spatial agency kinds of action encourage the engagement of the receptor as an active agent, rather than limiting her/him to a passive mode. You can read about similar concerns in the article by Lydia Matthews in the first part of this publication called “Learning from the Streets: Social Exchange and Knowledge Production”. During a lecture she gave for the “U-A-W?” project in Nicosia, she presented a project she curated in October 2012, in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia, which brought forward questions such as: “What forms of knowledge can artists, designers, scholars, students and local citizens use to revisit the status quo and re-envision their environment?”

Following the same logic, the “U-A-W?” project has proposed activities that translated complex urban issues, in an implicit or explicit manner, and invited engagement from a diversity of receptors. The receptors of this project vary from elementary school students, to neighbourhood inhabitants, to consumers, to drivers, to walkers, to politicians, to practitioners and academics who are interested in reaching out to other disciplines and fields of knowledge.

2. Between Rhythm Analysis and Chrono-urbanism: Adaptive Urban Actions to the Everydayness

How to operate across scales, taking into account the time-space interrelationships of the urban everydayness, as evoked by the rhythm-analytic work of Lefebvre? (Lefebvre 1992) Rhythm analysis is an insight to how to “listen” to the urban world, where chrono-urbanism (Ascher 1995) becomes a sort of a managing agent for altering such space-time relations through all those disciplines that have the city as an object for transformation. How to turn arrhythmic urban environments into polyrhythmic ones? How to take into consideration when acting, the temporal context of the urban environment, the chrono-types of the everydayness? Quite often such rhythms are channelled, isolated
or juxtaposed indifferently, in a sort of arrhythmic condition, diminishing any possibilities of interaction or coexistence that could increase the qualities of the urban environment. In other cases, tensions are created by the proximity of incompatible rhythms, such as those of a city that sleeps with those of the city being entertained.

The major problematic of the "U-A-W?" project is how to increase sharing between people in the city by encouraging new processes for polyrhythmic urban environments. The "U-A-W?" project focuses on the proximity scale (Stavrides 2011), aiming to demonstrate both its importance and further on, its interconnection to territorial scales beyond any hierarchies and nestings. Activities which take place in the proximity scale could very well detect territorial scale temporalities as well as influence those (Stratis 2011).

3. Matrix of "U-A-W?" Activities

Such processes for polyrhythmic urban environments are studied through three themes coupling with their "U-A-W?" activities. The themes operate as means for mobilising common knowledge. The three themes are: "Mobility as Agent for Urban Mixity", "Natures in Urban Environments" and "Sharing Educational Infrastructures". Further on, the "U-A-W?" activities are events that have taken place during the project and have enriched the themes with new knowledge. They have operated as agents for making public, diverse problematics regarding the three themes. The knowledge mobilisation was launched at the July Workshop, which took place at the Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus, during July 2012. Some activities were designed and implemented by the volunteers of the workshop.

There are five kinds of actions that the 27 participants from 9 countries were invited to contribute:

a. alternative urban navigations,
b. temporal events, c. urban games,
d. XS installations and e. public presentations and seminars. Two sorts of participation, the physical and the remote, have emphasised both the importance of proximity of activities with the city inhabitants and of the influence of ideas that come from a distance regarding a common aim. The "U-A-W?" project has in fact become an assembly of the participants’ contributions. Actually, these five kinds of activities fall into the three themes described above, through their reciprocal action themes: "Reclaim The Street", "Go Natural In Your Own City" and "Revisit The School Yard", which correspond to the reciprocal themes (image 1).

Before proceeding with the definition of the three themes around polyrhythmic urban environments and their activity range, I wanted to focus on three issues of the "U-A-W?" project. The first one is about the "U-A-W?" baggage which was produced during the July Workshop. The second one is the nature of the exhibition itself that hosted the output of the project’s activities and the third one is the layout of the book, of the UAW BOOK.

The "U-A-W?" baggage: The "U-A-W?" baggage actually contained relevant material about the project’s objectives produced during the July Workshop regarding three case studies in Nicosia, Cyprus. The content of the baggage was food for thought for all participants, with the baggage itself becoming the 3D logo of the project (image 2). Further on, it served as the case for an XS installation (image 3). Ten participants were invited to produce micro-environments by transforming the baggage into a sort of time deposit device about urban environments. Indeed, the participants chose their favourite urban environment, testing the limits of representation of urban rhythms through such an XS installation. They had the baggage sent to them by post to their home cities such as Zurich, Vienna, Nicosia, Madrid, Lyon, Leipzig and Athens. A requirement was that a web camera would be located at the lower side of the box, projecting live its content on screens. It was a great pleasure to receive the packages back and look at the incredible diversity of approaches. You can see for yourself in the last part of the UAW BOOK (images 4, 5).

The "U-A-W?" mobile exhibition: The aim regarding the "U-A-W?" exhibition was to create dynamic interrelations between its form and its content. The exhibition had both physical and virtual presence. In fact, both presences were crucial to keeping together temporal communities, both virtual and in
polyrhythmic urban environments, as well as with critical spatial practice, produced through seminars and lectures during October and November 2012. The other parts are organised in relation to the rest of the four kinds of activities in which the participants were invited to operate, starting with the temporal events, followed by the part on alternative urban navigations. Further on is the part on urban games and lastly is the part on XS installations. As a matter of fact, in the latter you can also find the presentation of an XL installation, where a sort of a blown up "U-A-W?" baggage was stationed, which operated as a "disorienting" foyer for each indoor place where the exhibition was located. As mentioned already, throughout these four parts of the book you can find all kinds of images about the exhibition and its mobilisation regarding the kind of activities they accompany.

4. Defining the "U-A-W?" Themes

The hypothesis of the "U-A-W?" project is that by encouraging the coexistence of diverse urban rhythms more sharing could take place amongst humans, but also amongst humans and non-humans, in urban environments. The three themes have become a vehicle for such endeavour, creating a frame of communication between the participants.
It seems that the enhancement of polyrhythmic urban environments needs to be based on a significant presence of heterogeneous flows of publics, rather than only on a mixity of private orientated uses.

During the seminar on "Polyrhythmic Urban Environments" Didier Rebois evoked the need for a paradigm shift around mobility with regard to the contemporary urban environment. What are the ways to work with mobility as agent of linking the global city to that of proximity (managing coexistence of quick and slow speeds) by enlarging the idea of mixity and to begin treating the urban as an active container of mobility? In other words, how could infrastructures that enhance movement relate more closely to sedentary practices like gathering, hanging out, residing? We should remind ourselves of the magnificent research done by Appleyard on liveable streets and its visualisation techniques on such neighbourhood living. He demonstrated how the sense of belonging was totally different along streets that were similar in terms of scale and geometry, but with different kinds of flows (Appleyard, Gerson, Lintell 1981). Andreas Savvides referred to the close relationship between mobility and equality. How, in fact, decisions taken about urban mobilities create advantaged and disadvantaged people vis-à-vis access and transportation equality.

Mobility is an agent for achieving social equality. He introduced the soft aspects of mobility that relate to housing and working.

Physical and Remote Participation: Reclaim the Street

What kind of quick, cheap and light ways are there to reclaim a street from the car? This was the first question asked to the participants of remote nature, through video interviews (image 21).

"The most obvious way of re-appropriating the street is probably the physical occupation of the space, like installing pocket gardens, or organising festivities. These are ways..."
like Stockholm, where the "Testbed" Architects practice is located (image 22). Coexistences seem to be the aim of a few architectural practices in Cyprus, such as the "Pick-a-pocket" project of Hatzisotierou, Hatzichristou and Swiny (image 23), or that of the "Magic Carpet" project by AA & U. How to test the kind of publicness of streets caused by mobility? How to challenge the actual practices or how to bring to the surface legal texts that bind such practices?

It was Zafos Xagoraris, a visual artist from Greece, who in fact studied the Cypriot legal texts of certain spatial practices, such as the "flanneur" (stroller), or the noise tolerance in public spaces. He then created a series of performances that visualised such legal texts (image 24). Guess what he discovered. The practice of "flanneur" is prohibited in Cyprus. Strolling along streets, especially when passing by the same area repeatedly, is illegal. I guess that the young Cypriot State "forgot" to erase former British Colonial legal texts about controlling public space.

Regarding the testing of publicness engendered by mobility, it was LAC, the Italian team of architects and visual artists, through their "Reciprocity" project, a "Wasting Time Machine", that had unexpectedly run into two dominant Cypriot spatial practices of public spaces. During their "urban camping" with a car caravan, inviting people to waste time with them, they became... and you can easily reclaim it."

Michael Rudolph, Germany

"We could consider the multi-storey parking garage as a hybrid multi-use building which can change its uses according to time and to the changes of individual mobility. The parking garage would be a perfect and inexpensive tool for productively liberating the street."

Bernd Vlay, Austria

"When I was a kid we used to do something called the road trick. We would stand on two sides of the road pulling, pretending that we had a rope crossing the street. Every time a car passed, it would start to slow down. We would stand with our hands open showing that there was no rope after all. That was a very efficient way for stopping cars with absolutely nothing. It is a challenge to see how that can be transformed into architecture. I don't know how yet..."

Erik Wingquist from Testbed, Sweden

We need to emphasise that reclaiming the street is not about making cars disappear, as evoked by Duburcq & Martin team. It is rather a case of finding the right mix of different modes of mobility, allowing the coexistence of a diversity of urban rhythms. The physical participation of the "U-A-W" project aimed, in fact, to test the possibilities of such coexistence in Cypriot cities. Coexistences seem to be part of everyday practice in cities...
How to remind the passer-by drivers
of their potential pedestrian nature? Plus,
how to boost the psychology of
pedestrians while they cross the street?
These were the questions the “Magic
Carpet” project aimed to confront (AA &U). A
double white cardboard folding
structure was being unfolded and
refolded in 10 seconds, with the help of
volunteers, creating a sort of carpet-
lke temporal field with lightweight
objects while standing in front of the
surprised drivers. “I felt like a king,”
exclaimed one of the pedestrians, who
was assisted to cross the busy urban
boulevard (images 30, 31). Reclaiming
the street was, as a matter of fact, a
ritual developed by the “U-A-W?” mobile
expo. The tricycles with the 3D banners
riding around the city of Nicosia have
created all sorts of reactions among
passers-by, both pedestrians and drivers
(image 32).

6. Second Theme: Natures in Urban
Environments
Notions of dualities between city
and nature can no longer help us to
understand urban environments. Seeing
nature as outside of city bounds has
never really been the case.4 Nature
should not be regarded as the not
yet urbanised territories, but as
natural rhythms present all over
urban environments, determining their
performance and everyday life. The
article by Thibault Barbier about
landscape architecture projects, which
was presented in the polyrhythmic urban
environments seminar, demonstrates
such correlation. The nature of the
human body in terms of body temperature
comfort, walking distance tolerance,
noise tolerance, becomes crucial to
coexistence of diverse urban rhythms.
Furthermore, the ecologies of plants,
birds and animals which find the city as
a refuge are increasing. Urban voids,
un-built or abandoned territories
within urban agglomerations, become
such refuges (sort of third landscapes,
as Gilles Clément called them, Clement
2003). The XS installation by Anna
complicitors with the neighbourhood
inhabitants in appropriating the
streets for private uses (image 25).
In fact, this is a practice of private
appropriation of public space that
usually takes place in residential
areas, either on a temporary or a
permanent level. It is true that the
absence of frequentation of such spaces
by the rest of the city inhabitants
allows such practices.
Secondly, in some other cases, not
only couldn’t they get in contact with
the passers-by, but they felt invis-
able. Meaning they could indeed use pub-
lic space as they pleased without being
stopped by police, not to mention the
absence of any sort of engagement. Such
conditions were apparent both in the
commercial area of Nicosia’s city centre
(next to Fendi, image 26), as well as
along urban boulevards dominated by pri-
ivate car flow and stop & shop activities
(image 27). This is the second dominant
spatial practice. In other words, the
dominance of public space by a mono-
rhythmic mobility engendered by the use
of the private car, discouraging any
other activities from taking place. Pub-
clic space is used merely as a channel of
flows, as already mentioned. What is also
interesting is that pedestrians are usu-
ally of momentary character, since they
walk only from their parked car to the
nearby commercial facilities. The “mo-
mentary pedestrians” don’t get engaged
in any other activity of slower rhythms.
LAC’s gymnastics performance in front of
a “Stop & Shop Bakery” (image 28) lo-
cated along the main urban boulevard and
part of the case study area, made appar-
ent such absence of engagement. Regard-
ing the same area, AA &U (Cyprus) made
a video during rush hour and presented it
in fast forward mode, showing in a funny
manner the continuous tension between
the flow of cars along the boulevard and
those that endlessly stop at or depart from
an on-street parking in front of the
Bakery (image 29).
what degree the built environment could allow such negotiation between humans and non-humans is part of Bruno Latour’s problematics about reassembling "Going Natural" cannot, in fact, be in order to negotiate with them. How indeed is it possible to reposition ourselves in relation to the dualist representation initiated in the 17th century, opposing man to nature? Chris Younès, during the Seminar on Polyrhythmic urban environments, introduced the fact that nature cannot simply be reduced to metaphors, to green issues, to plants. The word nature, according to her, designates water, earth, fire, fauna, flora, the seasons' rhythms, day and night, heart beats and breathing, plus a lot more. "Going Natural, but how?" was the question put forward by Panayiota Pyla at the same seminar. She brought into discussion former pitfalls and blind spots of "Going Natural" in human architectural history. Both Younès and Pyla stressed the importance of understanding the existing representations of nature in order to negotiate with them. "Going Natural" cannot, in fact, be in harmony; rather it contains conflicts and tensions, seeking capacities of negotiation and compensation. How to allow such negotiation between humans and non-humans is part of Bruno Latour’s problematics about reassembling contemporary society (Latour 2005). To what degree the built environment could be regarded as an enhancing device for biodiversity and not as an intruder? Environmentalists like Charalambos Panayiotou, who presented his work in the same seminar, operate as a sort of manager of such conflicts, raising questions about the difficulty of keeping a distance from humans’ priorities over those of non-humans.

In the three case studies investigated through the July Workshop, one realised the importance of open spaces of a very fragmented nature within Cypriot cities. The urban development based on very small private plots with city garden aspects, plus the high degree of private car mobility, generate all sorts of open spaces. One can trace all sorts of natures through such open spaces which proportionally seem to cover much larger areas than the built part of the cities, even in areas closed to urban centres.

Some kinds of such open spaces are: 1. The private plot yard: at least 3 metres width around the plot, often extending to half of the plot’s area. 2. The empty-private plots. Low land property taxation allows large areas close to city centres to remain un-buit, either reserved for future generations, or for speculation. 3. The road: secondary and primary roads. 4. Public spaces: usually widened spaces at crossings of the road, allowing private urban development does not comply with the creation of major public spaces. 5. Parks: dry river beds, ancient wall moats. Plus, there are a lot of "left over" small parks produced by new private building plot developments. 6. Open spaces around public buildings: due to the low density of building development, public buildings, especially schools, are located within quite extensive open spaces. Usually such spaces have informal uses, but they still keep a mono-functional status. 7. State Land: protected areas such as natural reserves, urban forests, but also potential built area for public buildings.

"Lyon is a city which takes ample advantage of nature, settled in the confluence of two rivers, endowed with a system of parks. It is in fact about a very controlled nature, contained in the city. Green spaces are much desired and become more and more the business of town planners, ecologists or associations. The slightest green space must be surrounded, used, or the slightest weed must participate in biodiversity. Everything is colonised, loaded with an urban meaning. Nevertheless, such over-importance given to any natural space in the city also gives the paradoxical feeling of absence of nature."

Martin / Dubroq, France

"I am from north Nicosia, and sadly enough another question comes up in my mind: "Which natures?" Most of the natural areas which are part of our city are occupied by the military. It is actually very sad that there is not even one single park where kids can happily go and play with their parents."

Munevver Ozgur, Cyprus

"All around the city of Zurich one can see an actual network of colourful Halvæ, whose planting was initiated by an individual action in the '80s. These weeds that keep on spreading, while being a witty counterpoint to the controlled management of green spaces, have become part of the image of the city."

Anna Poullou, Switzerland

"I live in Leipzig, Germany, where we have a forest stretching right through the centre of the city. It is quite large, but actually disconnected from the ground water and the adjacent rivers. This is a result of one hundred and fifty years of industrialisation and mining in the vicinity of the city. It would be a big task to reconnect and reintroduce the natural rhythms of this water landscape into the city."

Michael Rudolph, Germany

"In my city, Vienna, the blowing of the strong wind is omnipresent, threatening new developments with high-rise buildings in particular. Working against the wind in these developments of course is very difficult. So why don’t investors capture the wind in order to convert the aggressive power into friendly energy?"

Bernd Vlay, Austria

"In Stockholm, nature has currently been divided into different types in a hierarchical manner. On the top of the hierarchy are the oak trees. So in planning today in Stockholm you can see how entire blocks have been moved a little bit in order to fit a certain..."
type of oak trees. In these terms nature seems to be winning.”

Erik Wingquist, Sweden

Urban natures, plus issues of representing natures, have also been emphasised by the rest of the project’s actions. Experiencing through alternative navigation tours was the tool used by the two physical participation actions, “Wild Greens” by the “pick-nick” team, and “Going Natural At Your Own Risk” by the EU Game Lab of the Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus.

The “Wild Greens” project was a 40-minute guided walking tour by a horticulturist, in a residential area in the eastern part of Nicosia (images 34, 35). The tour focused on the details to which we rarely pay attention. In other words, we examined some of the plants that grow right under our noses, along pavements, in residential gardens or in empty plots. From this guided tour, it became surprisingly apparent that during the last 100 years most of the island’s nature has become merely man-made. It was mentioned that 9 out of 10 plants we see around us come to Cyprus from all sorts of different countries. This was instigated by the British Colonial administration at the end of 19th century, aiming to introduce vegetation in arid areas, to drain wet areas and to create fuel forests. Such practices have indeed engendered a major landscape transformation of the island. The “Going Natural” of the British Empire in Cyprus “also gives that paradoxical feeling of absence of nature”, as Martin / Duburcq said in his interview regarding the city of Lyon, but in a different way.

What if “Going Natural” is demystified in two ways? Firstly, “Going Natural” is not about going away from the city and secondly, and even more importantly, “Going Natural” is not risk free. “Going Natural At Your Own Risk” (EU Game Lab, UCY) is the name of an alternative navigation path across Nicosia’s built-up suburbs, taking place through fragments of non-built territories that were left out of private development, consequently being ignored by the everydayness. The aim of this activity was to make public a body of knowledge resulting from research done by the author on the relationships between public and private domains which demonstrates the decisive role that topography has played in the periphery of Cypriot cities (image 36). The gain made through this activity was the experiential reconnection of such topographic fragments, offering a unifying public urban territory within a private fragmented one (images 37, 38). Furthermore, this activity aims to be a sort of an “avant projet”, raising awareness about possible informal communal use of such territories, aiming to influence the Municipality’s actual policies on public space, as well as those of the inhabitants. In other words, to create a demand for such use before implementing a heavy infrastructure with uncertain acceptance by the users (images 39, 40).

Raising awareness about “Going Natural” has to do with processes of representation, as pointed out by Chris Younès and Panayiota Pyla during the seminar on polyrhythmic urban environments. The remote participations from Madrid and Berlin also follow this logic. Concerning Madrid, the tutors and students from the EPS San Pablo Ceu University in Madrid have delivered beautiful maps about a new reading of the existing conditions in a fringe area in Madrid (image 41). They proceeded through a collective derive, developing a new view which aimed to construct a representation of the site’s latent complexity. It is by a multiplicity of urban rhythms that such complexity is produced through “conventionally neglected processes such as waste disposal, mining, water deposits, infrastructure, animals and many more that emerge from this new understanding of the place” (Franco, Gálvez Pérez, see part 2 of the book). It is through this spatial practice of derive that Phanos Kyriakou produced a video by superimposing experiences from domestic and open spaces in Berlin around “Unité d’habitation” by Le Corbusier (image 42).
7. Third Theme: Sharing Educational Infrastructures

What is the capacity of existing public facilities to host diverse activities beyond their designated role? This was the major question posed through the third theme. Is it possible to increase their polyrhythmic performance? What kind of new urban rhythms could be inserted without creating tension with the main role of the facilities? To what degree do “Health and Safety” concerns about public programs decrease the urban friendliness of such institutions? We focus, for this project, on public educational infrastructure (school buildings with open spaces around them) in order to study how polyrhythmic they could be. How could their operational period be longer, instead of closing off the city during a large period of the day, of the week, of the year? How could such infrastructures generate synergies with their adjacent areas of residential or commercial character?

During the July Workshop, we studied the area around two elementary schools at Ayios Antonios and Lycavitos (images 43-46). We also interviewed the president of the Nicosia Public Schools Building Administration. She mentioned that the aim was indeed to extend such operational periods of the schools. Synergies do take place between, for example, local sports teams that share the sports infrastructures of the schools with the educational curriculum. Informal uses do take place too, such as Sunday cricket games by immigrants at Ayios Antonios school yard, or afternoon kids’ games in all schools. There are also night courses offered to grown-ups in the students’ classrooms. The major difficulties for better managing such sharing include, firstly, the absence of any role for local authorities, relying merely on a rigid centralised administration of the schools by the Ministry of Education. The second difficulty is that of safety and disturbance to neighbouring residents. As a matter of fact, a lot of similar issues were raised by the answers given by the remote participants.

Physical and Remote Participation

“What kind of urban rhythms could be inserted into educational buildings in synergy with their main role?” was the third question asked, with the following answers:

“Urban rhythms can be present with quite simple things at first view: less artificial light in classrooms, seasonal vegetables in the school canteen, landscape or city viewing points from the school, accessible spaces to city inhabitants, such as evening classes, etc. All this may seem obvious, but connecting educational buildings with their environment is a challenge, since so far sanitary and safety standards tend rather to turn them into bunkers.”

Martin / Dubuq, France

“In addition to the use of schools as afternoon learning centres, I think where possible we should try and relax the boundaries of the school and think of the school yards as a neighbourhood park that will attract people for leisure and sports, and even host a weekly market or a summer cinema.”

Anna Poullou, Switzerland

“And more bird nests and other similar things around the school buildings. Because they can cope with the children and they can cope with the rhythms of the buildings and of their use. They are indeed an integral part of education.”

Michael Rudolph, Germany

“To combine education with social responsibility, physiological maintenance and hedonistic experience has to be the future focus for our education. So, afternoon classes for senior citizens, early evening dancing courses in the lobby, and weekend therapeutic seminars in the classrooms, etc.”

Bernd Vlay, Austria

“I think educational buildings could also sometimes interact with society outside their own domain. A very good example is some work done in Arizona by Rural Studio, where in this case architectural education moves out of school boundaries and takes place in public.”

Erik Wingquist, Sweden
Moving outside school boundaries, as Erik Wingquist mentions, was, as a matter of fact, the objective of the “U-A-W?” activities. Through an elective course at the Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus (E.U. Game Lab, UCY), a series of urban games were designed, called “Encouraging Urbanity” Games, aiming to increase public engagement in a critical play manner (the E.U. Games). Some of them used the city as a game board, while others combined virtual and physical environments. Some of them introduced the city into table game boards (Stratis 2009). The E.U. 05 urban game, which was implemented last year in Nicosia, Cyprus (image 47), and Thessaloniki, Greece (image 48), has been adjusted to the E.U. 05/06 Hyper Walker Game in order to promote a new kind of sharing between students of two elementary schools, Lycavitos and Ayios Antonios, Nicosia. It is about walking the city at a distance. Hyper-walkers, like hypertext, are the kind of “walkers” that have “extensions” into another environment. In this case, the “walkers” operate on a floor-board environment in one of the schools and their “extensions” walk in physical space around the other school following their strict instructions. Moving out of school boundaries took place both physically and virtually (images 49, 50).

As a matter of fact, the school boundaries should extend to students’ homes, enabling them to access the school from their home by walking. What if the prevailing modes of car mobility discourage such practice? That’s where architecture comes in as a sort of critical spatial practice to comment upon such a condition. The “Magic Carpet” project by AA &U, as mentioned already, is such a kind of spatial practice. In this case it operated as an escort to a walking bus of 7-year-old students around their school neighbourhood. “One, Two, Three... Open Magic Carpet” (image 51) was the appropriate phrase used by the students to have the magic carpet deployed across the street allowing them to cross. A project as comment, indeed, on the impossibility of school boundaries to reach out to students’ homes, since the dominance of actual modes of mobility prevail, facilitating certain urban actors over others.

Is it possible to seek such extension of the school territory by the management of processes that redefine urban actors’ relations? That is the theme of a table game called the “As You Wish Game” and designed by a diploma student (image 52), which makes explicit the priorities, power relations and struggles between urban actors around the Elementary School of Ayios Antonios, giving to the school’s territory a leading role. In fact the whole city could be revisited through such processes, as is pointed out by another table game called “Pubbles vs Pribles” (image 53), putting forward the arena as tensions between urban actors aiming towards a private or public interest. You can find all these in the third part of the U-A-W BOOK.


It seems that, when trying to introduce alternatives to the status quo, as referred to by Lydia Matthews, fairly often one needs to deploy all kinds of means in order to navigate within a conflictual urban environment. One should adopt all sorts of tactics, as it has become clear that power lies in the camp of the urban actors who maintain arrhythmic kinds of status quo.

The “Urban-A-Where?” project and, reciprocally, the U-A-W BOOK, seem to raise more questions than to give answers to the issue of polyrhythmic urban environments. However, what is offered is a method for generating urgently needed common ground in order to work towards such qualities for urban environments. The practice of translating, making explicit, communicating, re-representing does lie in the public intellectual role of any critical spatial practice (Erik Wingquist, 1994, Stratis 2011). It is quite evident that the heterogeneity and richness of the “U-A-W?” project’s activities have generated a matrix of outputs, across which it is sometimes difficult to create connections. But maybe that was meant to be, in order to allow multiple connections and free associations, depending each time on the genre of the receptors and the reciprocal temporal communities. That is the case for the U-A-W BOOK, which has become a sort of an open guide book.

Such openness quite often urged the project’s organising team to get tuned-in simultaneously with quite different receptors. Nevertheless, critical spatial practice lies, indeed, in the cracks between well-formed disciplines and practices, such tuning-in is a mission impossible. In some cases, the
insertion of the “U-A-W” activities into such disciplinary cracks was so ‘successful’ that it did not mobilise any of the receptors from the confronted disciplines. The “ones” thought that the activities were addressed to the “others”. Particularly due to the absence of a general overlay of a civil society drawn from Cypriot society.

In some other accidental findings were as exciting as the aimed-for ones. In the case of LAC, and their “Time of Reciprocity”, it was the contemporary urban condition of the public domain in Cyprus that was enlightened. In the cases of “Legal Texts and Public Space” by Xagoraris and “Wild Greens” by picnick, it was the rather uncomfortable affirmation of the presence of former British Colonial administrative practices in Cyprus.

In ending this article, I wanted to stress the multiple possible readings of this book quicker ones and longer ones, continuous and discontinuous, intended but mostly accidental ones. You can regard it as an unfinished guide book that aims to have you involved within this complex web of ideas and activities.

“One, Two, Three... Open U-A-W BOOK”...

References


Check the "Revisiting Donald Appleyard’s Livable Streets" from Streetslima, 2010 on http://viewe.com/16399180

1 Curator: S. Stratis, Assistant Curators: D. Beblois, M. Panayides. The project was made possible with the support of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union and of the University of Cyprus. It was organised by S. Stratis, M. Panayides and S. Appleyard, architects.


3 Check the "Revisiting Donald Appleyard’s Livable Streets" from Streetslima, 2010 on http://viewe.com/16399180

4 In the case of Cyprus it is quite interesting to see the complex relationships between urban actors and transformation of natural territory into urban. See Stratis, S. "Hybrid Assemblies for a Territorial City or Five Stories for a Weak Metropolis?" Cyprus, EurA 2011 (European Urban Research Association), proceedings, 2011.

5 The absence of Urban Development Plans in Cyprus up to 1990 put all the emphasis of urban development on private land through their owners or small scale developers. State land was sort of the left-over of agriculture activities of the early 20th century. For this reason, non-fertile land or small scale developers.

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