Visual Matrix for Unveiling Enclaves: Establishing Common Imaginaries through Urban Disenclaving

Fig. 1 An engaging interface made of visual matrices of the city's enclaves
We are standing next to a wooden wall on which a series of A1 drawings, a sort of matrices, are pinned up, depicting the actual situation of isolated Famagustian territories called enclaves. These visual matrices invite us to reflect on the shared potentialities of such enclaves, after reunification of the divided Cyprus. They are the material proof of a common concern of our “Imaginary Famagusta” group (“I.F.”). The “I.F.” group is an informal grassroots initiative and our common concern has emerged in regard to the political dimension of architectural practice in contested spaces and its role in advocating for the city's future commons.

We are in a space on the ground floor of a nineteen-fifties modernist building in the south part of the old city of Nicosia where the agency AA & U for Architecture, Art, and Urbanism has been located for the last 15 years (fig. 1). The Turkish-speaking Cypriot partners come from the north part of Nicosia through the Ledra street check point, crossing the demilitarized buffer zone every time they participate in meetings (fig. 2, 3). AA & U hosts the “Imaginary Famagusta” group, helping them out to bypass the deadlocks of the contested public institutions, such as those related to the State. In divided cities, as well as countries, such as Cyprus, where conflict generates from sovereignty issues, the legitimacy of the public institutions is inevitably part of the conflict.1

Notes
Fig. 2 The trips of the “Imaginary Famagusta” group across ethnic enclaves, military enclosures and ceasefire zones

Fig. 3 The “Imaginary Famagusta” group, during a round table meeting

Fig. 4 Isometric drawing of the AA&U office in Nicosia, Cyprus, hosting the “Imaginary Famagusta” group
The visual matrices of A1 size paper, mounted on the AA & U’s wooden wall, are organized in a range of columns, as well as in two major rows. The unfolding of the actual state of each enclave takes place within one of the rows of the two A1 sheets of paper within the various columns (pp. 86-91). A map of Famagusta lies in the first column, showing the geographic position of the enclave. In the second one, there are some black and white images of the enclave environment. The names of the actors at stake, both those who actually live in Famagusta and those having lived in Famagusta up to 1974, are written within the following column. In fact, part of the conflict lies on the fate of the refugee properties left behind after the people were forced to leave due to the war with Turkey. In the following columns of the A1 visual matrix, there is a text describing the dynamics that caused the enclaving of the territory, as well as its internal organization logic. Further on, there are short texts on the enclave border conditions, their porosity (physical and programmatic), and its range, as well as the proximity of the enclave to nearby armatures. The second sheet of A1 depicts the potential shared enclave conditions. Our hypothesis is that sharing may increase between Famagustians when the enclaves are exposed to a transcending (public) program coming from large scale natural and cultural elements of the city. The text in the rest of the columns is about potential shared spaces at three possible geographical locations: tangential to the enclave, within, or between enclaves.

The discussion between the Greek-speaking and Turkish-speaking Cypriot members of the “Imaginary Famagusta” group develops in an atmosphere of apprenticeship.

Notes
4. Ibid.
We communicate between us in English since our mother tongues are Turkish and Greek (fig. 6). There are a lot of things we do not talk about, since part of our common concern is to overcome our split narratives and mental maps in regard to the Famagustan, as well as to the Cypriot, territory (see in this Guide: Stratis “Architecture as Urban Practice in Contested Spaces”, pp. 12-45). The A1 visual matrices help us to formulate a political language around a common urban concern. They offer us transformative learning opportunities so that not only our argument changes but we change as well. I am increasingly becoming aware that we are going back and forth, from examples of enclaving dynamics in regard to the specific Famagustan territory to references from the international debates about divided cities, enclosed urban environments, as well as the transformative potential of conflicts into urban controversies (see in this Guide: Akbil “Transformative themes: advocating for commons that act across divided territories”, pp. 166-195).

We are actually undergoing a double test by employing the A1 visual matrix interface we have created: firstly, to understand the other’s fears, concerns, and imaginaries through the re-reading of the Famagustan territory. Secondly, to see whether such visual matrix interface could be useful for other interested parties. Such parties may want to contribute to creating relations between reconciliation and urban regeneration, and, thus, be part of the urban peace building. Our challenge is to enact a public debate about the role of the Commons in the future of Famagusta after a political agreement takes place between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities.

Fig. 6 The “Imaginary Famagusta” group and the visual matrices about enclaves, AARU, Nicosia

---

**Merge** enclaves (redenfines enclaves’ edges to allow an assembly of enclaves) **to have an urban role**: Merging enclaves by cancelling out their in between limits and reconfiguring an ensemble. The new resulting enclave will have a specific urban role vis-a-vis the urban agglomeration.

**New transcending program infiltration**

Introducing new program which relates to the eco-cultural assets of Famagusta (ecological and cultural) and has a translocal evocation.

**Explore dis-enclaving strategies**
The actual unresolved Cyprus issue, which dates back in the nineteen-sixties, increases inevitably the difficulty of such challenge.

The first test is successful, since this is one of the few architectural and planning practices with members coming from both sides of Cyprus across the divide. We have been working together since 2012, accomplishing the “Hands-on Famagusta” project. We have transformed the second test into an interactive web-platform reaching out to decision makers, grassroots activists, journalists, professionals, and academics. Its success remains to be seen.

The A1 size visual matrix interface is printed by the “Imaginary Famagusta” group in black and white, allowing a second layer in red color superimposed on the top row expanding all the way down to the second row where the information about the future role of each enclave is unfolded. Notes, sketches, and stickers project such possible future role of the enclave vis-à-vis a unified Famagusta. The purpose of the columns is to allow space for debate for such projections among the “I.F” group members. We revisit the city territory having in our mind a projective discourse that promotes the city commons. Eve Blau pointed out such projective intentions of the architects’ analytic posture, when she was presenting the Project Zagreb in a conference entitled “Mapping and its discontents” in the University of Berkeley back in October 2013.

The red color stickers (fig. 8) that depict the strategies for disenclaving are organized into two major categories: the first one has to do with the enclaves and the second one has to do with the armatures, channels, and networks of mobility.

Notes
6. www.handsongamagusta.org
beyond functionalistic positions. In this logic, it is crucial to rethink existing networks which are rather isolated from their surroundings, allowing neither synergies nor connections through a multiplicity of mobilities.

**Field armature:** The term “Field armature” is used to describe an urban area in the city which facilitates directionality through a network of infrastructures of multiple mobilities. In this manner, arterial roads, could serve as linear spatial network connecting and encouraging synergies amongst uses and activities adjacent to it.

**Introducing new armature:** Introducing a new armature where there are not any.

*Fig. 8* Stickers illustrating disenclosing strategies
Their pedagogical origin goes back to the methodology of the Urban Design Studio of the University of Cyprus, where I teach (see in this Guide, Stratis, “Atlas of Designerly Visual knowledge: urban commoning through the critical pedagogical project”, (pp. 234-253). They condense, in fact, urban proposals by merging programmatic, actorial and physical urban actions. They shift the focus of urban reconstruction processes from the physical realm to the urban one, inviting reconciliation initiatives deeper into the regeneration processes.

**Disenclaving Strategies**

- **Upscaling urban armature.** The process of “upscale” an urban armature refers to the reconfiguration of its urban role vis-à-vis its spatial setting. Special emphasis is given in encouraging complementarities and synergies amongst different uses and activities across it, supported by new forms of mobility.

- **Connecting fragmented transport networks into a unified urban armature.**

- **From non penetrable limit to porous border.** Transforming the impenetrable limits of an enclave into a porous border that encourages the incoming and outcoming of multiple flows of movement.
I look at one of the red stickers placed on the map that depicts the medieval city enclave. It has the symbol of connecting an enclave to an armature. The “I.E.” group member that placed it wanted to bring into the debate the need to connect the old city enclave with a potential seafront armature. Actually, it is deprived of its seashore by an underused commercial port with doubtful future after the unification of the island, due to its cargo off-route geographic location, small size, and poor infrastructure.

The red color sticker refers to an urban regeneration strategy. The ensemble of the stickers formulates an open source of acupuncture urban transformation. Placing the sticker on the A1 visual matrix sheet of paper legitimizes the presence of reconciliation processes in such urban transformation, advocating for the city commons. Not only do we back up such reconciliation but also we point out where it should take place. In other words, we make explicit how peace building should take place within urban transformation processes, offering an alternative paradigm to the potential neoliberal one. The means we provide may assist the civil society to grasp the urban complexities and to claim a role in the decision making for the future of the contested territories. The A1 visual matrices together with the red color stickers formulate an apparatus that call for future commons of the city by marking alternative urban strategies, handy to those urban actors who would reclaim an active role in collective decision making.