Architecture as Urban Practice in Contested Spaces

Introduction

Through this essay we will look into the challenge of architecture to support the city commons in contested spaces by establishing relations between modes of reconciliation and processes of urban regeneration. To address such challenge, we need to look into architecture as urban practice, recognizing its inherent non-conflict-free interventional character. Architecture as urban practice in contested spaces has a hybrid character, since its agencies, modes of action, as well as its pedagogical stance, emerge thanks to a tactful synergy across material practices, such as architecture, urban design, planning, visual arts, and Information and Communication Technology. The moving project lies in the heart of architecture as urban practice, since the process of making, the agencies of the materiality of such a process, as well as the emergent actorial relations, get a prominent role. Modes of reconciliation are embedded deep into the making of by establishing platforms of exchange of designerly knowledge to support the project actors’ negotiations, and even change their conflictual postures, especially in contested spaces.

By contributing to the city commons, architecture as urban practice may provide alternatives, both to dominant divisive urban narratives and to the neoliberal urban reconstruction paradigm. The “Hands-on Famagusta” project, which is the protagonist of this Guide to Common Urban Imaginaries in Contested Spaces, contributes to such approach, supporting the urban peace-building processes in Cyprus.

The essay consists of three parts. Firstly, we will situate architecture in different kinds of contested spaces and show how, by withdrawing from the political, it is indirectly caught in consolidating politics of division. We will, then, focus on an agonistic approach of architecture as practice by unpacking its agencies, modes of action, and pedagogies. In the second part, we will present the “Hands-on Famagusta”
project and unfold its challenges in regard to the Cypriot contested space, showing the kind of conflictual context the “Hands-on Famagusta” project team operates in. We will also make apparent three imminent scenarios of Famagusta urban reconstruction the day after a political settlement is found between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities: partition, privatized urbanism, and clean slate approaches. In the third part, we will revisit the “Hands-on Famagusta” project as a pertinent example produced by what we call architecture as urban practice. We will point out its agencies, modes of action, and pedagogical approach aiming to provide alternatives to the aforementioned urban reconstruction scenarios. Such alternatives may emerge by transforming mental geographies based on ethnic conflict, by introducing counter mapping as matter-of-common-concern, and by developing themes that advocate for the city commons. Even more so, new possibilities may appear by developing strategies around thresholds that transform enclaves, or by introducing urban controversies as a platform of re-allying urban actors across the Cypriot divide.

Through this essay, we will also connect the four essays and the seven stories that are part of the Guide to Common Urban Imaginaries in Contested Spaces with the problematics around architecture as urban practice. As already mentioned, the essays are written by Condorelli, Potte-Bonneville, Yaneva and Gaffikin, and Sterrett. The seven stories emerge from the multiple activities of the “Hands-on Famagusta” project and are written by the author of this essay, Akbil and Constantinou.

Contested spaces and the urban role of architecture

We quite often associate the urban role of architecture as part of urban design with the establishment of tangible continuities creating homogeneous urban environments through master planning at the physical intermediate scale between building and city. We see urban design, through master planning, gaining popularity since it has become a legitimate tool to city authorities that have gained importance over national planning. However, the pertinence of master planning certainty, as well as that of the well-defined scale of operation between building and the city, seems to be insufficient. Authors who search for a new role of architecture in the making of the urban,1 coin-in adaptive strategic incremental approaches and make their morphogenetic and trans-scalar characteristics explicit. They provide alternatives either to the “poeticality of fragmentation”,2 or to the certainty of the master planning mode of operation.

When searching for such new role, we firstly need to situate architecture within a heterogeneous contested urban environment, increasingly fragmented into an archipelago of juxtaposed enclaves, linked loosely through an ecology of armatures.3 Consequently, the

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Politics of edges get a prominent position in urban transformation processes, lying behind the degrees of exclusivity of such enclaves. Politics of edges depend on the special interests of publics and urban actors. Such interests are divergent—see conflictual—marked by class distinction, gender, and ethnicity leading to the fact that all cities are bound by contestation. Richard Sennet refers to politics of edges by making a distinction between borders and boundaries in his article in the catalogue of the 2006 *Venice Architecture Biennale*. He sees borders, on the one hand, as devices which allow infiltrations that generate all sorts of urban dynamics between parts of the contemporary city, enhancing the possibilities of coexistence. Boundaries, on the other hand, are impenetrable urban features that segregate entire areas within the city. Contested spaces are, therefore, deeply segregated with disputed edges and increased surveillance of fortified enclaves of all sorts.

Gaffikin and Morissey distinguish between two forms of urban contested space. In the first form, dispute and antagonism have to do with issues of pluralism coming from contentions due to power, status, and welfare imbalances among particular social groups. Chicago may be a relevant example of a segregated city due to socio-economic conflict. The second form of contested space is about sovereignty. Various disputes about rights and equity are weaved together with an ethno-nationalist conflict in regard to the legitimacy of the State itself. Belfast is an example of such ethno-religious conflict. Both kinds of contestation promote territorial segregation. However, each one requires its own understanding and interventions. In regard to the ethno-religious kind of division, an additional level of difficulty raises due to the fact that citizenship itself is contested.

The new role of architecture is about taking a stance on such politics of edges in contested spaces. More specifically, it is about advocating for urban porosity by transforming edges to urban thresholds, thus confronting trends behind territories of exclusion responsible for shutting out the urban commons. Having said that, we are faced with two major challenges: firstly, the maneuvering left for material practices such as architecture, urban design, and planning is quite small since urban segregation is the outcome of socio-economic and ethno-religious dynamics. Secondly, advocating for urban thresholds could allow for desegregation only as a part of overall socio-economic or ethno-religious reconciliation processes. Consequently, when we talk about practices that advocate for urban thresholds we do not start from the physical intervention in the territory but from alterations of the modes of action, means of representation, and pedagogies so as to influence those urban actors that have the territory as a matter-of-concern. We depart from the fact that contested spaces are extremely fragmented due to both socio-economic and ethno-religious

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factors. We acknowledge the conditions that have caused such territorial fragmentation and we focus on potential roles of such enclaves in regard to the urban commons. Having said all that, we are becoming gradually aware that we need to revisit the practice dimension of architecture within such contested urban environment.

**Architecture as practice:** Architecture as practice is about “…an action, a performance…a method of action in the sense of the habitual, customary routine…”. Architecture as practice shifts the focus from the static object to the moving project, evolving around non-linear processes. It is about communication tools to adapt, means of representation, and regulations that are the baseline of negotiations among the actors’ conflictual agendas. Practice in architecture may have the negative connotations of habit and unreflective action. Nevertheless, we would like to focus on that aspect of practice that revolves around controversies, making apparent its reflective aspect. Controversy is a synonym of architecture in the making, pointing to a series of uncertainties that a design project, a building, an urban plan, or a construction process undergoes. The essay in this Guide, entitled “Mapping Controversies as a Teaching Philosophy in Architecture” by Yaneva, is quite relevant, showing the pedagogical importance of the moving project in architecture (pp. 147-161). “I found a controversy”, Akbil exclaims in the story in the Guide, entitled “Transformative themes: advocating for commons that act across divided territories”. He is searching for an “intensified set of collected things, actors, spaces, disagreements and conflicts that could formulate a strong and resilient controversy”. (pp. 166-195).

By focusing on architecture as practice we are able to reveal its political dimensions, unfolding the agencies of architecture through its spatial, programmatic, material, as well as actorial virtues. Politics is in the heart of architecture practice, a battle where disagreement makes the political. We can identify matters of contention within architecture, making explicit its inherent interventional non-conflict-free character, as well as the permanent conflictual priorities of the actors involved in the moving project.

**Agencies of architecture in contested spaces**

The notion of agency is relatively recent in the architectural discourse but it has a long history in social and political theory. Some consider agency as the ability of the individual to act independently of the constraining structures of the society, where structure is the way a society is organized. Awan, Schneider and Till point out that agency should not only regarded in reaction to structure, but also in duality with it. Bjorkdahl, in political science, considers agency as active, defining it in three types: localizing (complying), co-opting (adopting, adapting), and counteracting (resisting, rejecting). She goes on saying that space itself may enable, or disable agencies.

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We can see roughly all these types of agency in regard to architecture operating in contested spaces. Quite often they are manifested in an implicit manner, just when architecture claims withdrawal from the political, accepting indirectly to serve the dominating politics of division. Some other types of agency come forward when architectural practice claims an active role in the politics of edges by advocating for thresholds. Localizing (complying) neoliberal reconstruction agendas is the first type of agency, such as the rebuilding of downtown Beirut. The whole center of the capital of Lebanon was given out to one private company, shutting out from the reconstruction processes the inhabitants of the capital and avoiding any associations to reconciliation processes. The second one is consolidating the power of the parties in conflict by extending ethnic and religious fight for dominance into real estate wars. Akar and Hafeda demonstrate how Sunnite

real estate companies are in constant conflict with the Christian church property owner in Beirut. They use strategies of infiltration into Christian populated areas where the Church employs tactics of disuse by letting the buildings derelict. The third type of agency consolidates the State plans, as it is the case of Israel’s strategy of colonizing the Palestinian territories, turning the construction of Jewish settlements into a military weapon as eloquently made explicit by Segal, and Weizman in their book entitled *A Civilian Occupation: politics of Israeli Architecture*. Despite their limited power, we could also see architectural practices claiming a role in the politics of edges by focusing on the urban porosity challenge. In this case, we can see counteracting but also co-opting types of agency that contribute to the change of the status quo of division. We are talking about agonistic practices that recognize better the social untidiness of the contemporary world and take into account the positive aspect of conflict. Such practices accept the different source of knowledge production (tacit and experiential knowledge). They seek to bring forward the implication of a plurality by endorsing multiple forms of valid expression and to advocate for civic empowerment, mediation, and negotiation on common social imaginaries as brought forward by Castoriades’s *Imaginary Institution of our society*. That is where architecture as agonistic urban practice supports processes of commoning that bound communities and the non-commodified resources together, thus confronting the “laisser-faire” neoliberal urban paradigm. Akbil unfolds such relations in the story, a part of this *Guide*, entitled “Engaging roundtable: transition from the bi-communal alliances to the pluriverse of potential collectives” (pp. 196-215). The agencies of such practice enable twin relations between urban regeneration and reconciliation processes, contributing to the urban turn of peace-building processes. In other words, they find where peace is rather than where conflict is, and they advocate for shifting power balance, allowing local peace-builders to challenge prevalent narratives and identities. Such shifting of power balance takes place by introducing plural experiences and designerly methods that support non-representational democracy, based on the emergence of the commons across divides.

**Modes of action for architecture as urban practice**

The modes of action of architecture as urban practice have a trans-contextual character. In other words, they are inscribed in physical, temporal, and pragmatic contexts creating synergies among physical space, programming, actorial dynamics, and policies.

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Consequently, such modes of action have a hybrid character borrowing means and ends from fields, such as planning, urban design, visual arts, information and communication technologies (ICT), and game practices. Participative methods become part of such modes of action, aiming to distribute power among the urban actors rather than to diminish their resistance to neoliberal urban developments. Participative methods may also have a hands-on urbanism approach, where we can see a self-initiated urbanism searching for self-governance and autonomy. The story in the Guide entitled “Action Dove Graffiti or Upscaling Hands-on initiatives” (pp. 70-75) by the author of this essay brings out a set of challenges in regard to a hands-on approach. Such modes of action introduce co-creating, co-modifying, and co-supporting moments, the essence of collective decision making on which non-representational democracy is based. The modes of action adopted by critical spatial practices have a lot in common with such an approach. The essay in this Guide, entitled “Support Structures: Directions for Use” by Condorelli, is quite pertinent (pp. 53-65). In fact, Condorelli refers to all those architectural spatial practices that go under the radar of the theoretical discourse of Architecture.

We gradually become aware that the moving project is in the heart of architecture as practice, giving importance to the processes of making. We could consider actions during the process of making a project to be an inherent part of the final outcome of the project. Such actions transform the project into interrelated activities, bound with a specific aim, adaptive means of communication backed up by ICT, physical meeting spaces, and temporal communities. The materiality of the process is the project, especially when it is bound by an off-institutional character, helping to bypass deadlocks of conflictual narratives produced by institutions across divides in contested spaces. The process is the project when it influences in various ways the final outcome, avoiding to fall into the trap, which Gaffikin and Sterret mention in their essay entitled “Problems and Solutions in Planning Divided Cities: The case of Belfast”, part of this Guide (pp. 217-229), of having all creativity of such activities lacking any statutory authority and commitment for practical delivery, where the dominating practices of official institutions continue their divisive bureaucratic business as usual influencing over actual development. Gaffikin and Sterret give recommendations concerning the formidable dilemmas facing planning in a deeply contested society.

20. Frank Gaffikin, Mike Morrissey, Planning in Divided Cities, p. 5.
21. Build Peace 2015 International Conference (Nicosia, Cyprus, April 2015) was based on the same concept.
The third aspect to introduce in regard to architecture as urban practice in contested spaces is its relation to pedagogy in terms of both programs of architecture and civil society. Supporting future architects and active citizens for the demanding compositional and conflictual culture of urban engagement in contested spaces requires high performance in negotiating, awareness of the common good, transforming communication and representation tools into active agents, translating politics into space, as well as projecting images of potential urban commons.

Critical pedagogy is reference pertinent to the programs of Architecture26 plus the alternative pedagogy of the moving project, introduced by Yaneva in the essay entitled “Mapping Controversies as a Teaching Philosophy in Architecture” (pp. 147-161). We can see, firstly, the fostering of learning environments that encourage the shift of power relations between students and tutors. Secondly, there is the increasing interaction and knowledge exchange among students informed by competing interpretations. Thirdly, the students are encouraged to formulate their own questions developing critical thinking. The story in the Guide, entitled “Atlas of Designerly Visual knowledge: urban commoning through the critical pedagogical project”, written by the author of this essay, is quite relevant (pp. 234-253).

“Must We Defend Society?: Governmentality, Civil Society, and Political Activism According to Michel Foucault” is the title of one of the essays in this Guide, written by Potte-Bonneville. He invites us to better appreciate a new perspective that Foucault’s notion of governmentality brought to the analysis of civil society. He revisits the notion through the paradoxes that currently accompany the reference to civil society in both western and eastern sides of Europe, focusing on the debates around two events, that of the French referendum on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE) in 2005 and the so-called Orange Revolution that took place in late 2014 in Ukraine (pp. 95-111).

What kind of pedagogy for civil society? But then, which civil society? We focus on the pedagogy for civil society for agonistic practices that may offer transformative learning opportunities for the participants, where not only their argument may change but they, themselves, may change too.27 Such pedagogy may also support civil society to grasp urban complexities and to claim a role in collective decision making in post conflict reconstruction processes. Lastly, it could foster environments where dialoguing may take place, generating issues of common concern across divides, readjusting well embedded distorted mental geographies and narratives about the other. Akbil, in the story entitled “Transformative themes: advocating for commons that act across divided territories”, takes a step further by alluding to the notion of the general intellect, according to Paolo Virno, and the sharing of general

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27. Frank Gaffikin, Mike Morrissey, Planning in Divided Cities, pp. 275-278.
intellect becoming the actual foundation of all praxis (pp. 166-195).

Actually, that is where we find the pertinence of the “Hands-on Famagusta” project feeding the seven stories written by the author of this essay, Akbil, and Constantinou, all members of the “Hands-on Famagusta” project team; stories about the emergence of temporal communities across the Cypriot divide thanks to the tactful employment of ad-hoc technology and the rearrangement of physical meeting spaces.

The “Hands-on Famagusta” project in the Cypriot contested space

In this part of the essay, we will see firstly what the “Hands-on Famagusta” project is about and unfold the challenges in regard to the Cypriot contested space. We will hence, revisit “Hands-on Famagusta” as a pertinent example produced by architecture as urban practice in contested spaces. We will point to its agencies, modes of action, and pedagogies as they are unfolded through a multiplicity of projects.
Fig. 3 Map of internal displacement of Turkish Cypriots to Famagusta during the 1974 war with Turkey

Fig. 4 Map of internal displacement of Greek Cypriot Famagustians during the 1974 war with Turkey
that are the backbone of the seven stories, part of the Guide to Common Urban Imaginaries in Contested Spaces.

About the “Hands-on Famagusta” project:
The “Hands-on Famagusta” project consists of support structures for public debate regarding the foundation of the urban commons in the Cypriot city of Famagusta, the day after a political agreement takes place on the island between the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities. Such project may be handy for the civil society initiatives to confront two major challenges in contested spaces. The first one has to do with operating in actual hostile environments where institutions produce narratives based on division. The second one has to do with confronting actual trends of post conflict reconstruction processes. Such trends are firstly large scale segregating private developments that ignore issues of reconciliation, as well as collective decision making processes about the city commons. Also, such trends are about inflexible plans based on bureaucratic, non-transparent procedures, incapable of handling the ever changing contested urban environments. The “Hands-on Famagusta” project is built around an interactive digital interface, face-to-face roundtable workshops and a physical transportable model of the city. The digital interface is an interactive web-platform which hosts a smart archive that advocates for the commons of a unified Famagusta by introducing a playful mode of designerly knowledge exchange. It aims to transform representations of ethnic conflict into those of urban controversies, making apparent the potential re-allying of actors across the divide. The face-to-face roundtable workshops, consultation meetings, and presentations are part of off-line activities linked to the on-line ones of the web platform. They all serve as exchange of knowledge, a confrontation of mental geographies and narratives of the other through exposure to designerly knowledge. The portable physical model of the city assists Famagustians and all Cypriots to visualize the city as a whole rather than as a divided territory due to the ethnic conflict. They are all material agents that play a decisive role in encouraging the emergence of informal groups (collectives), with members coming from areas across divides. They all have to do with means of engagement, means of representation and communication, as well as the tactful organization of physical spaces, and the initiation of events and rituals.
Fig. 6 Map of population flows from Turkey, settling to Famagusta after the 1974 war
Contested urban spaces: Famagusta, Cyprus

“Just when you thought it was safe…” was the front cover title of the The Economist on March 23, 2013, describing the neo-liberal bail-in experiment that Europe was imposing to the Cypriots after the meltdown of their banks. The front cover image was showing a sketch of the island of Cyprus sinking in the sea, with some sharks making circles around it. In fact, Cyprus, up to 2013, was notorious for its not so transparent bank transactions and flows of wary international capital despite the State effort to comply with the euro zone regulations since 2008. The Greek Cypriots, who have lived in the south part of the island since 1974, were in fact profiting from high rate interest deposit bank policies, substituting for the insufficient, rather non existing, Cypriot welfare state with their high interest rate incomes. Since 2013, the word Cyprus is rather linked to the euro bail-in experiment.

However, the word Cyprus is also linked to the enduring ethnic conflict on the island (fig. 5). Actually, the Greek Cypriots (GCs), the majority of the Cypriot population, live on the south part of the island and the minority, that of Turkish Cypriots (TCs), on the north part. The most recent and massive ethnic segregation was caused by the war with Turkey in 1974, following a military coup by the Greek Junta and its Greek Cypriot collaborators, overthrowing the president of the Republic of Cyprus. 150,000-200,000 Greek Cypriot (GC) refugees had to flee to the south part of the island and 45,000 Turkish Cypriots (TC) to the north part. In fact, the ethnic segregation in Cyprus dates back to late nineteenth century fueled by the Nation State concept. The second wave took place during the 1963 inter-communal conflicts, leading the TCs to take refuge into enclaves located mostly in the major cities of the island. One of the actual main disputes is that of the properties left behind by the refugees, mostly of the GCs in the north part of the island, but also of the TCs in the south part of the island. The unwillingness to share any common vision of the island backed up by the geopolitical dynamics of the area, has led the members of each ethnic community to be trenched in their own unwelcoming spheres, profiting from the comfort zone of the actual non-violent conflict. Actually, the Republic of Cyprus (RC) is a member of the European Union with the north part being in a limbo condition since RC has no control over it, and the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”), founded by the Turkish Cypriots, does not have an international status, recognized only by Turkey. Since 1974, Turkey has been extending its colonial agenda transforming the north part of Cyprus into a Turkish region, controlling it politically, financially and military with 40,000 troops parked on the island.

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Famagusta is a Cypriot coastal city, a part of such contested spaces. It is located on the east edge of the island just north of the UN cease fire military zone and east of a UK military base. Famagusta, Ammochostos, Magusa are the respective English, Greek, and Turkish names of the city. Its inhabitants are Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. However, after the 1974 war, the city has been deprived of its Greek Cypriot inhabitants who were displaced to the south part of the island during the war, and the Turkish Cypriots moved to the north (figs. 3, 4). The Famagusta population was 38,960 inhabitants in 1973, of which 31,960 were Greek Cypriots and 7,000 Turkish Cypriots (figs. 7-9). The actual population in 2011 was 37,939 inhabitants consisting of Turkish Cypriots and settlers from Turkey.  

Actually, Famagusta consists of all kinds of enclaves with the most notorious one being the Turkish army controlled, ghost area of Famagusta. It is an abandoned urban area that used to house around 30,000 Greek Cypriots, located by a beautiful sandy shore. A French/Venetian walled city is situated further north, very close to a university enclave.

Notes
UK military base and UN controlled buffer zone

Area inaccessible due to Turkish military control
Contested narratives of spatial and textual representation of Cypriot territories

Contested Cypriot narratives manifest themselves on various levels, such as split mental maps of territories, as conflictual topological naming practices, or even as divisive social network practices. In fact, they kill at its birth any initiative for reconciliation between the two communities before an overall political agreement takes place.

Split mental maps: If you do a simple exercise of searching images of Famagusta through the internet search engines by inserting either the key word Αμμόχωστος which is the Greek name for Famagusta, or Magusa which is the Turkish one, you may end up with a different set of images. With Αμμόχωστος as key word, you end up mostly with images of the ghost area of Famagusta, or with images of the pre-1974 era of the same more or less area. In other words, these images correspond to one part of the Famagustian territory. With Magusa as key word, you end up with mostly images of the historic city and with some images of the area further west or north of the historic city. In other words, when Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots upload images of Famagusta on the internet, they seem to have in mind rather different territories (figs. 11, 12). The major reason is the previous ethnic segregation in Famagusta, where the Turkish Cypriots were located mainly in the historic city since the Ottoman period and the Greek Cypriots lived in Varoš, the Turkish name of suburbs, when they were expelled from the city with the arrival of the Ottomans.
The 1963 bi-communal conflicts trapped the Turkish Cypriots in the medieval city enclave where the Greek Cypriots had the opportunity to push for an accelerated tourist development primarily further south, which ended abruptly on 1974 (fig. 13).

**Conflictual textual representation of Cypriot territories:** Yael Navaro – Yashin, in her book entitled *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a postwar polity*, describes how Turkish Cypriots constructed a territorial naming layer to efface the previous presence of Greek Cypriots to legitimize their self-declared “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” after 1983. She goes on to describe the practices of renaming former Greek Cypriot lands as part of the process of constructing a new State. This is, in fact, one of the reasons that the two communities do not agree on any common maps of the Cypriot territory. In 2001, Cypriots could cross the divide for the first time since 1974, when check points opened across the UN demilitarized zone that keeps a safe distance between the two communities. The Turkish Cypriot authorities handed out to the incoming Greek Cypriots a list of correlating names between the pre-1974 Greek names with the current Turkish ones, so they could find their homes. In a belated reaction, the Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus passed a law, in 2013, declaring illegal any “edition, or import or disposal of maps, books or any documents in print or digital form which contain altered names of toponymes or geographical areas”.

**Split collective memories:** Since the social media era, a considerable number of Greek Cypriot Famagustian web communities have been emerging, reconnecting the dispersed Greek Cypriot Famagustians who actually live in various areas in the south part of the island and abroad. Some of the social media communities are rather inviting in regard to the Turkish Cypriot Famagustians, despite the fact that the use of the Greek language becomes a barrier. Some of them are about joint initiatives, such as the bi-communal Famagustan initiative or the Eco-city project. However, the majority of the exchanges that take place in such networks are about the autobiographic memory of those that were old enough to remember Famagusta before 1974, unable to address the complexity of the process of return to the city after a political agreement would take place. In other words, the off-line narratives on both sides of the divide are reproduced on-line, except for the joint initiatives mentioned already of which the “Hands-on Famagusta” project is part.

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Contested urban futures of Famagusta

“The future perfect contains a projected past, an assurance that embedded in the present is a near future that will become visible in a more distant future”. 35

While formulating our urban imaginaries for post-conflict areas, such as Famagusta, in the rationale of Dana Cuff’s quote, we project on them our memories, our references, our actual individual agendas and practices, our generic understanding of public interest, our misconceptions and distorted mental maps, due to our diverse socio-economic or ethno-religious backgrounds. In our case, we refer to postwar disaster reconstruction in Cyprus, whereas Cuff referred to post-natural disaster reconstruction in the USA. Nevertheless, similar challenges arise in regard to the role of architecture as urban practice in support of such common urban imaginaries. It seems that there are tendencies for clean slate approaches coupled with the reproduction of past forms of urbanity through large scale master planning, following similar scale economies of urban reconstruction. Cuff and other authors have brought forward the pertinence of strategic peace-meal planning that is derived from common urban visions, and dynamically connects small scale urban increments with the territorial scale by adjusting to the ever-changing contested urban environments.

To address the possible urban futures for post-conflict Famagusta, we need to confront the prevailing norms and trends of Cypriots’ actual spatial practices and decide whether the future urban becomings are based on continuity, or on rupture with them. Such prevailing trends for Famagusta urban reconstruction could be roughly based on three scenarios that the “Hands-on Famagusta” project counteracts. The first one is that of the “Next Divided City of Cyprus”. The second one is the “Laisser-Faire Private Gated City”, and the third one is the “Clean Slate City”.

Scenario one: the “Next Divided City of Cyprus”. What if the actual division of Nicosia with the distinctive war wall and buffer zone running through the middle of the city becomes the future of Famagusta with the Turkish Cypriots living in the north part and the Greek Cypriots living in the south part of the city? Besides, that was the case traditionally, with the Turkish Cypriots living in the medieval city and the Greek Cypriots in the rest of the city, mostly in the Varosha area. Consequently, their mental maps are split, as we demonstrated already. Another prevailing norm of actual spatial practice that promotes such scenario is the separate, or else conflictual, governance of the ethnic communities.

What if the future of Famagusta is not exactly that of the divided Nicosia, but closer to that of Belfast where fragments of peace walls and separating zones provide another version of division?

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**Fig. 14** Divided Nicosia: UN buffer zone, old city walls, main traffic roads

**Fig. 15** Scenario one: divided Famagusta?
In fact, the actual spatial practices combined with the Famagustians’ split mental geographies and their intolerance to the “other” seem to implicitly lead to this scenario (figs. 14, 15).

**Scenario two: the “Laisser-Faire Private Gated City”**. What if the segregated Beirut becomes the future Famagusta, where the ethno-religious conflict is dressed with socio-economic clothing, using real estate as a weapon? Gaffikin and Morissey invite us to be cautious of the negative consequences of the geo-political antagonism with substantial social segmentation caused in the context of a rapidly globalizing and urbanizing world. “A city within a city”, as advertised by Real Estate agents in Lebanon, will be the dominant feature of a “Laisser-Faire” Famagusta. Under the fast-track urbanism which is rather fashionable across the Cypriot divide, the urban actors would be inviting international private investment to build private cities camouflaged under the urgent need of income due to the ongoing financial crisis and inability of the State to have a decisive role. Issues of safety may give rise to private armies put in charge of surveillance of such enclosed privileged communities (figs. 16, 17).

**Scenario three: the “Clean Slate City”**. What if modernist, as well as bureaucratic, views of clean slate would define the future of Famagusta? What if such views go hand in hand with new urbanist nostalgic reconstructions of the distant past, as in the case of New Urbanism in the post disaster areas in the USA? Then, there is a risk of

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37. Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morissey, ibid., p. 262.
masking the politics of homogenization under the so-called technocratic practices that are unable to manage conflict of any sort, or to advocate for the multitude of the city. On one hand, the actual building stock of the fenced-off area of Famagusta has been decaying for at least forty-two years. In fact, a potential clean slate approach to that area is part of the on-going dispute among the Famagustians. This is possible since the nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies hotel and apartment buildings may not be able to cope with the contemporary needs and standards. Furthermore, part of the building stock built by the Turkish Cypriots after the 1974 war may have considerable earthquake deficiencies, as well as problematic foundations. The clean slate scenario gets additional points by the fact that Greek Cypriots have kept their mental maps frozen in 1974, ignoring the post 1974 urban environment developed by the Turkish Cypriots. The “Clean Slate City” scenario has a legacy on the island, extending into postcolonial urban development. With the birth of the Republic of Cyprus in the nineteen-sixties, we have seen quite a few unsuccessful examples of incoming clean slate modernist development plans authored either by the United Nations or other interested countries, such as the UK and the USA.38

Fig. 18 Landing page of www.handsonfamagusta.org

Fig. 19 Digital interface as the product of an ad-hoc information and communication technology platform.
Unveiling agencies, modes of action, and pedagogies of architecture as urban practice through the “Hands-on Famagusta” project

The “Hands-on Famagusta” is a collective project that enables, firstly, public debates of people coming from communities in conflict, contributing into the foundation of the future Famagusta commons. Secondly, it unpacks latent agencies hidden within the three aforementioned scenarios of the city future. In this part of the essay we will unfold this collective project by making specific its agencies, modes of action, and pedagogies that demonstrate its relevance to architecture as urban practice in contested spaces. We will approach “Hands-on Famagusta” through its digital interface which is a register of a matrix of projects that have transformed the making-of the “Hands-on Famagusta” project into interrelated distinct actions with specific aim, ad-hoc technology, physical meeting spaces, and adaptive communication tools, thus enhancing the emergence of temporal communities consisting of people across the Cypriot divide. In fact, the digital interface is the product of an ad-hoc Information and Communication Technology platform, (ICT) which acts as an active agent for the foundation of the city commons. The matrix of projects has been continuously readjusting the ad-hoc ICT platform during its making, as well as during its performance (fig. 18, 19). The seven stories, which are the backbone of the Guide to Common Urban Imaginaries in Contested Spaces, have their origin in the matrix of projects.

From division as a matter-of-fact to multi enclaving as a matter-of-concern

We are looking at the landing page of www.handsonfamagusta.org at the portrayal of the contested subject that of the city territory in its entirety, but broken down into many parts, enclaves, which are floating...as if Famagusta were part of planet Pandora’s landscape in the Avatar film”39 (fig. 18). It is an outcome of a counter mapping approach by the “Hands-on Famagusta” project team that challenges the mental maps of division, eloquently described in the story entitled “Counter mapped isometric drawing” by Stratis, Constantinou and Akbil (pp. 116-131). Counter mapping took place with the support of A1 paper size matrices on which the enclaves were documented by the team in terms of their becoming conditions, limits, actors, programs, and proximities to armatures. The members of the “Imaginary Famagusta” collective, part of the “Hands-on Famagusta” project team, used this approach to revisit their own conflictual mental maps in regard to the Famagusta territory (fig. 20, 21). The story entitled “Visual matrix for unveiling enclaves: establishing common imaginaries through urban disenclaving” by the author, unpacks such a process (pp. 76-93).

Notes
Fig. 20 Famagusta: an ethnically divided mental geography
Fig. 21 Famagusta: a multi-enclaved urban territory for common concern
Counter mapping made explicit five conditions of enclaving in Famagusta, yielding a severely segregated urban environment (figs. 22, 23). The first one is due to warfare and military activities where Turkish troops prohibit any access. The fenced-off area of Famagusta is an evocative example. The second enclave becoming condition has to do with monofunctional zoning, such as the underused port, the university campus, as well as the light industry zone. The third enclave becoming condition comes from protecting cultural heritage areas by fencing them off the rest of the city. The medieval walled city is part of this enclaving condition, as well as the archeological site of Salamis situated further north. The fourth one derives from high property investment risk issues and it has to do with the areas that were supposed to be handed back to the Greek Cypriots with the UN resolution plan in 2004. Actually, we can see a similar risk issue in regard to the Greek Cypriot properties in the whole northern part of the island, turning any settlement between the two communities extremely difficult. The fifth enclave becoming condition has to do with a very important rivers delta ecological system with salt and sweet lakes, which is caught in the urban expansion.

When you click on the enclaves at the landing page, you get a pop-up window which acts as an archive of visual and textual data about the enclaved territories depicted, their enclave becoming conditions, kinds of edges, accessibility, and actors. The “Hands-on Famagusta” project team has produced various alternative maps based on this approach to address a diversity of audience, such as local authorities, politicians, bureaucrats, students.
The materiality of such maps enabled a counteracting type of agency to create alternatives to the dominant divisive mental geographies.

What we do not see on the landing page of the web platform is the process of collecting all the data by a team of forty volunteers to create the three-dimensional depiction of the Famagusta territory. Such process was treated by the “Hands-on Famagusta” project team as a distinct project to assist the emergence of a temporal community, part of a reconciliation strategy. The story entitled “Counter mapped isometric drawing” by Stratis, Constantinou and Akbil (pp. 116-131) makes explicit the agencies of the ad-hoc technology that enabled a controversial practice, that of mapping contested spaces, to take place. Thanks to this data collection, the “Hands-on Famagusta” project team made publicly available through the Creative Commons a “Supplement for the City’s Commons” which we can find at the end of this Guide. It is unique data, extremely useful for any debate on the future of the city.

What is not apparent on the landing page, either, is a portrayal of the contested city through a portable model that depicts Famagusta as a continuum of extensive landscapes consisting of built and non-built areas (fig. 24). It is rather opposite to the extreme fragmentation depicted in the image of the hovering rocklike enclaves but with the same objective of overcoming the representations that are inscribed implicitly in the city partition. It is a valuable material agent with which the “Hands-on Famagusta” project team introduces an alternative political debate about the future of the city through the rediscovery of the present of the city. In fact, the whitish surface of the 550cm X 180cm size model becomes a metaphorical landing page hosting video projections about unifying visions, as well as spatial information about the enclaves.
Having said all these, we realize that the “Hands-on Famagusta” project team shifts continuously among various means of representation, as well as among different modes of action. The hybrid character of architecture as urban practice encourages such change by allowing the team to employ a tactful approach, invest in the active agency of a heterogeneity of means and modes, and profit from their diverse capacity of engagement with multiple audiences. The story entitled “The overwhelming presence of a city model” by Stratis and Constantinou, (pp. 132-145) unveils such agencies, modes of actions, and pedagogical concerns. We see transformative learning opportunities taking place among the participants who not only change their arguments but also themselves. The case of the “Imaginary Famagusta” collective, as well as the extensive team behind the “Hands-on Famagusta” project, is quite evocative, to start with.

**Formulating themes that advocate for the city commons**

On the top of the landing page, there are three dark grey buttons with inscribed white letters, with the names of the themes formulated by the “Hands-on Famagusta” project team: wide public waterfront, shared infrastructures, and eco-culture as common ground (figs. 25, 26). Akbil, in the story entitled “Transformative themes: advocating for commons that act across divided territories”, sees such a process as an engagement for an *autonomous public sphere* (pp. 166-195). All three themes allude to territorial landscapes and networks that have the potential to transcend enclaved areas. When you click on any of the three buttons you see the enclaves at stake getting the same theme color. You also see an additional grey button just below the initial ones, entitled *Revisiting Emergencies*. Clicking on it, you move to a new interface where a series of “What if…” questions are supported by “then…” visually and textually depicted scenarios. Such scenarios address the foundation of the commons in the urban everyday life during the extraordinary conditions of post-conflict reconstruction. They establish common concerns across the divide around the consequences of the post-conflict urban reconstruction processes on the everyday life of the city.

![Fig. 26 www.handsonfamagusta.org: three pools to unfold controversial questions](#)
When we look carefully at the visual material, part of the “What if...then...” scenarios, we see images from urban design projects from the Urban Design studios of the University of Cyprus and the KTH in Stockholm. They are the output of pedagogical programs that put the architectural project right in the heart of the contested spaces transformation. They claim a role for the urban commons during the extraordinary conditions of post conflict reconstruction processes, quite often locked out in the name of safety and urgency. The students are exposed to the conflictual aspects of the contested urban environments getting prepared for the demanding compositional and conflictual culture of urban practices in that context. The story entitled “Atlas of Designerly Visual Knowledge: urban commoning through the critical pedagogical project” by the author of this essay, deploys this approach (pp. 234-253).

**Developing strategies for thresholds to transform enclaves**

When we look back on the landing page of the web platform once more, at the space between the three grey colored buttons with the names of the themes and the floating rocklike enclaves that depict the extremely fragmented Famagusta, we realize that we are missing modes of action that could support the transformation of the floating rocklike enclaves through the three themes by a collective decision making process. The story entitled “Visual matrix for unveiling enclaves: establishing common imaginaries through urban disenclaving” by the author of this essay (pp. 76-93) shows how to inscribe modes of reconciliation deep into urban regeneration processes. In fact, the kit-of-parts, named *disenclaving strategies*, become handy in creating alternatives to the three dominant scenarios for the Famagusta future: those of the “Next divided city of Cyprus”, the “Laisser-Faire Private Gated” City, or the “Clean Slate” City. The kit-of-parts is user friendly red colored diagrams in sticker form, depicting complex disenclaving strategic operations. They are about challenging the enclaves by transforming their dead limits into thresholds.

The pedagogical dimension of the red stickers has to do, firstly, with a thick analytical filter that encourages the undergraduate students of architecture at the University of Cyprus to access complex urban concepts by critically examining the best urban design practices. In reality, the red stickers depicting the *disenclaving strategies* support the students, as well as the active citizens, to associate social visions of reconciliation with spatial, temporal, programmatic, and actorial urban conditions. The essay entitled “Mapping controversies as a Teaching Philosophy in Architecture” by Albena Yaneva makes explicit such associations with design processes (pp. 147-161).
Introducing controversies to re-ally urban actors across divides

When we look back on the web platform page we can see on top of the three dark grey buttons inscribing the themes the phrase “explore controversial matters for visions about a unified Famagusta”. When you click on any of the three buttons, you can see some numbered white balloons hovering over the colored rocklike enclaves at stake in regard to the chosen theme. Those balloons are about urban controversies, a series of uncertainties that an urban project undergoes, consisting of conflictual actors’ agendas (fig. 27). When you go over the balloons with your mouse (if you are in front of a computer), or with your finger (if you are in front of a smart screen), you can read a controversial question.

For example, if you click on Controversy No 4 you may read: “ALLOW FOR A DIVERSITY OF INHABITANTS IN THE CITY CENTER? In contested cities (in conflict) the centers are divided. What if the location and structure of the main city center becomes more open through a diversity of inhabitants?” By clicking on the balloon No 4 you enter into a new digital interface where the battle around the controversy is about to take place. You can access three major pools with designerly knowledge: that of the Actors and Agendas, that of the Other Cities, and that of Urban Design Projects about Famagusta and other cities around the world. In the Actors and Agendas pool, as well as in the Other Cities one, there is available information about all three imminent scenarios about the Famagusta future: the “Next Divided City”, the “Laisser-Faire Private Gated City”, and the “Clean Slate City”. You are invited to take a side, to choose your allies for the on-coming battle either among the three dominating scenarios or that scenario to be founded on the city’s commons.

The story entitled “Engaging Roundtable: Transition From the Bi-communal Alliances to the ‘Pluriverse’ of Potential Collectives” by Akbil (pp. 196-215) brings forward such kind of agonistic practice. A dialogical exchange is enabled by the “Hands-on Famagusta” project team, thanks to their tactful set-up of a roundtable with invited participants coming from areas across the divide.
Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot Famagustian urban actors exchange their agendas, formulate new ones, and force themselves to put in words their conflictual points of views and narratives. The “other” is invited to listen, to be exposed to the conflictual narrative, without a need for consensus, but with a need for formulating a common concern.

**Architecture for creating common urban imaginaries**

Preventing architecture from becoming irrelevant to urban transformations in contested spaces has been the focus of this essay, but also of the *Guide to Common Urban Imaginaries in Contested Spaces*. We have unfolded architecture as urban practice in advocating for the city commons by demonstrating ways of inserting modes of reconciliation deep into potential urban regeneration processes. We made clear that when architecture operates in contested spaces, it has an increased political role. Its withdrawal from politics just serves indirectly the dominant political narratives around division.

Introducing thresholds is part of an agonistic practice that contributes to commoning practices, creating alternatives to the neoliberal paradigm of urban regeneration. Moreover, the politics for transforming edges into thresholds go beyond the usual association of architecture with the establishment of tangible continuities, resulting in the creation of homogeneous urban environments through master planning. The politics for thresholds infiltrate the “moving project” in all its aspects and layers: from its means of representation to its modes of action and pedagogical approaches. The materiality and agency of such means, as well as the tactful organization of meeting places of unlikely groups with members coming from areas and communities across divides, are equally important with the formulation of unifying visions of fragmented urban environments. The choice of mode of action depends on the continuous evaluation of the uncertain and unresolved existing conditions of the contested space at stake. The complexity of operating in contested spaces demands architectural practice to open up to other disciplines concerned with similar issues. Furthermore, it seeks for dynamic relations between theory and practice in the form of researched practice and practiced research. The hybrid character of architecture practice in contested urban environments unpacks much potential to transform representations of ethnic conflict embedded in space, as in the case of Famagusta, into a discourse around urban controversies thus enhancing the emergence of common urban imaginaries. The “Hands-on Famagusta” project claims to be an agonistic practice since it accepts a different source of knowledge, and endorses multiple forms of valid expression that contributes to the creation of the commons across the
Cypriot divide. It also advocates for civic empowerment, mediation, and negotiation by taking into account permanent and potential generative aspect of conflict.

Following Castoriades’ *Imaginary Institution of our society*[^40] where any common future has as prerequisite the constitution of the social imaginary, we have made explicit how the “Hands-on Famagusta” project has emerged as an agent toward such foundation of the commons to hand out to the becoming Cypriot civil society ways to claim its common future, despite the imminent scenarios of Famagusta urban future.

“When I saw the action dove graffiti on the wall with its nest made of the phrase ‘HANDS-ON FAMAGUSTA’, in the old city of Nicosia, I thought about all those graffiti reclaiming messages sprayed by people keen in creating political messages through ‘visual texting’, coming from diverse political spectrums... When I look again to the painted action dove graffiti, I sense that it is taking off its nest made of the phrase ‘HANDS-ON FAMAGUSTA’, giving me the feeling that even if the ‘hands-on’ should have been of Famagustians for Famagusta, I have the right to claim that ‘We are all Famagustians’. I claim that in the sense that ‘Hands-on Famagusta’ is a network platform that supports collectively created spaces and assists active citizens to reclaim politics in contested territories such as Cyprus.”

From the story entitled “Action Dove Graffiti or Upscaling Hands-on Initiatives” by the author (pp. 70-75).

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