

Garden Travelogues: Narrating the Past and Re-sharing the Future of the Nicosian Garden

Christos Papastergiou

National Technical University of Athens, Greece

Corresponding Author Email

cpapastergiou@mail.ntua.gr

ORCID

Christos Papastergiou <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0073-676X>

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Abstract

In this article I introduce the alien view of the traveller, the view from outside, as presented in a number of travel narratives describing the type of the domestic enclosed garden in Nicosia. I focus on three books published between the fourteenth and twentieth century, and do a comparative analysis of the narratives based on the information they provide about Nicosian gardens. I investigate how this knowledge can be used to develop design strategies for gardens as a typology in architectural and urban design. As a demonstration, I discuss the project 'Nicosian Garden Network', which uses the historically iconic element of the garden and its narrated spatial qualities as an answer to the problem of urban fragmentation and the presence of a large number of unused plots in the city of Nicosia. The project incorporates unused sites of different sizes into a network of shared semi-public urban spaces that could reconnect the landscape, create conditions of sharing by

the different communities on a daily basis, and regain its iconic presence in the contemporary city. The article aims to contribute to the discussion about ways in which travelogues, guides and other forms of travel literature can construct a field of knowledge about vernacular architecture and implement contemporary approaches to architectural design.

Keywords

Travelogues, narratives, Nicosia, gardens, leftover sites, urban fragmentation

From Jacobus de Verona, the Augustinian monk who visited Nicosia in 1335, to Archduke Ludwig Salvator of Austria, who visited Cyprus in 1873, recorded travelogues repeatedly refer to the gardens of Nicosia as an identifying element of the city.¹ Either in the form of productive orchards during the Lusignan era, enclosures of exotic plants and animals during the Venetian rule, or mystical domestic spaces with cisterns and small hammams during the Ottoman rule, enclosed gardens hidden at the back of the house have claimed their historical place in the Cypriot capital as heterotopic islands with the purpose of stimulating senses.² [Fig. 1] In this article I focus on accounts by foreigners who establish a specific 'alien view', from the outside, of the Cypriot domestic garden. Gardens are also mentioned in recent works by Cypriot writers, often as a nostalgic memory from their childhood. I reflect on some of these descriptions as well, in order to compare alien and domestic views of the phenomenon. The gardens of Nicosia appear so often in travellers' narratives, and the accounts are sometimes so lyrical, that it seems as if the garden was historically the most important and recognisable element of the city. Many travellers refer not only to

the beauty of the gardens but also to their large number. According to these narratives, the grandeur of the gardens could be appreciated when the city was approached from a distance, but this grandeur was only partially revealed to a foreigner who walked through the city streets. [Table 1] These gardens constituted a 'bigness' in the city that was hidden and could only be experienced from within by occasional glances and the hints of smell, touch, and hearing.³

Nicosian gardens in travelogues

The anthologies, which, as I have mentioned above, are the main source of texts for this article, include descriptions from many different authors, some of which specifically refer to the gardens. The first, *Excerpta Cypria: Materials for a History of Cyprus*, was edited by Claude Delaval Cobham, a district commissioner and one of the leading antiquarians in Cyprus, during the late nineteenth century and published in 1908.⁴ The work is a compendium of accounts by travellers, among them many foreign officials, pilgrims, rich Europeans and adventurers, from the year 23 AD to 1866. The second book is *Cyprus through the Centuries in the Texts of its Foreign Travellers*, edited by the Cypriot author Andros Pavlides and published in Nicosia in 1993.⁵ The third book, *Nicosia: A City in Literature*, edited by the Cypriot poet Kyriakos Charalambides and published in Athens in 2008, is the only one of the three dedicated exclusively to Nicosia, and the only one to include not only travelogues but also other forms of literature, such as fiction and poetry, including recent works published during the twentieth century.⁶

In all three books there are references to the contemporary geographical, cultural or political context in the way the travellers understood it during their stay in Nicosia. Typical of travel writing, they include many descriptions of the natural environment of Cyprus. They refer extensively to the qualities of the landscape and the natural context of the city, commenting on its position at the centre of the plain of Mesaoria, on the significant presence of the river Pedieos that crosses the city, and on the moat that surrounds it. The existence of many private or public gardens in Nicosia is frequently remarked upon during travellers' visits to the city. [Table 2] In this article I examine the travellers' sensory impressions as they go beyond visual descriptions in order to capture the hidden gardens of Nicosia. I consider this sensual quality to be among the most important identifying elements of the garden, and the one that encapsulates the heritage of garden in the Cypriot cultural context most accurately.

One of the earliest examples of literature to mention the gardens appeared in the first half of the fourteenth century: the memoir of Jacobus de Verona, an Augustinian monk, who visited Nicosia in 1335, during the rule of Hugh IV of

Lusignan. Among the things that impressed Jacobus was that 'the city of Nicosia is adorned with many gardens, and has many nobles'.⁷ This rather laconic comment points to the recent establishment of a system of nobility by the Lusignans. The new nobility was derived from a feudal system, and its power was attached to the land. Gardens, usually filled with productive plants, became the symbols of Lusignan rule. Léon Le Grand, a notary from Carinola in Campania, who visited Cyprus in 1394, a few decades after Jacobus de Verona and still during the Lusignan rule, provides further evidence of the intensive shaping of the land by Lusignans.⁸ Importantly, Léon distinguished the fields that dominated the wider area around Nicosia from the gardens or orchards, which were smaller entities and probably had defined boundaries within the city. This is a first recognition both of the domestic character of gardens, and of their scale.

The Czech mathematician Oldrich Prefat, who travelled to Cyprus as a student in 1546 during the Venetian rule, wrote of Nicosia: 'In the city there are a few nice houses, all of which have flat roofs, according to the habits of the Mediterranean countries. I also saw in the city many date palms and gardens.'⁹ Prefat places Nicosian gardens within a wider Mediterranean context, where gardens were a common part of the domestic environment, present in cities since antiquity. In the case of Nicosia, the European feudal tradition of ownership of large landholdings established during the Lusignan and the early Venetian eras was combined with a pre-existing Mediterranean tradition of small gardens that were an organic part of domestic life.¹⁰

Until the middle of the sixteenth century, these written narratives maintain the character of travel memoirs by people who stopped briefly in Nicosia on their journeys to the holy lands and the 'exotic' East. They mostly take the form of short written impressions. From the middle of sixteenth century onwards, the narratives become more complex, even containing historical references or systematically recording the qualities of the gardens, for example in the case of Tomaso Porcacchi, an Italian scholar whose 1576 work *L'isole piu Famose del Mondo* is a geographic and historical guide to the islands then considered the most famous in the world. The work is systematic insofar as it establishes a frame for a comparative analysis of the geographical and cultural contexts of the several islands in the Mediterranean. His descriptions stemmed not from his own experience, but from the information available to him from sailors and other travellers who had actually visited these islands. Porcacchi's description of Cyprus, written seven years after the siege and occupation of Nicosia by the Ottomans, refers to the city's rich system of water and gardens: 'It is supplied most healthfully and pleasantly with running water, and here the nobles of the island lived,



Fig. 1: Drawing of an imaginary garden. *Hortus Ignotus project*, draftworks architects, DK werkraum, Spiros Nassainas. Drawing: Aristophanes Hadjicharalambous, Triennale Milano, 2022.

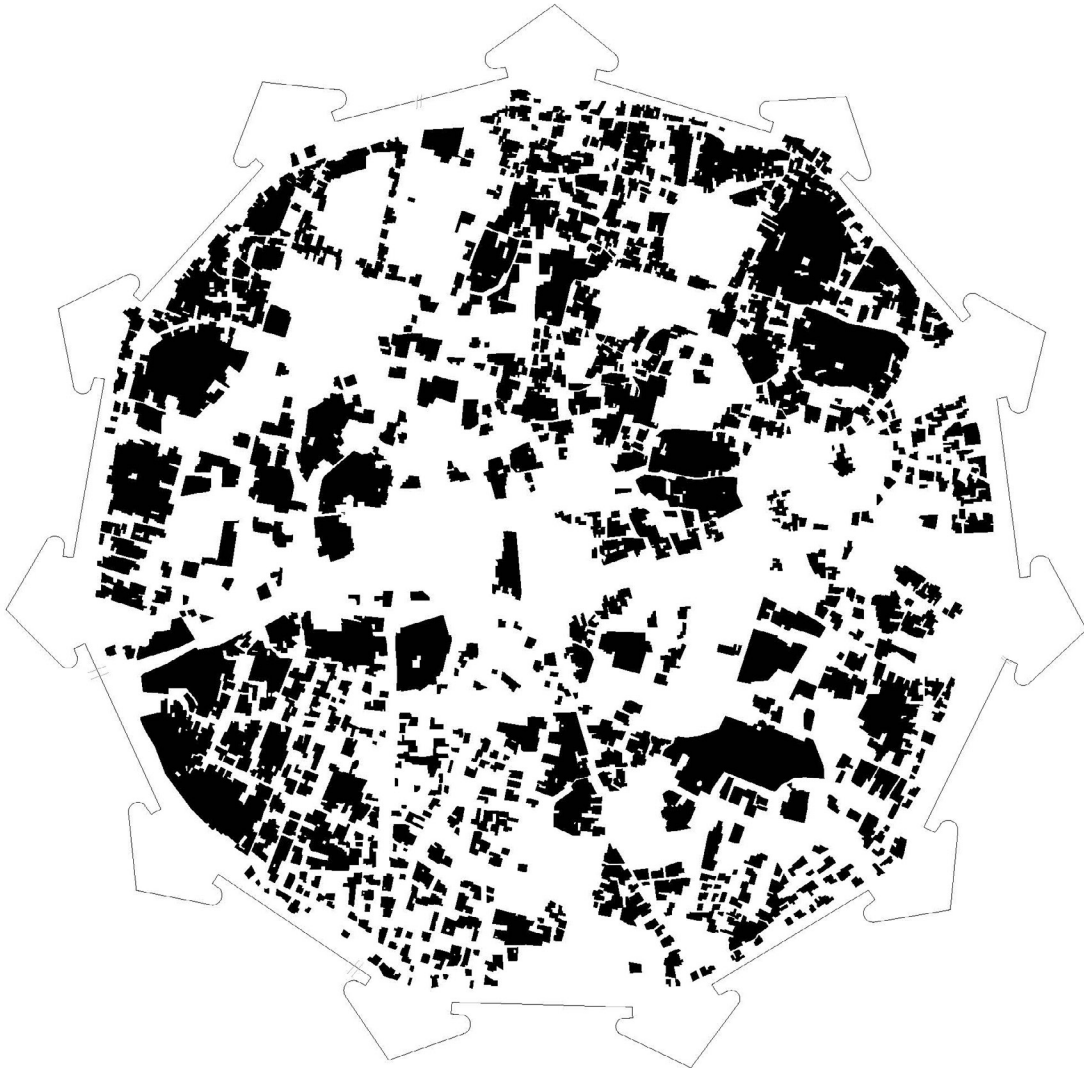


Table 1: Map of the Nicosian gardens based on the 1882 map by Kitchener, showing the percentage of the garden area (black) as opposed to the built area (white). Hortus Ignotus project, draftworks architects, DK werkraum, Spiros Nassainas. Drawing: Aristophanes Hadjicharalambous, Triennale Milano, 2022.

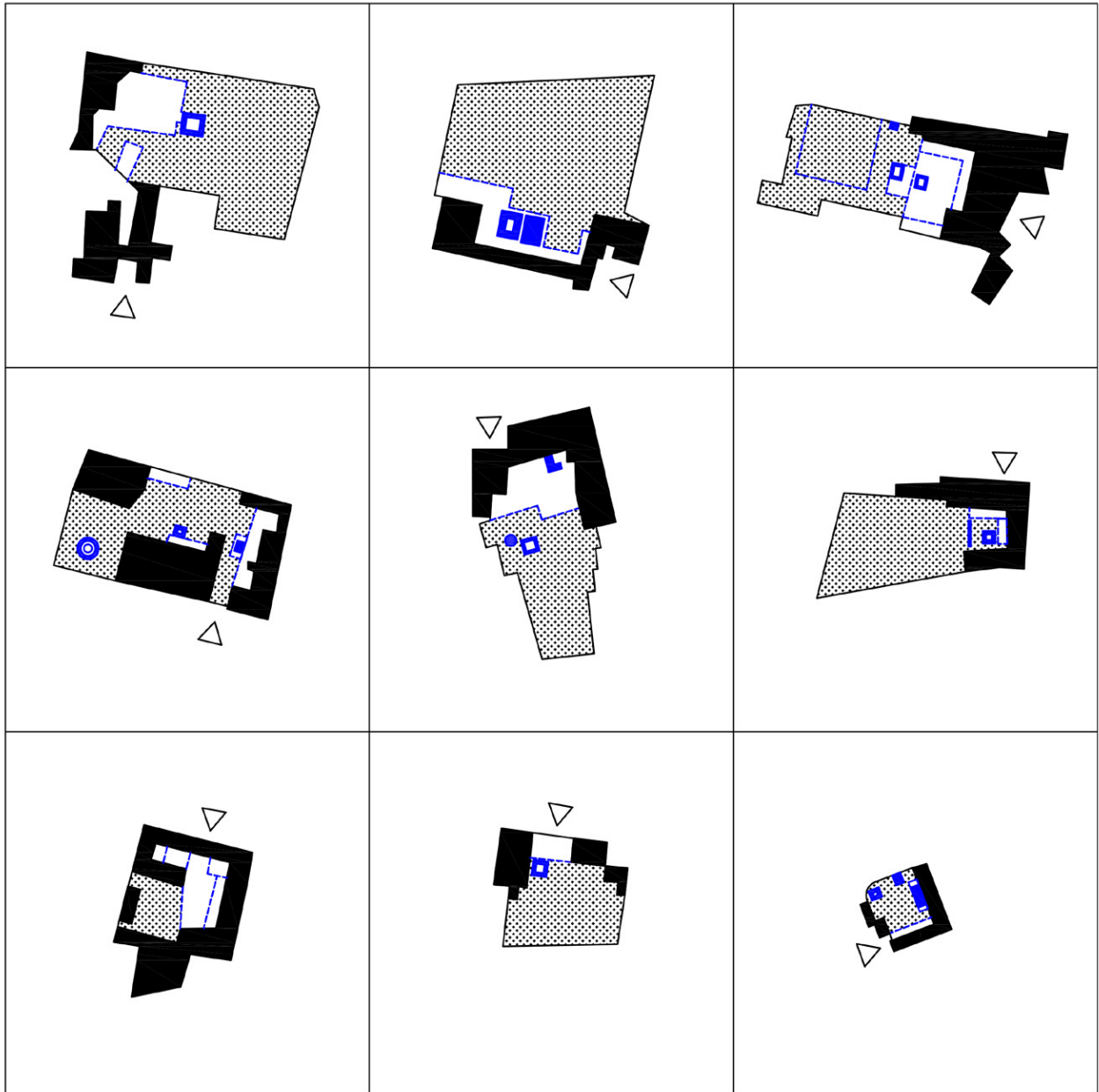


Table 2: Typology of nine Nicosian gardens from the 1882 Kitchener map, showing the relationship between indoor spaces (black) and gardens (hatched), with the outdoor furniture elements (solid blue) and open spaces (dashed blue) that mark the transition between the two. The space of transition is a multivalent boundary between indoors and outdoors, most of times related with the outdoor furniture elements containing water (cisterns, water tanks, fountains). 'Hortus Ignotus'. Drawing by the author, 2022.

who kept adorning it with ever new buildings, gardens and delights.¹¹ Porcacchi was the first to record the presence of running water from the numerous wells that existed in the city. The wells, cisterns and fountains had been present in the gardens since antiquity, but they were given a central role as sensory elements when the garden became predominantly places of pleasure, mainly during the Venetian era. Porcacchi's writings are among the first in Cobham's book to highlight this sensory character of the gardens. For Porcacchi, however, the pleasure of the gardens still mainly belongs to the nobility.¹²

From the middle of sixteenth century and during the Ottoman rule, there were fewer foreign travellers in Cyprus, and especially in Nicosia, but the gardens continued to attract their attention. Vincent Stochove, a nobleman from Bruges, visited Cyprus with his company in 1631.¹³ He wrote: 'The city is rich in gardens full chiefly of date palms.'¹⁴ Noel Dominique Hurtel of Artois visited Cyprus in 1670 and included a description of his visit in the manuscript 'Du Voiage de Jerusalem'. Hurtel's short description of Nicosia focuses mainly on its gardens: 'The houses are set in beautiful gardens, well planted chiefly with the palms which bear dates.'¹⁵ Constantius, Archbishop of Sinai, visited Cyprus in 1766. His description of this visit was published in 1819 and was used for many years by pilgrims to Jerusalem as a source of information about the history of the island, and as a type of a travel guide. Among other things, Constantius refers to the presence of water and orchards: 'The situation of the city is charming, wells and springs and verdant orchards abound.'¹⁶ His narrative is carefully enriched with flattering descriptions of the island and its charms.

The references to the gardens increased again during the nineteenth century, when Cyprus attracted the interest of upper class Europeans and more ambassadors, scholars and leisure travellers visit and write about them. One such description regarding the condition of the city gardens during the Ottoman era comes from William Turner, a staff member of the British ambassador at Porte. Turner visited Cyprus in 1815. Among other things, he described his impression of the horizon that can be seen above and beyond the walls of the gardens:

As every house has a large or small garden attached to it, the first view of the city is very pleasing from the contrast which this cultivation affords, with the dark mountains behind. ... The gardens within the walls are well cultivated, and abound in fig, olive, mulberry, orange, lemons and pomegranate trees.¹⁷

According to this description, the gardens in Nicosia continued to be an important part of the city, and an essential part of its heritage. However, after almost three centuries of Ottoman rule, life in Nicosia had become more private,

and so had the gardens. They were an essential feature of each house, usually hidden at the back of the property, and accessible through entrance yards. As Turner noticed, these house gardens included productive trees essential for the production of domestic goods used on a daily basis, such as olive trees, fruit trees and date palms. Regardless of their private nature, the gardens did not cease to be oriented toward the senses. New leisure elements like small hammam, were added, especially to the houses of the rich. The presence of hammams – usually places that favour socialisation – indicates that the gardens, although private, were also open to visitors, friends or family for small community events or daily social interaction. Due to the dismantling of the network of nobility during the Ottoman rule, the gardens were no longer only reserved for the rich houses, but became an important addition the houses of all classes, in various sizes.¹⁸

One of the most lyrical descriptions of the Nicosian gardens during the nineteenth century is by Franz von Löher, a German jurist and historian, who visited the city in 1876, one of the last years of Ottoman rule. For him, the gardens in the city constituted a reality that dominated all other realities:

The city lives within fragrant smells. Whenever I stood and walked within the tangle of streets flowering pear and apple trees popped out above the walls and between the passages of the gates, dark shadowy bushes of rosemary and wide-leaved fig trees, and again the red and white-yellow flowers of orange and lemon trees, mulberry and pomegranate trees drew the attention. However, there was no garden with walls so high that would not let cypress trees, palm trees and minarets to go up towards the blue sky. Half Nicosia consists of gardens, and one hears everywhere the gurgling noise of water running out of the pipes to refresh the gardens and make them fertile. The city swims within a graceful fragrance and at the corner of the streets where the slightest breeze happens to blow, that is where the mix of fragrances triggers the coolest mood.¹⁹

Almost simultaneously with Löher, some of the most detailed descriptions of the Nicosian gardens appear in book by Archduke Louis Salvator of Austria, a Habsburg royal who visited Cyprus in 1873. Louis Salvator describes the garden as one of the contradictory elements constituting the identity of Nicosia. He refers to the contrast between the city and its periphery, as well as the contrast between the built elements within the city. In his descriptions the gardens are the dominant element contributing to the coherence of the city:

Almost every house has an orange garden, with gigantic palms towering over the fruit-trees ... All these gardens are bounded by clay walls on the side of the street; the side adjoining the open hall of the house is fenced only by a low wooden balustrade; and they are watered either from cisterns or directly from the aqueducts. All sorts of fruits are cultivated there; some are very

sweet, orange-shaped lemons (*Lemonia gligia*), ... [and] citrons of an extraordinary size. ... Apricots and other kinds of fruit are equally famous: St. John's bread, pomegranates, and dates. [...] The bunches of dates are wrapped up in soft straw mats to protect them from the millions of ravens, rooks, and jackdaws, which sometimes cover the palm-trees in such numbers that they appear quite black. Vines and mulberries are also frequent ... The ground by the side of the fruit-trees is occupied by fine vegetable gardens, watered with the help of a sort of shovel.²⁰

Louis Salvator specifically mentions the bounded and enclosed character of the gardens, the fact that they are hidden from the rest of the city. The gardens in Ludwig's description appear as rich self-contained ecosystems consisting of both vegetation and animals.²¹

The travelogues during British rule, from late nineteenth century and on, bear a more colonial character. The British were keen to establish relationships between their colonies, which is why they note the comparisons between garden typologies across the Mediterranean. The British army officer William Hepworth Dixon visited Nicosia in 1878, in the first year of the British rule, noting that 'these gardens resemble – however in a harsh and distant manner – the patios of Seville and the front yards of Damascus.'²² For the British, Nicosia was just one of the many cities that belonged to the British Empire, and comparison was a method by which Dixon could understand and place Nicosia in a wider context. He notes that Nicosia's enclosed domestic gardens were not a unique phenomenon, but rather a wide-spread typology in the Mediterranean region.

Émile Deschamps, a French scholar, visited British-occupied Cyprus in search of its French-Lusignan past in 1892. His journey took place during a new era of extroversion of the island: during British rule, Nicosia was once again an open city, the capital of the new British colony at the fringe between East and West that many people were curious to visit. Due to the absence of physical clues about the earlier French presence, much of which had been intentionally destroyed during the Venetian rule, Deschamps ended up writing a dense record of his impressions of the Cypriot cities, their people and customs. His account highlights the ways that nature dominates the built elements in the gardens of Nicosia:

Nicosia, the Assyrian Lidir and the ancient Greek Ledra, is a sum of brick houses and some stone buildings, divided by narrow and small mazy streets woven with each other ... During my first walks in the city some places appeared to me to be ravishing and strange at the same time. We follow an old street, framed by brick huts with weathered walls, to find ourselves in a marvellous garden, where a palm tree stands close to the white wall of a

recently built house, caressing with its elegant leaves the green shutters of the house.²³

Deschamps's description also depicts Nicosia as a homogeneous built environment to which the gardens contribute by creating unexpected pauses or small but intense surprises within the urban context. The phenomenon of the urban gardens as unexpected pauses in the familiar routines of the city, continued to amaze travellers in various ways during the twentieth century as Nicosia became more and more cosmopolitan. The Greek painter and writer Athina Tarsouli mentions the importance of gardens in Nicosia in her work *Cyprus* (1955), published after her visit a few years earlier.

At times, when some of these doors happen to stay open, the passenger ... who will glimpse at the interior of a garden, he will stand, unintentionally, as his sight will rejoice with the small, secluded paradise that is revealed to him ... These old gardens, that during the summer days look like fresh love nests, after the sunset, when the intense daily chiaroscuro becomes softer, change their expression, they become more spiritual, more mysterious, and they invite you to a silent reverie, under the light blue of the trees.²⁴

In Tarsouli's description, the garden is more than an impressive element of the city; it becomes a sanctuary that is hidden and shadowy during the day and mysterious and spiritual at night. Her lyrical description confirms what was established by earlier travellers, namely, that the garden is an important identifying element of Nicosia and a part of the city's subconscious.

The Greek scholar I.M. Panayiotopoulos, who visited Cyprus in the 1970s after it gained independence, also wrote about its gardens: 'Nicosia ... bears the air of a great capital and at the same time the loneliness of a rural area ... All around the city houses with gardens are being built, flowers everywhere create lyrical paradises'.²⁵ Panayiotopoulos considers the gardens to be a factor that retains the sensual character of Nicosia's past, while at the same time acting as an element of coherence in the new developing urban conglomerate.

In the last two examples, both from the second half of the twentieth century, the gardens of Nicosia are presented in a more emotional manner as a phenomenon that conserves the unique identity of the city in an increasingly urbanised environment. The descriptions have a nostalgic character in their presentation of the gardens as an element of heritage, connecting the modern city to its rich past, traces of which were still discernible in the pre-war Nicosia of the early 1970s. Both Tarsouli's and Panayiotopoulos' books, which can be considered two of the most recent

travelogue references on Cyprus seen from the eyes of two non-Cypriot scholars, can be added to the trilogy of the books with the historical references that I referred to in the introduction.

The view ‘from the outside’ and the view ‘from within’

Based on the accounts by Löher, Louis Salvator, Tarsouli and Panayiotopoulos, the physical characteristics of the Nicosian gardens are the following: they contain various architectural elements, such as cisterns and fountains, as well as all sorts of cultivated and non-cultivated vegetation, which appeals to the senses, and they are bounded by walls that result in the perception of the gardens as an elusive yet dominant urban element. These characteristics establish the gardens as a form of protected paradise, a heterotopia in the city, which the alien eye, nose and ear can perceive only fragmentarily and occasionally, through cracks, openings, balustrades, and over high walls. It is almost as if their aura precedes their physical presence. Literary descriptions such as that of Tarsouli, imply that the gardens, although private and secluded, at the same time allow entrance to a hesitant foreigner, who can enjoy, and be surprised by, their qualities. This means that the gardens can, at times, take on an intimate, yet public role. [Fig. 2, 3]

Yet, in the travellers’ views ‘from the outside’ discussed here, there is no direct reference to the intimate public role of these gardens. To show this quality, a ‘view from within’ is needed, such as a recent sentimental record of a garden by the Cypriot artist and writer Andreas Karayian, a member of the Armenian community in Cyprus. His viewpoint is that of a local, who has lived all his childhood in such gardens, before moving to Athens as a young adult. His childhood memories, gathered in the book *The True Story*, published in 2008, after an absence of almost half a century, can be considered essential, since it showcases the social qualities of the garden. Karayian unfolds the quality of the gardens as part of the city’s heritage, and, most importantly, as spaces of sharing and not only contemplating. In the book Karayian refers to the garden of Emettes, an enclosed domestic garden in Nicosia where a great friendship between his mother, a Cypriot Greek woman, and Emettes, a Turkish Cypriot woman, developed in the years that preceded the conflict of the 1960s and 1970s:

You would ascend two or three steps from the street, you would open the door, cross the long *eliakos* and then you would find yourself in front of a miracle, well-hidden from the street by a high wall. The magical garden of Emettes, my mother’s dear friend, a red-haired Turkish woman. They grew up together and were inseparable, until war set them apart.²⁶

Karayian refers to the physical qualities of the garden, describing from memory the trees and plants it contained, its qualities of light and shadow and its various resting spaces. He also describes what he and his siblings or friends did in the garden as children, such as making necklaces out of jasmine flowers, or enjoying the treats that Emettes offered them when they visited. He relates nostalgically how he and his friends found refuge in her garden when playing in the neighbourhood or trying to escape their strict private school next door.

The *bazaar* (market) was traditionally the place that brought the different communities in Nicosia together. Karayian’s record shows how the garden as a spatial condition, seemingly so different from the bazaar, may have performed a similar role, yet with more intimacy and at a smaller scale. While the bazaar, a place where goods were sold and bought, favoured coexistence and sharing in an open and publicly accessible space, the garden established a more intimate space of sharing. While preserving its private character, the garden would also occasionally host the wider family, friends or neighbours, especially during the cool summer nights or during important life events such as weddings, the birth of children, and yearly celebrations. In this way the garden would occasionally transform into an intimate public space, hosting events for small communities, in keeping with the specific culture of Nicosia – a city where privacy was protected, and sharing was practiced in semi-public, almost intimate, settings.

Garden narratives as sources of information

According to the British academic Carl Thompson, travel writing acts ‘as a vehicle for geographic, ethnographic and sociological knowledge.’²⁷ Travel narratives can act as sources of historical information, especially in cases where no physical evidence survives. Over the years there has been a change in the way the garden travelogues transfer knowledge. As Thompson relates, the style of travel narratives has evolved from the mediaeval era to the Victorian and industrial era. One can also detect these changes in the garden narratives of Nicosia. Mediaeval travelogues were expected to offer ‘matter of fact’ information to the readers, which is why they were mostly factual and objective descriptions of journeys.²⁸ The narrative style was often dictated by a number of widely used and ‘approved’ texts such as religious literature. Towards the nineteenth century the descriptions become more subjective and the writers start using poetic forms of literature. The gardens then gain importance as subjects of description in terms of the sentimental impact they have the visitor. This happened for two reasons. First, the gardens are entities that cannot necessarily be described in an objective way, as for example, physical

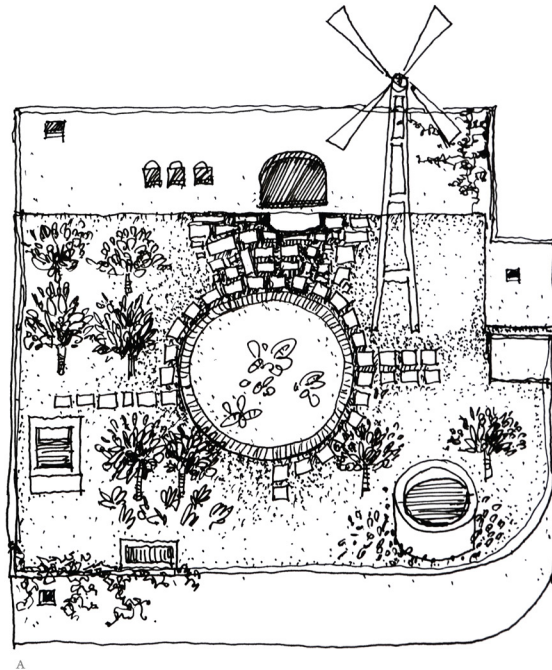
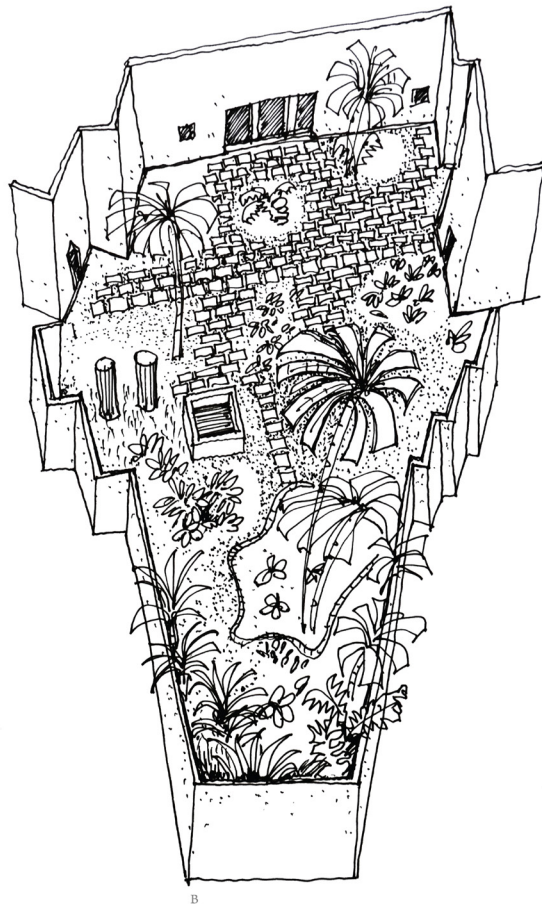


Fig. 2-3: Drawings of gardens based on the 1882 map by Kitchener and the travellers' narratives. 'Hortus Ignotus'. Drawing by the author, 2022.

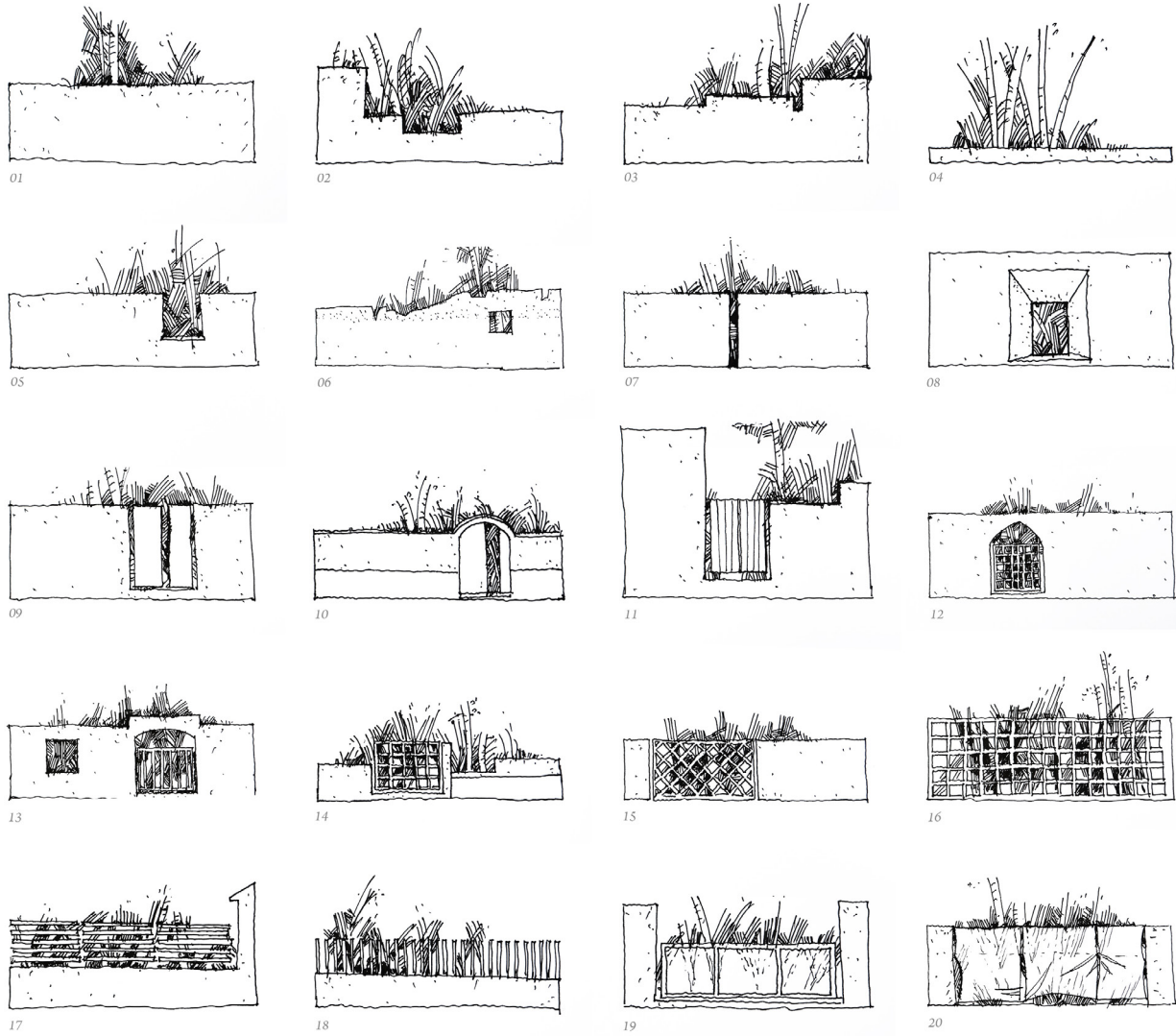


Table 3: Types of garden walls in relation to their porosity. Drawing by the author, 2022.



Fig. 4: H.H. Kitchener's map of Nicosia. Department of Lands and Surveys Cyprus, 1878-1882.

remains or archaeological findings could be described. Their main element, nature, is an elusive entity, fragile and changing over time, which cannot be preserved as an archaeological object. This is why today there is not that much physical evidences of historical gardens in Nicosia, making the written evidence so important as an alternative source of information for identifying their cultural role and spatial characteristics.²⁹ Second, the gardens are urban elements, not fully accessible to foreigners, and as a result, the narrators often use assumptions or abstract descriptions when writing about them. Of course, these can also be considered advantages within a more subjective approach that highlights the elusive, lyrical or poetic aspects of the gardens.

There is a category of travel narratives that offers exactly this opportunity. Thompson describes how, contrary to previous eras, travelogues during the Victorian age focused more on the aesthetic and poetic spirit of a place and on the traveller's experience:

They claimed to capture impressionistically or poetically the 'spirit' of a place or culture, rather than offer a comprehensive, factual account of it. Thus, in one branch of the travel writing genre, it was style and aesthetic effect rather than factual information that was increasingly prioritised by writers, and valorised by critics and readers.³⁰

Thompson also argues that the travel narratives tend to distinguish themselves from others because all journeys act, by default, as 'a confrontation with, or more optimistically a negotiation of, what is sometimes termed alterity.'³¹ Following this argumentation, all the narratives mentioned above are experiences of the garden built from the outside. They all construct an imaginary world of alterity that lies behind the walls, as a fascinating unknown, in the form of a private and virtually expandable paradise.

The garden travelogues link this sentimental construction with the garden's qualitative characteristics and anchor it to actual architectural elements. Most importantly, the garden is protected behind a wall, a *perivolos*, which protects it from prying eyes.³² The garden's interior is also constituted by fragrances from vegetation, the sound of leaves moving in the breeze, of water, and of birds nesting in the branches. Travelogues stress the importance of the aura of the gardens: the sense of something that you cannot see, that you partially see, or that you see at a distance.³³ The visitor's imagination works to complete the fragmented image and often creates a rather poetic and intriguing outcome. The garden fascinates the visitor exactly because it is hidden, and it stimulates the imagination by activating all our senses. [Table 3] [Fig. 4]

Project Nicosian Gardens Network

What about contemporary Nicosia though? Does this vernacular type still have the potential to communicate the aura of the place? As I have outlined above, until the early 1970s there were still references to gardens as an important element in the city. This changed in the years that followed, because of the uneven growth of the city and its increasing fragmentation, for reasons both contemporary and historical: the traditional division of land in small parcels, the rapid urbanisation since the 1970s, the marks of the 1974 conflict on the land, and the subsequent ethnic divisions among others. At the same time, the types of the buildings constantly changes, resulting in the abandonment of the gardens as a main element of domestic architecture. The Cypriot writer Giorgos C. Kythraiotis writes in his 2008 book *A Walk Along the Walls* that such a walk in contemporary Nicosia is an overwhelming experience:

Since then the city has grown, has become unrecognisable ... it has sprawled wildly in every direction, started growing taller, gaining floors. [It is] impossible to see the horizon any more, unless you climb up somewhere high – a roof garden, let's say, or something like that.³⁴

The reconstruction of the city continues along with its division and fragmentation: 'And, of course, the city is being radically rebuilt, progresses, constantly tangled in the scaffolds, divided, uncertain, wounded by check-points and machine-gun bunkers.'³⁵ Kythraiotis uses the term 'mosaic' to refer to the fragmentation of the memory of the city along with its material fragmentation. The landscape, wild, cultivated or domestic, that once acted as the shared substrate of a common identity, has now been rendered a discontinuous body, a mosaic, a sum of abandoned leftover fragments. It has been 'un-shared'. Within this context the city has lost its aura and the disappearance of gardens has resulted in the loss of the spirit of the place.

The urban fragmentation of Nicosia has led to the accumulation of numerous empty, undeveloped and neglected plots, some state-owned, others privately owned. [Table 4] The question I pose here is whether the existence of the 'leftover' sites is a hidden opportunity to read the city's public space from a different perspective? By hidden opportunity, I refer to the inherent qualities that derive from the informal character of such sites. [Fig. 5] An innovative urban and architectural design has the potential to reactivate leftover spaces in order to overcome the fragmentation of the city on a large scale.³⁶ Furthermore, the management of leftover sites can be introduced as a realistic solution that can trigger cooperation between the communities that now live in the divided city, and establish a condition of sharing the landscape anew. How can



Table 4: Photographs of public leftover sites in the suburban area of Nicosia.

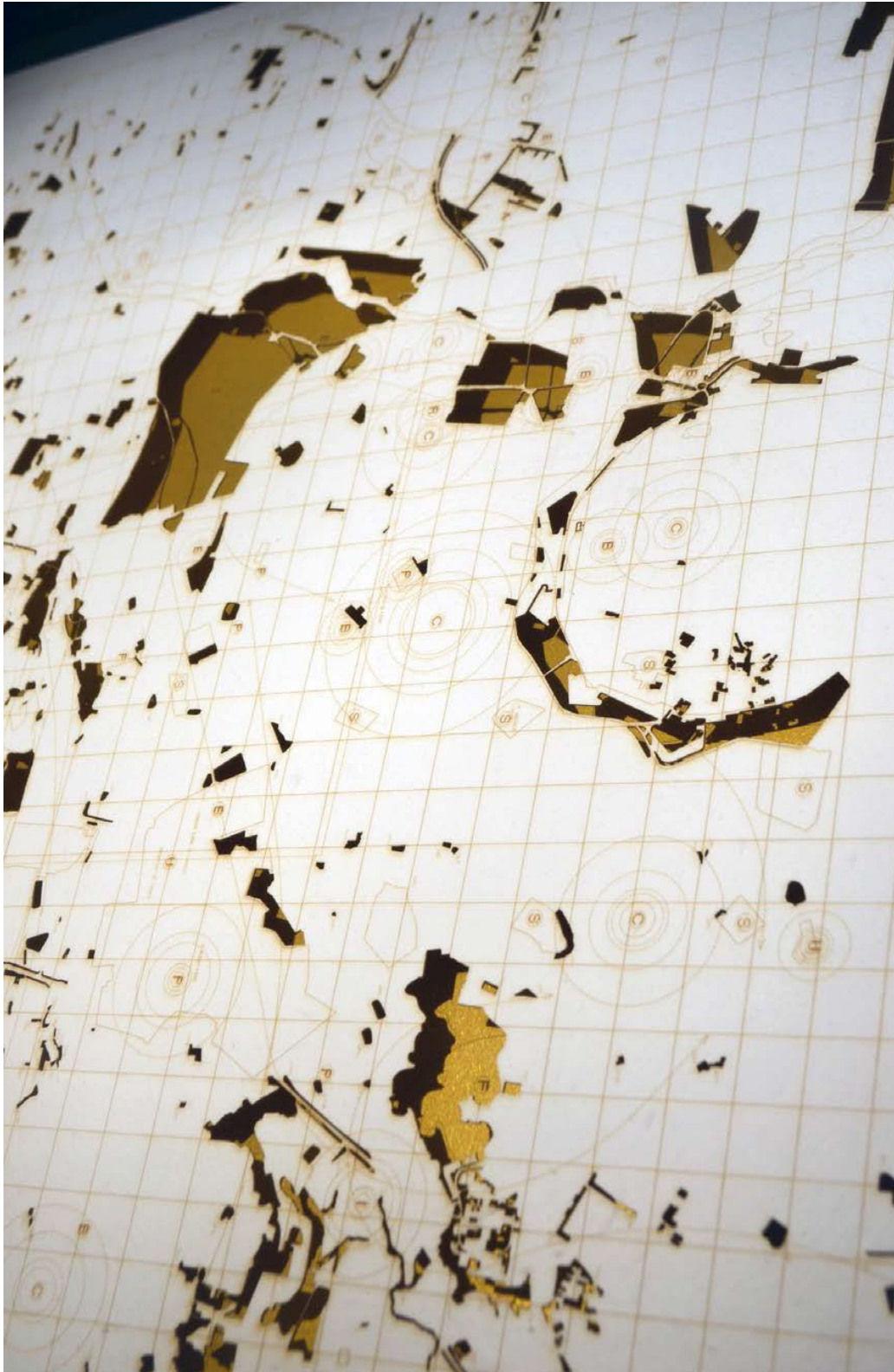


Fig. 5: Model of the leftover sites in Nicosia based on the map in Table 5. The fragments as holes on the skin of the city. Model by the author and Nicolas Kourtis, from the project: Nicosia Network of Gardens.

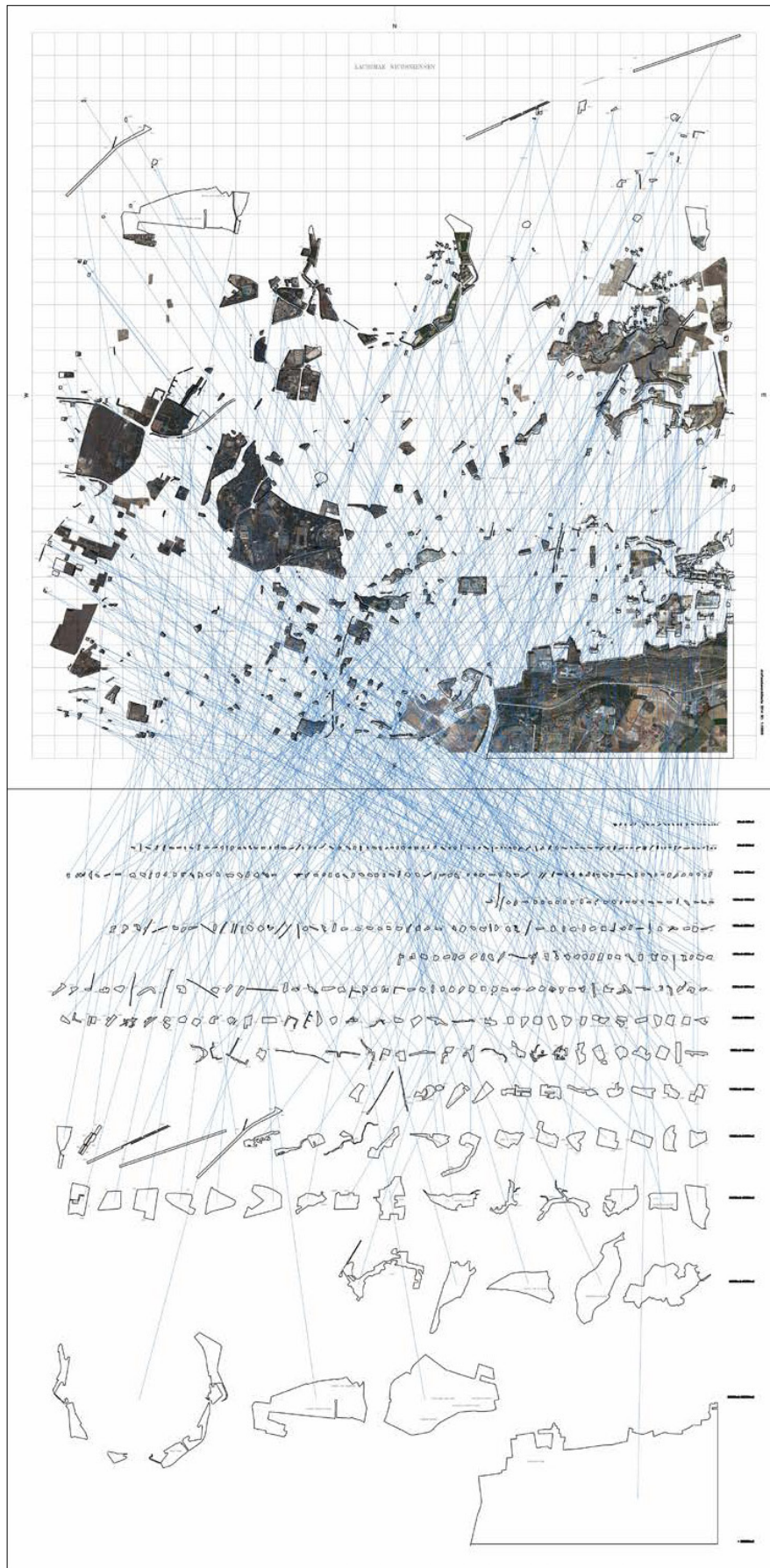


Table 5: The diptych drawing with all the types of leftover site in Nicosia. The first drawing, a map produced by the method of *décollage*, erases all the urban mass and keeps the leftover sites as the focus of research. In the second drawing, the leftover sites are arranged in different types according to size.

our knowledge of enclosed vernacular gardens, extracted from travelogues and literature, inform this sharing?

Kythreotis attempts to connect the growth of the city and its fragmentation – what he calls the mosaic – with the presence of refugees. He does not refer strictly to the refugees of war, political or economic refugees, but more widely to the people he calls wanderers, those who search for the memory of the city they once knew, and who, as he says:

wander around, inconsolable, gathering fragments and pieces and constantly struggling to put together an old mosaic that they barely remember, who constantly struggle to organise their return – a return to a long-lost past – and look for an *aethria* at the centre of the city, a garden of waiting, within the concrete desert.³⁷

Kythraiotis uses the term *aethria*, which literary means an open-air space or the clear, unclouded atmosphere, as a key concept for the understanding of the importance that gardens in Nicosia once had, which today has faded away.³⁸ The Cypriot poet Niki Marangou, in her poem *Nicossianses*, refers to a similar category of occupant of the Nicosian garden that she calls transitory, meaning temporary or passing:

In company with the aphid and the grasshopper
But also the spider mite, the tiger moth, the leaf miner,
The mole and the hover-fly
The praying mantis that devours them all,
We shall be sharing leaves, petals, sky,
in this incredible garden
both they and I transitory.³⁹

Both authors describe a kind of a transitory, wandering user who escapes the contemporary fragmented reality within Kythraiotis's *aethria*, an urban condition that acts as 'a garden of waiting' within the built mass of the city. More than a spatial element, *aethria* introduces the garden as a state of mind between reality and memory.

Kythraiotis proposes the term *aethria* to metaphorically describe a pause or void within the city where one is given space to think. *Aethria* can be seen as a mental state, a space of transition, in which the mind is clear of everyday concerns. The pause can help the city dweller connect the present with memories of the city, the way that the garden preserves and stores the memories of the daily lives of its occupants. I use it to describe a semi-accessible space that secures a clearing within the dense city where natural elements occur: the ground, the weather, vegetation, water, nature and unplanned social activities, such as spontaneous gatherings, can take place.

The concept of *aethria* has outlined an opportunity to bring together the emblematic Nicosian garden with the contemporary problem of the urban fragmentation. The project Nicosian Garden Network addresses the modern alienation from nature and taps into the potential of the leftover abandoned plots in the city. The purpose of the project is to incorporate the leftover sites of different sizes in Nicosia into a network of shared spaces in the form of urban semi-public or intimate gardens. The aim of the network is to become the new identifying element of the city, to re-connect the landscape, and to bring city dwellers together by providing them with spaces for interaction on a daily basis.

The project is divided into two parts. The first is about documenting the leftover sites of Nicosia, the by-products of uneven urban sprawl. Using tools such as drawing, collage and model-making, the project documents the fragments of land of various sizes and in various conditions into which the once continuous landscape has broken down. [Table 5] The second part is a proposal to convert the leftover sites into a functional network of shared, public gardens. This garden network, as I call it, aims at reactivating various landscape elements. It also proposes uses that engage all the senses and which, as discussed above, were an important element of traditional Nicosian gardens.

I consider each garden-leftover site as a distinct entity, an 'island' that belongs to a wider network of islands, an archipelago. These voids can be effectively preserved by the creation of a frame around each site. The frame is more than a wall; it is a porous entity that bounds the site, forms a protective zone around it, and at the same time, attracts uses. It establishes the new character of the leftover sites in two ways. First, it regulates the relation between the site and the city. Instead of strictly separating nature within the 'island' from the city outside, this framing aims to create an intermediary zone between the densely built environment of the city and the natural environment of the island. On one hand, the zone protects the nature within, while on the other, it attracts sense-oriented and leisure programmes: children's play, small public hammams, public kitchens, shared fountains and cisterns, structures for small fairs, performances, circuses, and small habitats for protected animal species. The formation of each site's boundary as a protective yet porous frame reflects the initial idea of understanding the leftover sites as *aethrias*: pauses in the city. Second, the frame also acts as the element that connects all the islands within a single network. It becomes the common denominator of the different islands. The recurrent appearance of the frame around contained structures creates a shared design language that links all the different islands in the

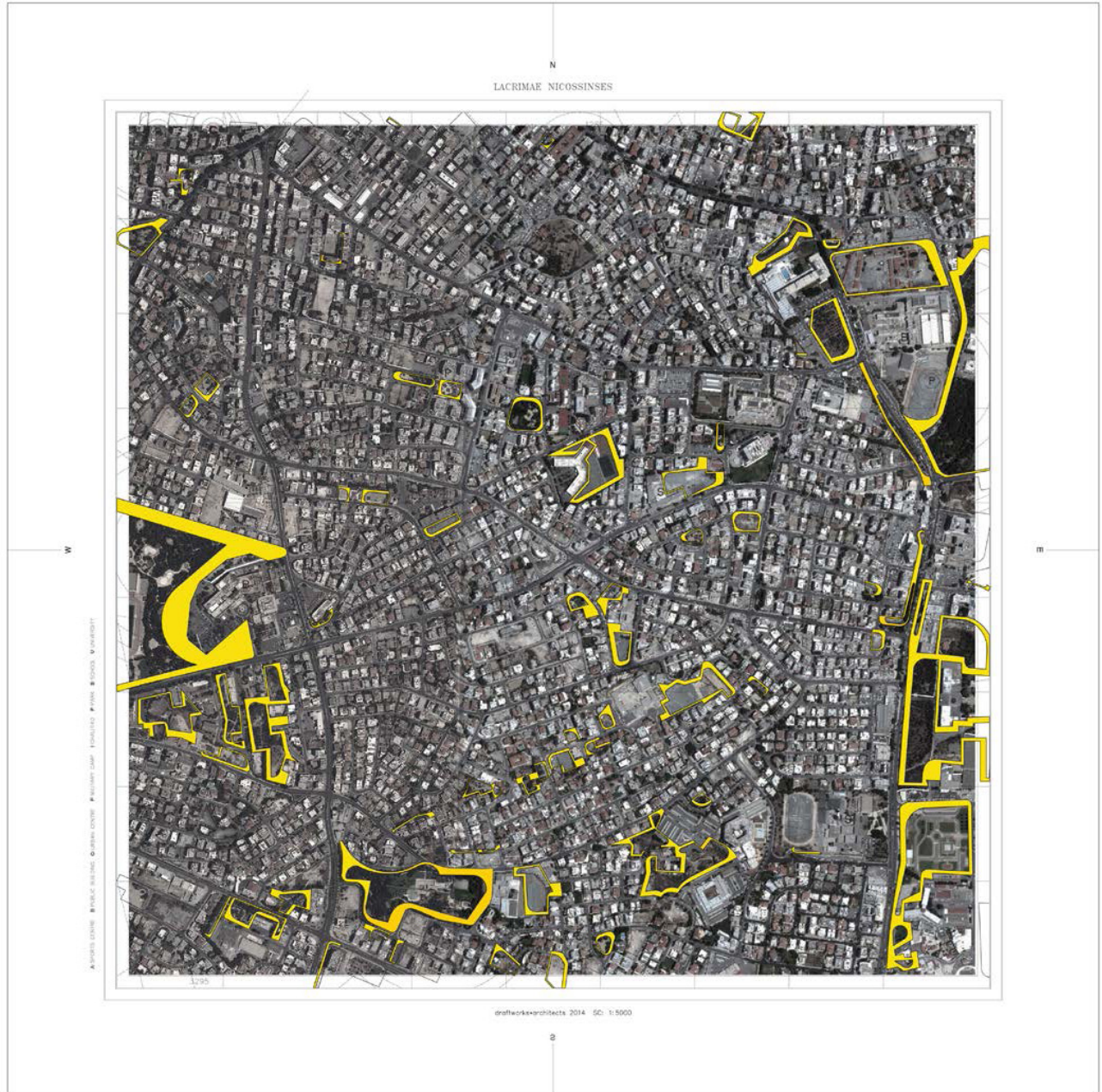


Fig. 6: Drawing of the leftover sites in Nicosia based on a part of the map in Table 5. The yellow zones around the leftover sites represent the programmatic frames. The drawing suggests the possibility of people to wander among the leftover sites in a city, in walkable distances and to create alternative routes of moving in the city, creating in this way an informal Garden Network. Drawing by the author, from the project: Nicosia Network of Gardens.



Fig. 7: Model based on map in Table 5. showing leftover sites as single islands containing nature and surrounded by programmatic zones. Model by the author and Nicolas Kourtis, from the project: Nicosia Network of Gardens.



Fig. 8: Models of the leftover sites as islands with a natural context at their core and framed by a programmatic zone. Model by the author, from the project: Nicosia Network of Gardens.

perception of a city wanderer. The perceptual connection between the different islands would eventually constitute an 'archipelago', that would re-establish Nicosia's urban coherency. [Fig. 6, 7]

The garden with unrestrained nature is the main programmatic element of this archipelago. The porous access would allow wild animals to coexist with domesticated ones. The project Nicosian Garden Network can contain self-sustaining species that naturally grow in Nicosia, do not require much care, and do not consume much water, along with fruit-bearing trees, vegetables, and other edible plants, whose growth and consumption encourages social interaction between local people. The gardens can become shelters for animals that once prospered in the area but that are now oppressed by urban growth and close to extinction. The gardens can also become a refuge for users whose access to the city is constrained, like children or disabled people. This new identity of the garden rests on the enormous unused potential of each leftover site; it is a territory that can become a shared urban value of modern-day Nicosia.

From the garden travelogues to alternative urban narratives for re-sharing the city

I have shown how historical travelogues or travel narratives describe the enclosed garden as a vernacular types in Nicosia, with its specific architectural characteristics and qualities. The narratives refer to the gardens as private spaces but also places for sharing: a private space that can occasionally open to the local community, wider family, group of friends or the neighbourhood, transforming into an intimate public space. This knowledge led to a proposal for intimate semi-public spaces in Nicosia, with vegetation and animals, yet distinct from open public spaces or parks. The travel narratives transcend their original purpose as a valuable source of information about distant lands, and become the inspiration and starting point for new imaginative and creative approaches to urban and architectural design. Such an approach can link the past narratives, present readings, and future urban visions of the site, especially when we aim for situated architectural projects with distinctive local characteristics that can be shared among different communities. My purpose is thus not just to present a historiographical review of Nicosian gardens through the travelogues, but also to show how the knowledge gained from bibliographical research can contribute meaningfully to the development of architectural imagination and practice.

The concept of *aethria* is one such research-driven design idea. *Aethria* can be seen as spaces that link the gardens to the leftover sites and enhance the sensual

experience of the city. The project Nicosian Gardens Network also proposes an alternative form of urban navigation and mobility that reconnects the existing network of streets, pavements and parks through walking and cycling.⁴⁰ This new urban mobility provides opportunities for people to construct new narratives for understanding their city, as an alternative to the dominant ones dictated by the planning departments, similar to the way in which travel narratives establish an alternative, lyrical, and sensual way of understanding a city. [Fig. 8]

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Notes

1. In literature Jacobus de Verona is often mentioned under the Italian version Jacopo da Verona or anglicised as James of Verona. Claude Delaval Cobham, ed. and trans., *Excerpta Cypria: Materials for a History of Cyprus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908).
2. Christos Papastergiou, 'Garden at the Rear: The Secret Garden as the Informal Part of the House in Nicosia and the Mediterranean', *Archimaera Magazine* 9 (March 2021): 69–90, <http://www.archimaera.de>.
3. I use the word 'bigness' in order to describe the cultural impact that the gardens had in the city due to their large number, which was only perceived when walking in the city, due to their fragmented and hidden character. The word 'bigness' is used by Rem Koolhaas to describe a cultural phenomenon of big sizes in the cities. Rem Koolhaas, 'Bigness and the Problem of Large' in *S, M, L, XL*, edited by Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 494–516.
4. Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria*.
5. Αντρος Παυλίδης, *Η Κύπρος ανά τους αιώνες μέσα άπω τα κείμενα ξένων επισκεπτών της. Τόμος Α'* (Antros Pavlides, Cyprus in the ages through the texts of its visitors, Book A) (Λευκωσία: Φιλόκυπρος, 1993), 128. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Greek are my own.
6. 'Κύπρος', στο *Λευκωσία. Μια Πόλη στη Λογοτεχνία*, Κυριάκος Χαραλαμπίδης (επιμ.) (Cyprus, in Nicosia, a city in literature, ed. Kyriakos Charalampides)(Αθήνα Μεταιχμιο, 2008).
7. Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria*, 17.
8. The Italian notary Nicolas Martoni was published under the name Léon le Grand. *Ibid.*, 26.
9. Pavlides, Cyprus in the ages, 128.
10. We still see them in other countries in Southern Europe, the

- Middle East and North Africa. See Linda Farrar, *Gardens and Gardeners of the Ancient World: History, Myth and Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
11. Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria*, 165.
 12. Ibid.
 13. Also found under the name Le Sieur de Stochove.
 14. Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria*, 217.
 15. Ibid., 233.
 16. Ibid., 316.
 17. Ibid., 436.
 18. Euphrosine Rizoroulou-Egoumenidou, *The House of the Dragoman of Cyprus Hadjigeorgakis*.
 19. Cornessios, trans. Lana de Parthogh (Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, 2001), 32.
 20. 'Cyprus', στο *Λευκωσία 1878 – Ωρα Μηδέν. Η Φυσιογνωμία και η Ζωή της Κυπριακής Πρωτεύουσας κατά την Αλλαγή της Ξενοκρατίας*, Πολυχρόνης Κ Ενεπεκίδης (επιμ.) (Cyprus, in Nicosia 1878, ed. Polychronis Enepekides) (Λευκωσία: Ιδρυμα Α.Γ.Λεβέντη, 2002), 46–56. Archduke Louis Salvator of Austria, (Levkosia, the Capital of Cyprus) (London: Triglyph editions, 1983), 26–27; Franz von Löher, (Nicosia 1878 – The ultimate hour: The physiognomy and the life of the Cypriot capital during the colonial transition), ed. Polychronis Enepekides (Nicosia, Leventis Foundation, 2002).
 21. Some animals referred to by Salvator no longer live in the city, or their population has decreased considerably due to the dramatic lack of nature, as in the case of ravens.
 22. Άντρος Παυλίδης, *Η Κύπρος ανά τους αιώνες μέσα άπω τα κείμενα ξένων επισκεπτών της*, 191–96.
 23. Stavros Lazarides, ed., *Emile Deschamps: In Cyprus, the Land of Aphrodite – From the Diary of a Traveler* (Nicosia: Laiki Cultural Centre, 2005), 57.
 24. Αθηνά Ταρσούλη, 'Κύπρος', 279.
 25. 'Η Κύπρος, ένα ταξίδι, Αστήρ, Αθήνα 1974', στο *Λευκωσία. Μια Πόλη στη Λογοτεχνία*, Κυριάκος Χαραλαμπίδης (επιμ.) (I.M. Panayiotopoulos, 'Cyprus, a journey, Astir, Athens, 1974', in *Nicosia, a city in literature*, ed. Kyriakos Charalampides) (Αθήνα: Μεταίχμιο, 2008), 258–62.
 26. Andreas Karayian, *Η Αληθής Ιστορία, Ι* (The true story) (Athens: Kastanioti ed, 2008), 31. The *eliakos* is a typical element of vernacular Greek houses. It is the part of the house that intermediates between the public and the private rooms of the house, usually directly linked with the main entrance. It is a space that is tall and fully accessible by the sun (that is why it is called 'iliakos', from 'ilios', meaning 'sun' in Greek).
 27. Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 2011), 4.
 28. Such cases are described in Panos Leventis, *Twelve Times in Nicosia: Nicosia, Cyprus, 1192–1570: Topography, Architecture, and Urban Experience in a Diversified Capital City* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2005).
 29. Papastergiou, 'Garden at the Rear', 69–90.
 30. Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 55.
 31. Ibid., 9.
 32. *Perivolos* in Greek means the 'surrounding wall' or 'the area that is bounded'.
 33. The German philosopher Walter Benjamin has defined the 'aura' of the natural object as 'the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be'. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Benjamin, Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 97.
 34. Γιώργος Χρ. Κυθραιώτης, 'Περίπατος στα τείχη', στο Κυριάκος Χαραλαμπίδης (επιμ.), *Λευκωσία. Μια Πόλη στη Λογοτεχνία* (Giorgos Kythraiotis, A walk along the walls, Nicosia a city in literature, ed. Kyriakos Charalampides) (Αθήνα: Μεταίχμιο, 2008), 303.
 35. Γιώργος Χρ. Κυθραιώτης, 'Περίπατος στα τείχη', 34.
 36. Christos Papastergiou, 'The Leftover City: Leftover Sites as Disruptors of Urban Narratives in the Work of J.G. Ballard, Jim Jarmusch, and Wim Wenders', in 'Urban Disruptors', *Informa* no. 13 (2020): 208-221.
 37. Γιώργος Χρ. Κυθραιώτης, 'Περίπατος στα τείχη', 37.
 38. *Aithria* in Greek means the clear, unclouded atmosphere, or the clear, cool atmosphere of the night. The word was originally used to describe a weather condition or the qualities of an exterior space. However, it also derives from the Greek word *aethrio*, from which the Latin *atrium* was derived. *Atriyum* in Turkish is translated as 'patio', meaning the interior courtyard or garden of a building, an open, clear space that is usually enclosed by a structure or is within a building.
 39. Niki Marangou, with photographer Arunas Baltenas, *Nicossienses* (Vilnius: R. Paknio Leidykla, 2006).
 40. The Garden Network project is an ongoing effort that has so far been developed as a design hypothesis. It can potentially be developed further by involving citizens, researchers, local authorities and institutions in ways that exceed the objectives and timeline of this article. In a wider sense, the project also seeks to contribute to the efforts of EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 to reverse the degradation of ecosystems in the European Continent. The project forms a strategy for reversing a fragmented and degraded urban nature, by converting it into a network of gardens, and a pool of shared material and cultural resources.

Biography

Christos Papastergiou is a practicing architect and academic. He holds a Diploma in Architecture, an MSc in Architectural Design and Theory from the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), School of Architecture, and a PhD in Architectural Design from the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, sponsored by the Hellenic Republic. With his practice Draftworks Architects he has received awards in architectural competitions and his work has been widely exhibited and published. He has taught architectural design studios and theory classes at the University of Nicosia and

University of Cyprus and he is currently elected assistant professor in Architectural Design at the School of Architecture, NTU Athens. He combines design practice with research and reflective writing. His research interests include the study and incorporation of vernacular processes and typologies in contemporary localised architecture, the study of means of communication in architecture and the investigation of new methodologies in architecture pedagogy. www.draftworks.eu