

CONSERVING THE HISTORICAL IDENTITY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: NICOSIA WALLED CITY

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Abstract: The Nicosia Walled City, on the north side of Cyprus, has a deeply layered urban fabric that still bears the imprints of different cultures and civilizations even though it has been divided since 1974. Inspired by this rich medieval heritage, this research study investigates architectural design strategies for the harmonious interaction of the new architectural language with the diverse historic environment while keeping the cultural identity intact. Throughout the course of time, the damage to the city caused by its users, illegal constructions and continuous neglect has put Nicosia in danger of losing its morphological features and its authentic character. Two case studies were examined in this research employing a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the extent of these issues. The results show that the recent design interventions have harmed the city's historical layers. This is mainly because the conservation practices were more focused on evoking a nostalgic feeling rather than preserving the typological values. The social, cultural, environmental, and economic aspects, which are the four pillars of sustainable development, were used to structure the analysis. In the end, the research offers instruments that encourage the participation of different groups and the coming into existence of new conversations with the past, thus, facilitating the preservation of the city's identity and its being alive for the generations to come.

Keywords: Sustainable development; Conservation principles; Nicosia walled city; historical identity

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INTRODUCTION

The Walled City of Nicosia in Cyprus is among the Mediterranean's ancient cities that have successively experienced the influence of different empires. The city has preserved their marks spread over the urban fabric, thus it possesses the nature of an open-air museum with significant heritage and tourist value. Its complex history, mainly the Medieval period, along with present-day components, has given it a unique character where architectural works such as towering vaulted and arched religious buildings, typical residential houses, and grand imperial buildings were the dominant elements not only in the physical urban landscape but also in the cultural sphere (Jiang et al., 2024). These pictorial layers, some of which are no longer visible, some destroyed, and many still preserved, keep adjusting to the cultural transformations while they also retain and raise the feeling of place which is related to the genius loci of other Medieval settlements that were influenced by both the East and the West (Sönmez, 2024). Ledra is the name by which it was known in the past.

Later Nicosia was renamed through interactions between different cultures that have been the source of cross-cultural fertilization throughout Cyprus (Turkan, 2024). From 1974, it has been separated by a buffer zone into Turkish-speaking communities in the north and Greek-speaking communities in the south (Karaderi & Turkan, 2024). This research is centered on the area up north which is now called the North Nicosia Walled City. It studies the effects of architectural design methods in the historic context. Recent findings about some districts have shown that the changes there were often not in harmony with sustainable development plans, and the activities of "faking continuity" were going against the aims of heritage conservation (Rofiqi & Munjiah, 2025). The past environment, the historical environment is, similarly to all landscapes that are life-sustaining, has a peculiar character which might be either heterogeneous or homogeneous (Karimi et al., 2024).

Concepts of diversity and integration have been used as the theoretical background for the analysis in this paper. Diversity signifies the presence of the past in the present (HaghighatBin et al., 2024), and integration has been described as the city's grain (Zhou et al., 2024), the coexistence of tangible and intangible heritage along with environmental and equity concerns, and the interaction of change within an integral totality (Akbarinejad et al., 2024). In this material-cultural identity, architectural objects are the symbolic spaces that not only represent the meaning, but also extend it to their

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surroundings. For instance, a heterogeneous environment like the Old Medieval Town of Rhodes in Greece is a diversified yet integrated character. On the other hand, homogeneous ones such as Timbuktu in Mali, although uniform, are ecologically structured forms shaped by Arab civilizations. In a broader sense, historic urban areas are subject to evolution under cultural, spatial, and temporal forces and thus, they reflect Patrick Geddes' account of the Medieval city as a harmonious integration of nature and human artifacts, and Camillo Sitte's perception of urbanism which accepts environmental and social aspects (Akbarinejad et al., 2024; Alhmoud, 2024). These ecological layering models have been challenged numerous times for their mechanistic and linear nature, besides, other models which emphasize openness, unpredictability, and dynamism have also been suggested (Conte, 2018). Among them is the model for the social ecological system (SES) presented by Christophersen that provides not just a static but rather a dynamic picture where nature, culture, and humanity are seen as one single ecological framework (Christophersen, 2023).

With time, historical cities usually become abandoned centers that no longer function as a result of changes in social life, physical conditions, and structural transformations (Rabie, 2021). On the other hand, these urban creations of past generations, which are the carrier of universal heritage values, saving them has an indispensable role in the promotion of economic growth and sustainable development (Gilberto & Labadi, 2022; Jawabreh et al., 2024). After the societies became rapid consumers following the Industrial Revolution, and were driven by technological and rational advancements, they are now reconsidering the notion of sustainability. However, the very first debates about environmental resources were in fact linked to issues of economy, governance, and urbanism. The sustainability of both the environment and the economy is fundamentally dependent on the city as the central place of human settlement, thus making "urban sustainability" a very important subdomain of the broader concept of sustainability. Its main objective is to focus on local situations while at the same time ensuring a balance between the protection of architectural heritage and the economic growth, functional vitality, and livability thus making sure their continuation to future generations (Muminović et al., 2020).

Historic identity is a complex urban fabric concept that not only deals with the physical process of the architectural design of buildings but also represents the socio-cultural dreams of the people and communities (Mausch et al., 2021), thus upgrading the historic settings' holism through the different compositional layers of the city and reinforcing the continuum between past, present, and future (Gray & Manning, 2022). In this layered sequence, the urban fabric of historic cities is also evolving through new additions where, as (Moazzeni & Asadi Eskandar, 2024) pointed out, the injection of contemporary concepts and the use of innovative materials can breathe not only the physical but also the social aspects of the historic environments.

The interaction between the new architecture and the existing fabric producing the dialectic of "new and old" (Bulakh, 2019) is one of the results of such urban fabric. Besides, by referring to the city as a living organism (Broto et al., 2012), the authors suggest that its historic contexts have to grow and adapt, thus, contemporary architecture is often seen as a means to heritage spaces. In this context, the paper tries to figure out the effects of design techniques in the layering of new interventions in the historic environment of the North Nicosia Walled City to find the ways of the inclusive presence that both protect and combine its multiple identity layers.

The study, by focusing the discussion on the conservation principles, design approaches, and the typologies of historic environments, localizes the issue of architectural interventions in heritage contexts to a broader level. While previous studies have tended to separate the themes, this paper merges the three central concepts of design approaches, principles, and relational dynamics between "new and old" thus, it not only opens up new horizons of architectural heritage preservation but also promotes sustainable heritage conservation as a process that is inclusive and dynamic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Design approaches in architecture are no less than the dynamic and multidirectional concepts that are not limited by the rules of the discipline but instead, they venture into the depth of a multidisciplinary network of concepts, which significantly influence their complexity and social aspect. As the urban challenges become more and more a part of the built environment, they require consensus-driven responses to environmental problems of our time, hence new modes of design thinking are necessary to result not only in efficient outcomes, but also in addressing local needs.

In their nature, designers in conservation act as heritage protectors through the use of design, but in a few cases, it might be the least or even lack of intervention that is the most proper way.

Design approaches, as a brainchild of problem-solving, help architects to figure out building- and site-related issues (Broto et al., 2012) and provide a framework which is originally from industrial design as a method of development of products under various conditions and enters the two significant areas (Kim & Lee, 2010) simultaneously. The "inside-out" method emphasizes the features of the product that are derived from its functioning mechanisms, at the same time, the "outside-in" method is more about the experience of the user and reflective practice, as an example, post-occupancy evaluation (POE).

The architectural "product" is the one that the different modes of thought are being referred to when we talk about the "inside-out" method it is the area of architecture devoted to the resolution of problems by working with the topic, concept, and context. While using these methods in historic environments, the authors suggest that the combined application is necessary and overreliance on one approach is a frequent cause of imitation designs that reduce the level of authenticity (Bassols et al., 2025) this research paper responds critically to such a situation. Understanding typological aspects as a store of past, present, and future heritage, this paper takes an inclusive stance merged together with the opinion of different conservation organizations. The Amsterdam Declaration stressed that "new buildings of today will become the heritage of tomorrow" and it also pointed out the necessity of good-quality contemporary architecture (Loren et al., 2024). The Royal Fine Arts Commission was not slow to react, in fact, it had been critical already beforehand, in particular, the designers' failure to comply with the Town Planning Act of 1947 which led to historic conservation being weakened and poor

pastiche approaches becoming prevalent. As a result of the criticism, it suggested that the new architecture should be original and innovative, with an acceptable level of contrast with the existing context, and the design created using an inward–outward rather than outward–inward approach, as well as being attentive to style and function .

English Heritage (Historic England) (Lindenmayer et al., 2006) pointed out as well the intrinsic and extrinsic values of heritage, which can be synthesized in four principles: the historic environment as a living record of human endeavor; as a natural and cultural asset that communities value for their traditions, identity, and sense of belonging; as a legacy that has to serve the present needs without depriving the future generations; and as a public good that needs legal and institutional protection. These principles highlight the intrinsic social, cultural, educational, and spiritual importance of heritage environments, which among others, are the perfect grounds for sustainable revitalization and "iconic" architecture that is oriented towards the values of the present-day rather than the architect's signature (Embaby, 2014; Adamkulova et al., 2026).

The Getty Conservation Institute was also very clear that architecture in historic settings not only reflects the continued existence through generations but also functions at the same time as cultural symbol and urban form, needs context-sensitive design approaches which are determined by the specific circumstances, and should be open to dialogue and compatibility if they aim at achieving harmony. Therefore, conservation is most comprehensively defined as the management of change made in order to retain continuity (Macdonald et al., 2018) which is quite different from preservation whose remit is narrower. Within this scheme of things, Toprak was of the opinion that interventions should not imitate the existing contexts but rather show the present-day cultural and technological factors, while Toprak and Sahil warned against the repetitiveness of design methods and the presence of inauthentic layers that do not reflect environmental dynamism. Hence, this research paper is a study of the effects of simpler design approaches that jeopardize the layered identities of historic environments and it argues for quality design principles that defy universality and thus, enhance the dynamic meanings, values, and significance that are not only embedded in but are also an integral part of urban heritage (Lerario, 2022).

Abrar examined 21 instruments and created 20-point guidelines for illustrating how to blend contemporary architecture into the historical context, thus effectively evolving a model for assessing modern buildings based on international heritage principles. Nevertheless, the assertion of the Athens 1931 charter as the reference source for the principles governing the introduction of contemporary architecture to the historic context has been found by other studies to be inconsistent, as they rather identify it as leading principles for preservation and conservation (Gohardani, 2014). In this argument, the question of principles being the main issue serves as a determinate piece of evidence that has to be examined further, as subsequent studies have delved into the manner in which the matter of building new structures in historic cities is addressed in different international agreements. Among these research examples are Turkish historic cities where the necessity of controlling strategies and regulations was highly accentuated.

Their results emphasized that the relationship levels of people, culture, and environment have to be considered when dealing with contemporary architecture in historic areas. At the same time, they also pointed out the need for restrictions on the design of new buildings having modern features without the historical environment being harmed (Gohardani, 2014). Although their "new is necessary" design criteria are in agreement with most conservation bodies, a closer look at the legal documents discloses that exercising this principle often produces superficial and repetitive results. In contrast, historic cities themselves provide examples that show the importance of designing new layers which not only take into account the historical context but also reflect cultural, technological, and defining aspects of our age without copying existing expressions, thereby being a part of what some other scholars call "new preservation" (Panavaitè, 2024).

Such an opinion brings up the question of whether rules help or hinder the use of design methods with results in historic cities questioning our understanding of how contemporary design principles are incorporated in local contexts.

A preservationist stance in one direction can lead to design falsification, whereas a two-way perspective indicates that modernization and material innovation have the potential to revitalize not only the tangible but also the intangible layers of historic environments (Broto et al., 2012), thus supporting Stavreva's idea of the historic city as a playing field where the "new and old" come together. The union in question at the same time elevates the already existing ones as historical models (Eilouti, 2018). It brings in the new buildings that link the historic areas with the rest of the city, which is a good example of the adaptive reuse of the Plumstead Library in Greenwich, London, where the old red brick is still there. On the other hand, a new glass panel stands for change (Panavaitè, 2024).

Researchers in the American context made a point that lively, diverse surroundings encourage the development of new ideas while fragile, uniform ones discourage it because they have weak urban design frameworks. Still, conservation documents both at national and international levels are silent when it comes to providing clear definitions of character types of the historic environment. As policies that are good for one context may be unsuitable for another, more refined consideration of personality and character becomes necessary, especially if the goal is to keep continuity by creating identity layers that link past and future cities (Buda et al., 2021). Architecture as a sign can provide a way for each generation to write its image in the environment that is already built, hence bringing the creative/aesthetic community and society together (Chan et al., 2024), but the discussions going on at the moment disclose that there are gaps between regulation and practice. To give an instance, in a recent webinar, Chris Miele argued that a great deal of effort is committed to the preservation of old buildings as compared to the promotion of new design in historic settings which results in the shortage of distinctiveness and the dividing line between the generations, whereas Rebecca Madgin maintained that the cheap perception of place comprises more than just nostalgia and includes "wow sensibilities", which are aesthetic and emotional responses characterized by admiration and adoration. The absence of these links between design approaches and regulatory principles points to the existence of unresolving historic identity layers issues, particularly in the equilibrium between heterogeneous and homogeneous contexts.

METHODS

This article utilizes a mixed-methods research approach. It combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to examine the effects of design strategies on the historical identity layers of the North Nicosia Walled City. Mixed-methods research involves data collection, analysis, and inference from both paradigms to gain a deeper and more accurate understanding of complicated issues, by using the advantages of each.

This approach goes beyond the two methodological types that have been tested across different studies, and thus, it allows the researchers to use various techniques. The qualitative part of the study provides an understanding of the relationship between design strategies, regulatory principles, and historic places, while the quantitative part offers confirmation and makes complex interactions understandable to be used for more trustworthy scientific interpretations.

The same types of mixed methods were used by (Farmer & Knapp, 2008; Alhmoud & Alhmoud, 2024) in his work on the long-term effects of interpretation programs at a historic site, and by researchers who studied the regeneration of derelict industrial areas in urban China (Berta et al., 2016). Furthermore (Li et al., 2021) used mixed methods to identify challenges in the adaptive reuse of architectural heritage, and (Menconi et al., 2018) utilized them to suggest interventions for the improvement of environmental performance and enhancement of resilience in the case of the listed historic buildings.

1. Research Process

The search process utilized several terms such as contemporary architecture, new designs, modern architecture, and new constructions but each term was always connected to the idea of working within or responding to the historic environments. Two case studies from the Selimiye neighborhood were chosen to investigate this concept in the real world, and the analysis was done according to the qualitative approach described in the RMI framework. This framework, which helped to form the five main criteria, was: the use of large-scale design typologies; principles derived from conservation regulations; the degree of harmony or compatibility with the surrounding context; the way people visually perceive and appreciate the place; and the nature of the historic setting, whether mixed or consistent in character.

A number of visuals were used to back up the research, such as maps that were taken from the Lefkoşa Municipality online archive, and pictures that were taken from different platforms like PetalPixel, VICE, and Anne Travel Foodie. Besides these, there were also Google Earth views, photographs, and direct site observations.

First, two buildings from the North Nicosia Walled City: A. Sabor Restaurant near the Yunus Emre Enstitüsü on Selimiye Square along Müftü Hilmi Street, and B. the Istimdami Koruma Office on Müftü Asım Efendi Street were selected because of the following reasons:

I) They show changes, which have been made after the period of the city's stagnation of development following the 1974 division.

II) These buildings were erected in the TRNC period and before the Crossing period (1983–2003). Bi-communal efforts to rehabilitate deteriorating neighborhoods on both sides of the city were starting to bear fruits in this period.

III) It is the Selimiye area that is historically significant where these buildings are located. At that time, the area was suffering from considerable architectural decline and demographic shifts.

IV) Their growth was in line with conservation principles at the international, national, and local levels.

(V) Their visual interaction with the surrounding urban fabric made comparative examination possible (Figure 1).

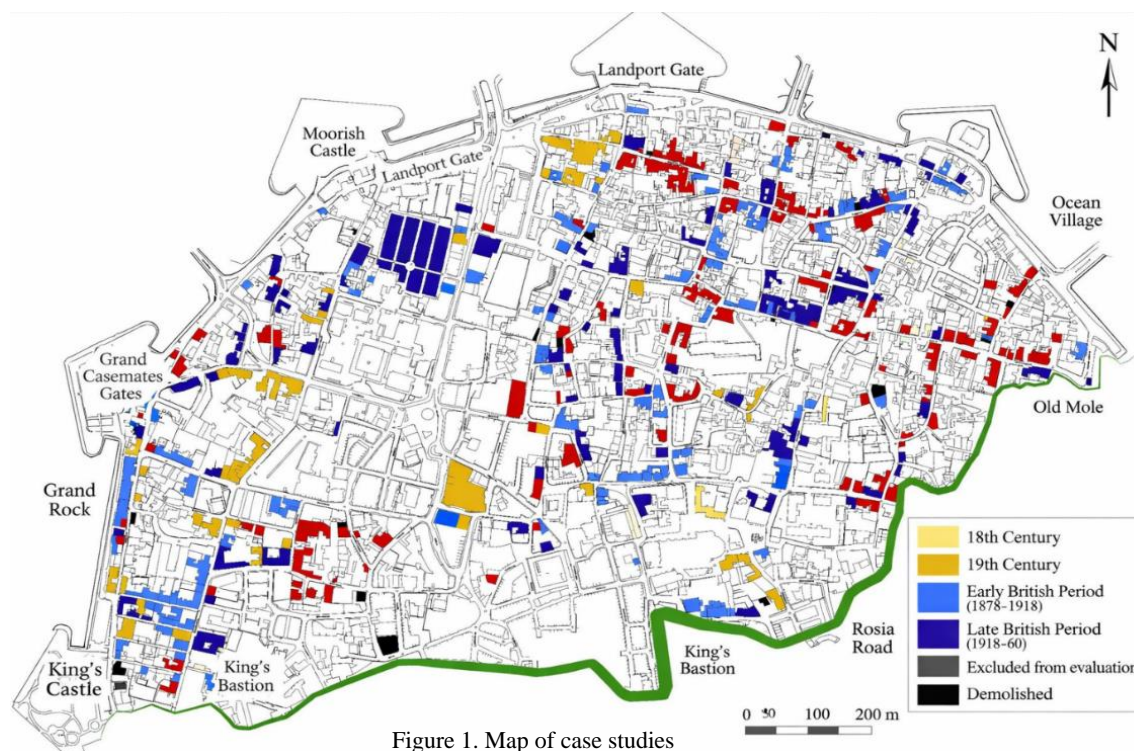


Figure 1. Map of case studies

Case A is the northeast side of Selimiye that directly faces the square. It was initially a house later merged into the visual context of the historic node. Even though it is a recent addition, the building's general shape and layout are in line with the surrounding traditional buildings' flow, though the construction materials and colors vary significantly, as can be seen in Figure 2 (Cases A). One of the features that came into view is the Cumba, which is quite prominently here; this feature, deeply rooted in Ottoman domestic architecture, was at one time typical of the twelve northern neighborhoods of the Walled City and visually supports the building to be of a genre like contextual uniformity, referential design, and simulation.



Figure 2. Case A. Traditional courtyard house in the historic walled city of Nicosia. (a) Main entrance façade, (b) interior courtyard, (c) load-bearing stone walls, (d) traditional wooden roof system, Photographs taken at the historic walled city of Nicosia in August 2025 Adopted (Muslu, 2024)

Case B located to the northwest of the Selimiye Mosque and used as an Employment Protection Office, is more conspicuously different from its immediate surroundings in terms of materials and color. However, it still has its own version of the Cumba, which is a British colonial style as a semi-open balcony, depicted again in Figure 3.

Its flat roof is a characteristic feature of British Period II architecture and thus is adding another historical layer, creating a hybridized architectural expression. While the two buildings do combine fairly well with the general street atmosphere, the blending of their stylistic references from different periods results in a somewhat disjointed composition. As a result, the visual reading of Case B is associated with typologies such as contextual continuity, abstract symbolism, harmonic contrast, differential treatments, and other modes of integration.

2. Data Specification

By using both qualitative and quantitative data, the authors focused on the specific documents of published research and conservation regulatory sources. Besides, the authors used a variety of materials such as books, book chapters, and other documentary references that, taken together, underpin the present understanding of the topic.



Figure 3. Case B. Late Ottoman residential building in Nicosia, (a) Street elevation, (b) internal circulation space, (c) structural wall system, (d) traditional floor construction, Photographs taken at the walled city in August 2025, Adopted (Muslu, 2024)

The case studies illustrate examples that were picked out of the authors' broader research, which was an investigation of the reappearance of forgery-related expressions in the complex historic fabric of the North Nicosia Walled City.

In order to have a good command of the material and to interpret it, they used the prepared checklists which were based on current inventory forms and they structured the data by means of different sorting techniques, tables, statistical tools, diagrams, charts, and a variety of visualization and image-enhancement methods, all of which facilitated the elucidation of the patterns and supported the analytical process.

3. Limitations

The literature review in this research gave an overall idea of the current design debates and conservation principles being considered in response to new architectural interventions in the historic area. Nevertheless, the actual study was limited to the northern part of the Nicosia Walled City mainly because this area offered readily accessible examples of how the implementation of policy statements is translated into everyday practice. Their emphasis, however, does not indicate that the southern half of the city is not of equal importance. In fact, looking at that area might also be the way to a valuable comparison, particularly concerning how each side deals with the issue of the historical identity preservation when facing new developments not only within the walls but also along their immediate edges.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The different sorting stages of the various design strategies yielded findings in two tiers: the first stage of the sorting revealed eleven design types that designers typically use when adding new layers to historic contexts, with each one being influenced by the surrounding conditions; the second stage combined these results and added six more, thus forming a wider and more inclusive conceptual classification which integrates the results of both levels and is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Design typologies

Contextual Design Approaches	Sources
Contextualism preferences (replication and contrast)	67
Contextual approaches (contextual uniformity, contextual juxtaposition, contextual continuity, freestyle)	44
Compatibility and differentiation	39
Interpreting the historic context (modernist, historicized, and hybrid)	65
Contextual compatibility and admiration preference	40
Contextual value interpretation	42
Contextual architectural styles	43
Contextual typologies based on qualities that are distinct, specific, or indistinct (mimetic, associative, and contrasting)	47
Contextual continuity via creation of new architectural emergencies	48
Formal fitting into the historic context (imitation and abstraction)	68
Contextual image through a model (too modern and too historic)	49

The results shown in Table 2 indicate that designers have for the most part used reflective and selective-reflective approaches in their changes of historic settings, hence they have mostly referred to the typologies of these approaches. While analyzing the data, the researchers found that the words "contrast" and "contrasting," which are generally thought to be the same in the literature, were deliberately separated in order to correspond to different conceptual origins: "contrast" goes along with progressive design thinking, while "contrasting" shows features of typical fashionista approaches. This specification facilitated solving the classification issue that had been ambiguous for a long time.

Table 2. Design approaches classification

Design approaches (new class)	Design typologies	Brief notes	Frequency
Indicative approaches	Philosophical, genius loci, and prescriptive.	Approaches that serve as a sign and bring about the attributes of similarities between the new and the old.	8.3%
Reflective approaches	Facadism, re-founding, morphological, parody, impressionistic, contextual uniformity, pastiche, literal replication, imitation, referential, simulation.	Approaches that reflect previous character and patterns of the old.	26.3%
Selective reflective approaches	Collage city, contextual continuity, abstract symbolism, stylistic intention within a style, abstract reference, version, harmonic contrast, differential, integration, partitioning, and traditional.	New selection of certain elements or components of old preference.	28.5%
Resiliency approaches	Intellectual, strategic, neutral, participatory, subtle, and humanistic.	Design approaches that are neither old-biased nor new-motivated.	15.4%
Progressive approaches	Spatialism, contextual juxtaposition, opposite, analogy, contrast, spectrum interpretation, modern, picturesque.	New work grows in innovative stages with age, without a common language	17.2%
Fashionista approaches	Intentional opposition, contrasting, freestyle, arrogant.	Approaches that insert surprise.	8.4%

Each of the principles (a-u) for the horizontal preference check was tested against the frequency of the emphasis by the regulatory bodies, and the mean scores in both directions were the reference for determining the 11 principles that were most consistently prioritized. It is important to note that bar b, which was mainly concerned with the protection of a monument's character, its setting, and its historic value together with the avoidance of demolition, seemed to be the guiding principles, which were dominant, almost, among all the bodies. These horizontal preference patterns also served as a reason for understanding why the principles had resulted in an equal ranking.

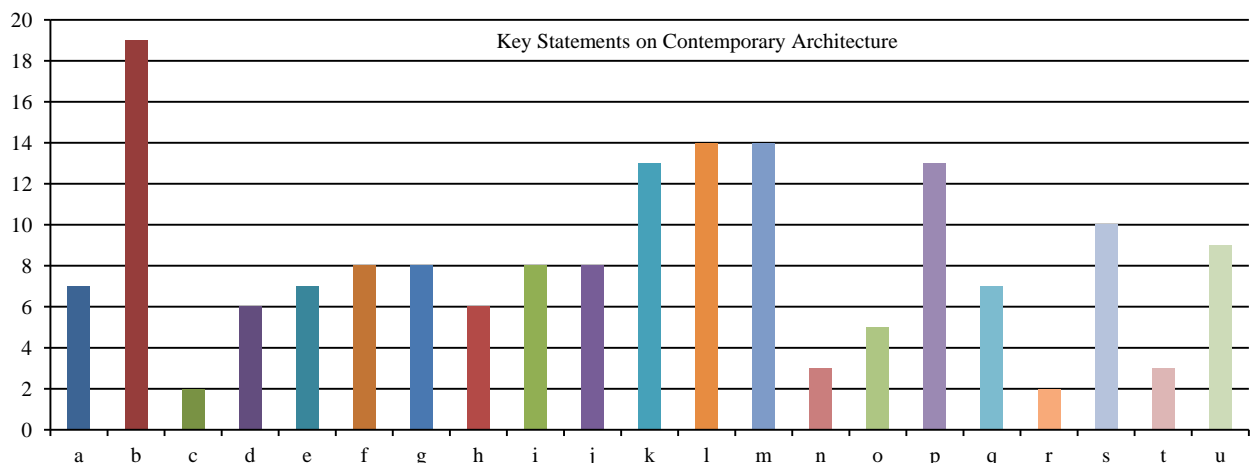


Figure 4. Principles and preferences for contemporary architecture

The trends illustrated in Figure 4 emphasize a very sharp contrast between different regulatory levels with national bodies being highly in favor of contemporary architecture (about 91.4%) while international organizations being the least by only roughly 9.3%. On the basis of these findings, six ranks were created to organize the eleven principles that represent the way contemporary architecture can be introduced in the historic setting and the percentage values assigned to each rank made it clearer why certain principles had the same position.

The first rank, which almost exclusively deals with the protection of monuments, can be considered as the dominant one, whereas the sixth rank relating to the recognition of the expressive qualities of contemporary architecture was the least talked about, as reflected in Table 3.

Table 3. Regulatory principles

Guideline Criteria	Percentage	Rank
B. Protection of monuments' character, surroundings, and historic values, and not demolition.	10.21%	1st
L. Contemporary architecture as part of town-planning schemes for future development demands administrative resources.	6.61%	2nd
M. Avoid new uses that destroy residents' livelihoods and historic conditions.	6.61%	
K. New role/adaptation of the 'historic groups' and authenticity/integrity should be regarded.	6.45%	3rd
P. New should be harmonious/contextualized with its surroundings/whole town.	6.45%	
S. Safeguarding the natural or manmade environment as an umbrella concept for heritage care (activities and interventions).	5.76%	4th
U. Duplicate Venice Charter principles.	5.23%	5th
F. Rigorous scrutiny of contemporary proposals/new materials by specialists.	4.66%	6th
G. Permit change of function/modifications as urban evolution/continuity.	4.66%	
I. New must be distinct and bear a contemporary stamp (mark of our age).	4.23%	7th
J. Valorization of cultural heritage as tools for progress.	4.23%	

Afterwards, the results of the examination of the case studies against five criteria derived from the literature and the previous qualitative review (shown in Figure 5) demonstrated a significant dependence on reflective and selective reflective design approaches. The principles adopted in both instances were mostly the same as the top three ranked categories, thus indicating a consistent relationship with the character of the study area.

Whereas the Case A sounded like a reminiscence, Case B brought a feeling of newness, a difference that shows a moderate level of acceptance of the addition of new architectural layers as a way of expressing the contemporary lifestyle. Nevertheless, both examples were located within a historically rich urban context. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of conservation principles and regulatory preferences influencing the introduction of contemporary architecture within historic contexts. The chart compares the relative emphasis of different regulatory levels (international, national, and local bodies) on eleven key principles, revealing clear variations in priorities.

The results indicate a strong dominance of monument protection and preservation of historical character, while principles related to the expressive and innovative qualities of contemporary architecture receive significantly less attention. The ranked structure highlights how regulatory frameworks tend to favor reflective and selective-reflective approaches over progressive or expressive design tendencies.

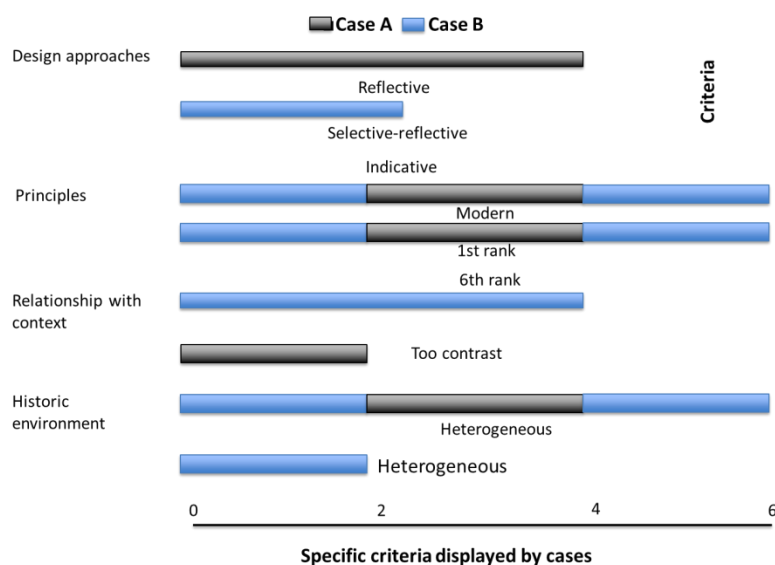


Figure 5. Case studies' criteria assessment

The Old City historical changes illustrate the significant impact the Ottoman and British periods had on its complex character, although both in a very different way. The Ottomans were more of a hands-on type; their additions were

mostly procedures of reuse or restoration that did not challenge but rather extended the older fabric, so in the case of a major change like the one of the conversion of St. Sophia Cathedral into the Selimiye Mosque the previous identity was not removed but integrated with the new one. In contrast, the British administration with its different mindset undertook the city by the means of demolitions and planning measures which disrupted the earlier layers and thus effectively unchained modern interventions that changed the rhythm of the historic environment.

Between these extremes, the later phases from the Lusignan period to the years of the Cyprus Republic were inclined to selective and reflective design responses, most of the time trying to imitate the already existing and to stay in conversation with the surrounding context. Nevertheless, the recent TRNC period tells of a complicated time when imitating the old forms and keeping the inherited looks were ways of projecting the new identity claims, sometimes without recognizing the city's longstanding plural layers. This also played into a bigger ideological plan to depict an Anatolian character in the northern part of the island, a move that resulted in limiting the space for new design languages and, to some extent, wrongly understanding the city's history of layered change.

If the conservation principles in Table 2 are compared with the design tendencies in Table 3, the connection is obvious: the principles with the highest ranking are very consistent with reflective and selective reflective design approaches, a relationship which can be recognized both in the wording of the official documents and the visual patterns shared by the case studies (see Figure 5). The conservation regulations in North Cyprus are in line with this trend by stipulating that new interventions should be very close to the old fabric. Meanwhile, the places where designers played up the contrast seems to have been a matter of necessity, especially in those parts of the city where the decay had reached a very high level.

Among these are the examples of historic cities of Lithuania and Türkiye, and some towns of Poland where regulatory attention to conservation principles has been presented as the main factor behind the continued influence of architectural work to not only refurbish but also fundamentally eke. Generally, the adherence to the set guidelines in the studied examples shows a very strong influence on the design decisions both in terms of direction and final product. Previously, the debate around conservation principles had been tackled in broad terms and over chronological periods, this study locates the issue beyond those and delineates specific design typologies of each major category instead of just enumerating the wide categories as commonly done in the literature (Buda et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021; Macdonald et al., 2018). It is not less significant the fact that historic places are the ones that actually give rise to a personality and the architects become the main characters who by their decisions interpret and convey it.

The distinctions made in Table 2 account for this aspect of the role by prompting the designers not to rely on predetermined patterns but rather to respond more selectively to the local features. The previous works have suggested that quick, vibrant, and ever-evolving milieus could be a source for the pitch of the creative thinking, whereas in more fragile environments the creative output may be limited; however, these approaches as such are not problematic, what matters is the manner of their application and the impressions they evoke.

Simply put, the insertion of something new into the old does not necessitate going back to outdated methods, and even a minimalistic gesture can still be of support to and intervention in the historic environment if it embraces a preservation mindset that sees continuity as well as the co-existence of new layers in the urban fabric.

The first point of this research that design methods have features that can be directed in different ways depending on the nature of a historical context becomes more obvious when one considers how mixed and uniform surroundings respond differently to the same intervention. The idea of applying the case studies, a pattern is visible whereby new additions frequently change simple imitation, thus, they do not create a distinct layer but repeat the context's existing character. In fact, although these pieces incorporate modern materials, their aesthetic appeal is often reminiscent of the old, which reveals a one-way preservation rather than an open dialogue between time periods.

The results show that simply maintaining the existing character is not enough to represent the city's changing identity and may cause a homogenization that dulls the richness of historic areas. This is not to say that contemporary architecture is inherently problematic. On the contrary, well-thought-out design principles can bring about coherence and equilibrium without compromising the visual or cultural diversity of a place. Table 3 illustrates how previous rules put most of their emphasis on the protection of monuments thus allowing very few new architectural ideas and indirectly giving rise to repetitive design results that are similar to those of mid-century modernity.

When all heritage sites are considered as having the same conditions, it is particularly difficult for designers, conservation experts, to recognize and maintain the characteristics which set one place apart from another. In this context, the use of interpretive design approaches seems to be a delicate, flexible, and ever-changing process that if not handled properly, even lively historical settings can become dull as a result of design strategies and regulatory constraints leading to replication instead of thoughtful engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

The research reveals that design philosophies significantly influence the transformation of the historical personality of old cities, as they act as a bridge between the objectives of urban heritage conservation and the wider social and economic requirements of contemporary urban development. Such approaches like the Historic Urban Landscape framework exemplify this by not only focusing on the physical fabric but also including the full range of the tangible and intangible qualities which make up the lived environment, such as cultural diversity, socio-economic conditions, environmental pressures, and community values. It's a very important point: using the past as a reference should not be equated with producing historical styles, and the results emphasize that the design approaches' impact is very much dependent on the context: it is determined by the way conservation principles are understood and put into practice.

As a matter of fact, when these principles lead to replication, newer stages simply reflect former architectural forms thus visually reducing the sequential depth which is especially important in layered historic environments like the North Nicosia Walled City. On the other hand, if design strategies are utilized in a manner that acknowledges and enhances the existing character, then new interventions become a positive force as they help to maintain the historical layers' continuity. In the end, it is to what extent designers perceive and react to the unique character of each historic context that their works serve as a means to either deepen or shallow the evolving identity of the urban heritage landscape.

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