

# **Historic concrete buildings in the Republic of Cyprus**

Conservation and re-use: actors, tasks and approach

**Project: CONSECH20**

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## 1. Introduction

CONSECH20 (*CONSErvation of 20<sup>th</sup> century concrete Cultural Heritage in urban changing environments*) is a European Project, supported by the JPI Cultural Heritage in Changing Environments programme, which focuses on 20<sup>th</sup> century historic concrete constructions (i.e. structures dating primarily from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until ca. 1960<sup>1</sup>). The project particularly explores structures with social interest in the sense of bringing people together (e.g. for recreation, inhabiting, working), as it seeks to strengthen the link between society and 20<sup>th</sup> century concrete architectural heritage.

The aim of this report is to outline the procedures for the conservation and re-use of listed buildings, with a particular emphasis on historic concrete buildings, in the Republic of Cyprus. At the same time, this report will identify the actors driving the process for the protection, conservation, and re-use of such buildings. Chapter 2 offers a short history of concrete buildings on the island (based on a non-extensive literature review), along with a review of the increasing attention these buildings are receiving locally. Chapter 3 describes the legislative framework for the conservation of historic concrete buildings in the Republic of Cyprus and discusses the role of different actors in their conservation and re-use potential.

Given the social objectives of CONSECH20, the report reflects on the possibilities to include the wider public in decisions around the conservation and reuse of 20<sup>th</sup> century concrete heritage buildings. We conclude with a series of thoughts regarding the opportunities and limitations for the protection of concrete cultural heritage structures in Cyprus.

## 2. A short history of concrete buildings in Cyprus

The history of concrete buildings in Cyprus is linked with the shift to modernity. The latter has, in turn, been linked with the island's histories of colonialism and decolonization, nation-building, socioeconomic modernization and identity politics (Pyla and Phokaides, 2009<sup>2</sup>). From the 1930s onwards, cities in Cyprus grew considerably and the first public buildings were constructed along the lines of international modernism (Fereos and Phokaides, 2006<sup>3</sup>). Two channels through which modernist architecture was introduced on the island may be identified. On one hand, (primarily) the British Colonial Government appointed architects from abroad for the design of Governmental buildings and schools. On the other, Cypriot architects with studies abroad, in countries such as Greece, France and the UK, began to return to the island and establish their architectural practices. One of the first Cypriot architects affected by modernist architecture, for example, was Polys Michailides, who spent a short term in Le Corbusier's office in Paris, and collaborated with Thoukidides Valentis in Athens, before permanently moving back to Cyprus around 1930 (Fereos and Phokaides, 2006<sup>4</sup>).

At the same time, besides the Government itself, there were other actors who, for different reasons, opted to move away from vernacular architecture towards modern architecture. From the research conducted for selecting the Cypriot case studies for the CONSECH20 project, it became evident that these other actors varied and ranged from private individuals, who chose to build their residence in a

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<sup>1</sup> In Cyprus, the structures which fall under CONSECH20 are those which have been built until 1965, since the introduction of concrete to the construction industry was delayed. Furthermore, a number of concrete structures were built after the 1960 independence.

<sup>2</sup> Pyla, P., & Phokaides, P. (2009). Architecture and Modernity in Cyprus. Virtual Tour – 20<sup>th</sup> Century. EAHN Newsletter No 2/09.

<sup>3</sup> Fereos, S., & Phokaides, P. (2006). Architecture in Cyprus between the 1930s and 1970s. *Docomomo*, 35, 15-19.

<sup>4</sup> Fereos, S., & Phokaides, P. (2006). Architecture in Cyprus between the 1930s and 1970s. *Docomomo*, 35, 15-19.

modernist style, to private companies, particularly in the cases where the building constructed was a commercial one or a factory, or companies linked to the Cooperative movement, which also emerged and developed around the same period, as well as the Church itself.

It is important to note that a number of reinforced concrete (R/C) buildings selected in the framework of our study may be described architecturally as hybrids, since they combine the modern and traditional, something which reflects the transitional nature of the local modern buildings of that period. In these cases, local limestone is usually combined with concrete, with an outcome that may be characterized as local idiom (Fereos and Phokaides, 2006<sup>5</sup>).

Following the Second World War, an increasing trend towards urbanization introduced what is called the aesthetic of “corporate modernism”, with concrete-frame apartment buildings and office blocks beginning to spread out of historic city centers (Pyla and Phokaides, 2009).

The first cement plant on the island was built by the Cyprus Cement Company in Limassol in 1956<sup>6</sup>. In 1967, the 150,000-ton production facility of Vasilikos Cement (a Limited company founded in 1963)<sup>7</sup> was also launched. These two local cement factories “marked” the history of concrete buildings in Cyprus, as the production of concrete on the island became exclusively local since then.

### 3. Legislative Framework

Up until 1972, heritage buildings in Cyprus could only be granted legal protection via ‘The Antiquities Law’ (Article 6 ‘*Authority to the Cabinet to declare ancient monuments*’). This law, which dates back to 1905, gave the jurisdiction to the Ministerial Council, following the recommendation of the Director of the Department of Antiquities, to declare as ‘Ancient Monument’ objects, buildings or sites considered to be of public interest by reason of their historic, architectural, traditional, artistic or archaeological value. It was by this law that the majority of the archaeological sites, many historic buildings, as well as a small number of traditional buildings, were given the status of an ‘Ancient Monument’ and were thus protected from demolition or alteration of their authentic character<sup>8</sup>.

In 1972, the ‘Town and Country Planning Law’ was introduced and has since been the main legal tool for the protection of primarily vernacular architecture, with over 100 preservation orders issued until today, covering more than 5,000 buildings across the Republic of Cyprus. The majority of these buildings are of vernacular architecture, whilst a much smaller number fall into the category of ‘modern architecture’<sup>9</sup>. Specifically, through Article 38 - ‘*Conservation Decree*’ of the aforementioned Law, preservation orders can be issued by the Minister of Interior, on the recommendation of the Department of Town Planning and Housing (TPH), declaring as ‘listed’ individual buildings or structures, groups of buildings or sites of special / particular social, architectural, historical or other interest / character. There are no restrictions regarding the age of the building which can be recommended for listing through a protection decree, or indeed the type of construction material. Once listed, these buildings are protected in the sense that their demolition, or any alterations which would change their original character, become illegal. Legal owners of listed buildings have the

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<sup>5</sup> Fereos, S., & Phokaides, P. (2006). Architecture in Cyprus between the 1930s and 1970s. *Docomomo*, 35, 15-19.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior (1958). Minerals Yearbook, Volume 1. Metals and Minerals (Except Fuels).

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.vassiliko.com/en/the-company/milestones>

<sup>8</sup> Philokyprou, M. 2017. *Cyprus. In: Time Frames: Conservation Policies for Twentieth-century Architectural Heritage*. Carughi, U., & Visone, M. (Eds.). Routledge.

<sup>9</sup> Philokyprou, M. 2017. *Cyprus. In: Time Frames: Conservation Policies for Twentieth-century Architectural Heritage*. Carughi, U., & Visone, M. (Eds.). Routledge.

responsibility and obligation to submit any planned alterations to the competent Section (i.e. the Conservation Section) of the Department of TPH and wait for permission before they can continue with their project<sup>10</sup>. Recognizing the economic burden which ensues the conservation of a building, particularly since one needs to follow certain principles and rules issued by the Department of TPH, the Government offers certain economic incentives, in order to make it attractive for the owner to restore, rather than let the building deteriorate. The incentives include: (i) direct financial incentives for the restoration of a building, (ii) possibility to transfer / sell building coefficient in the cases where a building has been listed and restored and thus there is no possibility to use the existing building coefficient, and (iii) tax incentives, whereby the owner is able to receive certain tax exemptions<sup>11</sup>.

There are two ways in which a building (or a group of buildings) can be proposed for listing under the 'Town and Country Planning Law'; either following an application from the legal owner of the house, or following a suggestion by the Department of TPH itself. In both cases, an argument needs to be put forward regarding the special social, architectural, historical or other character of the building, group of buildings or area. The Department of TPH is obliged to inform the legal owner regarding its intentions to list a building and, if for any reason the owner is against the listing of the property, he / she has the right to submit a hierarchical appeal objecting it. The example of the 'Melkonian School', which is among the first examples of buildings where reinforced concrete was used on the island (built in 1926), is a prime one. Built as a boarding school for Armenian orphans and consequently served as the school for the Armenian community in Cyprus, the 'Melkonian School' was listed via a 'Conservation Decree' in 2004. The owners submitted a hierarchical appeal which was rejected, and then proceeded with an appeal in the Court of Justice, which ruled in favour of the owners and cancelled the original listing<sup>12</sup>. The Department of TPH then proceeded with the listing of a smaller area of the Melkonian School, including only the three original buildings and the small forest, which was planted in front of them as a memorial to the Armenians who were killed during the genocide. It is thus more straightforward for the Department of TPH, in terms of its argumentation, to suggest and proceed with the listing of a group of buildings or a whole area, rather than of individual buildings, particularly if there are objections from the owner. Such examples include the Conservation Decree Κ.Δ.Π. 237/1992<sup>13</sup> which covers a whole area called a 'Special Character Area' (*Περιοχή Ειδικού Χαρακτήρα*) in the centre of the city of Limassol, which includes a list of 113 buildings of vernacular, neoclassical and modernist architecture. Another example is the Conservation Decree Κ.Δ.Π. 297/2012<sup>14</sup> which is dictated by (among others) the fact that the buildings listed by that Decree are both individually, as well as parts of an assemblage, characteristic and / or representative and / or selected samples of historical / traditional industrial architecture. This Decree also talks about the fact that the surrounding area of the listed buildings in question is an integral part, and a necessary requirement for their exposure. The latter highlights that the Decree, besides the protection of the buildings, also suggests that the industrial landscape is considered to be an integral aspect of what needs to be safeguarded. Finally, this Decree also proclaims that the aforementioned industrial landscape is part of the historical / traditional fabric of the industrial area of the city of Limassol, which must thus be protected.

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<sup>10</sup> Town and Planning Department of the Republic of Cyprus. *Management of Listed Buildings*.

[http://www.moi.gov.cy/MOI/tph/tph.nsf/page40\\_gr/page40\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.moi.gov.cy/MOI/tph/tph.nsf/page40_gr/page40_gr?OpenDocument)

<sup>11</sup> Town and Planning Department of the Republic of Cyprus. Scheme for Funding of Listed Buildings:

[http://www.moi.gov.cy/MOI/tph/tph.nsf/page41\\_gr/page41\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.moi.gov.cy/MOI/tph/tph.nsf/page41_gr/page41_gr?OpenDocument)

<sup>12</sup> The court decision can be found here: [http://www.cylaw.org/cgi-](http://www.cylaw.org/cgi-bin/open.pl?file=apofaseis/aad/meros_4/2006/rep/2006_4_1001.htm&qstring=%EC%E5%EB%EA%EF%ED%E9%2A)

[bin/open.pl?file=apofaseis/aad/meros\\_4/2006/rep/2006\\_4\\_1001.htm&qstring=%EC%E5%EB%EA%EF%ED%E9%2A](http://www.cylaw.org/cgi-bin/open.pl?file=apofaseis/aad/meros_4/2006/rep/2006_4_1001.htm&qstring=%EC%E5%EB%EA%EF%ED%E9%2A)

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.cylaw.org/KDP/data/1992\\_1\\_237.pdf](http://www.cylaw.org/KDP/data/1992_1_237.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.cylaw.org/KDP/data/2012\\_1\\_297.pdf](http://www.cylaw.org/KDP/data/2012_1_297.pdf)

#### 4. Listing and Understanding the Value of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Historic Concrete in Cyprus

In Cyprus, like in many other countries in the EU, the focus regarding the conservation of historic buildings and monuments currently falls primarily on vernacular heritage. This seems to be also strongly reflected in the views of the broader society.

The main inventory on 'Architectural Heritage' (following the Granada Convention) is managed by the Department of TPH, and it currently consists of more than 10,000 buildings (mainly traditional), accompanied by more than 80 reference maps. As mentioned above (section 3), approximately 5,000 of these buildings have already been listed. The inventory's index cards register information on each individual building: location, type, use, legal status and a brief description of its architectural form (typology, construction principles and materials)<sup>15</sup>.

Several attempts have taken place over the past decade to record buildings which go beyond the traditional Cypriot vernacular architecture. In 2009, the Department of TPH funded the publication entitled '*Learning from the Heritage of the Modern*' within the framework of the European Heritage Days, an institution established by the Council of Europe with the aim to enable the wider public to learn and appreciate the cultural and architectural heritage of its country. The DOCOMOMO Cyprus Foundation<sup>16</sup> prepared an extended list of significant projects constructed roughly between 1920-1980, the goal of which was to showcase the impact of local modern architecture in modernization and the shaping of the built environment in Cyprus. The list included not only single buildings, but also sites and neighbourhoods; i.e. from houses to factories, from simple structures to entire landscapes.

Currently, there is an emerging research hub on architectural modernism in Cyprus, which helps to advance our knowledge in the field, both historically and conceptually. An example is Mesarch, a research laboratory at the University of Cyprus focusing on the history and theory of Modern Architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean, conducting historical and archival research on the Architecture and Modernization Histories of Cyprus, linking this to modern architecture within international scholarly debates. Mesarch also aims at documenting and digitizing relevant archival material. It is important to highlight at this point that, just like in the case of the DOCOMOMO Cyprus list (and the list of case study buildings selected in the framework of CONSECH20), in the Mesarch archive the majority of historic concrete buildings identified have not been listed yet, though this does not mean that they do not represent the Cultural Heritage of the country.

Despite the fact that the general public and local stakeholders in Cyprus only started to show an interest in 20<sup>th</sup> century historic concrete buildings in the recent past, from the list of case study buildings selected in the framework of CONSECH20, it appears that 20<sup>th</sup> century historic concrete buildings, constructed either with R/C columns and infill walls, or R/C slabs and masonry load bearing walls, began to become listed in the mid- to late 1980s (ca. 15 years after the relative legal framework was put in place (see section 3)). In 1986, for example, the historic Ledra Palace hotel (1947-49), located since 1974 in the UN Buffer Zone in Nicosia, was listed as part of a 'Protection Decree' that listed many buildings in that specific area of the capital of the Republic of Cyprus. In 1988, the 7-storey G. Pavlides Building (1957-60) was listed; this was probably the first listed building along clear modernist lines, together with its 'sister' building in Nicosia, the Alexandros Demetriou Tower (1957-

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<sup>15</sup> Philokyprou, M. 2017. *Cyprus. In: Time Frames: Conservation Policies for Twentieth-century Architectural Heritage*. Carughi, U., & Visone, M. (Eds.). Routledge.

<sup>16</sup> Docomomo Cyprus, 2014. Cyprus – 100 Most Important Building Sites and Neighbourhoods. International Scientific Committee on Registers – Docomomo International. Available at: [https://issuu.com/docomomo.cyprus/docs/\\_importantbuildingsdocomomocy\\_18\\_04?fbclid=IwAR3\\_p6BNXnhWgtJxOu\\_khRozAzGcvMLnzL2fdaLMQ5EyuD\\_xShrR9ASDY](https://issuu.com/docomomo.cyprus/docs/_importantbuildingsdocomomocy_18_04?fbclid=IwAR3_p6BNXnhWgtJxOu_khRozAzGcvMLnzL2fdaLMQ5EyuD_xShrR9ASDY)

59), which was nevertheless listed much later in 2006. Both of these buildings were designed by the famous Cypriot architect Neoptolemos Michaelides, of whom a number of other samples of his work have also been listed. Examples include the Theodotos Kanthos Residence (1949-52) and the Neoptolemos Michaelides Residence (1964-1966) in Nicosia. A number of Municipal Markets in the Nicosia area have also been listed, such as the Old Municipal Market (1965) designed by the architect Stavros Economou, the Pallouriotissa Municipal Market (1950) designed by the architect Panayiotis Stavrinos and the Ayios Andreas Municipal Market (date unknown). Unfortunately, other fine examples of modern architecture in the form of Municipal Markets, such as the Larnaca Municipal Market built around the 1930s by Polys Michaelides, have been demolished. Hence, as Philokyprou<sup>17</sup> highlights, there is a clear need for broadening the local listing policy and for creating a systematic inventory of buildings belonging to the period under examination. The process, however, appears to be moving really slow, albeit in the right direction, with a number of buildings of that period being demolished before receiving protection status.

One must not forget that there are several factors (such as environmental changes, changes in the surrounding landscape, natural disasters etc.), which may be considered critical for the deterioration or loss of historic reinforced concrete structures. This further complicates the protection and conservation of such structures. Furthermore, the historic proximity of the period early concrete buildings were constructed, the absence of a systematic study for the architecture of the modern movement in Cyprus, as well as the abundance of relevant diverse examples on the island, impede the documentation and evaluation of these buildings. The scattered knowledge, and the indifference of both the public and local stakeholders, is leading to the loss of at least part of this architectural heritage due to demolition or overwhelming alterations with the aim of new development or reuse. Even when efforts are made to restore historic reinforced concrete buildings, the “blind” application of the various safety provisions, which are designed for the retrofit of contemporary concrete structures, can lead to a failure to recognize their original architectural value. Furthermore, insufficient knowledge of the correct restoration practices can often result in architectural geometrical alterations (especially problematic in structures of the modern movement with specific geometries), or in more adverse deterioration after the repair of such structures (usually in cases of faulty repair techniques in corroded members).

The above render the study and understanding of the values, diversity and wealth of early concrete heritage, as well as the adoption of criteria for its evaluation, imminent, with the aim to protect and preserve at least the most representative examples. Taking into account that the modern movement was not solely an architectural trend, but more of a philosophy, the evaluation and selection criteria for listing early concrete buildings should include broader parameters, such as the technological novelties, or the contribution to political or socio-economic development.

#### **4.1 Role of the Civil Society in the Conservation and Reuse of Concrete Heritage Buildings**

From section 3 describing the procedures for listing a heritage building, it becomes apparent that there is currently a limited role civil society can play in putting forward buildings considered important to conserve. Thus, unless one is the legal owner of such a building, there is limited space for action at policy level, despite the Department of TPH encouraging individuals (e.g. researchers) or groups of people (i.e. organised societal groups or alliances of professionals etc.) to make relevant documented suggestions for promoting the conservation /protection of 20<sup>th</sup> century concrete heritage buildings. At the same time, it is clear that a lot is still needed in order to adequately record and document 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Philokyprou, M. 2017. *Cyprus. In: Time Frames: Conservation Policies for Twentieth-century Architectural Heritage*. Carughi, U., & Visone, M. (Eds.). Routledge.

century concrete heritage buildings in Cyprus, as there is a breadth of elements which require extensive study; these include historical and social information, as well as architectural details, specifications etc. Due to the fact that the Department of TPH is currently understaffed, they cannot themselves proceed with research to accomplish this, or indeed investigate the numerous suggestions received for listing individual buildings. Proposals are therefore sometimes rejected, not because the building is not worth to be listed, but rather because the claim is not adequately substantiated. Thus, multidisciplinary action and collaboration between the public and private sectors and academia is the key, as well as a necessity, for such an endeavour.

Recently, there has been a surge of civil society actors interested in the conservation of modernist buildings in particular; these actors have become active at the level of communicating and informing the public around the existence (to begin with), as well as the history and social importance of such buildings. These individuals, who have a background particularly in architecture, and less so in other disciplines, such as art, social science etc., have created a “space” in which such buildings gain visibility and often appreciation. Such examples are pages on social media, which are widely used to share information about buildings which fall under the modernist movement, with the most used one being a Facebook page called ‘Cypriot Modernism’<sup>18</sup>. Posts on this page tend to include (where possible) details for each building uploaded regarding the architect, contractor, year built, owner, etc. and tend to motivate discussions over these characteristics. Lately, the administrators of the group gathered all the buildings which have been posted in the group and created the ‘Map of Cypriot Modernism’<sup>19</sup> which, besides the location, allows the public to explore these buildings according to their use.

From informal discussions with a number of local actors and stakeholders, it seems that they themselves often feel weak to ensure the protection of what they consider to be 20<sup>th</sup> century concrete heritage buildings, since there is no possibility to share their views and push, at an administrative / technocratic level, for the conservation of these buildings. There are also limited discussions regarding the future use of such buildings, as it is rather (as expected) up to the legal owner to decide. In the case of the Old Municipal Market within the walls of Nicosia, for example, the decision of the Municipality (owner) to offer the building for the establishment of RISE, a Research Centre of Excellence focusing on Interactive Media, Smart Systems and Emerging Technologies, was part of the broader plan of the Municipality for the creation of an ‘Innovation Quarter’ in that area of the Old City. Despite the fact that this plan was open for public consultation, there have, nevertheless, been reactions by “users” of the Old City, as well as from admirers of the (architectural style of the) market, who envisaged the building playing a different role in the social fabric of the Old City.

## 5. Conclusions

The history of concrete structures in Cyprus is rather short. Despite the existence of a legal framework to protect 20<sup>th</sup> century historic concrete structures, the general trend tends to neglect the significance of such buildings. Important steps towards the conservation of historic reinforced concrete structures in Cyprus, particularly in the legal / technocratic framework, have recently been made, with the Department of TPH not only taking the initiative to list some important buildings of this architectural character, but also making an effort to raise public awareness around the importance of such building. Nevertheless, it is irrefutable that there is still much to be done on both accounts. Private entities are

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/cypriotmodernism/>

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[https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1MHlOhnjsDhrGHy\\_t1ElkHvrm1Ad7b9NA&ll=35.156148761265314%2C33.52520969238276&z=9&fbclid=IwAR2z5eVrNVgRqUNTDhJVpQevABjT65pprGqYo8XSWBcxG05i004WWMizUlw](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1MHlOhnjsDhrGHy_t1ElkHvrm1Ad7b9NA&ll=35.156148761265314%2C33.52520969238276&z=9&fbclid=IwAR2z5eVrNVgRqUNTDhJVpQevABjT65pprGqYo8XSWBcxG05i004WWMizUlw)

facilitating to a great extent the appreciation of such structures by a wider audience, and in general there is an evident shift among different groups of professionals (from architects to engineers, as well as artists and beyond), who in turn push institutions to take real steps towards the protection of 20<sup>th</sup> century concrete heritage buildings. Time is of course vital in this effort.

It is also important to note that preserving the architectural value of historic concrete structures presents inherent challenges, as possible methods of retrofit are limited by the demand to preserve the architectural concept. Furthermore, there are unclear guidelines, as well as limited experience in the Republic of Cyprus, to be used for successful interventions. This renders the involvement of both public and private stakeholders and actors in the process crucial.

The social aspect of historic structures is also essential and more needs to be done in order for conservation research to become really interdisciplinary in Cyprus. Many of the historic R/C buildings on the island have an interesting social background, which can in turn be used in order to not only argue for their protection, but also to facilitate their restoration and rehabilitation in such a way that will enhance their social importance and appreciation by the wider society.

Given the social objectives of CONSECH20, namely to explore and advance the potential of 20<sup>th</sup> century historic concrete as a promotion vector for social integration and cultural tourism, as well as to outline new approaches for citizen engagement in the protection of modern architectural heritage, the case of the Republic of Cyprus highlights at least some of the limitations in pushing for these social objectives. The high cost of restoring such buildings often suggests the need for the inclusion of private investors in the process, something which could limit the possibility of keeping a more open / social function to the buildings. Additionally, there seems to be a limited potential for the inclusion of society in discussing the future of such buildings. Having said this, it is neither simple nor necessarily fair to argue about circumventing the wishes of the legal owner. More needs to be discussed therefore as to how can such an endeavour move forward without impeding upon the rights of the legal owners of such buildings.