

Urban Strategy for Lemesos’ Center – A Vision for the Future

Reference number: 207

- **SUMMARY**

Limassol is the most important costal city of Cyprus and the biggest municipality with more than 100,000 inhabitants. The historical Center of the town – which is full of Ancient monuments and listed buildings – was remained underdeveloped for years due to the lack of a proper development plan or legislation. Moreover, the owners of these old properties were not able to claim any grants or benefits for the reconstruction of their buildings or for any change of their use to transfer them to anything more profitable from the original use, based on a kind of sustainable development. As a result a lot of important buildings were demolished and in there place now are standing ugly concrete towers. Apart from that, an old legislation which demanded the road’s widening, was the reason for the old road network to loose its original configuration.

The central area of Limassol covers about 2,5 square kilometers. Approximately it is the territory in which the town was already developed in 1945. The heart of it is the area of the old medieval castle, with the old port and the old Cathedral.

The area is characterized by a network of narrow, winding streets and a mix of small workshops, stores, offices, houses and apartments, all built on a pedestrian scale. It is extremely popular for tourists, who come to marvel at the ancient buildings and to shop and browse in the many stores. Generally is an integral part of the city, a crucial link with its rich past

The great and sudden expansion of population, after the war in 1974, and the total of the urban activities did not find the town properly prepared. In connection with the sudden expansion of the tourist industry and the stand still found in infrastructure, this fact created serious problems in urban organization and a burden to the environment. These problems, which are evaluated, that will be eliminated with proper city planning, are mainly the following:

In 2002, Limassol Municipality and the Ministry of Interior (Town Planning and Housing Department) issued the Area Scheme of the Center of Limassol which is a proper development plan for the Central part of the Town. This is a “putting in order” plan with certain guidelines and solutions for an urban reconstruction for the whole area in general and for each neighbourhood, even building, in particular. This instrument includes all the important aspects of development, based on sustainability, and having considered all the important planning and social matters and factors which will influent to the area, such as the new university or the new marina.

In order to access this aim in the Area Scheme were implemented certain Policies for each different aspect of development, with specific suggestions and projects which have to be realized in the following 10-12 years.

- **INTRODUCTION**

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean with an area of 9,251 square kilometers, situated at the crossroads of Africa, Asia and Europe.

The city of Lemesos is situated on the southern coast of the island. Lemesos is the second largest population center of the island and its main port. It is said to be the island's "center of gravity" lying approximately equidistant from the other three main towns, Nicosia to the north, Larnaca to the east and Paphos to the west. It has a population of approximately 160 000, of which 95 000 are within the municipality of Lemesos. It lies on the center of a triangle – shaped valley, and it has perfect traffic connection with the other parts of the island through comfortable highways.



Photo 1: General view of Lemesos

The agglomeration of Lemesos concentrates a dynamic sphere of activities, functions and services concerning all the aspects of Cyprus' financial development since:

- i. It is situated at the center of a rich area with a lot of potential for agriculture development
- ii. It is the main passenger and cargo port of the island
- iii. It has an active multi-dimensional industrial development
- iv. It is the center of commercial activities and services both on local and international level
- v. It is a popular holiday's destination as it is surrounded by beautiful sandy beaches, ancient cities and place of natural beauty.

- **HISTORICAL REVIEW**

The urban development of the central area can be divided in four historical periods. Each of them had its own specific influence on architecture and cultural heritage according to the rulers of the town. These periods are:

- i. Pre – ottoman period (500-1571) – Limassol was just a small estate around the medieval castle
- ii. Ottoman period (1571-1878) – The town was developed along the costal line
- iii. Colonial period (1878-1960) – Includes the first expansion of the town in area and population from 1910 – 1930 as it became the main export point and the biggest industrial center.

- iv. Modern period (from 1960) The creation of Limassol agglomeration and the expansion of the population after the war in 1974, as a lot of refugees from the occupied areas settled in there. (126)

- **TOWN PLANNING PROBLEMS**

In 1972 the Town and Country Planning Law, probably the most important piece of legislation regulating land development, was enacted. The law offered, for the first time, the possibility to develop a framework for rational planning guidelines, strategies, and policies in Cyprus. Implementation of the Town Planning Law was delayed, however, until December 1990, due to the need to accommodate incoming refugees from the occupied areas of Cyprus. In the meantime, municipalities relied on an outmoded Streets and Buildings Regulations Law of 1946 – whose primary purpose was to ensure the safety of buildings, and the provision of proper amenities and sanitary facilities instead of trying to control and guide development. The result was a haphazard development and degradation of natural environment.

In December 1990, the local plan for the Greater Lemesos Area, which includes the Lemesos Municipality plus the small municipalities and improvement boards adjacent to Lemesos, was adopted. The plan determines the type, size, and location of development in the metropolitan area. The plan was developed by the Government of Cyprus, after consultation with the affected local authorities.

The great and sudden expansion of population, after the war in 1974, and the total of the urban activities did not find the town properly prepared. In connection with the sudden expansion of the tourist industry, and the stand still found in infrastructure, the increase of the population created serious problems in urban organization and a burden to the environment. These problems, which are evaluated, that will be eliminated with proper city planning, are mainly the following:

- The radial and concentrated structure lead to overloading of the main roads with commercial and other uses, which downgraded the environment, especially in the city center.
- The fact that most areas contain a mix of uses, such as residential, commercial and even industrial, has a negative influence for the quality of the environment.
- The random residential development, and the phenomenon of huge areas between the residential zones which remain empty
- Industries and workshops which situated all over the town, including the cost zone, and causes certain problems for the proper and well organized development. More over this factor creates several environmental problems concerning air pollution and heavy transport.
- The lack of the necessary infrastructure, especially for the tourist and recreational development.
- The insufficient of the city structure to satisfy the increased needs of urban transport. This mainly concerns the capacity of the roads and the small number of organized parking places in the center.
- The lack of dominates or symbols of the town both in the commercial center or the seafront, of visual connections to the sea or to monuments, and in general of a proper image and a “face” of the town.

In order to improve the picture of the city, the Local Plan defined the development Strategic Policy, which in general, is included in the following:

- Encourage the organized urban development within the determined areas
- Secure segregated areas for specific uses, especially for residential development, offering a high quality life in neighborhoods
- Adapt a contemporary multi-dimensional transport policy
- Strengthen the Urban center and the central business district with uses, which will revive the area.
- Concentrate the industrial development in specific territories
- Protect the environment

Having studied the evolution of the area, it was easy to realize that we need to control the development and introduce a new plan which determine a new look, at least for the central part of the town, based on the conception of sustainability, in order to reduce the environmental pollution, succeed a high quality life in neighborhoods and have the possibility of easy access to necessary information and data concerning all the main aspects of the services offered by several Government or Municipal departments.

• **THE CENTRAL AREA**

The central area of Lemesos covers about 2,5 square kilometers. Approximately it is the territory in which the town was already developed in 1945. The heart of it is the area of the old medieval castle, with the old port and the old Cathedral.



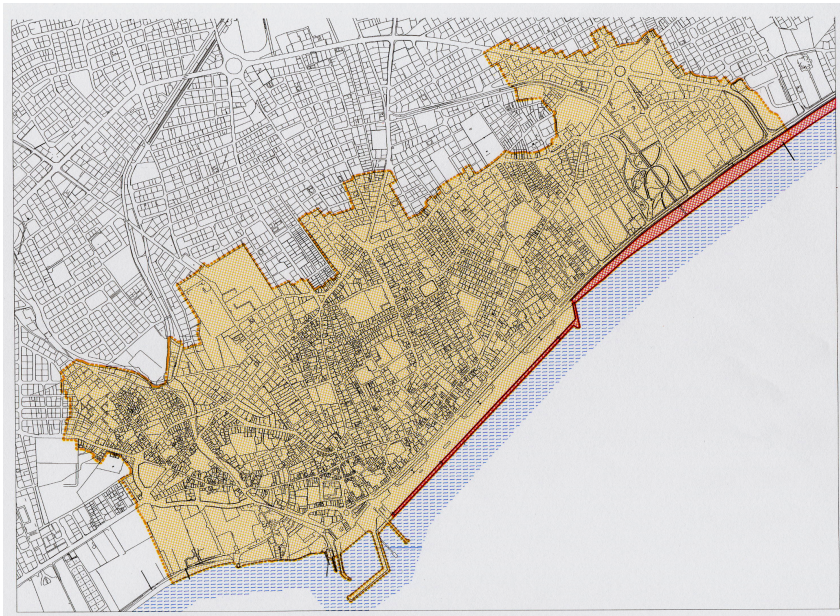
Photo 2: Central Part of Lemesos

The area is characterized by a network of narrow, winding streets and a mix of small workshops, stores, offices, houses and apartments, all built on a pedestrian scale. It is extremely popular for tourists, who come to marvel at the ancient buildings and to shop and browse in the many stores. Generally is an integral part of the city, a crucial link with its rich past



Photo 3: St Andrew street

- **THE AREA SCHEME FOR THE CENTRAL PART**



Map 1 Area scheme

The Municipal Technical Department, in cooperation with the State Town Planning Department had prepared a study, called an Area Scheme of the Central Part of Lemesos. It is the first such a project for Cyprus. The goal is to create alive with residents, commerce, small manufacturing and visitors, rather than simply an artificial environment, a museum for tourists.

The elaboration of this study was fully based on the GIS map of the area. Having all the necessary information concerning town-planning aspects, we managed to analyze every single plot of this area, and define its future through the above mention development project.



Photo 4: Ayia Napa Cathedral

Now we have the aim to incorporate all this information into the map, along with elements and results from other studies, such as about the waste, the transport, the ownership, the estimated value, the population, and in general everything that concerns each plot. This will give us the opportunity to use GIS in order to have better results in ruling our municipality. We are certain that since we managed to solve the problem of planning a sustainable development, in the roughest part of the city, we will soon proceed on extending the “putting in order” process we started.



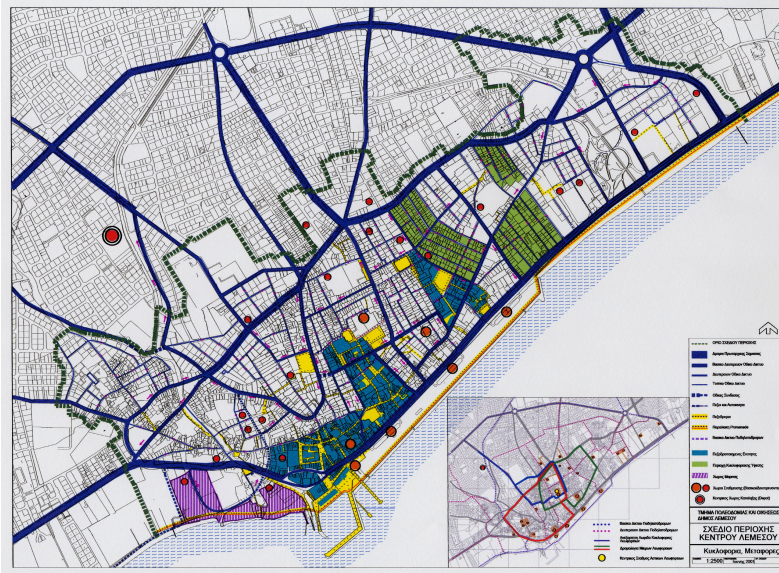
Photo 5: St Andrew street

Of course the above will not be completed for a certain time. Meanwhile having already the GIS map for the central part, we certainly planning to estimate the influence of each parameter or evident we are already informed about, in order firstly to restrain, and finally to reduce pollution which now exist. This concerns mainly the whole environment (natural or artificial), and in general the quality of life at least, for that area of the city, which appears to be the most important one. Now, we are in the phase of getting our first positive results of all this effort, of the study of the development project which was made after having all data and information using the Geographical map of the area.

The reasons for the preparation and the implementation of the study were mainly the following:

- The central area of the town itself, and it's great and multifunctional importance for the town in particular and the whole island in general.

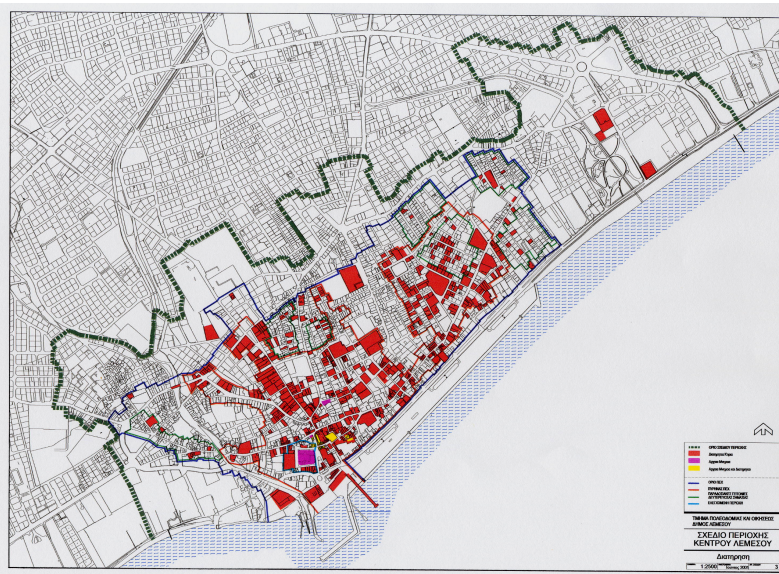
- The completion and hierarchy of road network
- The effort to reduce the number of cars in the area by network of big parking places around the center
- The implementation of traffic management measures



Map 3 Transport

Preservation Policy

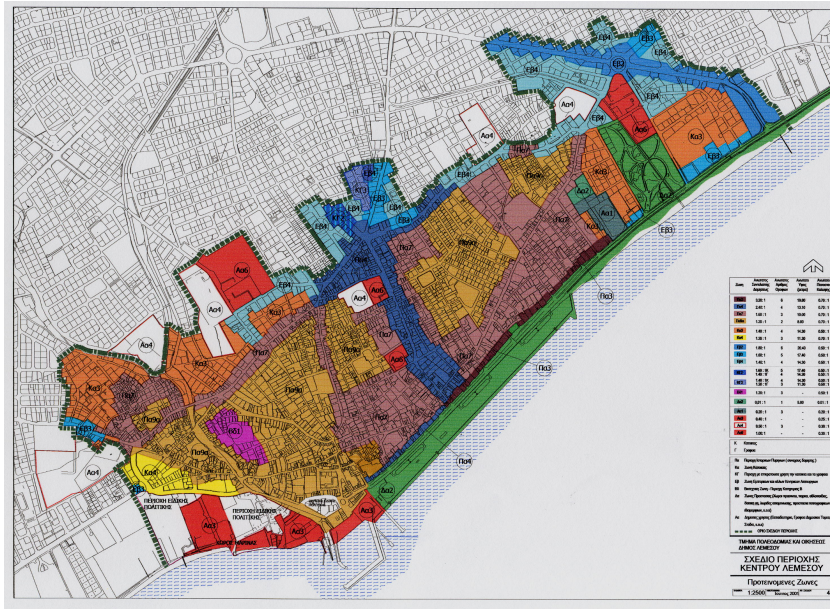
- The promotion of the conception of the entirely preservation of specific neighborhoods
- The extension and separation of the Specific Character Area to sub-areas in order to improve their handling
- The determination of guidelines for the construction of new and the reconstruction of listed buildings within the Specific Character Area
- The operation of a coordinator and advisory department in the Municipality for any matter concerns the Specific Character Area



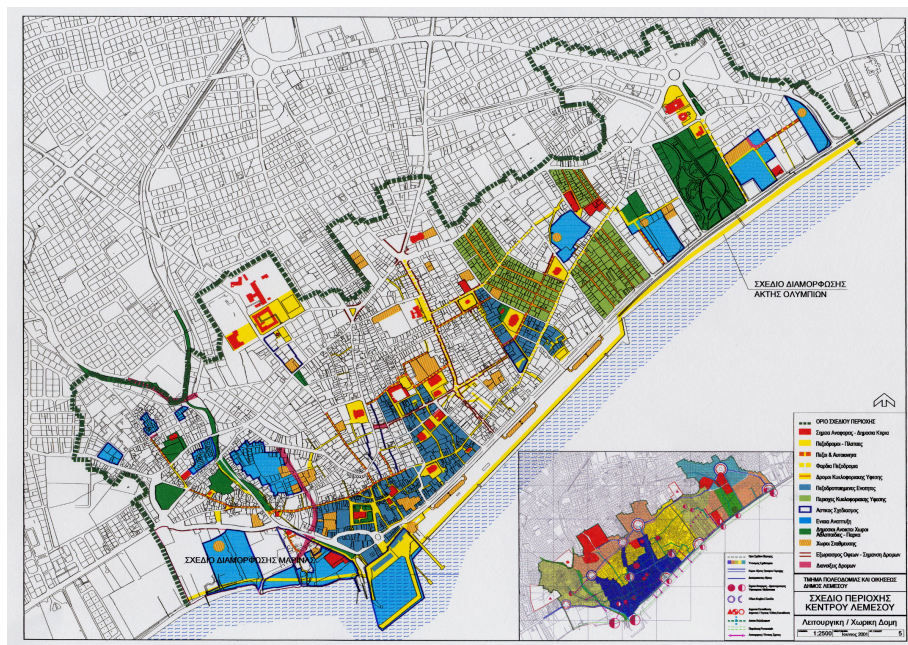
Map 4 Listed buildings

Functional Policy

- The division of the area in functional unities
- The determination of organization elements and signs of the center such as landmarks, main roads etc
- The rendering of the existing, and the creation of new dominates and symbols of the town
- The determination of pedestrian courses throughout the whole area.



Map5 Building Regulations

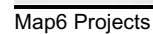


Map 6 Structure and Spacing

Spacing Policy

- Reformation of dominates, public buildings, squares and parking places

- Apart from the above mentioned policies, a number of projects are already taking part in the area. The most important are the marina, the reconstruction of the old port, a new university, the reformation of the seafront promenade, the reconstruction of main roads and squares, the municipal garden theater, the old market, the city museum and the theater museum.



1. Limassol's Local Plan – (issued by State Town Planning and Housing Dep. 2003)
2. Area Scheme for Limassol' Centre – (issued by Ministry of Interior 2002)
3. Green Strategy for the City of Limassol – (issued by Limassol Municipality 2000)
4. Energy and Urban Environment for the Mediterranean Countries – Report for the City of Limassol – (author Stelios Stylianidis, issued 2003)
5. Limassol During Ottoman Period – (author Christos Sergides, issued 2004)