



## PRESS RELEASE

### Press Conference for the Cyprus Participation in the 15<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale of Architecture

Last week, on Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2016, at the Cyprus Architects' Association office in Nicosia, the results of the Cyprus participation in the 15<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale of Architecture were presented by the curator Socrates Stratis, Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus, with his collaborators. The Venice Biennale of Architecture is the most important international event of architecture and takes place every two years. Alejandro Aravena, the curator of the Biennale, has invited the participants to address the theme of "Reporting from the Front". He touches upon the need for architectural practice to go beyond its familiar territories and search for its social and political dimensions.

The Cyprus contribution, entitled "Contested Fronts: Commoning Practices for Conflict Transformation", ([www.contestedfronts.org](http://www.contestedfronts.org)), has been selected through an open competition organized by the Minister of Education and Culture with the Cyprus Architects Association. The participants of the Cyprus pavilion are the "Hands-on Famagusta" project by the "Imaginary Famagusta", (an informal group of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot architects and planners), by AA&U for Architecture, Art and Urbanism ([www.aaplusu.com](http://www.aaplusu.com)) and by the Laboratory of Urbanism, University of Cyprus (L.U2.CY). Six international networks, practices and pedagogical programs participate too. They come from Northern Ireland (City Repair), from England (Mapping Controversies), from Italy and Turkey (Institut of Threshold), from the Netherlands (Archis See) and from Spain (Build Up).

Socrates Stratis mentioned that the objective of the curatorial project has been achieved. It is the creation of a critical mass of people, knowledge and tools that project alternative scenarios for the future of Famagusta, the day after the reunification of the island will take place. It is actually up to the State and the city's authorities to invite them to proceed further. He also mentioned that the project needs funding and support from all interested parties.

The possible problematic scenarios for the city's reconstruction that we need to avoid, according to Socrates Stratis and his team, are firstly a master plan prepared by the existing planning bureaucratic mechanisms, usually not very transparent to the public and with no imagination in

addressing the unique condition of Famagusta. The second problematic scenario to avoid, is the large scale privatization of the reconstruction process that would exclude the Civil Society, from the decision making for the future of the city.

The curatorial project, Socrates Stratis pointed out, builds on the “Hands-on Famagusta” project that has taken place that last couple of years, ([www.handsonfamagusta.org](http://www.handsonfamagusta.org)), thanks to the collective effort of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Part of the “Hands-on Famagusta” project’s aim has been to create awareness to the Cypriot Civil Society in regards to Famagusta becoming the next divided city of Europe. To avoid so, Stratis has urged the need for collective work across the Cypriot divide, to construct common concerns and visions. He also emphasized that Famagusta would be competitive only when it is a unified city from Derynia to Salamina. Esra Can Akbil, architect and member of the “Imaginary Famagusta” group, referred to her transformative experience, by being part of the project team, together with the rest of the Cypriot members of the group, thanks to the participation of Turkish Cypriot architects for the first time in the Cyprus Pavilion. She went on to explain the gain for the “Hands-on Famagusta” project by being part of the contributors in the Cyprus pavilion. Further on, Pany Valtoudi, doctorate student at the Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus, presented an urban game she designed with two of her colleagues (Pachi, Michael), entitled “Ammopolitics”. It is a board game, one of the six urban games presented at the Cyprus pavilion, which are part of the Encouraging Urbanity Games 08. The games are designed by the students of an elective course at the Department of Architecture and their objective is to address specific groups from the civil society and encourage them to come in touch with the complex Famagustian urban transformations, in a playful manner, (<http://www.socratesstratis.com/en/eu-games-list>). Lastly, Chrysanthe Constantinou, architect, urban designer and adjunct faculty member at the University of Cyprus presented, with Socrates Stratis, the results of the students’ work of the Urban Design Studio that are also exhibited at the Cyprus Pavilion and are also part of the webplatform [www.handsonfamagusta.org](http://www.handsonfamagusta.org). “Imagine Famagusta as the city of an important European Institution” was the design challenge given by the tutors to the students of the Urban Design studio back in 2012. “Make visible the role of architecture in the everydayness of the Famagustian inhabitants during the first years of the city’s reconstruction”, was the design challenge given to the students in 2014.

The exhibition is as an open source archive with architectural methods useful in transforming conflicts through collective practices. In addition to the exhibited items already mentioned, the visitor can see the twenty pieces of a transportable city model of Famagusta representing the city from Derynia to Salamina. She or he, can also see large size drawings that depict the extreme fragmentation of the city, as well as images from the cartographic practices of volunteers, videos and books in regards to the international participants.

The sponsors of the exhibition are: University of Cyprus, SEMHEK, Cyprus Electricity Authority, Bank of Cyprus, Rotary Club of Famagusta and Nicosia-Salamina. The main media sponsors are Phileleftheros and Cyprus Weekly. The supporters are: Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Famagusta, ClimaCare Engineering Ltd, Association of the Graduates of Greek High Schools of Famagusta, Caramondani Desalination Plants Ltd, Waternet Ltd, Phanos Epiphaniou Ltd, Metaxas Compuplanet Ltd, Andreas and Alexandra Matsi, Eleftherios Montanios.

The exhibition started on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May and will be open until the 27<sup>th</sup> of November. It is located at Palazzo Malipiero close by the Palazzo Grassi at Campo San Samuele.

**END OF PRESS RELEASE**