

# PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF URBAN MORPHOLOGY RESEARCH IN CYPRUS

## ABSTRACT

The Cyprus Network of Urban Morphology (CyNUM), established in 2016, is a bicomunal initiative led by scholars residing both in the north and the south of Cyprus. The aim of the network is to promote research on the urban form of Cypriot cities and support its dissemination in Cyprus and abroad. CyNUM also acts as a platform for knowledge exchange and networking among researchers who have a specific interest in Cypriot cities and the wider Eastern Mediterranean region. Because of the relative youth of universities in Cyprus, all leading urban morphology scholars trained in other countries and brought to Cyprus the approaches linked to their alma mater. In the country, there is a strong focus on two approaches: the historico-geographical and the configurational, although typo-morphological studies also exist. Since its inception, the network has made efforts to exchange knowledge, access expertise from other countries and develop various research strands through individual research, funded projects, and scientific events, including regional conferences and hosting the 2019 ISUF Conference. This paper reviews the background to the network, its activities and research outputs to critically discuss avenues for future development of Cypriot morphological research based on the direction of current and proposed future projects.

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KEY WORDS  
MEDITERRANEAN  
CITIES  
MULTIDISCIPLINARITY  
HISTORY OF URBAN  
MORPHOLOGY  
EVIDENCE-BASED  
URBAN DESIGN

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE NETWORK

In Cyprus, knowledge exchange between academicians across the divide is infrequent, accessing data from organisations located ‘on the other side’ and organising shared events is difficult and operationally challenging. During the 22nd ISUF conference, *City as Organism: New visions for urban life*, organised by ISUF Italy in Rome in 2015, a small group of scholars from the north and the south of Cyprus decided to discuss the establishment of a bicomunal regional ISUF network. The shared heritage of Cypriot cities across the island inspired local scholars to collaborate to deepen their understanding of the urban form and identity of the cities, and to develop avenues for knowledge development through sharing of know-how and comparative research.

The network was formally established in October 2016 by its founding members: Dr. Alessandro Camiz, Dr. Ilaria Geddes, Dr. Naciye Doratlı, Dr. Nadia Charalambous, Dr. Nevtar Zafer Cömert and Dr. Şebnem Hoşkara. The aim of the network is to promote research on the urban form of Cypriot cities and to support its dissemination both throughout the island of Cyprus and abroad. The network acts as a first point of contact and information for researchers interested in Cypriot cities and as a platform for knowledge exchange and networking among researchers in the field of urban morphology who have a specific interest in Cyprus and the wider Eastern Mediterranean region. The objectives of the group are: a) to promote and develop the subject of urban morphology in Cyprus and the wider region; b) to encourage research on Cypriot urban form and support its dissemination internationally; c) to establish, with other Mediterranean countries, a wider research network in the field of urban morphology; d) to develop links with other organisation concerned with the built environment in Cyprus and the Mediterranean basin; e) to develop and broaden collaborative studies on urban form at the national and international level, in particular across the Mediterranean basin, through cooperation with different institutions and other regional ISUF networks.

Since its inception, CyNUM has expanded to include a variety of members from different institutions and backgrounds. Prior to the establishment of the network, key members’ research activities were relatively limited to individual research projects, design competitions and workshops within their respective institutions. Notable research by the network members included diachronic syntactic studies,<sup>1</sup> comparative case studies<sup>2</sup>, environment-behaviour studies,<sup>3</sup> morphological studies<sup>4</sup> and the Muratorian or Italian school of typomorphological studies finalised to architectural design.<sup>5</sup> These pieces of research were disseminated collectively - in summary format - through the network’s website in a dedicated section, aimed at providing researchers with open access baseline information on Cypriot cities. These works also highlight that initially there were strong and discrete linkages between individual researchers and affiliated institutions with specific approaches prevalent

where the scholars had trained. The next section describes how the work of researchers and the collaborative work of the network developed in the six years following its foundation up to the present day.

## THE NETWORK'S ACTIVITIES TO THE PRESENT DAY

CyNUM decided to initiate its activities with a programme of knowledge exchange between the members, other local researchers, members of other established ISUF regional networks, as well as international researchers. These comprised a seminar series, covering both strictly morphological topics and broader related themes with contributions from external researchers, and the 1st CyNUM regional conference, *Urban Morphology in South-Eastern Mediterranean Cities: Challenges and Opportunities*, which took place in parallel with the AESOP's Thematic Group for Public Spaces and Urban Cultures meeting. The regional conference resulted in the publication of proceedings comprising 28 papers,<sup>6</sup> presenting mostly research work on Cypriot cities. The papers ranged in focus from methodological applications, urban sprawl and fringe belts, the relationship between urban form and social phenomena, urban and architectural design, and urban conflicts. This publication constitutes a significant collection of work dedicated to the urban form of Cypriot cities, which is unique as a collective effort to compile ongoing research across the island.

Having gained an overview of past and ongoing research, members of the network formally reviewed how different morphological approaches had been deployed in Cyprus, looking at studies dating back to the 1980s. The related paper revealed the focus on two approaches, mentioned in the previous section, and specific themes (relating urban form to physical divisions and social interactions) which featured quite prominently in the literature.<sup>7</sup>

Between 2017 and 2020, the project *EPUM: Emerging Perspectives in Urban Morphology*, funded by Erasmus+ and led by University of Cyprus, brought together well-known urban morphologists, including long-standing members of the ISUF community to explore the integration of urban form research and teaching approaches through pedagogic innovation. The final project workshop in Nicosia, in September 2019, had as a case study an area close to the buffer zone in the southern part of the city - research published in the proceedings of the first regional conference served as a background study to the activities of the workshop.<sup>8</sup> Students explored possible design options to create connections across the buffer zone; during the workshop site visits and fieldwork were carried out in both parts of the city.

The 26th ISUF International Conference was hosted by CyNUM in Nicosia in July 2019 (figure 1). The general theme of the conference, *Cities as Assemblages*, provided a platform to discuss how we conceptualise cities and

describe the processes of their emergence and transformation, as well as how we design methodologies to comprehensively assess the social and physical elements of cities and their interrelations. The conference welcomed 250 delegates with almost 130 papers published in the proceedings in 3 volumes.<sup>9</sup> This collection, as an expected outcome of the international conference, has a global outlook, with only 8 papers focusing on Cyprus - theory, multidisciplinary methodological approaches and design applications feature as prominent themes.

The 2nd CyNUM regional conference, *Transformation and Conservation of Urban Form in South Eastern Mediterranean Cities*, which took place in Famagusta was held between 7-9 April 2023. The regional conference resulted in 18 papers, presenting mostly research work on South Eastern Mediterranean Cities. The papers ranged in focus from methodological applications, urban conservation, cultural heritages and fringe belts, the relationship between transformation and conservation of urban form and social phenomena, urban and architectural design. This conference constitutes a significant collection of work dedicated to the transformation and conservation of urban form not only in Cypriot cities but also the region, which is unique as a collective effort to compile ongoing research across the region.

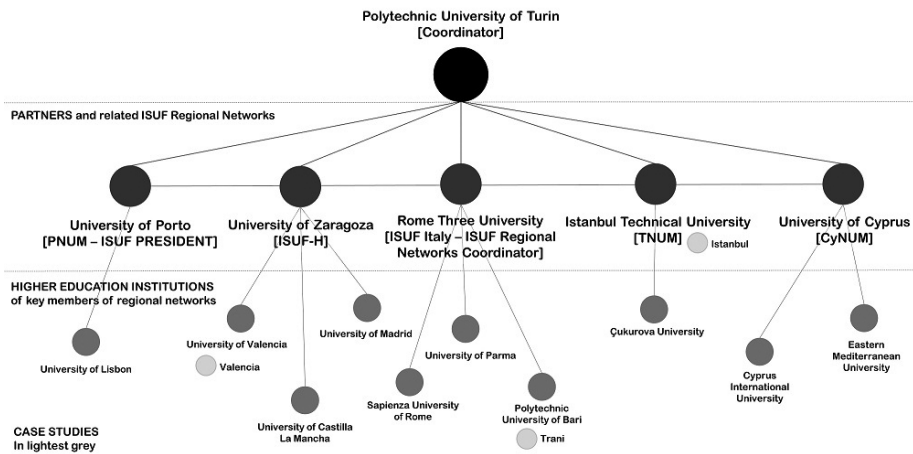
Individual research work during these years continued, establishing previous and ongoing research on various aspects and frameworks of diachronic analysis,<sup>10</sup> urban morphology and green spaces,<sup>11</sup> integrated methodologies in the field of urban morphology,<sup>12</sup> urban morphology within architecture and urban planning curricula,<sup>13</sup> as well as Muratorian typo-morphological studies and digital survey campaigns of heritage sites in Cyprus finalised to architectural design and restoration.<sup>14</sup> During this period, the network's research has specialised and diversity has increased with greater interaction between scholars from different disciplines and different fields of study within the network. This has led to the network developing into a platform for multidisciplinary studies focusing on issues and challenges affecting Cypriot and Mediterranean Cities, influencing current and future directions of research in the region.

## CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CRITICAL REFLECTION ON FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In recent times, a strategic decision was made by some members of the network to focus on securing research funding to increase capacity and develop the assets for Cyprus to become a centre of excellence in the field of urban form analysis in the wider Mediterranean region. This effort led to the implementation of two ongoing projects: *Knowledge Alliance for Evidence-Based Urban Practices (KAEBUP)*, funded by Erasmus+, and *Twinning Towards Research Excellence*



**CORSUM: Higher Education Ecosystem in the Mediterranean Basin**



UP: Fig. 1. Panel session at the 26th ISUF International Conference

MIDDLE: Fig. 2. Poster advertising the Call for Papers of the 3rd CyNUM Regional Conference

DOWN: Fig. 3. CORSUM higher education ecosystem in the Mediterranean basin

in *Evidence-Based Urban Planning and Design (TWIN2EXPAND)*, funded by Horizon Europe. Within this strategy, the thematic focus of the projects on the relationship between research and practice, and on evidence-based design (EBD) wants establish urban morphology as an intrinsic fundamental element of EBD and as a paramount science in design, planning and urban governance practice. The 3rd CyNUM Regional Conference will take place jointly with the KAEBUP project final event (figure 2).

In order to also develop capacity in the geographical context of the island, an Erasmus+ funding proposal is currently being developed through a collaboration among the ISUF regional networks in the Mediterranean basin and higher education institutions of representatives of the networks. The proposal: *Comparative Research School on the Urban Form of Mediterranean Port Cities (CORSUM)* aims at establishing a strong higher education ecosystem in the field of urban studies in the Mediterranean basin, providing the resources to undertake systematic comparative research of Mediterranean port cities. The project, therefore, refers back to the objective of the network of creating a wider Mediterranean network and trying to formalise collaboration for comparative research. The starting ecosystem of CORSUM and its case studies is based on the relationships between relevant universities and ISUF regional networks (figure 3).

The expected outputs of the project, including, among others, an ecosystem framework, a collaborative curriculum of urban form analysis, a comparative research framework for urban form analysis, and a digital survey of Mediterranean port cities are expected to set the basis for the establishment of a Pan-Mediterranean network of urban morphology open to scholars across the three continents in the region for long-term collaboration.

With local research becoming more specialised and research capacity increasing through cross-sectoral projects comprising leading European universities as well as design practices, CyNUM has the ambition to become a focal organisation of reference in a wider scholarly network in the Mediterranean. While the road towards research excellence still requires some time to reap the benefits of ongoing projects and increasing the output of high-impact research, the network is proceeding on a steady course towards achieving its founding objectives and contributing a significant wealth of knowledge to the field of urban morphology.

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#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TWIN2EXPAND is funded by the European Union [grant number 101078890] and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK government’s Horizon Europe funding guarantee [grant number 10052856].

KAEBUP is funded by the European Union [grant number 621585-EPP-1-2020-1-CY-EPPKA2-KA].

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## PROŠLOST, SADAŠNJOST I BUDUCNOST ISTRAŽIVANJA URBANE MORFOLOGIJE NA KIPRU?

**Ilaria Geddes, Alessandro Camiz, Nezire Özgece, Nevter Zafer Cömert, Şebnem Hoşkara, Gizem Caner**

Kiparska mreža urbanih morfologa (*The Cyprus Network of Urban Morphology* (CyNUM)), osnovana 2016. godine, je inicijativa dve zajednice koju predvode istraživači koji žive i na severu i na jugu Kipra. Cilj mreže je da promoviše istraživanja o urbanoj formi gradova na Kipru kao i da podrži diseminaciju ovih istraživanja kako na Kipru tako i u inostranstvu. CyNUM takođe deluje kao platforma za razmenu znanja i umrežavanje istraživača koji su posebno zainteresovani za gradove na Kipru i širem regionu istočnog Mediterana. Zbog relativne kratke tradicije univerziteta na Kipru, svi vodeći istraživači urbane morfologije obučavali su se u drugim zemljama i doneli na Kipar pristupe povezane sa lokalnom akademskom tradicijom. Na Kipru postoji snažan fokus na dva pristupa: istorijsko-geografski i konfiguracioni, iako su prisutne i tipomorfološke studije. Od svog osnivanja, mreža je uložila napore da unapredi razmenu znanja, pristupi ekspertizama iz drugih zemalja i razvije različite istraživačke aspekte kroz pojedinačna istraživanja, finansirane projekte i naučne događaje, uključujući regionalne konferencije i organizaciju ISUF konferencije 2019. godine. Imajući u vidu pravac trenutnih i predloženih budućih istraživanja, ovaj rad razmatra istorijat mreže, njene aktivnosti i rezultate istraživanja kako bi se kritički raspravljalo o putevima za budući razvoj morfoloških istraživanja na Kipru.

KLJUČNE REČI: MEDITERAN, GRADOVI, MULTIDISCIPLINARNOST, ISTORIJA URBANE MORFOLOGIJE,