

## Article

# Socio-Cultural Recovery of the Border in Nicosia: Buffer Fringe Festival over Its Boundaries

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**Abstract:** The reproduction of space along the border in post-conflict divided cities is an important issue in relation to urban resilience. Nicosia, widely known as the last divided capital city in Europe, is the capital city of Turkish Cypriots in the north and Greek Cypriots in the south. The Buffer Zone was formalized in 1974 as an emergency measure against inter-communal clashes. Further, the walled city of Nicosia was bisected, and thus urban and social unity became a relic of the past. In addition, the city center became the edge of the two bisected halves. The Nicosia Master Plan (NMP) was initiated by professionals on both sides. Moreover, it was in the first planning attempt that Nicosia was considered as a whole. The NMP was the first self-reliant quest that was developed for the purpose of finding a solution that could operate without having to wait for a political consensus. The Ledra Palace crossing opened in 2003 as the first opening on the border that ran across the United Nations (UN)-controlled Buffer Zone in Nicosia. Such a crossing possessed a symbolic meaning; the two communities feel as if they are socially united, and it encouraged NGOs and artists to step forward and allow the border to be perceived not as a boundary but as a shared space. The Buffer Fringe Festival is one of the recent cultural organizations that was held along the divide of Nicosia and it is also the festival scrutinized in this paper. This festival was designed to explore the boundary as a phenomenon experienced in daily life; furthermore, discussions were had regarding how the Buffer Fringe actors and artists perceived the festival as a peace-making tool. Together with visual and verbal records, the analysis conducted in this paper is based on qualitative data within a theoretical framework concerning body–space connections. In this paper, the aim is to emphasize how festivals can function beyond the limits of borders, provide an arena for connecting people, and exemplifies how one can interpret the spatial transformation of a space within the context of post-conflict divided cities.

**Keywords:** boundary; shared space; Buffer Fringe Festival; Home for Cooperation; Nicosia



**Citation:** Gurdalli, H.; Bulanik, S. Socio-Cultural Recovery of the Border in Nicosia: Buffer Fringe Festival over Its Boundaries. *Land* **2023**, *12*, 370. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land12020370>

Academic Editors: Arch. Federica Scaffidi, Luca Tricarico, Gaia Daldanise and Rui Alexandre Castanho

Received: 2 December 2022

Revised: 18 January 2023

Accepted: 26 January 2023

Published: 30 January 2023



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## 1. Introduction

A boundary is a geographical concept that separates regions by cultural, political, and/or economic means. Simultaneously, many issues such as social or political forms of control, ethnicity, and economic differences can result in concrete or symbolic border production.

It is also a fact that the practice of constructing architecture requires boundaries in order to create space. The boundary, which is the starting point in delineating human settlements, initiates human–space interactions and directs behaviors. Diener and Hagen [1] underline the need to understand more deeply the role of the border in every spatial and social area, as well as in areas of insecurity, contact, and conflict, or in the areas of cooperation and competition. In this article, the paradoxical structure of the boundaries that obstruct social life whilst, at the same time, allowing spatial formations that create a collaborative environment is explained.

Since the mid-1970s, the border dividing the island of Cyprus into two has resulted in the popularization of the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ for the two communities living in the same region. The high walls that continue along the border of the ‘Buffer Zone’ controlled by the United Nations (UN) divided Cyprus and the capital Nicosia into two. Along with the integrity of collective spaces, the flow of daily life has also been disrupted. Within the boundary, many facilities were abandoned during the conflict and have remained unusable for many years.

The Buffer Fringe festival is important given the national and international status of this divided city, Nicosia. In order to explore the possible variations in the perception of spatial and communal boundaries, as well as of territory and common space, the role of the Buffer Fringe Festival in Cyprus is examined. This study aims to draw attention to the Buffer Fringe Festival, which offers unifying experiences with the projects it produces in a field that has lost its spatial meaning. Furthermore, the importance of a human–space interaction and its determining role with respect to borders is questioned. The theoretical basis of the study is the space formation process, which includes limits and human factors [2,3]. Based on this theoretical knowledge, three performances within the Buffer Fringe Festival in 2020 and 2021 are included in the study. These performances were chosen as they are appropriate examples for examining the reproduction of spatial meanings distorted by the effect of borders. These three studies possess different perspectives on the space–body relationship; in addition, they contain guiding principles that offer new space experiences with an unlimited manner of thinking with respect to the borders that disrupt the hitherto shared space.

All over the world, different kinds of festivals are being organized [4]. Some of these festivals, events, or carnivals now act as symbols for their respective cities and are also part of the local economy. Events and festivals can be defined as communal celebrations; they have the potential to strengthen social connectivity among communities that see people as ‘others’. Further, their role in bringing individuals and communities together by creating arenas in which to share individual stories, traumas, and memories is increasing [5]. Mell et al. emphasized the limited discussion concerning the role of public parks in local engagement in post-conflict cities [6]. Similar to the perception of public parks as shared spaces, it can be said that little literature can be found regarding the role of festivals in divided communities. Therefore, it can be safely said that the study of the relationship between festivals, events, and peace is quite new [7]. This paper attempts to provide an insight into the dialogue concerning body–space relations with respect to the artists and visitors who are changing individual mental maps along the divide in spite of the border’s physical presence. In places of conflict, communities with different ethnic backgrounds, languages, and religions (e.g., Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, as well as Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland) perceive the ‘other’ as a ‘double minority syndrome’ [6]. They may see each other as a threat, and sometimes, political discourses increase the divisions in the respective communities. As such, this paper examines the manner in which the Buffer Fringe Festival interprets the process of peacemaking in relation to a divided Nicosia from the point of view of the participants.

This article is divided into four stages. The first stage is the theoretical literature re-view. The literature review focuses on the unique situation of the divided capital city of Nicosia, whereby the cultural and social interpretations within the city result in the creation of a new shared space; meanwhile, politically, the negotiations are still ongoing. The formation of the Home for Cooperation (H4C) and the facilities it informally hosts helps with the peacemaking and reproduction of urban spaces against political divisions in the divided city center.

As part of the literature review, the history of the conflict (which ended with the division via the Buffer Zone) is emphasized to clarify the purpose of the current research. A variety of books, articles, and academic research within this field are utilized as written archive material.

The second stage involves an analysis of the organizations that work for peace and, in turn, utilize innovative and creative ways for the purposes of reproducing urban space.

In the third stage, three projects from the Buffer Fringe Festival are chosen that exemplify the concept of displacement. Indeed, this concept is clearly related to the vulnerability of a city that has experienced migration as a result of the ethnic and political conflict between Turkish and Greek Cypriots.

The fourth and final stage of the research involves a consideration of the interpretations of the three projects; then, there is a discussion regarding the effect of the Buffer Fringe Festival in Nicosia as a socio-cultural innovation with respect to reproducing shared urban spaces. Within the context of post-conflict divided cities, the example of Nicosia introduces a unique condition whereby cultural projects and social integration form a bottom-up force that could be utilized for the future of the city.

## 2. Border as the Spatial and Social Boundary

It has been stated that “Man is the creator of all judgments and decisions that encourage, invent and carry all developments in the world, and the planner of the future” [8]. The occupation of space is the first proof of such an existence; furthermore, it is the basic expression of human beings and animals; plants and clouds; balance; permanence; and the body as an articulation of acceptance [9]. According to Zevi (1974) [2]—who underlines the concept of space in which the body’s gestures and movements are what renders the space as alive—when there is no interaction in a space, what happens is that the space transforms into a geometric space, as opposed to an alive space, instead. When such a phenomenon occurs, such a space does not meaningfully differ from the natural environment. Regarding the ‘special space’ type of space [10], which separates human beings from the natural environment in order to gain meaning, experiences are required that include our vital values and the concept of time.

Unlike other living things, human beings can interact with space. In addition, they can load their symbolic values into a limited space and transform it into a ‘place’ through rhetorical actions, which is possible thanks to the awareness of existence. Pallaasma (2014) [3] advises that the importance of the human body is such that it is the place of perception, thinking, and consciousness. This fact also highlights how the senses are effective in articulating, storing, and processing thoughts. Space stimulates the senses by interacting with the human body and also helps in creating memories, imaginations, and dreams.

Behaviors ensure the maturation of spaces, that is, cultural transformation, by being managed by the perceptions activated simultaneously with accumulated memories. Simultaneously, it makes the image of the space immanent, making it meaningful for the person wandering in it. Thus, humans are defined by their attachment needs.

There is a human need to create two fields of consciousness. This may be the open and vulnerable space or the closed and humanized space. Human life is a dialectical movement between attachment and freedom [9]. A person needs self-knowledge [7] to carry out the paradoxical relationship created by staying inside and outside the boundaries. Self-knowledge, which enables him/her to go beyond the boundaries of the place they live, makes it easier to look at external reality as a dimension of inner life. At the same time, this situation establishes a meaningful connection, providing a balance between perceptions and experiences in the production of spaces.

### 2.1. Boundary

Boundaries, while determining territoriality, are also the lines that physically divide spaces and limit their former uses. When a boundary creates an obstacle that limits spatial experiences, it can dull peoples’ ability to relate to others or to the space. The concept of a boundary, which is both physically and socially produced, guides spatial experiences and social behavior, appearing in all areas of life. It signifies the idea of imagining the other’s existence in the form or the content of representation [11]. While political geographers and

anthropologists map their border experiences, states and social organizations use the idea of a limitation to create and maintain an us and them distinction [12]. The neutralizations or limits consciously created due to economic, political, social, psychological, or cultural reasons can disrupt the idealized perception of human life. Simultaneously, people exposed to the shapeshifting perception of space may have to change their habits to protect their personal and collective experiences of space and social order.

The subject to be underlined here, regardless of its reason for occurring, is the adaptability of human beings who are directed to a new way of life due to the drawn borders against new spatial experiences [13]. It can be said that this situation is facilitated by the physical and mental capacity to separate the boundary differences between social, political, cultural, and economic variables and the systems and institutions emphasized by Diener and Hagen [1]. When humans think that they can cope with limits, they want to take actions that will nourish a collective image. Sennett calls this a 'situation of strong public sentiment'. Social interaction forms, such as conversations and theater, help the search for a strong image [14]. People who want to be together as social beings share their experiences using their self-knowledge with others and try to overcome the limits in front of them by realizing the production of new spaces.

People may not always be able to experience meaningful interactions with the space they are in. The conscious configurations that divide interior life from the outside, and the 'no past and future' spatial experiences related to the rapid flow of modern life, can create a neutralizing effect on behavior and weaken the bond that people establish with space. This situation, which Sennett defines as "conscious neutralization," underlines the fact that people who assume different roles in society mix but do not necessarily integrate, presenting an equality that melts the inner life. The experiences of space, which Nietzsche describes as "an inner life that does not correspond to anything outside, an external being unrelated to what is inside," can also dull people's ability to see and evaluate their relationships [14].

Depriving people of their relationship with space can cause them to feel lonely, detached, suppressed, and excluded. The places which human beings cannot experience also remain desolate; furthermore, it becomes a geometric void that only bears the traces of past meanings. When desiring a collective way of life that combines class, age, race, and taste differences, human beings must incorporate the consciousness of existence into the experience of space [15]. People who are prevented from interacting with space due to consciously determined boundaries cannot convey their experiences.

Indicators, such as barbed wire, signboards, and high observation towers, indicating that the borders are impassable, on the one hand, keep the conflict within the border alive; on the other hand, they reveal the uncertainty about the future. People who want to cope with the discussed emotions, consciously or instinctively, try to transform the spaces, as individuals need places where they can move and experience other people and be in contact.

The Buffer Zone (Dead Zone) is the border that lies in the midst of the capital city, Nicosia. Once the traditional Market Place, this central area was the most vibrant area in the city, was loaded with historical and visual meaning, and had been the melting pot of citizens from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The loss of the center is a way of neutralizing the city space geographically [14]. Currently, the elongated scar of the Buffer Zone that is formalized as a border dividing the Cypriots and their city is not an appealing place for people to gather and has lost its value as a community focal point.

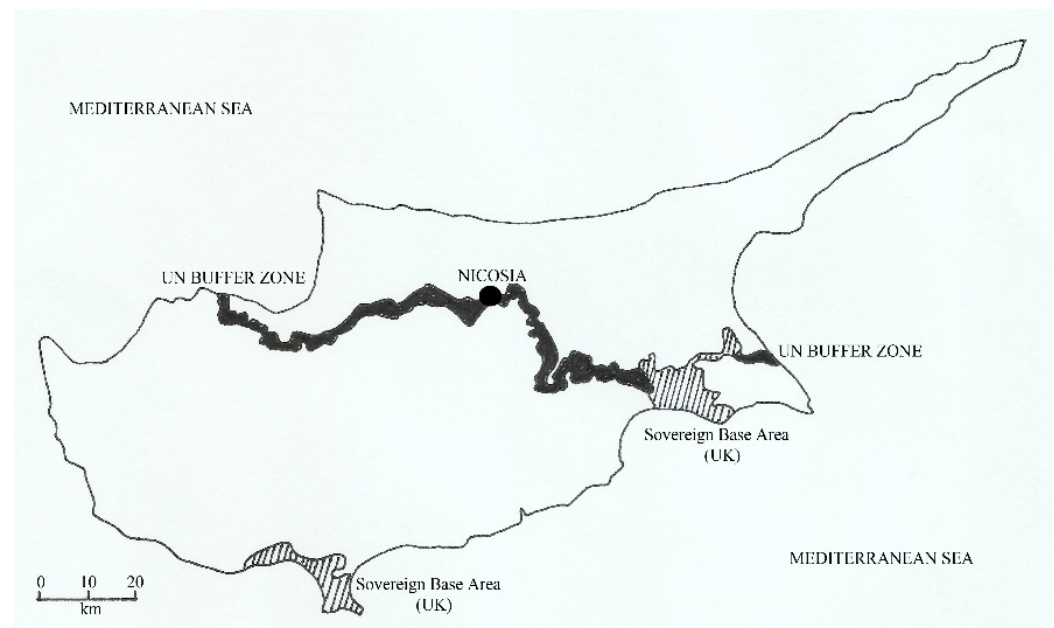
## 2.2. Nicosia Border—Buffer Zone

Nicosia is the capital city of Cyprus, called Lefkoşa by Turkish Cypriots and Lefkosia by Greek Cypriots. Throughout the ages, it has been the historical administrative center of all governments, starting with the Lusignans (1192–1489) and continuing with the Venetians (1489–1571), Ottomans (1571–1878), and the British Empire (1878–1960). The first division in Nicosia took place in 1956 under British colonial rule. The conflict and tension created

by ethnic differences were reflected in the city's life, and the barbed wire, known as the Mason–Dixon line, became a concrete indicator of that division [16].

Between 1960 and 1963, Cyprus became an independent republic for the first time in its history. However, this situation was overshadowed by the resumption of tensions and conflicts between ethnic groups soon after. With the Green line established in 1964, the unified image of the island was distorted. The Green line allowed movement between the north and south, albeit with restrictions, until 1974, when it became an UN-controlled official border.

The Buffer Zone in Cyprus stretches from east to west, crossing the different landscapes of the island (Figure 1). In rural areas, the width of the dividing line is 7 km wide, while in Nicosia, it narrows as thin as 3.3 m [17].



**Figure 1.** Buffer Zone through the island.

The border, which was formed as an end product of the clashes of paramilitary forces from both sides and was symbolized by the Buffer Zone, limited freedom of communication and movement for citizens. Even trying to take photos of this UN-controlled authority area controlled by soldiers has been prohibited for civilians since then. With the de facto division of the two communities, issues such as immigration and resettlement, housing, public landscapes, and infrastructure have arisen for planners [18]. The city center became an edge on both halves of Nicosia, causing the socio-economic decline following the move of activities and urban developments towards the outskirts of the divided city [19]. Many dead ends are formed where streets stop at a 'wall' and continue on its far side. The barbed wires, briquette walls, and barrels physically constituting the geographical border were added to the city's visual landscape as new urban elements.

### 3. Reproduction of Space, Recovery

Space production occurs with the interaction between the objects that make up the space and the people who experience the space. Objects, which at first glance seem to be only 'things' designed for their intended use, can transmit information relating to the meanings that they are attached to as well as their functions. Thus, they continue to exist effectively in the world. The transfer of the meaning between that within the space and that within the objects occurs when it is produced, consumed, and then 'reproduced' by human beings. The 'poetic imagination' [15] that emerges thanks to the consciousness of existence helps in the realization of new space productions in harmony with the dialectic of life.

Lefebvre, who defines every new spatial configuration that structures and directs the patterns of social life as a new space production that provides the transition from one space to another, states that every social production has its own appropriate space. In Lefebvre's trio of 'perceived, designed and lived space', the production of space starts from the body; material production permeates the social spheres through the production of knowledge and the production of meaning. The space practices produced dialectically with spatial representations and representational space dimensions intervene differently across societies or periods. Spaces with a past associated with abstractions, symbols, sensory experiences, meanings, the relations between them, and social practices become a means of production simultaneously as they are produced [20]. Changes in the temporal order of social interactions often require changes in spatial patterning. Since even the repetition of daily life includes spatial regularities, social relations and spatial relations are important. Urry [21] emphasizes that spaces are not the only determinants of social patterning and should not be considered as producing the environment in which the activity takes place. Ongoing social activities and meaningful structures that reproduce this activity provide many aspects of the spatial environment. New spatial configurations will structure and direct the emerging patterns of social life.

The production of new spaces is also a healing process. New experiences and encounters structured in abandoned spaces allow for human interaction, create a basis for social associations, are developed by feeding memories and emotions accumulated over time, and allow patterns to physically spread as long as the social relations continue.

Bauman asserts that the associations in the experience of space are the matrix of structured encounters. He mentions that multifaceted selves and desires, and the interests belonging to these selves, emerge in these encounters. At the same time, he emphasizes that the experiences that begin at the moment of an encounter, developing and ending immediately, having no past or future, and not depending on any result, can have moral consequences and are determinants of behavior [22] and create a meaningful pattern in space production; to make it livable is to express it by ruling outside of the determined area [23]. This also helps to create a relationship situation that keeps community behavior alive. These spaces, which are sometimes arranged by chance and sometimes normatively, ensure the unity of people by integrating social differences.

Situations that need to be restructured against deteriorating spatial orders are inevitable in conflict regions. Projects and activities have become the basic components of the peace strategy, and due to their common goals, bi-communal activities can be expressed as examples of struggle. In the projects created in relation to spatial expressions, the physical spaces used can become symbols that encourage the two communities to action by facilitating socialization.

In the Buffer Zone of Nicosia, a divided city for nearly four decades, bi-communal, apolitical projects, and activities, which have become a key component of the peace strategy, create new spatial experiences. Actions and activities that encourage dialogue between the two communities characterize the Buffer Zone as a socializing area and provide opportunities for new spatial patterns. They also contribute to the processes of healing, peace, and unity. In addition to H4C, which creates exemplary projects by expanding its borders day by day in the Nicosia Buffer region, there are many other organizations. These entities operate in the divided city of Nicosia, Cyprus, and many other countries.

#### **4. Representational Venue H4C (Home for Cooperation) in Nicosia Buffer Zone**

The Buffer Zone is in Nicosia, Europe's last divided city. The border represented by the Buffer Zone divided the economic, political, and socio-cultural lives of Cypriot society after the transformation of the political landscape in 1974. When the island community, which had been divided for nearly thirty years, could not agree on the Annan plan proposed by the UN in 2004, the European Union accepted the Republic of Cyprus as a member state, accepting it as a whole administration and half the region. In this context, the Buffer Zone became the EU's border, and Nicosia was branded as the only divided capital of the EU,

becoming the city most affected by the division of the island. With the historical city center and its streets becoming a dead-end that ended in high walls, communication between the two communities has become almost impossible [24]. Referred to as the country of nobody, the Buffer Zone, with its unused places and empty streets, was a symbol of confrontation between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots until 2011.

According to Werlen (2005), borders are the spatial consequences of marginalizing processes; their existence reshapes identities [25]. The boundary walls that physically divide Nicosia into two have been effective in personal and collective space transformations by creating abstract and hidden layers loaded with the memories of the people who experienced the conflict [26]. Along with the division's transformations, new formations against the division are also an inevitable result of this process. The best example of this situation in Cyprus is H4C (Figure 2). H4C uses the 'porous structure' of the Buffer Zone, which is still defined as the boundary and re-examines the 'gap between them'.



**Figure 2.** H4C in relation to the walled city Nicosia and Buffer Zone.

Located within the Nicosia Buffer Zone, H4C is an organization that operates to increase the dialogue between the two communities and encourages the emergence of new understandings and thoughts. H4C, which produces projects that enable the development of creative potential by using art for peacebuilding and social change, also provides opportunities for interesting international collaborations. The Buffer Fringe Festival is one of the most important projects of the H4C.

H4C is a community education center established to ensure cooperation across borders instead of socio-spatial conflicts. (Figure 3). The goal of H4C, which was established in

2011 in the Buffer Zone, is ‘To take the perspective of others, to support and provide opportunities for civil communities and to strengthen the relations between the two communities across the island’ [27]. The Buffer Zone, which is between the boundaries dividing the city and independent of the two communities, hosts H4C because it offers a dynamic space where both sides can see each other and have common cultural experiences [28].



**Figure 3.** Street view: Home for Cooperation Building. Nicosia, 2019. Source: Copyright 2021 by EEA and Norway Grants.

H4C (Home for Cooperation) organizes education programs that support culture and the arts. It also supports projects that emerge from the collective efforts of non-governmental organizations and individuals working on historical research and peace-building. The Buffer Fringe Festival is one of the most important of these projects. This festival, which emerged with the desire to open a new space that would benefit from the transformative effect of art in constructing new social identities after the division, became international within a few years of its establishment.

## 5. Materials and Methodology

### 5.1. Methodology

The participatory approach it encouraged and the collaborative projects it hosted turned the Buffer Fringe Festival into a peace-making tool that challenged the perceptions of the border, bringing people together rather than dividing them. The festival not only hosted artists from different countries to share projects and ideas but, at the same time, as a bottom-up initiation, raised hopes of unifying society as the formal negotiations continued on and off between politicians.

Together with the above background, this paper investigates whether the characteristics of the festival and its effects on a post-conflict society can act as a model. Furthermore, it questions the way festival organizers and artists interpret existing narratives together with the power of space.

In combination with the literature, a qualitative approach was used for the analysis, and three projects that were presented at the Buffer Fringe Festival with the theme of ‘Dis-placement’ were scrutinized. Verbal and visual records were used to understand the challenge the artists wished to pose. Interviews with Ellada Evangelou, the Artistic and Cultural Director of the Buffer Fringe Performing Arts Festival, were used to understand the initiative considerations behind organizing the festival and the process of its transformative power.



Three projects from 2020 and 2021 with the theme ‘Displacement’ were examined. The projects are described, and then the words of the artists are used for detail. This provided a chance to better analyze the concept of the art in relation to the artist’s experiments with the space and how they intended to involve the audience with the theme. The reason behind choosing the 2020–2021 projects was not random, as the ‘Displacement’ theme significantly related to what many of the organizers, artists, and audience members experienced within their families. On the other hand, while questioning concepts such as immigration, mobility, and displacement within the scope of ongoing problems within human history such as ‘immigration, war, climate change,’ the inability to be in one’s own place as a result of the limitations brought about by COVID-19, which the whole world was trying to overcome, also became a debate relating to displacement. Social media channels offered to broadcast the performances, and this provided a new means of participation that had not been previously planned. The Buffer Zone, also known as the Dead Zone, as it was not accessible for many years, was thought to be ‘nowhere’, not only for Cypriots but for all, as ‘nowhere’ for ‘nobody’ was ‘everywhere’.

As in 2021, the world was still experiencing the effects of the pandemic and people came together in a controlled way. The director Evangelou provided two interviews on digital platforms. The first interview took place during the preparations of the Buffer Fringe Festival 2021, to be between 8 and 10 October, and was carried out by Leslie Frost, a teaching Associate Professor from North Carolina [29]. The second interview was by Culture360 on 24 November, after the 2021 Festival [30]. At the same time, articles from newspapers *Yenidüzen* [31] and *Cyprus Mail* [32], *Buffer Fringe* [33], and *Home for Cooperation* [34] were used.

This study aimed to add the discursive material from the organizer’s point of view together with the artists’ intentions and to build a comprehensive framework of the festival’s aim of being a transformative peace-making tool and not just an artistic event.

### 5.2. *Buffer Fringe Festival That Exceeds Its Limits*

Developed by the Home for Cooperation (H4C) team in 2014, the Buffer Fringe Festival was established with the idea of questioning sensitive issues, expressing ideas in new and creative ways, and providing a platform for a different and meaningful contemporary art movement to flourish in Cyprus. Simultaneously, through sharing opinions with each other, both political and divisive, it aims to support independence from formal historical ideologies and identities. The experimental performing arts festival is considered to be the best tool for triggering debates regarding the personal or collective traumas experienced by Cypriot society in the past and for promoting understanding, respect, and, ultimately, trust in each other. The fringe itself is already a compelling and unstable concept for popularizing art practices in a particular context. Fringe festivals worldwide continue to promote and embrace different types of art (performances, music concerts, stage plays, and many other events). They also bring together various groups of people who want to collaborate and change the artistic field. Exploring a buffered urban life’s limits and marginality is more challenging and unstable. The Buffer Fringe Festival is different from similar fringe festivals in the world. The Buffer Fringe Festival itself takes place within the true limit of normal life, conflict, and accessibility.

The idea behind the formation of the Buffer Fringe Festival is directly linked to the Ledra Palace crossing, one of the Gates of the Buffer Zone in Nicosia, which opened in 2003 to ease the communication between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. The crossing named after the Ledra Palace Hotel, constructed in the 1940s, had been the home of the UN forces controlling the dividing area since 1974. With the foundation of the H4C in the same area, this segment of the Buffer Zone that divided the city became a socio-cultural hub.

Since 2014, the Buffer Fringe Festival has continued to be a peacebuilding program as a unique performing arts festival in terms of social responsibility. This festival, which considers art to be an opportunity for experiences that ‘encourage the integration between subject and object’, became international within five years and has managed to reach

people living beyond the Buffer Zone and its borders. In 5 years, the festival managed to receive prestigious awards, including the EFFE label of 'Remarkable Festival' and the EFFE Laureate [33], and formed partnerships with fringe festivals around the world.

#### 5.2.1. Buffer Fringe Festival with Theme 'Displacement' Projects and Artists

In the Buffer Fringe Festival, which started as a two-day festival with eleven performances in 2014, the participating independent artists' personal journeys of discovery within the context of soul, body, and mind received attention. In the second year of the festival, a route was drawn out of the Buffer Zone [34]. A performance route was drawn that connected both sides of the divided city of Nicosia by dealing with the concept of us and the others, which are formed due to the border, urban memory, spatial transformations, and dead-end streets. The festival, which rose to the international category in 2016 with the steadily increasing richness of its content, continues its integration goals. In addition to the perceptions created by the boundary and the memories accumulated within it, many spaces where different bodily experiences come together have been produced. The 'duet' performances, which provide a combination of artists with different perspectives in a cultural and social context, were included in the festival [33]. In 2020, the Buffer Fringe festival also hosted positive experiences that brought people together and permeated borders. Unlike previous years, it included a contradiction, telling people not to come together due to the global pandemic. The festival's concept, located within the ongoing global health crisis, has drawn a framework that includes the concepts of individual bodily boundaries.

For the Buffer Fringe Festivals of 2020 and 2021 with the concept of 'Displacement', the artists were asked what displacement meant, artistically and personally; that is, how migration, mobility, and displacement can be perceived and differentiated; how displacement and memories are related; and what COVID-19 confinement meant in terms of social/physical isolation and in relation with the isolation of space. In short, both the theme and the space were reminiscent of the space's historical trauma [31].

The festival was to be internationally realized in October 2021 and the artists were encouraged online to complete their creative processes that started in 2020. Eleven projects took part in the festival; there were 59 artists from 12 countries [33]. The selected themes, while carrying the traces of previous traumatic experiences, held hopes for the island's future. Furthermore, interaction between the artists and audiences was also an aim, and it was hoped that these formations would go beyond the existing physical boundaries [34].

Three works were selected and detailed from among the thirteen performances included in the 2020 and 2021 Buffer Fringe Festivals. It is in the relationships between the physical and spiritual levels that a person establishes a relationship with a space, and these examples, which commence a different relationship between the boundary and the human body, provide new perspectives on understanding space and adapting to non-locality. The artworks focus on the ability to experience a space beyond physical boundaries while maintaining the movement and senses of the human body.

#### Example One: 95 Points' (Mapping the Space between Us) Interdisciplinary

Instead of seeing the displacement concept as a negative connotation that loses the sense of belonging, it treats it as a dynamic that creates opportunities for discoveries and pleasures (Figure 4). It is the fictionalized drawing of new boundaries, creating a map by adding sensory associations, such as a previously eaten meal, music, conversation, or memories in the past, to new spatial experiences. The most striking point of the project is the fact that the journey that forms this map is inspired by 95 stops along the 95 km distance between the two cities separated by the border, Limassol and Famagusta. Yiannis Toumazis, Elena Agathokleus, and Nurtane Karagil are the artists of this performance, which included new experiences that allowed people to feel at home when entering unexplored areas.



**Figure 4.** 95 Points artist banner. 2020–2021. Source: Buffer Fringe Art Festival.

The artists say 95 stops brought to the surface what was good to them. By searching, touching, and using sound as an element of space they asked questions, such as ‘Who we are? What do we see?’.

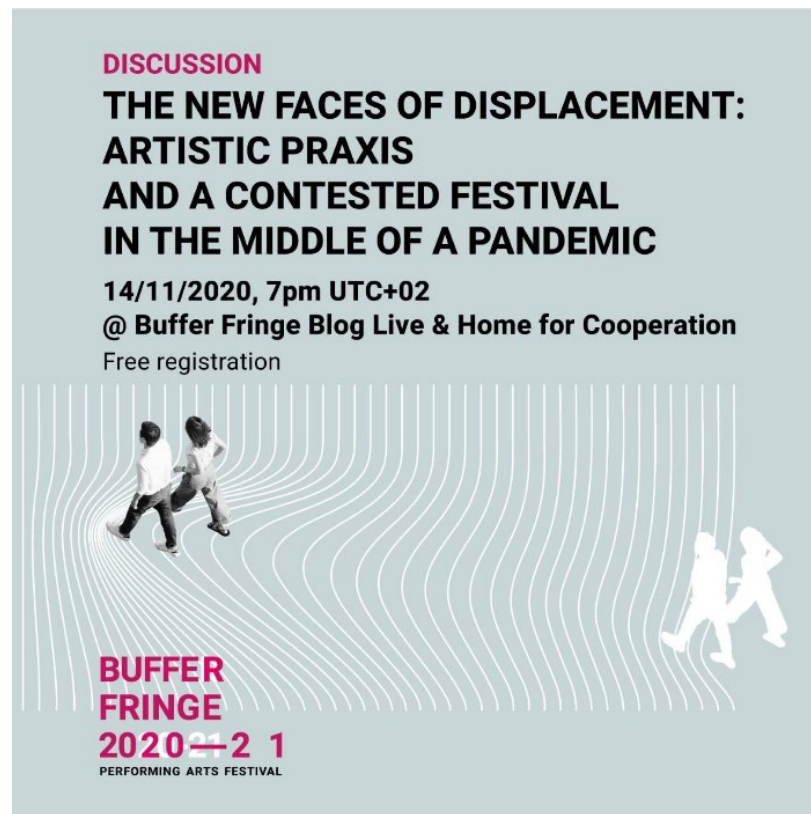
They emphasize that Cyprus is a home for them and the space and the place forms experiences, such as loss, displacement, trauma, politics, and invasions, but at the same time, new ideas, sharing, hopes, dreams, and love. While explaining what was revealed to them from the process, they stated that the important thing was that between all of the different layers, they looked for their futures in united locations [33].

#### Example Two: Clutch

It tries to create an environment where intercultural ties are established in a conflict that spans the distance between ‘native’ and ‘foreign’. The subject of ‘relocation’ was conjured by the artist Mixalis Artisdiou; it was conveyed with a dynamic street performance in an outdoor space that he experienced with his own body movements (Figure 5).

A form of expression that integrates the human body, imagination, and movement was revealed through editing with sound recordings added on a bicycle trip in Limassol city. The artist creates a multi-layered outdoor experience where different senses belonging to other human bodies are articulated through his body movements and what he sees. It is a performance that involves the changes in the body and the relationships between languages, dialects, and silence to connect with the field within and beyond individual identity.

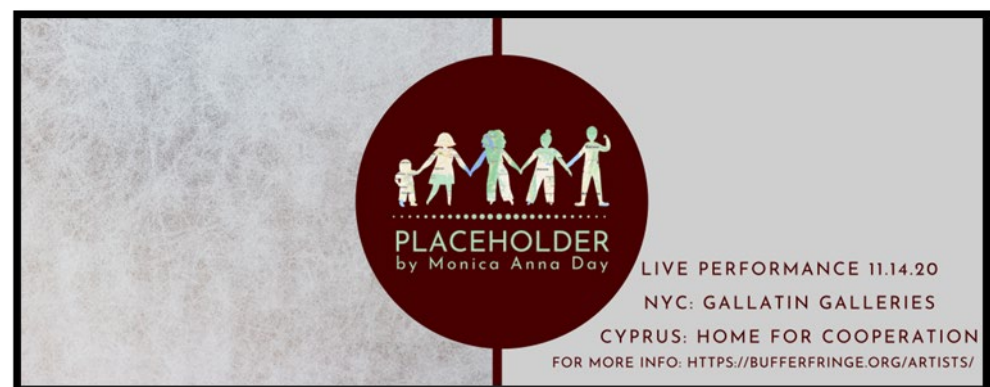
From the artist’s explanation, it is understood that he started the work by questioning the experience of the notion of ‘displacement’ in a dialogue; “How does a conflict enable us to find our individuality?”. He underlines the different languages that Turkish and Greek Cypriots use and tries to raise awareness of experiencing commonality through art projects and understanding the changes in connecting with the space and with one’s own body [35].



**Figure 5.** Event Poster 2020–2021. Source: Buffer Fringe Art Festival.

### Example Three: ‘Placeholder’

Placeholder defines the sensory process that a human establishes with the space they are connected to; that is, to change ‘location’ and to adapt to new ‘settlements’ (Figure 6). Understanding the body is also an expression created to make the meaning given by the space adapt to the body [36].



**Figure 6.** Placeholder artist banner. 2020. Source: Buffer Fringe Art Festival.

It is understood that in all the examples, the body–space relation is emphasized. The ways of attachment of the self to the space through sensory processes were shared with the audience. The first example (95 Stops/Mapping the Space Between Us), the site specific to public and private urban spaces used a digital map in the Festival 2000 and real-time travel to perceive the migration and displacement in 2001. Perceiving the physical border while travelling from Famagusta to Limassol is part of the experience, relating memories, buildings, hopes, and grief. Listening to music, eating, or looking to the same scene and common senses created by these are seen as elements of attachment

and common dreams. The second example (Clutch) highlights language as a border and reactions of the body to the Turkish and Greek language and different language. The border of language is overwhelmed by the art projects where people can perceive the same artwork and feel similarities in connecting space without talking. On the other hand, the third example (Placeholder) is related with the adaptation of the body to the new place after displacement. The border is more internalized this time, attempting to make the audience delve deeper to discover the sensual boundaries felt with displacement. With concepts of the permeability of a border, fluidity of territoriality, impossibility, and leaving and returning, the projects show the bitter realization of displacement with the hope that penetrates through collective sharing.

### 5.2.2. Buffer Fringe Actors

From the Buffer Fringe Festival's Creative Team, Ellada Evangelou's interviews on the festivals in 2020 and 2021 are used as comprehensive material to enhance the intentions of the artists. She is a Cypriot-born curator and was the Executive and Artistic Director of the Buffer Fringe Festival in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Cyprus Mail quotes Evangelou's questions: "What does it mean to resist? What does it mean to be inclusive? What does it mean to make space for new stories?" and highlights her answer that answering these questions was challenging in a politically unstable island and making it even more challenging was the pandemic and social unrest throughout 2020–2021. Art was and is the tool she believed should be used for making changes in life [32].

Evangelou sees art as intersected with activism (ARTivism) and says that the creation of artworks reminiscent of experiences, traumas, and narratives is required in places such as Cyprus. This is especially due to the fact that islands are detached places, and memories, stories, and grief need an arena, a stage, to recreate what colonization and conflict mean to individuals [29]. With her background as a theater maker and as an academic, she defines her vision as shedding light on the folds of rare groups and aims to connect performances to unexplored identities and cultures throughout the history of the island.

When asked about the inspiration behind 'Displacement', she stated that war and immigration unease people and that she sees art as providing a platform where hidden individual stories can be shared. Because of COVID-19, when movements were restricted globally, the meaning of displacement changed; thus, Buffer Fringe 2021 hosted these mobility and immobility themes together [30].

The concept of 'Displacement', carried out from 2020 to 2021, provided an opportunity for the projects to be presented physically in Nicosia (north and south) and Famagusta as well as online, with an even deeper concern regarding the connection to space after the COVID-19 pandemic. Evangelou exemplifies the '95 Steps' project presented in collaboration between the Mitos Performing Arts Center (Limassol) and Magusa Kale Pasaji (Famagusta). The virtual mapping of the two coastal cities changed to another map with 95 stops signifying 95 km between the two cities. The stops started in Limassol in 2020 and changed to starting in Famagusta in 2021 and, together with the online sound installation, provided an opportunity for looking from the 'other' side. With this move, again, the connection to individual narratives was very strong as the map symbolized the displacement of refugees from Famagusta to Limassol and from Limassol to Famagusta [36].

On the issue of the festival's peacebuilding aims, Evangelou stated that in 2021, having three venues, one in the south, one in the north, and one in the Buffer Zone, made people walk across the divide to see or present artistic works, and they did this as if the barrels, barbed wires, and army were not there. This provided Cypriots and visitors with a chance to perceive Cyprus in another way. She thinks that managing, at least for a couple of days, the mental geography of people is the power of the art [37].

## 6. Findings and Discussion

As part of the Buffer Fringe 2020–2021 festival and focusing on individual experiences, these studies link the concept of 'displacement,' which is as old as humanity's existence,

with boundaries. In addition to the staged performances, the projects that enable the artists and the visitors to participate from their own living spaces and individual spaces enabled the exchange of ideas between the artist and the audience. The scope of the festival included the border that divides two communities living in the same geographical region, such as Cyprus, the prohibitions that come with the virus and the effect on the world in terms of situations that suddenly appear in the flow of daily life and disrupt habits, and many more topics. It highlights different events, likely to happen anywhere in the world, that have similar experiences.

The concept of boundaries, considered within Buffer Fringe, provides a creative framework for people to interact with the 'other.' At the same time, it is possible to create a bridge that turns this situation into cooperation by using the potential to go beyond borders with the help of their imaginations. The festival uses art that builds a road between two places, which is both direct and indirect and also symbolic, physical, and intellectual, as a connecting bridge. All of the projects, productions, and educational content fall within the scope; it is about the factors that form the borders and the people who leave due to the existence of borders. At the same time, the performing of artwork offers people an opportunity to communicate and share their ideas without words in a multi-lingual, divided country.

It can be seen that both the director of the creative and organizing team, Ellada Evangelou, and the artists, as the presenters, share the same ideal and believe that art, specifically performing art, is a very strong tool for bridging the two communities across the di-vide. They both dream of creating a medium for people to share individual experiences, face their traumas, and see the 'other'. From the words of the artists and the directors, the borders created by COVID-19 may unexpectedly make us more creative in overcoming boundaries. From the verbal records of the organizers, it is traced that the Buffer Fringe Festival was planned and executed to have positive social consequences from the very beginning. From the start date of the festival until the present day, the process is creatively developing with the belief that this unique Buffer Festival may have the power to heal individuals and the spatial scar of the division.

## 7. Conclusions

The events and festivals derived from the spatial and cultural roots of a community form a basis wherein the self attributes meaning to the experienced, and they are very effective elements in daily public life when they are organized to operate beyond physical and mental borders.

The aim of this article was to show that a human being surrounded by borders can set an example for discovering creative methods and integrating into spaces of conflict.

Home for Cooperation (H4C), and one of its international formations, the Buffer Fringe Festival, creates new spatial patterns for two communities living separately. Unlike many organizations working toward peacebuilding, the HC4 building, located in the neutral zone, right in the middle of the border region, has a symbolic value in terms of its power for spatial transformation since the day it was put into operation. The Buffer Fringe Festival, which started and continues to expand its participation every year, supports this transformation intangibly and concretely.

The projects taking place in the festival show that it is possible to create a bridge that turns people's imagination toward cooperation by using their potential to imagine beyond borders. The festival, which creates abstract space experiences, helps collective ideas mature and find form and offers alternative suggestions for personal and collective space representations in cities struggling with physical boundaries.

Having been divided by the Buffer Zone, Nicosia has been the center of resistance against urban and communal separation. Despite the political deadlock, some revitalization projects have been implemented at the urban and architectural scales. In a post-conflict divided city where international agencies and policy makers' negotiations play a limited role in the city's future, the effect of NGOs' attempts can be immense. The challenges

proposed by community-led initiatives and artists can have unpredictable success in transforming the divided area into a shared space more than through formal plans.

The scrutinization of the Buffer Fringe Festival process in Nicosia as part of spatial planning indicated how the socio-cultural aspects of planning are complementary and inclusive. Considering art performances in general, and the Buffer Fringe Festival in particular, in relation to conflict may shed light on the peace-building strategies in divided cities.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, H.G. and S.B.; methodology, H.G.; validation, H.G. and S.B.; formal analysis, H.G. and S.B.; investigation, S.B.; resources, H.G. and S.B.; data curation, H.G. and S.B.; writing—original draft preparation, S.B.; writing—review and editing, H.G. and S.B.; visualization, S.B.; supervision, H.G.; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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