

The Second Life of Modern Period Architecture

*Resilient and adaptive
renovation towards net-zero
carbon heritage buildings*

Talking Buildings

From Community Engagement to Citizen Science

23 March, 2026, Nicosia

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NetHood



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SINCERE at a glance

Technology

Optimize the carbon footprint and energy performance of historic buildings through innovative materials, energy harvesting technologies, and ICT tools.

Society

Raise awareness and offer opportunities for engagement for the preservation of cultural heritage buildings at national and international level.

Horizon Europe

*Grant no. 101123293
HORIZON-CL5-2022-D4-02
Start: October 1st, 2023
Duration: 3 years
Budget: 5 420 275 EUR
18 partners
4 pilots*

The talking buildings game

The game

*Giving a voice to
a building as a
participatory process*

Inspiration

*Who talks through a
building? How can a
building talk?*

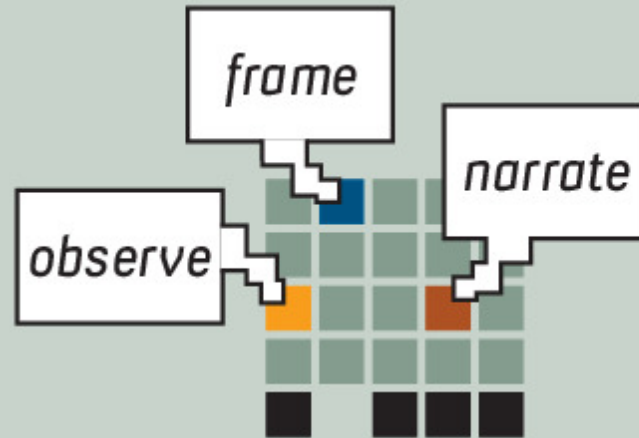
Application

*How can we use
this tool here
in Nicosia?*

The game

The talking buildings challenge

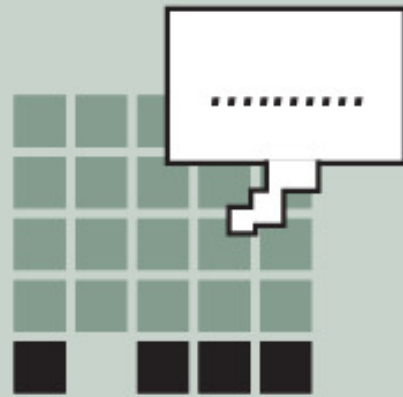
Give a voice to a building in 5 steps




sincere

What should I do?

1. *Visit a cultural heritage building you feel connected to*



This building wants to say something



2. Observe its facade, its details. Can you enter inside?



Using all the senses, except taste!

3. *Frame* an object or an area inside or outside

What attracts your attention?



You!



4. *Narrate a story or a thought from the building's perspective*

So, imagine you are me!^{*}



And the real me, what will do?

**film me and speak over like it is me talking*



5. *Share your story!*

*Record my story and share it!**



Wait, I need some inspiration first

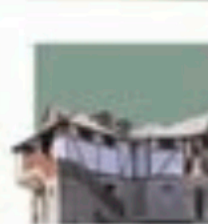
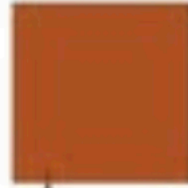
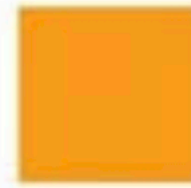
**more details at talkingbuildings.net*



Συνομιλώντας με τα Ιστορικά Κτίρια της Ρόδου



ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΕΣ ΗΜΕΡΕΣ
ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΗΣ ΚΛΗΡΟΝΟΜΙΑΣ
2025



Γίνε κι εσύ συμμετοχος
προάγοντας τη βιώσιμη
χρήση τους!



Συνομιλώντας Με τα Ιστορικά Κτίρια της Ρόδου ~ ~

Public group · 385 members



+ Invite

Share

Joined

Inspiration



Not a new idea!



If Buildings Could Talk ...

*... some of them would sound like Shakespeare.
Others would speak like the Financial Times,
yet others would praise God, or Allah.
Some would just whisper,*

*Buildings are like people, in fact.
Old and young, male and female,
ugly and beautiful, fat and skinny,*

*Don't get me wrong: this is not a metaphor.
Buildings DO speak to us!
They have messages. Of course.
Some really WANT a constant dialogue with us.
Some rather listen carefully first.*

Wim Wenders



Rolex Learning Center, Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (CH)

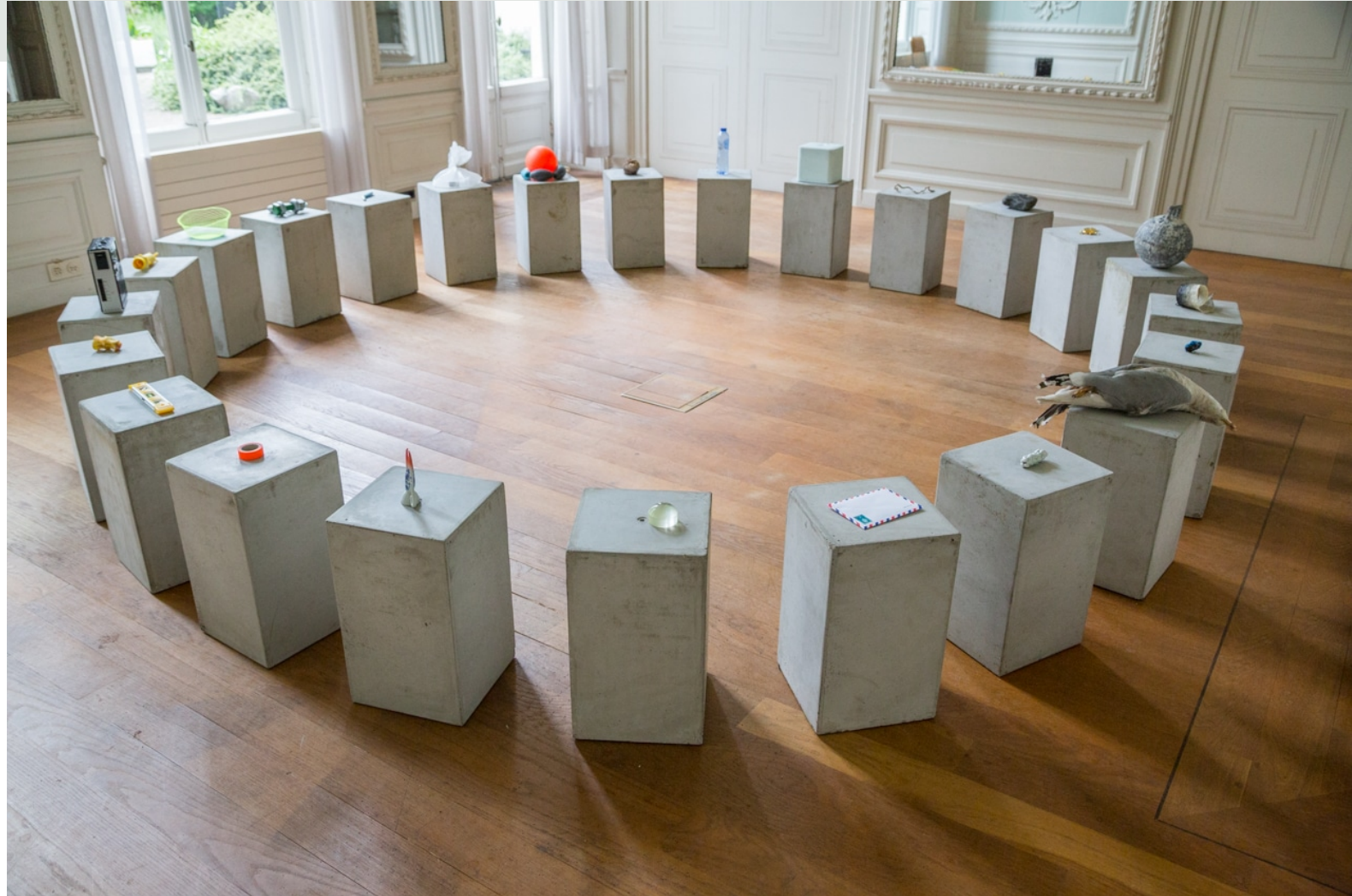
The parliament of things

*What if we welcomed
all animals, plants and
things into our Parliament?*

*What would the argument of the
cod, algae or Gulf Stream be?*

*What positions would the
trees take and what future
would oil see for itself?*

Bruno Latour



Even A Brick Wants To Be Something

*If you think of Brick, you say to Brick,
'What do you want, Brick?'
And Brick says to you,
'I like an Arch.'
And if you say to Brick,
'Look, arches are expensive,
and I can use a concrete lintel over you.
What do you think of that, Brick?'
Brick says, 'I like an Arch.'
And it's important, you see, that you honor the
material that you use. ...
You can only do it if you honor the brick and glorify
the brick instead of shortchanging it.*

Louis Kahn



Inspiration

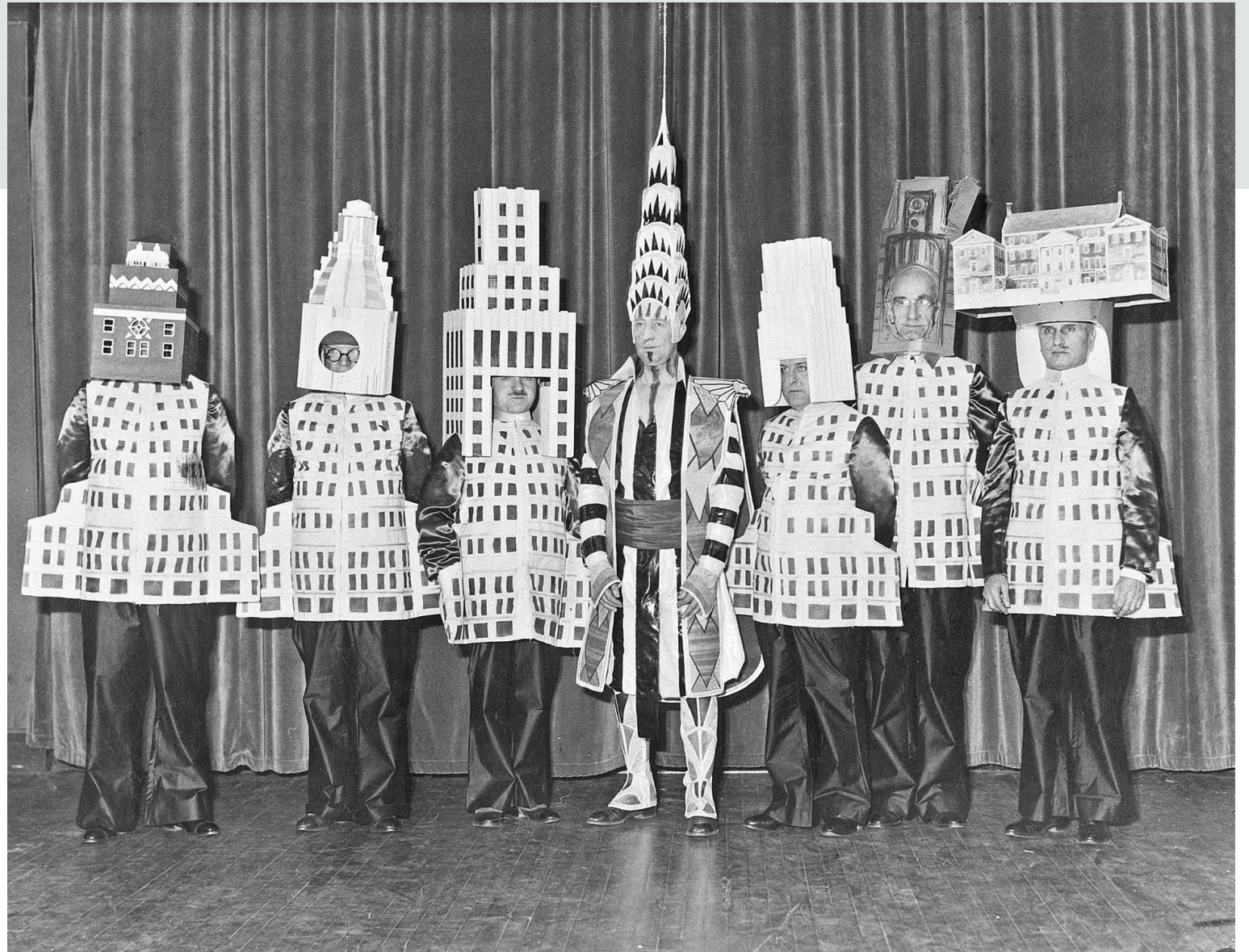
Who?



Who talks through the building?

Who talks?

*The
architects
?*



Famous Architects Dress as Their Famous New York City Buildings (1931)

Who talks?

The
architects
?



Sketch of a villa in Bucharest by architect Alfred Popper

Who talks?

*The
residents
?*



Residents of the under demolition Haggerston estate in Hackney, London; Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Who talks?

*The
activists
?*



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Who talks?

*The
owners
?*



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Who talks?

*The
artists
?*



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Who talks?

*The
Nature
?*



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Who talks?

*The
History
?*



Conversations with the historic buildings of Rhodes; Photo: Maria Bakari

Who talks?

*The
technology
?*



Light projections on the facade of the Petruzzelli Theatre in Bari

Who talks?

*The
users
?*



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Who talks?

*The
users
?*



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Who talks?

*The
users
?*



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

*Who talks?
The
visitors
?*



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Who talks?

The
market
?



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Who talks?

*The
media
?*



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Who talks?

*I, the
building*



Who talks?

*I, the
machine*



For about 20 years, i operated, transforming raw cotton into the essential material for the textile industry.

Screenshot from the 2025 video by Elisavet Keskini and Dimitris Tsoukalas, Democritus University, Xanthi

Who talks?

*We, the
materials
?*



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Inspiration

How?



*How can a building
talk?*

Voice over



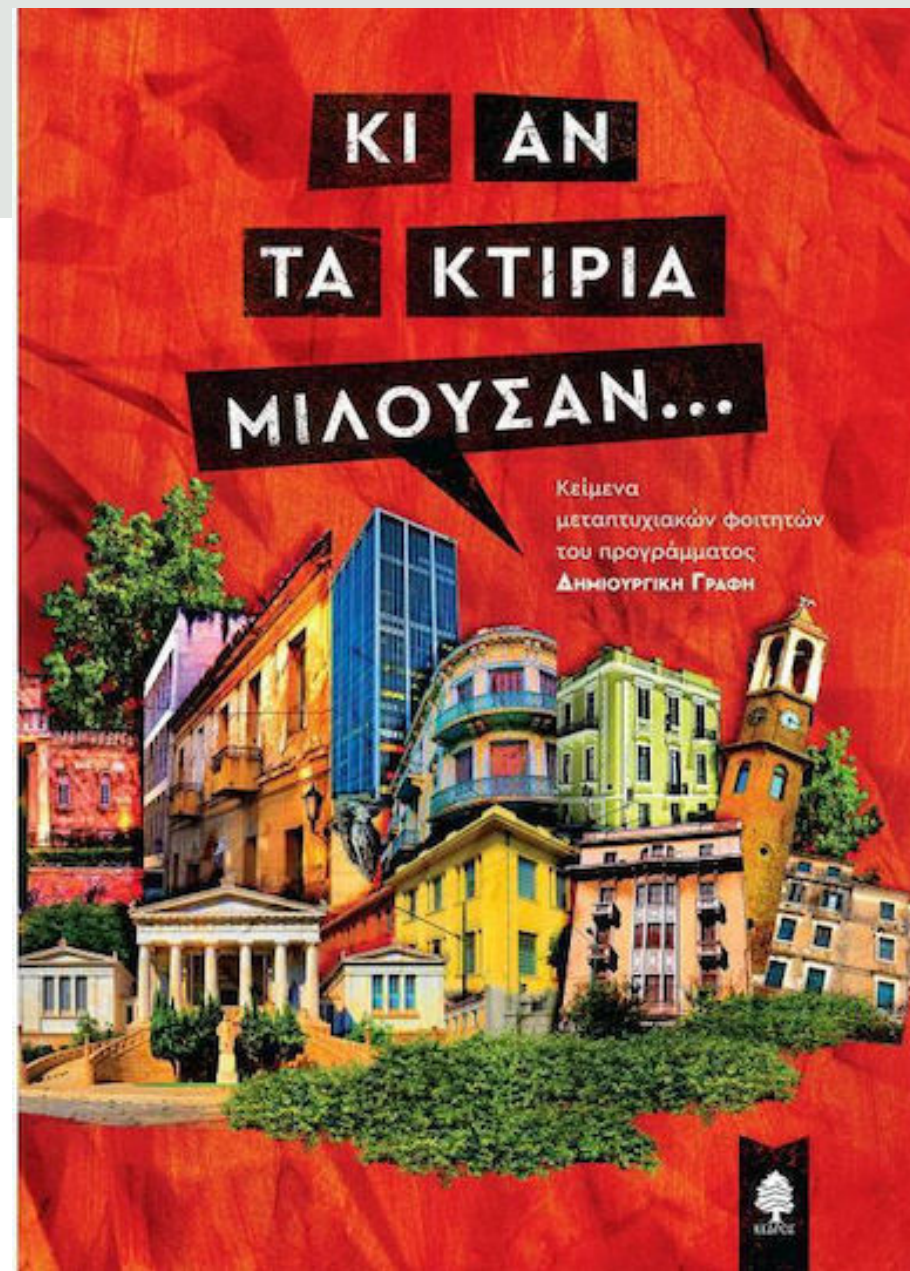
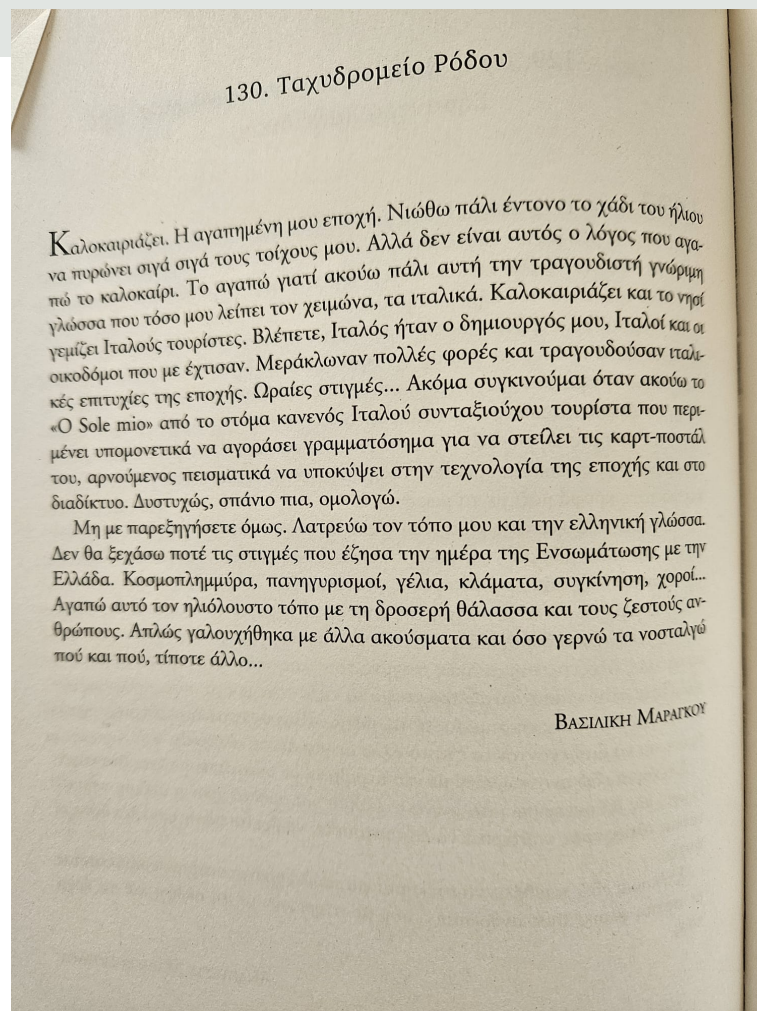
SINCERE project - Heritage in Dialogue - European Heritage Days 2024



but if we look at the sustainability aspects of my existence

Screenshot from the online conference of buildings, European Heritage Days 2024

Creative writing



If buildings could talk, Kedros editions

Facade art



Installation on the facade of Place des Arts, Montreal, Quebec, 2014 by Krzysztof Wodiczko.

Soundscapes



Screenshot from the film The Prison of History (2023)

Traces from the past



Jorge Otero Pailos



Different ways to use the game

- Understanding the space
- Understanding ourselves
- Communicating our ideas about the space



Who listens to the building?



Different actors, settings and processes

- Understanding the settings and processes
 - Knowledge production: scientific lab, expert conferences
 - Decision making: real life lab, participatory workshops
 - Collective awareness: public realm, interactive events
 - Learning: schools, social settings
- Understanding the involved actors

Providing suitable input to specific settings and various actors

- Various actors: scientists, architects, conservationists, engineers, policy makers, local community, nonhumans
- Citizen science: knowledge production by experts and citizens
- Inclusive decision making: authorities and local communities
- Social learning: many actors, long-term, learning by doing

Application



What is at stake?



Ambivalence of heritage and its value negotiation

- Heritage: something transmitted / acquired from a predecessor
- Ambivalent: having contradictory feelings like wanting and not wanting [ambi- means both and -valent, from the Latin verb valēre meaning to be strong]
- Negotiation: to confer with another so as to arrive at the settlement of some matter

Core tensions in negotiating heritage value

- Historical authenticity versus sustainability
- Reversibility versus performance
- Aesthetic and experiential values versus technical rationality
- Cost efficiency versus craft, quality and ethics
- Safety and building codes versus heritage values
- Energy production versus visual and cultural integrity
- Durability versus material authenticity
- Transport and locality versus technical optimisation

Historical authenticity versus sustainability

- Historical integrity and cultural continuity vs. environmental responsibility and climate mitigation
- Retaining original materials versus replacing them with high-performance alternatives
- Limiting interventions versus deep energy retrofits
- Original materials may have poor thermal performance, while sustainable materials may alter appearance, texture or construction logic

Historical authenticity versus sustainability: Windows

Triple glazing, aluminium windows are more effective for thermal performance than the original single-glazed wooden windows, which instead can tell many stories of a past culture, its construction tradition, materials and craftsmanship, preserving the building's integrity and its authentic experience etc.



Photo: Panayotis Antoniadis

Reversibility versus performance

- Future adaptability, precaution, heritage ethics versus long-term efficiency and resilience
- Using removable insulation systems or non-invasive fixings to avoid irreversible structural or material changes
- Reversible systems often have lower durability, while high-performance solutions tend to be more invasive

Reversibility versus performance: Insulation

Internal insulation systems allow for energy efficiency upgrades, avoiding façade alteration by means of a reversible system, but risking moisture problems.



Source: *URBED Ltd* - urbed.coop/internal-wall-insulation

Aesthetic and experiential values vs. technical rationality

- Beauty, sensory experience, meaning vs. measurable performance, optimisation
- Exposing technical systems vs. concealing them; visible ducts, panels or added layers can alter proportions and textures
- Demolition, replacement and densification versus preservation

Inclusive decision making in negotiating heritage value



AI generated image by Ileana Apostol 2026

Inclusive decision making in negotiating heritage value



AI generated image by Ileana Apostol 2026

Application



So what?



Talking Buildings - qualities of impersonation

- Drawing attention (humor, central stage)
- Diversifying perception (details, perspectives, temporalities)
- Stimulating participation (playfulness, anonymity, collective)

Application



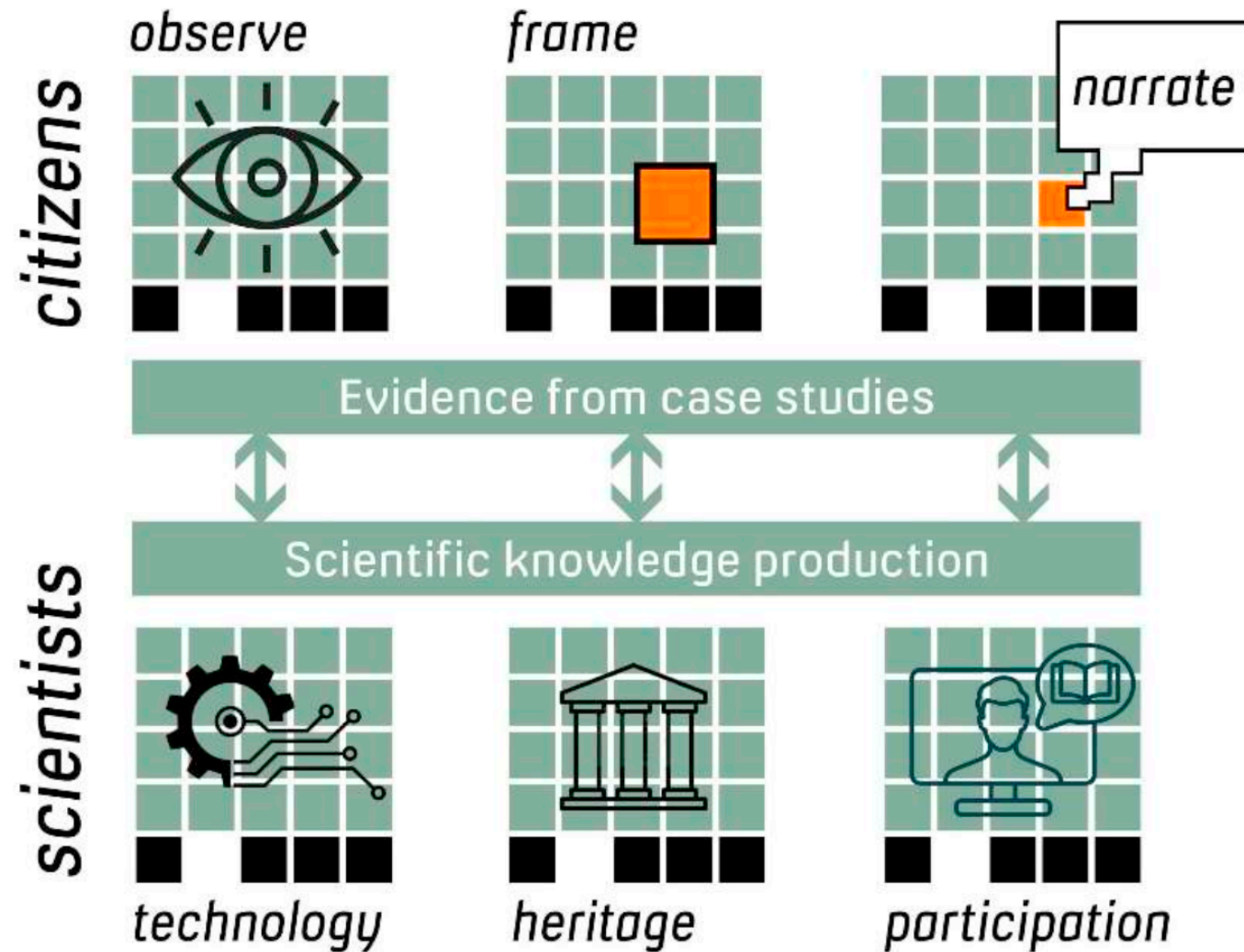
The Nicosia game?



Talking Buildings - three rules of the game

- Choose a core tension in the process of heritage renovation
- Use the dialogue form
- Identify and clearly express the generic and the specific of your particular case study

Talking Buildings in citizen science processes

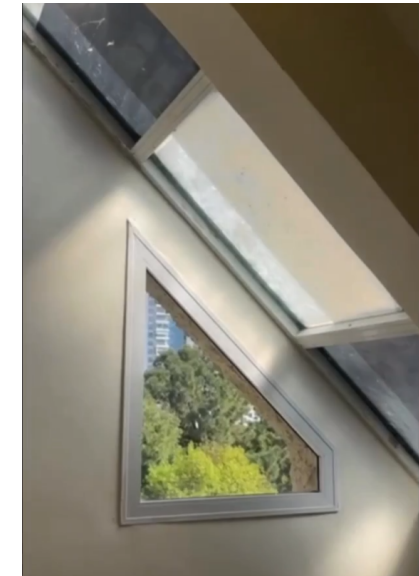




*What are some
good examples?*

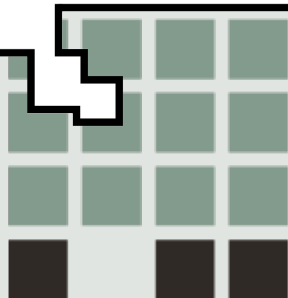


The workshop in Xanthi - March 2025



More info: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhUgFF0muaQ

*More information at
talkingbuildings.net*



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