

Tourism and Political Change



Edited by Richard Butler and Wantanee Suntikul

The Opening of the Ledra Crossing in Nicosia: Social and Economic Consequences

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

17 The Opening of the Ledra Crossing in Nicosia: Social and Economic Consequences

David Jacobson, Bernard Musyck, Stelios Orphanides and Craig Webster

Introduction

Cyprus is divided along ethnic lines, with Greek Cypriots in the south and Turkish Cypriots in the north. The division is formalised by a Green Line, established by the United Nations in the aftermath of the war between Greek Cypriot and Turkish armed forces in 1974. The Green Line runs through the middle of Nicosia, the capital city, which has in fact been divided for an even longer period, following inter-ethnic unrest in the 1960s. There are huge consequences for the Cyprus economy, not least for tourism, which is a key contributor, accounting for significant amounts of employment and income (Jacobson et al, 2008).

Following agreement between officials on both sides, in April 2003 a number of crossings were opened between north and south. None of these, however, were in busy urban areas. The opening in April 2008 of Ledra Street, which runs north–south through the heart of the old city of Nicosia, was the first crossing directly connecting residential and commercial areas in one municipality.

For all these crossings, including the new Ledra crossing, individuals must show a passport or identity card. The Turkish Cypriot authorities check this, and date-stamp a visa form on crossing to and from the north. Many Greek Cypriots do not cross into the north because of this. “Why should I show my passport to anyone while moving around in my own country?” is a typical explanation for this reluctance.

Table 17.1 shows the number of people that used this crossing from its opening until February 2009, the latest month for which data are available.

The table shows that of the three categories of people using the Ledra crossing, the largest is the non-Cypriot, mainly tourist, category. Prior to the opening of the Ledra crossing, many tourists in the south did not know where or how to cross into the north. The new crossing is much more central and obvious.

Table 17.1: Crossings through Ledra Street/Lokmaci checkpoint. Source: Republic of Cyprus Police

Month	Greek Cypriots	Turkish Cypriots	Non-Cypriots	Total
April 2008	46,925	29,216	21,128	97,269
May 2008	37,129	22,560	41,458	101,147
June 2008	19,596	17,074	29,643	66,313
July 2008	19,851	18,716	33,838	72,405
August 2008	17,985	17,272	30,204	65,461
September 2008	15,978	18,593	31,383	65,954
October 2008	19,804	20,019	37,271	77,094
November 2008	18,932	18,612	32,749	70,293
December 2008	23,561	25,865	34,311	83,737
Total 2008	219,761	187,927	291,985	699,673
January 2009	21,769	18,651	31,622	72,042
February 2009	20,076	16,311	30,631	67,018

As we have argued elsewhere, the Cyprus problem has been reflected for tourism in the restriction on movement, both of tourists and of tourism professionals, across the Green Line (Webster *et al.*, 2009). Any diminution in that restriction on movement – arising, of necessity, from a relaxation in inter-communal tension – would therefore be reflected in an improvement in tourism.

The opening of the Ledra crossing is an example of such a diminution in restriction on movement. It is also, as will be shown below, a consequence of rapprochement between the leaderships of the two communities. The Ledra crossing is in the middle of Old Nicosia, a main attraction for tourists; they are therefore aware of it, and given how easy it is to cross, many do. Tourism is, moreover, not limited to non-Cypriots. Many Cypriots also cross for tourist and other purposes.

This chapter examines some of the causes and consequences of the opening of the Ledra Street crossing – known to Turkish Cypriots as the Lokmaci crossing. The chapter draws on research that was carried out by an international team, including Greek and Turkish Cypriots, in the summer of 2008 (Jacobson *et al.*, 2009). The rest of the information for the chapter is derived from secondary sources, including Greek and English language newspapers in Cyprus.

Having set the context in this introduction, this chapter goes on to briefly review the literature on divided cities. From this literature some key issues emerge that suggest that tourism may have an important role in the context of the Cyprus problem. Tourism in Cyprus is predominantly that of non-Cypriots. However, given the increasing ease with which Cypriots in Nicosia can go to the north of the city following the opening of the Ledra crossing, it should also be noted that particularly for Greek Cypriots, ‘sightseeing’ or tourism is one of the reasons why they visit the other side. The final section of the chapter considers the new crossing in the context of the literature and discusses the implications for the future of Nicosia and of Cyprus.

Chapter extract

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