

CHARTING A PATH TOWARDS RECONCILIATION THROUGH CONTESTED HERITAGE

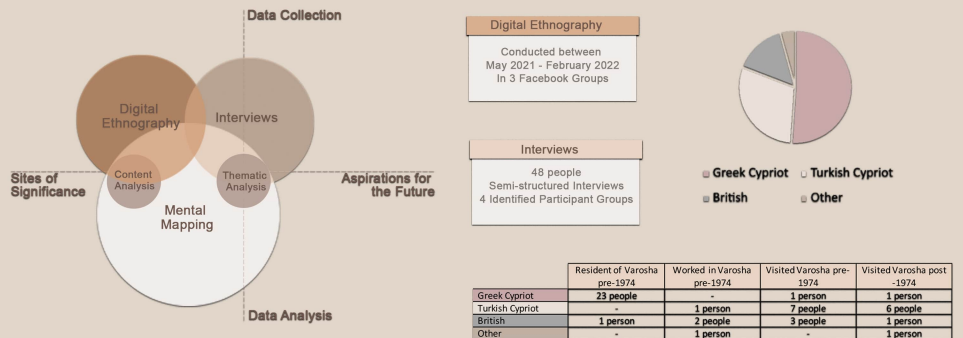
Nilsu Erkul, Doctoral Candidate at the Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University

INTRODUCTION

In October 2020, with an initiative by the Turkish Cypriot government, two main streets of Varosha opened to the public. After 48 years of ongoing conflict and discussions, this strong political action turned Varosha into a museum of tragedy, dashing residents' hopes of returning to their city and putting a ramp on hopes for a peaceful resolution. Employing a comprehensive approach that combines digital ethnography and interviews, this paper seeks to reveal different communities' aspirations for the future of Varosha and identify sites of significance in the area to offer potential pathways towards reconciliation through the identification of contested heritage. Presenting nuanced and diverse findings, this paper amplifies the voices of different groups of participants and emphasizes the vital role of intergenerational engagement in the conservation and interpretation of post-war sites.

METHODS

This research employs a combination of ethnographic methods; including **digital ethnography, interviews, and mental mapping** to gain a deeper understanding and visualize data. It aims to collect two types of data; collective memory and oral history to identify sites of significance and communities' aspirations for the future of the site.



BACKGROUND

Once the rising tourist centre of the Mediterranean, Varosha had a modernist layout and a lifestyle ahead of its time, completely different from what was happening in the rest of Cyprus.



Memories of leisure and culture have been violently displaced by memories of war and conflict that emerged during the division of the island in 1974.



Varosha has been used as a **bargaining chip in the Cyprus Peacetalks and left uninhabited**. With the sudden opening of Democracy Avenue and John Kennedy Avenue, this ghostly urban remnant was opened to the public for the first time in 46 years. At the cost of destroying the value of its former inhabitants, Varosha is rapidly turning into an **open-air museum of tragedy**.



This political action has provoked strong reactions and condemnation not only in Cyprus but also internationally for **violating human rights**.

CONTRIBUTIONS

- Reveals diverse perspectives on the future of Varosha.
- Emphasizes the vital role of intergenerational engagement
- Identifies contested heritage sites as potential pathways to reconciliation.
- Demonstrates the value of digital ethnography in capturing memories and interwoven narratives.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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DISCUSSION

In an area like Varosha, where there is lots of contestation as well as a lack of historical knowledge, the data that is collected through individual narratives and collective memory are important. As Green (2004) suggests, valuing individual narratives as well as collective memory allows for a focus on how discourses of power negotiate beliefs and are situated within dominant narratives.



Over the years, technological disruptions in communication tools have significantly changed the way we store and interact with our collective memories (Yasseri et al. 2022). The "material" inaccessibility of Varosha for former visitors and residents has led them to create their own virtual Varosha on Facebook. As these groups revolved around sharing memories, the posts provided valuable data for conducting digital ethnography. The integrated use of both digital ethnography and interviews enabled this research to identify important sites in Varosha. The two buildings below are **just a few of the buildings identified as playing a role in the cultural and social life of the former inhabitants**.



This research **captures the diverse texture of different communities' perspectives and aspirations for the future of the site** through oral history collection and demonstrates that **digital ethnography can be a useful tool for capturing memories, revealing interwoven narratives** to identify key sites in the contested geography of Varosha. These sites bear witness to the collective memories, hopes and aspirations of different communities, offering fertile ground for dialogue and the possibility of transformative reconciliation and healing.