

Assessment of traumatic landscapes in the context of urban memory and dark tourism: A case study of Northern Cyprus Varosha

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze Closed Varosha, a prominent tourist destination in the Eastern Mediterranean, as a traumatic landscape in the 1970s. This study also seeks to evaluate this site from the perspective of landscape architecture, with a particular focus on urban memory and dark tourism concepts, and to introduce the concept of “traumatic landscapes” to the existing literature on the subject. The case study analysis, on-site observation and document examination techniques were employed as research methods. A comprehensive literature review was conducted as part of this study, encompassing data on Closed Varosha, the study area, and its surrounding context. The Varosha city visited with the assistance of a travel guide, and comprehensive information and visual materials (photographs, video footage, etc.) collected in the field study. Study results proposed that the landscapes where social traumas are experienced and which have become a symbol should be used for cultural and scientific activities. This may be achieved by making use of urban memory in order to transform these landscapes into an improved version of the existing ones. Furthermore, this could serve to awaken the awareness of universal peace in visitors within the scope of dark tourism. Another potential avenue for exploration is the organization of common sense workshops with the participation of stakeholders from both communities. This could facilitate the development of future solutions through a participatory approach. Additionally, there is a need to expand transnational and multidisciplinary studies. This would enable future generations to engage in dialogue about Closed Varosha in a constructive manner.

Keywords: dark tourism; frozen heritage; ghost city; traumatic sites; Closed Varosha

1. Introduction

The characteristics of a site of memory extend beyond its physical attributes. In addition, these locations embody historical significance, social interactions, and the dynamics of power (Till, 2003). The concept of space is of particular significance in the context of memory, particularly in the case of traumatic events (Çavdar, 2017). Events and situations that occur due to reasons such as war, natural disasters, and genocide can cause physical and psychological wounds that can last for generations. These wounds can be perpetuated by phenomena such as discrimination, poverty, and migration. Such experiences can be defined as collective trauma (Soykan, 2022).

Groups such as family, ethnic group and nation can be defined as main memory communities (Misztal, 2003). The main memory groups exposed to trauma regulate which aspects of the past will be retained and which will be forgotten. This is achieved through the formation of shared values, emotions and meanings within the society in question. This process is perpetuated through the transmission of memories to subsequent generations. In this context, landscapes, places, ruins, monuments, and other sites where traumas are experienced play a significant role in the preservation of group memory. The desire to discover their historical pain, interest in cultural heritage,

curiosity and desire to obtain information, and the desire to strengthen their ethnic identity have led individuals to travel to trauma sites (Özdemir, 2023). The phenomenon of “dark tourism” has emerged as a specific type of tourism that encompasses visits by post-modern societies to attractions with the aim of exploring their cultural heritage, confirming their national identity and sense of belonging, enabling individuals to gain insights into the relationship between life and death, maintaining social memory, and experiencing dark heritage sites (Biran et al. 2011; Golańska, 2015; Özdemir, 2023; Winter, 2011).

This study aims to examine the transformation of Closed Varosha, a prominent tourist destination in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 1970s, into a traumatic landscape over the past five decades. Study also seeks to evaluate and develop policies this transformation from the perspective of landscape architecture, with a particular focus on the concepts of memory and dark tourism. Additionally, it introduces the concept of “traumatic landscapes” into the existing literature through policy development on this subject. It is crucial to identify and examine the intergenerational historical trauma embedded in the memories of the two homogeneous communities, the Turkish and Greek communities, regarding Varosha, which was once a shared living space. This should be done through the policy development, with the aim of preserving the educational aspects of the tours and visits organized in the area. The area is now open to dark tourism, and it is of the utmost importance that the original purpose is not deviated from. This purpose is to incubate transnational and multidisciplinary research, and to ensure the future of the place.

This study has also evaluated the concepts of cultural heritage and memory, traumatic landscapes and dark tourism. This study has been done in order to contribute to academic attempts and contemporary literature to transform landscapes where social traumas are experienced and which have become emblematic, and to reveal the values of such disused places.

The concept of cultural heritage is defined as “all movable and immovable, tangible and intangible cultural assets that have survived from the past of a society or country” (Ahunbay, 1994; Çoban and Halaç, 2023). Cultural heritage is a significant domain that warrants protection due to its intrinsic artistic and scientific value, as well as its status as a shared heritage of humanity. The preamble of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention states that the degradation or destruction of any part of the cultural and natural heritage constitutes a harmful degradation of the heritage of all nations, that parts of the cultural and natural heritage are of exceptional importance and should therefore be preserved as part of the world heritage of all mankind, and that participation in the protection of the cultural and natural heritage is the duty of the entire international community (Kuşçuoğlu and Taş, 2017).

Cultural heritage has documentary value insofar as its content and the information it conveys to contemporary society are of intrinsic value. Cultural heritage provides insight into the characteristics of societies that utilize and evolve it over time. In addition to the social, cultural, political and economic characteristics of societies, their technical level, fashion and tastes, aesthetic approaches, lifestyles, rituals, social and social norms can be understood by correctly interpreting these physical artefacts (Ahunbay, 1994; Kuban 1994; Kuşçuoğlu and Taş, 2017). The threats to cultural

heritage can be classified into two categories: Those resulting from natural causes and those caused by human activity.

In the context of conservation approaches to the transfer of tangible and intangible cultural heritage to future generations, the existence of a shared memory formed by individuals within a common context and time, and the survival of this memory, represent a crucial criterion. In this regard, the concepts of cultural heritage and memory are in a symbiotic relationship (Al and Coştur, 2008; Çoban and Halaç, 2023).

The study of memory has introduced a sophisticated set of theoretical concepts for analyzing singular events of history and violence framed by the term “trauma” (McNeill and Peter, 2014). Trauma can be defined as any event or series of events that exceed the capacity of the psyche to represent or mentally process the experience (Garland, 2018; Levine, 2014). Despite the paucity of evidence indicating a direct causal relationship between trauma and memory loss, the concept of implicit memories of trauma is a topic of ongoing debate in the field of psychology (Kihlstrom, 2006). The most significant contribution of memory studies has been to elucidate the manner in which seminal historical events serve as a distinctive point of reference for societies, influencing the formation of collective identity and contributing to processes of democratization and reconciliation. Although interdisciplinary in nature, the field of memory studies tends to focus on cultural and political phenomena. The study area, Closed Varosha, can be defined as a traumatic landscape problem in terms of its impact on trauma and memory.

In addition to the official historiography, which presents the past in accordance with established social norms and the constraints of remembering and forgetting, there are alternative memory narratives. These narratives are based on the accounts of individuals who have been subjected to crimes against humanity, such as genocide and massacres, or who have learned about such events through intergenerational transmission. In consequence, the collective memory of groups that do not conform to the accepted norms of citizenship serves to remind us of the “dark” and “objectionable” aspects of national history and heritage. From a perspective informed by the state, history is not simply a matter of what is stored in the collective memory; instead, history is constituted by a process of selective retention, representation and institutionalization (Hobsbawm, 2006).

Contrary to the assertions made in historical texts, social memory is a phenomenon that is scientifically produced to a much greater extent than collective memory. Indeed, it is society itself that plays the primary role in the production of social memory. The collective memory of a society is constituted by a set of shared interests, including common values, emotions and reactions (Aslan et al., 2016). While collective memory is often conceptualized as a repository of culture, this perspective can potentially lead to confusion between the terms “collective memory” and “cultural memory” (Darian and Hamilton, 1994; Hussein et al., 2020).

Cultural memory has been the subject of study in a number of different interdisciplinary fields, including psychology, sociology, geography and architecture. Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora are regarded as the pioneers of contemporary cultural memory studies, particularly within the discipline of built environment (Hussein et al., 2020; Mahmoudi et al. 2015). In this context, it is imperative to

consider cultural and urban memory as inextricably linked entities. The study of urban memory has become a significant area of research within the field of social history, particularly in the last century. The interaction between urban memory and space is further complicated by the fact that individuals perceive urban space in different ways, which in turn leads to differences in their experiences and interpretations (Ünlü, 2017).

The concept of urban memory encompasses the notion that past accumulations are an integral aspect of the collective urban experience (Rossi, 2006). As Calvino (1974) asserts, cities are locales of exchange where individual experiences, memories, and the collective past are shared. The objects, tools, housing, means of transportation, places, and time spent in them shape the formation of memory. The emotional connections that people establish with these elements influence the way they interact with and remember them. The relationship between urban space and memory is analogous to the relationship between people and things, as well as between space and time. In this instance, the relationship between humans and space is reversed, and the human experience of time reveals the memory of space (Taşçı, 2023). Urban memory is the set of elements that determine the character of urban spaces and, as a result, define urban identity (Beşgen and Topaloğlu, 2017). The urban environment is constituted by a multitude of elements, including streets, avenues, parks and squares, which collectively shape the formation of a society and the development of urban spaces. Urban spaces serve as the nexus for established relationships, exemplifying the collective memory and urban consciousness of a society (Bayazıt and Kısakürek, 2021; Çalpak, 2012).

The concept of space assumes a particularly salient role in the context of traumatic events, as evidenced by the observations of Halbwachs (Halbwachs, 1950). In particular, the location where witnesses' events that cause social trauma, such as natural disasters, war, massacres, terrorist attacks, genocide, becomes a symbol that transcends its physical existence and meaning. In recent times, places with associations of tragic and negative memories have acquired considerable cultural significance. Such places are preserved by the current generation of stakeholders with the intention of conveying the heritage value of the built environment and landscapes, as well as the social value attributed to them, to future generations (Mason, 2019).

Since the early 21st century, the global community has adopted a new approach which conceptualizes trauma as a master narrative of social change. Gao and Alexander (2012) define cultural trauma as an event that leaves a profound and indelible mark on a community's collective consciousness, permanently altering its memory and future identity.

The term "traumatic landscape" is used to describe areas where cultural traumas are physically represented and commemorated. The management and protection of traumatic landscapes, and the balancing of their social value, represents a challenging process. The most crucial question for those engaged in the study of traumatic landscapes is to ascertain the nature of the space that the trauma leaves behind. In particular, it is essential to ascertain the purposes for which the locations where traumatic events occurred and which are no longer suitable for daily use are utilized in the present day, and to determine the extent to which the traces of the past are preserved (Clark, 2015).

The subject of traumatic landscapes can be any location where horrific events, natural disasters, wars, streets, buildings, parks, palaces, churches, monuments, museums, cemeteries, etc. have occurred. For the communities residing in or exposed to traumatic landscapes, or for the individuals who visit them, the experience of being in a place where pain and tragedy are experienced has a profound impact on the self, fostering empathy and understanding. It is indubitable that individuals can gain insight into the past and historical significance of these locales where pain and trauma have been experienced through the perusal of historical texts. Nevertheless, it is feasible to enhance the velocity and durability of learning by visiting traumatic landscapes and being in these locations where intense pain and sorrow were previously experienced, by leveraging the profound connection between the location and memory. The value attributed to these landscapes, and the fact that they are reserved for private use rather than being made available to the public for daily use, gives rise to the concept of dark tourism, whereby the concepts of trauma landscapes and tourism converge.

In recent years, the evolving expectations of tourists have prompted the diversification of tourism types, giving rise to alternative forms of tourism that challenge the traditional sea, sand, and sun model. In particular, since the early 1990s, events such as wars, mass deaths and natural disasters have given rise to the emergence of dark tourism as an alternative type of tourism. Dark tourism can be defined as the act of visiting sites associated with death, disaster and tragedy for the purposes of commemoration, education and entertainment (Ak Çetin, 2020; Foley and Lennon, 2000). Events that have a profound impact on a society, such as historical occurrences, the hardships endured by their ancestors, and the heroic actions of those who have shaped their collective identity, can serve as a catalyst for reflection and revitalisation. The exploration of historical sites can serve as a source of respite from the monotony that often accompanies the study of history (James et al., 2024). The foundation of dark tourism is the desire of contemporary individuals to visit these locations to gain a deeper understanding of past events, to experience the emotions associated with them, and to confront feelings such as sadness, pain, and grief (Kürüm Varolgüneş, 2018). Despite the lack of a universally accepted typology of dark tourism, there is a consensus that a universally accepted definition remains elusive (Miller & Gonzales, 2013). One of the initial examples of such travel is the exploration of gladiatorial playgrounds organized by the Romans in the Middle Ages (Sharples and Stone, 2008).

Notable examples of dark tourism attractions include the site of the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Alcatraz Prison in San Francisco, and the Sealed Knot Society in England, which hosted displays about the English Civil War (Blom, 2000; Seaton, 1996; Wilson, 2008). Following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on 11 September 2001, the area designated as Ground Zero has become a prominent destination for dark tourism. Ground Zero is an area where the deceased are commemorated with ceremonies, vendors sell souvenirs, and tourists evince a high level of interest (Adams, 2007; Akbulut and Ekin, 2018). The ancient Roman city of Pompeii, along with other developing cities in the vicinity, was inundated by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. Those with an interest in the fate of the Pompeii people, who perished in the volcanic eruption, are drawn to this region in considerable numbers (Zhang, 2021).

In 1986, Chernobyl experienced a major nuclear explosion and today it is one of the most popular destinations for dark tourism. In recent years, visits have increased exponentially and it is estimated that around 10,000 tourists visit the nuclear explosion destination annually. In general, these visits are permitted as part of a highly regulated and organized private tour. There are various document checkpoints as visitors arrive at the destination by tour bus (Alili, 2017). Examples of dark tourism include Pearl Harbor (Hawaii/USA), the site of the Japanese attack on the United States during World War II in 1941, Auschwitz (Krakow/Poland), the Nazi concentration camp, and Arlington National Cemetery (Pennsylvania/USA) in the United States, which commemorates those who died in World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War. World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War, Arlington National Cemetery (Pennsylvania, USA), the Berlin Wall (Germany), constructed to prevent East German citizens from escaping to West Germany, the Paris Catacombs (Paris, France), where individuals who died of various diseases were interred in underground cemeteries, the Anne Frank Museum (Amsterdam, Netherlands), erected in memory of Anne Frank, a symbol of the Jewish genocide in Germany, and the death bridge after World War II. The River Kwai Bridge (Kanchanaburi/Thailand), which acquired the epithet “bridge of death” in the wake of the Second World War, and the site of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan (Hiroshima/Japan) (Birdir et al., 2015; Dark tourism, 2024). Blom (2000) refers to dark tourism as ‘morbid tourism’ and considers the graves of famous people within the context of death tourism. Blom provides examples of the Althord House Museum, where Princess Diana’s grave is located, Elvis Presley’s graves in Graceland and Jim Morrison’s graves in Paris. Additionally, he presents examples of the commercial effects of dark tourism (Birdir et al., 2015). The findings of the studies in literature indicate that motivations for visiting places and guiding are driven by ambivalent emotional experiences that facilitate personal transformation and highlights the role of intergenerational trauma in shaping these experiences (Mogano et al., 2023).

When the concept of dark tourism and example destinations are examined, it becomes evident that the objective is to convey the historical narrative of a given destination and the knowledge of the processes and events experienced in this area to future generations through education, to enable societies to take pride in the victories they have won in their past and to learn lessons from their defeats, to awaken the awareness of universal peace in visitors by bringing areas where war, genocide and natural disasters have occurred to tourism, to satisfy the sense of curiosity of visitors about the past and the events of the past, and to create areas that will host cultural and scientific activities (Atabeyoğlu and Güzel, 2021; Birdir et al., 2015; Chang, 2014; Kırmızıgül, 2021; Yuill, 2003).

2. Materials and methods

The study area, Varosha Ghost Town, is situated within the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in the city of Famagusta. Cyprus, with an area of 9251 km², is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, preceded by Sicily and Sardinia. The island is situated 70 km from its nearest neighbour, Türkiye, 102 km from Syria to the east, 165 km from Lebanon, 233 km from Israel, 347 km from Egypt and 835

km from Greece. As a consequence of its geographical position, Cyprus represents a gateway to the Eastern Mediterranean, situated at the intersection of Asia, Europe and Africa, a region commonly referred to as the Old World. Indeed, the island's geostrategic and geopolitical significance arises from its position in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is of paramount importance. The Eastern Mediterranean, a region where numerous civilizations have interacted and blended since historical times, functions as a conduit linking the Eastern and Western hemispheres (Erçakıca and Yüksel, 2023; Kahya, 2022; Kırmızıgül, 2021).

The enclave of Closed Varosha (Varosha in Greek), colloquially known as the “Ghost City” in Famagusta in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), is one such settlement. However, it differs from other settlements that have been left in a state of abandonment in terms of its distinctive characteristics. In the 1970s, Varosha was a highly popular tourist destination in the Eastern Mediterranean, generating significant revenue for the island of Cyprus. Following the Second Cyprus Peace Operation in 1974, the area was placed under the control of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and its inhabitants were compelled to leave (World Atlas, 2024; Holleran and Holleran, 2024).

The area, which was inspected by the United Nations (UN) and located within the “Green Line” that demarcates the separation of Cyprus into two distinct parts, was subsequently closed to settlement and habitation in accordance with the resolutions issued by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Following 46 years of closure, the enclosed Varosha area was partially opened to the public at the unilateral discretion of the TRNC, amidst a geopolitical climate in the Eastern Mediterranean that is undergoing significant shifts (Erçakıca and Yüksel, 2023; Kahya, 2022; Kırmızıgül, 2021). **Figure 1** illustrates a map of Cyprus, delineating the UN buffer zone and the locations of UK military bases.



Figure 1. Map of Cyprus showing the “United Nations” buffer zone and UK military bases.

Source: (World Atlas, 2024).

At the TRNC Water Supply Project Pipeline Repair and Water Handover Ceremony, it was announced that the 1.5 km coastline and sea of Varosha will be accessible to the TRNC population in 2020, following a joint decision with Türkiye. The reopening of Varosha by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) marked a significant geopolitical event. Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan and TRNC leader Ersin Tatar toured the area, which has remained inaccessible since 1974, except to the military, highlighting its dilapidated buildings and unfinished hotels. Notably absent from the reopening were representatives from the Republic of Cyprus, an EU member claiming the territory, as well as UN officials and representatives from other nations. This absence reflects the unilateral nature of the TRNC's decision, as the state is recognized solely by Türkiye. The area was reopened without specific plans for development or restoration, serving instead as a symbol of the decay of what was once the island's premier tourist destination (Holleran and Holleran, 2024). This evaluation highlights the disparate perceptions held by the two communities regarding the partial opening of the Closed Varosha to tourist visits. As a site of traumatic history, the significance of memory and perception among the Turkish and Greek communities regarding the visitation of Closed Varosha within the context of dark tourism is evident.

Until today, only one building allocated to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and six apartment buildings allocated to the Turkish Armed Forces have been utilised within the designated study area of Closed Varosha. One of the aforementioned buildings was utilised as a female dormitory for a period of time. Following the closure of Varosha to settlement in 1974, the area was home to a significant number of tourist-related facilities. These included 45 hotels with a combined capacity of 10,000 beds, 60 apart-hotels, 2953 commercial units, 99 entertainment venues, 143 administrative offices, 4649 residences, 21 bank buildings, and 24 theatres and movie theatres. Additionally, a state-owned library with 8500 volumes was present. Additionally, the area housed a building that served as an art gallery. However, it is evident that these buildings are currently in a state of disuse (Erçakıca and Yüksel, 2023).

Case study analysis was used as a qualitative method in the study. Case study research is a detailed examination of an environment, a single subject, document or a specific event (Biklen and Bogdan, 2007). This study was conducted by obtaining data from different sources such as photographs, in-depth examination of the landscape areas in the study area and utilizing different data collection methods.

The case study research was conducted on the Northern Cyprus Varosha Ghost City, which represents a rare example of a frozen heritage site within the global context. In a case study analysis, a variety of research tools may be employed, including descriptive analysis, interviews, document reviews, observation, and physical artefacts (Akbulut and Ekin, 2018). In this research, the case study analysis method was determined to be on-site observation and document review. A comprehensive literature review was conducted as part of this study, encompassing an in-depth examination of the study area and its surrounding contexts. In the field study, the Closed Varosha was visited with the assistance of a tour guide, and comprehensive data and visual materials (photographs, video recordings, etc.) were collected. Documents, information and academic studies on the Closed Varosha, which are

accessible for download, were examined and analyzed within the framework of urban memory and dark tourism concepts from the perspective of landscape architecture. In this study, the categories of analysis pertaining to the epistemological approach methods have been delimited.

3. Results and discussion

The Closed Varosha was selected as a case study for the study. The researcher's observations and comments about the area were also included in the data analysis. During the observation, notes were taken, photographs and videos were taken, and a voice recorder was also used. As a result of the research, descriptive and explanatory information about the experience of Closed Varosha Dark Tourism was obtained. In this respect, the research also has a descriptive feature.

The total area of Varosha is 6.4 km², and there is an 8 km long coastline known for its white sand (**Figure 2**). As reported by Dağlı (2015) “Varosha has developed as one of the most famous entertainment and tourism centres in the world, especially after Beirut, the city of trade, entertainment and tourism, lost its importance due to the war in Lebanon in 1969–1970 (Dağlı and Önal, 2001). With its holiday resorts and high-rise 5-star hotels, the town developed and became an example of the ‘year-round holiday’ principle of the period [56]. During this period, Varosha had 45 hotels and 60 apartment hotels with a capacity of 10,000 beds, about 3000 commercial buildings, 99 entertainment buildings (cabaret, bar, restaurant, cafe and tavern, etc.), 25 cultural buildings (theatre hall/cinema, state library with 8500 books and art gallery, etc.), 143 administrative offices, 4649 apartments, 21 bank branches, 380 buildings under construction and industrial buildings (Dağlı, 1999)”.

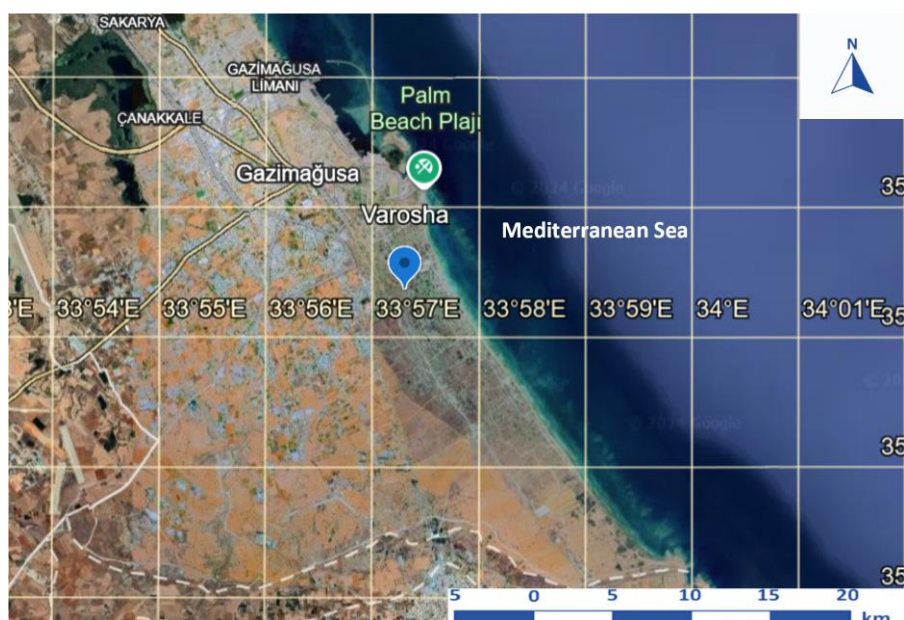


Figure 2. Map of Varosha.

Source: (Googlemaps, 2024).

On 20 October 2024 an inspection visit was made to the ghost town of Varosha to make determinations regarding the area. The closed area of Varosha is located within the boundaries of the city of Famagusta. The area is 3 km from the centre of

Famagusta. The entrance to the area for visits is from the area called Palm Beach by the locals. The area is 85 km from Nicosia and 80 km from Kyrenia. It takes about 1 hour and 20 minutes from Nicosia and 1 hour and 10 minutes from Kyrenia.

The Ghost Town of Varosha, where time stopped in 1974, Varosha, known as the “Las Vegas of the Mediterranean”, gives its visitors the feeling of travelling back in time. The 5-star hotels, famous brand shops, restaurants, houses, parks, beaches and 50-year-old landscape structure without human intervention attracts visitors by making them imagine all the details of how the area looks deserted and uninhabited after a deep sleep. Passengers who get off in the parking area reserved for organized tours can enter the 1.5 km long Closed Varosha tour route from the checkpoint. There are also possibilities for public transport and private cars to reach Closed Varosha. After entering Closed Varosha, the bicycle and scooter rental area, the ticket office, the resting and sitting area, the buffet and the asphalt road prepared for visits appear as arrangements made for dark tourism visitors (**Figures 3 and 4**).



Figure 3. Entrance of Closed Varosha.

Source: (Author).



Figure 4. Bicycle rental area at the entrance of Closed Varosha.

Source: (Author).

It can be seen that all the participants in the dark tourism tour are in a hurry to leave the areas organized for today's tourist visits as soon as possible and to see the traces of how the buildings and the landscape have been preserved or changed after the trauma experienced. This is because the visitors start to examine the surroundings of the buildings right next to the entrance, looking for traces of 1974 by examining the trees in the gardens that have not been pruned for 50 years and the buildings that have not been renovated and maintained (**Figure 5**).



Figure 5. A residence located at the visitor entrance to Closed Varosha.

Source: (Author).

All tourists travelling along the designated route continued along Democracy Street, examining the derelict buildings, incomplete construction sites and the memories of what this ghost town would look like today if life had continued in this abandoned area and if it had been able to compete with other leisure tourism destinations. The tour guide provides a comprehensive account of the Varosha tour route, the city of Famagusta in which Varosha is situated, the events in Cyprus prior to 1974, and the historical, architectural, cultural and geographical characteristics of the region. In addition to the tour guide's description of Varosha during that period, it is evident that the 1960s and 1970s spirit is reflected in the signage and shop windows of the establishments, and how history has been preserved (**Figure 6**). The Toyota Building represents one of the most frequently visited locations in the search for historical memory. The edifice was constructed by a Turkish foundation during the Ottoman era and subsequently leased to the Greeks by the British. A UN control point is situated in front of the building (**Figures 7 and 8**).



Figure 6. A souvenir shop in the Closed Varosha.

Source: (Author).



Figure 7. The most visited point (Toyota building) in Closed Varosha.

Source: (Author).



Figure 8. Documents regarding the ownership status of the Toyota building.
Source: (Author).

Another significant point of interest on the Closed Varosha Dark Tourism tour is the Bilal Aga Masjid and Cultural Centre. It is documented that the mosque was inaugurated for worship on 20 July 2021, following a period of 47 years (**Figure 9**). The panel situated at the front of the mosque presents an account of the site's history (**Figure 10**). The total area of the mosque (dated 1813) and adjacent lands belonging to the Bilal Aga Foundation is 582.6 m². According to the archive of the foundation, dated 8 November 1902, the foundation is located to the west of the mosque and was constructed from cut stones in 1891.



Figure 9. Bilal Aga Masjid and Cultural Center.
Source: (Author).



Figure 10. General information on Bilal Ağa Masjidi.

Source: (Author).

In 1974, an airline company initiated a programme of scheduled flights to a number of international destinations, including Ankara, Beirut, Cairo, Istanbul, Rhodes, Tel Aviv, Rome, London, Paris, Milan, and Athens (**Figure 11**). The existence of flights to Cyprus in 1974, a destination of global importance, indicates that Varosha constituted a significant tourist destination during that era.

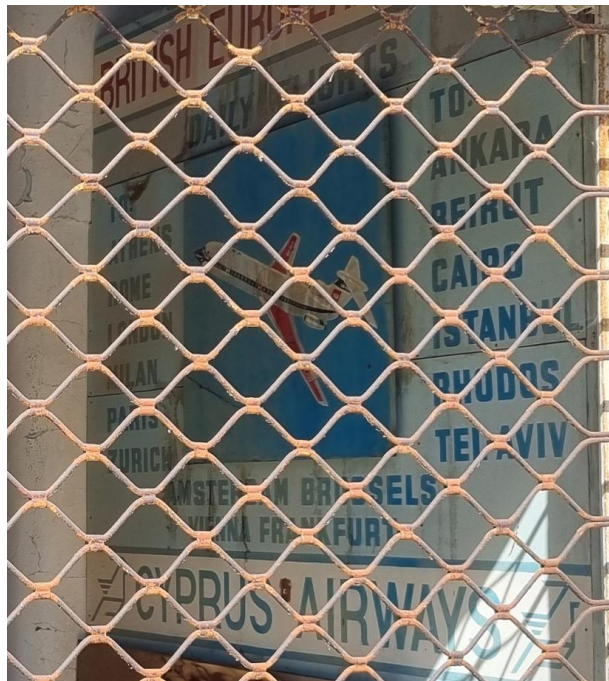


Figure 11. Flights to Varosha city in 1974.

Source: (Author).

In the vicinity of the entrance to Closed Maraş, the Famagusta Municipality has undertaken the landscaping of two beach areas, the provision of sunbeds and umbrellas, and the deployment of lifeguards (**Figure 12**). In order to meet the needs

of visitors, a variety of facilities have been constructed, including toilets, showers, changing cabins, and other amenities (**Figure 13**). Those visiting the beaches in Closed Varosha today have the option of dining at a restaurant in the area following their swimming and sunbathing activities on the distinctive beach, which features fine white sands. The significance of this ghost town, situated on the coastline, can be more fully appreciated by a direct observation of the area. While the lack of utilization of the 8 km coastline and the sea-sun-sand tourism potential of the closed Varosha for approximately 50 years is perceived as a loss for humanity, the prolonged period of inactivity has had a beneficial impact on the preservation of the natural landscape structure of the area. It is evident that the region should be revitalized for sustainable use scenarios in the future, without being exposed to human use pressure.



Figure 12. The Closed Varosha beach.

Source: (Author).

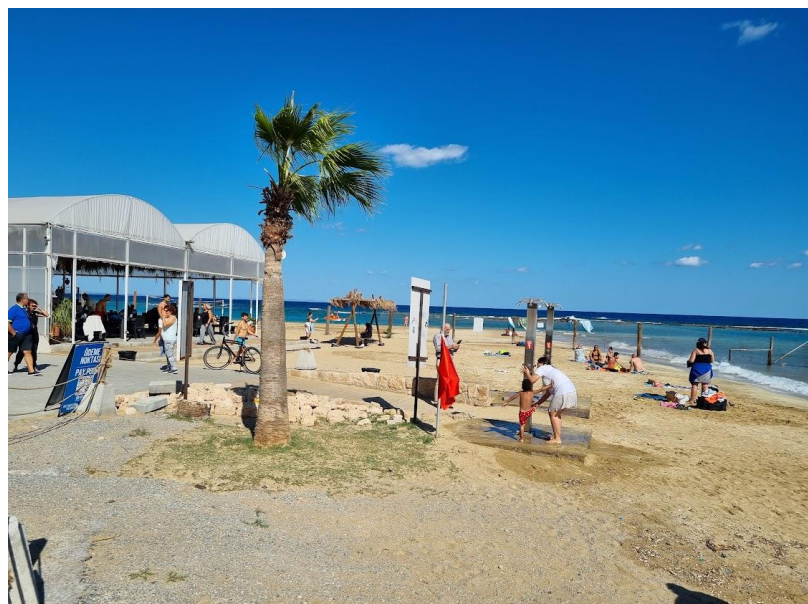


Figure 13. Regulated areas in the beach of the Closed Varosha.

Source: (Author).

It is permitted for tourists to engage in swimming activities in the sea at Palm Beach during the organized tours to the Closed Varosha. Additionally, the public beach at Palm Beach and the derelict high-rise luxury hotels from the period along the coastal strip can be observed from the sea (**Figure 14**). In the closed beach area of Varosha in 1974, there is a proliferation of modern high-rise hotels. From 1960 to 2016, numerous hotels were reportedly fully booked by prominent figures in the Hollywood film industry. **Figure 15** illustrates a hotel building where the entrance is obscured by dense vegetation and the lower part is repurposed as a café.



Figure 14. High-rise buildings on the coastline.

Source: (Author).

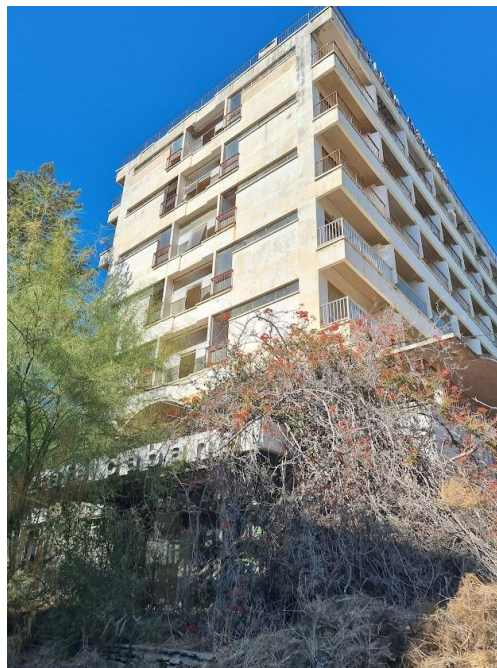


Figure 15. A hotel in the Closed Varosha beach area.

Source: (Author).

One of the most significant points of interest on the Closed Varosha tour is the opera house, which was previously an art school and is depicted in **Figure 16**. It is one of the 14 theatre buildings that existed in Varosha in 1974 and is regarded as a prominent landmark associated with opera. Its historical significance and architectural grandeur evoke a sense of longing among visitors to experience the sounds of music emanating from the opera house once more. Although the Closed Varosha visit appears to be a city when viewed from a distance, it is evident that the areas have not been visited for years since they were abandoned have been overtaken by nature. Invasive plant species have proliferated, and the areas have reverted to a state of nature. As illustrated in **Figure 17**, structures situated in remote locations, devoid of human intervention, can serve as potential habitats for diverse biological communities.



Figure 16. Art school opera house in the Closed Varosha.

Source: (Author).



Figure 17. Plant infested streets in the Closed Varosha.

Source: (Author).

4. Discussion

Prior to 1974, Varosha was developed in accordance with contemporary design principles and sea-oriented tourism strategies that were prevalent during that period. The development of the Varosha settlement provides an illustrative example of the significant transformation in architectural conditions on the island. It demonstrates a notable shift from traditional forms to universal ones, which can be conceptualised as a transition from tradition to modernity (Dağlı, 2015). As stated by Talebzadeh et al. (2024), the island experienced a period of rapid growth in the early 1970s, becoming a highly sought-after tourist destination in the Eastern Mediterranean (Arsoy and Başarır, 2019). Although the island of Cyprus has a long history, it can be said that Varosha did not have a long history before 1974, when it underwent a process of rapid decline and became a ghost town. However, it is notable that the island's development began at that time, with investments in sea tourism. As Akengin and Kaykı (2013) have reported, Famagusta began to develop as a tourist destination with the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, with the area to the southeast of Kato Varosha becoming the focus of this growth. As documented by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the city's population constituted 7% of the total population of Cyprus prior to 1974. Nevertheless, at that time, 10% of the island's total population was employed in this region, within the context of available employment opportunities. During the period in question, the city accounted for 50% of the total bed capacity in Cyprus within the tourism sector (Dağlı, 2015; Keshisian, 1985). With the cessation of all urban activities, including settlement, this most dynamic, developing, and growing part of the city was effectively frozen, resulting in the termination of trade and tourism activities, which constituted the city's primary source of income. The urban memory of Varosha encompasses the period between 1960 and 1974, during which time the area was known as the Las Vegas of the Eastern Mediterranean and served as a prominent tourist destination. One of the most significant points of interest along the dark tourism trail in Varosha is the area's beaches. In the context of the city's revitalisation efforts, it is recommended that particular attention be devoted to the development of sea tourism.

Furthermore, the reopening of the city within the context of dark tourism has been met with criticism. Scudellaro (2023) highlights the exploitation of catastrophic events and abandonment for the purpose of tourism. Boğaç (2021) articulated his reservations about the concept of dark tourism, stating that it did not align with his academic and professional inclinations. In their assessment of the economy and transport situation in Northern Cyprus, Holleran and Holleran (2024) emphasise that access to the north of the island can be made by sea and air via Türkiye. Furthermore, they highlight that there is very little access to international funds. However, it is asserted that due to the economic developments in the region and the Syrian conflict, their concentration and financial resources are elsewhere. It is highlighted that tourists who visit the Closed Varosha do so out of curiosity, with these visits occurring on a daily basis. Güzel and Atabeyoğlu (2001) mentioned that within the context of dark tourism, the motivations underlying all travel and visits vary according to the nature of the destination in question. The experience of the Closed Varosha has been found to have a significant psychological impact on visitors (Ünlü, 2017). Visits to the Closed Varosha are

intended to facilitate the acquisition of historical knowledge, to address the curiosity of visitors regarding past events, and to reinforce the concept of universal peace by examining the consequences and adverse effects of war and social conflict. On the other hand expenses of the visitors positively effect to region and contribute to the financial market (Fink et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2001; Zeng, 2010).

The observations made during the field trip to Closed Varosha demonstrate that the traumatic landscapes of Closed Varosha, which is neither in the south nor in the north of Cyprus, abandoned to its fate, have been overtaken by natural vegetation. It was observed that the entrances of the former 5-star luxury hotels had been blocked by invasive plant species, and that the modern buildings from the period had been left to decay due to corrosion. Arsoy and Başarır (2019) characterise this phenomenon as the transformation of the urban fabric into a wasteland. In order to revitalise the aforementioned building stock in the wake of the trauma and present it as an open-air museum, exhibition, or monumental site for tourism, it is imperative that studies be conducted with a particular focus on urban landscape identity, urban memory, place attachment, and rehabilitation concepts. As Zaninovic et al. (2023) argue, post-conflict memorial sites are defined as areas affected by man-made disasters, which can also result from intentional human actions such as terrorism, genocide and war conflicts. In the context of warfare, which is an intentional man-made phenomenon, the urban landscape identity should be re-defined and re-evaluated as part of the rehabilitation process. Boğaç (2009) highlighted that for individuals residing in Kato Varosha, their original residences continue to symbolise the concept of an “ideal home”. Furthermore, the provision of suitable accommodation for refugees does not necessarily mitigate feelings of loss and alienation.

A number of sources indicate that the closure of Varosha was in effect for only half a century, with the period of inactivity commencing in 1974. However, the closure of Varosha has also resulted in the severance of access to the Bilal Aga Masjid, constructed in 1813, and the eight Orthodox churches, erected at an earlier date (Laouri et al., 2024). This has led to the disruption of the connection with the past memory of Cyprus. In order to facilitate access to the entirety of urban memory, it is imperative to first establish social peace and reconciliation. This necessitates the formulation of an agreement concerning the physical spaces and landscapes that are the subject of contention. Boğaç (2017) argues that in order to achieve peace and ensure its long-term stability, a comprehensive approach must be adopted with regard to the spaces in question, encompassing their redefinition, organisation and even creation. Given that the professional discipline of architecture is the act of designing all living spaces for human beings, it is necessary to revitalise the Closed Varosha as a means of creating a peace order and of paving the way for future scenarios.

5. Conclusion

This study makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature, providing an intriguing case study of the transformation of landscapes that have become emblematic of social trauma into a more positive and constructive outcome. It is evident that Varosha’s study represents an innovative contribution to the field of tourism. Closed Varosha represents a preserved cultural heritage site where active life has been absent

for half a century, thereby maintaining the accumulated narratives within its physical spaces. The site, which has been opened to visitors within the scope of dark tourism, comprises a number of notable structures, including the Closed Varosha, the Toyota building, the opera house, the Bilal Aga Masjid, the Bank of Cyprus, a number of residences, shops, public buildings, high-rise hotel buildings, and Palm Beach. These structures, which collectively span approximately 1.5 km, convey the trauma experienced to visitors through their physical presence. It is proposed that these tourist visits to traumatic landscapes contribute to the awakening of universal peace awareness, the resolution of property issues on the Closed Varosha, and the creation of awareness regarding the utilisation of this area for cultural and scientific activities. Nevertheless, there is a risk of dark tourism becoming a problematic practice due to factors such as a lack of consideration for the value and meaning of the visited areas and a failure to pay the attention expected by traumatised communities. In order to achieve a sustainable solution, it is essential to develop an inclusive plan that incorporates the perspectives of the local community, as opposed to solely focusing on tourism-oriented utilisation and the temporary involvement of external “users”.

The estimated cost for the renewal and revitalisation of the infrastructure and construction of Closed Varosha is approximately 10 billion US Dollars. This figure is derived from the evaluation of future scenarios for the area. In disputed cities such as Closed Varosha, the reconstruction of a viable future through community involvement and a transnational approach is of paramount importance to ensure the implementation of long-lasting and sustainable solutions.

Spaces can be defined as areas that are subject to dynamic updates within the vital elements of human life. The impact of the natural environment on the built environment of the Closed Varosha, which has been isolated from human intervention for half a century, also elucidates the extent of the trauma experienced. It is not only in the case of Closed Varosha that this approach should be adopted; the universal value of all cultural heritage items lost after wars and genocides should also be taken into account. International cooperation and common sense workshops should therefore be initiated with a view to revitalising these places.

In light of the observations made regarding Closed Varosha, it became evident that restoring the region to its former state in a short time frame would be challenging. Consequently, it was proposed that interdisciplinary and international expert groups comprising architects, designers, urban and regional planners, landscape architects and sociologists should be constituted. These groups would adopt a participatory approach and work at the regional scale before progressing to the building scale, with the objective of developing projects that would facilitate the restoration of Closed Varosha.

As with all research, our study is subject to certain limitations. This study specifically designed to evaluate as a case study in terms of landscape architecture perspective. It is also a deepen analysis need to understand stakeholders and policy development using participatory methods for Closed Varosha. Survey designs and holistic approach can be used to analyse the study area of social, economic and environmental aspects.

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