

# Transforming conflict-ridden Cyprus through music: Building bridges across the divide

## *Müzik yoluyla birbirini anlamak: Kıbrıs'ta iki toplumlu koro*

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on a bi-communal choir situated in Cyprus, whose members are made up of Greek and Turkish Cypriots. A holistic case study was conducted in order to evaluate the influence of the bi-communal choir on its regular members with respect to their (i) initial motives; (ii) viewpoints on social and cultural interactions; (iii) problems they might have faced after joining the choir and their (iv) opinions on the impact of the choir on conflict transformation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with members from both communities, amounting to a total of 24 participants. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis method. Research findings show that the bi-communal choir may play a role in the name of peace in the island, by improving the communication and relationship between the two communities and by instilling a sense of coexistence and sharing of values by making music. Findings also show that peace is hindered not only by lack of political communication, but also by a lack of communication between ordinary people.

**Keywords:** peace studies, conflict resolution, informal music education, choir, singing, lifelong learning

### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Kıbrıs'ta bulunan ve üyeleri Kıbrıslı Rum ve Kıbrıslı Türklerden oluşan iki toplumlu bir koroyu ele almaktadır. Araştırmada, iki toplumlu koronun düzenli üyeleri üzerindeki etkisini değerlendirmek amacıyla kapsamlı bir durum çalışması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu değerlendirme şu dört boyutta incelenmiştir: (i) üyelerin başlangıçtaki motivasyonları; (ii) sosyal ve kültürel etkileşimlere dair bakış açıları; (iii) koro üyeliği sonrasında karşılaşılabilecekleri sorunlar ve (iv) koronun çatışma dönüşümüne etkileri konusundaki görüşleri. Araştırma kapsamında, iki toplumdaki toplam 24 katılımcıyla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler, içerik analizi yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Araştırma bulguları, iki toplumlu koronun adada barışın sağlanmasına katkı sağlayabileceğini, müzik yoluyla iki toplum arasındaki iletişimi ve ilişkileri geliştirdiğini, birlikte yaşama ve değerleri paylaşma duygusu kazandırdığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca bulgular, adada barışın sadece siyasi iletişim eksikliği nedeniyle değil, sıradan insanlar arasındaki iletişim eksikliği nedeniyle de engellendiğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** barış çalışmaları, çatışma çözümü, resmi olmayan müzik eğitimi, hayatboyu öğrenme, koro, şarkı söyleme, barışkorosu

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cyprus, an island well-known with the protracted Cyprus Conflict, has gone through a myriad of traumas in the last sixty years as a result of internal violence between the two major ethnic groups on the island, Greek Cypriot community and Turkish Cypriot community. Anticolonial struggles, postcolonial instability, rise of ethnic nationalism, war, intervention, territorial partition, and internal population displacements have all been contributors to the ever-growing divide between the two ethnic groups. Despite the ever-present ethnic nationalism, there has also been channels of interaction among the two ethnic groups in Cyprus. This has been taking place in various contexts, in the form of numerous bi-communal activities. Musical bi-communal events are among these. This study explores the transformative power of music in conflict resolution settings by looking at the case of Cyprus.

### 1.1. Possible reasons behind the ongoing estrangement between the two communities

Past conflicts and the ongoing segregation have undoubtedly caused the two communities to grow estranged from one another. It is important at this point to understand how one community views the other. There have been two important studies in this respect, both published the same year. Georgiades' (2007) study aimed to illuminate how the Greek-Cypriot community perceived its Turkish counterpart on several grounds. 150 Greek Cypriot participants were interviewed about various issues on the Cyprus conflict. While only one-sixth of the interviewees showed mistrust towards the Turkish Cypriots, it was still striking to observe that 43% of the interviewees believed that they were not psychologically prepared to coexist as a group with the Turkish Cypriots.

79% of the interviewees favored reunification and demilitarization of Cyprus and 65% of them favored rebuilding of intercommunal trust and healing past wounds. Although these statistics show potential within the framework of a peacebuilding vision, it was still notable that 73% of the interviewees were intimidated by and did not trust Turkey, and only 17% percent favored the extinction of military service. While some utopic ideals are clearly manifested in the responses of the interviewees, it would still be far-fetched to say that either side completely trusts the other.

In Hadjipavlou's (2007) comprehensive study, a total of 2146 participants, divided equally between the two communities, took part in a survey aiming to shed light upon the possible causes behind the ongoing Cyprus conflict. The survey questions were divided into 5 categories:

i. External causes ii. Internal causes iii. Extended stakeholders iv. Contextual causes v. Social psychological factors.

According to the findings of Hadjipavlou's survey, the notion that the two communities are rather estranged from one another is quite convincing. The reasons for this outcome are manifold; for example, in the 'internal causes' category, it turned out that both sides believed that such an alienation between the two communities can be the cause of the sometimes-extreme-nationalistic stance of both sides. Ethnic, religious and cultural differences, as well as the lack of communication between the two communities came up as the main reasons as to why the two sides might be detached from one another in the 'contextual causes' category. Answers given in 'Social/psychological factors' category may also contain some clues behind this ongoing estrangement; as the participants believed that the influence of different values and beliefs cultivated by the separate education systems of both communities as well as the lack of trust are quite substantial.

It is important to take into account that the above mentioned two studies, albeit being comprehensive in their own right, date back at least two decades and that certain positive attempts regarding the Cyprus conflict have already been witnessed even before 2007, such as the opening of the borders in 2003 and the 2004 Cypriot Annan plan referendums. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that deeply rooted cultural and social attitudes are unlikely to change dramatically in a matter of two decades. This is especially true if the segregation is still ongoing and there has been hardly any revisions to education systems that have been denying children of learning the multicultural, multiethnic nature of their island (Latif, 2010).

Here, two concepts which enhance one another come forth: national identity and the 'other'; Hall (2000) points out that identities can only attain a meaning by means of what they lack and exclude, their constitutive outside, and thus essentially what they are not with respect to the 'other'. In the Greek-Turkish context, due

to historical reasons both sides, to a certain extent, interpret one another as the 'other', and therefore a threat to its identity.

## **1.2. Transformation of national/cultural identity**

The transformation of such deeply rooted values and attitudes can be a long-term process of generational change. In dealing with an ethnicity-based conflict, one encounters past violence, collective traumas, exclusion of either one of the identities, and also the feeling that a particular narrative and nationhood have been denied to one (Kagawa, 2005). The above-mentioned factors all contribute to the rigidity of one's national, cultural, ethnic, etc. identity. When state education is brought into the equation, the national, ethnic cultural identity of an individual or a group of people becomes even firmer. According to Antoniou (2015), most governments today attain a stable nation by means of imposing national unity through state education. Through it, not only do people become part of a skilled workforce of a nation in question, but also, in times of danger, they will be ready to defend their country by taking up arms; paving the way for the claim 'whoever controls education, controls the nation-state.'

The breaking apart such of identities is indeed challenging. It may involve the re-building of former attitudes and behaviors and replacing them with newly created values such as tolerance, cooperation, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding (Bajaj, 2008). Discovering commonalities may create an atmosphere where trust can be built between conflicting parties. Most importantly, common experiences may help the construction of a shared cultural identity. Constructivism as a social theory is interested in explaining the way in which agents and structures co-constitute each other (Jackson & McDonald, 2009). Beyond that, constructivists are also concerned with the socially constructed nature of actors and their identities and interests. According to this perspective, existing antagonistic identities can be deconstructed for the creation of new shared identities through a cooperative conflict transformation process. Related to that, creating a cooperative conflict transformation necessitates a degree of exposure to the beliefs and values of the others. In a study by Intrac (2011) one of the crucial prerequisites in establishing trust between two alienated communities is helping one community to understand and appreciate the other. Community groups are considered to be as trustworthy cultural channels that can create an atmosphere for further sharing of beliefs and values. Shared identity can be constructed and reinforced by music in such communal activities (Forrest, 2006; Small, 1998). In this context music is seen as a powerful tool because it signifies societal values and power structures to be renegotiated among conflicting parties through communal interaction. Yet, what makes music a special agent at this point still begs for further elaboration. It is argued that self /group identity and memory work are parts of listening, which is considered to be as an active, reflexive activity. Music is also considered to be as a powerful agent of political socialization. By definition, socialization processes emphasize the influence of the personal and social environment of an individual, his/her values and norms (Neundorf & Smets, 2017). Music, in that sense, is believed to make an impact on a person's political beliefs by influencing one's orientations to life. In that vein, it can be used as part of conflict resolution activities and trust building efforts.

## **1.3. The bi-communal choir for peace**

The Bi-communal Choir for Peace was established in Cyprus, in 1997. Between 1997 and 2003, Turkish and Greek Cypriots could not come together easily due to the divided nature of the island. Choristers from both communities could meet and work village called Pyla, where Greek and Turkish Cypriots lived together. During this time, concerts were mainly held in England and Turkey. With the opening of the borders in Cyprus in April 2003, the peace choir began to fulfill its dream of singing all over Cyprus. From that date until 2017, a total of 216 events were held. It can be said that the annual average number of events has been 10. The activities of the choir are numerous and include events such as the commemoration of people who fought for peace and were killed in Cyprus; activities that emphasize solidarity with minority groups of Cyprus (such as Maronite, Armenian, Latin), activities organized jointly with the political party supporting peace, local government, non-governmental organizations and trade unions, and activities held with students in schools. is seen.

Utilizing music as a conflict resolution tool requires conceptual or practical understanding of music education, philosophy of music, sociology of music and musicology. In addition to that, music practitioners/researchers need to grasp the broader language of conflict-resolution, and both academically and professionally build a relation between music and the field. Otherwise, the outreach of the activities can be limited, and they hold the risk of remaining marginalized and largely ineffective. It is also important to note that research on music and conflict transformation should not be limited with artists and organizers. It is important to explore the ways in which engaging with music alter the lives of participants. With this aim, this chapter adopts more

of a grassroots perspective. Here, it is argued that an understanding of how music and arts get into action in everyday life in Cyprus can be attained through direct interviews with people who become part of these experiences. Without exaggerating the role of music, dwelling on proofs or further discussion as to what the impact of music is in transforming individuals and societies, the chapter attempts to discover participants' understandings of conflict transformation.

The aim of the research is to assess the influence of the bi-communal choir on the participants with respect to their initial motives; viewpoints on social and cultural interactions; problems they might have faced after joining the choir and conflict transformation and their opinions on the impact of the choir on conflict transformation. Interviews were held with 24 participants from both communities (Greek/Turkish Cypriot). Research questions include;

1. What were the reasons for the participants in joining the Bi-Communal Choir in Cyprus?
2. What sorts of problems, obstacles, reactions and discouragements did the participants encounter as a result of joining the bi-communal choir?
3. In what ways did participating in activities designated by the bi-communal choir influence the participants' previously established viewpoints on social and cultural interactions between the two communities?
4. What do the participants think about the impact of the choir on conflict transformation?

## **2. METHOD**

The present paper is structured as a qualitative case study. The viewpoints of the choir members were gathered with respect to societal and political events in Cyprus and its potential role in the emergence of a peace culture in the island. Furthermore, this study is modelled on a single case holistic design, as described by Yin (2003). His opinions and viewpoints were evaluated through the stance of a single group, in accordance with the intrinsically holistic nature of the study. The core elements of the study were evaluated within sub-categories such as the aim of the choir; kinds of activities; problems being encountered; influence of language and the effects on peace culture.

### **2.1. Participants**

The selection of the participants was carried out through purposive sampling. Those who were regular volunteers and regarded volunteering as important were given priority. In order to reveal as many different opinions and experiences as possible, the researchers aimed for as heterogenous a sample as possible. In doing so, the researchers took care to take into account age, ethnic origin, gender and language/dialect spoken. Importance was also given to selecting members who lived in different locations throughout. When the study took place, the Bi-communal choir had 70 active members, this study included 24 of them. In addition to the choristers, two conductors, one a Turkish Cypriot, the other a Greek Cypriot, also took part in the research.

### **2.2. Data collection tools**

Unstructured observations, combined with in depth literature review formed the basis of the questions prepared for the semi-structured interviews. Two separate interview forms were prepared; one for the choristers and the other for the conductors. The interview form for choristers consisted of such topics as: reasons for joining the choir; opinions regarding Greeks/Turks after joining the choir; interest in visiting the other side; interest in learning Greek or Turkish; problems and reactions encountered after joining the choir; friend members quitting the choir; friend members remaining with the choir; age situation within the choir and what role the choir might play in bringing the two societies together. The interview form for the conductors consisted of such topics as: how the choir was formed; reactions and problems encountered after the establishment of the choir; impact on language learning; age situations of the choristers; choice of repertoire; the development of the choir in time; the most significant experience so far regarding the choir and how the choir might play a role in bringing the two societies together.

### 2.3. Procedure

In keeping with Glesne's (2011) description of a case study, it was aimed to execute an in depth, longitudinal approach in examining the particular situation. Two of the researchers became active members of the choir and personally took part in the choir activities, thereby being able to collect and evaluate the data from the standpoint of someone who has made direct and long-term observations. This approach has in turn enabled the researchers to attain in depth descriptions and thematic inferences from the data.

Initially, the two researchers taking part in the bi-communal choir resorted to unstructured observations in order to get to know the participants and decide on who to include in the main body of the research.

The main data for this study was collected in a 6-month period. During the semi-structured, each participant was given a substantial amount of time to communicate their viewpoints to the full, some participants were interviewed twice. Each session involved one or two members and lasted about an hour, during which audio recordings were taken.

### 2.4. Analysis of data

The notes from observations and interview recordings were, as mentioned before, prepared as documents. The further parsing of the data is as follows:

- Extraction of key words or codes from the written documents
- Attainment of sub-themes by establishing relations between codes and grouping similar ones together
- Attainment of themes by grouping similar sub-themes
- Attainment and naming of categories

### 2.5. Reliability of data

The interview questions were examined by 4 expert academicians with respect to intelligibility, scope and effectiveness in extracting the correct information. Furthermore, two pilot interviews were conducted, one with a Turkish Cypriot, and the other, with a Greek Cypriot. Necessary changes were made so that the questions were as intelligible as possible.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In parsing the observational notes and interviews with choristers and conductors, the researchers were able to extract four main categories. Each category, as mentioned above, also contained a number of themes and sub-themes: 1) The Journey of Beginning to Sing in the Choir 2) Problems, Reactions and Discouragements 3) Social and Cultural Interaction, 4) The Impact of the Choir on Conflict Transformation.

### 3.1. Category 1: My Journey to Sing in The Bi-Communal Choir

#### *Reasons for joining the choir*

Some participants stated that they joined the choir with the encouragement of other people, through influence of the conductor, friends, or spouses. Other participants based their reasons for joining the choir on musical aspirations, citing their love of singing, choir and music, and further mentioned that they were inspired to make such a decision after having listened to the choir's work and performance. Strikingly enough, some participants cited their own political beliefs as the reason for joining the choir; what seems to come forth is the desire to contribute to the potential peace between the two communities on the island by actively participating in the bi-communal choir.

*'Well, the first time the choir was created, I heard it and thought that it was a very good idea for both communities. Because until that time no civil community or activity like this was created. And I wanted to achieve something about for my country and peace.'* P1

### **Most memorable choir experiences**

Many of the participants cited concerts in London, Athens and, Istanbul as the most memorable ones; being able to gather in foreign venues before the Turkish-Greek border was opened in 2003.

*'... We couldn't see each other. And we sang in London first time, together. ... We were 20000 km away from one another but even for a moment together now; we were living in same country.,'* P2

For some, one of the most unforgettable memories was the concert they performed as part of the Çanakkale Choir Festival in Turkey; the reaction of the audience, the congratulatory notes and the feedback they received after the concert were all unforgettable memories.

*'I remember our every concert. But our Çanakkale concert was exceptionally good. I was extremely impressed then. Everyone cried when we were singing Padrida. I liked it. There was also a composer from Turkey there, Adnan Atalay, who was influenced by us and composed for us. Now we sing his composition.'* P8.

### **3.2. Category 2: Difficulties, Reactions, Obstacles**

#### ***Institutional barriers***

Many participants stated that after joining the choir, they received negative reactions from the institutions they worked for, but that such reactions did not deter them from pursuing their goals.

*'I did not get an individual response, but I got an institutional one. From the Ministry of Education. ... They punished us; they lowered our salary scale. Thinking that lowering the salary scale is the most humiliating punishment for teachers. ... And they cut our salary for 6 months. We worked in vain at that time and our salary scale fell even more. Just because we were singing with the Greek Cypriots.'* P9

*'It was the year 2006. We were doing a concert in the university hall. The mayor of that period, went on the stage quickly after the concert, and shouted 'Sir, you have to vacate this place immediately. Vacate it fast a bomb is reported.' ... At that time, the mayor assumed all responsibility and prevented the concert from being held. He said that he took all the responsibility. Because he realized that this was a fake notice, a fake one just to antagonize the concert, and took all the responsibility.'* P10

*'When we had a concert in the year 2000 at Pile. Everything was prepared and last at the last moment the president of the North gave orders to stop the cars of Turkish Cypriots coming for the event. So, we were waiting, waiting, and Greek Cypriots were already waiting at Pile, so we decided that just Greek Cypriots should sing every song in Greek and Turkish.'*P4

#### ***Politics and security***

Some participants stated that they faced inconveniences due to political sanctions and that these inconveniences put them in undesirable situations; for the most part, the extreme security controls and restrictions imposed by the state administration made the choir's work that much more difficult and in turn demotivated the participants.

*'For example, when we were crossing the border, the police would search our files about music. They would look at our scores, they would take photocopies. Plainclothes police used to follow us where we would go and whether we would go to the other side.'*P9

*'We had after the referendum in 2004, number of Turkish Cypriot friends were disappointed about the result and some of them left. Because they told the Greek Cypriots that they didn't want to live with them.'* P2

*'I received some negative reactions from some people, when we were going to Pile, they would say 'what you are doing there with this Barbarians?'* P2

## Age

Participants stated that the choir was more popular with people old enough to remember the war times. However, they stated that it is important for new and young people to also participate in order to carry out the mission of the choir.

*'Generally, the choristers are actually middle-aged and older. I think our wish is to forget what happened in the past. Because the new generation did not experience what happened in the past, they are not interested in a peace-related activity. We need to show that hostility and wars are wrong, and we need to live in peace. I do not think that young people are very conscious about this issue.'* P5

### 3.3. Category 3: Social and Cultural Interaction

#### Who we are

Participants from both communities stated that being brothers and sisters and living in peace should not only involve Greek and Turkish Cypriots, but all peoples of the world. Some participants mentioned that although the two communities have been separated from one another, they themselves have been aspiring to break away with the perception of a Greek or a Turkish Cypriot and instead instill the perception of a holistic 'Cypriot-ness' and bring the two communities under the roof of 'Cypriotism.'

*'The two communities have already been separated from each other for years, left alone. A Turkish or a Greek Cypriot case was established. However, because of the choir there is now the opportunity for people to focus on the Cypriot phenomenon and to bring everyone together under this roof.'* P3

Some participants from the two communities stated that the bi-communal choir, hence music, is a means for peace, their main purpose is to convey a message of peace to both communities. Participants stated that they still have hope to overcome the alienation that has been ongoing for years between the two communities and that they are doing their best to keep the hope alive for the two communities to get closer.

*'It's just people both sides who believe in idea of peace and hoping to live together.'* P2

Most of the participants stated that they do not belong to any political party, do not pursue any political aim, and do not act together with the leaders and administrations of the communities they belong to.

*'...and I believe that because this group is not politically belonging any political party or any other group or any other organization.'* P2

*'...We solve the problems also by singing, and never interfering with politics and never let politics interfere with the choir. Whatever happens around us may happen because politicians have their own way of thinking, they play own their own game which is much different from the others. So, we said we don't allow politicians to have any negative effect on the choir. So, we solve the problems like this; we go on, we grow up and we are happy to be doing this.'* P4

#### Now I know, understand, and feel

A number of members from the choir stated that they got to know and understand each other better both socially and personally after joining the Bi-communal Choir; stating that the Bi-communal choir has been instrumental in creating the first ever venue to bring the two communities together, creating an environment in which people from the two communities feel more at ease with each another. For instance, many of the participants in the bi-communal choir stated that they felt safer about visiting the other side, at bi-communal events and gatherings.

*'I feel more confident. I go more because I meet them, to see what kind of people they really are. So, I feel safer.'* P5

*'...they said you are singing Turkish, yes I am singing Turkish. You are singing with them, yes, I am. You have friends from there, yes, I have. They are Cypriots. That was difficult to expect them to grasp why*

*I participate in the bi-communal choir. And I talked with them, brought them to the concerts to see the choir, they changed their mind.' P11*

### **Power, influence, and the social aspect of music**

Participants and conductors in the bi-communal choir stated that the main purpose of this establishment was to convey a message of peace and unity, and that they did this with music. The participants emphasized that they would reach many more people by conveying their messages through music, going on the stage together and singing songs that share commonalities between the two communities; as a result, bringing the two communities together, spreading this vision of unity to a larger audience.

*'... In other words, we symbolize a miniature of society, that Cyprus should be in the future, with the choir. Laughing together, crying together, cheering up together. We are giving the message that this miniature Cyprus is the Cyprus we want to see. So this is our contribution.' P6*

*'...The peace will come after the good relations between the two communities. And we are showing them. Now we are just singing together. But then, we will live together.' P1*

### **Visiting the other side**

Some participants stated that after joining the bi-communal choir, they visited the other side of Cyprus more frequently than before; being a member of the choir was key in this and they made more trips to the other side than before because they felt more secure about engaging with the other community after starting to participate the bi-communal choir.

*'After joining the choir, I began to make programs and visit my friends from the Turkish side. Also, in order to develop my Turkish, I attended theatres, movies, concerts and festivals there'. P8*

### **A bi-lingual choir, singing in a language that one does not speak**

Some of the participants stated that although they took private lessons and made considerable efforts, they did not practice the language of the other community enough for personal reasons (forgetfulness, old age, etc.) and instead focused more on English, being relatively simpler to learn. The participants stated that, from time to time, they attempted to learn the language of the other society by means of memorizing the lyrics of the songs they were singing in the choir; they asked their friends to translate the words for them so that they could grasp the meaning of the song and therefore be able to give the accurate emotion, and this was useful in learning the language of the other community.

*'I studied Turkish at a University because I wanted to set an example to people from my own community. And after joining the choir, I found the opportunity to really practice my Turkish, eventually interpreting for the members of the choir who did not speak English' P8*

## **3.4. Category 4: Impact of The Choir on Conflict Transformation**

### **Bringing closer of the two communities**

As a part of their mission and the message they strive to convey under the name Bi-communal Choir for Peace in Cyprus, some choir participants stated that they have been working to eradicate former prejudices concerning the two communities since 1997, mentioning that in doing so the choir became a sort of 'miniature of the dreamed Cyprus', being instrumental in raising awareness and showing that the communities could actually live together in peace and harmony.

*'Building bridges, bringing people together... it gives them happiness... I believe that we had success because we believe in what we are doing. Because it is how Cypriots should live together; sharing their lives, hearing well each other, believing in their friendship.' P4*

*'...Choir is a symbol for the future. Peace and cooperation. Many people are reflecting this to us. You are our symbol, you are our inspiration, from both sides. At the 20th year's celebration this year, 2 leaders sent messages to us to congratulate. Members of the EU parliaments and the chairpersons and civil*



*society persons and politic persons, both sides celebrate with us. The choir perhaps plays the most decisive role among the civil society groups in peace building efforts. And it continues to play and be a role model for further activities I believe.'* P12

*'The choir has achieved important things in terms of removing the walls between the two communities, hatred and hostility. Despite politicians, I believe there has been a softening between the two communities. I think the choir is a tool in this. "* P13

### **Politics**

Some participants stated that they received support from organizations that embraced leftist ideals and left-wing political parties, albeit having also received negative reactions they received since the time of the formation of the choir. However, the participants and conductors stated that they were able to convey messages of peace to politicians at important times.

*'We try to send a message to the table at every opportunity, to our leaders. We organize and hold concerts to accelerate such critical meetings.'* P10

*'For example, we were more effective than politicians could ever be. Before I explained anything, many of my friends did not know what Turkish Cypriots went through, they would tell me whether it was true or not. But of course, because they knew me well, they believed that what I said was true. Therefore, I think it was an environment to understand each other better than getting closer.'* P14

## **4. DISCUSSION**

The Bi-Communal Choir for Peace, with its peace-oriented philosophy and its penchant for reconciliation, strengthening communication and allowing sharing between the two communities in Cyprus; has been a role model for other bi-communal organizations and activities since it was first established in Cyprus. The choir strives to encourage the sharing of common values, therefore contributing to the improvement of communication between the choir members in a framework of inclusive Cypriotness, in a way mirroring an ideal future society. Loizos (2009) mentions in his research that the most important role of bi-communal organizations in Cyprus is enabling the two communities to communicate again. Thus, he argues that other deficiencies and obstacles to peace can easily be resolved by re-establishing positive communication between the two communities.

The bi-communal choir defends the view that the two communities will continue to build a common culture together in line with its mission, and expresses this ideal in every organized event. For this reason, the choir, supported by the UN (United Nations), the municipalities in both sides of the island, political parties, non-governmental organizations and peace-loving segments, can still continue to work effectively today (Albayrak, 2008). Audiences from both sides participating in events held by the choir come to witness people singing in two different languages on the stage, yet sharing the same mission and values. The ensemble they see on stage is actually a reflection of what Cyprus strives to become. Thus, the increase in the participation of Cypriots in bi-communal activities and organizations, is an indication that the idea of reconciliation has begun to gain more acceptance. In his research Ungerleider (2012) defends that Bi-communal Youth Camps are one of the most important bi-communal activities in Cyprus, and that young people of different communities establish friendships by engaging in constructive dialogues, and that they tend to build relationships based entirely on cultural reconciliation and sharing, leaving aside political conflicts with their communication and problem-solving skills. He advocates that peace will come gradually albeit with solid foundations through peaceful contact and communication. Broome (1998), on the other hand, talked about the importance of bi-communal activities and organizations in ensuring peace and stated that people started to understand each other thanks to these organizations. As one of the most important building blocks of this foundation, the bi-communal choir says that peace is possible through music and brings together the values of the common culture.

One limitation of this research is that it does not examine how the general public of Cyprus views the bi-communal choir. This parameter should definitely be included in future research. In a similar study conducted by Kaşıkçı (2012) with Turkish-Greek participants, the results were in line with this study. The following results

are underlined in the study, which deals with the dimensions of the cultural interaction between the Turkish and Greek communities living in the western region of Turkey.

In the aforementioned research, it was aimed, through bicomunal music activities, to improve and facilitate inter-communal cultural reconciliation, to improve communication and reducing prejudices and promoting friendship and peace. However, there are those in both communities who think that such activities are positive, as well as those who view these them negatively, there are also those who stated that they approached it with suspicion and did not find it convincing at the end. From this point of view, it can be said that examining the views of people of different ethnic and political views on the bi-communal choir in Cyprus would be the next step.

In conclusion, the choir takes the initiative to show that peace is being hampered not only because of the lack of political communication, but also because of the lack of communication between ordinary people. Aiming to dismantle the prejudice that still exists in both societies and therefore the reluctance to participate in bi-communal activities, this study argues that steps towards peace is possible not only through political legislation, but through providing interaction and communication between people from different communities. The choir continues to work actively today as one of the important establishments and supports the future peace in the island.

#### **Ethical approval**

The study was approved by Near East University Ethics Committee (date: 24.09.2024, number: NEU/ES/2024/C008).

#### **Author contribution**

Study conception and design: SN, SE; data collection: SN, analysis and interpretation of results: SN, SE,GA; draft manuscript preparation: all authors. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the article.

#### **Source of funding**

The authors declare the study received no funding.

#### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

#### **Etik kurul onayı**

Çalışma, Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu tarafından onaylanmıştır (tarih: 24.09.2024, sayı: NEU/ES/2024/C008).

#### **Yazarlık katkısı**

Çalışmanın tasarımı ve konsepti: SN, SE; verilerin toplanması: SN; sonuçların analizi ve yorumlanması: SN, SE, GA; çalışmanın yazımı: tüm yazarlar. Tüm yazarlar sonuçları gözden geçirmiş ve makalenin son halini onaylamıştır.

#### **Finansman kaynağı**

Yazarlar, çalışmanın herhangi bir finansman almadığını beyan etmektedir.

#### **Çıkar çatışması**

Yazarlar, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmektedir.

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