



USING INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA TO CREATE POSITIVE ETHNIC IDENTITIES THROUGH RECONCILIATION

Dissertação apresentada à Universidade Católica Portuguesa
para obtenção do grau de mestre em Psicologia

- Especialização em Psicologia da Justiça e do Comportamento desviante-

Beatriz Moreira de Sousa

Porto, Julho 2026



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Declaration of AI use

It was used ChatGPT and Claude, in the sections of the body of text, in order to improve grammar, refinement and remove repetition, so as to obtain suggestions for the improvement of the text.

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Resumo

O conflito entre Gregos e Turcos Cipriotas dura há várias décadas e tem contribuído para uma grande divisão entre as populações, sendo a causa para grande sofrimento ao longo de gerações. A reconciliação surge, assim, como importante fator que pode contribuir para mitigar essa situação. Este estudo pretende, então, compreender a percepção dos participantes em relação à reconciliação, ao papel que a justiça pode ter na mesma e quais os componentes essenciais para um programa de reconciliação. Deste modo, foi realizado um estudo qualitativo com jovens Gregos e Turcos Cipriotas, utilizando-se uma entrevista semi-estruturada como instrumento para a recolha de dados. Além disso, a sua análise foi realizada utilizando as seis fases da análise temática. Os principais resultados encontrados indicam que os participantes compreendem o conceito de reconciliação, mostrando abertura aos vários mecanismos que podem estar envolvidos na mesma, tais como a compreensão dos sentimentos e perspectiva dos outros. Além disso, compreende-se que estes entendem o conceito de justiça, existindo diferentes opiniões relativamente à sua importância para a reconciliação. Finalmente, destaca-se a diversidade de componentes que os participantes consideram importantes para um programa de reconciliação e os desafios e sucessos que lhe podem estar associados.

Palavras-chave: reconciliação, justiça, programa de reconciliação, gerações mais jovens

Abstract

The conflict between Greek and Turkish Cypriots has been ongoing for several decades and has contributed to great division between the populations, being the cause for great suffering through many generations. Reconciliation therefore emerges as an important factor that can contribute to mitigate this situation. This study therefore aims to comprehend the participants' perception of reconciliation, the role that justice may play in it, and the essential components of a reconciliation programme. This way, a qualitative study was conducted with young Greek and Turkish Cypriots, using a semi-structure interview as the instrument to data collection. Furthermore, its analysis was conducted using the six phases of a thematic analysis. The main findings indicate that the participants understand the concept of reconciliation, showing openness to the various mechanisms that may be involved in reconciliation, such as understanding the others' feelings and perspective. Moreover, it is understood that the participants comprehend the concept of justice, existing different opinions regarding its importance for reconciliation. Finally, the study highlights the diversity of components that

the participants consider necessary for a reconciliation programme and the challenges and successes that may be associated with it.

Keywords: reconciliation, justice, reconciliation programme, young generations

1. Introduction

This study is being carried out as part of the Master's degree in Psychology, specialising in Psychology of Justice and Deviant Behaviour, at the Faculty of Education and Psychology of the Portuguese Catholic University (FEP-UCP). The main objective of the research is to understand how the participants perceive reconciliation, the necessary components of a reconciliation programme and the role that justice can have in the promotion of reconciliation, which may help in the promotion of reconciliation between young Turkish and Greek Cypriots.

In recent years, we have seen the escalation of conflicts, and the wars have impacted, in many ways, the lives of everyone (Vukoičić & Milosavljević, 2023). In effect, after the cold war, we witnessed an increase in intensity and frequency of conflicts between ethnic groups that, nevertheless, share the same political unit (Kelman, 2008). Peace Psychology emerges in that context, in a search to prevent and mitigate violence, promoting nonviolent management of conflicts and the search for social justice, in an idea to make and build peace, peacemaking and peacebuilding (Barbosa et al., 2013). In order to achieve those ideals, it is not enough to resolve conflicts through an agreement signed between leaders, but rather to seek reconciliation between populations and to develop actions and transformations that allow them to see each other in a different way, preventing the conflict from recurring. Reconciliation is, therefore, a fundamental piece to construct and promote peace, potentially preventing the emergence of new conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2009). The global outlook serves as a warning about the need for more work in this area so that new conflicts can be prevented.

An illustrative case, the focus of this project, is the conflict that has existed for several decades in Cyprus between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. In reality, for several decades the Greek and Turkish Cypriot populations have been fighting for control of the island of Cyprus, seeking its union, or part of it, with Greece and Turkey, respectively. Thus, over the years, there have been several periods of violence in the country and a geographical separation of the two groups, which led to relocations for security reasons and differences in the prosperity of each population. Furthermore, these periods of violence resulted in economic problems for the population and many deaths and disappearances (Hadjipavlou, 2007a). Thus, these moments of tension caused great emotional suffering that persists to this day, without there ever being a great effort by the institutions of power to address the problem and seek reconciliation, which they often disregard (Hadjipavlou, 2007a).

This history of suffering persists not only in individuals who were directly involved in these situations, but also in younger generations, who inherit hatred, fear, stereotypes,

negative images, misperceptions, and ideas of victimisation from their families. These factors will influence how they relate to each other, and also their attitudes towards the other community, and may even fuel further conflict and violence (Hadjipavlou, 2007a). Consequently, the creation of reconciliation projects becomes relevant. However, this is a complex process that requires the development of trust and a change in the relationship between individuals and their communities in order to foster collaboration between conflicting groups, based on reciprocity and the ability to respond to each other's needs in a balanced way (Kagoyire et al., 2023), that is, it is primarily about creating trust and understanding between two communities in conflict. Thus, reconciliation can be presented as “a resolution process of removing psychological barriers, such as negative emotions and beliefs, with the aim of creating and restoring positive and sustainable relationships between groups” (Karić & Mihić, 2020, p. 214). However, as is the case with the conflict between Greeks and Turkish Cypriots, this is not an easy process, often being rooted in political issues.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a complex and time-consuming process that requires a transformation in the people involved and must aim to strike a balance between various elements, such as justice, accountability, stability and peace. However, it is not a process on which there is universal agreement, and there are two ways of classifying it: a maximalist approach and a minimalist approach (Little & Maddison, 2017). The first relates to the idea of healing and forgiveness, and is an approach concerned with interpersonal reconciliation between perpetrator and victim. The second approach, by contrast, is more closely associated with political issues; it seeks to transform these systems and social institutions, recognising that conflict is part of politics and is therefore part of society (Little & Maddison, 2017). Both approaches are important, as they highlight the need for reconciliation to give due weight to the past, acknowledging the acts that were committed, whilst also emphasising the urgency of addressing legal and political issues, which often lie at the root of injustices that perpetuate conflicts and benefit perpetrators. However, some authors argue that, following episodes of crime and violence against a group, expecting a maximalist form of reconciliation is unrealistic or difficult to justify (Strupinskienė, 2020; Little & Maddison, 2017; Crocker, 2000). Consequently, the minimalist approach is considered more realistic and achievable, particularly from the victims' perspective (Strupinskienė, 2020). Indeed, a minimalist approach will initially enable changes at the political and institutional levels, which will form

the basis for changes at the individual level and for the future implementation of a maximalist approach.

Furthermore, reconciliation involves focusing on feelings resulting from years of living with the trauma of events perpetrated against one's ethnic group; in other words, it will be necessary to address any negative feelings, beliefs and emotions that may exist between the groups. Emotions are a fundamental part of an individual's life and can alter one's objectivity regarding an event, motivating them to act in a certain way. Furthermore, they shape the attitudes of group members and influence their views on various topics, such as politics (Čehajić-Clancy, 2016). The group's emotions are felt by the individual, regardless of whether they have personally experienced the situation.

In fact, the momentary emotions of the group and the individual are transformed into long-term feelings, which is one reason for the difficulties encountered in reconciliation processes. However, group emotions can also be positive, inspiring feelings of hope, support and empathy in individuals (Čehajić-Clancy, 2016). Indeed, individuals come to act more in accordance with the group and its emotions and feelings than with their own, influencing both their own behaviour and that of the group and acting as a powerful motivator. Consequently, emotional regulation will be essential to ensure successful reconciliation.

Indeed, one technique used for emotional regulation is cognitive reappraisal, which involves changing the meaning an individual attributes to a situation in order to alter its emotional impact (Čehajić-Clancy, 2016). The individual may seek to view a situation or event more objectively, critically analysing the way in which these are presented by the media, or may seek to change their self-categorisation to something more inclusive, which will enable them to cope with negative emotions (Čehajić-Clancy, 2016). Thus, reconciliation is, first and foremost, a process of emotional regulation. The fact that an individual becomes a member of a group means that this sense of belonging becomes part of their social identity, thus becoming an extension of themselves and leading them to perceive themselves and other members as a collective unit, rather than as individual people (Smith & Mackie, 2015). Consequently, when faced with a conflict situation affecting the group, it is assessed on the basis of its significance to the group, which gives rise to an emotional response aligned with this collective perspective and influences the way in which individuals perceive and behave towards other groups (Smith & Mackie, 2015).

Furthermore, it is also important to change the way the opposing group is perceived; in other words, we must challenge the idea that all members of the opposing group are the same. This can be achieved by exposing people to personalised, individual stories of members

of the opposing group, so that they come to understand that each story and experience is unique and that individuals are not all the same (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004). Indeed, the creation and sharing of narratives is essential for fostering empathy and understanding of the other's perspective. This sharing fosters a deeper emotional and personal connection between the groups and their members, thereby increasing trust amongst all (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004). Furthermore, it is crucial to change the perception that the group considered the 'enemy' is incapable of change – that is, the belief that the other cannot change because it is in their nature to be evil. Furthermore, it is essential to manage feelings of anger, guilt and responsibility, for although guilt is a negative emotion, it is important that individuals and the group take responsibility for their actions (Čehajić-Clancy, 2016).

As already mentioned, reconciliation is a process that is intertwined with political issues, particularly in the case of the conflict between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Indeed, governmental and social institutions often use interpretations and representations of the past – which do not always correspond to the whole truth – as political capital, thereby perpetuating the idea of 'chosen trauma', half-truths and misperceptions of one's own group and the opposing group (Hadjipavlou, 2007a). Thus, reconciliation can be a successful process if political and social organisations contribute to reconciliation efforts through policies and campaigns aimed at deconstructing beliefs and fears regarding the opposing group. Alongside these necessary changes at the political level, it is important that there be a shift in peace education (Hadjipavlou, 2007a). Indeed, the education system can be a fundamental tool for building peace and reconciliation. However, it must be borne in mind that, very often, school structures perpetuate certain narratives, presenting certain facts as entirely true, and portraying the opposing side in a more negative light whilst depicting their own side as more heroic or victimised (Hadjipavlou, 2007a). Consequently, in reconciliation processes, there must be scope for seeking change at a political and educational level, as it is not only the individual who must change and transform, but also the institutions that form a fundamental part of their life, upbringing and actions; in other words, in order for individuals to change, the foundations of their lives must also shift their perspectives.

Furthermore, the best way to achieve a more successful reconciliation process is to encourage contact between the two groups in conflict, although this must take place under specific circumstances, this is called the contact hypothesis by Allport (Bekerman, 2007). Indeed, these meetings should take place on a basis of equality between the groups and cooperative interdependence, thereby fostering acceptance, recognition and respect for each

group's cultural differences and building familiarity amongst individuals from both groups (Bekerman, 2007).

When considering a potential role as facilitators and those responsible for reconciliation programmes, mediators can play a vital role in ensuring that individuals understand one another, particularly when dealing with groups with cultural differences, as communication is fundamental to understanding and dialogue. A mediator can act as a bridge between groups with differences, help to interpret situations and provide a safe and friendly space so that trust between the groups can be built, thereby enabling conflicts to be resolved (Karanikola & Panagiotopoulos, 2025).

Reflecting on other conflict scenarios, such as the conflict in the Balkans, a number of conclusions can be drawn regarding the approach taken and the pursuit of post-conflict reconciliation, which may highlight how significantly this differs from the conflict in Cyprus. Domestic and even international bodies sought to promote reconciliation, doing so not only by establishing a system of power-sharing amongst the three main ethnic groups, but also by acknowledging the crimes committed during the war and seeking justice for the victims. Consequently, various measures were implemented, such as educational reforms designed to make the education system and the school curriculum itself more multi-ethnic – that is, to promote tolerance and understanding between the various ethnic groups (Begić, 2024). Thus, the differences between the conflict in the Balkans and the conflict in Cyprus are evident. Whilst, in the former, measures were implemented with the aim of promoting coexistence and understanding between the groups involved in the conflict by both international and domestic bodies, in the case of Cyprus, domestic bodies perpetuate the idea of division and estrangement between the two groups involved in the conflict. This significant difference may be indicative of the changes that must take place in the Cypriot context in order to promote reconciliation.

Attempts at reconciliation have already been made in other conflicts, most notably in the case of South Africa. The objectives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was an attempt at reconciliation, were to acknowledge and document the crimes committed during apartheid; it interviewed many victims and granted amnesty to many human rights violators (Gibson, 2004). In this way, it sought to ensure that victims received recognition for the abuses they had suffered and that perpetrators sought forgiveness for their crimes. However, despite the widespread belief in the success of this programme – largely based on the fact that there was a successful transition from the apartheid regime to democracy – some authors question whether the truth uncovered during this process actually led to genuine

reconciliation, arguing that whilst this may have occurred in individual cases, collectively nothing has changed (Stanley, 2001), whilst others argue that, at least to some extent, the reconciliation processes in South Africa were successful, with the justice delivered by this commission having met the existing need (Gibson, 2004).

Other cases also stand out, such as Rwanda. The quest for reconciliation in this instance requires the promotion of truth, justice, the humanisation of the other, and the building of trust and a shared vision that can unite people. A number of initiatives have been put into practice, such as equal access to education, the improvement of economic conditions, and educational programmes on people's origins. However, there is still a long way to go and, despite these advances, much work remains to be done to achieve full reconciliation (Staub, 2014). In the specific case of Cyprus, the opening of the Green Line has enabled people to access the other side and to have contact with the population there. Although this initiative helped to dispel certain stereotypes held by the populations, it also contributed to the emergence of others, and did not significantly contribute to trust or reconciliation between the populations (Hadjipavlou, 2007a).

Thus, although there are reconciliation efforts and programmes in various contexts, the outcomes of these processes are not universally accepted and highlight the need to continue this work, drawing attention to the complexity of reconciliation and the need for it to be considered at various levels, such as the political, educational and judicial levels.

2.2. Reconciliation Programme

When considering a reconciliation programme and the components it should have, there doesn't seem to exist an instruction or method on how to design one, at least a comprehensive one that considers psychology (Shapiro, 2021). Also, it's important to consider that a reconciliation programme can be a complex process of work, that demands processes of conceptualising, operationalising, and implementing initiatives. Additionally, reconciliation itself is also a challenging process, that can have multiple facets, can take a long time and be politically and emotionally challenging, because, in reality, there are many ways a society can have reconciliation and they might also have different necessities (Shapiro, 2021).

In terms of the activities that can be involved in a reconciliation programme, they can be differentiated into the internal component and the external component. Meaning, the internal component concerns activities directed towards the internal element of the groups involved in the conflict, such as emotions, attitudes and motivations. These activities can

consist of replacing negative stereotypes with positive ones, admitting the truth about the conflict, apologising and taking responsibility and negotiating a collective memory of the events, for example (Nets-Zehngut, 2007). On the other hand, the external component addresses the external elements of groups to a conflict such as the physical environment and the socio-economic and socio-political context. It consists of activities aimed towards the damages done to the economic and socio-political areas, such as the reconstruction of houses and buildings and the rehabilitation of political institutions, for example (Nets-Zehngut, 2007).

Despite the lack of a specific design and the components that should be considered in the creation of a reconciliation programme, it's also important to consider the various programmes that exist in the Cypriot context that address reconciliation. Effectively, in order to ascertain the problems affecting the Cypriot society and the lives of the community, the Technical Committees were created. They strive to promote and facilitate the cooperation and understanding between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Communities (Gür & Cromwell, 2026). These committees operate under the principles of equality, no project extending one party's authority over the other, the work should benefit both communities, political content should be avoided, and it should have approval from the leaders of both sides (Gür & Cromwell, 2026). This way, there have been committees on various issues such as culture, education and, more recently, youth. Furthermore, it can also be considered the role of civil society organisations in the creation of initiatives. These organisations work on both sides of the divided line of Cyprus and provide humanitarian help and promote community development, as first and second generation organisations, respectively (Hajisoteriou, 2023). Various organisations like the Home of Cooperation (H4C) and the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR) have aimed at promoting peace and bringing the two communities together, through the promotion of activities and conversations (Hajisoteriou, 2023). Also, another initiative important to note is PeacePlayers International (PPI), established in Cyprus in 2006. Their activities use sports to promote interactions between children of divided communities, while trying to build respect and cooperation between the two and bridging the divides of the two communities (Tuohey & Cognato, 2011). Finally, the efforts of the United Nations and its organisations should also be considered, particularly the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These organisations look into devising programmes, such as the Youth Champions for Environment and Peace and the Peace It Together, respectively,

that allow the two communities to learn about each other, share their narrative and discuss ideas, so they can understand the perspective of the other (Marisa & Köprülü, 2022).

2.3. Justice

How to define justice in post conflict situations seems to be something challenging because the two sides of the conflict don't, usually, see things the same way, having, therefore, different concepts of what justice should be. So, in order to have justice it is necessary to negotiate and compromise and even though that can be difficult, it might also be important to establish some common truths about the past and how the crimes and offenses should be handled (Pankhurst, 1999).

Truthfully, justice in the context of reconciliation has been something discussed for many years. Particularly, when the reconciliation programmes and efforts started to emerge, so did questions about pardon or punishment (Graybill & Lanegran, 2004). While early situations like World War II motivated trials, like the Nuremberg, the truth is many participants of the violence and offenses were left out of the processes, because trials can create an idea of collective innocence, by not dealing with the people complicit to the actions and particularising (Fletcher & Weinstein, 2002).

Regarding the concept of transitional justice, it emerged as an approach to justice in post-conflict societies that experienced episodes of severe violence and human rights violations (Van Zyl, 2005). The principal elements of this type of justice can involve the prosecution, that will only be a partial response to the situation, therefore it is fundamental to have other components such as truth seeking, institutional reform, reparation and reconciliation (Van Zyl, 2005). Effectively, transitional justice can have a duality, more formal or informal measures. Formal measures focus more on legal aspects and processes for which certain results are expected and are an important element of transitional justice (David, 2017). However, informal measures such as apologising from the people in power, having friendly relations in the communities can also have a crucial impact in the process, which indicates that, despite the relevance of legal processes, more informal measures can also be fundamental (David, 2017). Therefore, it's important for the concept of transitional justice to be broader and to include other measures.

When talking about societies post-conflict it is important to consider that even though it is necessary to have recognition for the offences of the past, it is also important to remember that actual trials might be detrimental because it can cause more division and harm to people (Allen, 1999). This way, in order to find an answer to how people should live with

past enemies, the idea of restorative justice emerged. This theory consists in the use of inclusive and cooperative processes to repair the damage caused in the conflict and expose the crimes (Van Ness, 2005). The minimal procedural standards for using restorative justice are established in the UN Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters, which provides important concepts for the use of restorative justice (Van Ness, 2005).

There are a few examples of the approach to justice in the context of post-conflict. A case that illustrates that is the Truth Commissions that attempt to balance justice and reconciliation, aiming to demonstrate a break with the human rights violations of the past and the importance of justice, while also not having the more traditional punitive process (Allen, 1999). However, there also seem to exist questions and criticism regarding the actions and goals of Truth Commissions (Allen, 1999).

3. Methodology

3.1. Rationale for the Methodology

First and foremost, it is important to note that the data collection process has already been initiated and completed, and data are already available to carry out this study.

The methodology adopted in this study is qualitative in nature, as it allows for a better exploration, understanding and interpretation of the perspectives and needs of participants in reconciliation programmes, thereby helping to understand their motivations and experiences. Indeed, qualitative research allows for a better exploration of the participants' frame of reference; it is a more flexible approach that can provide a greater volume and richness of qualitative data, thereby enabling a deeper understanding and interpretation of the research context (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

This way, the analytical technique to be used in this study will be a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was chosen because it is a flexible method for analysing qualitative data, enabling the identification of patterns and themes within a given dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.2. Research Questions and Specific Objectives

The research question of this study is: Understanding how the participants perceive the components of a reconciliation programme and the role of justice in the promotion of reconciliation. This way, concerning the specific objectives, they are: (1) Explore the participants perception on reconciliation and its possible key elements; (2) Understand the

participants perception about justice in the context of reconciliation; (3) Identify and explore the components considered crucial for a reconciliation programme; (4) Identify and explore difficulties and success factors in reconciliation programmes.

3.3. Sample

In this study, data were collected through selective sampling; that is, the researcher selected a representative sample that met the study's requirements and enabled the research question to be answered. To recruit participants, individuals were contacted through convenience sampling, with the researcher contacting potential participants. Thereafter, participants were recruited via snowball sampling, where one participant indicated the other. Thus, a total of 20 participants were recruited, of whom 10 were Greek Cypriots and 10 were Turkish Cypriots, with an equal number of men and women for each ethnic group. The age of the participants ranges from 19 to 30 years old ($M=26.7$). Furthermore, of the participants, eighteen were born and raised in Cyprus, while one was born in London and another in Istanbul, although all were raised in Cyprus. The native language of the participants was Turkish for the Turkish Cypriot participants and Greek for the Greek Cypriot participants, with one, in particular, considering their native language was both Greek and English.

3.4. Research Instruments

Before any procedure was carried out, informed consent was obtained from the participant. Indeed, given the qualitative nature of the research method and the objectives of the study, the instruments used to collect information were semi-structured interviews, designed by the person responsible for data collection for the sole purpose of obtaining data for this research, and which had been peer-reviewed. The interviews were conducted in the participants' native language by two researchers who identified with the ethnic groups of the participants. An interview guide was therefore drawn up for use with the participants, as shown in appendix A, with the aim of understanding and exploring their experiences and views on reconciliation, the importance of justice within it, and the key components of a reconciliation programme. The interviews were structured around themes relevant to the study's objective, with open-ended questions designed to allow participants to provide as much detail as possible and to have the freedom to explore additional topics they considered important to mention.

The interview guide intended to explore topics to understand how the participants view reconciliation and the historical situation of Cyprus, raising questions about the

possibility of the two communities living together and what the feelings of the other side might be. Furthermore, it was also important to explore if the participants consider the importance of the existence of justice in reconciliation, including their interpretation of the meaning of justice. There were also questions asked with the goal of understanding the important components for a possible reconciliation programme.

Finally, although no sociodemographic questionnaire was administered to the participants, they were asked about certain details, such as political views, occupation, religious affiliation, gender identity and level of education.

3.5. Procedures

Data Collection

Given that data collection has already been carried out and the data required for the research is already available, the project has also been approved by the ethics committee. Indeed, this process was carried out through individual interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes each. The interviews were conducted in person, and audio recordings were made to enable transcription, translation and analysis in English.

The data collection focused on exploring the experiences, opinions and feelings of the participants regarding the historical knowledge of the two communities and the impact it has on their lives. Additionally, an attempt was made to understand if the participants tried to comprehend the perspective of the other side in the conflict and how they felt about it, in order to understand their receptivity to reconciliation. Also, it was explored the meaning of reconciliation for the participants and what components they expected to see if a reconciliation programme was to be created, in order to comprehend what could be necessary and important to include in a reconciliation programme from the perspective of the actual possible participants. Finally, the participants were questioned on their opinion regarding the importance of justice for reconciliation, in order to perceive if they consider it to be something fundamental to achieve reconciliation.

Data Processing and Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of the research, data analysis was carried out using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Specifically, data analysis was conducted using the six-phase process for each ethnic group. In the first phase of the process, the researcher familiarises themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the collected data, so as to become thoroughly acquainted with the material and be able to identify relevant information

and patterns. In the second phase, initial codes were generated. The transcripts were coded using semantic (descriptive) and latent (conceptual) codes that appear to be of interest to the analysis. In the third phase, through the use of the Nvivo software, themes were generated, and the data was aggregated according to meaning and the relationships between the codes, identifying themes. The fourth phase, in turn, involved reviewing potential themes. The data was analysed in order to establish clear boundaries for each theme, maintaining narrative coherence and ensuring there is sufficient supporting evidence. In the fifth phase, the themes were defined and named in such a way as to provide a coherent narrative that reflects their content and meaning. Finally, the sixth and final phase concerns the production of the report in a way that is coherent and logical, providing an account of the story of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Presentation and Discussion of Results

Three major themes were identified. The first theme, Reconciliation, relates to the various mechanisms that can influence the process of reconciliation and what that process means to the participants. The second theme, Justice, relates to its meaning to the participants and its importance in reconciliation. Finally, the third theme, Reconciliation Programme, corresponds to the necessary components for a reconciliation programme, see Appendix B.

4.1. Theme 1: Reconciliation

Historical Knowledge

This theme captures what participants know and understand about Cyprus's history. A recurring strand was the recognition that harm was mutual and remains unacknowledged. One Greek Cypriot was surprised to learn that some Turkish Cypriots resent Turkey itself (GS-GC), while another described killings by both extreme-right and left-wing Greek Cypriots against Turkish Cypriots, and vice versa, as wounds that "*aren't openly discussed*" because acknowledgement "*disrupts narratives... that we are the aggrieved party*" (OM-GC). Several participants likewise noted that reunification ambitions were not one-sided, some Turkish Cypriots having wished to connect with Turkey. This absence of mutual acknowledgement, and its attribution to political actors, aligns with Hadjipavlou (2007b): the state and political figures circulate selective information that projects a biased image of the other side and reshapes public perception — a logic echoed by the participant who blames neither Greece nor Turkey but "*the games played by major powers*" (BT-TC). As Xenophontos et al. (2026) argue, institutional environments — the army in the Greek Cypriot

case, football in the Turkish Cypriot case — shape national identity while marginalising the other community.

A second strand concerns the structural imbalance between the communities. A Turkish Cypriot participant recalled the mixed villages before 1963, where communication was good but the socio-economic situation was not, attributing this to a three-to-one population ratio that affected governance and labour rights (BC-TC) — consistent with Hadjipavlou's (2007b) account of unequal access to resources.

A third strand is the split between those who want peace and those who do not, cutting across both communities (MO-TC), alongside a sense that the conflict was "*staged*" or belongs to an earlier generation. One participant explicitly disclaimed inherited guilt — "*if someone... kills a parent, is the child... a murderer?*" — and, with it, any interest in the history (SI-TC). As Sitas et al. (2007) note, this coexistence of views is not straightforward: those who want reconciliation may still enforce ideas of separation, an ambivalence Trimikliniotis (2018) situates within the stop-and-start of the political negotiations themselves.

Finally, participants located the division in external powers, particularly Britain, which "*supposedly came to establish peace but instead separated us and turned it into a colony*" (STA-TC) — echoing Hadjipavlou's (2007a) account of how colonial rule exploited communal differences and drew the dividing line through Nicosia. Others, from both groups, simply acknowledged knowing little beyond the war, the Ottoman period and British rule (BS-TC).

Feelings and Impact on the Participants' Lives

Participants' feelings about the historical situation were predominantly negative, but they differed sharply in whether the situation was felt as a live burden at all — and that difference was itself patterned. Several Greek Cypriots described being able to "*disconnect*" from it: life on their side is "*very normalized and stable*" since EU accession, so "*one can easily say that it doesn't concern them*" (OM-GC; EA-GC; RD-GC). Others felt a diffuse injustice at "*being affected by all the things that have happened in the past*" (DA-GC; AA-GC) and a sense of being "*compromised*" — accepting a divided Cyprus as the place they must live in while insisting that "*Cyprus is all of Cyprus*" (NL-GC; MS-GC). Turkish Cypriot participants voiced the weight more consistently: the feeling of being "*in a jar*", where everything ultimately "*is related to the Cyprus problem*" (SM-TC), and a sadness that "*our culture is slipping away... and we don't even have a voice*" (AA-TC). This variability is

not noise: the capacity to feel unaffected tracks the same structural asymmetry seen throughout these data — the relative security of the Greek Cypriot side versus the minority position and precarity of the Turkish Cypriot side.

A recurrent thread was the erosion of hope. Participants described helplessness because “*what has happened has happened*” and it is unclear “*how much the emotions from the past can be calmed*” (STA-TC), and a hope since curdled into resignation: “*nothing will change because we don’t want it to*” (FS-GC). This aligns with Hasler et al. (2023), who find lower hope for peace among Cypriot youth than older generations — but the interviews specify what the hopelessness is about. Participants locate it not in the other community but in political manoeuvring and a collective unwillingness to move, distrusting “*politicians from that time, just like... today’s politicians*” (SI-TC). The obstacle they name is therefore political cynicism rather than intergroup hostility, which matters for design: if disengagement flows from distrust of the political process, a programme must give young people a sense of efficacy, and not only contact with the other side, since without the belief that peace is attainable they are unlikely to act on it (Hasler et al., 2023). Where the situation does mobilise feelings, it often surfaces as anger and impatience — “*I try to do activist things, but it’s usually not enough... It affects me as a person*” (MS-GC) — emotions that, as Čehajić-Clancy (2016) notes, shape how individuals view the other community and their willingness to engage in reconciliation.

The most concrete impact participants named was restricted movement. Greek Cypriots spoke of being unable to see family places such as Varosha (AA-GC) and of feeling “*like a stranger in your country*” when they do cross — not recognising the streets or the language, and unsettled by “*flags that are threatening*” (DA-GC). Turkish Cypriots framed it as a broader mobility problem, dependent on a second passport to “*travel comfortably anywhere outside of Cyprus*” (STA-TC). Consistent with Dizdaroğlu (2024), the salience of movement is less about logistics than about a wish for contact and social cohesion — which reframes it, for programme purposes, as an aspiration to build on rather than merely a grievance to record.

Finally, participants described impacts that fell unevenly on the two groups. Beyond the shared burden of carrying “*certain burdens even today*” and the language of “*the other side*” and “*this side*” (OG-TC), Turkish Cypriot participants reported being pre-judged — “*people automatically start forming opinions about me*” (BS-TC) — economic inequality, “*different currencies, different statuses globally... we don’t have equal opportunities*” (SI-TC), and a dependence on Turkey that forces constant self-explanation: “*Yes, I speak*

Turkish, but no, I'm not Turkish''' (SM-TC). That these additional impacts cluster in the Turkish Cypriot accounts reinforces the asymmetry running through the data, and, as Yucel and Psaltis (2019) note, the resulting preconceptions bear directly on the trust and willingness to make contact that reconciliation depends on.

Feelings About the Other Side

This was also a theme that only emerged in the Turkish Cypriot group, and it relates to how the participants feel about the other community and their perspective about the situation. Effectively, the participants said that they felt the same way as the other community, because both communities went through similar things during the war. Another participant claimed to “*feel sorry for the Greek*” side, because they believed the other side was “*justified in some aspects*” and that “*they lost more*” during the war (BT-TC). Finally, there were also mentions about feeling sad, because they didn’t consider it necessary for both communities to suffer and experience the pain that they experienced: “*I felt sad. I wish no one had to experience that pain because both sides suffered a lot, and it was unnecessary. Both sides lost family members, so I think it caused deep pain for both.*” (SI-TC). These results might suggest that the Turkish Cypriot participants have a more positive view of the Greek Cypriots, being more open to understanding the other, which might also be related to the fact they feel less connected to Turkey and less willingness to reunite with that country (Neophytou, 2019).

Living Together

Most participants could imagine living alongside the other community and framed it positively — as feeling “*much more like a Cypriot*” (DA-GC) and as a sign of “*cultural progress*” (NL-GC). Greek Cypriot participants, however, were markedly more hesitant: several said coexistence “*wouldn’t be a problem*” in principle yet found it hard to picture, fearing that “*after so many years of anger and separation, it would lead to a lot of conflict*” (EA-GC; AL-GC). This asymmetry mirrors Dizdaroğlu (2020), but the interviews specify its source rather than merely confirming it: Greek Cypriot hesitancy tracks a structural position — EU membership, relative normalcy — that makes the status quo tolerable, whereas Turkish Cypriot openness coincides with the minority position and dependence documented elsewhere in these data. Contact is therefore not equally costly for both groups, which qualifies the optimism of the contact hypothesis and bears directly on whom a programme must work hardest to engage.

The main obstacle participants foresaw was not personal but social: families who “*would object*” (SM-TC) and a wider society quick to label them “*traitor*” or “*infidel*” (STA-TC), including in romantic relationships, where difficulties were seen as real but “*not insurmountable*” (MO-TC). This fits the literature on peer and family influence, where group pressure leads individuals to conform and reconsider their own openness (Čehajić-Clancy, 2016; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Xenophontos et al., 2026). One participant captured the resulting realism: ideal conditions “*will never exist*”, but dialogue remains possible (OM-GC).

As to what coexistence would require — a question raised only by Greek Cypriot participants — the emphasis fell on early contact and education rather than on converting entrenched beliefs: the aim was less to persuade the nationalist who says “*Turks are only murderers*” than to “*change the norm*” so that voicing such views becomes unacceptable (MS-GC; AA-GC; AL-GC). This points, as Yucel and Psaltis (2019) argue, to trust-building and prejudice reduction through structured interaction as prerequisites for coexistence.

Feelings of the Other Side

This theme explores participants’ perceptions of how the other community feels about the war. The Greek Cypriot participants believed that the other community didn’t like the war context and that their lives were difficult, because of the lack of employment opportunities. Furthermore, they believed the other side, the Turkish Cypriots, felt “*betrayed by their neighbours*”, experiencing a “*sense of impotence*”, “*incompetence*” and “*helplessness*”, as if they were “*pawns*” in someone’s game (DA-GC). Also, they considered the Turkish side to have feelings of anger, despair and fear for their identity, that is perceived as disappearing and being replaced. Some participants also mentioned that the Turkish Cypriot side felt oppressed because they are a minority, even in the northern part of the island, where they live, as evident is the following comment: “*I believe they feel oppressed because Turkish Cypriots are a minority, not just on the whole island but also in the northern part because most people living in the northern part are not Turkish Cypriots, they are Turkish settlers.*” (RD-GC). Additionally, there was the belief that Turkish Cypriots experience more stress than Greek Cypriots.

Turkish Cypriot participants also appeared to believe that the other community felt afraid and sad and that they went through similar things to them, also suffering and experiencing losses and pain. This theme of shared suffering by both sides appeared predominantly in the Turkish Cypriot group. Furthermore, they also believed that the other

side hasn't had the opportunity to heal and that they have very serious traumas that continue to be made bigger, as is evident in the following quote:

"Cypriot Greeks have their own serious traumas, and that wound has continued to be reopened... 'One day we will return to our home, one day we will go back to our land in the north, the occupation will end.' This discourse naturally elevates hope to a much higher point. It keeps the flame alive constantly, and I believe it unintentionally magnifies the traumas even more." (MO-TC).

The answers provided by the participants show that they considered the other group's feelings, understanding that the other side also suffered and experienced negative things. This suggests an attempt to take the perspective of the other side, understanding and having empathy for them. Empathy is a key element in promoting good relations between groups. In fact, it seems to be associated with prosocial behaviour and the willingness to help others (Klimecki, 2019). Furthermore, through contact with the other group and a perception of common identity, empathy can lead to better relations between the two conflicting groups, contributing to reconciliation (Klimecki, 2019).

Reconciliation: Meaning, Feelings and Requirements

Feelings about reconciliation, a theme raised only by Turkish Cypriot participants, were positive but hedged. Reconciliation was seen as a necessity and even as a solution in itself (BC-TC), yet several wanted it while doubting it, the doubt attached less to the other community than to politics: one participant *"really want[ed] it to happen"* but felt *"hopeless... because politics gets involved"* (SI-TC), while another found it did not *"mean much"* personally but *"would make [them] happy"* (BS-TC). As with the erosion of hope discussed above, the obstacle participants foreground is the political process, not the adversary.

Asked what reconciliation means, participants offered strikingly varied definitions, confirming that reconciliation is not a single object (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016). Most framed it relationally: as accepting disagreement and recognising that *"the truth lies somewhere in the middle"* (AA-GC), as building *"a more accepting society where one doesn't want to harm the other"* (AL-GC), or as a collective friendship — a willingness *"to move forward together"* despite disagreement (DA-GC). Several went further, describing a holistic process closer to forgiveness — *"you forgive and move on... you need to realize your mistakes, the other person theirs"* (FS-GC) — or, tellingly, likening it to restorative justice: *"not about punishment, but about allowing the aggrieved individuals to be heard"* and recognised

(MS-GC). A minority defined it structurally, as unity across schools and the political system with “*no difference in terms of quality of life*” (OM-GC) or simply as “*a country where you feel safe*” (STA-TC). These accounts echo Ladisch’s (2007) emphasis on the social dimension of reconciliation and lean predominantly toward the maximalist pole of forgiveness and healing, with only some participants invoking the minimalist, institutional focus (Little & Maddison, 2017).

When the question turned from meaning to requirements, however, the emphasis shifted. Participants named social transformation — “*our problem is not practical; it’s the way we think as a society*” (AA-GC) — a safe space and social skills over material resources (AL-GC), and mutual respect, since imposing one’s view “*isn’t respect*” (NL-GC). Crucially, they also introduced mechanisms largely absent from their definitions: accountability and a shared historical narrative taught in schools, so that if the communities “*don’t share a common historical narrative that includes all the crimes committed by both... reconciliation won’t happen*” (AA-TC; OM-GC). This produces a revealing tension: reconciliation is imagined in relational, maximalist terms but is thought to require the recognition, truth-telling and institutional change associated with the minimalist and transitional-justice literatures. The gap between how participants picture reconciliation and what they believe would produce it is itself a finding, and suggests a programme must connect the emotional work participants value with the structural acknowledgement they concede is necessary. Consistent with Rettberg and Ugarriza (2016), participants converge on mechanisms of communication, cooperation and improved intergroup relations, reflecting an overriding wish to repair the relationship with the other community.

Others Emotional Needs

This theme reflects the participants’ perceptions of the emotional needs of the other community. The Greek Cypriot participants believed the other side needed to be recognised and understood and that they would want to feel integrated and accepted into a social group. Furthermore, they believed the others desired a sense of safety, wishing that others do not feel threatened by them, while also seeking empathy from the wider community. Participants believed that the other side would want to “*feel heard and validated*” (DA-GC), that what they have to say matters. Also, one participant mentioned the need to reclaim what was lost during the war and feeling their experiences are validated, as the next comment shows: “*reclaiming what they lost, what they experienced in the North.*” (SM-TC). Some participants also mentioned the importance of equality, particularly in terms of opportunities.

Finally, it was also noted that the need for a better structure and development in terms of culture, healthcare, education and the infrastructures was important, even though the participants recognised that they aren't emotional needs, they considered them important for possible emotional needs to be met, as evident in the ensuing quote: *"I believe a Turkish Cypriot would want to live in a more developed state in terms of culture, technology, infrastructure, healthcare, and education."* (OM-GC). Moreover, there were participants that mentioned the mental stress that people might have from the time of the war and the need to provide them with psychological support.

The comments of the participants suggest an understanding of the emotions and emotional needs that the other group might have. Also, both groups seem to have similar ideas about the others' emotional needs, which might indicate that the emotional needs of one group might be the same as the other. Effectively, as Shnabel & Nadler (2008) mentioned, in order to try to achieve reconciliation it's important to address the emotional needs of the people involved in the conflict and possibly try to satisfy them. Furthermore, as mentioned, this recognition of the emotions of others is fundamental in order to foster empathy, which is a big component of reconciliation (Heaton, 2020). Finally, it's also important to note that emotional regulation can have a crucial role in the success of reconciliation, being necessary, as a first step, to recognise those emotions so they can be addressed (Čehajić-Clancy, 2016).

Perspective-Taking

Most participants said they had tried to understand the other community's perspective, though the effort was uneven. Some had done so through direct contact — a month abroad with a Turkish Cypriot peer through the Cyprus Friendship Programme (DA-GC) — or by deliberately *"put[ting] [themselves] in their position"* (RD-GC). Others could only imagine it, aware that imagining is not knowing (FS-GC), and some had never had the contact that would make it possible, one finding the subject *"triggering"* and avoiding it (EA-GC). This distribution qualifies the empathy the section otherwise documents: where contact is absent, perspective-taking remains speculative.

In picturing the other side's experience, Greek Cypriot participants recognised a community living with a pending, precarious situation (AA-GC) and a fear of erasure — that *"there would be no Turkish Cypriots in northern Cyprus"* (DA-GC) — as well as everyday indignities, such as the bureaucratic obstacles a Turkish Cypriot friend faced simply obtaining a passport, *"little things [that] ruin your life experience"* (MS-GC). Turkish Cypriot participants reciprocated, recalling that Greek Cypriots *"lost their homes too"* and that it is

“unsettling to see someone else living in their homes” (SM-TC), and some sensed a broadly *“similar mindset”* across the divide (GS-GC).

The most searching reflections concerned property and repossession — the houses once owned by Greek Cypriots and inhabited by Turkish Cypriots for decades. One participant worked through the dilemma aloud, recognising that a settler *“born in my house”* and now in his forties has a claim too, and concluding that *“some will lose, some will win”* (NL-GC). Here perspective-taking moves beyond empathy into an acknowledgement of genuinely competing claims — arguably where reconciliation is hardest. As Heaton (2020) notes, taking the other’s perspective helps participants appreciate others’ experiences and fosters empathy; these data suggest it can also confront them with losses that empathy alone cannot resolve.

4.2. Theme 2: Justice

Justice in Reconciliation

Participants were divided on whether justice is necessary for reconciliation, and the division was largely generational. Several saw it as desirable but not a priority for their own cohort — *“for me, it might not be necessary, but for a grandmother who lived through the war, she definitely should have this opportunity”* (FS-GC; MS-GC) — consistent with their largely social, rather than juridical, conception of reconciliation (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016). Others held that without a sense of fairness reconciliation is simply impossible: *“if you have one side where they don’t feel it’s fair, then you can’t have reconciliation”* (BT-TC; AL-GC), with some emphasising initial rules and proportionality in key positions as a route to eventual equal opportunity (RD-GC; SM-TC). As Pankhurst (1999) notes, positions on the place of justice vary widely; notably, participants who invoked its formal, legal side were matched by others foregrounding informal processes — recognition, apology, fairness — which points, with David (2017), toward a broadened, transitional conception of justice rather than legal norms alone.

Justice: Meaning and Requirements

Asked what justice means, participants again offered plural definitions. A minority framed it punitively — *“someone being punished for what they did”* (FS-GC) or compensation for harm (DA-GC) — but most leaned toward restoration and recognition: a *“healing”* the state might now provide (OM-GC), the forming of an *“alliance”* built on accepting that *“there are two sides”* with commonalities (GS-GC), or a *“framework to*

improve human lives” (MS-GC). Several stressed the sheer relativity of the concept — *“what’s just for me isn’t just for the other”* (NL-GC) — and, in the Cypriot context, its limits: *“there can’t be complete vindication”* (OM-GC). This mirrors the literature’s shift from punitive toward restorative justice as a means of repairing past violations through apology and restitution (Van Ness, 2005; Allen, 1999) and, crucially, aligns justice with the relational reconciliation participants described earlier rather than setting the two in tension.

As to what justice requires, participants converged on mutual recognition and truth: both sides being *“seen”* in each other’s territory (AA-TC), the replacement of misinformation with accurate information (BC-TC), and accountability — *“both sides admitting their own mistakes instead of blaming each other”* (BS-TC). They named concrete unresolved issues, above all property — *“the houses that belonged to Greeks, like the land I live on, what will happen to them”* (BT-TC) — equal opportunities and rights (SI-TC), and extensive research into what people lost, even where full restitution is impossible (STA-TC). These mechanisms map closely onto transitional justice, whose key elements are truth-seeking — an official acknowledgement of past violations — and just reparation that secures equality rather than deepening division (Van Zyl, 2005). That participants foreground acknowledgement and truth over punishment reinforces the chapter’s larger pattern: reconciliation and justice are wanted less as retribution than as recognition.

4.3. Theme 3: Reconciliation Programme

Content

Participants’ suggestions for programme content clustered around a few aims. The first was multiperspectivity: activities fostering historical knowledge from *“both sides”*, ideally led by *“people who are more connected to 1963 and 1974”* (AA-GC; GS-GC), including honest acknowledgement of mutual harm — confronting *“the pains of both communities”* rather than teaching them *“in an understated way”* (AA-TC). The second was getting to know one another directly, to combat the stereotypes that arise *“without exposure”* (MS-GC) and, for some, to understand one’s own identity better (SM-TC). Several argued the programme need not centre the conflict at all: a *“common theme... not solely focused on intercommunal aspects”* — professions, or a cultural trip — could reveal that the two communities *“have nothing to divide”* (MS-GC; OM-GC; SM-TC), while keeping a balance between comfort and learning so as to build *“willingness to learn on their own”* (RD-GC). These proposals align with evidence that programmes organised around a neutral common theme such as sport or the environment can succeed by providing shared ground for positive

contact (Kadis & Avraamidou, 2008; Tuohey & Cognato, 2011), and that storytelling and living or travelling together — if structured around equality and cooperative interdependence — build the empathy, trust and respect for difference on which reconciliation depends (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004; Bekerman, 2007).

Deal-Breakers

Participants also named factors that would deter them from taking part. Composition mattered: an equal number of Greek and Turkish Cypriot participants (GS-GC) and, for some, a shared age group (EA-GC). Above all, the programme had to be seen as impartial — not *“financed by one of the two states’ leaderships”* (MO-TC) — and framed so as not to assign guilt: a title like *“Turkish occupation”* or *“Greek occupation”* would make participants feel like *“the guilty one”* and withdraw (AA-TC). Coercion and mistreatment were disqualifying — no one should be forced to attend or *“treated poorly”* (BC-TC) — as was any restriction on expressing opinions or a superficial, purposeless design (SI-TC; STA-TC). Conversely, visibility mattered positively: some would be drawn by a well-known host and an active social-media presence (BT-TC). These converge with Shapiro’s (2021) emphasis on representation, equality and facilitator neutrality, and on keeping institutional or governmental involvement from deterring participation.

Duration

Asked how long the participants considered the programme should last, there was considerable variation in participants’ suggestions. Some participants considered that *“three months”* with sessions *“two times a week”* was enough (DA-GC). There were also suggestions for a duration of six months with once-a-week moments. This suggests that some of the participants considered the sessions should be frequent for a limited period. Also, there were considerations that travelling could be difficult for people, so the programme should happen once a month: *“I believe that in a reconciliation program, maybe once a month, because I estimate it will be difficult for someone to be part of the program for longer.”* (FS-GC). There were even suggestions for the programme to be just a moment, an open session during a day or an hour. However, some participants also considered that a programme which aims for reconciliation should be something long, with mentions of the programme lasting several years, as is indicated in the following comment: *“But to change a mindset, you need a year or more. I’d say once a week, an hour for 7 years or something. It might be utopian, but I believe it takes many years.”* (GS-GC). Despite the suggestion, the

participant understood that something like that could be difficult to accomplish, but that it would be ideal for success. The duration of a programme could also depend on the type of content the programme has, and there could be different types and durations of reconciliation programmes. Although there is no specific design for a reconciliation programme that explains what the duration should be, the literature suggests that this type of programmes shouldn't be one-off events, but rather they should promote repeated contact between the participants (Maoz, 2011), because healing takes time and effort and demands emotional tasks, so it should not be a rushed process (Shapiro, 2021). Furthermore, considering that reconciliation is a gradual and complex process that involves the development of trust, empathy and changes to the relations of two groups (Nadler & Shnabel, 2015), it could be more beneficial to have longer programmes that allow more time of interaction between the participants.

Format

Concerning format, most participants considered that it should be delivered in person, emphasising the importance of face-to-face contact, because people need to be together in this type of programme and it would help create empathy: *"Definitely not online, people need to be together."* (GS-GC). Also, it should be an *"open session"*, *"like conversation"* (BS-TC), friendly and informal or a symposium-style event. Having said that, it could also be a live online programme, where comments and criticism are accepted, as the succeeding comment suggests: *"I would prefer it to be something like a live program on Facebook where comments are accepted and it's open to criticism"* (OG-TC), because even though in-person allows for better communication, online sessions would allow more people to participate: *"would prefer it to be in-person, but when it's online, maybe more people would participate."* (STA-TC). The fact that the majority of participants believed the programme should be face to face is supported by the idea that contact between the group, face-to-face, is essential to reduce prejudices and stereotypes, through the development of strong personal and close relationships between the groups and promoting empathy, trust, and deeper knowledge of the other (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Location

Regarding the location of the programme, the majority of participants believed it should be held in a neutral area, where they could be comfortable and safe, as the following comment illustrates: *"I'd like it to be in an area where I feel comfortable and safe. I wouldn't*

feel comfortable and safe if it were in Turkey, for example. Maybe Nicosia.” (AA-GC). Furthermore, some participants also believed it should be held in different regions, allowing for diversity, and maybe a region in the north and another in the south, so both communities could become more familiar with the island (SM-TC). This would allow the programme to take place in three different areas: one in the north, another in the south and a neutral area. Holding the programme in a neutral area could be crucial for providing participants with a sense of safety, but the possibility of contact with other areas of the island, can be important to promote understanding and deepen the knowledge the participants have of the other side. As Vogel (2018) argues, the space and location of initiatives can have a deep impact on the opportunities of interaction of the two communities. The author also mentions the importance of the buffer zone in Cyprus, particularly as an example of a neutral area that doesn’t belong to either part of the conflict and is administered by the United Nations, allowing for more equality between the groups (Vogel, 2018). The location can be crucial for people’s participation, as it impacts their motivation, feelings of safety and trust (Vogel, 2018).

Facilitators

Views on facilitators were broadly consistent. Most wanted coordinators from both communities (EA-GC), and several saw no need to involve foreign or “*neutral*” third parties, preferring “*one Turkish Cypriot and one Greek Cypriot*” from each side (OM-GC). More important than origin was competence and impartiality: someone knowledgeable about the local context, able to “*mediate and create a productive environment*”, with expertise in conflict resolution and reconciliation (MO-TC), and without political affiliation (AA-TC) — though a minority did not mind who led it (FS-GC). Some added that a well-known figure could lend visibility through social media (BT-TC). This matches Shapiro’s (2021) account: facilitators need the knowledge, connections and neutrality to lead without siding, and a team representative of the participants, since a lack of representation can make people hesitate to participate. As Karanikola and Panagiotopoulos (2025) note, facilitators play a key mediating role in bridging differences, building trust and holding a safe space.

Language

Regarding the language that could be used during the programme, there seemed to be a unanimous belief that there should be a “*common language*”, such as “*English*” (AA-GC). However, participants also believed that people should know each other’s languages, and there could be opportunities to teach each other’s language, as the ensuing comment shows:

“I would definitely want both languages to be spoken for the understanding of both communities. Most people in Cyprus can speak English, so you can make it accessible in three languages, and it would be accessible for everyone” (BS-TC). As Xenophontos et al. (2026) suggests, language is a strong factor in the identity of the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities, playing a crucial role in the expression and shaping of people’s identity, so it’s understandable that the participants wished for both languages to be taught. As a participant suggested, communicating in people’s native language could facilitate the expression of certain feelings, as some people could have a limited understanding of English, something reflected in the following comment: *“I said English because it’s universal, and everyone knows it. They can speak Turkish and Greek, and there could be translators to assist in communication because sometimes expressing certain things in one’s native language might be better for both sides.”* (SI-TC). Thus, the use of a language that isn’t native to the participants can influence the way they express themselves and the interpretation of the experiences and narratives of the participants (Saunders, 2008).

Needs for Participating

It was also important to understand what the participants believed would be required in order to participate in the programme. This theme emerged only in the Turkish Cypriot group. An important part would be listening to people, giving them a platform to express themselves, as the next comment shows: *“Listen to what they have to say, we don’t know how to listen in this society.”* (AA-TC). Also, participants believed it could be important to have *“knowledge”* and *“awareness”* (BC-TC), to be willing to understand the other’s experiences. This way, they considered that stigma needed to be reduced and that people needed to be willing to accept that *“more positive things could be beneficial for everyone”* (BS-TC). Therefore, willingness, self-confidence and availability were considered important. Also, it could be important for the programme to have a peaceful approach and for the people involved to be *“trustworthy”* and *“honest”* (SI-TC). Finally, the participants suggested the possibility of giving people a *“reward”*, *“something more they can gain from participating”* in such a programme (SM-TC).

Needs for Success

Participants defined success primarily in relational terms: a shift in perceptions of the other community, sustained contact afterwards, and even friendships *“without labels”* (MS-GC), achieved through non-judgemental contact and a footing of equality in which

people are heard and opinions respected (AA-TC). A recurring concern was reach: because *“people who come to these organisations are already in favour of peace”*, the harder task is engaging those who are not (AA-TC) — one participant even suggested making participation mandatory so that differing perspectives are present (STA-TC). Social media was seen as a key tool for outreach, visibility and sharing results (BC-TC; MO-TC). Others stressed the competence of the team — accurate historical and political knowledge, plus psychological expertise, so information is *“not... half-baked or altered”* (SI-TC) — and the value of interpreters to include those less comfortable in English (SM-TC). These priorities mirror Shapiro’s (2021) list of what undermines such processes: facilitators who cannot mobilise people, a lack of equality and representation, and a poorly conceived design. In short, participants located success in communication, accurate information, equality and, above all, reaching beyond the already-convinced.

Safety

Safety was also an important theme, particularly what participants would need in order to feel safe. Participants mentioned needing to be understood, have a good environment where people are comfortable, where there are no fights and insults: *“To feel safe with someone has to do with the other person. I don't want to fight or curse at someone, so I want the other person to be understanding.”* (AL-GC). Participants also emphasised the importance of good communication and people being able to say when they’ve felt offended, as the subsequent comment shows: *“Something that would make me feel secure is that if I say something offensive to others, they can tell me personally.”* (MS-GC). This indicates the need for some form of communication guidelines to ensure that people feel secure when communicating with others. Furthermore, they indicated that they would feel safer if they weren’t alone and had other people they knew with them in the programme, as the following quote illustrates: *“To feel safe, I would probably want to go with some other acquaintances. I wouldn't go alone.”* (EA-GC). It would also be important to have delegates from both communities present and an equal number of participants from both sides. The people responsible should be able to control discussions and people should have a positive attitude about the programme: *“If I know that they come with the same attitude. I mean, I don't think I would need something extra like extra security or anything like that. But attitude is important, I think, on both sides”* (BS-TC). Besides, some mentioned needing just normal things to feel safe, not anything extra, as the following quote shows: *“I think just normal safety, like anywhere else.”* (BT-TC). Nonetheless, some participants believed they would feel safe in

reconciliation programmes, not feeling the need to question that safety, as evident in the succeeding comment: *“In such programs, I believe it's safe to participate. I don't think I'd be curious if it's safe or not.”* (RD-GC). Effectively, security and feeling safe is fundamental for reconciliation, allowing the people involved to interact with the others and share their pain and experiences, which is an important part of reconciliation (Kelman, 2004).

Prior Information

Finally, participants wanted to be well informed before joining. They asked to know the plan, activities, participants and facilitators and, pointedly, *“who is funding it... if there are any interests behind it”* (AA-GC), as well as practical sensitivities such as which words to avoid — *“like ‘occupied’”* — that might offend (FS-GC), and first-hand accounts from others who had attended something similar (GS-GC). Some wanted to prepare by learning about the other community — its language, history and culture (AA-TC) — and to know who they would be meeting, including political leanings, so as to know *“what to expect”* (SN-TC). Others sought background on past peace talks and how such processes work and have failed (SM-TC). Underlying these requests is a wish not to enter *“entirely into the unknown”*: as Casas-Casas et al. (2020) and O’Sullivan et al. (2021) argue, information, clarification and trust in the process are preconditions for genuine consent and engagement.

5. Conclusions

This study provides valuable insight into understanding how the participants feel about reconciliation as its possible key elements such as their knowledge of the historical situation of Cyprus, the possibility of interacting with the other community and comprehending the perspective and emotions of the other community. In fact, the findings indicate that despite the wide variety of information provided by the participants, generally, one can conclude that the participants know about the history of their country and that said history impacts their lives in various ways, particularly in the restriction of movement. Furthermore, it's also possible to understand that the participants consider the other community's emotions, feelings and perspective about the situation and would consider the possibility of living together as a positive aspect, despite possible obstacles. These are essential elements for a possible reconciliation, which can lead one to comprehend that the participants understand the concept of reconciliation, wish for it to be achieved, and have already an openness to it.

Moreover, it's possible to comprehend that the participants understand the concept of justice, in formal and informal measures and that they have different opinions on its

importance for reconciliation, despite the majority believing it important. For future research, it could be important to deepen the role justice can and should play in a reconciliation process, particularly, which approach could be more appropriate in the Cyprus context. Finally, one can also understand that the participants' responses indicate that there is a wide variety of elements and possibilities when considering the design of a reconciliation programme. Nonetheless, aspects such as lack of representation, lack of comfort, prejudice and bias could present difficulties for a reconciliation programme. However, elements such as changes in participants' perspectives and facilitators having appropriate knowledge could be fundamental for success. Also, social media is considered an important tool to contribute to that success and reach more people. This way, it could be important, in future research, to explore more deeply how social media can be utilised to improve reconciliation programmes and contribute to their implementation and success.

Lastly, regarding the limitations of this study, the use of different interviewers from both sides, so as to ensure that the participants could be interviewed in their native language, in order to facilitate rapport building, led to different follow-up questions. Something that could have been improved by having both interviewers present in the room during the interviews so as to have less variability in the follow-up questions. Furthermore, certain characteristics of the participants, such as identifying as atheists or non-practicing in their religion and having a left-leaning political orientation indicate a specific segment of the population, which suggests that the participants might have felt more comfortable, generally, to discuss the topics. In future research a different sampling technique could be used so as to have participants with different demographics.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A

Semi-structure Interview Questions

Interview Topic Guide	Examples of Questions
Perception of the historical situation and its impact	What do you know historically about the two communities? How do you feel about the current historical situation? How does this situation affect you?
Perspective-taking	Have you tried to see things from the perspective of a Turkish Cypriot? How do you think they might feel? What do you think their emotional needs are?
Living together	Can you imagine Greek and Turkish Cypriots living together now?
Reconciliation	What does reconciliation mean to you? If we were to create a reconciliation programme, what would you expect to see?
Justice	“Reconciliation cannot take place without some form of justice”. Do you agree or disagree? What does justice mean to you?
Exploratory	Anything else you’d like to add?

Appendix B

Themes

Theme	Subtheme	Number of references	Description	Examples of excerpts
Reconciliation	Historical knowledge	17	Represents the participants knowledge and understanding of the historical situation of Cyprus.	<i>“The history of these two communities is a very difficult history, and this has been going on in this island for a few hundred years. What people should be and how they should be a part of this community and how those living here prove that they are part of this community is still a battle.” (AA-TC).</i> <i>“I don't know much”. (AA-GC).</i>
	Feelings about historical situation	24	Represents how the participants feel about the historical situation of the two communities.	<i>“I'm not pleased. I believe things would have been different if we hadn't had the war. I want to believe it's for the better, but you never know. But it certainly set us back a lot, economically and socially. These are not pleasant situations. It's a shame what happened.” (AA-GC).</i> <i>“I don't know what I should feel since I didn't live in that period.” (BC-TC).</i>

Impact on the participant's life	25	Represents the several ways the historical situation of the two communities impacted the life of the participants.	<i>"I don't even have free movement in my country. I didn't even go to my grandfather's village. It's something my father doesn't want to talk about. It's I can show my passport and pass and it's something I do, but it's like feeling like a stranger in your country. I don't know the streets, I don't recognize the language when I go there, it's like another country. And then you see the flags that are threatening. It's uncomfortable for sure. You feel like there's something wrong."</i> (DA-GC). <i>"People automatically start forming opinions about me, so it affects me in that way."</i> (BS-TC).
Feelings about the other side	7	Represents how the participants feel about the other side and their perspective.	<i>"They are definitely justified in some aspects, and in this situation, they lost more. People from the North can't come and stay now; their homes are gone, their land sold, often through illegal means. So, of course, I feel sorry for the Greeks too."</i> (BT-TC). <i>"Since I found this topic somewhat triggering, I didn't</i>

			<i>question it when it wasn't being discussed.” (OG-TC).</i>
Possibility of living together	16	Represents the participants' views on whether they can imagine themselves living with someone from the other community.	<i>“I believe if the situation were as it is now, after so many years of anger and separation, it would lead to a lot of conflict.” (AL-GC).</i> <i>“I can, it's no problem for me.” (BT-TC).</i>
Feelings of living together	15	Represents how the participants feel about living with someone from the other community.	<i>“I would feel very nice if we could all be together; I would feel much more like a Cypriot if we were all together.” (DA-GC).</i> <i>“It would be difficult, of course. Relationships between two people, I mean romantic relationships, are complicated. There are some cultural differences, language differences, and other challenges, including family-related difficulties. These are not insurmountable issues. I don't think it would be a problem if there is enough interest from both sides to start a romantic relationship.” (MO-TC).</i>

Needs for living together	3	Represents what the participants believe to be necessary for the two communities to live together.	<i>“Education is definitely needed. Our generation has opportunities to solve some social problems because, in my grandmother’s generation, there’s a lot of hatred.”</i> (AL-GC).
Feelings of the other side	16	Represents the participants’ perception of the other community’s feelings about the war.	<i>“I definitely see anger. There’s despair, and fear. Fear because their identity is Cypriot, and their country is being Turkishified.”</i> (MS -GC). <i>“They were afraid too, they were sad to lose their homes too, they suffered the same losses. Both sides suffered losses, you know, many people in the North forget this, suffering is not exclusive to us, in the South, many people suffered the same way. They couldn’t go to their homes.”</i> (SM-TC).
Feelings about reconciliation	5	Represents how the participants feel about reconciliation and the possibility of achieving it in the Cyprus context.	<i>“Reconciliation makes me feel like a solution.”</i> (BC-TC).

Meaning of reconciliati on	19	Represents the meaning the participants attribute to reconciliation and their understanding of the concept.	<i>“Being okay, being able to coexist as friends, as acquaintances. Being comfortable in the same place. For me, reconciliation is a holistic thing. It's not just about avoiding a fight. When you do it, you need to mean it and feel it. Somewhat like forgiveness. You forgive and move on with your life. You need to realize your mistakes, the other person's theirs and simply move past them.” (FS-GC).</i> <i>“When I go to the South, I don't want Cypriot Greeks to stare at me just because I'm a Cypriot Turk or speak Turkish, or make me feel uncomfortable. For example, even going to a bar, some people do this, and I feel that discomfort. I've never felt this abroad, and it should be the same here, without borders. I wouldn't have to show my ID or get insurance when crossing to the South.” (BT-TC).</i>
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Needs for reconciliation	8	Represents the mechanisms the participants believe are needed to achieve reconciliation.	<i>“A basic prerequisite is for the others to be accepting as well. I mean... the paradox of tolerance that someone mentioned... where the limits of tolerance stop at the intolerant people because if someone is intolerant, they can never coexist.” (OM-GC).</i> <i>“To unite these two communities, if we teach this understated history to children and say, “Look, Greek Cypriots did this to you, Turkish Cypriots did this to you, this is our history, and we will not do these again, we will create two communities,” I believe we can actually create a real sense of a republic.” (AA-TC).</i>
Others emotional needs	21	Represents what the participants believe to be the emotional needs of the other community.	<i>“I would want to be accepted and recognized by my classmates. I would want to feel that I’m not the Turk who will harm you but that I’m someone who is a human being. So, I would say empathy. To understand me.” (AL-GC).</i> <i>“To be understood by the other side, because no one would want to willingly take a gun and shoot or kill someone standing in front</i>

			<i>of them. No one would want to witness or experience a family falling apart or being destroyed.” (BC-TC).</i>
Trying to understand the others perspective	21	Represents whether the participants reported trying to understand the perspective of the other community.	<i>“I’ve never been in that position. I think because I haven’t known someone to that extent with whom I could have serious conversations and engage in this process. I haven’t brought it up myself either.” (EA-GC).</i> <i>“My peers have told me about it, but just as we’ve heard from our parents, they hear the same thing. So, there wasn’t much opportunity to share it. Also, I didn’t want to talk about it much because I found this topic somewhat triggering.” (OG-TC).</i>
The other side’s perspective	15	Represents what the participants believe to be the perspective of the other community about the situation of the country.	<i>“I want to believe that since it comes from each of us, I am surrounded by people who think like me. So, I think there’s a similar mindset with them on this issue.” (GS-GC).</i> <i>“It made me feel that there is no difference between them, Kıbrıslı Rumlar, Kıbrıslı Türkler, as Kıbrıslı Türkler would feel. We experienced the same things, the</i>

				<i>same pain, the same negative experiences.” (BC-TC)</i>
Justice	Importance of justice in reconciliation	12	Represents the importance the participants attribute to justice in the process of reconciliation and whether they consider it necessary.	<i>“Certainly, for reconciliation to exist, a form of justice is necessary.” (NL-GC).</i> <i>“It's quite important because without justice, I don't think any side would agree to reconciliation. Although, I know that politicians want more than justice; they want to surpass justice. So, even if justice is served, they might not go towards reconciliation because they want to go beyond justice.” (SI-TC).</i>
	Meaning of justice	28	Represents the meaning attribute to justice by the participants.	<i>“The compensation that you receive for the things that have been inflicted upon you.” (DA-GC).</i> <i>“Justice means not having one's thoughts and actions controlled.” (BC-TC).</i>

Needs for justice	16	Represents what needs to happen, in the opinion of the participants, to achieve justice.	<i>“Replacement of misinformation with accurate information. Objective information should be presented more objectively, whether in the education sector, information programs, seminars, or books. This way, information pollution can be eliminated, and individuals can think more objectively and approach issues more objectively.” (BC-TC).</i> <i>“Initially, there will be denial, we need to understand that there will be anger and anxiety about the new reality, bargaining with what we knew before and now with the new information, and then acceptance. So, there is a process that requires some understanding before acceptance. I think that, at least for Greek Cypriots, what they have is anger, where the circle hasn't closed because there is no understanding and acceptance. I believe that whatever hasn't closed will continue. I just think that intentionally, our politicians don't allow us to close this circle.” (GS-GC).</i>
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Reconciliation programme	Content	16	Represents what the participants want to see in terms of content and activities in a reconciliation programme.	<i>"I would like the activities to teach me how they grew up, and how the situation is there now with the Turks." (EA-GC).</i> <i>"To confront the pains, learn the pains of both communities, bring them to the forefront and say, "We did this, you did this to us, they did this to us." Not in an understated way but teaching it truly. Maybe something like a "human library" event, where people who lived through the war come there. For example, a Turkish Cypriot saying, "I lived through this," and a Greek Cypriot saying, "I lived through this." Show them together and draw some conclusion at the end." (AA-TC).</i>
	Deal-breakers	17	Represents what the participants consider to be deal-breakers that would influence their willingness to participate in a reconciliation programme.	<i>"A dealbreaker for me would be if it was forced, where everyone has to participate because I believe it would be harder for someone to change in that case." (MS-GC).</i> <i>"I think being treated poorly would be a deal-breaker for me. If someone behaves with hatred or negatively towards me." (BC-TC).</i>

Duration	11	Represents the duration that the participants believe the reconciliation programme should have.	<i>“It should definitely be frequent like once a week for six months.” (EA-GC).</i> <i>“Two days are not enough time for such an event; it's not like it should be rushed. In 50 years, the situation went down the drain, and even now, the political structure has changed, but if this takes place efficiently and both sides genuinely want it, we can definitely reduce it to 1, 2, or 3 years in a clear way.” (AA-TC).</i>
Format	12	Represents the format the participants believe the reconciliation programme should have.	<i>“Definitely not online, people need to be together.” (GS-GC).</i> <i>“Would prefer it to be in-person, but when it's online, maybe more people would participate. However, when it's online, there wouldn't be that personal connection, that eye contact. I don't think the communication would be at the same level, so in-person, like that.” (STA-TC).</i>
Location	12	Represents the location the participants believe the reconciliation	<i>“I think it should be conducted in different regions.” (BC-TC).</i> <i>“I'd like it to be in an area where I feel comfortable and safe. I wouldn't feel comfortable</i>

		programme should be held in.	<i>and safe if it were in Turkey, for example. Maybe Nicosia.”</i> (AA-GC).
Facilitators	21	Represents who the participants believe should be the coordinators and facilitators of a reconciliation programme.	<i>“I believe there should definitely be coordinators from both sides.”</i> (EA-GC). <i>“I think it should not be someone specific, neither a Cypriot Turk nor a Cypriot Greek or a Turk or a Greek. It should be someone with an identity other than X.”</i> (BS-TC).
Language	19	Representing the language the participants believe should be used during the reconciliation programme.	<i>“There should be a common language, e.g. English because it is the only common language.”</i> (DA-GC). <i>“We communicated in English, and if there were any innovation, I would like to see this: perhaps at a basic level, Greek Cypriots teaching simple Greek to Turkish Cypriots, and Turkish Cypriots teaching a bit of Turkish to Greeks. In this way, learning to speak the common languages of the island by teaching them.”</i> (BC-TC).

Needs for participatin g	14	Represents what the participants believe is required to participate in a reconciliation programme.	<i>“The people organizing the program need to be genuinely trustworthy and honest. This would roughly determine the level of people participating in the program.” (SI-TC).</i>
Needs for success	18	Represents what the participants believe to be the needs to achieve success in a reconciliation programme.	<i>“I believe it would be a success if even a little change in perceptions towards the other community occurred. But I also think we can go a bit further, aiming to become friends without labels.” (MS-GC).</i> <i>“Publicity, people seeing it, visibility, I think it's important. So that it can look somewhat better in terms of what it is, how it is, where it is going, and how it is done.” (MO-TC).</i>
Safety	15	Represents what the participants would need to feel safe in a reconciliation programme.	<i>“To feel safe with someone has to do with the other person. I don't want to fight or curse at someone, so I want the other person to be understanding.” (AL-GC).</i> <i>“It never occurred to me to wonder whether it was safe or not because it is certainly safe. I would probably give a classic answer like having a third-party</i>

			<i>mediator, a UN office.”</i> (SM-TC).
Prior information	22	Represents the information the participants would like to have before participating in a reconciliation programme.	<i>“I’d like to know in advance what the plan is, what we will do, who the people from each ethnicity will be, to understand the situation and who is funding it. If there are any interests behind it.” (AA-GC).</i> <i>“I would want to know who organized it, with what budget, and who organized it.”</i> (MO-TC).
