MASTER'S THESIS

RADBOUD UNIVERSITY NIJMEGEN

Critiquing Trust in Peacebuilding

Conceptual Misalignments and Challenges in Cyprus

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Disclaimer of Issues Surrounding the Thesis and Reporting

In this thesis, the term “northern Cyprus” (with a lowercase “n”) is employed in a neutral manner to describe the northern geographic regions of Cyprus. This is done to avoid any implication of recognition of an independent state of the areas not under control of the Republic of Cyprus and avoid controversies relating to the Cyprus Problem. However, in cases referencing to actions taken by the self-declared but unrecognized “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus,” (or TRNC) the N is capitalized. References have left the capitalization as applied in the source material.

A significant challenge encountered during this research was the acquisition of reliable data, particularly concerning northern Cyprus. A number of official statistics are available, but their credibility is frequently called into question based on the source. During my time in Cyprus, I encountered a lack of consistency in population figures published by different entities in the north, the south, or by Türkiye. The discrepancies that arise are because statistics published by the north are often rejected by the south, particularly when they include groups such as Turkish settlers or international students, who would be expected to leave the island in the event of reunification. Absence of accurate data is driven by political and economic interests (Hatay, 2024; Hatay quoted in Aygin, 2023).

Abstract

"Trust" is frequently used in peacebuilding. Generally, its constructive nature is assumed without further clarification of what the concept entails or defining what underlying aspects should be addressed. This thesis critiques the uncritical application of "trust" in the field and examines its potential for miscommunication due to cultural misalignments in understanding, as uncritical application can have adverse effects.

The study focused on the Cyprus Problem and compared associations with trust between different identity groups. A quantitative section collected associations. Furthermore, qualitative stages explored the topic "trust" and cooperation-related issues in Cyprus in depth. Even though no meaningful differences were found between identity groups, the findings suggest that "trust" is highly dependent on individual interpretation. This raises concerns regarding the broad application of "trust" in the field. Beyond the quantitative insights, barriers to sustainable peacebuilding in Cyprus were revealed.

There were several limitations to the research, such as the absence of a Greek Cypriot participant in the qualitative stages of the study and a limited sample size. These limitations mean the quantitative findings are indicative, rather than conclusive, and the qualitative sections might portray issues surrounding the Cyprus Problem in a biased manner. Future studies should address these limitations to provide a more comprehensive perspective.

Based on the insight that "trust" is highly individual, more precise terminology should be used instead of "trust" to avoid miscommunication and severe consequences. Such an approach would also enable for quantitative analysis of the applied concept, and thereby increase the efficacy of peacebuilding projects.

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Chapter 1 - Setting the Stage: An Introduction

In the field of peacebuilding, the importance of trust as a means of achieving reconciliation between conflicting parties is frequently highlighted. Scholars and practitioners regularly cite trust as a fundamental element necessary for the establishment of dialogue, collaboration, and, ultimately, sustainable, long-term peace. However, despite its frequent usage, the concept of trust is often vague and is applied without sufficient critical analysis. In many instances, the term "trust" seems to be employed as a buzzword with an assumed universal meaning that extends across diverse cultural, social, and individual contexts. Thus, this uncritical usage is problematic because it obscures the inherent complexities of the concept, which can lead to varied interpretations and misunderstandings.

This thesis aims to address this gap in the literature by examining the concept of trust in peacebuilding. To achieve this, the study hypothesizes that there are significant differences in the interpretation and understanding of trust between individuals, as well as culturally dependent impacts on these interpretations.

This study focuses on the case of Cyprus, which offers a compelling opportunity to examine the concept of trust in a post-conflict environment. Cyprus has been divided along ethnic lines since 1974, which represents the culmination of a series of ongoing tensions that originated in the 1950s and 1960s. This resulted in a de facto partition between the northern Cyprus, which is nominally Turkish Cypriot-dominated, and the southern Cyprus, which is Greek Cypriot-dominated.

The enduring division offers a unique opportunity to examine the evolving conceptual landscape between communities with a shared historical experience, yet becoming increasingly distinct over the last decades due to several aspects: The long-lasting physical division, coupled

with religious and linguistic differences between the two communities, has led to a significant degree of separation. An additional factor is the influence of geopolitical and socio-economic dynamics. While the Republic of Cyprus in the south is a member of the European Union, the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is only recognized by Turkey and remains economically and politically isolated. As a result, the disparate socialization processes on either side of the Green Line (the buffer zone) likely influenced the interpretation and understanding of "trust."

Image 1. *A photograph illustrating the divide of Cyprus, taken by the researcher. The image offers a perspective from the old city walls. The building in the center of the picture is the old police station, with a bunker to its left that was constructed during the conflict.*
The areas below, including the street, are part of the area under the control of the Republic of Cyprus.
On the left side, on top of the walls, the flags of Türkiye and the TRNC are visible.
The researcher took the picture from a park on top of the city walls, inside the area of northern Cyprus.

In this context, coupled with the low intensity of the conflict, offers an ideal setting for examining the conceptualization of trust and the potential for divergence in underlying concepts between and within groups in a safe environment.

The investigation deployed a mixed-methods approach. As preliminary stage, a questionnaire was employed to provide a quantitative baseline understanding of trust among the population. In a second step, qualitative methods in the form of a focus group and two interviews with local conflict experts were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of factors that may influence trust, as well as how the concept is applied in peacebuilding locally.

The study was conducted between September and December 2023, during which data collection occurred simultaneously with the internship related to this master's thesis. The temporal focus of this research is on contemporary perceptions of trust and the situation in Cyprus, rather than a historical analysis.

The findings of this study indicate that the concept of trust is highly individualized, with significant variation in its interpretation. Among the 55 participants in the study, over 120 different associations with trust were submitted, which serves to illustrate the personal and context-dependent nature of the concept of trust. This challenges the current status quo in literature and practical applications used in peacebuilding, which often treats trust is a universally understood concept.

The study proposes that, rather than employing the term "trust" as an overarching concept with a lack of specificity, peacebuilding professionals should utilize more precise and quantifiable terminology. Such an approach could prove beneficial in avoiding miscommunication and enhancing the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts.

The following is a brief overview of the structure of the thesis: This introduction is the first chapter.

The second chapter examines the theoretical and social relevance of the study, as well as several aspects surrounding trust and its potential for miscommunication in peacebuilding literature. In addition, the research question and hypothesis are presented in this section, followed by a comprehensive introduction to the context of Cyprus.

The third chapter presents the quantitative aspects of the study, specifically the questionnaire. First, the methodology of the questionnaire is delineated, including information on the design, data collection, participants, and the manner in which the data was treated and analyzed. Moreover, this section presents the findings derived from the quantitative data.

Chapter 4 presents the qualitative aspects of the study, which are divided into two sections for the methodology. One section is dedicated to the focus group, while another is devoted to the interviews. Both sections present the instruments utilized, the participants of the respective sections, and the procedures of focus group or interviews. Subsequently, the data analysis for the qualitative data is presented, followed by an integrated presentation of results that includes information from both the focus groups and the interviews.

Chapter 5 presents a comprehensive discussion of the findings, encompassing a critical examination of the limitations and ethical considerations, an analysis of the theoretical and practical implications of the insights obtained, and detailed suggestions for future research. It also includes a brief summary of the discussion section.

Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings and relevant aspects from the discussion in a concise manner.

Chapter 2 - Delving into Trust: Its Significance and Complexities

Conceptually, trust is fundamental to all forms of social interaction (Kwon, 2019). Whether when leaving the house and trusting other participants in traffic, relying on cars to stop when crossing the street, or when visiting a doctor and seeking their expertise, social interactions require trust. As noted by Ravale et al. (2022), “Trust is a complex human habit that has evolved over time” (p. 3). The interpretation and meaning of trust are highly dependent on the surrounding circumstances and situations in which it is applied.

In order to contextualize the concept of trust, it is common practice to utilize sub-concepts in order to provide a more detailed description of the term. Such sub-concepts are interpersonal, institutional, and political trust (Hwang, 2017). Hwang argues that these sub-concepts derive trust from an array of sources: The concept of interpersonal trust is analogous to the notion of “trust in people,” whereas institutional trust is founded upon the tenets of social systems and the structures that guarantee the “administration of social norms” (p. 7). The trust in question pertains to different trustees, and the mechanism through which it is derived varies accordingly. In the case of interpersonal trust, it is dependent on interpersonal factors. In contrast, institutional trust is based on deterrence (Hwang, 2017, p. 8, referring to Newton, 1999, 2001,).

2.1 The Foundations of Trust

In addition to the context-dependent nature of trust, a number of underlying factors contribute to its formation and maintenance. These factors can be seen as interrelated and multifaceted, collectively influencing the development and evolution of trust.

For example, Kass (1996) makes the argument that generally, trust is placed in others without much consideration. The determining factors for placing trust in others, as outlined by Kass, are "gain, security, flexibility, and convenience" (p. 59). While the potential for gain motivates us to trust and benefit, the role of security is vital as a protection mechanism preventing loss. However, in cases with large potential gains, the importance of security from losses might become less relevant. This perspective on the anticipation of benefits is shared by Deschênes and Arcand (2022), who further state that this anticipation introduces vulnerability and dependency on others.

The other two aspects that are mentioned by Kass (1996), flexibility and convenience, illustrate the social aspects of trust: Convenience permits the formation of cooperative arrangements without significant effort, thereby enabling the realization of potential gains without an up-front cost. The advantages of flexibility in trusting relationships include the capacity to address unforeseen challenges more effectively. Trusting relationships becomes more adaptable and thus stable. Consequently, increased flexibility contributes to the resilience of trust. Together, convenience and flexibility enhance the ability to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

Beyond the aspects that motivate us to trust, Kass (1996) stresses the fact that broken trust relationships are extremely difficult to repair due to their potentially serious adverse consequences for the individuals. Even more severe, however, is the loss of trust in institutions, as this can erode an entire society's ability to collaborate and realize opportunities together (Kass,

1996, p. 66).

Cook (2001) compares trust to a psychological learning model, in which cooperative gestures facilitate the acquisition of understanding for potential mutually beneficial interactions. This, in turn, is manifested in the tendency to consider the motives of others more often. In a transaction, participants will evaluate others as trustworthy if there are benefits for all parties involved (p. 25). In relation to this rational-choice model, Deschênes and Arcand (2022) claim that trust is influenced by emotional cues in addition to knowledge about the interlocutor. This may be one of the reasons why individuals from an in-group are typically more trusted than those from an out-group. Emotional cues and shared knowledge are more aligned.

This perception of trust (or distrust) being a learned aspect of life is shared by Misztal (1996). If there is the active decision of trusting someone, rather than passively allocating it, memories of them are recalled, based on past experiences of previous interactions (Misztal, 1996, pp. 75-76, referring to Luhmann, 1979). This perception of assurance that our expectations will not be disappointed is not dependent on absolute truth. Instead, it is shaped by familiarity. This learned trust, serves to minimize risks. However, (positive) memory and trust are fragile and can easily deteriorate (Misztal,1996, p. 141, citing as cited in Gambetta 1988, p. 234).

Solomon and Flores (2003) assert that the foundation of trust is rooted in reciprocal relationships, which are characterized by a self-fulfilling prophecy. If trust is bestowed upon an individual, they will attempt to align their actions with the expectations associated with that trust. This offers the trustee psychological rewards associated with fulfilling such an expectation, as well as the attempt to prove to the trustor that the decision to place trust in someone else was merited. Solomon and Flores also argue that the converse is true for mistrust. Moreover, as Solomon and Flores posit, an understanding of trust is crucial for grasping its impact on trust creation.

In the context of a conflict, the majority group may identify "safety" as a prerequisite for a trusting relationship. In order to establish trust, they may engage in forced searches of homes and individuals for weapons. For those undergoing the searches, however, this would be more akin to a form of totalitarian control than a demonstration of trust. Consequently, a perception of constant observation, control, and distrust may result. Despite the fact that these searches are conducted in the name of "trust," they ultimately result in a reduction in intergroup trust. This indicates that, rather than examining the intended nature of trust, it is necessary to investigate its conceptual application in practice.

To encapsulate the underlying concepts of trust, such as rational choice, risk-reward calculations, and emotional cues that influence trust, Delhey and Newton (2003) introduce the concept of "foundational trust." They relate foundational trust to the underlying factors that contribute to trust in different contexts. To ascertain the validity of this concept, they conducted a comparative analysis of six distinct theories with survey data from seven countries.

All six theories can be classified into two general schools of thought on trust. The first school of thought considers trust as an individual attribute that is shaped by personal experiences, both in childhood and in adulthood. This includes personal demographic factors such as income and gender.

The opposing school of thought maintains that trust is a product of the larger societal structures, such as regional wealth or community engagement of the population, impacted by cultural influences, and influenced by political and social institutions. Accordingly, theories were tested based on different levels to reflect these schools of thought: Two theories were based on the macro level (social conflict and safety within a society), two on the micro level (personal networks), and two on individual factors (personal success, well-being, and anxiety).

Three of the six theories were confirmed. However, only one theory was confirmed at

each level, leading to the conclusion that trust is a multi-level concept influenced by various factors. The theories that they found which influence trust are societal conditions (social conflicts, satisfaction with democratic institutions, political freedom, and public safety), social networks (of friends), and success and well-being (income, social statis, life and job satisfaction, happiness, and anxiety). Delhey and Newton (2003) conclude that trust is a complex, multi-level concept. To encapsulate this, definitions of trust must consider these multiple dimensions to be comprehensive. Consequently, a single-level definition will always be inadequate.

2.2 Defining Trust – a Fruitless Endeavor

The multitude of factors and underlying influences that impact trust are frequently overlooked when publishing research, field guides, or project proposals. As Hwang (2017) notes, the "multi-dimensional feature of trust has been neglected in almost all of the existing empirical studies on trust" (p. 1). Ravale et al. (2022) provide an accurate description of the current status quo in literature, stating that:

> Trust has been categorized as a black-box, or undifferentiated variable, in the massive number of studies, and has rarely been investigated in depth. Even if it appears in predictable ways, trust is not a one-dimensional or homogeneous idea. Trust is viewed as a multi-faceted notion that can be interpreted differently depending on the context. (Ravale et al., 2022, p. 1)

Upon examination of existing research on trust, it becomes evident that there is a reluctance among contemporary scholars to define the concept in a definitive manner. The concept of trust is too broad to be defined in a single, comprehensive manner.

In the year 2000, McKnight and Chervany conducted a content analysis with the objective of defining trust in the English language in a more concise manner. Instead, they discovered that three dictionaries offered between nine and 24 distinct definitions of the term. Approximately 65 of the 80 books and articles on trust defined the concept, with many presenting unique definitions.

This analysis was constrained to the variability within the English language. When considering the influence of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it becomes evident that seemingly equivalent translations of "trust" may prove to be misleading. In Japanese, for instance, this translation is ambiguous, as it can signify either "goodwill" or the anticipation of

competence (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994).

Similar discrepancies in seemingly equivalent translations have been observed in comparisons of more straightforward concepts than trust. In bilingual individuals, the formation of associations with seemingly equivalent translations is influenced by the language used as input (Luna & Peracchio, 2002). A comparison of the English and Spanish terms "friend" revealed that the English term was associated with the concepts of "honesty" and "toys," while the Spanish term was associated with "love," "cycle," "play," and "male". This indicates that concepts that are perceived as identical may in fact have disparate underlying associations and thus meanings.

The study conducted by Luna and Peracchio (2002) was carried out with individuals from two distinct cultural backgrounds in relation to a tangible concept, namely "friend." When considering the differences in origins, experiences, and cultural backgrounds of individuals from a variety of socialization contexts across a diverse range of cultures, the probability of conceptual misalignment increases. This is particularly the case with amodal[1] concepts such as "trust," which are inherently complex.

The potential for misalignment in conceptual understanding of a core concept could have significant implications when considering the impact of culturally dependent communication styles. One theory of communication styles is based on the contrast between high-context (in which the majority of information is conveyed through contextual cues) and low-context (in which information is explicitly formulated) (Hall, 1976). These distinct communication styles also rely on differing approaches to resolving communication issues.

[1] Without physical representation that could be used to clarify meanings further, unlike "pencil" or "chair."

Croucher et al. (2012) found that individuals from low-context cultures tend to rely on solution-based approaches, such as compromising and integrating other perspectives, whereas those from high-context cultures prefer indirect approaches, such as avoiding a topic or obliging. This presents a challenge when the project content does not align with local needs. Particularly when the local population relies on communication strategies that do not explicitly address such misalignments.

An aspect of trust considered as fundamental by project managers or external sponsors, there is no guarantee that the same aspect is considered significant among the local population with the possibility for unwillingness to correct misunderstandings. It is therefore essential for such projects to establish the exact underlying parameters to ensure a streamlined process. It is important to understand which facets of trust are relevant within local groups to allow for targeting these concepts. Improving the underlying concepts associated with trust might increase overall trust levels because trust comprises these related concepts.

2.3 Contemporary Workarounds to Defining Trust

In trust-related fields, these considerations are often disregarded. Instead of proposing inclusive definitions of trust, a general absence of definitions of trust is the preferred workaround in practice. This could be problematic due to the individual differences in interpretations, specifically in conflict studies.

In the context of protracted conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa region, where attempts at reconciliation have proven unsuccessful, Oberschall (2007) discusses past intensifications of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the time, the conflict was characterized by the ongoing negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, which have resulted in two significant agreements: Oslo A and Oslo B. These agreements sought to establish the respective zones of authority, encompassing both civil and security administration. As Oberschall notes, these agreements ultimately failed due to the presence of "profound mistrust," and "had there been greater trust on both sides, between the negotiators and the people they represented, an agreement might have been reached" (p. 153). Furthermore, Oberschall asserts that reconciliation is unlikely to succeed when ethnic opponents are demonized and deemed irrevocably untrustworthy, a claim that appears both plausible and applicable to a wide range of conflicts.

Oberschall (2007) concludes their book on an optimistic note, suggesting that when ethnic groups have either similar or different preferences, policy should prioritize projects and institutions that foster collaboration between identity groups. They assert that "trust is learned in shared institutions and transferable to all domains of ethnic relations and from one generation to the succeeding ones" (p. 238). This sounds encouraging. However, if current generations are unable to learn to trust, what are the implications for learning of future generations? And overall: What is meant by "trust?" The answers to these questions are never explored in the book.

Oberschall (2007) is not the sole author to identify trust as a foundational concept in peacebuilding yet failing to explain its meaning. Lederach (1997) asserts that cultural and contextual resources for peace and conflict resolution are indispensable for those engaged in the peace process. It is imperative that the international community adopt a more nuanced and inclusive approach that transcends the limitations of a prescriptive outsider perspective. Instead, local perspectives should be adopted in order to facilitate the peace-building process. While several linguistic associations with trust are included, like it being a "holistic approach to mediation that develops over time" (p. 97), fundamental to peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997, p. 130).

This impression of not clarifying the underlying concept of trust is strengthened when analyzing the literature surrounding peace and conflict studies: Authors writing about (mis-)trust leave room for imagination: In their 2019 review of higher education institutions' potential for trust-building in post-conflict Cyprus, Ioannou and Sonan never delineated the underlying constructs of trust beyond cooperation and contact between the southern and northern parts of Cyprus. Özerdem (2012), on the other hand, indicates that former combatants are unable to return to their homes due to a pervasive atmosphere of distrust and apprehension about potential retribution. They argue that post-conflict communities are frequently polarized and fractured, necessitating attention. However, it is difficult to address the issues of mistrust that have been identified without first providing a clear definition of what is meant by the term.

This issue is not confined to the realm of academic discourse; rather, it represents a pervasive phenomenon within the field of conflict and peace studies. When examining field guides published by the United Nations that are designed to facilitate improved relations between conflicting parties, the concept of "trust-building" is a common theme. For example, in a United Nations report from 2022, that includes a chapter on "Intercommunal Relations, Cooperation, and

Trust-Building." The term "trust" is referenced on eight occasions throughout the report, yet no definition of the term is provided.

This absence of a clear definition for "an indispensable prerequisite for cooperation, […] [that forms] the bedrock of common understanding between two negotiating parties" (Temizkan et al., 2023) [2] is problematic. Especially so, if the conceptual meaning and understanding of trust potentially differs between individuals. If individuals hold disparate conceptions of what constitutes trust and its implications, how can trust ever be cultivated? [3]

Moreover, this absence of a foundational concept is not an isolated phenomenon that occurs in some few publications. UN documents designed to assist personnel on the ground in achieving their objectives regarding conflict transformation do not provide a definition of trust, leaving it to the imagination of their readers. For instance, the "Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Standards" (IDDRS) (United Nations, 2014) stipulates that "trust in the process" should be instilled in the local population. According to the guide, this can be achieved by appointing a local representative who has the trust of the community to be included in processes.

A similar lack of specification regarding the meaning of trust is evident in the documents "DDR Support to Mediation Process" (United Nations, 2018) and "Effective Weapons and Ammunition Management in a Changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context" (United Nations, 2021) , as well as in "IDDRS 2.20 The politics of DDR" (United Nations, 2021), and "IDDRS 2.30 Community Violence Reduction" (United Nations, 2019).

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[2] Unlike the UN, Temizkan et al. (2023) do offer a conceptual debate of trust in their work which includes rational choice, psychological, and social aspects.

[3] In this paper, trust was not defined either, however, this is the case because this is intended as critical voice against the application of an undefined concept.

Even the most recent publications aimed at improvement of conflict situations do not provide a definition of trust. This is exemplified by the public statement released by the Greek Turkish Forum regarding the Cyprus Problem on September 15, 2023.

> The GTF [Greek Turkish Forum] believes that a shared regional vision could be an important inducement for moving forward, considering evolving regional challenges. In this context, a need to reinforce trust between the two sides in Cyprus to create a positive environment and pave the way to restarting dialogue is essential. To encourage this, specific goodwill gestures and measures need to be taken. The GTF will continue to work on the region and encourage both sides on the Island to develop and offer concrete ideas to build trust. Taking advantage of the positive atmosphere between Greece and Türkiye, all relevant parties should strive to contribute to efforts to reconvene substantive talks in Cyprus as well.

Designating “trust” as a key concept for conflict resolution, while leaving it open to interpretation, makes documents like the ones published by the UN appear as a buzzword-driven appeal to international donors and an expression of goodwill, rather than field guides that aim towards implementing actionable plans. The failure to ensure the intended meaning is conveyed accurately to the reader can lead to misunderstanding and, consequently, the erosion of trust.

This is shown by Willems and Van Leeuwen (2015) observed that one challenge encountered in DDR projects aimed at reintegrating former combatants was the failure to meet expectations. The circulation of rumors, the failure of project coordinators to communicate effectively, and the inability to temper overly optimistic expectations contributed to a sense of frustration among participants. This leads Willems and Van Leeuwen to advocate for the implementation of more realistic objectives within the scope of DDR programs. A similar

conclusion is supported by Idris (2016), who identified that unrealistic expectations of DDR projects represent a significant challenge.

In the absence of clear definitions of trust, it can be assumed that there is a high frequency of misalignment in understanding what it refers to. Such discrepancies in expectations would also lead to inconsistencies in the way that projects surrounding a conflict are perceived. In light of these assumptions, it is evident that discrepancies between stakeholders cannot be resolved without clear delineation of the intended outcomes and the implications of core concepts (e.g. trust) to all relevant parties. In the absence of such measures, the desired outcomes of the programs will not be achieved.

One example of an unintended consequence is a project in South Sudan, where the destruction of weapons in circulation resulted in a reduction in trust levels among the population. This was due to an increase in vulnerability to violent crime, such as cattle rustling, in the absence of firearms among the population (Phayal et al., 2015). Despite the good intentions behind the international community and the project, the result ultimately exacerbated the situation.

Another potential consequence, this time on the protracted Israel-Palestine conflict, is given by Aggestam and Strömbom (2012). They observe the phenomenon of peace fatigue due to the discrepancy between good intentions and absence of tangible results, caused by the proposition of numerous unfruitful peace plans that were subsequently suspended (p. 12, referring to an interview with Anat Saragusti). The repeated cycle of hope and disappointment leads to a population that is disengaged from the conflict and potential solutions. This is often attributed to the involvement of elites, who are perceived to take top-down actions that exclude sections of the population, and consequentially fail, something Aggestam and Strömbom refer to as “vertical expectation gap” (p. 7).

It is essential to reduce the room for (mis-)interpretation in order to decrease miscommunication, limit the above outlined issues of exacerbating the local situation. Vertical expectation gaps and peace fatigue could possibly be avoided through the alignment between the intentions of policymakers and project coordinators and the needs and expectations of the local population and participants. However, this remains impossible if concepts are left open to interpretation.

2.4 Guiding the Inquiry: Research Objectives and Questions

To evaluate the potential risks associated with miscommunication related to trust among diverse identity groups, this research project initially sought to examine the understanding of trust between different identity groups in Cyprus. This entailed a comparison of the understanding of trust held by Greek and Turkish Cypriots. A second step involved investigating potential discrepancies (or similarities) in the scope of focus groups with locals, with the aim of gaining deeper insight into the underlying factors influencing the conceptualization of trust within the Cypriot population.

Due to the quasi-isolation of northern Cyprus, where limited trade is conducted through the Green Line (European Commission, 2023), alternative means of transportation must be utilized to convey goods to and from the region. Given that the entirety of Cyprus is technically an EU member state, the Republic of Cyprus in the south does engage in official interactions with international actors. It can thus be surmised that the understanding of trust held by participants in the north differs from that held by participants in the south. In light of the aforementioned considerations, the research question for this project was thus formulated as follows:

> How do Turkish and Greek Cypriots conceptualize and understand the notion of trust, and what are the similarities and differences in their underlying beliefs and perceptions?

The initial portion of the inquiry was addressed through the administration of a brief street questionnaire, which sought to capture what individuals associate with trust. The second part of the question was addressed through the use of focus groups with residents of Cyprus, with the aim of obtaining a more nuanced understanding of the surrounding dynamics within the local context of Cyprus.

The underlying concepts were explored through the collection of quantitative data, with

the aim of identifying patterns that would provide insights into the potential conceptual overlaps and discrepancies between the two identity groups, Greek and Turkish Cypriots. These preliminary findings were employed as a foundation for discussion during focus groups, wherein curiosities, historical factors, and personal experiences pertaining to these differences or similarities were investigated. In light of the context of Cyprus, which has been shaped by a long shared, but recently divided history between the communities, the following hypothesis was formulated:

> There is a significant difference in the underlying associations made with trust between members of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, with more associations overlapping within a community than between the communities.

The null hypothesis was stated as follows:

> There is no significant difference in the underlying associations made with trust between members of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities compared to within a community.

Researching the underlying concepts associated with trust is essential to effectively implementing projects that allow for successful trust-building, fostering of cooperation, and address long-standing issues. If disparities in the perception of trust exist, this may impede the efficacy of initiatives designed to foster trust. It is therefore imperative to examine the underlying complexities, particularly in instances of protracted conflict where previous attempts at reconciliation have proved ineffective, resulting in the continued division of communities, as evidenced in Cyprus. The insights derived from this research will inform policies and strategies aimed at fostering enhanced cooperation in Cyprus and contribute to the broader field of

peacebuilding.

Before moving on to the methodology of the study, it is crucial to develop an understanding of the contemporary and historical context of Cyprus, which will help fully comprehend the context and can help with interpretation later on.

2.5 A Historical Perspective on the Cyprus Problem

In the case of Cyprus, experts on the region argue that the lack of trust between the communities impedes the ability to find a solution. Adamides (2015, p. 2) argues that the relative peace and prosperity[4] have rendered the population complacent with the status quo, as they perceive that a potential resolution could disrupt this stability. Both communities perceive themselves simultaneously as minorities: the Turkish Cypriot community on the island and the Greek Cypriot community in the region. This perception gives rise to feelings of anxiety and a pervasive sense of threat.

In addition to the threat posed by other ethnic identity groups, Cyprus has historically been subject to external influences. This process was facilitated by the Hellenization of the island under the Ottoman Empire and later by the British administration. In 1878, the British assumed control of Cyprus, initially as a protectorate and subsequently as a British colony. During this period, several naval bases were constructed on the island with the objective of maintaining control of the Suez Canal, and these bases remain in use to this day. During the period of British colonialism, the British authorities employed Turkish Cypriots as a police force to maintain control of the island (Demetriou, 2019, p. 406).

In addition to leveraging a power differential in favor of Turkish Cypriots on the island, the British also devised cartographic representations wherein the island's regions were delineated as either Turkish Cypriot or Greek Cypriot territories (Bueno-Lacy & van Houtum, 2019, pp. 593-596). In reality, the population of Cyprus was diverse, with Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots residing in close proximity to one another rather than occupying distinct geographical

[4] In the south.

areas. However, the colonial administration failed to acknowledge this fact while simultaneously propagating the new reality of the island in schools, thereby reinforcing the perception that there are separate ethnic groups with distinct ethnic regions.

Between 1914 and 1950, four referendums were held in Cyprus on the question of Enosis, the idea of a political union between Cyprus and Greece (Emilianides, 2023, p. 184). Emilianides explicitly identifies the role of religion in the referendum process, which occurred in 1921: Signatures were collected by "priests, teachers, members of school and village committees" immediately following the completion of the solemn doxology (a part of the religious sermon) in Greek Orthodox churches (p. 185). Additionally, the Archdiocese (the central administration of the Cypriot Orthodox Church) took upon itself to maintaining the records of the referendums and organizing the final referendum in 1950 in collaboration with the Enosis movement and AKEL (a political party) (p. 186). The 1950 referendum resulted in 95.71% of votes in favor of political union with Greece, with 224,747 valid votes (Database and Search Engine for Direct Democracy, 2016). However, it was not conducted by the official authorities and was rejected by the British administration, with only Greek Cypriots participating. Ultimately, the referendum did not result in union with Greece (Reuters, 2017).

In 1955, the organization EOKA[5] (Temizkan et al., 2023; citing Hatay & Papadakis, 2012) was established by Greek Cypriots with the objective of achieving independence from the British Empire and attaining the goal of Enosis (political union with Greece) through the use of violent means. In the span of five years, EOKA was responsible for the deaths of over two hundred individuals, the majority of whom were British soldiers and Turkish Cypriots, as

[5] EOKA - Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston, which translates to "National Organization of Cypriot Fighters".

evidenced by Temizkan et al. (citing Aziz, 2000). The movement for unification with the Greek mainland posed a threat to the Turkish Cypriot population and gave rise to conflicts within the community.

Image 2. *Official flag of the Republic of Cyprus. Retrieved from Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024).*

Image 3. *Flag of the Turkish Republic of Cyprus that declared independence in 1983 and remains internationally unrecognized apart from Türkiye. Retrieved from North Cyprus International (2020).*

In 1960, the British relinquished their colonial governance of Cyprus, retaining only their naval bases on the island. The cessation of colonial governance led to the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus. In its nascent stages, the Republic of Cyprus was a bi-communal state in which power-sharing was a fundamental tenet. Quotas were established for members of parliament. A specific number of ministerial positions was set aside for Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, and the posts of president and vice-president were allocated to a Greek Cypriot and a Turkish Cypriot, respectively. Additionally, the Turkish Cypriot vice-president was granted veto powers. The newly established republic was endowed with three security guarantor powers: the United Kingdom, Greece, and Turkey, as stipulated in the Treaty of Guarantee (United Kingdom, Greece, Turkey, & Cyprus, 1960).

The bi-communal state of was short-lived. The inaugural president of the recently established republic was Archbishop Makarios III, a staunch proponent of the militant

organization EOKA and the unification endeavors of Enosis (Temizkan et al., 2023). In November 1963, a political crisis resulted in Archbishop Makarios proposing thirteen amendments that would diminish the influence of Turkish Cypriots in the joint government (Hazou, 2013). Two days prior to Christmas Eve 1963, two Turkish Cypriots were killed when a Greek Cypriot police patrol was purportedly verifying identity documents. On the same day, Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot fighters engaged in conflict, resulting in the eruption of hostilities in multiple towns across Cyprus. On Christmas Eve, 1963, 31 Turkish Cypriots and 5 Greek Cypriots were killed, [6] and in the following days, Turkish Cypriots were forcibly evicted. The bi-communal state had failed (Temizkan et al., referring to Aziz, 2000).

On July 15, 1974, a military coup was initiated with the objective of removing Makarios III and accelerating the agenda of uniting Cyprus with Greece. On July 17, the Turkish Prime Minister traveled to London to request a response in accordance with the guidance set forth in the Treaty of Guarantee, emphasizing that if no action was taken, Turkey would proceed to take action on its own (Kareklas, 2011). On July 20, prior to Greece's inclusion as a guarantor, Turkey initiated unilateral military action, invoking Article IV of the Treaty of Guarantee to safeguard the Turkish Cypriot community.

In August 1974, the Turkish military initiated what they called a second peace operation, gaining control of approximately 36% of Cyprus. The buffer zone between the northern and southern regions of Cyprus, designated as the "Green Line," was established along the front lines of 1974 when the fighting stopped. It was placed under the authority of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), which remains there to this day.

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[6] Turkish Cypriots refer to this event as "Bloody Christmas."

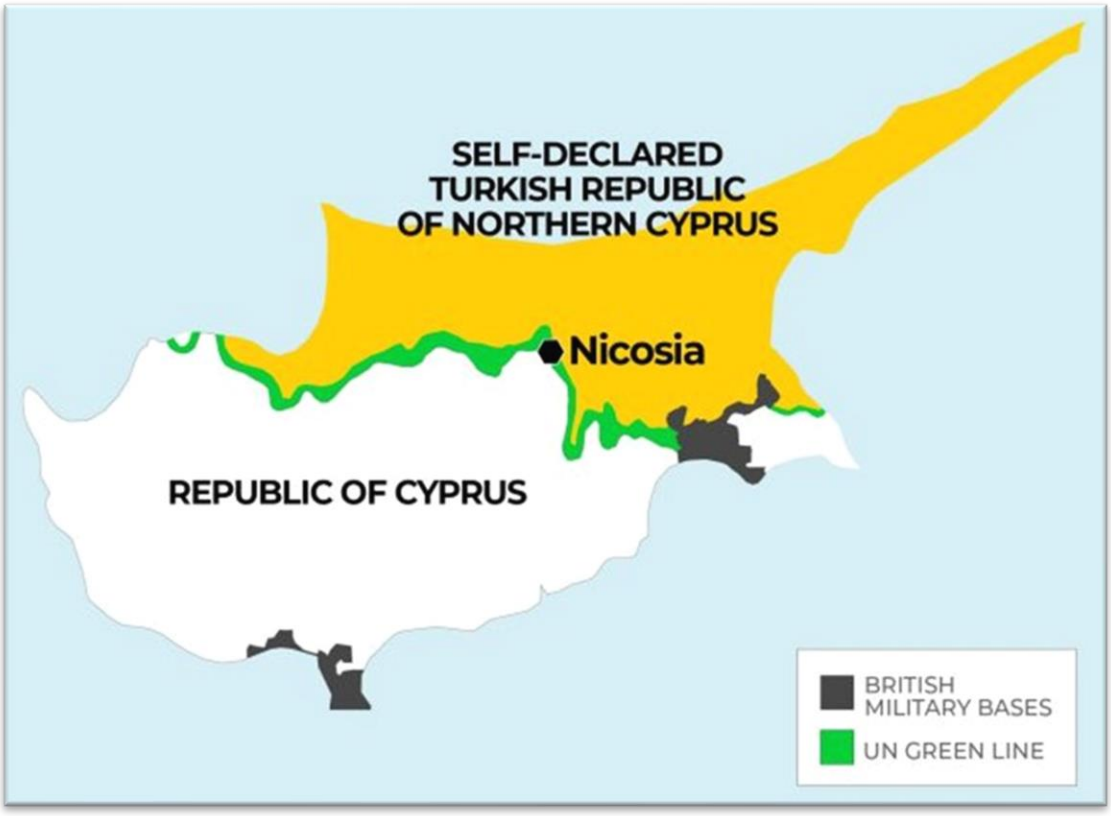

Image 4. *Current map of Cyprus displaying the Republic of Cyprus, the area of the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the British military bases, and the buffer zone or "Green Line." The Green Line is along the front lines of 1974 when the fighting stopped and is under the authority of the UN peacekeeping mission UNFICYP. Adapted from: Al*

In the northern region, the de facto state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was established, which is only recognized by Turkey. Prior to the unilateral opening of crossings by the TRNC in 2003 (Reuters, 2003), the Green Line constituted an insurmountable barrier to population movement. It was only following the reopening of the crossing that Cypriots from both sides were permitted to visit their former homes and establish relationships for the first time in decades.

In 2004, the UN Secretary-General introduced the Annan Plan, a comprehensive proposal for implementing Cyprus's reunification. The plan was submitted to a vote in Cyprus, and while the majority of the Turkish Cypriot community expressed support, the majority of the Greek Cypriot population opposed it. As the Greek Cypriot community constitutes the larger population

on the island, the Annan Plan was rejected (Hadjipavlou, 2007, p. 351).

Despite the Republic of Cyprus' attainment of EU membership status on May 1, 2004, which permits trade and the tourism industry in the Republic of Cyprus, the north lacks formal relations with the EU. In the absence of violence, the Cyprus Problem has been characterized as a "comfortable" conflict (Adamides, 2015). This implies that maintaining the status quo is preferable to implementing change, as it reduces the risk of the conflict deteriorating towards more acute violence.

2.6 The Cyprus Problem: A "Frozen Conflict?"

Since the escalation of the conflict in 1974, the Cyprus Problem has often been referred to as a "frozen conflict" (Byrne, 2006, p. 159) and is frequently still referred to as such (Hadjigeorgiou, 2023). Furthermore, Cyprus is infamously known as "the graveyard of diplomats."

The manner in which history is represented has the potential to foster distrust among the population (Farmaki & Antoniou, 2017). Museums on both sides allege that they have been subjected to unjust atrocities, portraying their ingroup as a victim of the crimes of the outgroup while depicting the actions of the ingroup as a justified and "heroic" defense. Furthermore, such divisive narratives are also reproduced in the education system of Cyprus (Ioannou & Sonan, 2019). As a result, the potential for collaboration between the two identity groups is severely limited from the outset. Despite the persistence of historic divisions, the prospect of reunification and a resolution to the Cyprus Problem remained high in 2015 (Sonan, 2015). However, talks between the north and the south ultimately ceased in 2017 (Ioannou, 2017) following the introduction of a commemorative day in public schools to mark the 1950s referendum on political union with Greece by the Republic of Cyprus (Reuters, 2017; Temizkan et al., 2023). This resulted in the Turkish Cypriot president at the time, Mustafa Akinci, refusing to attend further talks.

The conflict also persists beyond the political sphere. The United Nations has observed an increasing number of incidents occurring in the buffer zone. In a report published in 2022, the UN stated that "unilateral, unauthorized military activities by the opposing forces close to and inside the buffer zone have been steadily escalating in number and severity since 2018." These violations, according to the UN, include the construction of firing positions, the digging of trenches, and the deployment of concertina wire fences. These developments are contingent upon

reciprocal behavior from both sides[7], which suggests that the trend towards militarization in Cyprus will continue to gain momentum.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a further deterioration of relations, particularly among the general population, due to the unilateral closure of the checkpoints by the Republic of Cyprus, preventing movement between the north and the south (Daily Sabah, 2020). In the same year, another factor contributed to the aggravation of the situation in Cyprus: The TRNC administration opted to reopen the ghost town of Varosha for tourists, prompting a wave of international criticism and apprehension about the potential for escalation (Woodyatt et al., 2020).

Image 5. *A picture of the ghost town of Varosha, taken by the researcher.*
The area was closed off since 1974, now it has opened for tourism. Before the conflict, the area was designated to become a tourist resort. Along the beach, there are numerous hotels that have been abandoned and are collapsing.
To make the ghost town accessible to tourists, roads have been constructed. Tourists can either opt for guided tours, for walking through the town on their own, or for renting different vehicles, such as bicycles or electric scooters. Hospitality services are available, as well as the possibility to swim and sunbathe.
This reopening of the area has been criticized heavily by the UN and the international community. This is because the opening intends to attract tourists profiteering from the conflict and related trauma. During the conflict, the entirety of the population was displaced. Property ownership was never resolved.

[7] This reciprocal behavior has also been described to me as “tit-for-tat” behavior between the two sides.

While the checkpoints have resumed operation following the pandemic, they continue to serve as the sole means of traversing the Green Line between the north and the south.[8]

Image 6. *The Green Line.*
A perspective on the UN buffer zone between the north and the south. This picture was taken by the researcher near the center of Nicosia from the southern side Observation posts, such as the one in the center of the picture are frequent along the Green Line, and sometimes UN troops keep watch.
In front of the buffer zone, a flag post displaying the flags of the Republic of Cyprus and of Greece are visible.

[8] Moving between the two sides is relatively quick and easy (with the right passport – in my case German). During my stay in Cyprus, I have moved between the north and south frequently, often more than once a day, mostly over either the Ledra Palace or the Ledra Street Crossing (a pedestrian-only crossing). Crossing usually only took a few minutes, where IDs have to be presented on both sides.

The sustained military presence, which incurs considerable expenses, and the unresolved status of the issue also act as a deterrent to investment in the region, for instance, in the hydrocarbon industry (Crisis Group, 2013). Another deterring factor was the discovery of natural gas in the region. This has resulted in clashes between Turkey and northern Cyprus on one side and Greece and the Republic of Cyprus on the other. The objective of these clashes is to extract oil and gas from the region (BBC, 2020). Consequently, the situation is unsustainable.

A notable intensification of the conflict occurred in August 2023, when Turkish Cypriots initiated the construction of a road to connect the northern region to the bi-communal village of Pile in the buffer zone. This represented a severe intensification of the conflict, given concerns that the roads would be used for future military operations. The United Nations peacekeeping force attempted to intervene and halt the construction. A confrontation with Turkish Cypriot authorities ensued before Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots ultimately reached an agreement on the contested project (Associated Press, 2023).

The presence of these contributing factors on and surrounding the island indicates a heightened potential for conflict, which in turn undermines the prospect of achieving a resolution to the Cyprus Problem. Moreover, these factors raise questions about the applicability of the term "frozen conflict" to the Cyprus Problem.

The concept of "frozen conflicts" does not account for the evolving nature of conflicts and the shifting influence of actors over time (Relitz, 2020). The current reality for the Cypriot population is that the conflict is a constant presence in their daily lives. In 2024, the United

Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus has been active for six decades, while the Turkish military landed on the island half a century ago, marking an important historical milestone in Cyprus.

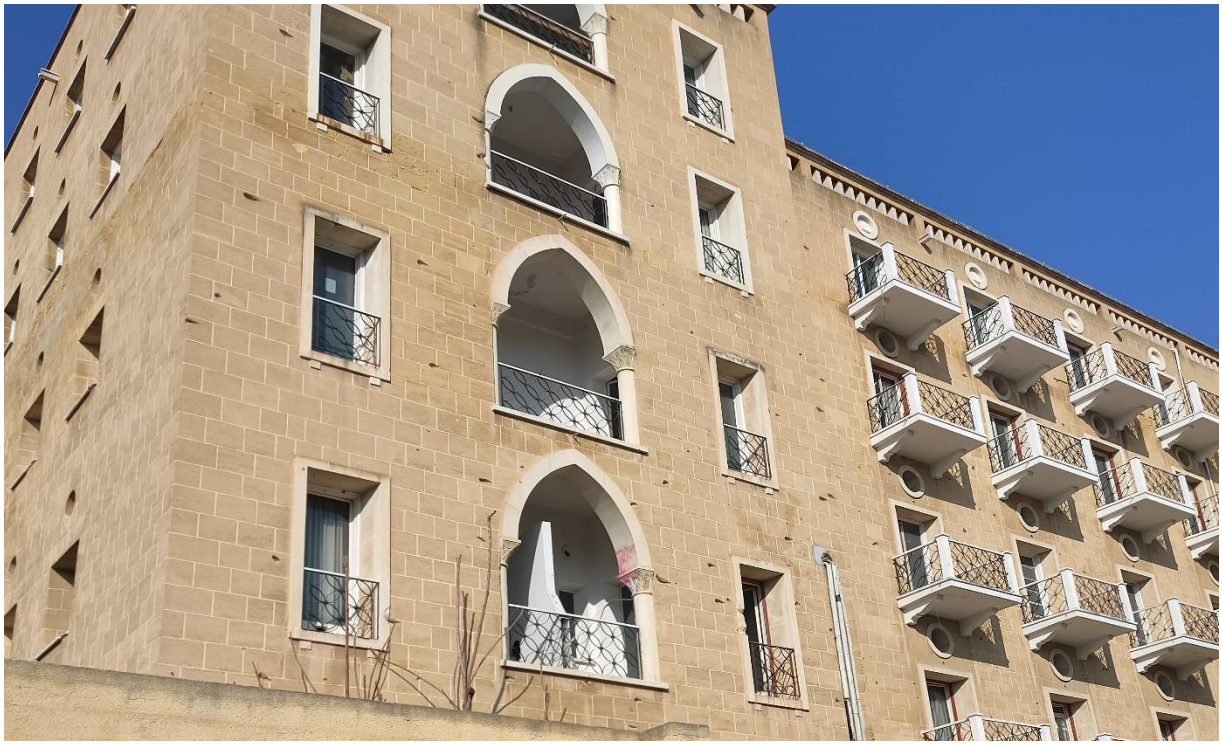

Image 7. *A photograph of Ledra Palace, taken by the researcher.*
The structure now acts as a headquarters of the UN on the island, the building still bears the marks from the conflict in the form of bullet holes.
The hotel is located inside the buffer zone, however, it is along one of the transit points between the north and the south, meaning it is also accessible to the public to a degree.

2.7 Trust in Cyprus: A Societal Perspective

The long-lasting division of the island, the instrumentalization of existing ethnic groups during British rule have contributed to a high level of distrust between these groups. Nowadays, the emergence of biased portrayals of history, which served to perpetuate a climate of what Temizkan et al. (2023) calls mistrust (absence of trust) and distrust (opposite of trust), whereby the atrocities committed by the other community are deemed unjustified, while those perpetrated by one's own were presented as necessity or even heroic, which is a significant concern.[9] These biases are also reproduced by the education system, as evidenced by the leaked emails to teachers in the Republic of Cyprus. This email included instructions to remove a page from an English workbook that referenced Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish state (Daily Sabah, 2021). In the wake of the leak, the Ministry of Education took the decision to remove the workbook from the curriculum entirely (Euronews, 2021), thereby further exacerbating the existing divide between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities on the island.

In their 2023 review, Temizkan et al. examine the factors contributing to the deepening distrust among the Turkish Cypriot community towards Greek Cypriots. The authors contend that, in light of the political decisions taken by the Republic of Cyprus (some of which have been previously discussed), including the removal of workbooks, the recent introduction of public celebrations in honor of the 1950s referendum, and the portrayal of Turks in Cyprus, As "occupiers" (the least derogatory term used in the article), and in the absence of policies aimed at mitigating the stereotypical portrayal in historical narratives, there has been a decline in trust

[9] An example for the biased display of history in a Cypriot museum was a knife, displayed as example for weapons used in massacres that one community performed on the other. A few steps further in the same museum, "personal belongings" of a "hero" were displayed. The personal belongings in question: a pair of shoes, a shirt, a backpack, a water bottle, and a machine gun.

(Temizkan et al., 2023).

The United Nations (2022) shares the assessment of a decline in trust in their most recent report to the Secretary-General of the UN Security Council, albeit on both sides of the divide. The authors argue that public rhetoric from both sides continues to undermine efforts to build trust. They also highlight the potential for the economic gap between the north and the south to increase resentment and distrust, which could exacerbate the estrangement between the two parts. Furthermore, the UN expresses concern that, over time, the communities may drift further apart. This has tangible implications, as the rise in tensions and distrust has coincided with an increase in actions that undermine the effectiveness of the peacekeeping mission, UNFICYP. In light of the ongoing deterioration of the situation in Cyprus, the importance of projects aimed at fostering trust and improving relations between the northern and southern communities is increasingly evident.

Despite the existence of some intercommunal cooperation in the form of business collaborations, these instances are so infrequent that such endeavors are recognized with awards (Stelios Foundation, 2022). Despite the existence of the "Green Line Regulations" (European Commission, 2004, last amended on August 31, 2015), which permit the trade and interaction across the Green Line of certain goods and services, significant social, political, and institutional barriers persist, impeding the realization of comprehensive cooperation. A pervasive social obstacle is the dearth of interaction between the two groups (Ioannou & Sonan, 2019). For Turkish Cypriots, there is a notable absence of demand for their products from the Greek Cypriot population, coupled with significant challenges in securing product placement in shops or advertising opportunities within the Republic of Cyprus (European Commission, 2023).

In addition, institutional barriers in the Cypriot context manifest as a lack of recognition of documents issued in northern Cyprus, including driving licenses and roadworthiness

certificates (European Commission, 2023). This renders the delivery of goods from the northern to the southern region a challenging undertaking. In order to do so, it is necessary to obtain the requisite documentation from both sides, enabling the vehicle to traverse the entire route. Alternatively, a switch must be made at the checkpoints to a vehicle with valid documentation and a driver in possession of the required permits.

A political obstacle to enhancing the conditions for collaboration is evident in the strategies employed by the Republic of Cyprus, which involve the non-recognition and non-interaction with areas not under their effective control: In the event of trade-related issues along the Green Line, the authorities in the south raise the matter with the European Commission, which then conveys the concerns to the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce (European Commission, 2023). This indicates a preference for indirect communication over direct engagement between the two sides. While the Green Line Regulations represent a step towards cooperation, negotiations to permit additional goods and services to cross the buffer zone remain cumbersome, as each item is subject to individual negotiations (Theodoulou, 2023).

Chapter 3 - Quantifying Trust: Research Methodology and Findings

In the initial phase of the research, which involved street surveys conducted in both the northern and southern regions of Cyprus, individuals were asked to list several associations with the term "trust." The second phase of the study comprised a focus group, during which participants were invited to contribute their perspectives on the insights obtained during the initial research stage. As a third step, expert interviews were conducted with two individuals involved in the peacebuilding process in Cyprus and possessed extensive expertise surrounding the Cyprus Problem. The subsequent sections present the findings of each of these different aspects of the research, followed by the presentation of insights based on these stages.

3.1 Quantitative Approaches: Methods and Framework

An online questionnaire (see Appendix B) was prepared and distributed in the local communities of Cyprus (either through the researcher's network or in person) as an initial step and foundation for later qualitative information. The researcher's information, the purpose of the study, and the expectations of participants were included in both documents.

To ensure that all participants were aware of the research goal, it was reiterated on the first page of the questionnaire in the event that some individuals received the questionnaire without the accompanying standardized message or flyer. Additionally, the initial page of the questionnaire requested that participants complete it independently, without consulting with other participants, to prevent any potential influence on the results. Subsequently, participants were requested to indicate their consent to the terms of the study, and to confirm that they understood the procedure for contacting the research team.

The questionnaire inquired about several demographic factors to facilitate subsequent between-group comparisons. These included age, area of residence, district of residence, ethnic

identity, gender identity, and median household income. The age of participants was collected in discrete categories, with the following ranges: younger than 18 (excluded), between 18 and 29, between 30 and 39, and so on up to and including those aged 90 or above. The district of residence was dichotomous, comprising rural and urban categories. Participants were permitted to indicate their respective home districts in an open-ended format. The questionnaire presented five options for gender identity: The options for gender identity were “male,” “female,” “non-binary,” and “prefer not to say” or “other,” with the latter requiring a specification. Additionally, participants were asked to indicate their marital status, with the following options: “single,” “in a relationship,” “married,” “divorced,” “widowed,” or “prefer not to say.” In conclusion, the ethnic identity category presented the following options: “Cypriot,” “Turkish Cypriot,” “Greek Cypriot,” “Turkish,” “Greek,” and “Other (please specify).”

In the subsequent phase of the study, participants were asked to provide at least two and up to five responses regarding their perceptions of trust. Any written response was permitted, including simple words or sentences/phrases.

Afterwards, participants were presented with the opportunity to participate in a raffle, with one randomly selected winner receiving a modest compensation of €15. Additionally, they could indicate their interest in participating in a follow-up study in the form of a focus group and opt in to receive updates regarding the study’s findings. Finally, participants were invited to provide their email address to be contacted for various purposes, including follow-up, results dissemination, and prize notification.

Who Contributed: Participants Overview.

The participants were selected on the basis of convenience sampling. Some participants were recruited online or through the network of the researcher. As a result of an insufficient number of

participants, the researcher proceeded to attempt to contact them via online forums (Reddit) but was unsuccessful. Following the failure of the online approach, individuals were approached in person on the streets of Nicosia (north and south) with the aim of increasing the number of participants. Below these two manners of recruitment are outlined in more detail.

Digital Outreach Strategy.

Individuals who were contacted through the researcher's personal or professional network were provided with a standardized message (see Appendix A1) that included an invitation link to the online questionnaire that was distributed through messenger services (WhatsApp, Viber). The link was distributed online to ensure that participants could complete the questionnaire at their convenience without the necessity of the researcher's physical presence or contact. Instructions accompanying the link detailed the objective of the study, information regarding the confidentiality of the data, an estimation of the time commitment (approximately five minutes), and details on the appropriate point of contact in the event of any concerns or queries.

Engaging with the Public: Direct Recruitment.

The researcher relied on direct public engagement to increase the response rate to the questionnaire. This was done in a variety of settings, including small cafés and bars. Upon approaching potential participants, the researcher proceeded to introduce the research project, articulate the objectives, and provide information that was also included in the standardized messages used in the messages for online recruitment. Additionally, the researcher informed potential participants of the requisite time commitment.

If the individual consented to participate, they were presented with a Quick Response (QR-) code that led directly to the questionnaire. The researcher remained present throughout the completion of the questionnaire to address any potential questions or concerns that the

participants might have had.

During this phase, some participants inquired about the manner in which they should respond to certain prompts within the questionnaire, particularly those pertaining to trust. In response, the researcher advised that the responses could take any form, whether a word, a sentence, or any other form of expression that came to mind. This was intended to encourage open and honest responses without guiding the participant towards a specific answer.

Once the questionnaire was completed, the researcher expressed their gratitude to the participants for their involvement in the research project and extended their farewells.

Additionally to online recruitment and direct public engagement, flyers (see Appendix A2) were printed and distributed in preparation for the focus group for the qualitative section, which included a QR-code to the online questionnaire.

Participant Selection Criteria.

The participants in the study were required to be at least 18 years of age, possess sufficient English language skills to comprehend the information provided and complete the questionnaire (self-reported), and voluntarily consent to the conditions of the study (with the option to withdraw consent at any point in time). An additional criterion for inclusion or exclusion was that all participants were required to be permanent residents of Cyprus. In the event that any of the aforementioned conditions were not met, the participants were automatically directed to the conclusion of the questionnaire.

A limitation of the study was the restriction of the sample to individuals who met the language requirement. This may have resulted in the exclusion of individuals from isolated groups and minorities, individuals residing in remote areas, or Turkish immigrants due to the language barrier. On the other hand, the benefits of these exclusion factors are that they facilitate

the analysis. Had the data collection encompassed Greek and Turkish (and potentially other languages), the intrinsic meanings of the information provided would have necessitated translation. However, translation implies that the information is viewed through the lens of a prospective translator, rather than through the direct lens of the participants. As this study aims to ascertain whether the underlying meanings of trust vary between individuals, relying on a single individual to translate the perspectives of others would undermine this approach.

The exclusion of individuals under the age of eighteen is related to ethical and logistical concerns regarding parental consent. The objective of this study is to challenge the notion that there is a universal concept of trust, which can be achieved without the inclusion of youth.

Participation Turnout.

While the questionnaire was made available to approximately just shy of 90 persons, only sixty-nine consented to participate in the data processing. One additional participant completed the

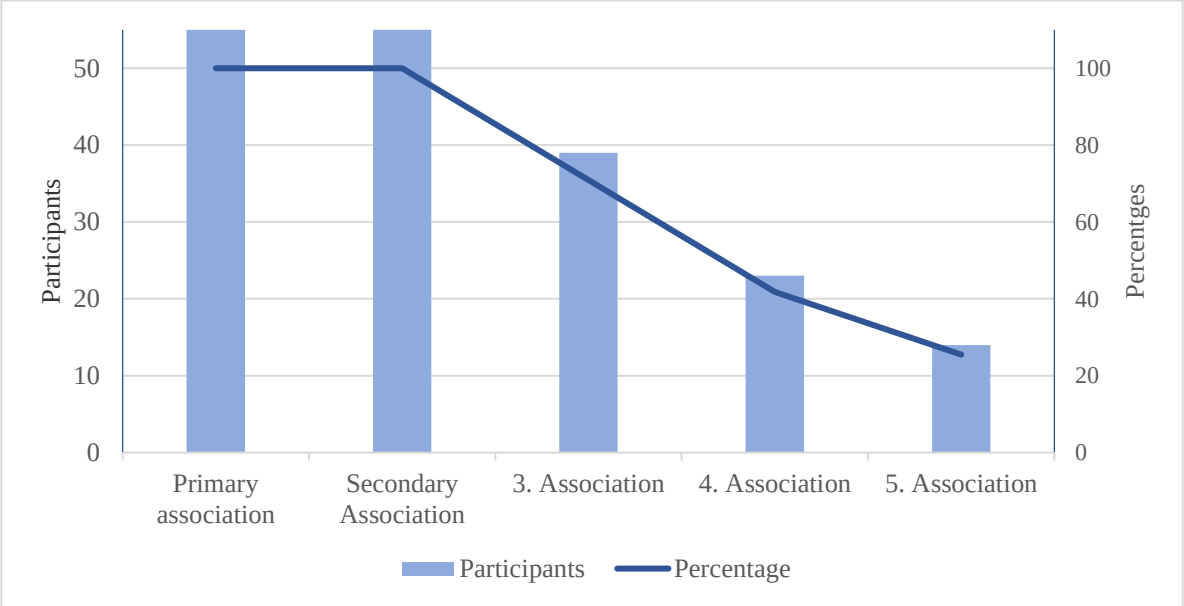

Figure 1. *Number of rate of submissions by respondents.*
All the fifty-five participants submitted the primary and secondary associations, which were mandatory for participation and inclusion in the dataset. The subsequent submissions decreased in each iteration. While thirty-nine participants (70.9%) submitted a third association, the submission of fourth associations already dropped to twenty-three participants (41.8%), and only 14 participants (25.5%) submitted a fifth association.

questionnaire in its entirety; however, due to a technical error, no affirmative consent was recorded. As a result, their responses were excluded from the dataset and the analysis to ensure ethical compliance. Furthermore, no response was received after contacting this participant, which resulted in their exclusion from the dataset. Five respondents were not residents of Cyprus, two initial respondents did not meet the age requirement, and two participants provided invalid responses (indicating "yes" for the district of residence). One participant indicated trust in associations with Turkish, and one indicated that they did not speak or understand English. Two participants responded with a single association ("respect") to all five prompts, and thus were excluded to avoid skewing the data. In total, twenty-four submissions were excluded from the dataset, resulting in a final dataset with fifty-five valid responses, which indicated at least two different associations with trust. The rate of submissions to associations with trust is presented in Figure 1. An overview of all dempgraphic information that was collected is given after the section on data cleanup.

Refining the Data: Cleaning and Standardization.

Following the exclusion of non-valid cases, the information in the dataset was subjected to cleaning and standardization.[10] In regard to the associations that were made, the following modifications were made to the dataset in order to ensure its integrity: In some instances, when a participant indicated multiple associations with trust in a single submission, such as "family and friends," this was separated into two distinct associations (primary: "family," secondary: "friends"). This entailed adjusting the order of the associations, which was done for a single case.

[10] In one response, the indication of residence was changed from "City Centre" to "Nicosia". One participant noted Nicosia Politiko as their area of residence, which is a small village in the district of Nicosia. Because they also indicated that they resided in an urban area, their district of residence was changed to "Nicosia". Different districts in which people resided were adjusted so that the spelling would match across participants ("Aglandzia" and "Aglantzia" → "Aglandjia").

Furthermore, the associations that were established were also standardized. Rather than maintaining multiple iterations of the same association, they were transformed into a single corresponding association. The version selected for modification was determined by identifying the most prevalent variant. (e.g., “honest” and “honestly” became “honesty”). This was done to enhance the comparability of the dataset and facilitate more effective and straightforward statistical analysis. Errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation were corrected. Any articles that were included were removed. For example, “relation ship” was changed to “relationship”, “Interest.” was changed to “Interest” and “the truth” was changed to “truth”. Furthermore, the first letter of each association was capitalized in order to standardize the formatting of the associations submitted by participants.

Understanding the Participants: Breakdown of Demographics.

This chapter presents a series of figures that provide an overview of the demographic characteristics of the research participants. The figures are designed to offer transparency regarding the representativeness of the study sample and to present the data in a clear and concise manner. Each figure is accompanied by a description of the data, which provides further details.

Figure 2 provides an overview of the age of the participants, while Figure 3 depicts the area of residence of the sample and the Cypriot population. The districts of residence of the participants are displayed in Figures 4 and 5, with a comparison between the sample and the local population in Cyprus. This is followed by a display of gender identities (Figure 6), and ethnic identities (Figure 7). The displays of data are concluded by marital statuses (Figure 8) and self-

reported household incomes (Figure 9).

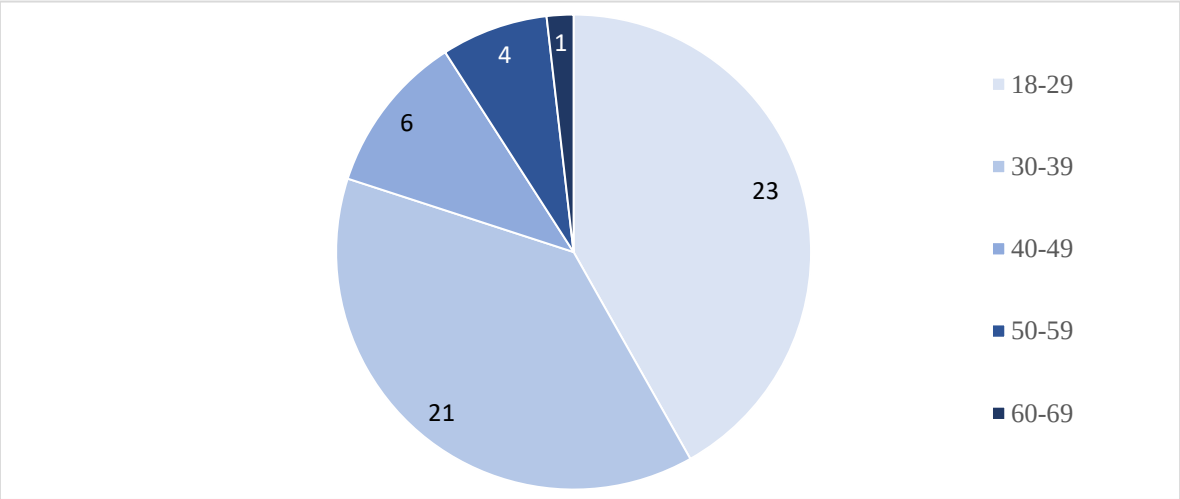

Figure 2. *Age of Participants in Age Brackets.*
The largest group of twenty-three participants (41.8%) was aged between 18 and 29. The second largest group of twenty-one participants (38.2%) was between 30 and 39. The group of individuals aged between 40 and 49 years counted six participants (10.9%). Four participants (7.3%) were aged between 50 and 59, and one participant (1.8%) was between 60 and 69. Most participants were thus aged between 18 and 39.
The median age of the population of Cyprus was 38.5 years (Worldometers.info, n.d.). This likely represents the south, there was no data on the north.

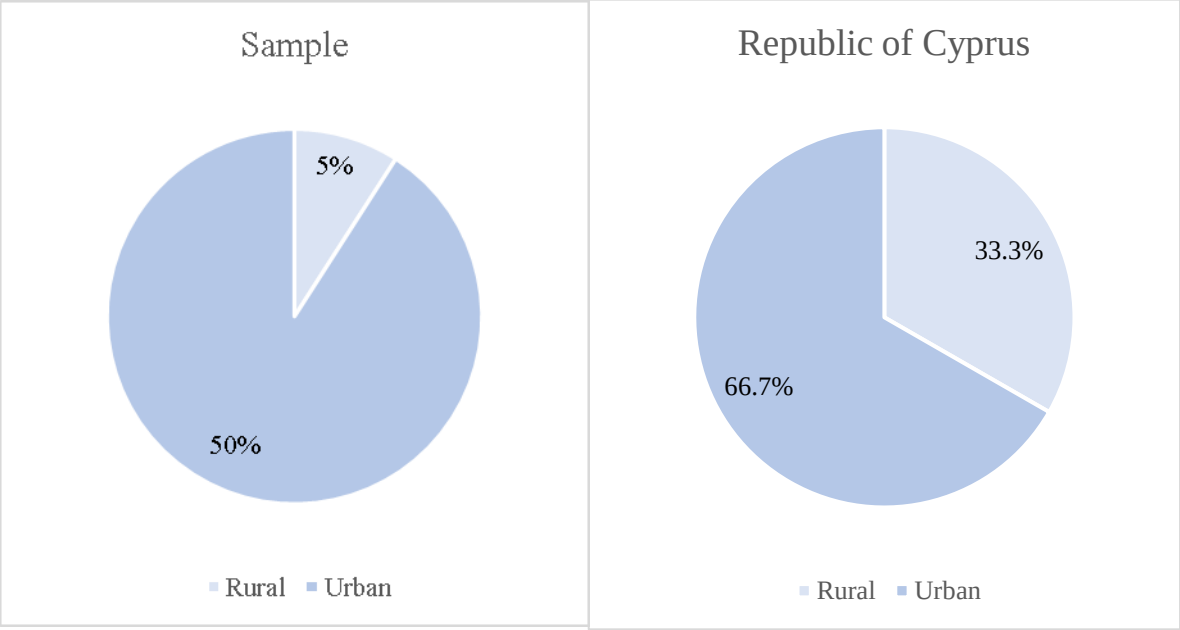

Figure 3. *Division between Rural and Urban Residence of Participants.*
On the left side, the participants of the study group are shown: Fifty participants (90.9%) resided in urban areas, and five (9.1%) were in rural areas. On the right, the distribution in the Republic of Cyprus is shown based on a preliminary report on a census in 2021 (Ministry of Interior, 2024). No data for northern Cyprus has been found.

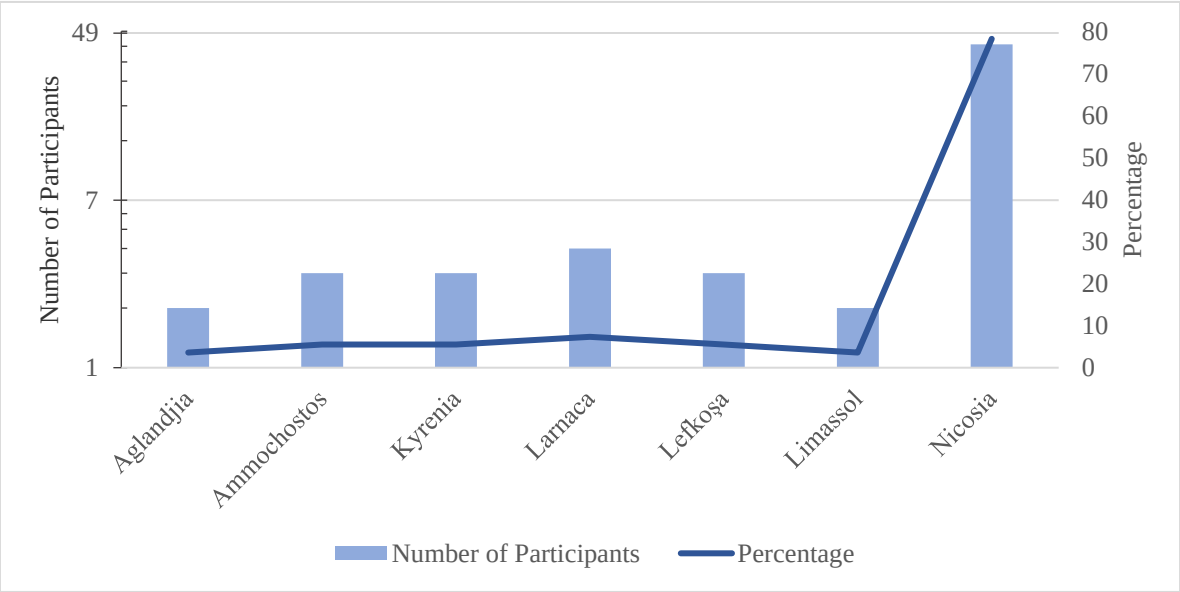

Figure 4. *Participants by District of Residence (logarithmic).*
Two participants (3.6%) were from Aglandjia and Limassol. Three participants (5.5%) were from Ammochostos and Kyrenia and Lefkoşa (the Turkish name for Nicosia). Four participants were located in Larnaca (7.3%). One participant (1.8%) indicated that they were from both Limassol and Nicosia. The largest group of participants (78.2%) were in Nicosia.

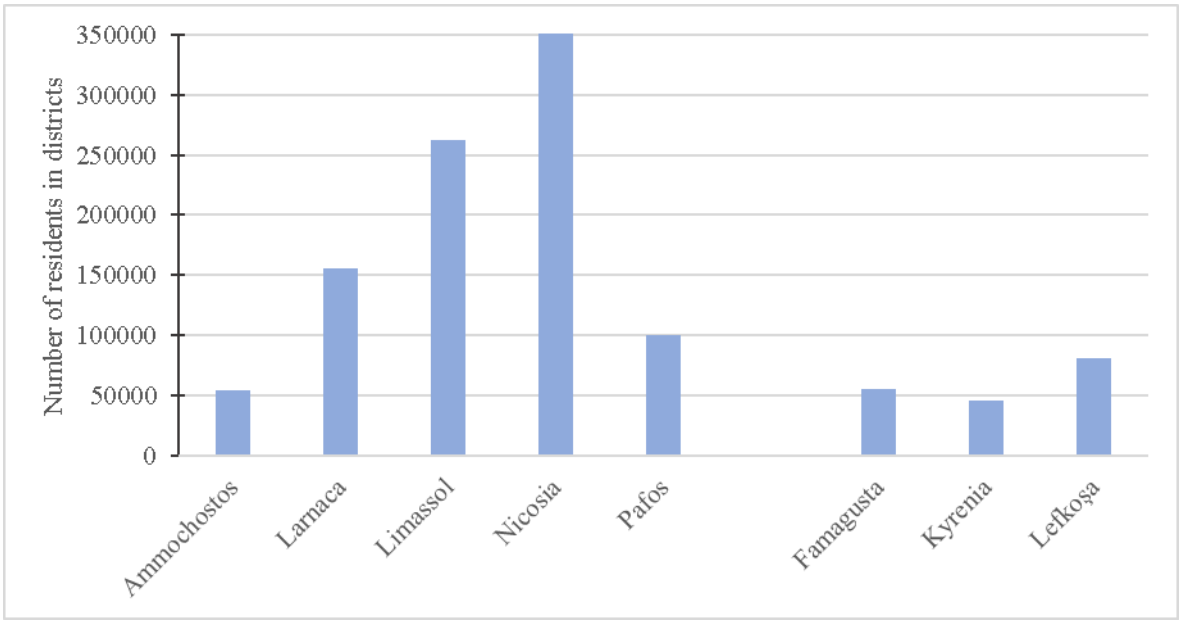

Figure 5. *Number of inhabitants per district in Cyprus (absolute).*
The districts on the left side of the figure represent districts in the south, while the three names on the right side are located in the north. The data for districts in the south are based on a report by the Statistical Service (2023) of the Republic of Cyprus. The numbers for the northern Cypriot municipalities are based on a report by the TRNC State Planning Organization (Başbakanlık, Devlet Planlama Örgütü, 2019), meaning the population data on the north is slightly outdated.

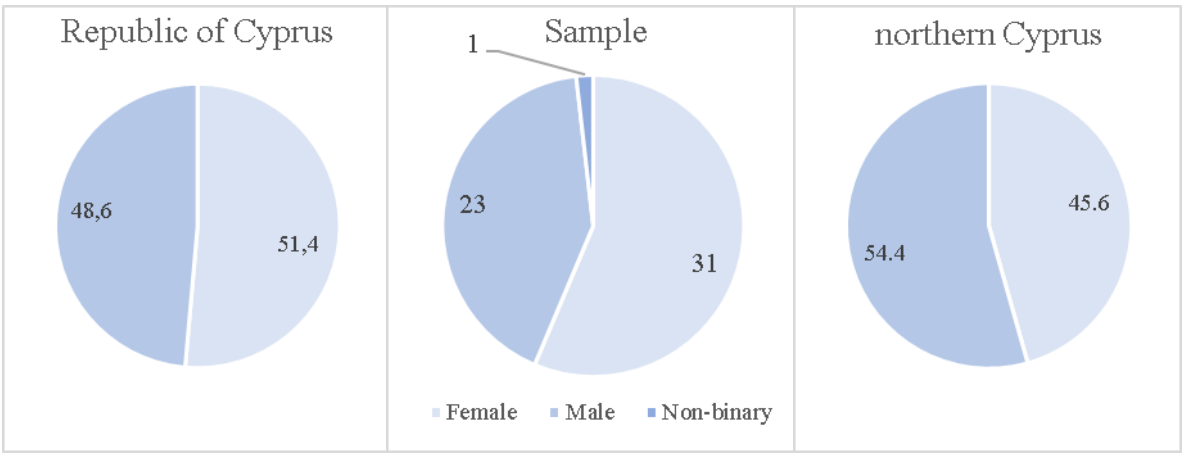

Figure 6. *Gender Identities among Participants and in Cyprus for the Republic of Cyprus, the sample, and northern Cyprus.*
Most participants (56.4%) identified as female, while 41.8% identified as male. A single participant (1.8%) identified as non-binary. The population of the Republic of Cyprus in 2021 numbered about 918,100 people in a ratio of 48.6% males and 51.4% females (Statistical Service, 2023). The total population in northern Cyprus in 2021 was 390,745 inhabitants according to a projection of the Statistical Institute of the TRNC (İstatistik Kurumu [Statistical Institute], 2022), consisting of 54.4% males and 45.6%. Based on these numbers, the total population of the entire island of Cyprus in 2021 was about 1.3 million. There is no data on non-binary gender identities in the reports used.

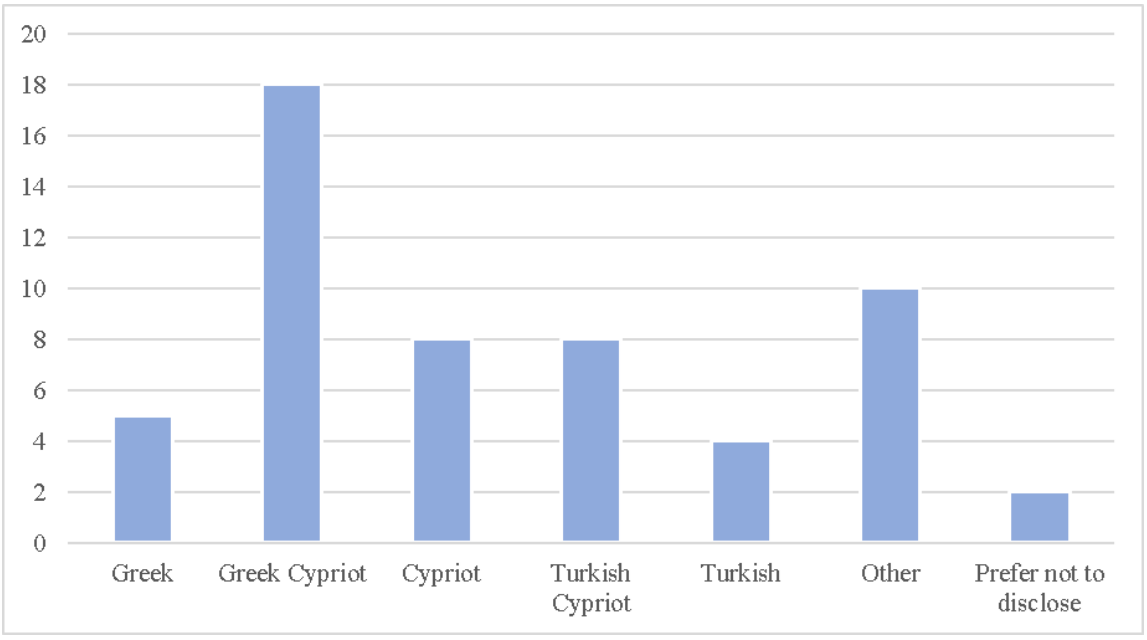

Figure 7. *Ethnic Identities of Participants.*
Ethnically, eighteen participants (32.7%) identified as Greek Cypriots, while eight participants (14.5%) identified as Turkish Cypriots, and another eight participants (14.5%) viewed themselves as Cypriots without either Greek or Turkish association. Another five participants (9.1%) considered themselves Greek, and four (7.3%) viewed themselves as Turkish. Ten participants (18.2% named another ethnic identity, which was two French individuals (3.6%) and one (1.8%) of each of the following: American, Armenian, Asian, Greek Cypriot Bulgarian, Hungarian, Pakistani, Turkmen, and one case "third EU country." The remaining two participants (3.6%) preferred not to share their ethnic identity.
There are no reliable statistics on the ethnic composition of the population of the entire island available.

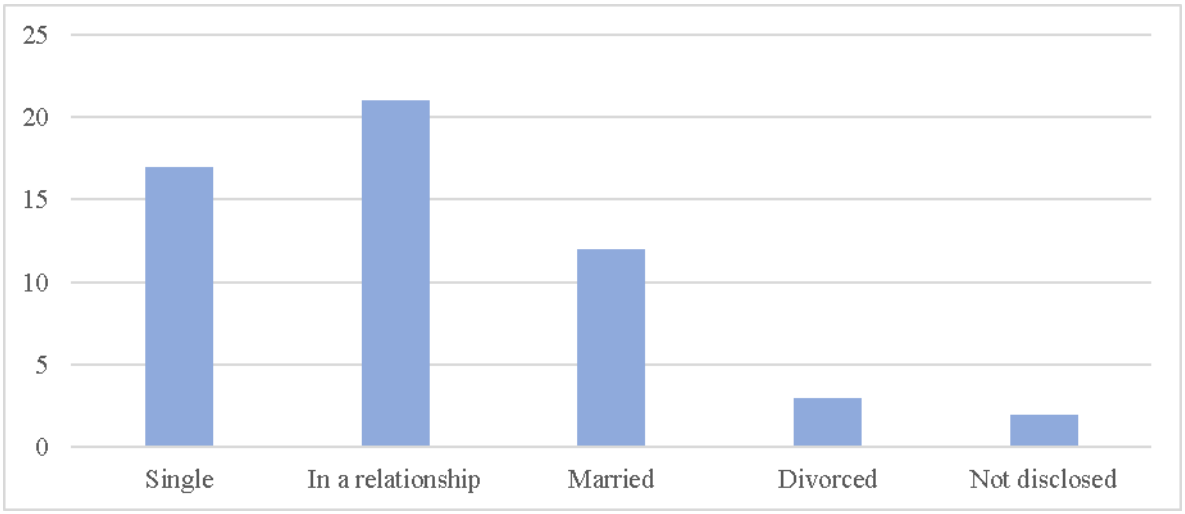

Figure 8. *Marital Statuses of Participants.*
Seventeen participants (30.9%) were single. The largest group of participants with twenty-one (38.2%) were in a relationship. Twelve (21.8%) were married. Three participants were divorced (5.5%), and two (3.5%) did not disclose their marital status.

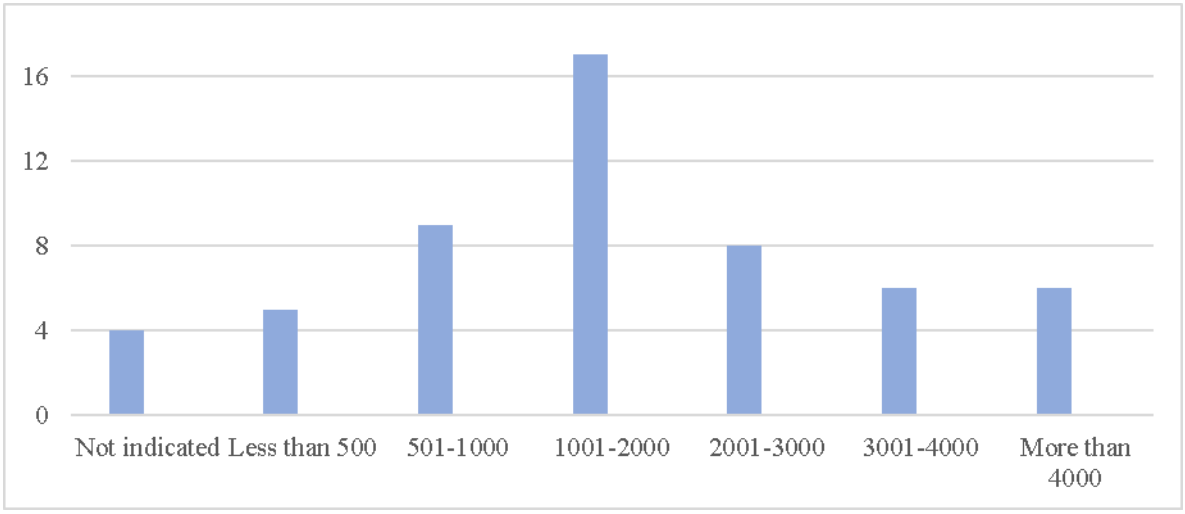

Figure 9. *Self-reported average household income of participants in €.*
In the socio-economic dimension, four participants (7.3%) did not indicate their monthly household income. Five participants (9.1%) numbered their income as less than 500€. Nine participants (16.4%) had monthly earnings between 500€ and 1000€. The largest group (17; 30.9%) had an income between 1001€ and 2000€. Eight participants (14.5%) earned between 2001€ and 3000€ per month. Six participants (10.9%) had monthly earnings between 3001€ and 4000€, and another six participants (10.9%) indicated that they earned more than 4000€ per month. This compares to the minimum monthly wage of 900€ (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2023) and average monthly household income in the RoC which was around 2200€ per month in Q3 2023 (Trading Economics, n.d.). In the north, this compares to a minimum monthly salary of around 340 € per month (Mesarya University, 2023). According to Wikipedia contributors (2024), about 1270€ are the average monthly income for northern Cyprus sourcing a report by the Ministry of Trade (2023) of Türkiye. The document is only available in Turkish, and the Wikipedia-sourced is dead by now, however, these numbers were included due to the lack of more reliable sources.

A Quantitative Analysis of the Data.

Following the cleaning and standardization of the dataset, the submitted information was subjected to analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 29.0.1.0 (171). Prior to conducting comparisons between groups, frequency analyses were performed, resulting in the presentation of demographic information above.

Additionally, comparisons were made between different groups based on self-reported identity or on demographic factors, with the frequencies of submitted associations with trust serving as the dependent variable. To that end, multiple chi-square tests with the Bonferroni correction were conducted in order to avoid false positive results in multiple comparisons.

The fundamental premise of this test is that each cell must have a minimum of five counts to ensure the reliability of the resulting data. However, due to the considerable variability in responses and the relatively limited sample size, the majority of cells did not meet this assumption. To address the issue of low cell counts, Fisher's exact test was employed.

No statistically significant relationships were identified between demographic characteristics and the different associations with trust at the 0.05 level of significance. In order to ascertain whether there were any differences between the Cypriot and non-Cypriot participants, the dataset was divided into these two groups and the tests were repeated. However, this did not yield statistically significant results either.

To gain further insight into the impact of local cultures, the tests were repeated with a focus on the Cypriot population exclusively, divided into three distinct sub-identities (Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, and Cypriot without further association). This yielded no statistically significant results.

To reduce the variability in the data, the information was organized into categories (the specific methodology is outlined below). For these categories, the statistical tests outlined above

were repeated. While the majority of tests remained insignificant, one test comparing Cypriots and non-Cypriots in relation to the categorization of the fifth association yielded a significant result. To facilitate the interpretation of this result, post-hoc tests were conducted, including a pairwise comparison between the groups and the calculation of Cramér's V to determine the effect size.

Description and Justification for Categories.

The categories were partially based on definitions of trust from the existing literature, which coincided with the associations made by the participants. In addition to the categories based on the literature, two more categories were created: one category to reflect the participants' (linguistically) defined "trust," and one category to include the relative importance of religion in Cyprus. Further details are outlined below. For a concise overview of the categories, please refer to the section on the coding procedure.

- Cooperative association

  The significance of collaboration with regard to trust is founded upon the insights of Cook (2001). The notion of mutually beneficial interactions and the necessity of reliance on others are pivotal elements that have been identified as vital aspects of trust itself. Kass (1996) corroborates the assertion that trust serves as a conduit to surmount vulnerabilities that originate from information asymmetries, thereby facilitating cooperation. Illustrative examples of this category include "collective action" and "contract."

- Institutional association

  The interdependence between institutions and trust is evident when one considers the role that institutions play in maintaining the psychological and physical well-being of individuals. If institutions designed to ensure justice are undermined, this will, in turn,

erode the public's sense of security, as daily routines become less reliable, and the physical well-being of individuals may be at risk (Kass (1996). Further, the deterioration of trust in institutions undermines the ability to trust in entire societies. Associations were made with institutions such as the "Police" or the "University of Cyprus."

- Interpersonal relationship

  Trust is an inherently interpersonal phenomenon. As Solomon and Flores (2003) have observed, reciprocated trust between individuals represents a fundamental aspect of relationships. Kass (1996) has similarly noted that trust is contingent upon the quality of interpersonal relationships. The significance of relations in fostering trust is thus evident, justifying the identification of interpersonal relationships as a distinct category. This category encompasses associations such as "family," "friends," and "relationships."

- Negative association

  As Kass (1996) notes, the risk associated with placing trust in others and the potential for that trust to be betrayed can result in adverse consequences and loss in a very practical sense. In addition to the risks associated with trusting others (Kass, 1996), trust is a learned ability that is also fragile and intertwined with prior experiences (Misztal, 1996, p. 76, citing Luhmann, 1979). Consequently, when prior experiences are negative, this may result to a negative perspective within an individual, leading to the formation of negative associations. Examples of such negative associations in the dataset include the following: "No such thing" and "Not using information from those who share it to their disadvantage."

- Physical and emotional wellbeing

  The physical and emotional well-being related to trust is of vital importance, as the

benefits of the cooperative and interpersonal traits of trust remain less available in the absence of freedom from social fears (Kass, 1996). In a similar vein, Misztal (1996) cites Giddens (1990) in identifying trust as contingent upon ontological security, which they define as the assurance that one's personal identity will remain intact. This may serve to partially explain the contemporary decline in trust observed in societies where migration is prevalent. Further, Misztal relates "elementary" trust, which facilitates daily life (p. 91) to the predictability of daily interactions, particularly in the context of daily routines which in turn is linked to security. This implies that trust necessitates the absence of existential threats in daily life and the presence of security in an emotional and physical form (Misztal, 1996, pp. 90-94). In the dataset, "low crime rates" and "no harm" were identified as occurrences that met these criteria.

- Religious association

The Cypriot Orthodox Church plays an important role at the local level, particularly in the south of the island. Further, Islam is a rising religion in the northern regions. In addition to its social relevance, religion in Cyprus, the participants frequently made religious associations such as "faith" and "God." This religious connotation prompted the inclusion of a religious association with "trust." The distribution of religions in Cyprus is displayed in Figure 10 on the right.

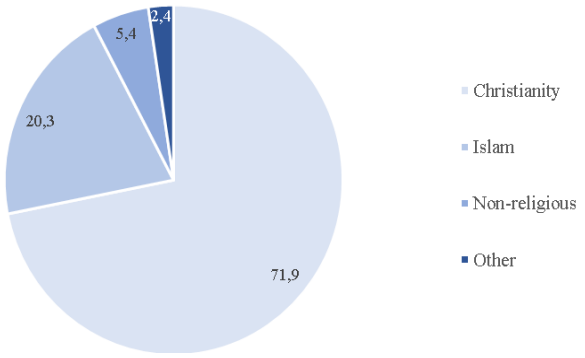

Figure 10. *The distributions of religions in Cyprus (Joshua Project, 2024). While the source is ideologically motivated, they include northern Cyprus unlike other sources that only included the south. Christians are mostly members part of the Cypriot Orthodox Church and located in the south. Islam is dominant in the north*

- Underlying/defining principle

  It is of great importance to assess the underlying and defining principles that respondents associate with trust in order to gain insight into the local nuances and interpretations of trust that exist. These indications could be either terms that participants might consider as defining concepts or otherwise as synonymous with “trust.” Examples from the dataset include “reliability” and “honesty.”.

Coding The Data Into Categories.

Two independent coders applied the previously defined categories to each association in an Excel file. From this file, any personal information was removed ensuring the protection of the identities of participants. The initial coder was the researcher, while the second coder had no direct involvement in the research project beyond the coding of the dataset.

Category	Justification	Example associations
Cooperative association	Cooperative behavioral side of trust.	Collective action, Contract
Institutional association	Stability of institutions and impact on trust.	Police, University of Cyprus
Interpersonal relationship	Inherently interpersonal component of trust.	Family, Friends
Negative association	Risk associated with "trusting" others.	No such thing, Not using information from ones sharing to their disadvantage
Physical and emotional wellbeing	Safety and security play a large role in building trust.	Low crime rates, No harm
Religious association	Importance of religion in Cypriot context.	Faith, God
Underlying/defining principle	Insight into local understandings of trust by visualizing seemingly equal expressions.	Honesty, Reliability

Table 1. Overview of the different categories, their justifications, and examples of these categories.

The researcher provided instructions in the form of an overview of the coding scheme, accompanied by oral instructions regarding the process. Two illustrative examples were provided: “Faith” → “Religious association” and “Security” → “Physical and emotional well-being.” Following the provision of the manual and instructions, the coder was permitted to inquire further regarding the task.

Once the secondary coder had completed their task, the initial intercoder reliability was calculated to ensure that the concepts were objective and not based on subjective biases. This was accomplished by calculating Cohen’s Kappa, which yielded a satisfactory result: $\kappa = .71$, $p < .001$. Disagreements between the initial and secondary coders were identified and subsequently discussed among the researcher and the secondary coder. Following this discussion, the intercoder reliability was found to be exceptionally high: $\kappa = 1.00$, $p < .001$.

3.2 Quantitative Results and Discussion

The following pages present an integrated view of the quantitative data, beginning with the associations. The second part of quantitative results are insights based on categories. This is followed by a section on the qualitative research. The qualitative data section is followed by the overall discussion and conclusion of this research project, which includes suggestions for improving the research project in future iterations.

Figure 11. *Word cloud of associations with trust.*
The graphic displays all the associations participants made. Larger words represent associations which occurred more frequently in the dataset. Some phrases required shortening to be included. The word cloud was created using the word cloud tool offered by the Information Center Chemistry | Biology | Pharmacy of the ETH Zurich, 2023, retrieved under: https://wordclouds.ethz.ch/

The dataset, comprising submissions from a total of fifty-five participants, yielded a total of 124 distinct associations across all five categories. Of the 124 associations identified, 107 were unique occurrences, while 17 occurred multiple times. These are presented in a word cloud (Figure 11) to illustrate the diversity of associations.

Moreover, the frequencies of non-unique associations are presented on the subsequent

page for the overall sample, including a demonstration of associations made by Cypriot identity groups and non-Cypriot identity groups (Figure 12). Unique associations were excluded to highlight potential commonalities, overlaps, and misalignments, as well as concise presentation.

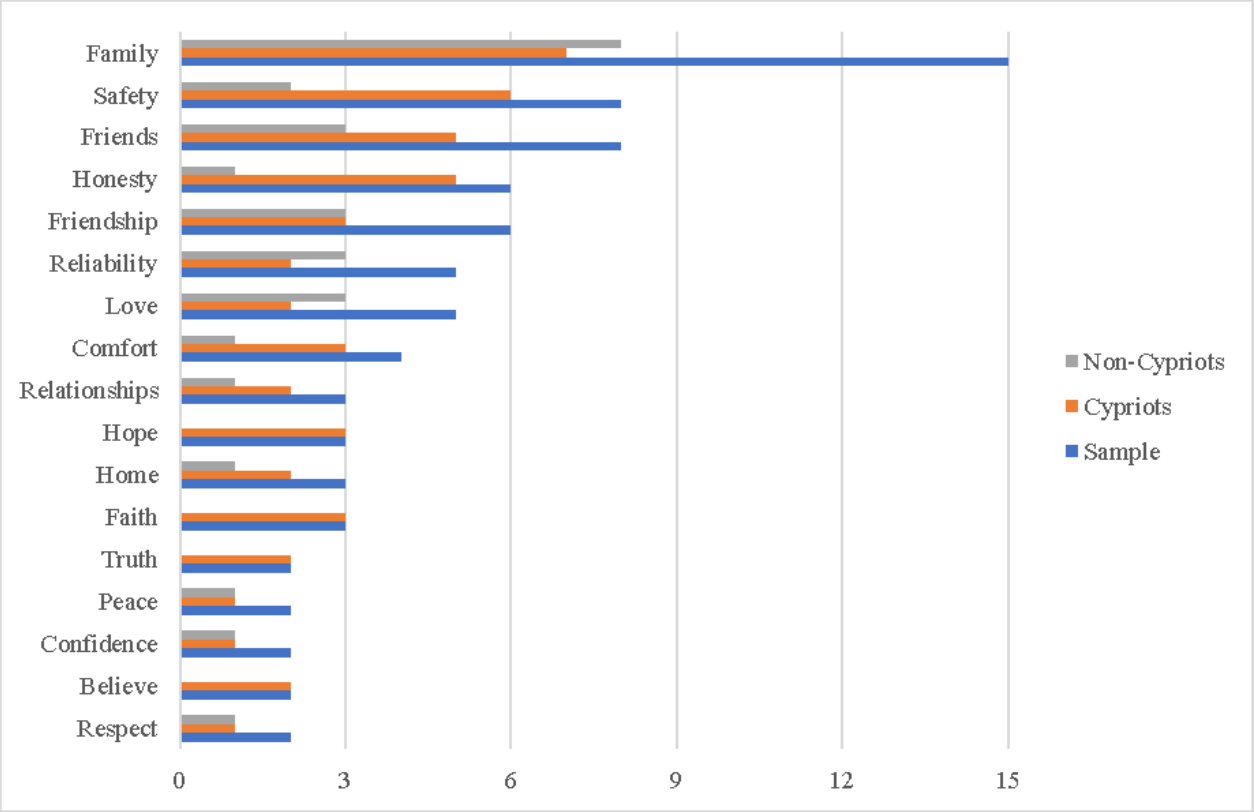

Figure 12. *Overall Frequencies of associations for the entire dataset. Cypriot submissions have been marked. "Family" was the most frequent association (8.1%), followed by "Safety" and "Friends" (4.8%). When combining "Friendship" (3.6%) with Friends, this is the second most frequent association with 14 instances. "Honesty" makes up 3.2%, closely followed by "Love" and "Reliability" (2.7%) and "Comfort" (2.2%). "Faith," "Home," "Hope," and "Relationships" made up 1.6% of the dataset. Other associations that were not unique were "Believe," "Confidence," "Peace," "Respect," and "Truth" (1.1%). The other 107 associations were unique mentions across the dataset and were excluded.*
Cypriot contributions to the dataset make up all the associations of "Hope," "Faith," "Truth," and "Believe."

Primary and Secondary Associations.

The frequencies of primary, secondary, and further associations that occurred more than once are displayed on the following page in the form of bar charts. These charts compare the overall dataset with submissions made by Cypriots and non-Cypriot participants (see Figures 13 and 14).

Due to the lack of recurrences in the following associations, only charts for primary and secondary associations were created. The only tertiary association that occurred more than once was “Friends,” with three occurrences (13%). The fourth association, “Family,” occurred in two instances (14.3%). No fifth association was named more than once.

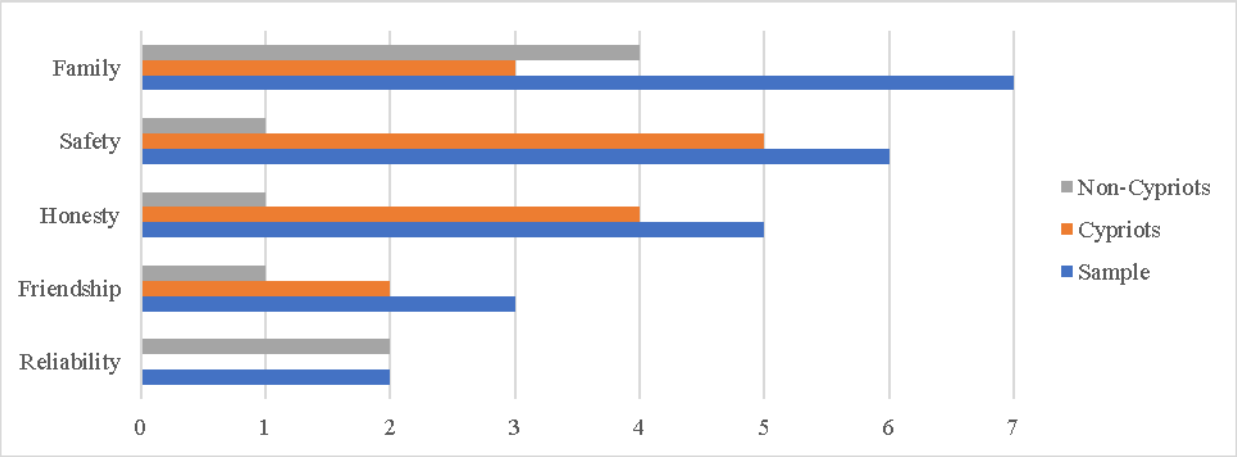

Figure 13. *Frequency of primary associations (55 submissions, 34 by Cypriots).*
Among the fifty-five primary associations, “Family” was named seven times (12.7%), “Safety” was the second most frequent association made, with six occurrences (10.9%), and “Honesty” was named five times (9.1%). The next most frequently named association was “Love,” with four instances (7.3%), and “Friendship,” with three instances (5.5%). The only other primary association that occurred more than once was “Reliability,” which was named twice (3.6%).
Among exclusively Cypriot participants, the primary associations were led by “Safety” (14.7%), then followed by “Honesty,” (11.8%). The next most frequent was “Family,” with three instances (8.8%), and “Friendship” and “Love,” with two instances each (5.9%).

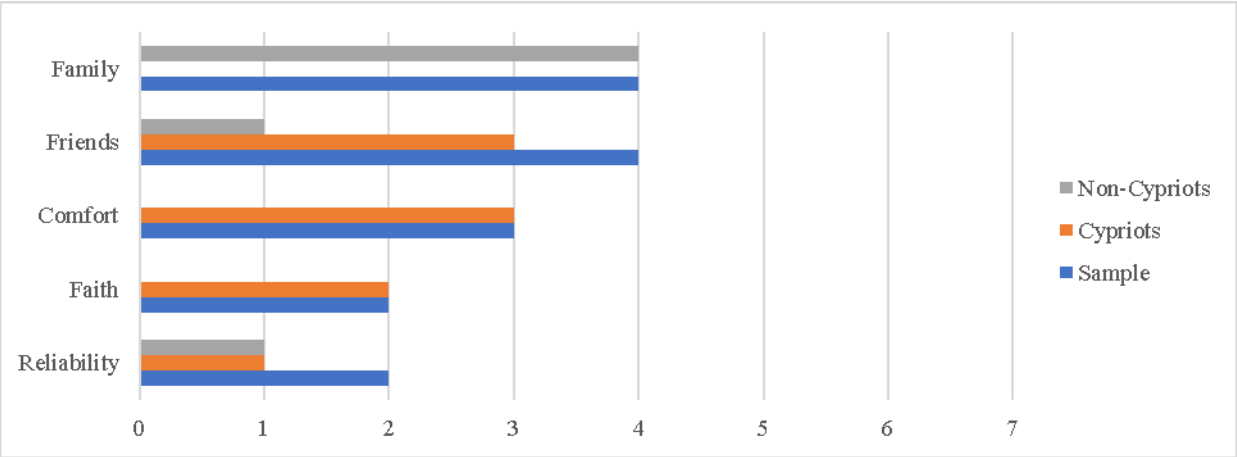

Figure 14. *Frequency of secondary associations (55 submissions, 34 by Cypriots).*
The most frequently named secondary associations were "Family" and "Friends," (10.3%), followed by "Comfort" (7.7%). "Faith" and "Reliability" each made up 5.1%.
In terms of secondary associations among Cypriot respondents the most frequent responses were "Friends" (11.8%, including one case of "best friend"), followed by "Comfort" (8.8%). "Faith" and "Relationship" (in one case specified as "Long term relationship") made up 5.9%. Other associations were excluded because they did not occur more than once.

A comparative analysis of submissions from Cypriot participants [11] within the context of the broader data set reveals a divergence in perceptions regarding the construct of "trust." The term "family" was frequently associated with trust overall, but this occurred less frequently among Cypriots and not at all as a secondary association. Conversely, only individuals of Cypriot nationality submitted the associations of "faith" and "comfort." Although this may be indicative of potential discrepancies in the conceptualization of trust across different groups or individuals, the statistical tests yielded insignificant results.

For the purposes of this analysis, any associations that occurred as either primary or secondary submissions were considered to be included in both figures. However, due to the lack of frequency with which they occurred, they were excluded. The association of "safety," which was the most frequently occurring primary association, only occurred indirectly as a secondary association (e.g., as "police" or "no harm," with one instance each).

[11] Consisting of eight Turkish and eighteen Greek Cypriots, as well as eight Cypriots without further indication of ethnicity.

The following pages present the results of the study, with Figures 15 and 16 displaying the associations grouped by different Cypriot identity groups. The initial figure presents the primary associations, while the subsequent figure displays the secondary associations. The groups included in the study are Turkish Cypriots, Greek Cypriots, and participants who indicated that they are Cypriots but did not provide further information regarding their ethnic identity.

These displays are indicative for the potential for misalignment in the associations between groups with regard to trust. For instance, the primary association of "family" and the secondary association of "faith" were identified among Greek Cypriots and Cypriots without further specification of ethnic identity, whereas these associations were absent among individuals identifying as Turkish Cypriots. Similarly, the primary association of "love" and the secondary association of "comfort" were identified by Turkish Cypriots and individuals without further indication of ethnic identity.

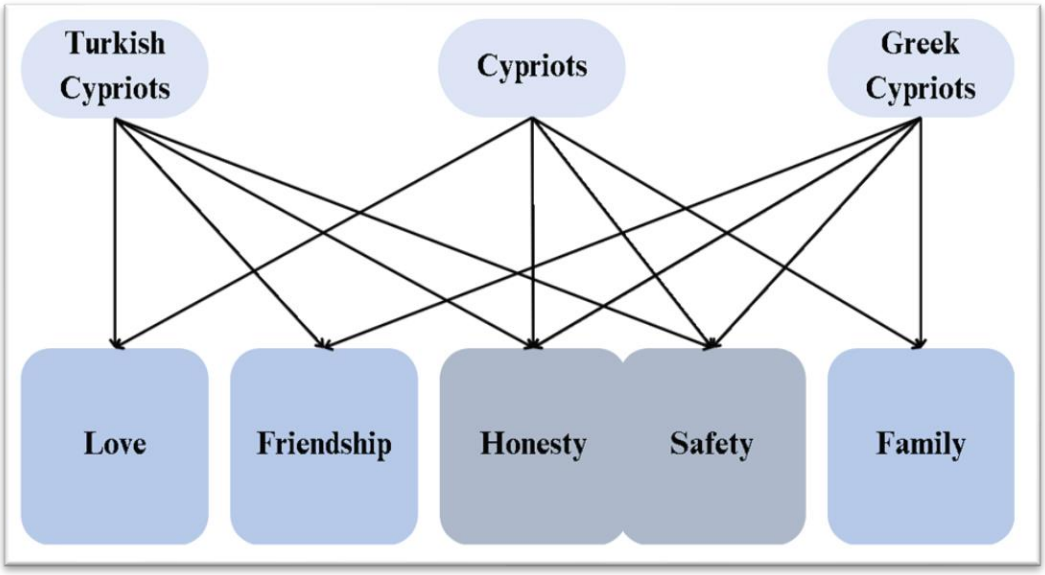

Figure 15. *Primary Associations with trust made by Cypriots (adapted from Luna & Peracchio, 2002; De Groot, 1992).*
The identity groups are colored light blue, associations that occurred in two groups were marked in a darker blue shade, while associations that occurred in all three groups are shaded in grey.

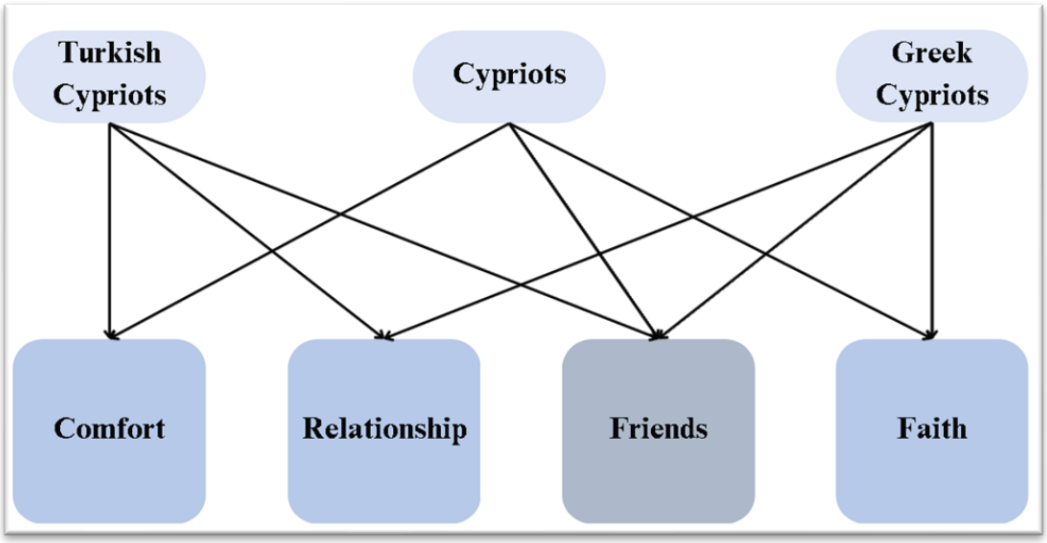

Figure 16. *Secondary Associations with trust of Cypriots made by Cypriot identity groups (adapted from Luna & Peracchio, 2002; De Groot, 1992).*
The identity groups are colored light blue. Associations which occurred in only one group were shaded in the same light blue shade. Associations that occurred in two groups were marked in a darker blue shade, while associations that occurred in all three groups are shaded in grey.

Although some underlying associations appear to be shared between the groups, the different Cypriot identity groups mentioned previously made associations with “Honesty” and

"Safety" as primary associations, as well as "Friends" as a secondary association with "Trust." This could be evidence for the presence of group-dependent facets of trust, while there are also some shared aspects. This suggests that not all underlying associations differ across cultural groups.

Overview Over Categories in the Comprehensive Dataset.

This section presents an overview of the quantitative results concerning the categories to which the associations were coded. The displays include non-Cypriots, Cypriot identity groups, and the total number of participants (Figure 19). This display facilitates a comparison of trends among the Cypriot participants and the general sample, thereby providing a contextual framework for interpreting the findings.

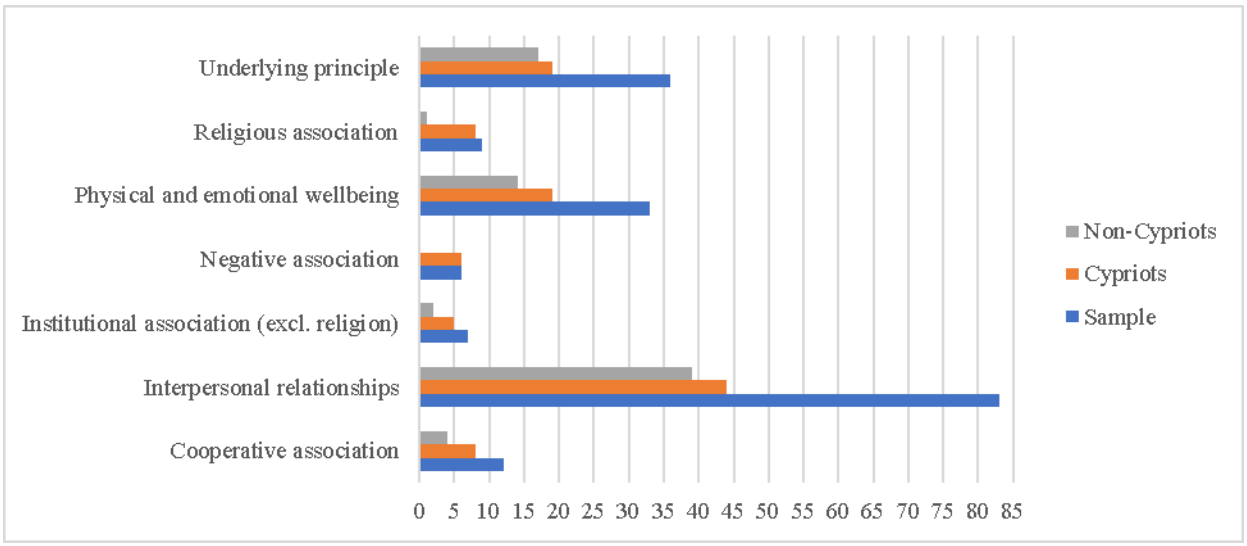

Figure 17. *Overall categories of the associations made in the overall dataset. "Interpersonal relationships" (44.6%) were the most frequent, followed by "Underlying principles" (19.4%), and "Physical and emotional wellbeing" (17.7%). These categories make up most of the overall associations. "Cooperative associations" represent about 6.5% of the associations, while "Religious associations" made up 4.8%. The least frequent associations were "Institutional associations" (3.8%), and "Negative associations" (3.2%). It is notable that "Negative associations" and "Religious associations" were primarily submitted by Cypriots.*

There is a considerable disparity in the frequencies of occurrence between the most common category, which constituted nearly half of the total data set, and the second and third

most frequent categories, which collectively accounted for almost one-fifth of the data set. The remaining categories, in contrast, represent less than 10% of the data set.

The category of "interpersonal relationships" was the most frequent category overall and in each individual association. This is likely an indication of the inherently interpersonal nature of trust and related concepts, which require the participation of at least two individuals to form either trust, mistrust, or distrust.[12] The literature also reflects this interpersonal aspect of trust, as evidenced by the work of Hwang (2017) and Solomon and Flores (2003).

The "underlying principle" was the second most frequently occurring association, both overall and in the majority of the remaining associations, with the exception of the secondary and fourth associations. This result was to be anticipated, as the questionnaire prompted respondents to consider their associations with the concept of trust. Consequently, many participants defined trust in accordance with their own understanding of the term. Furthermore, the study by McKnight and Chervany (2000) demonstrates that the associations that can be identified as defining and explaining trust are wide-ranging. Therefore, the considerable number of responses that were classified as an underlying or defining principle is an unsurprising outcome.

The third most frequent category overall was "Physical and emotional wellbeing." This frequency of the category likely reflects the need for stability and security as prerequisites for the development of trusting relationships with people and surroundings. This is also reflected in the results of Delhey and Newton (2003), who confirmed the relation of trust to larger societal aspects, including a safe environment and social conflicts. Furthermore, this is consistent with Misztal's (1996) perspective that trust is contingent upon ontological security and Kass's (1996)

[12] Besides in cases of self-confidence where one places trust in oneself.

assertion that trust-related benefits are diminished in the context of social fears. The disproportionate representation of Cypriots in this category may indicate the pivotal role of a secure environment. In the context of Cyprus, where a smoldering conflict persists, it could potentially erode this foundation.

With a greater degree of separation, the fourth most frequent category of associations in the overall dataset was “cooperative association.” This category is comparable to “interpersonal relationships,” as it indicates a necessity for an interlocutor for the purpose of collaboration. However, in contrast to the interpersonal aspects, this category places the focus on the interactions themselves, rather than on the individuals involved.

The category of “Religious association” was the next most frequent category. This category was included to represent religious values among the Cypriot population. While the frequencies regarding these associations are much higher among Cypriots than for non-Cypriots, which does match with the expectations of the researcher, the overall low frequency of this category does not. The researcher included include this category of religious associations that for perceived local relevance, however, in the end the number of associations amounted to less than 5%.

“Institutional association” (exclusive of religious institutions/associations) was observed to be an even less frequent occurrence. This may indicate that although the stability of institutions can influence physical and mental wellbeing, which are essential for the formation of trust, they may not be as significant as other underlying elements of the concept. To illustrate, the institutional aspect that affects trust may be of secondary importance to immediate security concerns. Moreover, it is possible that institutional trust represents a relatively minor aspect of the overarching concept of trust.

The least frequent associations across the entire dataset were those coded as “negative

associations." It should be noted that while all submissions categorized as negative associations were made by Cypriots, the data is misleading. One individual respondent provided three distinct associations with trust (primary, secondary, and tertiary), all of which have been classified as negative. This represents a significant contribution, as it accounts for half of all negative submissions. While this introduces a distortion to the data, it is nevertheless the case that all other negative associations with trust also occurred among Cypriots. The low frequency of negative associations in the dataset (3.2%) may indicate that the aspect of potential risks and betrayal related to trust is relatively uncommon. This could suggest a potential overrepresentation of such experiences in the literature discussing trust. Conversely, experiencing such a betrayal of trust could be highly impactful on an individual level, as evidenced by the participant who submitted three different negative associations, which would support the aspect of fragility of trust (Misztal, p. 76) that is related to the potential for negative consequences (Kass, 1996).

Breakdown of Categories of Primary and Secondary Associations.

Below is a display of the association categories of all primary (see Figure 18) and secondary (see Figure 19) submissions. The graphs show the total sample responses as well as a breakdown of Cypriot and non-Cypriot submissions. The categories of primary and secondary associations have been standardized to a maximum of 28 on the x-axis to make the figures comparable, as both have the same number of submissions. The figures in the following sections, which represent other associations, have adjusted the maxima due to a decreasing number of submissions. The statistical tests based on primary and secondary associations did not yield significant results.

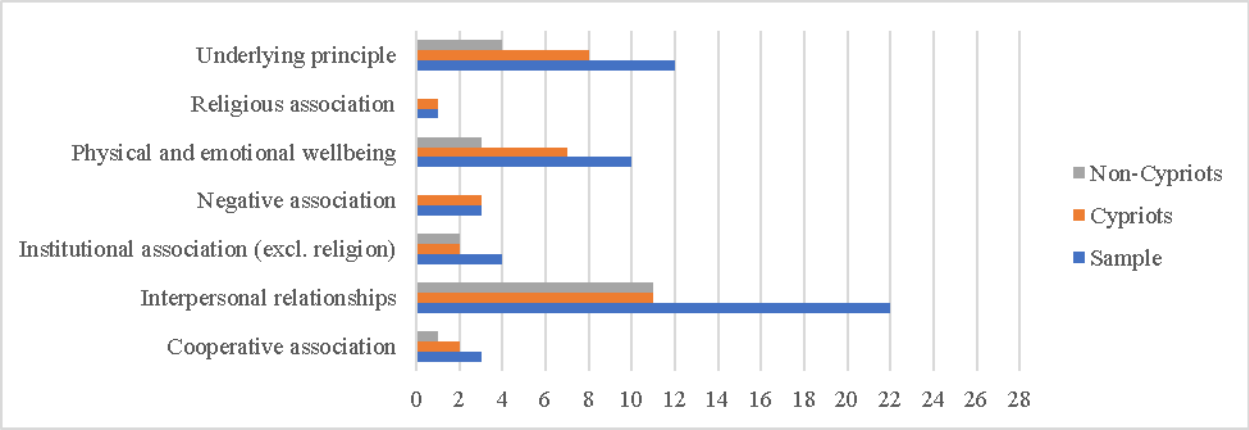

Figure 18. *Frequencies of categories of primary associations (55 submissions, 34 by Cypriots).*

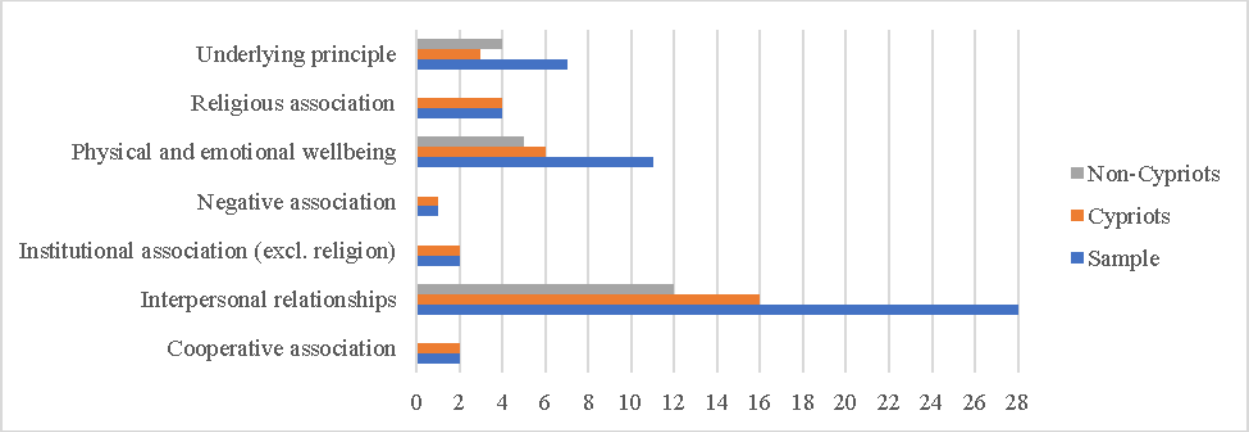

Figure 19. *Frequencies of categories of secondary associations (55 submissions, 34 by Cypriots). This is the only association in which "Physical and emotional wellbeing" were the second most frequent occurrence. This might be related to the Cyprus Problem, as well as to the requirement of a safe environment for the development of trust.*

As shown in the overall data for the categories, the most common association was "Interpersonal Relationships," while the second most common association was either "Basic Principles," followed by "Physical and Emotional Well-Being" (in the case of primary associations), or in reverse order (for secondary associations). It is also noteworthy that "religious associations" and "negative associations" were made exclusively by Cypriot participants as either primary or secondary associations.

Categories of Further Associations.

As with the categories of primary and secondary associations, most of the statistical tests based on further associations did not lead to statistically significant results. In addition, "interpersonal relationships" remains the most common category of associations made in all three cases, and as in the other cases, "underlying principles" and "physical and emotional well-being" remain in 2nd and 3rd place in terms of frequency.

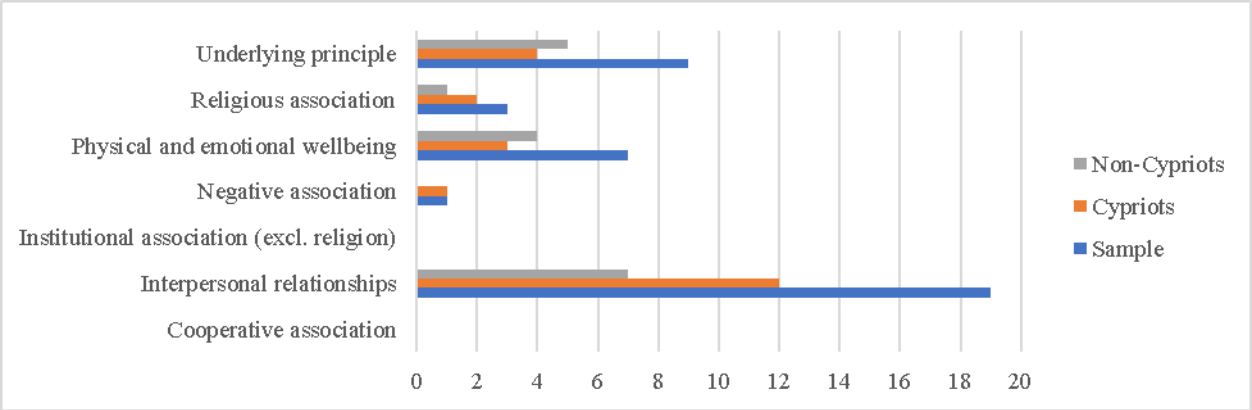

Figure 20. *Frequencies of categories of third associations (39 submissions, 22 by Cypriots).*

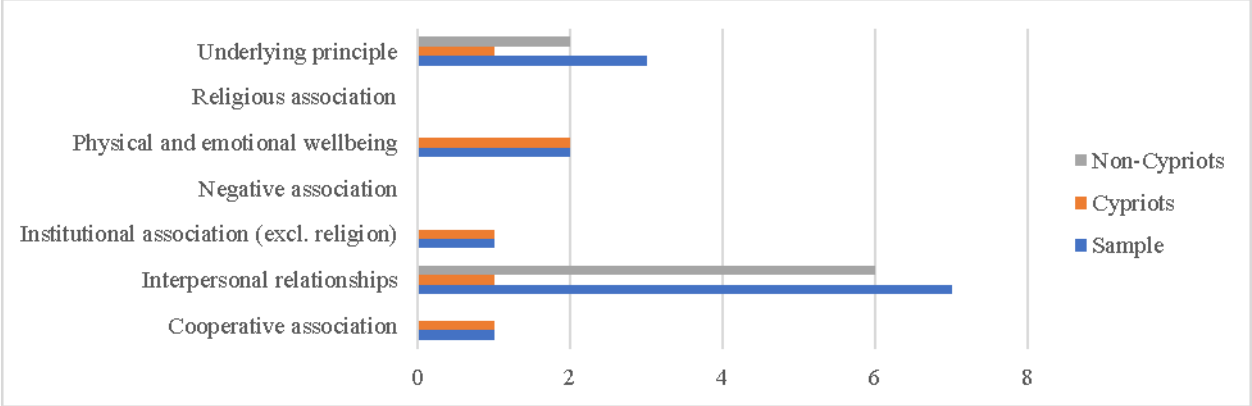

Figure 21. *Frequencies of categories of fourth associations (23 submissions, 13 by Cypriots). This is the only association in which "Cooperative associations" were the second most frequent occurrence, which could stress indicate the social nature of trust besides the aspect of "Interpersonal relationships" which seems to be the most important associations made with trust.*

The exception to the statistical tests and the order in which "interpersonal relationships" follow are the categories of fifth associations (see Figure 22 on the next page). In the case of the fifth associations, "interpersonal relationships" is followed by "cooperative associations" and

then by “underlying principles” and “physical and emotional well-being”. In addition, the categorization of the fifth associations yielded the only statistically significant test in this study.

When testing the relationship between identity (Cypriot, non-Cypriot) and the category of the fifth association with trust, a chi-squared test revealed a medium effect size (χ^2 (5, N = 55) = 10.05, p = .020, V = 0.45). However, the contingency table showed no significant differences between the subgroups. To explore this further, the standardized residuals were examined, which can provide insight into specific patterns or deviations within the data that may not be captured by the overall test.

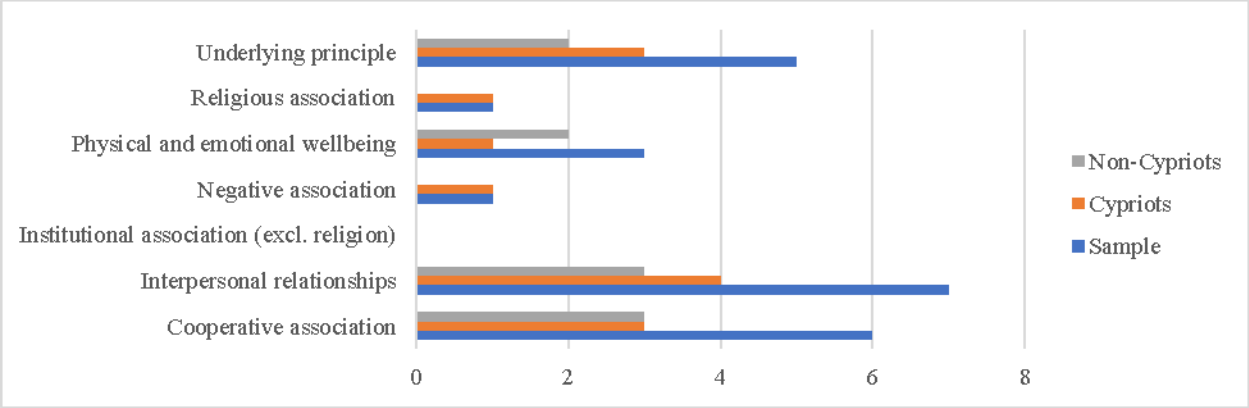

Figure 22. *Frequencies of categories of fifth associations (14 submissions, 6 by Cypriots).*

A standardized residual greater than 1 indicates that the observed number is higher than expected, while a standardized residual less than -1 indicates that the observed number is lower than expected. Based on the SPSS output, there was a significant difference in the associations coded as “interpersonal relationships”. For non-Cypriot participants, the standardized residual was 2.0, meaning that the associations that occurred were above the expected frequency, with 6 cases out of 8 valid submissions by non-Cypriots. For Cypriot participants, the standardized residual was -1.6, with only one instance out of 6 valid Cypriot submissions, indicating an underrepresentation of occurrences for this group.

However, this result may be misleading due to several factors, such as the issue of

associations considered more relevant being made earlier (e.g. as a primary or secondary association), the lack of submissions as a fifth association overall, and the consequent impact on the reliability of statistical tests. These limitations are explored in further detail in the following section.

3.3 Synthesizing the Quantitative Findings

Based on the frequencies of associations, no statistically significant differences between groups were confirmed in the data set. Due to the high level of noise in the data, no patterns could be identified. However, there are some indications based on the variance of 120 unique associations made by 55 participants. This variance in the data confirms the original outlook of this thesis: "Trust" is a highly versatile and elusive concept. Thus, the meanings related to "trust" are difficult to capture in a simple phrase.

The most frequently mentioned associations with trust were interpersonal aspects such as "family" or "friends" and "friendship". "Reliability" and "love" were also common associations across the dataset. These associations resonate with the underlying factors of trust, that Kass (1996) identified in the general themes of security to avoid negative consequences, as well as the familiarity of personal contacts that are a driving factor when assigning trust according to Misztal (1996).

While no statistical patterns were found, there are indications of differences: For example, the fact that the associations "safety" and "honesty" were preferred by Cypriots over non-Cypriots (Figure 15), or the absence of the association "faith" among Turkish Cypriot respondents compared to other Cypriot identity groups (Figure 16). These associations again relate to the overarching themes of security (Kass, 1996). Here, an outlier is faith.

Although there are indications of intercultural misalignment, these are based on small sample sizes with highly variable submissions. A larger dataset is required for more conclusive findings.

The associations made with "security" and "comfort" match with the factors that Kass (1996) identified as underlying trust: Safety and convenience are vital to ensure the likelihood of successful cooperation and allow for employing trust more frequently. Additionally, the

submissions naming personal contacts (e.g. “family,” “friends”) resonate with Misztal’s (1996) claim that trust is related to familiarity

Understanding Key Categories.

Categorizing the data reduced the variance in the data set. However, the statistical tests remained largely insignificant. Most of the associations were related to the category of interpersonal aspects, reflecting the importance that the trust literature places on the interpersonal dimension.

The frequent categorization of associations as “underlying principles” is likely due to participants’ interpretation of the research process to determine what should be recorded and to reveal what they associate with trust. This broad interpretation likely increased the variability of responses.

The importance of “physical and emotional well-being” as a trust-building factor is clear, with Cypriots providing more responses in this category, possibly due to the post-conflict context of Cyprus, although statistical tests did not confirm this association.

“Cooperative” and “institutional associations” were present, but less frequent compared to the above-mentioned categories. “Cooperative associations emphasize the practical aspects of interpersonal relationships, while institutions contribute to the stability necessary for well-being.

“Religious” and “negative associations” were rare, mostly reported by Cypriots, suggesting cultural or individual differences in trust perceptions. The rarity of “religious associations” likely reflects limited sampling within local religious communities, as convenience sampling did not reach these groups.

Higher “negative associations” among Cypriots may seem related to post-conflict issues, but closer analysis shows that individual experiences likely influenced this trend. Three out of six negative associations came from one person, skewing the data, suggesting that personal

experiences rather than societal factors may shape perceptions of trust.

The only statistically significant result comparing the categorization of the fifth associations between Cypriots and non-Cypriots raises several concerns about its validity and reliability. On the one hand, the analysis relied on researcher-generated categories that may reflect personal biases. In addition, the test was based on fifth associations, a response that likely reflects afterthoughts, as more relevant thoughts are likely to have already been submitted to one of the previous associations. Fifth associations were intended to add further nuance to the responses given by participants. Notably, only 14 out of 55 participants provided a fifth association, potentially reducing the validity of the statistical test.

Lessons from the Data.

No statistically significant patterns were identified in the data based on the data when analyses were based on different demographic aspects. Thus, the project was not able to reject the null hypothesis that there are differences in the underlying associations with trust between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Although the null hypothesis must be accepted based on the current data set, there is evidence of differences between the groups.

Furthermore, the data confirm the original thoughts behind this research project: The concept of trust is extremely diverse and individual. While the high degree of variance in the submissions may obscure differences between groups, such differences may be revealed with an expanded sample size.

Chapter 4 - Exploring Trust in Qualitative Approaches

4.1 Diving Deep: The Qualitative Methodology

To build on the insights obtained during the quantitative parts of the study, a second, qualitative stage was conducted in two parts. The initial phase consisted of a focus group, while the subsequent phase entailed two expert interviews.

Originally, two focus groups were planned, one in the northern region and one in the southern region. However, due to a lack of respondents, the second focus group was substituted with two expert interviews. The methodology for both parts is described in detail below, first for the focus group and subsequently for both expert interviews. The results are presented in a structured manner, with each topic that the conversations centered around given a dedicated section. Both statements from the focus group and from the interviews are presented together to provide an integrated view of the perspectives of focus group participants and experts, thereby enhancing the value of the insights gained.

Collective Insights: The Focus Group.

The focus group was organized with two primary objectives: to gain qualitative insights from the perspective of local inhabitants and to pose more general questions in preparation for the expert interviews. The focus group was semi-structured, allowing for the exploration of questions posed by the researcher while also allowing for the expansion on topics that emerged during the group discussion. The session lasted approximately one hour and included different members of Cypriot society. The questions for the focus group are listed below.

Research Tools and Question Design.

To gain insight into the nuances of trust beyond the confines of simple associations, the initial questions delved into the respondents' personal experiences and perspectives, which may have

shaped their perceptions of trust and the factors deemed crucial to the evolution of their perspectives. The following questions were posed on this subject:

- What do you personally understand as trust?
- How do you think your local culture influenced how you perceive trust?

Given that trust is an inherently social phenomenon, the following questions were formulated to investigate the influence of interpersonal interactions on the formation and degradation of trust:

- Are there any specific actions or gestures others perform that either make you trust them or distrust them?

Given the sustained nature of the Cyprus Problem, an investigation of the local dynamics on the island was also a focal point of the focus group. To this end, the following questions were asked in order to obtain information relevant to the Cyprus case:

- Do you perceive some mistrust or hesitancy towards one of the other communities on the island?

The following questions were posed to gain insight into the role of positive approaches and to identify factors that could foster trust in Cyprus:

- What could support an increase in trust/decrease in mistrust?
- How could trust be built?

The questions above were prepared in advance and posed during the focus group. Below, questions which were not prepared in advance, which arose during the focus group discussion. Some of these questions were asked to provide further clarification (for example, the second question about red flags), while the question regarding trust in personal safety in Cyprus came up

in the context of one participant's experience of racism. The final question was designed to ascertain which communities could be considered "other communities," beyond the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities that might be relevant in the context of trust:

- (On cultural impacts) In what way did your culture influence how you perceive trust?
- (On behavioral aspects that impact trust) Are there any "red flags" that make you immediately become (dis-)trusting?
- (On the experience of racism) Do you trust in your safety in Cyprus?
- (On the topic of experiencing hesitancy towards another community) Do you experience hesitancy towards the southern Cypriot communities? Or, for example, the Turkish immigrants?

Profile of Focus Group Participants.

Twenty-eight individuals who completed the initial questionnaire expressed interest in participating in a follow-up focus group on the topic of trust. However, eight of these individuals, despite indicating their willingness to take part in a subsequent phase of the study, did not provide their email addresses.

Of the remaining twenty participants, only seven responded when contacted. However, these seven had limited availability. Given the unavailability of a sufficient number of respondents, alternative forms of convenience sampling were employed.

Local contacts were approached to apply snowball sampling. However, due to the continued lack of responses, flyers (see Appendix A2) were printed and distributed in Nicosia, both in the north and the south, to advertise participation in the focus group. Due to the absence of further responses, the originally planned two focus groups (one in the south and one in the north) were reduced to a single, bicommunal focus that consisted of four participants.

Of the four participants, two were residents of the northern Cyprus. One was a Turkish Cypriot in their forties who owned a restaurant. The other was a Cameroonian first-year student who pursued their degree in northern Cyprus. From the southern region, an American in their fifties who has resided in the Republic of Cyprus for several decades, and a second-year student from Ukraine, who grew up in Limassol and Nicosia participated in the study. Two of these participants were male, and two of them were female. It is noteworthy that none of the participants expressed extreme views on the Cyprus Problem. This might be because individuals with extreme views would likely object to participating in an event held in the chosen location. As an incentive for their participation, the participants were invited for a drink at the café and received 7.5€ in cash for their time. This amount was above the hourly rate in Cyprus in both the south and the north.

Focus Group Execution and Process.

The focus group was conducted at the "Home for Cooperation," a facility located in Nicosia, Cyprus, situated inside the Green Line. The café is frequently utilized for bi-communal events, as it is accessible to individuals residing on either side of the checkpoints without the necessity of a visa. Furthermore, the location is situated in neutral territory, which serves to circumvent any potential territorial bias that might arise during events. The "Home for Cooperation" is the sole location where such political discourse can be conducted in a neutral territory accessible to the general public.

To mitigate the influence of the researcher's presence on the focus group's outcomes, the researcher's role was primarily that of a guiding moderator. This involved posing questions to the group while allowing the conversation to flow freely, maintaining a general orientation towards the original topic of trust. This approach of limiting the researcher's presence was taken capture

as many insights from participants as possible.

Once all participants had been seated, the researcher introduced the topic of the research project, and provided a summary of findings from the quantitative phase. Subsequently, participants were invited to offer their own perspectives on the concept of trust and to provide feedback on the questions posed by the researcher.

The time allocated to each topic of discussion was approximately 10 to 15 minutes. However, when the discussion was less engaging, the researcher moved on to the next topic. When additional topics emerged during the course of the debate, time was allocated to address these issues. The entire focus group lasted approximately one hour.

It is possible that informing the participants of the research goal might have influenced their contributions. However, this was done to ensure transparency about the topic and to allow all participants to contribute their personal experiences and viewpoints on the subject from different angles to gain insights from diverse perspectives.

Insights from Expert Perspectives.

After the focus group, two interviews were conducted. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the researcher to engage with the interviewees' local expertise and to request clarifications, when necessary, while facilitating a conversational approach. The researcher proceeded to inquire about the topics outlined in the prepared questions, which were derived from the previously collected quantitative and qualitative data. Moreover, the second interview included queries that emerged during the preliminary analysis of the first interview.

The first interview was held with a distinguished political scientist and international relations expert from Cyprus and lasted approximately 30 minutes (here named Interviewee 1). The researcher has been involved in peacebuilding initiatives in the region for decades and

continues to do so. The second interview was conducted with a local UN employee in Cyprus and lasted approximately 36 minutes (called Interviewee 2 in the following pages). This individual possesses extensive experience in peacebuilding, as well as a deep understanding of the Cyprus context. The initial contact was made at a local event, where the researcher obtained the interviewee's contact information and where the interviewee expressed interest in participating.

Research Tools and Question Design.

The first interview began with general questions regarding trust in Cyprus, the experience of Interviewee 2 with local confidence building measures, and their perception of the role of the UN. As a Cypriot, the expert was able to provide valuable insights into the needs of Cypriots with regard to enhanced cooperation.

- What do you think is the most significant issue related to trust in Cyprus?

To address the role of the UN in Cyprus, as well as the target for criticism in this project:

- Do you see the UN confidence-building measures in Cyprus to be working?

Regarding the discrepancy between participants' interpretations of trust, the following questions were asked:

- Do you think a missing common understanding of trust makes confidence-building measures ineffective?

Additional questions were addressed during the first interview that were not prepared in advance. Among the spontaneous questions were the following:

- Are the confidence building measures constructive?

- To clarify the topic of a missing standard definition of trust: In your career, have you encountered miscommunication between stakeholders regarding confidence-building measures based on trust, a very broad term that could lead to misunderstandings between stakeholders?

The second interview was conducted with a greater focus on the United Nations (UN), the role of trust in the UN's strategies, and the role of confidence-building measures performed by the UN in Cyprus and their impact. This was done because Interviewee 2 possesses relevant experience with these topics and can provide insider information on the various underlying dynamics more effectively than participants from the public or a researcher outside of the UN framework could do.

- How do you perceive the role of confidence building measures in the context of Cyprus and maybe in the scope of the mandate that the UNFICYP has?

Since UN documents often mention the importance of building trust in post-conflict cases, the question arises as to whether and how this is being measured by the UN Mission in Cyprus:

- Do you see a problem with a lack of a clear definition of trust inside the UN? In terms of miscommunication between the different stakeholders of programs, projects, and confidence building measures?

According to the focus group discussion, transparency could play an important role in building trust in Cyprus. Based on the first interview, the UN in Cyprus lacks communication with the public. This led to the following questions:

- What role does transparency play within the UN in building trust?

The following questions were not prepared before the interview. They emerged during the conversation and were used to either clarify or redirect the discussion to topics that emerged during the interview:

- Is trust measured explicitly or analyzed explicitly by the UN in any form?
- (Because the interviewee mentioned the church as a superstructure that impacts the local conflict) What is your opinion about the church?
- (Based on notes taken during the first interview) Do you think people perceive the UN in Cyprus positively?
- (As a follow-up on transparency related to the UN mission) Are you working on improving transparency?

Conducting Expert Interviews: Procedure and Approach.

The first interview was conducted in the office of the interviewee, a few days after the focus group. The interview commenced with an informal re-introduction, as the researcher and the interviewee had already become acquainted during several events in Cyprus. After being offered refreshments, the researcher requested Interviewee 1 to give consent to record the conversation and informed them of their right to withdraw their consent at any time. Subsequently, the researcher presented an overview of the study, including preliminary findings from the quantitative research and the focus group. They verified the functionality of the recording device and proceeded to ask the planned questions. When the researcher identified an aspect that had not been previously considered, they asked clarifying questions.

The second interview was conducted a few days after the first interview at a local café. Interviewee 2 offered the researcher a beverage upon their arrival. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher provided Interviewee 2 with relevant background information, including

details about the research project, preliminary findings, and the conditions of the recorded conversation, which included the anonymization of any information that could be used to identify the interviewee. The interviewee was also informed that their consent to participate in the research and to have their data used could be withdrawn at any time.

Interpreting the Narratives: Data Analysis.

All qualitative data was recorded and later transcribed using the automatic transcription software "trint." Once the automatic transcription process was complete, the researcher listened to the recordings again to verify the accuracy of the transcripts, correct discrepancies, and gain a deeper understanding of the discussion's contents. The participants of the focus group and the interviews were anonymized.

4.2 Key Findings and Reflections: Trust and Beyond

Trust Unwrapped.

The following section presents an overview of the participants' statements regarding the meanings of trust and the factors they consider to be impactful on their understanding of the concept of trust.

Conceptualizing Trust: Participant Perspectives and Variations.

When the focus group participants were asked to define the term "trust" in their own words, their responses varied considerably, providing further confirmation of the insights derived from the questionnaire. Participant 1 regarded trust as an all-encompassing concept, stating, "everything is related to it. Trust" (personal communication, December 1, 2023). Participant 2 pointed out the foundational aspect of trust by referring to a wide range of concepts, including interactions with other individuals, material items, online transactions, and governmental institutions (personal communication, December 1, 2023). This evidence supports the argument that trust is a fundamental concept in human societies, as assessed by Kwon (2019).

Participant 3 articulated a connection between the adverse effects associated with negative implications resulting from misplacing trust: "[Trust] is not going to deceive you. Or mislead you" (personal communication, December 1, 2023). Similarly, Participant 4 related the concept of trust to the absence of corruption in an institutional sense: "To me, the first thing that comes to mind is no corruption" (personal communication, December 1, 2023). These aspects are noteworthy as they portray an inconsistent inverse correlation. The individuals from countries ranked low in the Corruption Perceptions Index considered the absence of corruption as important. Ukraine is currently ranked 104th with a score of 34, while Cameroon is ranked 140th with a score of 27 (Transparency International, 2024). However, the Turkish Cypriot participant

did not express concern regarding the absence of corruption, despite the fact that northern Cyprus is tied with Cameroon in terms of corruption (Gokcekus & Sonan, 2023).

Interviewee 1 brought up an additional concept of trust was introduced that is particularly relevant to the Cyprus context: Security. According to previous polls that explored the feasibility for reunification, over 70% of the respondents consider this as crucial, with other issues being considered as less pertinent (personal communication, December 12, 2023).

Interviewee 1 also gave an example for such a security issue: The assurance for fair treatment by judicial and executive institutions. The treatment of individuals may differ based on differences in ethnic identities. This presents a security concern in the Cyprus, as it might target a certain group over another structurally (personal communication, December 12, 2023).

When questioned about the effect of discrepancies in understanding trust in the field, the initial interviewee offered their experience: "As long as you have people from different cultural, ethnic, religious or even language backgrounds [you have misunderstanding]. […] every process needs some brewing time" (personal communication, December 1, 2023), further supporting the possibility of miscommunication based on the misalignment of core concepts.

Interviewee 2 stated that the presence of trust is generally beneficial in post-conflict environments. However, they also noted the lack of reliable data related to the concept, which presents a challenge in this context (personal communication, December 14, 2023).[13]

This lack of quantitative analyses surrounding the concept of "trust" in Cyprus, as well as the absence of a singular, comprehensive conceptual definition, illustrates the discrepancy between the practical applicability of trust (which is nearly impossible without data) and the

[13] Polls and interviews with locals were mentioned, however the interviewee themselves stated that they do not consider this reliable information.

communication strategy of the UN as applied in their official publications. This highlights the necessity to establish a clear understanding of what trust means and implies (or alternatively to introduce more robust concepts that are measurable instead of trust).

These individual perspectives reinforce the importance of integrating local cultural and contextual dynamics into the conflict resolution process, as asserted by Lederach (1997). In light of the remarks made by the participants, it becomes evident that this should also be applied at the conceptual level, which forms the foundation for conflict studies.

In the context of Cyprus, this implies a particular emphasis on the role of security. While security may constitute a significant aspect of trust at the local level, it does not act as a universal indicator of trust for Cyprus, as other aspects still play a role. Furthermore, these findings reinforce the significance of risk and negative consequences associated with "trust," as postulated by Kass (1996). This is evidenced by the participants' concerns with corruption and the importance attributed to not being deceived.

The high variance in understanding that occurred in the focus group confirmed the wide conceptual range of trust observed by McKnight and Chervany (2000). This is evidence for an increase the likelihood of miscommunication that comes with leaving the underlying aspects of trust undefined.

Shaping Trust: Personal Stories and Influences.

The next topic during the focus group discussion was what might influence people's different perceptions of trust. The statements made by the different participants illustrate how they think they developed their personal perspectives on trust: Participant 3, who mentioned growing up in a corrupt country, believes that this influences how they learned to trust: "[What I saw] really just influenced me in... Maybe trusting people less, trusting institution less" (personal

communication, December 1, 2023).

Participant 4 also claimed that they grew up with stories that government officials could not be trusted because of the importance of bribes and the unreliability of governmental tasks (personal communication, December 1, 2023).

Participant 2, on the other hand, experienced the opposite: A safe environment with functioning and stable institutions which made them trust easier:

> I grew up in a very and middle-class neighborhood in this state, and I just trusted and I knew it was safe outside. I could trust my neighbors. I could trust that, you know, basically everyone would be in it waking up to go to work or go to school, you know, every single day. I could trust these sorts of routines in life. […] And I didn't grow up with any kind of fear, which I think some of you probably have in your lives. (personal communication, December 1, 2023)

These perceptions highlight differences in upbringing, which further suggest contrasting ways of learning to trust and not trust. While Participants 3 and 4 claimed that trust was low earlier in their lives, Participant 2 said that their trust levels were high earlier and that they learned to limit their trust in others later in life.

When asked what could potentially influence whether they develop (dis)trust towards others based on certain behaviors, Participant 3 claimed that facial expressions are an indicator: "The way they look at you or their facial expression" (personal communication, December 1, 2023), which Participant 2 confirmed this with the statement: "If they look in your eyes" (personal communication, December 1, 2023).

In relation to distrust, Participant 2 mentioned that they have had problems with "science skeptics" since the COVID-19 pandemic:

> I have a problem with people who are 'science skeptics.' I'm trying to be as rational as possible. And so if I'm having a conversation with someone and they start to say: „Oh, but did you see this, uh, video on YouTube and they're saying that we shouldn't trust the vaccine, why did you get the vaccine? And I shut down. I don't want to talk to you anymore, and you can't tell me anything. Um, yeah, that was my thing. (personal communication, December 1, 2023)

This again speaks to learned behaviors and markers being able to impact how trust is formed (Cook, 2001). While the inverse of this participant's statement may also be true (so-called "science skeptics" trusting each other more than trusting individuals less susceptible to misinformation), there are currently no studies that would confirm this beyond associations between numeracy and trust in science (for example Roozenbeek et al., 2020).

The statements made by the participants underscore the significant influence of local culture and personal upbringing experiences on their perceptions of trust. In addition, individual factors such as facial expressions and specific statements further support the theory that trust can be learned. One participant's statements about the COVID-19 pandemic is noteworthy because they support the idea that trust is continuously learned, particularly in the form of negative attitudinal changes toward people who rely on misinformation.

Cyprus at a Crossroads: Key Issues.

The following sub-chapters deal more specifically with the case of Cyprus and local trust-related issues.

From Social Narratives to Acts of Non-Cooperation.

When the focus group participants were asked if they perceived any mistrust or hesitation towards any of the groups on the island, most of them denied it. Participant 3 mentioned that they

did not perceive any mistrust or hesitation towards or from any other community on the islands (personal communication, December 1, 2023). However, later during the focus group, they expressed that they had experienced racism repeatedly during their stay on the island:

> So you know, this is quite cool. Kind of. But sometimes it's not cool. You know, like the racism and stuff. […] I've experienced it like a couple of times, but, like, I've also got to the point where, like, I'm okay dealing with it, actually. (personal communication, December 1, 2023)

While Participant 3 themselves may not have such feelings, their personal experiences of racism and stereotyping suggest that these attitudes exist within the island's communities, particularly towards international Africans. In addition, their responses to the question of whether they felt safe suggest that perceptions of trust and safety are relative and can vary depending on one's background and experiences: "You know like you can walk at night. Okay. Like not maybe late late at night, but like you can walk at night, like, I feel kind of safe" (personal communication, December 1, 2023). This perception may not be shared by people who grew up in a "safer" region where walking around at night was not a concern.

An issue of prejudice was raised by Participant 1: "Sometimes when I'm seeing people in the south or meeting or gathering or spontaneously meeting, they're not calling us Cypriots. They're Cypriot and we are Turks" (personal communication, December 1, 2023). This observation points to a perception gap between Cypriot identity groups.

Participant 2 summarized the issue by pointing to larger societal problems:

> They say there's always that element of the population that really doesn't want anyone mingling with the north. 'Don't buy anything! You can visit, but don't buy anything!' You know, like that's that. (personal communication, December 1, 2023)

Another way in which this pressure is exerted on the individual was described by Interviewee 2:

> I worked in [redacted for privacy reasons] for many years, and there is one word that keeps going back to all the ways in the Middle East, and it's the same here. It's the word 'traitor.' 'If you do that, you're a traitor. If you meet these guys, you're a traitor. If you go to the north, you're a traitor.' It's the worst thing you can be called. It's the worst thing you can do. So people don't do this anymore, so they [others] don't say it. And only one who actually treat with people from the north from the south are people who go spend money in casinos and go see prostitutes That's it. That's the only ones who cross. (personal communication, December 14, 2023)

This suggests strong social pressures on individuals to conform to larger societal forces. This socially institutionalized reluctance to interact echoes the observations of the European Commission (2023), which describes a general lack of demand on the part of Greek Cypriots for goods produced by Turkish Cypriots and difficulties in advertising and selling their goods in the Republic of Cyprus.

These existing societal barriers are dangerous because discouraging people from crossing perpetuates stereotypes and urban myths. Interviewee 2 described metaphorically that some Greek Cypriots "imagine Turkish Cypriots with horns" (personal communication, December 1, 2023) and that the existing structures that prevent contact between people in the north and south prevent such stereotypes from being dismantled.[14]

While these social pressures sustain reciprocal negative sentiments, a key step toward

[14] A Greek Cypriot coworker during the internship told me that they had crossed the Green Line twice before working their current job they had crossed the Green Line twice over the course of 50 years of their life.

reconciliation never took place in Cyprus, according to Interviewee 2: Truth commissions, formal bodies designed to establish facts and acknowledge the suffering of different identity groups with the aim of creating empathy and reconciliation, have never taken place (personal communication, December 1, 2023).

Instead, there are a number of technical committees working on various issues. Furthermore, the Commissions for Missing Persons, which search for and identify people who were never found after the conflict are present on the island. But these initiatives do not lead to a society-wide understanding between the north and the south.

Interviewee 2 described the situation as follows:

> Sustainable peace building in the UN is that, you work, you bring the population together, again, truth commission, all that. It's difficult to agree on the future if you don't agree on the past. In fact, you should agree on the past. And then the the peace agreement would be the cherry on top of the cake. But here we're doing the opposite. (personal communication, December 14, 2023)

These testimonies suggest that while individuals may not explicitly recognize mistrust or reluctance towards other communities on the island, underlying issues of racism, stereotyping and prejudice are prevalent. These negative sentiments are not only experienced on a personal level (as in the case of the participants), but they are also a deeper reflection of the social divisions present in contemporary Cyprus. Social pressures, such as the fear of being labeled a "traitor" for interacting with certain groups, reinforce the barriers.

Furthermore, divisions are maintained by the absence of a commonly agreed upon "truth" about the past, which confirms the biased portrayals of history (Faramaki & Antoniou, 2017) and divisive narratives (Ioannou & Sonan, 2019). These factors reveal the existence of barriers within

Cypriot society that prevent effective cooperation and hinder a meaningful peace process between the two sides. To make matters worse, the perspective shared by Interviewee 2 presents a view of socially institutionalized pressures that prevent peace efforts and mutual understanding by maintaining the status quo of social division.

Institutional Barriers.

This is not the only example of institutional barriers that exist on the island, as was discussed at length during the focus group. Participant 4 observed murals upon entering this section of the Green Line: "When you come inside the buffer zone, from the south, there's these […] canvases about like, Greek, young Greek Cypriots who were killed. […] I think that's very interesting to see like, what propaganda is like" (personal communication, December 1, 2023).[15]

The treatment of Turkish Cypriots at Greek Cypriot checkpoints was elaborated on by Participant 1:

> Also the south saying, representing the all. They believe still believing in one line, one country. That's that's why they gave us ID and passports. Right? But this is the very conflict. You know, we have same I.D., same passport, but yeah, checking three times on ID, and there is Cypriots, Greek Cypriots, they're showing and crossing. (personal communication, December 1, 2023)[16]

[15] Regarding propaganda from the north, above the checkpoint to the northern side on the same road as the southern propaganda posters, there is a large sign with the writing: "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Forever," meaning there is reciprocal propaganda along this part of the Green Line.

[16] When crossing with a Greek colleague, they were asked every single time instance when entering the north if it was their "first time?" by Turkish Cypriot border agents. In one instance, crossing from the north to the south took a long time due to a blackout, temporarily rendering the hardware used to check IDs in the north unusable. I did witness that, border agents of the south wove through individuals when it was unusually busy, which also happened to me once as a German passport holder.

These issues regarding the crossing of Turkish Cypriots are also related to the non-recognition of northern Cypriot documents, as noted by the European Commission (2023). This always requires the possession (and prior acquisition) of valid documents for both sides. Thus, not only the crossing of goods is an issue (Theodoulou, 2023), but also the heightened scrutiny of people crossing the Green Line is an institutionalized barrier.

Participant 1 also mentioned the conduct of southern border agents towards tourists:

> Sometimes while crossing the line, I observe the tourists, tourists asking the police guy or like, borders and stuff. Yeah, I think the only problem if you go, well, yeah, they're saying very personal. And. 'This is occupied area. We don't know, you're going to be safe or not.' You know, they are saying like that! (personal communication, December 1, 2023)[17]

Participant 2 joined in and shared their perceptions of the border guards' behavior on the way to the focus group location:

> You know, even even to just come over here [Home for cooperation]. They want to say: 'Where are you going?' What if I am going to the north? What difference does it make? But there is like: 'Why are you going there?' (personal communication, December 1, 2023)

With regard to structural othering on the part of the Greek Cypriot authorities, they described their friends' experiences with the naturalization process in the Republic of Cyprus:

> Some of my friends who have just received their Cypriot citizenship lately. You know, they were British and they married Cypriots and they finally received their citizenship.

[17] In one instance I witnessed someone asked a Greek Cypriot border agent if their passports would receive a stamp and requested no entry to be made. The border agent responded: "It's one country."

> And when they go for the interviews at the immigration, they're asked: 'How often do you go over? Do you go over and how often do you go over?' It's like, what difference does it make? What business is it that you know, okay, they can check their system and say: 'Yes, she does cross maybe twice a year,' whatever, but. What is the reason for this question? I don't know. (personal communication, December 1, 2023)

Furthermore, Participant 2 shared their observations regarding the Metehan crossing (a major crossing point for vehicles), where Turkish Cypriots often wait for an hour before being allowed to continue (personal communication, December 1, 2023).

This issue is also mentioned in the UN report of 2022 to the Secretary General of the Security Council: Increasing crossings coupled with "staffing and other issues on the Greek Cypriot side" (p. 6) led to an increase in frequency of long waiting times, thereby confirming the validity of the observation of Participant 2. While the UN did observe improvements in April 2022, the number of crossings is still lower than before the pandemic (United Nations, 2022).

This questioning of officials' behaviors and intentions to cross, demonstrates a culture of non-cooperation. On the other hand, these behaviors contradict Oberschall's (2007) recommendations to foster coherence through the experience of positive interactions. In this case, the opposite is done. This might teach reluctance to interact and suppress positive interactions, reinforcing the separation between the communities further.

The Potential and Issues of Confidence Building Measures in Cyprus.

The issue of no contact and non-cooperation was also discussed by Interviewee 1 in relation to the need for a cultural change that could be supported by confidence building measures: "Look, why we need confidence building measures for the first place, in my opinion, is that there has been a lack of cooperation experience, as well as cooperation culture between the two

communities for so long" (personal communication, December 12, 2023).

To overcome this culture of non-cooperation, confidence building measures are needed to break down existing stereotypes and prejudices in order to support a rapprochement between the two sides: To this end, confidence building measures must touch the daily lives of average Cypriots so that they can reap and feel the benefits of cooperation.

Interviewee 1 also gave the example of the initial opening of the checkpoints for crossing the Green Line. This opening allowed mobility across the buffer zone. The movement of people and goods between the two sides also helped to break down urban myths and stereotypes (personal communication, December 12, 2023).

Another example given was the creation of solar fields inside the buffer zone to provide cheaper electricity for the island.[18] This would reduce the monthly bills of the inhabitants and thus increase the positive attitude towards cooperation with the other side (Interviewee 1, personal communication, December 12, 2023).

Interviewee 2 agreed with the need for positive collaborative experiences. They argued that the role of the UN mission is to find solutions to real problems that people experience, which can help people build bridges across the gap by using these solutions (personal communication, December 14, 2023).

However, when asked about the potential of bicommunal technical committees in the context of confidence building measures, Interviewee 1 expressed the need to go beyond these committees. This is because they are tied to track-one diplomacy (e.g., diplomatic talks between high-level diplomatic leaders), and thus have been unable to deliver meaningful results since the

[18] Cyprus has much potential for solar power due to the large number of sunny days in Cyprus. The island is highly dependent on oil for power generation (Statista Research Department, 2023) and has some of the highest energy prices in Europe (Eurostat, 2024).

collapse of the talks between the north and south in 2017 until now (personal communication, December 12, 2023). Instead, according to Interviewee 1, actors from the broader civil society should take the initiative to contribute and amplify potential peacebuilding efforts.

Interviewee 2 was also asked about the potential of the bi-communal committees in Cyprus, to which they replied:

> The most important committee should be the committee of education. One where they talk with the Greek Cypriots and tell them, you need to start looking at the history books. 'This is too soon.' Too soon! It's been fifty years! (personal communication, December 14, 2023)

Contrary to the optimism of Interviewee 1, who considers the civil society as a force for progress in the absence of administrative actors, Interviewee 2 was more pessimistic in this regard:

> There's no vision about [peacebuilding]. We're going to put a piece here, piece here, and then it's going to get the big picture. No. It's somebody has an idea, say yeah, sure whatever. One NGO wants to do that, another one that. The problem in Cyprus is that there is a very, very weak civil society in many African countries, or even, I was in [redacted for privacy reasons]. Civil society is much stronger. Here, it is very weak. Just some people you see this mostly in Nicosia, also most of the population are living in Nicosia, and therefore, people like us, we're here to support, but we're not here to do. (personal communication, December 14, 2023)

In addition, the Interviewee 2 predicted that the situation in Cyprus would continue to deteriorate, also due to the influence of religion:

> We are here in a situation where we desperately need CBMs [confidence building measures]. But coherent CBM because in any other conflict in the world, time will help. This is the opposite here, because what you would call a superstructure here, like the schools and the church, especially in the south, mostly in the south is a real force to divide between communities […] So you need some CBMs. The most important CBM is education. The schools are fanatic breeding institutions here. (personal communication, December 14, 2023)

Summarizing the responses surrounding the potential of confidence building measures in Cyprus, both interviewees agreed that these are desperately needed. The measures taken should have an immediate impact on the population. However, the status of these projects in the form of technical committees in Cyprus is highly dependent on ongoing diplomatic talks, which are currently not taking place. Other major initiatives, such as the opening of the checkpoints, have been fruitful and successful (at least to some extent) in reducing the gap across the divide. At the same time, such successes are not widely known to the public.

Beyond the official actors, there are initiatives by NGOs that lack a structural, comprehensive approach, which, according to the second interviewee, is more akin to a makeshift approach to peacebuilding.

However, all of these approaches to peacebuilding are affected by entrenched social and institutional barriers. This represents one of the many vicious cycles surrounding the Cyprus Problem, as overcoming these societal issues requires a self-critical approach to education that reproduces historical narratives. Rethinking education is a potential confidence-building measure, but it is again hindered by the same social and institutional barriers, particularly in the areas of

religion and education. These barriers perpetuate the divide and make it difficult to implement the transformative changes necessary for sustainable peace.

Visibility Issues Surrounding Progress.

Although implemented confidence building measures must be useful to the public, Interviewee 1 identifies a visibility problem associated with such projects (personal communication, December 12, 2023). For example, the Nicosia Master Plan was a comprehensive urban planning project completed after the conflict had divided the city. It introduced a collective sewage system that could not be implemented without one of the two sides.[19] However, according to Interviewee 1, people outside the "conflict resolution bubble" are unaware of this ongoing cooperation (personal communication, December 12, 2023).

This lack of public awareness of existing solutions was confirmed by Interviewee 2. They gave a recent example of roaming in the north (personal communication, December 14, 2023): Apparently, many people are unwilling to cross the border because they will not have mobile phone signals. To address this barrier, the United Nations, in cooperation with local partners, has introduced roaming in the north. However, when the public debate is centered on the identity conflict, where going to the north is "treacherous," there is not much talk about practical solutions to having internet while visiting the north. The fact that such a solution exists remains unknown.

The unwillingness to cooperate creates the self-fulfilling prophecy. Solomon and Flores (2003, p.35) argue, that in a positive feedback cycle, being trusted presents a psychological gratification component of trust in itself. This feedback cycle is also functional in the case of

[19] Nicosia is slightly sloped which would lead to wastewater automatically flowing towards the north.

distrust, as people are less likely to be willing to depend on or cooperate with others.

Based on the comments by Interviewee 2, such a negative feedback cycle is present in Cyprus in the form of a continuous state of non-cooperation culture and experience between the two sides undermines the development of trust, that in turn exacerbates the problem of non-cooperation. A constantly evolving downward spiral, perpetuated by a lack of awareness of positive developments and cooperative projects on the island.

To break out of this vicious circle, it is necessary to address the lack of awareness in society at large. The Interviewee 1 calls for an effort to improve communication on both sides and across the divide (personal communication, December 12, 2023). This communication should be continuous and aimed at creating awareness of the intermunicipal cooperation projects that are being realized and implemented on the island. Furthermore, communication should be continuous in order to effectively create awareness, work against the current barriers that prevent cooperation, and build towards the culture and experience of cooperation mentioned by Interviewee 1.

In summary, according to these submissions, the problems of visibility in cooperation stem from a lack of public awareness of successes. Instead of focusing on practical solutions that work in the field, the public debate is more concerned with blame games. This problem could be alleviated through communication channels already used by the United Nations in Cyprus (e.g. Instagram). At the moment, however, most of the information published concerns the activities of UN personnel rather than the successes of joint projects. Shifting the UN's attention to a narrative that is more focused on the Cyprus problem and solutions could be conducive to the peacebuilding process.

Deteriorating Security Situation in Cyprus.

Another vicious circle also became evident concerning the security situation in Cyprus. According to Interviewee 2, the security situation in Cyprus has been on a continuous downward trend, with the situation between the various actors deteriorating, leading to increased militarization on the already highly militarized island:

> Since 2017, since the collapse of […] the talks, the trend has been bad. We have seen a continuous militarization of the island, the trust has collapsed. And there's been more and more tit for tat, resulting into borderization, and more and more militarization of the buffer zone. That's a fact. So the trend is bad and it's difficult to change trends because trends, to change trends you need trust, there's no trust. And both sides have lost trust, which is the other side but they also lost trust into the capacity. In the fact that there will be a political solution one day. Both sides, think it's unlikely there will be a political solution. And so this is. It's a bad trend. (personal communication, December 14, 2023)

While Interviewee 2 emphasized the fact that no one has been killed in the conflict for almost 40 years, they also noted that there are about 10 incidents from both sides every day inside the buffer zone that the UN has to deal with (personal communication, December 14, 2023).

When asked for their opinion on the role of the Church in Cyprus, Interviewee 2 described an increase in religious frictions and painted a bleak picture for the future of the conflict, which, according to them, is turning into a religious conflict: "Here the, everything goes by the church, the church is. Makarios was the was an archbishop. So it's its from the beginning, the church had a very strong character, and not a good one" (personal communication, December 12, 2023).

Interviewee 2 also mentioned that the Church has immense wealth, that it is in charge of

the education system, and that the speeches of Orthodox Church representatives have become less focused on reunification (personal communication, December 14, 2023). At the same time, the population in the north is changing - secular Turkish Cypriots are being outnumbered by Turkish settlers and international workers and students with a religious culture from Bangladesh and the Turkish mainland.[20] This change in population is also leading to the construction of more mosques, and the current religious leader in the north is more extremist than the previous one, according to Interviewee 2.

Another worrying aspect of the long stalemate in the conflict emerged during the focus group: Peace fatigue among some participants of the focus group. Participant 1 was critical of the prospects for a solution, particularly around the issue of population and properties in the north (personal communication, December 1, 2023). The issue regarding population is that people have been living in the north for a long time, but there is controversy about what should happen to these people after the reunification of the country, with parts of the population of the Republic of Cyprus calling for them to leave the island. The issue of property is related to displacement during the conflict. In the meantime, people other than the original owners have been living in them for decades:

> [The largest issues are] Properties and population. Which both of them not possible to sort it out now. Impossible and reunification is. I'm not gonna see that. We're, we're not going to see that. I mean, I, I don't believe it. Because we missed a big chance. Kofi Annan was

[20] During the focus group, the changing population and the impact of mostly Turkish settlers and Russian investors in the north was brought up by the participants. However, this exceeds the scope of the current research and has been excluded. The full transcripts can be consulted for local perspectives on the issue of migration in Cyprus.

> one of the best in entire of my life. (Participant 1, personal communication, December 1, 2023)

Participant 2 added that they are becoming increasingly disinterested in reading about possible solutions and progress in the Cyprus Problem because nothing has ever come of any plans and proposals. They summed up the matter by stating that nothing meaningful is contributed by such headlines and the actions of the politicians that cause them with the words: “They’re talking about talking” (personal communication, December 1, 2023).

This sums up the pessimism of the population regarding the Cyprus problem and the exhaustion of the stalemate surrounding the conflict. Both Participant 1 (who lives in the north) and Participant 2 (who lives in the south) seemed to have given up on the prospect of a solution. This speaks to the fact that the risk of unfulfilled expectations in post-conflict transformation projects, as identified by Willems and Van Leeuwen (2015) and Idris (2016), has manifested itself in Cyprus. While the prolonged presence of a peacekeeping mission in Cyprus led to the positive outcome of no conflict-related deaths since 1986 (Interview 2). At the same time, focus group participants showed symptoms of fatigue from hearing about (possible) progress.

This is a difficult situation because, as the second interviewee stated, movements towards a possible solution of the Cyprus problem have to come from local initiators. If these potential initiators are affected by peace fatigue (Aggestam & Strömbom, 2012), this reduces their motivation to initiate change. This represents another negative feedback loop in the context of Cyprus, and possibly for other protracted conflicts.

Another problem in the north is the inability of the population to influence political change compared to the influence of other global players on Cyprus. As Participant 1 commented, they are unable to exert sufficient control over their political system, accompanied

by the words: “We call it the Banana Republic” (personal communication, December 1, 2023). This perception is supported by reports of interference in the 2020 TRNC elections, which were won by a pro-Turkish candidate (France 24, 2020; Freedomhouse.org, n.d.).

In short, the Cyprus problem is actively deteriorating with an increasing number and severity of incidents inside the buffer zone. This is accompanied by divisive rhetoric from religious leaders on the island. While the UN is attempting to mediate between the two sides and resolve issues within the buffer zone, it is unable to initiate a peace process. The peace process has to be re-initiated by the locals. However, among the locals invited to the focus group, there were signs of peace fatigue due to the prolonged lack of progress on the Cyprus problem, especially after the rejection of the Annan Plan for reunification.

4.3 Lessons from Qualitative Findings

Based on the focus group and interviews, several aspects of trust can be observed: The often-stated aspect that trust is a fundamental concept in society is supported by the views of the focus group participants. Furthermore, the perceptions shared by the participants illustrate the concept of trust and its relation to personal and cultural experiences, thus confirming the potential for interpersonal and intercultural misunderstandings.

With regard to the Cyprus problem, the participants’ contributions portrayed several social and institutional barriers to meaningful reconciliation, such as the presence of divisive narratives and official attitudes and behaviors. While coordinated confidence-building measures are urgently needed to address the underlying issues, these are blocked by entrenched social and institutional barriers and a diplomatic stalemate, and there is a lack of public awareness of the benefits of cooperation. Finally, the current situation in Cyprus is taking a turn for the worse, with

peace fatigue as a result of the stagnant situation, coupled with intensified divisive rhetoric and a compounding deterioration of security in the buffer zone.

Chapter 5 - Bringing It All Together: Discussion and Implications

5.1 Synthesis of Findings: Qualitative and Quantitative

Although the research project was unable to identify statistically significant patterns based on the quantitative aspects of the study, which necessitates the acceptance of the null hypothesis (that there is no difference in the conceptualization of "trust" between Greek and Turkish Cypriots), several observations can be made about the data.

The data validates the original assumptions underlying this thesis. A total of 55 participants provided responses that yielded over 120 distinct associations with the term "trust." This indicates that the concept of "trust" is highly individualized. Moreover, the data reveals trends, such as the occurrence of religious associations among Greek Cypriots, which are absent from the submissions of Turkish Cypriots. A larger and more inclusive sample would allow for the confirmation or rejection of these observations with greater reliability.

The qualitative sections of the research further verified the role of trust as a fundamental element of human societies. Additionally, they provided insights into how personal, contextual, and environmental impacts influence an individual's perception of and approach to trust in their daily lives. This also supports the theoretical premise that conceptually, trust has the potential to contribute to interpersonal and intercultural miscommunication.

Additionally, the qualitative sections provided further insights into the practical application of the term "trust" in the context of the United Nations. Or rather, that it is not employed in quantitative analysis in initiatives related to Cyprus. Furthermore, the focus group and interviews provided insightful perspectives on the current state of the Cyprus Problem, offering a rather bleak portrayal of a continuously deteriorating stalemate. Additionally, several

social and institutional barriers to the resolution of the conflict were revealed, portraying a vicious cycle of unwillingness to collaborate which perpetuates barriers to cooperation.

5.2 Navigating Limitations, Ethics, and other concerns

The quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study yielded insights into how individuals perceive the concept of "trust." Moreover, the study yielded detailed insights into the context of Cyprus, the field of peacebuilding, and the United Nations.

This study did not require an ethical review from the ethical supervision body at Radboud University as no activities were included that would necessitate formal ethical approval (e.g., no research was conducted with minors). However, the study has limitations and, in some cases, related ethical concerns, which are outlined in the following pages.

Consent and Anonymity.

The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were strictly maintained throughout the research process. The data collected was anonymized and securely stored to protect the identities of all individuals involved. All participants were informed that their involvement in the research was entirely voluntary. All participants were provided with information regarding whom to contact in the event of any concerns, as well as their right to withdraw consent at any time by contacting the researcher without consequence.

The names of participants were not recorded at any point in time for the quantitative sections of the study. Any other identifying information (e.g., specific locations in combination with dates, positions, or gender) provided by interviewees or focus group participants was censored in order to protect their identities.

A number of participants provided an e-mail address, which was retained until the conclusion of the project for a variety of reasons. The participants were offered the opportunity to receive reimbursement for their participation, to be included in further stages of the research (focus group), or to receive a digital copy of the thesis after its completion.

Transcription software was used to record the focus group and interviews. Following the completion and download of the transcripts, the responsible team at "trint" issued and executed legally binding GDPR requests for the removal of all uploaded data.

Participant Recruitment: Challenges and Strategies.

The recruitment process was dependent upon the organization of the internship, the participation in reconciliation-related local events, and the utilization of personal networks. This resulted in an initial overestimation of the willingness to participate of the broader population of Cyprus. The alternative of approaching universities based in Cyprus was ultimately unsuccessful, as a significant proportion of these institutions cater to international students, while many Cypriot nationals pursue their studies abroad.

Improvements to the data collection phase (e.g., online recruitment, printing and distribution of flyers, increase of remuneration for participation, and direct recruitment) were implemented in a sequential manner, which proved to be a costly process in terms of time. The most successful recruitment strategies were direct recruitment and reliance on the researcher's network, which prevented true stratification and representativeness of participants (elaborated on in the next section).

Similarly, the recruitment of participants for the focus group and interviews presented a significant challenge. In place of the planned two comparative focus groups (one in the north and one in the south), only a single focus group was conducted, combining views from both sides of the divide.

The interviews were intended to address the absence of two comparative focus groups. However, while the insights from the interviews were more in-depth, they focused on the topic of

peacebuilding and the UN, rather than on "trust," as these were the topics that the interviewees had expertise in.

Sample Representativeness: Scope and Limitations.

As a result of the slow recruitment process and the subsequent reliance on convenience sampling, the sample is does not provide a representative perspective on the Cypriot population. The reliance on personal networks resulted in an overrepresentation of the international community. Furthermore, the sample demonstrated a notable bias towards urban areas and especially the capital city of Nicosia, where the researcher was based, and a lack of representation from more remote areas.

While the total number of participants in the quantitative sections of the study was 55, the number of Cypriot participants did not reach the original goal of 30 members for both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. Ultimately, only 34 participants identified as Cypriot. The limited sample size restricts the ability to conduct statistical tests to compare different groups based on identity or demographics, as the proportion of international participants was greater than that of the general population.

A significant limitation of the qualitative data is the absence of a representative from the Greek Cypriot community, whether as an interviewee or as a focus group participant. Despite multiple attempts to engage with community members and offer flexible scheduling, no Greek Cypriot participation was secured. Despite the participation of two focus group members who have resided in the Republic of Cyprus for decades, their perspectives still represent an external viewpoint, rather than a comprehensive representation of the Greek Cypriot community. Consequently, the insights gained from the qualitative aspects of the study should be regarded as indicative of the island's issues, rather than definitive evidence. Additionally, the absence of

Greek Cypriots from the study may have resulted in an incomplete representation of social and institutional barriers.

Stratification: Methodological Challenges.

A number of strategic choices were made that, had alternative decisions been taken, would have yielded greater insights into the data.

One such choice was to divide Cypriot respondents into three identity groups instead of two. This was done to offer inclusive submission possibilities for Cypriots who consider themselves members of the overarching "Cypriot" identity, rather than the Greek or Turkish Cypriot sub-identity groups. Although this approach allows individuals to express themselves more accurately, it simultaneously reduces the size of all three identity groups, which in turn affects the statistical comparability of the data. This is because the third group includes individuals from both communities who may have different cultural backgrounds. In the case of a larger sample size, this issue would be less impactful.

The collection of data on the age of participants in generational tranches offers no advantage over the collection of the exact age of participants. However, the latter offers more flexibility, as it allows for the assessment of median and average ages of participants, which can be analyzed further, or be used to verify representativeness. Moreover, the precise ages of participants can be classified into generational cohorts after the data has been collected.

The stratification of population representation by geographical districts presents a problematic issue in the context of Cyprus. While there are multiple districts in both the north and the south, the Nicosia district represents approximately one-quarter of the entire island. This calls into question the utility of districts as a geographical stratification indicator.

Religious identities of participants were not collected; however, this dimension would

have yielded further insights on differences between groups regarding the associations with "trust," as well as another mechanism to assess if the sample was representative of the overall population of Cyprus. While no data on religion has been collected, the researcher suspects that the non-religious participants are overrepresented in the sample.

The Potential Impacts of Post-Conflict Research on Participants.

The second stage of the research entailed in-depth discourse on the subject of trust and the prevailing circumstances in Cyprus. Potentially, participants have experienced trauma and loss because of the conflict.

Thus, efforts were made to establish a welcoming and secure environment where participants could feel at ease and share their experiences. This was accomplished by providing refreshments and initiating introductory conversations with all participants present before the actual research topic began.

Although the objective was to foster an open and inclusive atmosphere, participants were free to terminate or withdraw from the discussion at any point if they felt uncomfortable.

Significance of Findings in the Context of Cyprus.

The primary objective was to investigate whether the application of the concept of "trust" as a universally understood term presents any inherent problems. The evidence suggests that this is indeed the case, both in terms of the range of associations submitted and the qualitative information provided. In this context, the Cyprus Problem was employed as a case study to illustrate the potential for misalignment. Moreover, the potential issues that undermine trust in the context of the Cyprus case were examined.

These findings may have implications for the communities involved. In order to prevent the exacerbation of tensions and the misrepresentation of any group involved in the study, it is

essential to consider the ethical issues, such as the clear communication of the inherent biases of the study (such as the missing voice of the Greek Cypriot community), when reading and reflecting on these findings. While the inherent biases of the study cannot be discounted, the researcher attempted to be transparent in the communication of these biases, and present objective views (e.g., by adding personal observations in the form of footnotes). Furthermore, it was never the intention of the thesis to present a comprehensive account of the complexities of the Cyprus Problem or of the conflict that it evolved from.

Software used to ensure quality of writing.

To verify that the spelling, grammar, and general writing style meet the required academic standards, a variety of software was employed to review and correct these elements of the thesis. The thesis was subjected to a spelling and grammar review using the built-in tools of Microsoft Word 365. Additionally, Grammarly Pro was employed to identify potential errors, and finally, DeepL Write Pro was used to perform a final review. These checks for potential language errors were applied to all parts of the thesis except quotations.

5.3 The Broader Impact: Theoretical and Practical Implications

Building on Theory.

This study critiques the indiscriminate application of the concept of trust in a way that fails to acknowledge the nuances and variations in its interpretation. Although the evidence suggests the possibility of discrepancies in the individual interpretation of trust, further confirmation of such discrepancies between groups is necessary.

The findings support theories that emphasize the risks of intercultural miscommunication and misunderstanding. Therefore, a more nuanced perspective on often uncritically used concepts is warranted, especially when working in the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Another implication is that universalist approaches may miss important cultural and individual nuances. The current finding that trust is perceived differently even within seemingly homogeneous groups highlights the limitations of applying universal definitions of trust in post-conflict transformation initiatives. It challenges the assumptions that a shared conceptual understanding exists a group and highlights the need for more individualized analyses. Further, the findings suggest, that research on highly diverse concepts (such as trust) should not rely on grouping individuals into seemingly homogeneous categories alone, as this may obscure potential insights. This reinforces the need for more localized and context-sensitive approaches in research and peacebuilding efforts.

The qualitative insights into the current state of the Cyprus problem provide a new perspective on the entrenched nature of the conflict. These perspectives emphasize the role of trust (or lack thereof) as well as local dynamics that prohibit intercommunal cooperation and perpetuate the stalemate. This contributes to the discourse on protracted conflicts by highlighting

the importance of psychological, societal, and institutional factors in perceptions of the potential resolution of such conflicts.

Real-World Applications.

The findings of the study indicate that policymakers, peace-building practitioners, and researchers should exercise caution when applying the concept of "trust" and recognize the possibility of a lack of universal meaning across different or even within a singular cultural group. It is therefore recommended that projects address how locals understand the concept of "trust" and incorporate these aspects into the project planning phase and into communication with donors and local participants, even beyond the context of Cyprus. In sum, there is a pressing need for more culturally nuanced perspectives on overarching concepts.

Moreover, these findings indicate the necessity for conflict transformation programs to recognize and address the potential for miscommunication when it comes to key concepts. Initial stages of conflict transformation projects should prioritize comprehension and clarification of key concepts from varied perspectives to enable shared understanding. Alternatively, it may be preferable to employ more concise concepts, which would have the dual benefit of reducing the potential for intercultural misunderstanding and facilitating more effective communication. Additionally, more clearly defined concepts would enhance the effectiveness of projects, as they are easier to analyze and thus can be evaluated.

The study further suggests the necessity for training professionals engaged in conflict resolution. Diplomats and mediators would benefit from preparatory training programs to incorporate elements of the cultural and individual variability of fundamental concepts, such as trust.

By providing practitioners with an awareness of context-specificity and the potential risks

associated with assuming a shared understanding, they will be better equipped to navigate local complexities. Moreover, emphasizing the importance of clear and unambiguous language could enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution efforts.

A practical implication for the case of Cyprus specifically is the urgent need to address the "culture of non-cooperation," as described by the first interviewee. This severely constrains the potential for long-term resolution of the Cyprus Problem. Despite the one-sided portrayal of barriers between the north and south, the reality of deeply entrenched obstacles to cooperation between local communities persists. To advance towards a peaceful and cooperative society, further research is essential to comprehend the multifaceted causes of non-cooperation and to address these barriers at the local level across the divide.

5.4 Where To Go From Here? Future Research Directions

The findings of this research highlight the necessity for additional research on the topic of trust in a variety of cultural and conflict-related contexts.

It would be beneficial for future studies in this field to address the limitations of the current research project. One approach could be to expand the sample size and ensure diverse representation, for instance, of rural areas. This would help mitigate the high variance and noise observed. A more robust sample size would facilitate a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of trust and potential cultural nuances. The availability of additional data will further enable an accurate determination of whether the observed trends in the sample indeed reflect patterns that are consistent with reality. Or if instead, they represent anomalies or outliers that do not align with the broader society.

An alternative methodology for examining trust would be to utilize the associations observed in this study to develop regionally representative insights into trust through quantitative investigation.

To achieve this, participants could be queried as to whether different associations align with their interpretation of trust, with the responses being recorded on a Likert scale. This approach would facilitate the visualization and analysis of cultural misalignments, enabling the mapping of regionally representative interpretations.

Moreover, a more comprehensive investigation into the factors that are instrumental in the development of trust is required. As indicated by focus group participants, there are potential social and environmental differences in the formation of trust. Further research in this area could yield important insights into the psychological processes surrounding the concept of trust.

Lastly, more research should be conducted on the Cyprus Problem with a particular focus on the barriers to sustainable peace. This should also include perspectives from rural areas.

According to one interviewee, the rural dimension holds more extreme views regarding the conflict, which were missing from the current research. The inclusion of more extreme perspectives on the conflict could provide insights into aspects of the Cyprus Problem that are not present in Nicosia and thus receive less attention.

5.5 Recap and Broader Implications

In conclusion, the findings of this study are likely influenced by the intrinsic limitations of the statistical tests employed due to the relatively small sample size and the high degree of variability observed in the submissions.

While the findings provide valuable insights into the diversity of understanding of the concept of "trust," they should be interpreted with caution, as they represent trends rather than definitive results.

It is imperative to differentiate between statistical significance and practical significance. Although most statistical tests did not reveal significant differences in the associations of trust, the contextual information indicates that the concept of trust is highly diverse. The data indicates that trust is highly dependent on individual interpretation. It is therefore imperative that those engaged in related disciplines exercise caution when employing the term "trust," ensuring that it is not uncritically applied, thus preventing miscommunication.

The study is limited by the lack of diverse and sufficient data points, particularly the insufficient representation of religious or rural communities. As a result of these limitations, the findings are not representative of the general case of Cyprus. This is particularly relevant in the context of the qualitative aspects of the study, given the absence of a Greek Cypriot participant. This may have resulted in an incomplete understanding of the broader societal perspectives on the Cyprus Problem.

Further research is required to confirm whether potential conceptual differences in the interpretation of "trust" truly rely on the individual, or if there are patterns to be confirmed between different groups. Additionally, future studies should address the current ethical issues and limitations of the study, such as the limited sample size and ensuring true representation of

local groups. Additionally, future research on trust should focus on exploring the underlying meanings, rather than exploring conceptual misalignments.

Chapter 6 – Concluding Remarks

The primary objective of this thesis was to critique the conceptually uncritical application of "trust" in the context of peacebuilding. Accordingly, the study hypothesized that there are culturally dependent differences in the interpretation and understanding of trust.

Although the study was unable to confirm group-dependent differences, the insights obtained during this research suggest that trust is a highly individualized concept. Among the 55 participants, over 120 different associations were made, indicating that applying uncritically is nonetheless problematic.

The qualitative data from the study also reinforced this individualistic conceptual nature of trust and suggested a wide range of aspects that potentially influence its understanding. Furthermore, participants revealed various aspects that prevent cooperation and true progress in reconciliation in Cyprus.

These insights offer a perspective on the complexities surrounding trust, which give rise to concerns regarding intercultural communication issues. This is particularly relevant in the context of conflict and peace studies, where the concept of "trust" is frequently invoked as a means of facilitating reconciliation. The recognition that "trust" is a concept that is dependent on the individual and multifaceted in nature underscores the need for action. Rather than employing the concept in a vague and undefined manner, scholars and practitioners should strive for precise communication. This could be achieved by providing concrete, outcome-oriented definitions or opting for more precise terminology, thus preventing miscommunication.

It should be noted, however, that the study is not without limitations. Both, the qualitative and quantitative samples were based on convenience and do not reflect an inclusive view of the Cypriot population. Moreover, the quantitative sample size was insufficient to yield

representative identity groups. The primary limitation of the qualitative portion of the study is the absence of Greek Cypriot community members, which may have introduced bias in the assessment of barriers to cooperation. Consequently, these findings should be interpreted with caution, particularly in the context of the Cyprus Problem.

Further research should account for the weaknesses of the current study. Furthermore, studies should explore if there are indeed cultural differences as indicated by the current project. Beyond this there should be an exploration of which aspects individuals consider as overlapping with their own perceptions that could map out different cultural and regional understandings of trust to allow for a systematic overview of differences. Such an investigation would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of trust in interpersonal and intercultural communication.

In relation to the Cyprus Problem, more research is required on the multitude of obstacles to collaboration surrounding the Cyprus Problem. A deeper investigation of these issues is necessary to facilitate the peacebuilding process and address the underlying causes.

In conclusion, while this study contributes a much-needed critical perspective on the concept of trust in peacebuilding, it highlights the importance of considering individual perspectives and cultural contexts in addition to the concept itself. Future research into these dimensions has the potential to pave the way for more effective communication strategies and, ultimately, more successful peacebuilding efforts.

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https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/5f1e84aa13b876b04c77d255/KKTC%20Ulke%20Profili_ekim2023.docx.pdf, which is now a dead link)

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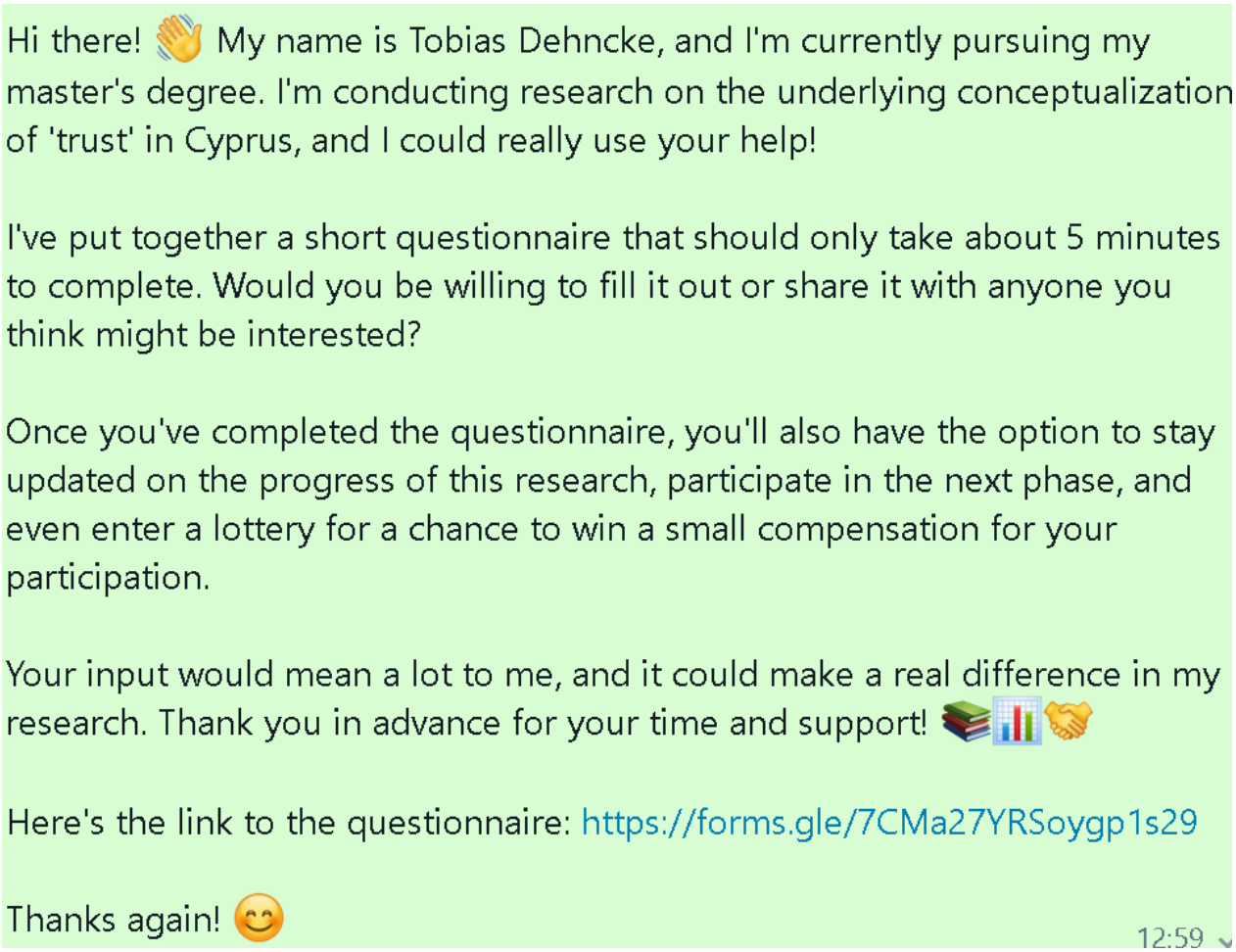
Appendix

Appendix A - Outreach

Appendix A1 – Message for Direct Contact.



Link to the questionnaire : https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScKblQLGbxypyOP-VMpuebFVhPnusM95MpZOafkgkOI748Z_A/viewform

Appendix A2 – Flyer and QR Code.

Appendix B - Questionnaire About Trust

Survey underlying conceptualizations of trust

My name is Tobias Dehncke, I am currently a master's student at Radboud University in the Netherlands. In case of questions or complaints, you can always reach me via email under tobias.dehncke@ru.nl or tobias.dehncke@posteo.de

This survey is the initial part of a study exploring 'trust' conceptualizations. The research aims to investigate how various identity groups, such as income brackets, generational groups, and ethnic backgrounds, perceive 'trust.'

Please complete this survey without communicating with others to avoid biasing responses.

The survey comprises multiple stages: an introduction to the research, self-related questions, demographic data collection, and your associations with 'trust.'

All data collected will remain confidential and solely serve the research's purpose, accessible only to Radboud University, research supervisors, and myself for analysis. Responses will be anonymized. If desired, you can provide your email address for potential participation in a post-survey focus group or to receive research results.

Email addresses will be deleted after the stage that you indicated, either after the second stage of the research, after the outcomes of the research have been communicated, or after the randomized winners for a small compensation have been selected.

Do you speak English? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

I have read the information above and agree to participate in this research. I am aware that I can withdraw my consent to participate at any time by sending an email to tobias.dehncke@ru.nl.

- ◯ I understand the above and willingly participate in this reserach.
- ◯ I do not with to participate in this research.

Demographic information

This part collects information regarding your identity.

What is your ethnic identity? *

- ◯ Cypriot
- ◯ Greek Cypriot
- ◯ Turkish Cypriot
- ◯ Turkish
- ◯ Greek
- ◯ Prefer not to say
- ◯ Other: _____

How do you describe your gender identity? *

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other: _____

Personal information

How old are you *

- ○ <18
- ○ 18-29
- ○ 30-39
- ○ 40-49
- ○ 50-59
- ○ 60-69
- ○ 70-79
- ○ 80-89
- ○ >90

Are you a resident of Cyprus? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Which district do you reside in? *

Your answer

What area do you live in? *

- ◯ Urban
- ◯ Rural

Martial status *

- ◯ Single
- ◯ In a relationship
- ◯ Married
- ◯ Divorced
- ◯ Widowed
- ◯ Prefer not to say

Estimated monthly household income *

- ◯ Less than 500€
- ◯ €500-€1000
- ◯ €1,001 - €2,000
- ◯ €2,001 - €3,000
- ◯ €3,001 - €4,000
- ◯ More than €4,000
- ◯ Prefer not to say

Associations with *trust*.

What do you think when the word *trust* comes up? Please give at least of 2 associations and a maximum of 5.

Association 1 (What do you associate with *trust*?) *

Your answer

Association 2 (What do you associate with *trust*?) *

Your answer

Association 3 (What do you associate with *trust*?)

Your answer

Association 4 (What do you associate with *trust*?)

Your answer

Association 5 (What do you associate with *trust*?)

Your answer

Thank you for your participation!

Would you like to be kept in the loop regarding the outcomes of this study?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Would you like to possibly participate in a focus group in a following step?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Would you like to win 15€?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Please add your email (optional)

This is only relevant if you would like to be updated on the research, if you would like to be invited for a focus group, or if you would like to win 15€.

Please add your email (optional)

Your answer

Appendix C – Statement of Own Work

Student Name: Tobias Dehncke

Student Number: 1017462

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

DECLARATION:

a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the university manual

(https://www.ru.nl/en/regulations/format-regulations-on-fraud) and with Article 3 "Definition of fraud" in the Format Regulations on Fraud.

b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words.

c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

Signature: 

Place and Date: Elchingen, 19.08.2024