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Article

A place to commemorate Smyrna refugees

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Abstract: The paper delves into the role and power of places of memory in preserving and strengthening the collective memory and identity of Greeks who originated from Asia Minor and specifically Smyrna. Historical data are presented regarding the persecution of this community and the triptych "place-collective identity-collective memory" is thoroughly studied. Through semi-structured interviews, and participatory design methods, with the collaboration of users, landscape architect, agronomist, and sociologist, the landscape design proposal aims to create the First Nationwide Open-Air Museum of Smyrna in Thessaloniki, Greece. The new land uses are based on the shaping and preservation of the collective memory and identity of Smyrnaeans, and the coexistence of historical and cultural elements in a modern design canvas. Users and visitors perceive the landscape as a document of the Smyrnaean culture, which narrates the history of their community, allowing them to define their particular identity and identify themselves as "us".

Keywords: place of memory; collective memory; collective identity; landscape architecture; participatory design; Smyrna

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been continuously increasing interest in linking memory, culture, identity, and landscape, as is confirmed, on the one hand, through the creation of new locations connected to cultural heritage (museums, monuments) and, on the other hand, through research focused on memory, both cultural and material [1,2]. As a result, we can speak of the cultural dynamics of memory [3]. A landscape can function as an anchor, helping people to recall and also preserve in their memory important past events that will enable them to narrate to others their personal stories and the stories of their communities [4]. The construction of monuments and the placement of elements of material culture in a location—which constitute the shaping of landscapes of memory—are in particular used by communities as practices of memory in order to preserve and thus have access to memories of events thereby shaping community identity [5]. Groups of people moving from their homeland transfer cultural capital—whether embodied, objectified, institutionalized [6]—which they seek to preserve in their new place of settlement. In doing so, they remain loyal to and carefully uphold the cultural practices that connect them to their country of origin. One such group that was forced to uproot without any alternative is that of the Greeks of Asia Minor. Within this group, the Greeks of Smyrna fled the region in September 1922 [7].

The paper aims to present and substantiate the idea of designing a place of memory dedicated to the refugees of Smyrna. The initiative for this project was undertaken by the "Agia Fotini" Association of Asia Minor Greeks from Smyrna,

based in the suburb of Eleftherio Kordelio, Thessaloniki, Greece. In pursuit of this vision, the Association sought collaboration with the International Hellenic University (IHU) to co-design and jointly develop the First Nationwide Open-Air Museum of Smyrna in Greece.

2. Literature review

2.1. Historical data

In the early 20th century, Greek populations from Asia Minor, the Caucasus, and Northern and Eastern Thrace were forced to leave their birthplaces, permanently abandoning their homeland, their property, their churches, and the graves of their ancestors. They were displaced and sought refuge in Greece [8]. The collective identity of these Greek populations was synonymous with the Greek national identity, and their orthodox dogma was a reference point that imbued them with national self-awareness [9].

Specifically, regarding the region of Asia Minor, Greeks had been present in this area since the early Archaic period (800-600 BC) [10]. After having lived on these lands for millennia, Asia Minor Greeks were forced to abandon their ancestral hearths, churches, institutions, and assets. They were repatriated in two separate phases, as follows: initially, as the Greek army left Asia Minor in 1922 after it was routed in the context of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, and, subsequently, in 1923, in a more organized fashion after the Treaty of Lausanne was signed by Greece and Turkey on 30th January, 1923 [11]. This treaty provided for the mandatory exchange of populations between the two countries based on religion [11,12]. This was the first case of mandatory population exchange ratified by international law [13].

Before the treaty was signed, it is estimated that over 750,000 Greeks of Asia Minor were displaced, fleeing when the Ottoman Turks set fire to Smyrna in September 1922, while tens of thousands of others were killed or imprisoned [7]. According to official data, based on the 1928 census, 626,954 Asia Minor Greeks sought refuge in Greece [14]. They settled around Athens and, in large numbers, in Northern Greece (Eastern and Central Macedonia, Thrace) [15]. Specifically, 120,000 refugees from Asia Minor and Thrace arrived in Thessaloniki seeking refuge. They settled in, inter alia, Tenekedoupoli (Tin Town), Toumba, Kalamaria, Harmankioi (Eleftherio), Neo Kordelio, and Nea Menemeni [16], being crammed into hovels, schools, churches, and any type of building available. The area of interest for the project carried out is present-day "Eleftherio-Kordelio", as the municipality has been named following the unification of the community of Eleftherio and the hamlet of Neo Kordelio [17].

2.2. Identity and Asia Minor identity

One response to the questions "Who are we?" and "Where do we come from?" may be covered by the assertion: "*we are our collective identity*" [18]. Collective identity is the product of conscious action and operates as a lens through which the members of the community interpret reality [19]. According to Barth [20], collective identity emphasizes social processes and extends beyond cultural traits, encompassing

how groups define themselves in relation to others. It is shaped and strengthened always in comparison to other groups, so-called "out-groups" [21].

The identity of Asia Minor Greeks living in Asia Minor was distinct from the other national groups with which they coexisted. The Greek identity flourished and reached its peak in Smyrna during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its core elements included the Orthodox Christian faith, the Greek language, ancestral heritage from ancient times, a strong emphasis on education and the unique traditions they preserved [22]. The painful experience of being uprooted from their birthplace led to their collective identity being shaped anew, which was based on the memory of their descent and their unique culture. The loss of their land—what they term "*the lost paradise of Anatolia*"—and their inability to return played a primary role in the reshaping of their identity [7]. Smyrna emerged as a symbol of the "lost Paradise" and the revival of Neo-Hellenism following a reassessment of national values and ideas. It served as a poignant reminder to Greeks of their past, present and destiny, while also functioning as a means of preserving national identity. This identity was deeply rooted in collective memory, shaped by shared experiences of suffering, mourning lost loved ones and social groups [23,24]. It has been argued that just as "*nationalism constructs the national homeland, the same way it also constructs the lost national homeland. The difference is that the (re)construction of the lost national homeland is purely conceptual and imaginary and thus easier to shape it to an ideal national place. The lost homeland becomes a national symbol and a constituent element of national identity, inducing sentiments of national belonging*" [25].

2.3. Collective memory

Collective memory is a reinterpretation of the past through the lens of the present, shaped by collective frameworks that serve as essential tools for its reconstruction. These frameworks enable collective memory to reinterpret the past, which aligns in each historical period, with the dominant ideologies and prevailing thoughts of society [26]. Collective memory is a social construct with symbolic content used by the members of a group to help them identify themselves and give them a sense of belonging [4]. The fact that they belong to the same group enables the members to acquire and share memories of events that they did not necessarily experience directly [27]. In this light, memory functions as a filter, a type of consciousness that allows the preservation of those elements that support a group's sense of identity in the present, serving the needs of the present [28].

Social remembering has a defining role in the formation of identities in that groups choose to remember, construct, and thus better preserve their uniqueness [29]. The relationship between memory and identity is so tight-knit that it is difficult for these two concepts to be distinguished from one another, with some researchers considering them one and the same [30]. According to Megill [31], identity is reshaped by the collective memories it has constructed, and, in that sense, it precedes memory. However, if identity is not powerful or if it fades, then the objective is to construct memory with the aim of constructing identity, as is the case with the "*imagined communities*". Anderson [32] claims that a nation is always "*an imagined political community*" that provides its members with a sense of identity and belonging, as it is

socially constructed, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that collective.

With his work, Nora [33] highlights "*lieux de mémoire*", in the form of material, symbolic, and functional artifacts, as a means of preserving and strengthening memory. He argues that "*memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past… Memory dictates while history writes…*". Nora [33] also argues that memory is "*affective and magical*", sheltering symbolic or concrete facts and actualities, while history, being "*intellectual and secular production*", needs further investigation and evaluation. Since it is difficult to preserve memory, which can be fragmented or easily lost, it is necessary to attach special importance to "memory places"—mnemonic places that serve as repositories of the past. Memory is sustained within these places, where history is accumulated and preserved, thereby making them important places for history. In places of memory, where multiple interpretations are not only possible but inevitable, the past becomes "*a polysemantic space, focused on the co-presence of many different versions of the interpretation of the same memorial structures*" [34].

Attempts are made to enhance the memories preserved by a group's descendants—such as the Asia Minor Greeks—through the narratives of their ancestors about life in their land of origin, about the uprooting, the difficulties of resettling, and everything that contributed to the shaping of their identity. This is further supported by using material evidence of memory [35,36]. Photographs that portray the past, the construction of churches and buildings, museums, monuments, statues, publications, books with historical records, poetry, albums, and films are some of the mnemonic media used to counteract oblivion [7,37]. Memory is also manifested in practices that are regularly repeated and capable of being reenacted (festivals, ceremonies, rites), and is closely tied to specific places, where a significant event has occurred or is replayed and commemorated [37]. The creation of places of memory preserves collective memory and invigorates identity, transmitting it to the next generations, since memory is also preserved through space [36]. Halbwachs [35] highlights the importance of the spatial framework for recalling the memories that compose collective memory. Material elements, such as churches and houses, and geophysical elements, such as rivers, springs, and the like, are proof/testimony of a group's connection to the space. All these forms of memory that are preserved, imparted, and handed down to descendants, are necessary for the survival of the group. As long as the story of the group is retold, it is preserved and strengthened. Cultural memory therefore ensures the invigoration of the collective identity of the members of a community, in this case of Asia Minor Greeks, precisely because it empowers them to realize their unity and their differentiation from other communities [38].

2.4. Place and identity

The sense of belonging is not merely linked to the traditions, narratives, cultural elements, and every means of differentiating one group of people from other groups; it is also connected to the place itself. The place has the power to function in a unifying fashion for a group thanks to the emotional ties that its members develop to it, making it a point of reference for them. These deep emotional ties developed by communities

with the land in which they are settled are understood as "*roots*" [39]. All those who are forced to leave their geographical place of origin entirely lose the place—as land—and, therefore, the historical symbolisms that their spatial heritage carries. As a result, they have the sense of belonging nowhere and are typically overwhelmed by insecurity [9,40].

The place is not merely constructed by its physical characteristics and the activities individuals carry out in it: it also acquires meaning in the framework of the relationships they develop with it [41]. It is considered that landscape is a cultural construct that bears elements of culture as a result of the interaction between people and the practices they adopt for its use. It can be charged with cultural memories of both imagined and real past events. It bears witness to people's history, revealing events and places through time and providing a cultural context for situating cultural heritage. It is the point at which nature and culture meet. Thus, there is a close relationship between place and identity given that the landscape also includes memories that allow us to comprehend who we are, providing a sense of continuity over time [42]. The place is hence of great importance, operating as a mnemonic medium for the restoration of cultural memory [3].

The loss of the place also entails the loss of spatial heritage. This means that a place is lost that bears unique historical and religious symbolisms for the people who feel they belong there, which arouses in them a feeling of insecurity [9]. In such a case, intentional acts and actions of memory may be implemented, which can recreate the past [4]. Commemorative monuments represent events of the past that a group may or may not have personally experienced, and the group reveals its desire to vividly establish them as memories among all of its members [43]. Often the construction of monuments and the placement of elements of material culture in a location are used as practices of memory by communities in order to preserve, enable and enjoy access to memories of events, thus shaping identity. Monuments crystallize the memory of an event in a place and that is why they are designed to strongly project the messages they are transmitting. Their design needs to serve the act of promoting the memory connected to the past, which the group desires to strengthen and advance [5].

In order for cultural memory to be preserved and transferred from one generation to the next, one or more material objects or images are required, which are connected to religion, the arts, and folklore: these gain symbolic importance for succeeding generations, operating as means of cultural continuity and transmission of cultural memory between generations [44]. As stated by Pierre Nora [33], since the late 1970s, we have lived in an age of conservation and encouragement of memory as a defense against change, modernization, the fragmentation of once close-knit communities. He underscores the role of people, space, buildings, images, objects, and artifacts as foundational anchors of memory, allowing memory to put down new roots and persist over time. These tangible and symbolic forms function as vital mechanisms for preserving and interpreting the past, that we strive to keep alive through collective memory, and ensuring its transmission across generation. A place can act as a means of preserving collective memory and allow us to have a partial awareness of what has been lost.

Consequently, the landscape could be seen as a cultural construct that combines the place, the practices, and the memories of displaced people and groups, thus

connecting vision and emotion, space and culture and thereby shaping identity [42]. Cultural and public spaces play an important role as part of heritage for people and groups. Functioning as a symbol, they are a means by which to develop memories and construct identity. In urban landscapes in particular, these spaces hold significant importance for social life as they serve as symbols of historical events, with monuments representing and/or commemorating past events [45].

The Greeks of Asia Minor were forcibly displaced, permanently abandoning their family homes. Their place of origin is irretrievably lost, making a return to Smyrna en masse impossible. However, in certain cases a place is abandoned merely physically and not mentally. People who belong to displaced groups endeavor to preserve the memory, culture, and history, this enabling them to have a consciousness of "who they are" and to pass on that consciousness to future generations [9]. By placing particular value on their cultural heritage, they develop a sense of community, an element that functions as a means of survival in a complex and continuously changing world [45]. Nourishing the desire to preserve their identity, they reproduce their cultural past and transform their new place of settlement from unfamiliar into a "*place of origin*" [9]. Through its tangible and intangible aspects, which arouse or construct memory, the landscape can function as a mnemonic medium that merges elements of the past with the present and the future, thereby functioning as a means of preserving the collective memory and culture [4].

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Project inception and initiation

The president of the "Agia Fotini"-Association of Asia Minor Greeks from Smyrna in Eleftherio Kordelio, following the agreement of its members, sent a letter of invitation for collaboration to the IHU, explaining the importance of this cooperation and the aim to create the First Nationwide Open-Air Museum of Smyrna in Greece. Concurrently, the letter assured the Department of the members' active involvement and participation, as well as the Association's commitment to providing support and services. Additionally, it solicited ideas and suggestions for its development to ensure that the new landscape will most effectively arouse and foster memory, identity, and emotion among the people. The design goal was defined as "*a combination of traditional with modern and updated landscape and cultural elements, so that the Association's long-term activity continues on the one hand, and on the other hand it keeps up with the evolution of time, creating a more familiar image, especially for the new generations*". Finally, it was emphasized that creating a place of memory is "*key to transferring information, history, and culture and is an effective strategy in preserving memory and a shared sense of belonging to Smyrna*".

3.2. Landscape site analysis

The research seeks to transform the outdoor space of the "Agia Fotini"-Association of Asia Minor Greeks from Smyrna, located in Eleftherio Kordelio, Thessaloniki, into an open-air museum. The Association was established in 1995 by second-, third-, and fourth-generation descendants of refugees from Asia Minor. It

possesses a total area of 316 square meters, which includes a 56 square-meter building that houses its offices. The Associations is located at the intersection of Skra Street and 3rd September Street, within the Municipality of Kordelio-Evosmos, situated northwest of the urban complex of Thessaloniki.

Access to the site is deemed convenient due to its central location in Kordelio. The site is encircled by a uniform pavement measuring 1.5 m, while a straight axial path provides direct access from the main entrance to the building. The pathway, paved with slabs, is flanked by lawns and framed by sparsely planted olive trees (*Olea europaea*). Within the enclosed area, a fir tree (*Abies borissii-regis*) and a fig tree (*Ficus carica*) have been planted. On the southern side of the building, which serves as the venue for the Association's daily meetings, the main entrance is surrounded by benches. A boat (**Figure 1**) has been placed on the lawn to the southwest of the building, standing as a symbol of the Smyrnaeans. It functions as a means of evoking the collective memory of the uprooting from Smyrna and their subsequent escape to Greece by sea.

Figure 1. The boat as the focal point of the space.

3.3. Methodological approach

The paper employs a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of a research problem [46] and to generate deeper insights into research questions [47]. For example, there is exploration of identity and place and the relationship between them, which need different means of investigation and, therefore, the use of different methodological strategies. This paper employed a semi-structured interview in order to gather and assess identity issues, namely, perceptions, feelings, values, attitudes, and beliefs, as well as other subjective approaches [48] together with methods from the field of Landscape Architecture related to pre-analysis, site analysis and synthesis, decision-making processes, and models [49,50]. Participatory design techniques and tools [51–53] were also employed in the research, including brainstorming, co-design, co-decision, and collaborative decision-making. These methods were utilized to develop a design proposal that fosters collective memory and identity, cultivates a sense of belonging, aligns with the principles and criteria of sustainable landscape design, and ensures that the final outcome adequately addresses the needs of the participants.

The methodology was divided into two phases. Phase A presents the theoretical

framework, and Phase B presents the case study. Phase A includes a literature review exploring the connection between collective memory, identity and place, focusing on Asia Minor identity. It also examines the historical events concerning the Greeks of Smyrna, addressing two key phases: 1) their expulsion/emigration from their ancestral homes, and 2) the areas where they resettled after their displacement to Greece. Research revealed significant gaps in landscape architecture projects concerning the promotion of collective memory and identity among the Smyrna/Asia Minor refugees. Moreover, shortcomings have been observed in the participatory design of urban places of memory for this group in Greece. Phase B includes the landscape design proposal. Topographic maps, base maps, collective drawings, and photographic capture of the existing landscape were used to investigate the site and analyze and interpret the data. The Autodesk AutoCAD 2018 drawing program was used for the 2D design proposal and the 3ds MAX 2018 program and Google SketchUp were used for the 3D photorealistic visualization.

Phase A and B activities included meetings as well as participation and cooperation process methods with the stakeholders (the administrative staff of the Association, its members, and other descendants), as described below:

a) The initial meeting and consultation encompassed discussions regarding the research objectives and the participative landscape design process in collaboration with members of the Association. The dialogue included an exchange of perspectives on the Association's requirements, the broader context of Asia Minor identity, and the imperative to foster collective memory and identity through the place. The brainstorming technique [54,55] was employed, during which all proposed and generated ideas were systematically recorded. The participants' preferences, as well as the characteristics and quality of the environment, were gathered and organized.

b) Audio-recorded interviews were conducted to gather information concerning the Asia Minor identity and its relationship to the establishment of the Open-Air Museum of Smyrna in the context of collective identity along with the context of the Asia Minor identity and the cultural and other actions that can be implemented and promoted in the new outdoor environment. The research questions were the following: What is the context of Asia Minor identity today? What is the importance of creating such an environment for the Asia Minor residents of the municipality of Kordelio? How will the landscape design serve the connection to the past? The interviews aimed at eliciting the perceptions of the origin of the Greeks of Asia Minor regarding the mnemonic constructions that could contribute to the preservation of the memory of the lost homeland among the new generations of Asia Minor origin. The results of the interviews would help to formulate the design proposal.

c) Two meetings were conducted with the members of the Association concerning the schematic design. The co-design approach was used to engage "*designers and people not trained in design working together in the design development process*" [56]. The research team collaborated with the stakeholders to generate design concepts. Subsequently, the landscape architect refined these concepts and presented a comprehensive concept plan that integrated all contributions. This plan was subject to discussion and voting to ensure that it addressed the needs of the stakeholders involved.

d) The final meeting with the members of the Association focused on the

landscape design proposal developed to fulfill the expectations of all stakeholders. This proposal was developed through a process of consultation, co-decision, and a decision-making framework [57,58], in which users not only influence the final decision but also bear responsibility for it. The landscape architect presented the mixed-use landscape plan, and the participants deliberated on the amended proposal, ultimately deciding whether to approve or reject specific activity zones, with the aim of composing the final landscape design (Master Plan).

4. Results

4.1. Qualitative interview data

A total of eight interviews were conducted with individuals of Asia Minor descent, comprising four third-generation and four fourth-generation. The snowball sampling method [59,60] was used for the sample group. The researchers reached out to two elected representatives from the Association who, in turn, facilitated introductions to additional descendants of Greeks from Asia Minor. The participants were apprised of the research objectives, the time commitment required, and their right to refuse participation or withdraw from the research at any point if they so desired. Finally, the anonymity and confidentiality of their personal data and experiences were ensured. The resulting data were grouped and processed in order to provide answers to the research questions [61].

The interviews reveal that the primary design goal of the open-air museum is to serve as a mnemonic device that will stimulate collective memory. This will enable Smyrnaeans and Greeks from Asia Minor in general to recognize both their unity and their uniqueness, thereby creating a sense of belonging and strengthening their bonds. The role of the museum will focus on providing meaning to the present and future of those originating in Asia Minor, orienting them to their past to ensure they do not forget and are, moreover, reunited with their roots. In this way, the museum will contribute to shaping and preserving their Asia Minor collective identity: "*First we want a museum to unite us with each other and connect us with the past and at the same time allow us to pass on the customs and traditions of Smyrna to future generations in an experiential way, so that no one forgets our ancestors and the fact that they came from Smyrna*" (3rd generation refugee from Smyrna, 25/5/2020). A key objective of the project is to create a multifunctional space that will enable users and visitors to interact and engage in cultural and other activities, thereby further strengthening the Association's extroversion: "*Our main concern is the creation of a modern, organized landscape, able to welcome our members and friends. We need a space to host our sister associations at our various events*" (President of the Association, 6/5/2020).

The connection of the Smyrna Greeks with a place that has been definitively lost but still defines them by shaping their collective identity, is shown by the fact that they still seek to become or to stay connected with the place through elements that recall it by acting as symbols, symbols that define and strengthen their distinct identity. The boat, in particular, which evokes the memory of fleeing their homeland, and specific herbs were mentioned by many interviewees as symbols that reflect the identity and uniqueness of their culture—an aspect they strongly desire not to lose in order to foster

a sense of belonging. As typically mentioned by six interviewees: "*Visitors will see the boat and remember that our ancestors entered a boat to escape death. This experience may not be directly ours, but we want it to unite us with our children. The boat is the symbol; it is a means of conveyance between now and our past. It's something that even we carry after so many years*" (3rd generation refugee from Asia Minor, 7/5/2020), "*A boat used by my ancestors to come here. The boat brings directly to mind my ancestors. […] A boat will help all of us, Smyrnaeans, even those who do not know our history or even fail to remember, not to forget*" (4th-generation refugee from Asia Minor, 25/5/2020). Special mention was made of culinary herbs and herbs that the Smyrnaeans incorporated into their beauty routine. Furthermore, with the aid of herbs, the women of Smyrna practiced medicine and flavored their food or made it easier to digest. Herbs were an important cultural characteristic: "*My grandmother used a lot of spices and mainly cumin and a lot of mint. All Smyrnaeans used aromatic herbs in their cooking as well as medicinally on a daily basis—far more so than the other races. […] The sweet fragrance of jasmine was a constant presence, cherished in their yard. […] An aromatic garden will bring us closer to our roots, to our grandmothers*" (3rd generation refugee from Smyrna, 17/6/2020) and "*Our ancestors' food, that is their tastes and smells, is transferred in some magical way to us, the next generations... as if DNA has a memory. The herbs that we will plant and our herb recipes will automatically connect us with each other and with the past*" (3rd generation refugee from Smyrna, 18/6/2020). Herbs and their use in cooking, flavoring, healing, and beauty treatment emerge as a means of cohesion and identity, which the new generations wish to preserve.

It is also worth mentioning the importance attached by interviewees to faith and religious values, and their devotion, in particular, to Agia Fotini. The founding and naming of an Agia Fotini church in Thessaloniki reflect their intense desire to preserve their past, bringing as far as possible the past into the present. The design, construction, and naming of a church dedicated to Agia Fotini are aimed at meeting the religious needs of Smyrnaeans, but, in addition, the church is seen as constituting a precious part of their collective memory and identity. It was characteristically mentioned: "*My ancestors used to go to Agia Fotini church, which was the jewel of Smyrna. By creating a church with this name, we bring the past to life and come into contact with it*" (3rd generation refugee from Smyrna, 18/6/2020), "*Wherever the Smyrnaeans settled, they built churches and dedicated them to Agia Fotini. My grandmother used to tell me stories about the big bell tower. Our church will be dedicated to all those who emigrated […] That way we won't forget them*" (3rd generation refugee from Smyrna, 24/5/2020), and "*A chapel will be a tribute to our ancestors and our roots, a symbolic expression of Smyrna in Greece and in Thessaloniki, because Agia Fotini was and is the patron Saint of Smyrna*" (4th generation refugee from Aivali, Asia Minor, 1/6/2020). All this makes it clear that both the present and the following generations, through the founding and naming of churches, seek yet another symbolic connection with the past and their ancestors.

The interviewees' devotion and their homage to the sanctity of their ancestors are further evidenced by their desire to construct a cenotaph for the unburied Smyrnaeans. This desire reveals the cenotaph's sacred nature and its potency in strengthening the refugee descendants' collective identity as well as in reinforcing their connection with

their forebears: "*The cenotaph will present the names of Asia Minor descendants who died and remained unburied. It will be like symbolically burying our own dead, and neither we nor future generations will forget the thousands that were lost*" (3rd generation refugee from Kordelio, Asia Minor, 17/5/2020).

The Open-Air Museum of Smyrna aspires to function not only as a place for preserving and fortifying the collective memory and identity of Greeks originating from Smyrna and Asia Minor, but also as a place for education and culture, as stated by most of the participants. The transfer of knowledge about the community's past can contribute to stimulating their sense of belonging to and their connection with Smyrna. As pointed out: "*Historical facts and data will help those who do not know the history of Smyrna to learn it and for those of us who know it to share the history of our tribe*" (4th generation refugee from Asia Minor, 9/6/2020) and "*We lost Smyrna… A museum will always help us travel through time to Smyrna and discover who we are*" (3rd generation refugee from Smyrna, 20/6/2020). Three interviewees also mentioned the importance of the outdoor photograph exhibition with photographic images of the first refugees' resettlement in Greece: "*Through the photographs we will see everything that our grandparents experienced. Not all of us are lucky enough to be told about them*" (4th generation refugee from Asia Minor, 25/5/2020).

The interviews highlighted the necessary mnemonic tools that will aid in preserving the collective memory and identity of new generations of Asia Minor origin, emphasizing that these tools should be integrated into their design and construction. The interviewees named the boat symbol, the Agia Fotini church, the cenotaph, and the herbs, expressing a preference for installations that will convey the history of Smyrna through thematic activities. They also advocated for the creation of an educational, cultural, and multifunctional open-air museum.

4.2. Aim of the design and design objectives

The aim of the design is to create a place that will stimulate collective memory and allow Greeks of Asia Minor to build unity, connection, and a sense of belonging, and to preserve social memories, customs, and traditions. The proposal focuses on the activation of memory and the revival of the distinctive cultural features that unite the Greeks of Asia Minor. The design intention is the reconciliation of old and new, natural and built environments, and the creation of use areas that fulfill the Association's needs and support its actions. The design objectives were defined from the early stages of the planning process. The place of memory should be designed to be inclusive and accessible to all individuals, ensuring autonomous, unhindered, and safe movement. It should be multifunctional and versatile, accommodating various themed activities and events organized by the Association as well as by sister associations. Additionally, all new elements and structures should be strategically placed to respect and uphold the Association's identity and role.

4.3. Landscape design proposal

The design is subject to the landscape's conditions and limitations and follows users' ideas, which were set down through the interviews, the brainstorming technique, and the several meetings with the stakeholders.

The source of design inspiration is the tears of history, in other words, the suffering and redemption of refugees. The concept plan is based on the teardrop shape, placing the boat symbol in the center as the focal point (**Figure 2a**). This plan, which was presented by the landscape architect to the Association members, included the following areas: welcome area (zone 1), memory area (zone 2), worship area (zone 3), friendship area (zone 4), social area (zone 5), and planting area (zone 6) (**Figure 2b**). The members expressed their strong desire for the creation of zones with tangible and intangible heritage assets of Smyrnaeans. The plan was discussed at length, carefully taking into account the members' needs and preferences, thus becoming the basis of the design solution.

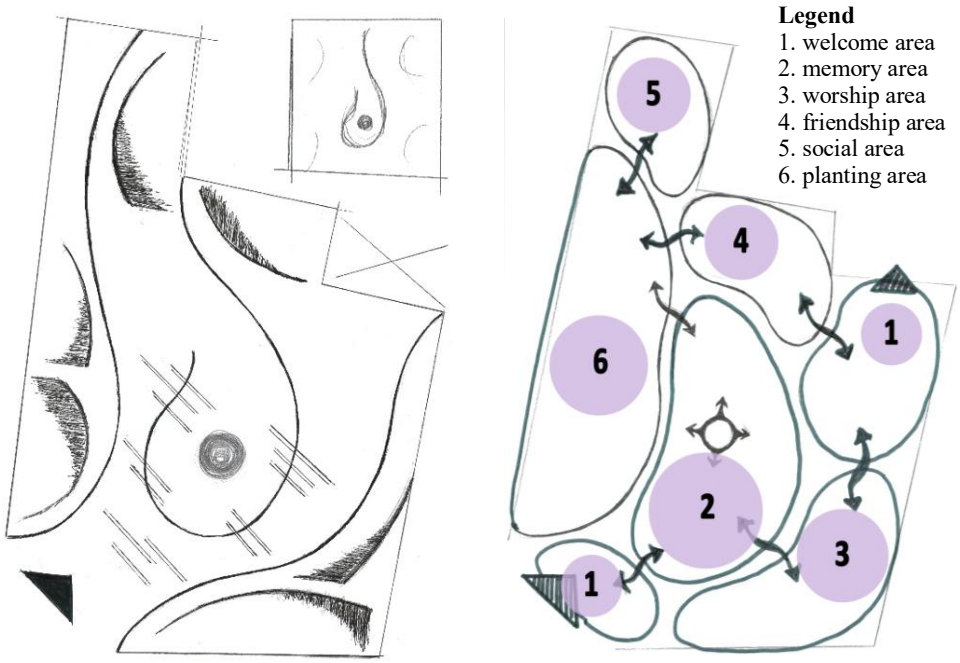

Figure 2. (a) Design inspiration; **(b)** concept plan-not to scale.

After a series of meetings with the Council of the Association and design adjustments (**Figure 3a**), the landscape proposal was evaluated and the image and function of the study area were decided upon at the last meeting.

Figure 3. (a) Preliminary design-not to scale; **(b)** proposed themed areas; **(c)** final design solution.

The design proposal was developed through a co-design process and collaboration between the research team (landscape architect, sociologist, agronomist) and members of the Association. It is organized into distinct areas and accommodates a functional variety and a central axis, which serves as the core of the overall landscape

composition. It is divided into seven (7) themed areas, as follows: friendship area (zone 1), history area (zone 2), worship area (zone 3), memory area (zone 4), cenotaph area (zone 5), free expression area (zone 6), and dialogue and co-working area (zone 7) (**Figure 3b**). The final landscape plan is shown in **Figures 3c** and **4**.

Figure 4. Photorealistic rendering of the landscape design solution.

In greater detail, the friendship area, serving as the Association's welcome point, is situated at the entrance of the plot, and adorned with a wooden pergola and the Association's sign. Additionally, at the entrance of the building, wooden benches are provided to encourage social interaction.

Zones 3–5 are located in a modular arrangement on either side of the path, where the history area is developed (**Figure 5a**). The engraved granite slabs, along the stamped concrete path, tell the story of the Greeks of Smyrna and their forced resettlement in Greece. In this way, the Smyrnaean refugee experience in Greece is captured historiographically via engravings and events, while also featuring images of

the Orthodox Cathedral of Agia Fotini in Smyrna. The visitor is transported to the past while crossing the path.

Figure 5. (a) History area; **(b)** worship area; **(c)** friendship area.

The worship area is designed to be located in the southeast of the area (**Figure 5b**), where a small chapel dedicated to the patron Saint of Smyrna and honored by the

Association, Agia Fotini, will be erected. A photography exhibition depicts the history of the 17th-century Cathedral of Agia Fotini in Smyrna before it was tragically blown up in 1922. It features striking images and descriptions of the famous 33-meter bell tower that was also used as a clock tower [62]. Visitors have the opportunity to step back in time and explore the stories behind the photographs, which capture the remarkable beauty and splendor of the Cathedral.

The memory area (**Figure 5c**) is located on the west side of the entrance where a seating area is designed for the site's open view. The memory concept is brought to life via preserved objects of Smyrna that validate memories while rekindling shared experiences and the feeling of identity, including the tulumba [pitcher pump], the bakratsa [small copper vessel for carrying food to work sites], and the boat.

The boat is filled with herbaceous aromatic plants (**Figure 6a**) from Smyrna that tell their stories with QR codes. The use of colors, aromas and fragrances, and textures is intended to evoke memories and stories. Another idea that was discussed extensively among the members of the Association during the co-decision stage was the creation of a boat-sculpture made of reflective material to stimulate deeply felt interaction of the people with the boat (**Figure 6b**). Such interaction can create profoundly meaningful contemplation and also a sense of place among viewers. Visitors become part of the boat and part of its history. Moreover, the closer they approach the boat, the more vividly they may picture themselves inside it. They therefore become directly associated with the refugees who were forced to embark on boats to escape, thereby feeling emotionally connected to their ancestors, and, in fact, putting themselves in the position of every person who has been uprooted. However, these are not the only messages that pass through this mirroring. The possibility that at some point anyone may be in a similar position to that of our ancestors, to these specific refugees, and to the alienated in general is becoming ever more intense because of the many perilous situations prevailing worldwide today [63].

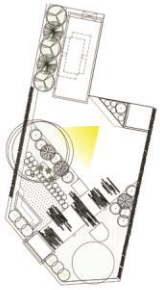

Figure 6. (a) Memory area; **(b)** memory area-the boat and its interaction with the visitor, **(c)** dialogue and co-working area.

A cenotaph (Greek: κενοτάφιον, 'kenotaphion') is to be erected in zone 5 in honor of the unburied Smyrnaeans and especially dedicated to their memories so that visitors can subtly pay tribute to those people who were tragically lost. The free expression zone (**Figure 7**) is designed for the Association's open workshops (history workshops, traditional dance groups, and traditional cooking of Smyrna) and activities (e.g., Smyrna Women's Day and the revival of the custom of Klidonas [Greek: Κλήδονας, a custom incorporating fortune-telling and fire-jumping] and the Memorial of the Forgotten Homelands). Moving on to the most northern part, the dialogue and co-working area is found (**Figure 6c**), an area for the Association's members to meet and communicate with each other and be able to host other associations for future joint actions.

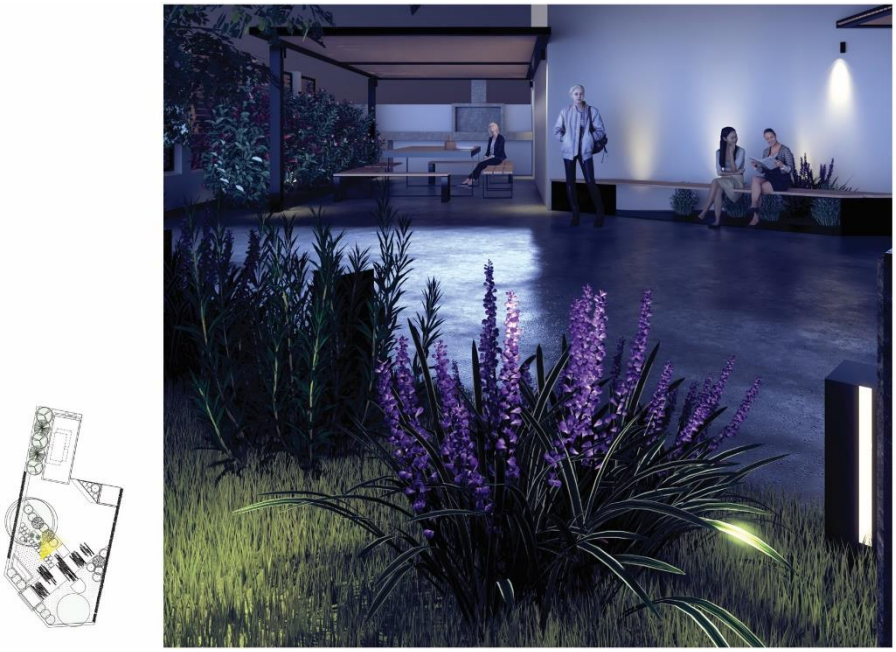

Figure 7. Free expression area and friendship area.

Regarding the proposed planting, an important goal was connecting with memory through the senses using plants from Smyrna. The plant species chosen offer a range of colors and fragrances while also adding seasonal interest. The proposed planting is to be different in each area depending on the function and desired degree of privacy. A combination of the climbing plants *Jasminum grandiflorum* and *Rhynchospermum jasminoides* is suggested to the east and the west so that there is transparency and dialogue between the open-air museum and the surrounding area. The evergreen *Viburnum tinus* shrub frames and draws attention to the entryway. The existing *Abies borissii-regis*, in zone 3, provides a formal focal point, while the proposed deciduous *Acer campestre*, in zone 4, with golden yellow leaves in autumn and small flowers in spring, offers summertime shade. Aromatic shrubs, annuals and perennials, integral components of Smyrna culture, are suggested for zone 4, such as *Cuminum cyminum*, *Lavandula angustifolia*, *Mentha x piperita*, *Ocimum basilicum*, *Origanum vulgare*, *Rosmarinus officinalis*, *Salvia officinalis*, *Thymus vulgaris*, as well as *Pelargonium zonale* and *Hyacinthus orientalis*. The evergreen shrubs *Prunus laurocerasus* and *Viburnum tinus* will create a plant privacy wall, helping to support social interactions and team-building (zone 7). The existing *Ficus carica* is removed due to the exposed tree roots being a hazard for visitors. Plants tell their own stories with interactive QR Code tags and signs so that visitors can, by scanning the codes using their smartphone camera, quickly gain access to information (photographs, botanical characteristics, plants care tips), as well as to the history and practical uses of plants by Smyrnaeans.

5. Discussion

Places of memory function as sites for the preservation and reinforcement of collective memory while simultaneously shaping and strengthening collective identity. They evoke a wide range of emotions and serve as dynamic settings for historical reflection, commemoration, and remembrance [4,43,64]. They narrate stories with the

purpose of preserving them in the collective memory and fostering a sense of unity among community members. This process allows individuals to define their particular identity and identify themselves as "us".

The various cultural events held across Greece to mark the centenary of the Asia Minor Catastrophe underscore the profound human need to honor their roots, deepen historical and ancestral knowledge, and convey these narratives to future generations. This paper has sought to highlight the interconnectedness of collective identity, memory, and mnemonic constructions, while proposing a framework for the development of a place to commemorate Smyrna refugees.

The landscape design proposal is a result of a collective effort fortified by a strong team spirit between professionals, researchers, and citizens/users for the purpose of reshaping a specific urban outdoor space [65]. Users with an active role as "*citizen experts*" [66], as "*experts from their own experience*" [56], collaborate with each other as well as with the research team as equal partners [67]. They make decisions and become critical participants in the design of their environment. The "Agia Fotini"—Association of Asia Minor Greeks from Smyrna in Eleftherio Kordelio, Thessaloniki, Greece—and International Hellenic University worked in close collaboration with each other on the design proposal. Through social dialogue and participatory planning processes, they have succeeded in delivering a proposal for a sustainable and evocative place of memory.

The participatory design product offers the landscape a clear image and structure, multi-functionality, and versatility. The reconciliation of today's aesthetics with the tradition of the 1920s is achieved, proposing the coexistence of historical and cultural elements on a modern design canvas. The overall design presents spatial representations of collectively shared memories and interactions which cultivate and sustain a profound connection between individuals and the place. The First Nationwide Open-Air Museum of Smyrna in Thessaloniki, Greece, serves as a significant medium for transmitting information and history while at the same time preserving memory and strengthening place attachment; it provides people with experiences while involving them in acts of memory and commemoration. Through the created place of memory, the user becomes a participant in the history, the identity of the place, the Smyrna culture, and an agent of the revival and preservation of the "*lost homeland*".

Via the transfer of knowledge, incorporating the conception and reconstruction of history and symbols, the community members become more conscious of "who they are." The seven themed areas alongside the seven key features and elements that encapsulate the cultural values and the history of Greeks of Smyrna—the history and documentary photography data and exhibition, the bakratsa, the tulumba, the kenotaphion, the boat as the escape memorial, the herbs as a culture of nutrition, healing, and beautification, the chapel of Agia Fotini as religious symbolism—aim to support contemporaries and future generations to acquire and maintain a sense of reference and orientation that were irrevocably lost with the definitive displacement from their homeland. Furthermore, these elements serve to preserve their cultural identity, which distinguishes them from other Greek population groups.

The participatory landscape design showcases and highlights the spirit, character, and action of the Association. This approach fosters the development of a dynamic

place that integrates aesthetic, functional, cultural, and environmental values. As a result, the Open-Air Museum of Smyrna is designed to be both sustainable and a lasting legacy for future generations.

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