Exploring the Urban Mediterranean Soundscapes in Cyprus and Malta: A Comparative Study

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Exploring the Urban Mediterranean Soundscapes in Cyprus and Malta: A Comparative Study
By Yiannis Christidis & Michael Quinton

Abstract
The contemporary Mediterranean Soundscape is a living organism, articulated by the ever-changing landscape, the growing building sprawl and vibrant urban activity. Accordingly, in Mediterranean Urban areas, towns' identities are shaped partly by the rhythms of the everyday life of their inhabitants.
This article approaches the contemporary soundscape of two Mediterranean places: the city centre of Nicosia in Cyprus and the urban areas of Malta. After practicing two respective soundwalks to describe the places' sonic environments, the research uses eighteen in-depth interviews to examine the relationship between the cities' inhabitants and their soundscape, and to explore the way people identify characteristic sounds of their place. The people of these islands appear to identify the soundscape of their place in a parallel, if not similar, way, giving particular attributes to key features of the Mediterranean soundscape. Through this study, the article outlines such similarities, as well as differences between the two soundscapes.

Introduction

In recent years the role of sound in everyday experience in the field of urban communication has been given significant importance by the academic community, as discussions on natural acoustic environments have begun and are becoming more popular. Everyday resonances which are caused by people's daily actions form parts of the overall sonic character of an urban area. The connected multidimensional triadic system of sound, environment and listener, has been widely studied since the late 1970s, within the field of Acoustic Ecology, where issues concerning environmental sound in terms of acoustic communication have been the main focus (Truax 1999). After the introduction of the term 'soundscape' (Schafer 1977), new terms in the academic community were coined to enhance the description and the need for preservation of the acoustic environment (Truax 1984). Terminologies such as 'sound signal' or 'soundmark' (Truax 1999) have enriched the process of preserving a sacred natural 'silence' which was dominant in our world in early, less human-centred environments.
In parallel with the development of the field of acoustic communication, a continuous exploration concerning other aspects of the patterns sound acquires in real life has been evolving, also combining theories and methods of various disciplines and academic areas. Although terms such as 'acoustic horizon' (Blesser & Salter 2007), or other kinds of categorizations, like geophonies, biophonies, anthropophonies or technophonies (Krause 1987) have been coined in time and used equivalently, expanding the focus of

Sound Studies, the basic emphasis of Acoustic Ecology remains the same: Sound, as a communicational means, needs more attention by us, the listeners.

Today, the concept of sound is analogously discussed within the wider field of sound studies. This area frequently refers to well-established scientific directions in contemporary research, in order to describe and explore a series of stimulating thematic fields under study. Approaches of the cityscape emerging from sound studies and urban studies (Kang 2007), for example, put in the forefront the importance of everyday cityscape sounds; since these interconnect place, sound and the city, they can be considered as constituents of an established basis for sound research (Wissman 2014).

The evolving research terrain of City Sound

Although the subject matter of Acoustic Ecology draws from the sounds of nature and the preservation of the silence of the sound environment before the industrial revolution, particular terms used in this scientific field seem to be suitable for contemporary studies concerning the city soundscapes. 'Soundscape' as a term refers to everything we hear, and from his early studies, Schafer had already used the term 'lo-fi' soundscape to describe the acoustic environment dominating the city, where machinery, cars and traffic resonate on a regular basis (Schafer 1977). Bull proposed a re-evaluation of the significance of one's auditory experience in the city (Bull 2001) and LaBelle discussed the city sound extensively, drawing attention to the forming of acoustic communities in the contemporary urban environment (LaBelle 2010). The theory of the sonic effects (Augoyard & Torgue 2005), on the other hand combined with CRESSON's (Amphoux 2003) approach on everyday sound in the city, complete a resilient theoretical basis for the study of city sound. A need to delve into a sound communication model is now being met by sound researchers who explore the sounds of urban or rural areas in the wider field of sound studies. (Sterne 2012).

The sonic identities of European cities have been extensively discussed by Amphoux (1993), who proved that sonic, spatial and socio-cultural dimensions, extensively discussed by listeners- whether such discussions happen after commented walks in the urban environment, or after listening to related sound compositions in a studio- are able to provide a satisfying description of the urban sonic identity of a place. Such dimensions appear to have an effect on the inhabitants' everyday life, thus, some certain features appertaining to life in Mediterranean places and resonating in the relevant soundscape would be expected to affect the quality of the inhabitants' everyday activities.

Interconnections and roles of landscape and soundscape in contemporary Mediterranean Places

The characterisation of a 'cosmopolitan superstructure' (Braudel 2001), as the ancient area of the Mediterranean was described, appears to be potentially still applicable today. A relocation of people would necessarily include the relocation and change of the resonance of their everyday activities; therefore, an important part of the ecology of the countryside, based on the triad of olive trees, vineyards and wheat, moved to the cities being transformed, in terms of its habits and sounds.

Composing the cityscape of a place in the Mediterranean area, both the roles of landscape and soundscape should be considered. Such a function, however, raises a

crucial question: 'the streets, squares, and stone; the form of a city- do these contours also shape its sounds?' (Chambers 2008: 42).

In the process of characterising the area of interest, it is crucial to point out the variety and diversity of the cultural elements present throughout such regions. Regarding its multimodality, Burke III states that 'a cultural fracture zone whose modern history contains deep structural continuities at the political and cultural levels, (and) even as it displays equally obvious discontinuities, the Mediterranean is the region where Europe, Asia and Africa come together' (2010: 199). Should its soundscape be an 'evolution' of landscape, or at least should soundscape ecology share parallels with landscape ecology and thus be interconnected (Pijanowski, et al. 2011), a contemporary listener would feel this growth: A constant evolution is evident in the context of the growing European cities, which includes their financial empowerment and social dynamism (Turok & Mykhnenko 2007).

Development in Mediterranean cities seems to start in a piecemeal way to just compensate for extra housing, a fact that crucially contributes to the uncontrollable sprawling around the city. From Izmir's massive growth (Hepcan, Hepcan, Kilicaslan, Ozkan, & Kocan 2013) to Athens' growing vertical profile (Salvati, Zitti, & Sateriano 2013), and from the Italian cities' peripheral State-built estates to Barcelona's viviendas marginales and to Greece's and Portugal's sudden erosion of illegal buildings (afthereta and bairros clandestinos, respectively) (Leontidou 1990: 251-252), the urban –in terms of buildings- expansion appears to also influence the listener's auditory experience. In many areas of the Mediterranean, new housing areas that sprouted out of the 1960's were planned in grid formation, keeping a certain road width; however, simple everyday structures like pavements/sidewalks were not carefully taken into consideration. Additionally, in many cases, like Malta and Cyprus, no green belts were formed between most towns and this would possibly explain the reason why they all merged into one big urban sprawl (Quinton & McGregor 2014).

Farina et al. stress the heterogeneity of the Mediterranean landscapes, as their inhabitants are also heterogeneous, to justify 'a soundscape with a fine spatial and temporal resolution, and a result of this parallel behaviour of sounds to landscape structure, soundscape indices (such as acoustic complexity or diversity) will be important indicators for ecosystem dynamics across human-dominated, complex landscapes' (Farina, Buscaino, Ceraulo, & Pieretti 2014: 11).

Urban Mediterranean Soundscapes: The cases of Malta and Cyprus

The natural Soundscape of a place has its unique tones (Schafer 1977: 26) and it is ethnological, because it is the listeners' identity that is moulded by the environment in which they live. The soundscape of a country is its signature, and accordingly, every place has its own resonant signature. In such Mediterranean countries, one would expect a typical noisy environment buzzing with the drone of traffic and public spaces overrun by excessive noisy activity. Certain areas of commercial importance are characterised by such noise but upon leaving the hubbub of these areas, one can find places enshrouded by a sacred silence (Bezzina 2010: 47).

Even though there are distinct features that make a country's soundscape unique in various respects, the region of the Mediterranean shares similar characteristics of hot summers and cool winters, while drastic weather changes such as torrential rains and high winds are common. The varied, ever changing landscape of high Mountains, rocky

shores, sandy beaches, coastal wetlands and the famous clear, blue sea define the Mediterranean region.

Despite being EU capitals, both Cyprus and Malta 'are influenced by their island characteristics to a great extent' (Böhme, Hanell, Pflanz, Zillmer, & Niemi 2009: 36); such quantitative similarities between the two countries are briefly presented on the table below (Solly 2012):

	Cyprus	Malta
Size	9520 sq. km	316 sq. km
Population	0.8 million	0.4 million
Under British rule in the past	yes	
Agriculture GDP	About 2%	
Industry GDP	About 19%	
Services GDP	About 79%	
Tourism GDP	About 12%	About 30%

Table 1 Similarities and differences

Such shared characteristics support the idea to study the two places simultaneously and acquire and examine 'island' and 'small size' characteristics, especially on how these are translated to sound. Nicosia and Valletta are the capital cities of these small Mediterranean islands, both characterised by a population working and participating in everyday activities. Both islands have similar temperatures and climate; however, there are geological differences with Valletta being situated next to the sea, whereas Nicosia is positioned in the centre of the island of Cyprus.

The city centre of divided Nicosia

The centre of Nicosia, which is the city centre of the Larger Urban Zone (LUZ) of the capital of Cyprus, has been divided since 1974. Since then, the Greek and the Turkish communities live in the southern and the northern part, respectively, separated by a strip of an abandoned, barbed wired space, under the supervision of the United Nations. Both sections of the city centre of Nicosia are surrounded by the remains of 16th century Venetian Walls, alongside many residential buildings with the architectural style of the 60s and 70s, some of which are currently being renovated, as well as a great number of buildings used as workplaces: car repair garages, wood, glass or iron workplaces or shops selling tourist souvenirs. The continuation of everyday life activity is geographically and culturally interrupted by the Dead Zone, which includes the abandoned places and only allows the waves of the sounds among the northern and the southern part of the city to cross.

Malta as a concrete urban place

Malta is a small island but in its smallness, its contrasting scenes, landscapes and levels of activity invoke an ever-changing soundscape. Its population grew substantially after the war; it doubled in amount, creating an urgency for housing. The island of Malta has been called 'Valletta' which does not only refer to Malta's Capital city, but incorporates the whole mainland island.

Having introduced the key concepts of the theoretical framework used in this article, and having overviewed the main characteristics of the urban areas-contexts of our study, at this point we should make some clarifications about our study design. Based on the assumptions that certain parts of the aforementioned models of Westerkamp (1974) and Amphoux (1993) can be applied in the area of Mediterranean places, and suggesting that the sound qualities have an effect on people's attitudes, our research was conducted in order to answer to the following research questions:

> a) Which are the sounds that characterise the places of Nicosia in Cyprus and Malta, and how do people connect with them?
> b) Which sounds do people recall from the past and how do they feel towards them?

The Study Method

Mediterranean places are considered to be highly noisy; the research method investigating this phenomenon involved field study, where both bottom-up and top-down methods were used to collect data: While soundwalking by the researchers themselves appears to be directing the research to experiential modes, ethnographic interviewing (Gobo 2008) reveals exact paths through which people give meaning to their place, and unveil sounds which inhabitants recall and which evoke emotions in them.

During the investigation of the sonic environment in urban areas, it appears important to consider that 'the dynamics of the city walks which permit the mixing between the spatial and temporal sonic spaces, allows the development of the characteristics of the crossing place' (Tixier 2002: 109). As initially proposed by Westerkamp (1974), soundwalking as a research method encourages interaction and discussion with soundwalkers who have been 'exposed' to the same experience, listening through their personal perspective. The soundwalks in the case under study have been conducted in a concept of differentiating the standards of the initial method. Since there were no groups walking around the areas, an alternative experiential approach was used: the authors conducted parallel soundwalks on their own in the areas of interest, the city centre of Nicosia and the city centre of Valletta respectively and chose to work with the written descriptions of their experience, rather than recordings. A justification of such a choice would emphasise the personal experience and a targeted interview conduction.

Agreeing with the attitude that the 'convergence of soundscape studies and ethnography should be emphasised…', in this article the view that 'diverse approaches to the soundwalk… can be integrated into ethnographic research' (Iscen 2014: 134) is supported. The research compensates for the feature of interaction that has not been used in the current methodological tool, with the use of the obtained data from the interviews: As in-depth interviews potentially provide the investigator with information

directly from the subject under investigation, we decided that this ethnographic method should be developed after the soundwalks.

The two research tools used for this article were the following:
a) intensive listening through soundwalking: a type of soundwalking was held in the city centre of Nicosia in Cyprus and the city centre of Valletta in Malta correspondingly by each author-as-a-researcher of the article. Through this procedure, the characteristic sounds of the places under study were outlined. The soundwalks were conducted on a sunny morning, in both areas, in October 2014 and lasted about 30 minutes each.
b) The individual in-depth interviews: A series of in-depth interviews was applied to inhabitants of the city centre of Nicosia and Malta. Hence, the results were able to provide the researchers with the way people connected with the existing sounds, but also the ones which they can recall.
The sample: Both series of interviews were conducted during the summer of 2014 using an interview guide with common elements, regarding the inhabitants' connection and meaning given to their soundscape and place, sounds they recall and emotions towards what they hear. Among others, participants were asked to recall the sounds they remembered from past years, how they heard the sound change over time and how the soundscape in their area sounds to them now. They were also encouraged to talk about the sounds they would want to preserve, treat or eliminate.

The Data Analysis Method: Our research lens focused on the participants' statements concerning their views and experiences related to the following thematic axes: traffic, machinery, human voice and other, uncategorized sounds which evolved from the discussions. Transcribed interviews were analysed on the basis of thematic axes corresponding to our research questions (Miles & Huberman 1994). Moreover, the method of constant comparative analysis was used to highlight commonalities and differences among the different responses (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The participants' responses were examined with regard to their correspondence to (a) the sounds they define as characteristic, and (b) the sounds they can recall from the past.

Intensive listening through Soundwalking

A soundwalk in Nicosia (Christidis 2014) begins from Paphos' Gate, in the western edge of its southern part. Leaving the traffic of the busy streets behind, the listener enters a silence which is only broken – in terms of the ambient sound – when s/he arrives at the cross point. Until then, his/her footsteps on the narrow roads mix with the ones of few passers by, some of them talking on the phone, or some kitchen sounds from the interior of a balcony with open doors. Arriving at the busy cross point, voices of tourists and locals intertwine with the loud sounds of children and their parents moving around. Crossing the borders, the sounds resonate the activity inside and in front of the checkpoint offices. The sound of the stamps and the 'queuing' activity is eminent, as many times even a group of tourists might stand and patiently check in or out, marking its presence while waiting with their mother tongue's sound – English, German, Russian or Italian. Entering the northern part and heading east, the listener/walker distinguishes more dusty qualities on the roads, and a silence that is broken by the sound of the mechanic shops, car repairs or metal shops, located next to the walker or in more distant places. In the western part of the northern city centre, the

sounds of the market and people shopping or selling their stuff, dry out in the areas where clothes hang on the two sides of a small street, and resonate more freely some meters away. Crossing the borders on the way back to the south, and walking on the western part of this side of the old city, the taverns and coffee shops are so numerous, that one can feel the sound of the people and customers very intensely. The yard of the church is also a place for teenagers, and after crossing it, one can find him/herself in quiet areas, where the ambient city sound is almost unnoticeable and the song of the birds dominates. During the day, one might hear the hodja's call to prayer, the sound of the church bell and other religion-related sounds, such as the liturgy, a prayer, or the sound of the people who gather on the occasion of a ceremony. In many cases, one can listen to these sounds simultaneously.

Figure 1. Map of the Soundwalk in Nicosia (Google Maps, 2014)

A soundwalk in Valletta also begins from the immediate area outside the city walls, where the main bus terminus is, and one can hear buses leaving and parking constantly. The sound of spraying water from the Triton Fountain situated in the middle of the terminus covers the noise of the bus engines. All along the terminus area, there are kiosks selling food and drinks and people who are hanging around them chatting loudly. We walk over the bridge and venture into the city. There is a wave of people walking in either direction and one manages to hear bits of conversation. One can hear Maltese, English, Italian, Spanish, French, Russian, Serbian, African languages, probably Somali or Sudanese or some other. Passing the gate, on either side of Republic Street are two flights of stairs that go to the left and to the right away from the street. The din of chatter, footsteps and construction noise coming from the new parliament building that is still under construction, hangs in the air. Walking further down this main road, one can hear the odd busker. Peruvian pan pipes, acoustic guitars, opera singers, violinists, piano accordions and even an upright piano in front of the law courts where any passer by can sit down and play. And just across the piano, there are people who make and sell handcrafts. The musical fountain at St. Georges Square pulsates in rhythm to the music being played, accompanied by the gleeful laughter of children as they run through the

water and parents snap photos or capture the fun on video. Walking away, one hears a car coming down one of the narrow side roads and turns down into Republic Street. The car passes and beeps its horn due to the amount of tourists and locals crossing at this point. Walking further down the road, the noise of the busy commercial and tourist part of the city starts to fade into the background and the street becomes quieter. There are steps that lead down the pavement and one can hear the irregular sound of footsteps due to the size of the steps which are low but long, not permitting one to go up or down in the regular sequential order of left and right. The rhythm goes: – down, step, step, down or up, step, step, up. The bottom of the Republic Street meets the surrounding ring road, which goes all around the city. One can hear coaches, mini vans and taxi's whizzing by and the sound of horse and coach is a common sound characteristic in this part of the city. The Cabby calls to the passing tourists in a distinct tone and a broken English accent to see whether they want to tour around the city by horse and coach and that it will cost a certain amount of money.

Figure 2. Map of the Soundwalk in Valetta

Similarities in Nicosia and Valletta soundwalks: between urban sound qualities and complexities

The traffic sound qualities in both Nicosia and Valletta appear to vary: in small distances, areas with heavy traffic can be replaced by other, more silent ones, where only pedestrians' activities take place. The locals tend to walk faster than the lounging tourists who are sightseeing and experiencing the world at a different pace. The voices of tourists are distinct in both cases, as they stand out, being foreign languages from the everyday ambience. Along with the tour groups walking by, one can hear the tour guides shouting above all the noise and talking about the Presidents Palace in Valletta or the Monument of Peace in the cross point of Ledra's Street either in Spanish, French

and Italian. There are also a number of different rhythms; in the footsteps, the chatter and the activities, their sounds intermingle with the ones of the local, open-air cafés, like in Republic square in Valletta or in Ledra Street in Nicosia. Along with these, music is present during the soundwalks: from small radios in modest workplaces to powerful hi-fi systems resonating in modern fast-food restaurants or cafés, one will surely notice the existence of commercial music or radio voice in various spots spread along the area.

Sound Concepts	Nicosia	Valletta
Silence	sporadic silent spots	
Noise	construction & rehabilitation Works	
Traffic sound	sporadic horns, cars, buses & truck sounds	
		horse & coach
Human Voice	chatters, talking on the phone, various languages (immigrants & tourists)	
	children & teenagers in yard	children around the fountain
Sounds from interior spaces	radio devices/machines in workspaces/talks	
Market sound	open-air and closed market of traditional character	commercial centre
Religious Sounds	church bell & hodja's call to prayer	church bell
Buskers' sounds		constant presence
Water sound		fountain

Table 2 Sound Components of the soundwalks in Nicosia and Valletta

The inhabitants' Urban Sound through Interviewing

A series of eighteen in-depth interviews (n=18) were carried out in the two Mediterranean urban places: half of the interviews were conducted with people who live in the city centre of Nicosia, and the rest of them with the inhabitants of the cityscape in Malta.[1] The interviewees will be referred to as N1-9 for the people who live Nicosia and M1-9 for Malta's residents.

traffic

In Nicosia, the sound of traffic appears to be of major importance, as, in the interviews, sounds referring to vehicles were often described. N3, N2 and N8 described the sound of it stating that machines and some motorcycles along with cars are audible, especially when a traffic jam happens, as there are one-way streets that result to a dead-end on the wall. Extracting similar data from the soundwalk, the specific area can be imaginably divided into smaller parts, where someone could distinguish a place characterised by heavy or light traffic sound, often disturbed by a sudden barrage of noisy vehicles.
N6 expresses her disturbance by the motorbike sounds, while N7 recalls his baby daughter being woken up in the middle of the night by the loud exhausts of motorbikes passing by her window. The sound of the horn is paradoxically praised by N8, who shows sympathy towards it:

> "Disturbing car horns don't disturb me… I don't know, I like the horn. Me too, when I drive, the hand… [showing his hand on the horn button]. If I could, I would have it pressed and I would keep on driving…"

In the same attitude, inhabitants of Malta commented negatively on the traffic noise. It was described as annoying and causing displeasure: Every interviewee described an increase in traffic over the years. Interviewees M3, M5, M6 and M8 described how traffic increased in their areas due to shops opening next to residencies, while M1 and M4 described how the displeasing low rumble of trucks, coaches and buses would go through the walls. As M1 described it:

> "Since all the traffic goes around the ring road (of Valletta) you get a lot of trucks, vans and heavy vehicles and the low vibration from their engines can be felt going through the walls. It is an unpleasant sound!"

Other interviewees described how traffic increased due to shops such as grocers, take aways, stationers, confectioneries and other convenience stores. Anyhow, both cases' inhabitants detest traffic sounds, especially their appearance in a dense form, whereas they highly appreciate their absence, when this happens.

machinery

In the city centre of Nicosia, there are sporadic construction works, which resonate during the working hours. This sound ceases when the works are finished, but there are still workplaces using heavy machinery and noisy tools, to repair cars or construct metal or wooden stuff. N9, a worker in the area of interest states that:

> "the only sound I hear is my own machines… When those work, no matter whether there are other noises around, you don't get to hear them. And even after you switch it off that sound stays in your ears for a long while."

In Malta's case M6, M7 and M8, described construction sound and showed their displeasure towards the loud, metallic sounds that often vibrated through their homes and was constant throughout the days. Construction sounds are temporary since they are only present when new buildings are constructed in the vicinity or when road works are taking place. M4 described how the sound of the Freeport becomes amplified when the wind is blowing from that direction.

In both cases, machinery sounds are present – should these concern workshops, repair-shops, construction, or airplanes crossing the air, the human-as a machine operator-presence is evident, and characterises a part of the identity of these two urban areas.

human voice

The main characteristics of human voice that were identified were in both cases were: People talking on the streets, Children playing and Street vendor calls.

'People talking on the streets' refers to people who see each other walking by and stop for a chat, or people who pass by and their voices resonate in the space. The conversations are described as sometimes being heard in the interviewees' house, as in M2's case, where it was described that even being two storeys away from the road the conversations are so loud that M2 knows exactly what is being said. He describes:

> "I get to know all the news of the town. They shout so much that you can hear every word they are saying. In Qormi (town) people are very loud…".

Similarly, in Nicosia's city centre, N3 declares to be able to listen to the dialogues taking place out of his shop.

M1 described how one could hear the many different languages (English, French, Italian, Polish) being spoken by the numerous tourists walking by on the streets and sat down at cafés and bars. N2, a worker in Nicosia in the tourism industry not only stresses the existence of such languages in his place, but also mentions the sounds of the languages of the immigrants: Sri-Lankan, Pakistani, Bulgarian are heard in the city centre of Nicosia, while in Malta the presence of Somali, Sudanese and Nigerian is distinct.

The sound of Children playing and running about in Malta has become a ghost of the past. All interviewees described how years ago the sound of children playing outside was common. As the years passed this activity slowly came to an end. In the case of M5 and M7 they described that they still hear children playing in the School Playgrounds that are close to their homes, but they do not hear children playing outside the school playgrounds any more. On the contrary, in the city centre of Nicosia, the sound of children playing is still present, mostly where schools have an open playground. N2 and N4 would also state their annoyance by their shouting and their voices, N1 argued accordingly for the adolescents making noise when gathering:

> "Anarchists, who make events, they make… they gather here… in general the place is open for all these… who either we want them or not, we have to live with them".

Instead, N9 would describe their sound presence as something pleasant with a vital role in the area.

Street Vendor Calls all had their own specific sound where they would call out what they were selling in their own way. M6 and M7 described how they could never comprehend what it was that the street vendor was actually saying, but they could recognize him from his actual call. Maltese interviewees preferred the old, traditional way where the street vendor would use his own voice rather than the 'hi-tech' approach, with the use of loudspeakers. Specifically, M4 notes:

> "I remember the street vendors all around the town square all selling their stuff and shouting out with their voices across the town square. But then they started using loudspeakers and it wasn't the same. They should go back to using their voices. It had a lot more character".

A complaint on the use of the speaker is also expressed by M6:

> "The street vendors used to come round to our street selling fish, vegetables, bread and all sorts of things, it was a nice to hear them call and all the different calls too. They are not so frequent now and a lot of them use those speaker things and they don't sound the same. The real shouts sounded like something more authentic and traditional".

In Nicosia, it has been observed that a speaker is rarely used. Without any electronic amplification, and with the sound of the cart he is pushing following him,

> "Mahallebici, Sulu Mahallebici"[2]

is what a street vendor shouts when selling this warm drink in the northern part of Nicosia, as N9 indicates. Also, M2 comments:

> "I remember the street vendors and how they all used to sound their horns and shout with their unique calls. Nobody could really understand what they were saying, but you could tell who was selling what from the way the shouted (laughs)… Then they advanced in technology and they started using loud speakers and guess what? It made it even worse because you couldn't understand what they were saying more than before (laughs)…".

other sounds

Animal Sounds: A sound which is no longer heard in the towns of Zabbar and Ghaxaq is the sound of a farmer walking through the streets with his herd of sheep or goats. The sound of hooves, the odd bleating and the bells tied around the necks of all the animals was always accompanied by shouts and whistles of the farmer who kept the herd in

place with his certain commands. Both M7 and M8 described how they would wait for the farmer to pass – accordingly, in the city centre of Nicosia, the sound of farm animals is remembered with nostalgia by N6, who mentions the past presence of chickens and cows around the neighbourhood.

Religious Sounds form a category that is often observed and commented during the interviews. In Nicosia, the resonance of both church bells and the hodja's call to prayer are prominent. N2 indicates:

> "Sometimes, the imams are praying here from minaret, but very near from south, just hundred yards away from here, sometimes we hear the bells over here. It's a cultural mix over here, you know, so as long as it's not too much every time noisy, it doesn't give you a problem".

The sound of the church bell is regarded as a timekeeper for both case studies. M8 and M9 report the time keeping role of the bell, while N6 and N7 from Nicosia immediately connect everyday activities with its regular appearance on the sonic environment. In Malta, M7 comments on the role of time keeping:

> "The Church bells keep the time. I think they are important because you can plan your day around them especially since there are different chimes for different times of the day".

Assuming the data that were generated by the interviews, regarding the sounds that appear in the areas under research, the following table is generated:

Sound Categories	Nicosia	Malta
Traffic	sporadic traffic jam, low rumble, motorbikes	
		heavy traffic
Machinery	machines from the workplaces	heavy construction
		aeroplanes
Human Voice	street chats foreign languages (tourists and immigrants) people talking on the streets/balconies/public space	
	radio voice presence	
	children playing/teenagers hanging around	
	street vendor calls	
Animal Sounds	dogs & cats	
Religious Sounds	church bell	
	hodja's call to prayer	

Table 3 Sound categories as formed through the interviews

Results and discussion

Detrimental sounds that seem to disturb people are mostly the ones caused by the resonance of urban traffic, especially when this is characterised as 'loud' to the ears of the inhabitants. On this, one could say that the constant presence of the lo-fi sound environment in the areas under study appears noticeable and disturbing, however not as disturbing as the frequent appearances of loud exhausts of specially modified motorcycles. Traffic, however, through its sound appears to declare human presence in the area, and this on a few occasions is regarded as something comforting for some people, as the analysis has shown. Nonetheless, one cannot say that the soundscapes, as described by these eighteen interviewees, approach a silent character in both Mediterranean urban areas of interest. On the contrary, a variety of sounds contribute to a loud and noisy soundscape. Supporting this discussion, N8 at a certain point claims accordingly:

> "I believe us Cypriots are villagers in general, I cannot explain this, not the kind of the villagers who come from the village. Villagers, in a sense that we like the fuss, we like noise".[3]

This statement not only encourages a perception of people desiring action to be declared through sound, even if this is a loud car horn, but also pictures a tension in the Mediterranean cityscape, where many sound sources are often based on this culture.
Either the sound of construction works, specialized machines in workplaces or rehabilitation works, machinery sounds emerged often in both places. Heat is an

important factor that should be taken into account at this point. Were the overall temperatures lower, people would spend more time inside their residencies/workplaces, detached from the external sound. It seems that the centre of Nicosia appears to keep some more traditional 'silent' elements compared to Malta's soundscapes, mainly in terms of the nature of the vendor calls, construction and traffic qualities. One could not disregard, however, the role of the church bell, in both areas, and the hodja's call to prayer in the case of Nicosia, sounds which often function as clocks modulating everyday life.

Conclusion

This article used a qualitative research of the soundscapes of two contemporary urban areas with similar geographical characteristics in the area of the Mediterranean region, and moved towards a definition of the relation of their inhabitants with the sounds. The description of the sonic experience demonstrated two rich-in-variety soundscapes, characterised by common elements and sound textures. The sounds of the church bells, the street vendors or more intensively, the traffic itself were discovered to be distinctively audible in both research areas, even if the two cases are not characterised by the same sound qualities. However, during the soundwalks, distinctive sound features emerged that seem to fit a format of an emerging contemporary urban sound environment. Qualitative accuracy regarding the research questions was followed by the realization of in-depth interviews with the inhabitants of these urban places.
Traffic, tourists, children and machines are proven to generate vital sound elements of the everyday experience, while religion-related sounds are also distinctive, and seem to be able to characterise people's bonds with the place. Also, as shown, sounds that have now disappeared and remembered in the interviews appear able to provoke discussions around this matter too.
The way inhabitants describe noise qualities, noise levels and detrimental or characteristic sounds of contemporary Mediterranean urban places and connect to them, their non-verbal behaviour included, shows an attitude of paying attention and satisfaction, also regardless of the disturbance some of them might cause. Most importantly, the article traced elements of homogeneity in the soundscapes of the two areas under study, and outlined the cases where the sound qualities were different.
The material presented in this article aims at an in-depth appreciation of the findings which would provide a social, ethnological impression of the Mediterranean, what it sounds like and how its inhabitants live in relationship with these sounds. In such context, determining possible further research actions based on the outcomes of the article, future research could be well organised having a study team at its centre, which would delve into the investigation of sound in the general area of the Mediterranean, using qualitative ethnographic methods to realize similar studies across its cities.

Footnotes

1. The data gathered for this study was a part of Christidis' doctoral on-going research on the soundmarks of the city centre of Nicosia, and the continuation of the pilot project of the Maltese Soundscape, which was the basis for the research of Quinton & McGregor (2014).
2. Mahlab: aromatic spice, made from a species of cherry, used in Middle Eastern countries.
3. The word "villager' in the Cypriot dialect is not only used in order to describe the origin of a person i.e. an individual residing in or coming from a village. It is often used in a pejorative sense, aiming to attribute the characteristic of "loudness" referring to the "loud" people coming from a village.

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Bio

Yiannis Christidis has studied Cultural Technology and Communication at the University of the Aegean and holds an MSc in Sound Design from the University of Edinburgh. He has designed sound and music for audiovisual products, web applications, radio productions and theatrical activities. His research focuses on the relationship between sound and image, soundscape studies, sound culture, noise and their effects and applications through new technologies and the internet.

Michael Quinton is a Sound Designer and Sound Engineer, and holds an MSc in Sound Design from Edinburgh Napier University. Michael has worked on sound designs for Theatre Plays and sound installations and has also worked on sound designs and composed music for short animation films and documentaries. Michael has also conducted a soundscape study on the Maltese Soundscape and has also worked on sonification for a planetarium. He is currently conducting research on Sonification at Edinburgh Napier University.