

## How Do Citizen Diplomacy Practices Affect Country Image? A Study on International Students\*

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### ABSTRACT

Individual relations, which are relatively outside of institutional and entrepreneurial structures, play an important role in forming images of countries in the international arena. The relationship between this process, which is defined as citizen diplomacy in the literature, and country image stands out as a remarkable issue. As a part of soft power organizations, the reflections of the accumulation that emerges from the relational activities of citizens in social layers in terms of the country's image are important. While there are many studies on the role of top organizations in the literature, the effectiveness of citizen diplomacy, especially in constructing country's image, has not been sufficiently determined, which constitutes the starting point of this study. The main problem of the study is the dynamics within which citizen diplomacy finds space for existence in its channel, the themes in which the interaction processes are clustered, and the results of this relational process for the country image in total. The research aims to determine the relationship between country image and citizen diplomacy and to analyze citizen diplomacy within the framework of experiences. In this context, 20 international students studying at Erciyes University were reached through the snowball sampling, and in-depth interviews were conducted. The data obtained was analyzed in line with the experiences within the scope of phenomenological research. As a result of the study, it was revealed that citizen diplomacy activities exhibit a strong link with the country's image. In this context, the images of countries established through professional initiatives (media content, etc.) or well-established initiatives at the formal level (schools, etc.) are completely destroyed or strengthened as a result of citizen diplomacy activities.

**Keywords:** Citizen Diplomacy, Soft Power, Public Diplomacy Country Image, International Students.

## Vatandaş Diplomasisi Etkinlikleri Ülke İmajını Nasıl Etkiliyor? Uluslararası Öğrenciler Üzerine Bir Araştırma

### ÖZ

Uluslararası sahada ülkelerle ilgili imajların oluşumunda görece kurumsal ve girişimsel yapıların dışında seyreden bireysel ilişkiler önemli yer tutmaktadır. Literatürde vatandaş diplomasisi şeklinde tanımlanan bu sürecin ülke imajıyla ilişkisi dikkate değer bir konu olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Yumuşak güç organizasyonlarının bir parçası olarak toplumsal katmanlarda vatandaşların ilişkisel faaliyetleri sonucunda ortaya çıkan birikimin ülke imajı açısından yansımaları önem arz etmektedir. Nitekim, literatürde üst organizasyonların rolüne ilişkin çok sayıda çalışma bulunurken vatandaş diplomasisinin özellikle ülke imajının inşasındaki etkinliğinin yeterince tespit edilememiş olması bu çalışmanın çıkış noktasını oluşturmaktadır. Vatandaş diplomasisinin kendi mecrasında hangi dinamikler çerçevesinde varlık alanı bulduğu, etkileşim süreçlerinin hangi temalarda kümelendiği ve toplamda bu ilişkisel sürecin ülke imajı için ortaya çıkardığı sonuçlar araştırmanın ana problemini teşkil etmektedir. Araştırmada ülke imajının vatandaş diplomasisiyle ilişkisinin saptanarak, vatandaş diplomasisinin deneyimler çerçevesinde çözümlenmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda Erciyes Üniversitesi'nde öğrenim gören 20 uluslararası öğrenciye kartopu örnekleme yöntemiyle ulaşılmış ve derinlemesine mülakat gerçekleştirilmiştir. Fenomenolojik araştırma kapsamında deneyimler doğrultusunda elde edilen veriler incelenmiştir. Çalışma sonucunda vatandaş diplomasisi etkinliklerinin ülke imajıyla güçlü bir bağ sergilediği ortaya konulmuştur. Bu bağlamda profesyonel girişimlerle (medya içerikleri vd.) ya da formal düzlemdeki köklü girişimler (okul vb.) yoluyla ülkelerle ilgili kurulan imajlar, vatandaş diplomasisi etkinlikleri sonucunda tamamen yıkılmakta ya da güçlenmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Vatandaş Diplomasisi, Yumuşak Güç, Kamu Diplomasisi, Ülke İmajı, Uluslararası Öğrenciler.

\* This article is produced from Dr. Tarık Kodal's PhD Thesis Titled " The Relationship Between Citizen Diplomacy And Country Image: A Phenomenological Analysis" prepared at Erciyes University's Institute of Social Sciences under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Faruk Temel.

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Makale Gönderim ve Kabul Tarihleri/ Article Submission and Acceptance Dates: 21.01.2025-18.06.2025

**Citation/Atf:** Kodal, T., & Temel, F. (2025). How do citizen diplomacy practices affect country image? a study on international students. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 57, 283-300. <https://doi.org/10.52642/susbed.1624392>

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## 1. Introduction

Citizen diplomacy, although related to public diplomacy in the literature, has emerged as a distinct field of study due to the intensification of academic research and the diversification of country practices. One of the first works in the field was "International Relations: Citizen Diplomacy" by James Marshall (1949). According to Marshall, 'If, as we now widely believe, it is people and not states that are the ultimate foundations of goodwill, then every possible means should be explored to enable people to plan and participate in the expression of international goodwill.' It draws attention to the important role that citizens can play in world peace. Mueller's study "The Nexus of U.S. Public Diplomacy and Citizen Diplomacy" is one of the steps that shaped the concept of citizen diplomacy. Mueller (2009) discusses the practical and theoretical aspects of the concept in his study. However, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, citizen diplomacy gradually gained currency among international relations experts and foreign policymakers (Fulda, 2019). Citizen diplomacy has come to be understood as an alternative problem-solving strategy that underpins the role that non-state actors can play in mitigating complex inter-state relations, helping to resolve entrenched conflicts that political leaders and the private sector alone cannot resolve (Fulda, 2019). On the other hand, the concept of the role of citizens in international relations becomes an alternative strategy to accompany and support the diplomatic initiatives taken by the government in solving problems. (Harini & Webster, 2020). In this context, the efforts of the atomic bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, called Hibakusha, to save people from the catastrophe of nuclear annihilation, and the people of Nagasaki City, through their voices and actions, are important examples of the power of citizen diplomacy. These actions demonstrate their pivotal role in the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the opportunities it presents for Nagasaki to strengthen and expand its citizen diplomacy (Richards, 2023).

In Türkiye, studies in the literature started to take place within the framework of public diplomacy in the late 2000s. In 2007, Watson's master's thesis titled "Mitigating anti-Americanism in Türkiye through Public Diplomacy" at Bilkent University was the first of these studies. In this study, Watson (2007) discusses the role of public diplomacy in relations between the two countries. Watson's study was followed by another master's thesis in 2010, two master's theses, and various articles in 2011. Since 2012, there has been a significant increase in the number of theses and articles written on public diplomacy. It is also observed that academic studies on public diplomacy are interdisciplinary and cover various fields such as international relations, communication, journalism, public relations, sociology, law, psychology, psychology, and public policy (Avci, 2021).

When the impact areas of citizen diplomacy are evaluated, a strong relationship with the country's image stands out. In the literature, studies in this direction are quite insufficient. Although the insufficiency of studies addressing the concepts in a related manner is noticeable, there are close studies. Although the studies were not directly addressed in the context of citizen diplomacy, they were evaluated in a way that may be related within the framework of country image factors. A study conducted in Colombia is an example of this approach. As a matter of fact, the foreign visitors in the study perform a citizen diplomacy activity in a sense: In 2013, a qualitative study conducted on foreign visitors from the eight countries in the Americas that send the most visitors to Colombia revealed that Colombia's image is not unidimensional but multi-dimensional. The study identifies five dimensions that influence a country's image: Knowledge about the country, industrial orientation, visitor attitudes, perceptions of expectations and preferences, and finally, image-related interests. (Cañas, Horst, & Parra, 2015). Again, Ruddy's (2014) study on the relationship between national cuisine and image, conducted with 140 participants in the United States, provides an important example of the relationship between citizen diplomacy practices and country image. The study revealed that 55.71% of the participants changed their opinions about a country after eating a dish from its national cuisine. The study's data pointed to the transformative potential that country cuisine can play in the perception of the country's image. The study found that exposure to a particular country's cuisine is essentially a positive experience, and 84% of respondents would consider traveling to a country based on its national cuisine. On the other hand, the relationship between country image and travel stands out as one of the important issues mentioned by Yousef (2023). Country image, travel intention, and happiness are interrelated constructs. Country image has a direct positive effect on

travel motivation (Matiza, 2022). It shows that post-travel tourists have a more positive destination image than pre-travel tourists (Yu & Zhang, 2020). On the other hand, the findings in Matiza's (2022) study indicate that a lack of country image can harm the perceived attractiveness of a destination.

In one of the studies conducted in Türkiye, the change in individuals regarding the country image before and after visiting the country, which can also be considered as related to travel, was examined. Yıldırım and Akbulut (2017) conducted a questionnaire study to determine whether there is a significant difference between international students' evaluations of Türkiye's reputation before and after coming to Türkiye and applied Mann-Whitney U test from nonparametric tests. As a result of the research, they concluded that there were no significant differences between the dimensions in the evaluation of attractiveness dimensions. It was evaluated that there was no change since the students had positive opinions about Türkiye before coming to Türkiye and maintained these positive views after coming to Türkiye. Media elements also play an important role in forming and changing a country's image. In this context, studies have revealed the effects of cinema, series, and TV channel content on the country's image. Cruz and Lacap (2023), who examined the role of movies in visiting a country and the country's image, determined that movie-related effects are inseparable factors in the formation of a viewer's intention to visit a destination in the field of film tourism. Again, in Morales' (2021) study examining the attitudes of viewers in Latin America towards Chinese, Russian, and Iranian channels, it was observed that perceived cultural distance prevented viewers from following the channels. According to Ogunnubi and Aja (2022), since the media also plays a critical role in shaping people's opinions, ideas, and perspectives, more care should be taken when reporting on immigration issues, and harmful racial stereotypes should be removed from the news content. Similarly, public officials and political leaders/figures should accept that their views, speeches, and actions determine people's behavior and reactions, and should be an example to society. Again, in one of the studies in this context, it was shown that between 1985 and 1989, hundreds of Soviet citizens came to the United States through projects initiated by American activists who feared nuclear war and hoped to improve relations with the USSR; Soviet visitors received extensive media coverage; and the programs had an impact on attitudes in many American towns and cities (Foglesong, 2020).

Like the media, culture, arts, and sports activities also play an important role in influencing the image of a country. A study of artistic activities in Indonesia serves as an example of this. It is to explain the participation of women as agents of citizen diplomacy by introducing Indonesian culture. Harini and Webster (2020), in their study titled Women Participation As Agent Of Citizen's Diplomacy Through Solo International Performing Art (SIRPA), found that it contributes to the promotion of Javanese culture through International Solo Performing Art and is among the supportive elements of the Indonesian government to strengthen relations with other countries.

Within the research scope, international students' effects on country images as a result of citizen diplomacy activities stand out. Considering that the number of university students in Türkiye has increased in recent years, it can be stated that the increase in the proportion of international students in this number has attracted attention. While there were approximately 18 thousand registered international students in Türkiye in 2000, this figure has reached more than 300 thousand international students from 198 countries by 2022. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics data, Türkiye hosts 2.9% of the world's international students. Between 2000 and 2020, when we compare the number of international students enrolled in higher education, we see that the rate of increase in the number of international students in Türkiye is higher than the rates of increase in countries such as the US and the UK. Moreover, according to the data provided by statistics, the number of international students has increased 1.7 times in the US, 2.5 times in the UK, and 10 times in Türkiye. In addition, the trajectory of current education policies suggests that Türkiye will be one of the top 10 countries with the highest number of international students worldwide. Increased student mobility and internationalization in Türkiye will contribute to cultural dialogue, interaction, and other policies (Yıldırım, 2015). In recent years, international students have been coming to Türkiye from countries with language, religion, and cultural ties, such as Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Somalia. These indicators show how important the transfer of cultural capital is. Türkiye's political/economic and geopolitical attractiveness will contribute to

a stronger center of attraction with multi-layered, integrated, effective, and efficient policies that appeal more globally. The development of new policies will also increase Türkiye's level of economic and scientific gain. In light of this information, the new and changing environment reveals an important area of investigation for the study.

Although it is possible to find certain studies in the literature on the activities of international students that can be included in the framework of citizen diplomacy, these studies remain limited in terms of scope and content. This study adopts a unique perspective by addressing the impact of international students on the country image in the context of citizen diplomacy. The research differs from the studies in the literature within the framework of its aim to determine the dimensions of the relationship between citizen diplomacy and country image. The research aims to reveal the relationship between citizen diplomacy activities and country image in this context. The unique characteristic of this study is that it deals with the experiences of international students within the framework of first-hand narratives and with a phenomenological perspective.

## 2. Research Design

Citizen diplomacy encompasses interpersonal activities that define a formal or informal relational process that may exist as a result of or independently of diplomatic relations between countries. The main problem of the research is the dynamics within which these activities find a space of existence, the themes in which the interaction processes are clustered, and the picture that this relational process reveals for the image of the country in total. In this context, examining the nature of the relations established by international students in Türkiye for their education emerges as an important route to describe citizen diplomacy. As a matter of fact, the results related to the country's image, depending on the relational processes of international students, are the primary focus of the research. The question of how the outputs of the citizen diplomacy process in the interaction of the individual and the environment affect the country's image constitutes the starting point of the research.

Within the framework of the decision taken during the meeting by Erciyes University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee dated 25/10/2022 and numbered 467; the study does not contain any ethical issues.

### 2.1. Methodology of the Research

This study aims to determine the process of change in the image of the country depending on the citizen diplomacy activities of international students. In this context, the qualitative research approach is in line with the purpose and scope of the study. The study is shaped by the possibilities offered by the phenomenological research approach in terms of how international students perceive their experiences in Türkiye and their own countries in the context of citizen diplomacy and the interactions they establish with others within the framework of country image. Phenomenology, a research method in which participants narrate, describe, and reflect on their experiences, contributes to understanding the experiences of the participants and touches the depths of these experiences. In exploring these experiences, interviews are usually conducted (Creswell J. W., 2017, s. 14). Within the framework of the phenomenological design, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 international students focusing on the concept of citizen diplomacy and it was aimed to describe and discuss the experiences in line with the data analysis. In this direction, subcategories were examined in line with the theme determined as the outcomes of the citizen diplomacy process in the interaction of the individual and the environment.

**Table 1. Research Theme and Categories**

<b>The outcomes of the citizen diplomacy process in the interaction between the individual and the environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The process of change in the country's image before and after the international student status in citizen diplomacy.</li> <li>• Change as a result of the interaction between the individual and the environment</li> <li>• Tangible and intangible outputs in the citizen diplomacy process</li> </ul>
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## 2.2. Research Field and Group

The field of study consists of international students at various levels (undergraduate-graduate-doctorate) studying at Erciyes University. According to the Higher Education Information Management System data, there are 3109 international students from 109 countries in Erciyes University in the 2022-2023 academic year. In qualitative research, it is generally seen that the non-probability sampling approach is preferred. Non-probability sampling can be divided into two types: purposeful or purposive sampling. In this study, a purposive and snowball sampling approach was adopted. International students, whose numbers and information are given above, were selected from the research area, and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 international students by the snowball sampling technique and with their guidance while the interview process was continuing with them.

**Table 2.** Demographic Characteristics of the Research Group

Pseudonym	Country	Gender	Age	Duration of Stay in Türkiye
K1	Democratic Republic of Congo	Male	25-30	5-7 Years
K2	North Macedonia	Male	25-30	5-7 Years
K3	Afghanistan	Male	20-24	3-5 Years
K4	Yemen	Female	20-24	3-5 Years
K5	Egypt	Male	20-24	3-5 Years
K6	Bangladesh	Male	31-40	5-7 Years
K7	Chad	Male	25-30	5-7 Years
K8	Kosovo	Male	20-24	3-5 Years
K9	Azerbaijan	Male	20-24	3-5 Years
K10	Morocco	Female	20-24	5-7 Years
K11	Kyrgyzstan	Male	20-24	3-5 Years
K12	China	Male	20-24	5-7 Years
K13	Ivory Coast	Male	25-30	3-5 Years
K14	Mongolia	Female	20-24	5-7 Years
K15	Iran	Male	20-24	3-5 Years
K16	Indonesia	Female	20-24	3-5 Years
K17	Kazakhstan	Female	20-24	3-5 Years
K18	Nepal	Male	20-24	5-7 Years
K19	Pakistan	Male	20-24	3-5 Years
K20	South Africa	Male	25-30	3-5 Years

When the demographic characteristics of the participants are analyzed, it is seen that all participants are from different countries. When the distribution of countries according to continents is analyzed, it is understood that there are 12 countries from Asia, six countries from Africa, and two countries from Europe. It can be stated that this distribution is similar to the general distribution of international students coming to Türkiye for education according to regions. According to gender, there are 15 male and five female participants. In terms of age distribution, 14 participants were between the ages of 20-24, 5 participants were between the ages of 25-30, and 1 participant was between the ages of 30-40. According to the length of stay in Türkiye, 12 participants have been living in Türkiye for 3 to 5 years, while 8 participants have been living in Türkiye for 5 to 7 years. In order to conceal the identities of the participants, their ages and the number of years they have been living in Türkiye are not given in exact numbers but in interval numbers.

## 2.3. Data Analysis of the Research

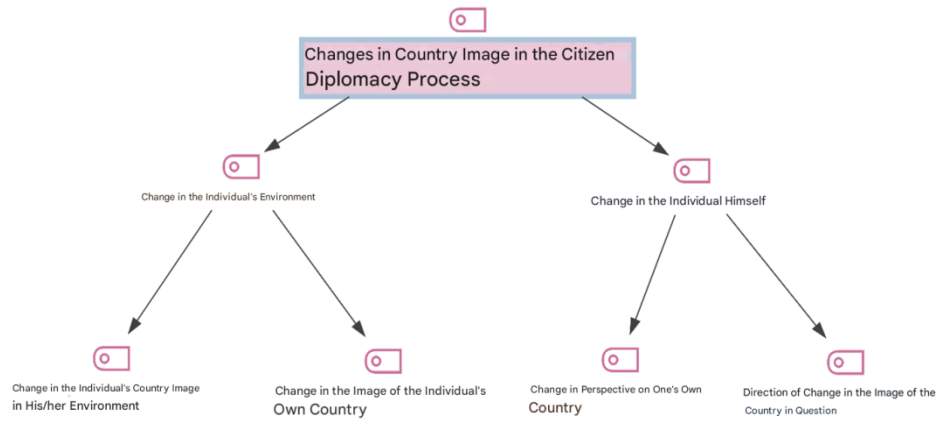
Within the scope of the research, the process of formulating the questions started with the identification of the main themes that were questioned in the conceptual framework of the study, and was followed in the field study. Questions were developed around the main themes, and the questionnaire was shared with the interviewees. This step constituted the basic preparation process for data analysis. In the process of analyzing the findings, MaxQDA 2022 was used for coding, mapping, and visual data. Creswell's (2018) data analysis spiral was used to analyze the data as presented below;

- The interview data obtained were organized as computer files in the data organization phase.
- The texts obtained were subjected to a detailed reading in the reading and taking reminder notes stage.

- In the thematization, classification, and interpretation stage, the main themes constructed while preparing the questions were used to classify the texts read.
- In the interpretation process, the classification was taken to a higher level, and abstractions were made that allowed for the comprehensive meaning of the data.
- In the final stage, the data were presented.

### 3. Change in the Country Image in the Citizen Diplomacy Process

The relationship between citizen diplomacy and country image is analyzed through the experiences of international students. The findings reveal the relationship between citizen diplomacy activities and country image. Within the scope of the research, two categories were formed under the theme of “Opinions on Country Image in the Process of Citizen Diplomacy”: Change in the Individual and Change in the Individual's Environment.



**Figure 1.** Hierarchical Code-Subcode Demonstration for the Theme of Change in Country Image in the Process of Citizen Diplomacy

Many elements shape the perceived image of a country. However, the image that individuals have about a country as a result of their own direct experiences is shaped as a result of their experiences, with external factors greatly diminishing. The study attempted to understand both the change in the image of Türkiye in students' minds and the changes in their images of their own country. On the other hand, while individuals change their thoughts about both Türkiye and their own country, it is also seen that during this process, they affect their social circles with whom they communicate, and thus change their images of both Türkiye and their own country. Participants were questioned about their pre- and post-trip perceptions about. It is seen that there are differences between the students' previously perceived image and the image of Türkiye they have after living in Türkiye. It is seen that this change can be caused by many different factors, such as economic, cultural, political, geographical, and religious. Interestingly, while some participants believed that Turkish people were more secular before they came, others believed that they were more religious. However, they stated that they encountered a different situation once they arrived. Similarly, there are also participants who stated that they previously thought Türkiye was more or less developed than it was. This situation emerges as an example of the perception of the country's image being quite different from the country's actual situation. On the other hand, it is seen that those who have more knowledge about Türkiye have less change in their views about Türkiye.

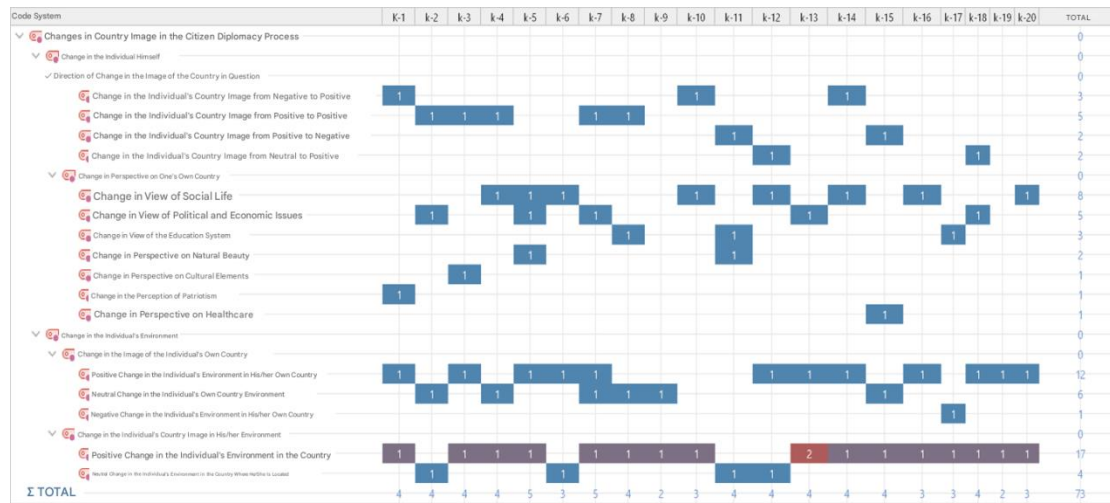


Figure 2. Views on the Country Image in the Citizen Diplomacy Process by Participants

The theme of Views on the Country Image in the Citizen Diplomacy Process was examined according to the participants. Accordingly, the participants focused on the codes of change in the view of social life, positive change in the individual's environment in his/her own country, and positive change in the individual's environment in the country he/she is in.

### 3.1. Change in the Individual Herself/Himself

Under the category of Change in the Individual, two subcategories were created under the titles of Change Direction in the Image of the Current Country and Change in Perspective on the Own Country.

#### 3.1.1. Change Direction in the Image of the Current Country

When the participants' image change direction regarding Türkiye was examined, four codes were created in line with the opinions. These are: Change in the Image of the Current Country from Positive to Positive in the Individual, Change in the Image of the Current Country from Negative to Positive in the Individual, Change in the Image of the Current Country from Positive to Negative in the Individual, and Change in the Image of the Current Country from Neutral to Positive in the Individual.

##### -Change in the Image of the Current Country from Positive to Positive in the Individual

While the participants' views on Türkiye were positive before they came to the country, they remained positive after a specific period of time in Türkiye. Participants expressed various opinions at this point.

K-2: "Before coming, I had tiny idea about Türkiye. My impression was generally positive, and it still is. People in Türkiye, especially in Anatolia, are very warm. You meet them quickly, and they behave very sincerely. I also visited Istanbul many times, but the people there are not as warm. Türkiye is a powerful country, and it has made significant progress in recent years, both in construction and technology."

K-3: "Before coming to Türkiye, I knew it from TV series; I used to watch many Turkish series. Apart from the series, I didn't know much about Türkiye. In the series, they show beautiful places and historical sites, and I thought of it as beautiful. Now, Türkiye feels like my second home. It was just as I expected. I really wanted to come to Türkiye, and it turned out even better than I had hoped."

K-7: "Before coming, I knew about Türkiye from TV series, books we read, and Ottoman history. I thought of it as a big and developed country. I came here for education, for my future, because I knew the education was good. After coming, I wasn't disappointed; I found what I was hoping for. I wasn't too surprised. Living here has added a lot to me. If I hadn't come here, I wouldn't be the person I am now."

The statement "People in Anatolia are very warm" mentioned by K-2 reveals that Türkiye's local culture creates a positive effect in the eyes of foreigners. Sincerity between people stands out as a factor that reinforces trust and understanding between countries. In addition, K-3's statement, "Türkiye is like my second home," describes how strong personal ties can be and how the ties people establish with the place

they live can serve as a diplomatic bridge. In this sense, cultural interaction and human relations, perceptions, education, and media content appear to be elements that reinforce the country's image positively. The importance of sincere ties established between individuals in the process of citizen diplomacy emerges.

**-Change in the individual's country image from negative to positive**

It is understood that the participants' views about Türkiye were negative before they came to the country, but they became positive during their time in Türkiye. This situation also shows that the individual who carries out the citizen diplomacy process is both an influencer and the one who is influenced.

K-1: "Before I came, I thought it was a dictatorship country; I thought there was no freedom of expression. There were a lot of bombs going off before. But when I came, we saw that there was no dictatorship. Everyone can think differently; there is freedom, and there are different parties. Why was I thinking of a dictatorship? Because that's what they told us. The Westerners were showing it like that. They are showing it like that now. I lived in Türkiye, but I haven't seen such a dictatorship. Especially in Africa, they talk a lot like that. For example, they talk about Türkiye and the Turks as very warlike and very aggressive, but people are people everywhere. In Western countries, everyone shoots at each other, but they don't show that; they show Muslim countries as killing each other in the media. My father motivated me a lot to come to Türkiye. My father used to read books about the Ottoman Empire."

K-10: "I started to think about Türkiye in a completely different way now. Before I came, I thought people were not very understanding, but people are generally friendly. My Turkish friends did not want to greet us in the first grade. They were hesitant to talk to us, but we say, we did not come from another planet. Now we have become friends. Before I came to Türkiye, I thought people were not very Muslim, but there is a mosque, a masjid every 20 meters. People go to Friday prayers. There is a place to pray everywhere. I thought that they only say Islam in their language, but there is no such thing at all. I thought there were no women wearing headscarves, but I was surprised when I came here. We only saw Emine Erdoğan wearing a headscarf; we thought the others were not. Türkiye is not as it seems from the outside. In fact, not every country is as it seems from the outside. When you enter, you feel like you have entered a different world. People's lifestyles can change depending on the region and climate conditions."

"K-14: "I thought the people were very harsh, harsher than us. I thought there were terrorist incidents. I thought the people were colder, but after I came, it changed completely. I saw that the people were a thousand times warmer than us. When I go to Mongolia now, I feel more uncomfortable. I don't know how people will respond to me, but I can guess in Türkiye, if I say this to someone, they will respond like this; if I do that to someone, they will respond like this."

These statements provide valuable examples that emphasize the importance of strengthening citizen diplomacy. The fact that a person experiences their previous negative or limited perceptions and evolves into a positive process shows that citizen diplomacy effectively breaks down prejudices and changes perceptions. In this context, individual experiences seem to be a highly effective form of action in eliminating misunderstandings and prejudices between people. K-10 states that he thought people were "inconsiderate" before coming to Türkiye, but later observed that they were sincere and open-minded. This similarly shows how his negative thoughts about countries can be broken through personal interactions. It can be said that people getting closer to each other and understanding each other will allow for healthier and more secure ties to be established in international relations. On the other hand, K-1 states that negative perceptions about Türkiye are primarily shaped by the influence of Western media and external sources. This situation exemplifies the false information and stereotypes people have about different cultures. Such perceptions are reinforced by the media and sometimes by political discourse. At this point, citizen diplomacy allows people to transform these negative perceptions after their own observations and direct experiences.

**-Change in the individual's country image from positive to negative**

Some participants stated that the image of the country they live in has changed from positive to negative.

K-11: "I thought it was wonderful before I came, but now I see that it is normal. I realized that it is less developed than I expected. I thought it was more developed."

K-15: "I saw Türkiye as a very European country. I thought that if you worked hard, you would rise quickly. But here, too, relationships are important in rising."



**-Change in the individual's country image from neutral to positive**

K-12: " I didn't know anything about Türkiye before I came. However, the people are very friendly, the food culture is excellent. I found education easy, and I think people do not care about getting an education. When you look at Türkiye next to the rich, it looks perfect. When you live with the poor, it looks different. When you meet different people, it looks different. So there is no clear answer, but Türkiye is a beautiful country."

K-18: " The only thing I knew about Türkiye was that it was a country between Asia and Europe. Now, after I came here, my perspective has changed a lot. I used to think that Nepal had the most developed people in Europe, and the US helped everywhere. I also met international students here. My perspective on the world has changed a lot."

K-12 and K-18 assessments reveal the power of citizen diplomacy and how personal experiences can shape worldviews.

**3.1.2. Change in Perspective on One's Own Country**

The students were asked how they saw their own country before coming to Türkiye and now, and whether there was a change in their perspective. It was aimed to see what kind of differences emerged in the perspective of individuals towards their home country while living there and in their thoughts after living in a different country in terms of country image. In his study conducted in Vietnam, Bier (2017) mentioned that culture, human capital, social attraction, and economic attraction were effective in the positive feelings that cultural mediators had towards their country and stated that economic attraction, in particular, increased the amount of communication with foreigners. Every student, without exception, observed a change in their perspective towards their own country. The experience of living abroad also changes the perspective of individuals towards their own country. This change can sometimes be positive and sometimes negative. The participants make various inferences by comparing their own country with Türkiye. The positive or negative image formed in their minds can vary from subject to subject and according to the country they come from. In this direction, 7 codes were created under the Change in Perspective on Own Country subcategory. These are: *Change in View of Social Life*, *Change in View of Political and Economic Issues*, *Change in perspective on the education system*, *Change in View of Natural Beauties*, *Change in View of Cultural Elements*, *Change in Perception of Patriotism*, and *Change in View of Health*.

**-Change in perspective on social life**

Participants expressed intense opinions within the framework of this code.

K-5: "I'm starting to think that Egypt is very crowded. Especially, public transportation is very congested."

K-6: " I have seen better things compared to Bangladesh. Traffic is very congested in Bangladesh, electricity goes out very often, and the internet goes out too. One thing I like very much about Türkiye is that the internet never goes out. In some places in Bangladesh, there is no internet, and in some places it goes out all the time."

K-10: " After coming to Türkiye, I got to know Morocco better. I did not know many things. Many questions are asked here, and I learned new things to be able to answer better. When you are in public, you can't see, but when you go out, you can see better. Morocco was better than I knew. Türkiye didn't seem safe to me before, but when I came, I saw that it was very safe, especially for girls, even if I walked by myself in the evening."

K-12: " When I go to China, I have to get used to it again. The lifestyle changes and develops. Good and bad things happen in every country. China always seems to be better than yesterday. It is getting further every day."

K-14: " I noticed that people are colder. I saw that Mongolia is democratic. There are more protests and people are protesting, but in Türkiye, young people talk among themselves."

K-16: " Before I came to Türkiye, I thought there were many Muslims in Indonesia but they did not reflect Islamic practices. Nevertheless, in Indonesia, for example, boys and girls cannot kiss on the street, but in Türkiye it has become normal. I saw that Islam is more widespread in Indonesia. Alcohol is not widespread in Indonesia. In Türkiye, it is free, you can buy it in any supermarket, even if you are Muslim."

K-20: " I used to think that we were behind in terms of infrastructure, but when I came here, I saw that we were not so behind. I used to think that if blacks and whites were in the same class, whites would be more successful academically, and white people would be smarter than blacks. But after I came here, I saw that we were all the same; there was no difference. It is a situation that changes depending on the person, not whether you are black or white. I never studied with whites in my life; I only went to schools where blacks went during my education. I used to think

*that in South Africa, only black people worked in the fields or did simple jobs, but when I came here, I saw that white people also worked."*

Each of the views demonstrates how perceptions between different cultures and societies can change, how individual experiences can transform people's worldviews, and how effective they can be in understanding cultural differences. K-5 observes the crowding and public transportation problems in Egypt, while K-6 compares the infrastructure problems in Bangladesh with the more stable internet connection in Türkiye. Such observations demonstrate how the general image of a country, when viewed from the outside, can change with individual observations. On the other hand, K-10 states that his concerns about Türkiye's security changed after living here, providing an important example of how the perception of security in Türkiye can be misunderstood and transformed with experiences. This situation demonstrates how perceptions, when viewed from the outside, can change with on-site experiences and how important it is to have a more accurate understanding of security. In this context, elements such as infrastructure, security, cultural norms, racial perceptions, and social structures observed by individuals in different societies can transform into a broader perspective over time. Personal experiences play an important role in breaking down misunderstandings between people, overcoming prejudices, and deepening intercultural understanding. This process also has the potential to pave the way for stronger and healthier diplomatic relations between countries.

#### ***-Change in view of political and economic issues.***

Participants stated that their perspective on political and economic issues has changed.

K-2: "I realized how backward we are politically and economically. I realized that we are a very small country. Türkiye is challenging big countries, but Macedonia is such a small country that it cannot make every decision on its own. I realized how much progress we have to make."

K-5: "I thought Egypt was expensive, but after coming here, I thought Egypt was cheaper. The purchasing power is higher in Egypt."

K-13: "I saw that politics is problematic. We buy a lot of foreign things in Ivory Coast. For example, many things are produced in Türkiye. For example, if I opened a shop there, my friends would not come and buy from me. They would buy from foreigners. Products from abroad are preferred over products produced in our country."

K-18: "The whole world knows Nepal. We fought with the British, Indians, and Chinese and won. I thought the whole world knew us and knew our heroism, but after coming to Türkiye, they ask me where I am from, and when I say Nepal, they look at me and say they don't know."

The participants' experiences and observations made on perceptions, economic situations, social structures, and social practices between countries show how individuals can transform their worldviews and how relations between countries are shaped. Citizen diplomacy points out how individuals can gain awareness of their own country and develop their worldviews through the experiences they gain while living in another country. It is seen that observing cultural, economic, social, and political differences contributes to the change of personal perceptions and the formation of a broader perspective.

#### ***-Change in perspective on the education system***

K-8: "It was good that I came to Kayseri. I saw how the cities are managed in terms of the education system, business life, and how life is in the dormitories. I see that my own city is not managed that well, and that there are deficiencies."

K-11: "I thought education in Kyrgyzstan was bad, but when I came here I realized that education was better."

K-17: "I think it is a difficult life for students in Kazakhstan. I think it is costly for students. House rents are very high, which affects students' finances."

#### ***-Change in perspective on natural beauty***

K-5: "I thought Egypt's nature was very beautiful, but I realized that Türkiye's was more beautiful. Egypt's was normal."

K-11: "I used to think that it was not good in terms of natural beauty, but now I think that Kyrgyzstan is very beautiful in terms of natural beauty."

These views of the participants demonstrate the potential of citizen diplomacy to raise environmental awareness and establish deeper connections between countries through natural beauty. It shows how a person's perceptions of environmental richness and natural environments can change when they travel to another country, allowing them to reach intercultural understanding and a broader perspective. Such observations show how cultural interactions between countries can be deepened and promoted through environmental factors and natural beauty.

**-Change in perspective on cultural elements**

K-3: " *After I came, I understood the problems in Afghanistan better. But I saw that Afghanistan is more attached to traditions. For example, traditional clothes are not worn in Türkiye, but they are worn there.*"

**-Change in perception of patriotism**

K-1: " *There is a big difference, nationalism was not established before. Now my Democratic Congo nationalism has increased even more because I saw this in the Turkish people. No matter what the view is, even if they are enemies of Türkiye, everyone is united. For example, if a country has a foreign policy problem, everyone can be against it. When I first came, I always hung out with Turks to learn Turkish, my circle was always Turks. I used to chat a lot with my teachers at school. I used to learn proverbs. While taking a photo at a school, I touched the Atatürk Principles on the wall with my hand. A middle school kid told me that "You can't touch that place". A middle school kid taught me about Atatürk. He actually taught me how to respect Atatürk.*"

K-1's statement, "My Democratic Congo nationalism has become even stronger," illustrates how the experience of nationalism in Türkiye has reinforced his commitment to his national identity. This demonstrates the impact of citizen diplomacy on the understanding of cultural belonging and nationalism.

**-Change in perspective on the health field**

K-15: " *I thought our country was developed in terms of medicine, but when I came to Türkiye, I saw that it was more modern. There are different devices than in Iran.*"

### 3.2. Change in the Individual's Environment

Participants were asked about the changes in the opinions of their social circles about Türkiye in their country of origin. In this way, it was made to understand the changes in the image of Türkiye in their social circles as a result of the citizen diplomacy activities in the countries where the participants came from. According to Bier (2017) the image of the United States of America is not formed in the United States. Rather, the image of the United States exists in foreign countries and gains context within each foreign country's culture. For example, the image of the United States in Vietnam exists according to the value system and cultural expectations of Vietnam. In this sense, the image of the country is an external cultural phenomenon that occurs within the country and creates perception. Apart from students from countries that are closer to Türkiye and know Türkiye better, it is seen that there are significant changes in the image of Türkiye in general. The less information the participants have about the country in their social circles, the more changes occur. On the other hand, it is stated by the participants that those who are informed have changed their ideas about different issues that were previously thought to be wrong about the country. There are also statements indicating that negative views have turned into positive ones. It is seen that the prejudices about the country are broken, and the participants who engage in citizen diplomacy by telling first-hand stories significantly shape the country's image. It is revealed that the country's image, which is formed by the influence of the media or other elements, can be rebuilt completely differently through citizen diplomacy:

Two headings were created under the Change in the Individual's Environment category. These are; Change in the Individual's Environment's Own Country Image and Change in the Individual's Environment's Current Country Image.

Three codes were created under the subcategory of Change in the Image of the Individual's Environment in Their Own Country. These are: *Positive Change in the Individual's Environment in Their Own Country*, *Neutral Change in the Individual's Environment in Their Own Country*, and *Negative Change in the Individual's Environment in Their Own Country*.

### 3.2.1. Change in the image of the individual's environment in his/her own country

Participants have played an important role in shaping Türkiye's image as a result of the information they provided about Türkiye in their social circles in their own countries, and have carried out two-way citizen diplomacy. Participants whose social circle is more knowledgeable about Türkiye stated that the image of Türkiye in their circle has changed less or has not changed, while participants who stated that their social circle in their own country had little prior knowledge about Türkiye have seen more changes in their circle.

#### **-Positive change in the individual's environment in his/her own country**

K-1: " Many people around me want to come to Türkiye. Some want to come as tourists or to study. Before I came to Türkiye, an uncle of mine was hostile to Türkiye, he did not like Türkiye. He did not want me to go to Türkiye. Then he called me and said I want to get treatment in Türkiye, can you find a hospital for me to get treatment. He did not like Türkiye because he did not know. They were afraid of Türkiye because of things like bomb explosions and terrorist attacks, but we are currently seeing each other, explaining, so they are taking good care of us now. They were afraid because they did not know before. They told me they would cut off your head because you are not a Muslim. It is because the media and channels watched in Democratic Congo are Western media. There is no Turkish media. Even if you do not talk, your environment is affected. When a person does not communicate, they think all the speculations are true, but when they come into contact with each other, they understand the missing or correct things. A person should know themselves and understand other people as well. We did not see any negativity. During the pandemic, during the closure times, a family took me to their home, and we stayed together; I am telling you this. "My father learns about Türkiye from books, not from the media, and sees it positively, but my uncle learns about it from the media and has a negative view. The more I explain it to him, the more his perspective has changed."

K-3: " They were saying Türkiye is beautiful, but since we always see non hijabi women there, when you look from abroad, Türkiye does not seem Muslim, no matter how Muslim it is, because the women in the TV series are non hijabi. When you go there, your friends say that your ideas may change. They were saying that "We pray 5 times a day here, but maybe you don't pray or fast there". When you only watch TV series, Muslims say that it is not like that because the women are non hijabi. But I told them that there are more mosques here than in Afghanistan. There are mosques every 100 meters, and people pray here too. Their perspective towards Türkiye has changed."

K-5: " They look at Türkiye better; they feel like they have come to Türkiye, too. I tell them. My uncle watches Turkish series a lot, he watches *Diriliş Ertuğrul*. I share photos on Instagram, they have an idea about Türkiye. Some of my acquaintances in Egypt want to come to Türkiye. Some of my friends made holiday plans because of what I told them. I think what I told them was effective. For example, it never snows in Egypt. When it snowed, I took photos and shared them on Instagram. Some people wondered if they could come and see it. An interest in Türkiye has arisen."

K-7: " People in Chad think that Turks are very helpful. Some associations go to help. During the Eid al-Adha, many people send sacrifices from Türkiye. They are distributed to those who do not have the means. This aid also contributes to Türkiye's image. Health and education issues are also important. Without student exchange in the last 6-7 years, there would not have been so many flights between Türkiye and them. The relations that started with education actually created cooperation in areas such as health and the economy. Students who come to Türkiye take something from here or they ask how the goods and products are in Türkiye. Some people want something. Economic mobility is created. Some people come to Türkiye from there for health. Health services are much more affordable in Türkiye than in Europe. Accommodation is also cheaper in Türkiye. That is why many people prefer them and are satisfied; they tell others, and more people come. These actually developed with the arrival of students, they establish closeness after learning the language. They contribute to the economy. There are many Chadians who come to Türkiye for education. When they return, they communicate with Türkiye. Relations grow with the snowball effect."

K-19: " There is a big difference because they didn't know either. Three of my friends are coming to travel during the summer vacation. They learned a lot more. Since I always share nice things here and travel, they also see it as good. A Pakistani professor in the USA said he wanted to come to Türkiye after retirement and get free education here. Many tourists from other countries also came or sent their children to Türkiye to study after talking to me."

K-20: " When they say Türkiye in South Africa, they know Arda Turan the most. They ask about Mesut Özil, have you seen them, etc., and Atatürk is very famous. But they did not know much. They thought of it as a rich European country economically. In terms of living standards, it was like Europe, but people thought of it like Arabs."

*Now they know that Turks are not Europeans and they are not Arabs either. They did not want to come here before, but now they want to come. And they considered it very expensive before, but now they know that it is not that expensive."*

These statements from the participants show that citizen diplomacy is a powerful tool for the image of a country and how individuals can transform perceptions by telling people in their own country about the culture, lifestyle, and people of another country. At the same time, these experiences indicate that communication, information sharing, and individual experiences that take place through citizen diplomacy can become the main factors shaping relations between countries. At the same time, personal experiences, direct communication and cultural interactions have the potential to transform perceptions between countries and establish deeper ties.

#### **-Neutral change in the individual's environment in his/her own country**

K-4: "There is no change, they also want to come. They ask about the scholarships. They saw it well before, they see it well now, too."

K-7: "Their view of Türkiye was good anyway. They know I am in a good place and see it well. There has not been much change."

K-9: "There has been no change, they already know Türkiye."

K-15: "I'm sure they think positively because I never complained about this place to them. There wasn't much change because the culture is very similar. After coming here, I got used to it within 3 months because I don't see it as a different country."

#### **-Adverse change in the individual's environment in his/her own country**

K-17: "My sister came to Istanbul and saw that there were many foreigners. She said that it was a beautiful place, but there were many foreigners and it was not crowded here. My friends in Kazakhstan thought everything was very cheap in Türkiye, but I tell them it is not like that here."

### **3.2.2. Change in the Individual's Country Image in His/Her Environment**

Under the subcategory of Change in the Current Country Image of the *Individual's Environment*, two codes were created: *Positive Change in the Current Country Image of the Individual* and *Neutral Change in the Current Country Image of the Individual*.

#### **-Positive change in the individual's environment in the country**

K-7: "We corrected some of those who got it wrong, but on the other hand, we tell the truth. We tell some of those who do not know. Their perspectives change. For example, they say, well, then there was only war and forests, and people continued their normal lives. Schools, hospitals, universities, everything a person needs are there, too."

K-10: "They think that everywhere in Morocco is like a desert. There were people who wondered if there was water there. Their perspective on Morocco has changed a lot. They did not know that it was touristic. They did not know that there was a visa-free travel opportunity. Moroccan and Turkish lifestyles are very similar. When they learn this, they think that if we go then we will not have many problems."

K-14: "Even if it was a little or a lot, after they met me, their perspective on Mongolia changed because I answer all their questions. They thought we were a part of Turkish culture, like Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, but we have different languages and cultures. Mongolian is very different. People no longer think Mongolia is similar to them. Our cultures are completely different."

K-15: "Friends who did not know Iranian films started watching Iranian films after I explained them. Some films won awards at Cannes. They did not know that Iranian cinema was developed."

K-19: "If a person has no knowledge, after telling them, they will have knowledge about the season, nature, history, and culture. There are people who want to come to Pakistan."

K-20: "They thought there was gold and diamonds everywhere on the street. People were asking if there was water in Africa. When I came to Türkiye, people knew that South Africa was more developed and richer than other African countries, so they behaved differently and showed respect. They thought we were wealthy, but we were not as rich as they thought. Those who did not know Africa at all thought we were poor, but those who knew Africa thought South Africa was richer. For example, when I was going to ERSEM, a Turkish friend of mine asked me where I was from, and he asked if there was water there. I explained to them that we were not poor. The 2010 Football World

*Cup was held in our country. The World Cup would not have been organized if it were a poor country. Some people say that there is a lot of gold and diamonds in your country, and you are rich, and I tell them that we are not very rich."*

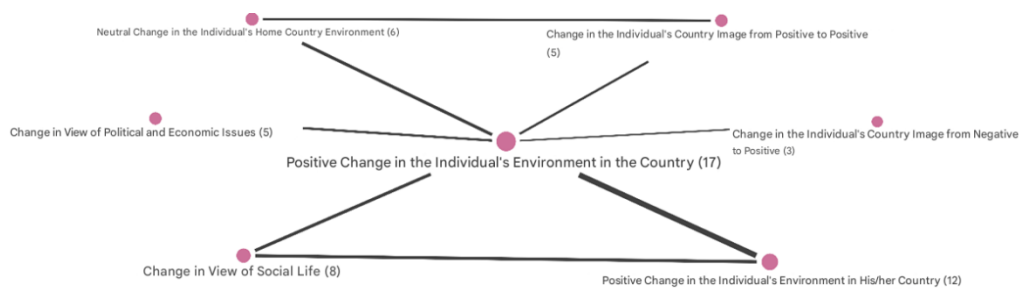
Individuals can effectively correct misperceptions and provide more accurate information sharing by directly experiencing the culture and lifestyle of their country. People discover the real face of a country through the information they hear and see, which allows for stronger and healthier relationships to be established at the international level. All of these help to establish a country's image in an accurate and realistic way.

**-Neutral change in the individual's environment in the country he is in**

K-6: "I have not seen any change, but I am trying to explain that they are getting information."

K-11: "I taught the capital of Kyrgyzstan. They learned the food. I taught the differences between Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Uzbek, Chinese."

K-12: "I gave a lot of information about the food culture in China."



**Figure 3.** Code Map of the Theme

Participants who mentioned the code of positive change in the individual's environment in their own country mentioned the codes of positive change in the individual's environment in their own country, change in their perspective on social life, change in their political and economic perspective, change in the individual's environment in their own country, change in the individual's image of the country from positive to positive, and change in the individual's image of the country from negative to positive.



**Figure 4.** Word Cloud Related to Theme

The important outcomes of citizen diplomacy are observed from the word cloud containing the codes and categories in the entirety of the relevant theme. The word cloud, which seems to highlight the processes of positive change in the individual's environment in the country he is in and the positive

change in the individual's environment in his own country, tells us that citizen diplomacy is a process that works positively for both countries through the same individual. At this point, the self-educating aspect of the individual is also observed, especially in the change of perspective on various issues.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The process of citizen diplomacy affects the individual and his/her environment in various ways. The awareness process that emerges at the final stage of citizen diplomacy brings about a perceptual, behavioral, and attitudinal change. This change can occur directly as a change in judgments or as a reinforcement of existing judgments.

One of the notable outcomes of the citizen diplomacy process is that the individual experiences a change in his/her perspective on both his/her own country and the country he/she is in. While the individual has the opportunity to evaluate some issues related to his/her country from different perspectives in line with his/her experiences in the country he/she is in, he/she can also abandon the thoughts he/she has been burdened with in the media or in the education processes in his/her own country regarding the country he/she is in. This situation shows that the citizen diplomat also emerges as an element of the interaction process. Ultimately, all relational processes directly affect the image of the countries.

One of the important outcomes of citizen diplomacy in interpersonal communication processes is that individuals' previously attached religious definitions about the countries they are in, the level of development of the country, or the characteristics of the people of the country generally change after the interaction processes. This situation shows that factors such as media, school, and family are effective in shaping the attitudes as a result of the socialization processes in their own countries. In this context, citizen diplomacy reflects the power of changing perspectives shaped especially by the media factor in the context of its effect on the image of the country. In the contact of citizens of countries living in a similar culture, there are no profound changes in the perspectives of individuals.

In the citizen diplomacy process, the individual does not only experience change. In particular, the social environment in his/her own country also experiences a change in his/her existing ideas. Change is mainly observed in the individual's close relatives and close friends. One of the important outputs of the citizen diplomacy process is the individual's planning of various activities that will establish ties with countries and the intention to carry this out as an internalized process. At this point, citizen diplomacy prepares the ground for cooperation in areas such as trade, tourism, and education between countries. Ultimately, it is determined that the outputs of citizen diplomacy have a powerful effect on the formation of the country's image. When other elements affecting the country's image (media, school, etc.) are taken into consideration, although citizen diplomacy exhibits a narrower appearance in terms of the audience it reaches, it has more convincing and permanent effects in terms of image.

The existence of many factors that are effective in the formation of a country's image necessitates the professional implementation of image studies. In this context, countries strive to systematically carry out image formation through various institutional structures within their own structures. However, many agents of influence can be evaluated outside the control mechanism in image formation. Indeed, the effects of citizens on the image of their countries, explained within the framework of the conceptualization of citizen diplomacy and evaluated within the scope of the study, are also framed in this context. While citizens can positively or negatively affect countries within an official organization, they can also achieve the same effect within the scope of informal activities. Moreover, in citizen diplomacy activities, individuals can consciously or unconsciously carry out citizen diplomacy practices.

It has been revealed that citizen diplomacy activities exhibit a strong connection with the country's image. It has been determined that citizen diplomacy, which is not given enough attention compared to elements such as public diplomacy, which are shown among the components of country image in the literature, has a very effective role in image formation and exhibits a quality that almost exceeds many entrepreneurial organizations. For example, when the role of a powerful instrument that is effective in the international arena such as the media is considered in image construction, it is one of the important findings determined during the interviews that citizens contribute to the construction of a perception and

image opposite to the media messages. This appears as an important output of the fictionality-free role loaded in citizen diplomacy. In this respect, similar to the role of the smallest structural unit of society, the family, citizen diplomacy shows the effective role of the individual's practices in accumulating positive and negative perceptions about countries with the role of the individual in public and non-public contexts. Citizen diplomacy has the power to change existing judgments within the framework of the positive and negative reflections of the individual's behavioral practices in the flow of messages from individual to individual, as well as having a quality that reinforces positive or negative judgments. In this context, interpersonal interaction plays an important role in changing or strengthening perspectives on countries. One of the important indicators that reveal that this role occurs naturally is that, although the cognitive level of individuals regarding the conceptualization of "citizen diplomacy" is at zero level, as determined by the research findings, they act within a framework of responsibility on behalf of their countries in terms of practices.

In citizen diplomacy, which is shaped as a process constructed by the individual, although the concept of diplomacy indicates an official initiative, it is seen that citizen diplomacy gains importance as a natural flow and is structured within this framework. In this context, the characteristic structure of the individual has an important effect on the quality of citizen diplomacy since it determines the relational processes. The issues, such as being enterprising, being warm-hearted, and the density of the circle of friends that reflect the characteristic features of the individual, are quite effective. In the same direction, it is also important for the individual to feel a sense of responsibility for his country. Indeed, while the research findings show that individuals feel a sense of responsibility in this context, it indicates that their characteristic features determine the intensity of citizen diplomacy. Especially in social relations, more open-minded individuals can establish relations with civil society organizations and also show their presence in the institutional activities of citizen diplomacy, on the other hand, they can continue their diplomatic activities with friendships. When we look at the areas where citizen diplomacy gains importance in relational processes, it is observed that the individual's connection with various civil society organizations is also important, and especially cultural processes come to the fore. At this point, it is determined that in the practices of individuals contributing to the country's image, cultural characteristics such as gift-giving processes representing their own country, food, geographical beauties, traditional clothes, music, and historical and architectural features come to the fore. Although in the literature, citizen diplomacy is given a role that contributes to the policies of countries, on the contrary, it is determined that divisive elements such as politics and race are at a very low level in citizen diplomacy. It is even observed that individuals prefer to stay away from political issues. While this situation shows that individuals are positioned at a point beyond their countries' political goals and political stances, it also reveals that friendships have a natural course in citizen diplomacy. It should be noted that culture is the focal point of this course.

One of the important issues in which individuals play a role in the context of country image in citizen diplomacy is that they act as a bridge between the individuals they interact with and their own country. When a citizen diplomat establishes a relationship with an individual who is foreign to their own country, this will contribute to the formation of a positive or negative perception in terms of the country's image. This relationship is considered the first reflection of citizen diplomacy. In light of the research findings, the reflection of the citizen diplomacy process does not only occur in this direction. Indeed, when a citizen in a foreign country returns to his/her own country, he/she forms an image of the country he/she is in with his/her close circle. In this respect, citizen diplomacy reflects a two-way interaction process between the country in which the individual is a citizen and the country he/she is in. In this direction, the individual acts as a bridge between the images of the two countries.

All these results show that citizen diplomacy, which is in a critical position in terms of the country's image, is important to be addressed on a strategic and tactical level; what important functions do international students fulfill as citizen diplomats, and in this context, it constitutes one of the important components of a planned country communication effort for countries. In terms of academic literature, future studies can focus on other actors of citizen diplomacy and explore new directions by examining the types of activities and sharing they engage in. By interviewing individuals who are engaged in citizen



diplomacy activities both in their home and host countries, it is possible to examine their different perspectives on the role of citizen diplomacy, how they evaluate the process of citizen diplomacy, and the changes in their own thinking during this process.

**Araştırmacıların Katkı Oran Beyanı / Contribution of Authors**

Yazarların çalışmadaki katkı oranları Tarık KODAL %50/ Faruk TEMEL %50 şeklindedir.  
The authors' contribution rates in the study are Tarık KODAL %50/ Faruk TEMEL %50 form.

**Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest**

Çalışmada herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.  
There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person in the study.

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In this study, the rules specified within the scope of the Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive were followed.

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