

Urban Public Streets in the Collective Memory: A Case Study of Uray Street in Mersin

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Abstract

Streets are public spaces that serve as a vital component of a city's transportation network, not only for transportation purposes but also for the spaces they provide that hold significant value in the daily lives of individuals. These spaces are subject to social, societal, and economic transformations and changes, which can ultimately weaken or even cause the disappearance of urban memory over time. The collective memory of a city, which is closely linked to its physical structure and identity formation, entails the interpretation of physical environment signs and symbolic meanings within the social, historical, and psychological components of society. This study aims to investigate the shifting and transforming role of Uray Street, a significant street that has been part of Mersin's memory since its inception, as a port city located in the southern region of Turkey. To this end, oral history interviews were conducted with individuals from different age groups who have utilized Uray Street. Through these interviews, the changes and transformations that have taken place on Uray Street were obtained from the narrations, memories, and recollections of the interviewees within the context of their own life stories as urban dwellers with long-term connections to the area.

Keywords: Collective Memory, Oral History, Urban Space, Streets, Space Transformation.

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Kolektif Hafızada Kentsel Kamu Sokakları: Mersin Uray Caddesi Örneği

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Özet

Sokaklar, kentlerin ulaşım ağını oluşturan, sadece bir ulaşım aracı olarak değil, barındırdığı mekânlarla da bireylerin gündelik yaşamında önemli bir yere sahip olan kamusal alanlardır. Kentlerin önemli bir parçası olan kamusal alanlar da, yaşadığımız sosyal, toplumsal ve ekonomik dönüşüm ve değişimlerden etkilenmektedir. Bu durum kentsel belleğin sürekliliğinin zayıflamasına ve hatta zaman içinde yok olmasına neden olmaktadır. Kentlerin fiziksel yapısı ve kimliklerinin oluşumu ile güçlü bir bağı olan kolektif hafıza, fiziksel çevrenin işaret ve sembolik anlamlarının sosyal, tarihsel ve psikolojik bileşenlerle toplumun bilişsel yapısı içinde okunmasıdır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin güneyinde bir liman kenti olan Mersinde, kentin ilk kuruluşundan bu yana önemli bir caddesi olan Uray Caddesi'nin kent belleğindeki değişen ve dönüşen konumunu araştırmaktadır. Bu amaçla Uray Caddesi'ni kullanan farklı yaş gruplarındaki bireylerle sözlü tarih görüşmeleri gerçekleştirilmiştir. Alanda bulunan uzun süreli bellek mekânlarının kullanıcıları ile sözlü tarih görüşmeleri yapılarak kentlilerin öz yaşam öyküsündeki, Uray caddesine ait anlatılar, anılar ve hatıralar üzerinden Uray caddesinde meydana gelen değişimler ve dönüşümler elde edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kentsel Mekan, Kolektif Bellek, Sokaklar, Sözlü Tarih, Uzak Dönüşümü.

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization, the result of rapid technological development since the 1990s, has revealed a broad and effective universal understanding of culture and space in architecture and urban design. This understanding of space is discussed and explained through the concepts of 'association', 'disidentification' and 'non-spatial' (Auge, 2017). Along with globalization, the increase in information and the movement of people affect space-time environment relations and create a new understanding of order. This new understanding of order focuses only on the biological needs of the individual and ignores difference, pushing into the background the meaning, identity, and culture that represent the individual. This situation has weakened the cultural differences of the city, and the urban space, which can provide a common history, a common present and a common world, and enrich the urban experience of citizens, is rapidly disappearing and shrinking. Streets have lost their place and importance as public parts of the city and have become appendages of the global economy. The public space of the city, which forms the common collective memory of the citizens, is rapidly disappearing and becoming monotonous, being replaced by spaces that we encounter everywhere in the world. On the other hand, these new spaces do not fit the fabric of the area in which they are located, rendering meaningless the connection that visitors form with the space.

Collective memory refers to a community's shared memories, experiences and history. It is a form of social memory that emerges from the collective experience of a group of people in relation to a space that shapes their identity, values and cultural practices. Public urban spaces are places where people can gather, interact and connect with their surroundings. They are the physical manifestation of the city's social and cultural life, reflecting its history, diversity and ambition. This study examines globalization-induced amnesia in the street, one of the city's public spaces. As one of the collective memories of the city, the street plays an important role in people's lives (Farahani et al., 2015). From childhood to adolescence to adulthood, people give different meanings to streets, and streets lose their meaning and functions, especially in the context of globalization. Mersin, located in the southern part of Turkey, is one of the cities with the greatest use of open public spaces due to its Mediterranean climate. This study focuses on the relationship between space and collective memory and uses Uray Street, located in the centre of the city and occupying an important place in the city's history, as an example to explore the impact of globalization on street memory.

Uray Street is one of Mersin's most important monuments with a long history. From the past to the present, it has been influenced by the different cultures it carries and has created its own unique memory. Cinemas, banks, bookstores, cafes, patisseries, restaurants and businesses are located on the street that connects the eastern and western edges of the city and runs parallel to the sea. As a commercial and entertainment district, it reflects economic, social and cultural life. But in the last 10 years, with rapid changes and transformations, it did not withstand globalization and lost its identity as a city centre. This study investigates which features of Uray Street have survived in the city's memory, which have been lost, and how these features of Uray Street have changed in modern memory.

“Memories are built as a city is built”
Umberto Eco, 1986, 89

In today's rapidly changing world, collective memory has become very important for the sustainability of social life. Research on collective memory is becoming increasingly important to understand what is happening around us and to find new connections between the present and the future. Boyer (1993) explained this connection between past and future in terms of “place”. He believes that space flows in an individual's life, just like memory. The value of history – a collection of places – here called collective memory, helps to understand the meaning and individuality of places.

As Pierre Nora (2006) puts it: “Memory is life itself, created by an ever-present group. To this end, memory is open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unaware of their constant changes, sensitive to various uses and sleight of hand, susceptible to prolonged uncertainty, sudden resurrection and constant development” (Nora, 2006, p.19) Halbwachs argues that collective memory includes both individual memory and personal memory, including all forms of memory, as individual memories are experienced within a social framework. He pointed out that although the memories that emerge are different, each individual memory has a view of the collective memory that changes with position in the group, and the place itself changes with the relationships established with other environments (Halbwachs, 2019, p.60). Connerton explains the importance of personal memory in the formation of collective memory as follows: *“no matter how personal the act of remembering is, it is in relation to the set of thoughts that many other people have”* (Connerton, 1999, p.60).

Halbwachs explained the relationship between memory and objects, emphasizing that the shapes of the objects around us are significant. He said that the objects around us form a quiet and inactive community. He explains it further as follows: When Balzac describes a family residence, a miser's house, or Dickens describes a notary, all his house paintings allow us to intuit the people who lived in this social category. the frame belongs to It is not just a simple harmony and physical harmony between places and the appearance of people. Every object we encounter and the space it usually occupies reminds us of the shared existence of many people (Halbwachs, 2019, p.160).

Halbwachs describes this situation, he does it through objects, but also through cities. Halbwachs describes this situation, he does it through objects, but also through cities. When we talk about the change of the city, “The differentiation of the city is actually the diversity of its internal functions and social traditions, but as the group develops, the external appearance of the city changes more slowly. Local habits resist the forces that tend to change them, and this resistance makes us realize how much collective memory in groups like this support spatial images. (Halbwachs, 2019, p.165).

Nora (1989) defined the relationship between memory and space as a powerful connection that is always constructed and expressed depending on where it is located. Nora expresses the relationship between history and memory as “memory is about place and history is about events” (Nora, 1989, p.22) and emphasizes that “spaces of memory” are important for the construction of collective memories. It defines a “place of memory” as “any significant object which, through human will or the efforts of time, has (become) a symbolic element in the lasting heritage of any society”. (Nora, 1989). The material commemoration

area described by Nora includes works of art, sculpture, individual buildings and urban spaces. Examples of buildings he assigns as material memory include the Eiffel Tower and the National Museum of Antiquities. It is important for individuals to have a sense of belonging in order to create a sense of collective identity. In particular, this sense of belonging, which is created and felt in the public space, in a shared environment characterized by shared social life and architecture, contributes to the sustainable development of society and at the same time preserves the local area. According to Boyer (1993), the public sphere provides a framework for the construction of collective memory. Public spaces that provide venues for social events can reflect class differences and cultural clashes, and can be part of corporate culture or be more subversive. (Boyer, 1993).

“A Public space is a place for everyone. It is a place in which you do not have to know anyone or do anything in particular, except be there. Public places serve an important role as the most easily accessible places to meet people and to take part in public life” (Gehl, 1989, p.17).

In the urban design research literature, public space is an important phenomenon for cities and people. Several researchers and authors (Lynch, 1960; Jacobs, 1961; Habermas, 1989; Carr et al., 1992; Cullen, 1996; Gehl, 2001) have pointed out that public spaces play an important role in preserving, recognizing and understanding social and cultural aspects play an important role in the meaning of the city. On the other hand, Neils (2010) and Carmona (2010) promoted citizens' interest in public space design by emphasizing the complexity of public space.

Streets, which are the main components of the urban structure, are not only the areas that form the transportation network of the city, but also important urban public areas that meet the functional, social and leisure needs of individuals (Soltani et al., 2018). Jacobs (1961) explains the importance of streets in everyday life as follows: *“The streets and sidewalks, the main public spaces of the city, are the most vital organs of the city. Sidewalks, their frontier uses and users are active participants in the drama of civilization...”* (Jacobs, 1961, p.49). Many researchers and writers (Jacobs, 1961; Southworth & Ben Joseph, 1996; Vernez-Moudon, 1991) mention that streets constitute the majority of public spaces in urban areas and their importance in revitalization efforts. What is usually meant by street revitalization is the effort to make the streets alive by increasing the capacity to create and use more action (NMSC, 2019). Carmona et al., (2003) states that streets constitute *‘accessible public space’*. Researchers such as Rudofsky (1969), Lofland, (1998), on the other hand, emphasize that streets serve basic needs in cities and towns, such as survival, communication, and the importance of various political, religious, commercial, civic and social functions.

While Southworth and Ben-Joseph (1996) talk about the physical and social component of the street, Rapaport (1990) noted that *“streets are the more or less narrow, linear spaces lined between buildings found in settlements and used for circulation and, sometimes, other activities...”* Moudon (1991) claimed, *“There are reasons why many streets can and should be opened to uses that serve the public at large, not only drivers but for pedestrian networks within a neighborhood or a city”*. Mumford (1973) mentions the function of the street as both a warehouse and a place of transfer culturally, which constitutes the physical space of the urban space.

With the rapid change and transformation of cities, public spaces have changed. As stated in Gehl and Gemzoe's (2000), *‘New City Spaces’*, streets that have been occupied by vehicles and turned into abandoned spaces for them are

now defined as a place for shopping with no memory and meaning: *“It is in the physical properties and meanings of places. It is an urban transformation of images and memories in individuals’ memories caused by the changes that occur”* (Gehl & Gemzoe, 2000).

METHOD

Through documentation, very limited information is available to future generations about modern people and the richness of urban life today (Counce, 2001, p.15). The clearest traces that allow us to compare the city’s past and present are the old trading centers in the city, the old trade routes through the settlements, historical sites, gravestones, road names, road routes and zoning structures that were part of the zoning. plan. Therefore, in addition to the traditional sources of history based on documents, other reading methods should be developed to interpret the traces of history that the city will carry, such as the disappearing line, to remove the materials that hide these traces, or to make traces obvious (Danacıoğlu, 2001, p.31-33). Oral history is the stories of the cities where people live and are able to record their thoughts on any issue that needs to be addressed. Be able to study the factors that make cities more human despite their flaws. An oral history approach builds on the organic nature of development, builds on the past rather than suppresses it, and can help revive a sense of need (Counce, 2001, p.41-42).

A shared identity and sense of belonging is another benefit of oral history in urban studies. A sense of belonging to the city greatly contributes to local social activity. This sense of belonging is fostered through oral history, which is an important tool. The ability to express oneself is one of its greatest strengths, and in the same way, listening to life stories can help researchers escape the feeling of being trapped in rigid social systems. People become stronger by listening to their lived experiences, because it allows them to realize how important and meaningful their lives are, even in the society in which they live (Thompson, 2006, p.37) Through the oral history of cities and urban spaces, it is possible to generate information about the past and/or current state of urban spaces and/or elements of the built environment that have changed, transformed or completely disappeared. This information is unique to the city and cannot be found anywhere else. The importance of this information is that it can only be learned through the oral history method, and it also includes the corresponding counterparts of the elements in the city’s memory and their relative importance in the city as a whole (Selvi Ünlü, 2019).

Through personal stories, narratives, memories, documents and images that make up collective memory, it is easier to understand the connection between cities and urbanists, to understand the history of cities and to understand urban change and transformation (Tosh, 2005). The practice of oral history of urban spaces was realized for the first time in the 1960s. Since then, oral history methods have been used to preserve the symbolic and social significance of historic urban spaces and allow future generations to experience them in their natural environment (Danacıoğlu, 2001). It is important to read social memory and build urban identity through public space, which has a large share in the formation of social relations (Boyer, 1993).

Oral history methods allow us to question symbolic and social meanings in the construction of identity in urban space (Köksoy, 2009). This is the most common approach of many researchers and authors (Selvi Ünlü, 2019; Asur et al., 2022; Doğu et al., 2017) to understand the interaction between urban spaces and their urban memory.

This research aims to explore how collective memory is stored, constructed and reproduced, focusing on the relationship between space and memory and considering the spatial images that people have in mind. To this end, oral history interviews were conducted with 23 Uray Street residents to explore in detail the historical features of the collective memory of Uray Street in the port city of Mersin. The research reveals an insight into the history and memory of the space, and provides the experiences of shop owners and local residents who have lived and worked there for more than 10 years to understand the changes and transformations of the street.

Table 1. Age, gender and profession distribution of the participants who are Uray Street residents.

Number	Gender	Year of Born	Profession
1	M	1980	Shopkeeper (restaurant)
2	M	1957	Shopkeeper (jewelry)
3	M	1954	Retired lawyer
4	F	1957	Housewife
5	F	1957	Housewife
6	M	1954	Merchant
7	M	1954	Merchant
8	M	1954	Retired Lawyer
9	F	1984	Shopkeeper (jewelry)
10	F	1956	Shopkeeper (restaurant)
11	F	1956	Housewife
12	M	1956	Shopkeeper (restaurant)
13	M	1954	Retired teacher
14	F	1982	Shopkeeper (jewelry)
15	M	1954	Merchant
16	F	1954	Retired teacher
17	M	1979	Berber (Hairdresser male)
18	F	1954	Retired teacher
19	M	1957	Shopkeeper (owner of the coffeeshop)
20	M	1954	Merchant
21	M	1954	Shopkeeper (jewelry)
22	M	1967	Merchant
23	M	1965	Merchant

Oral history interviews with street dwellers were conducted and videotaped. These recordings were then transcribed. Users were asked to describe their past and present use of the street, as well as memories of the street and memories related to their own life stories. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the obtained data.

FINDINGS

In order to understand the physical and social changes on Uray Street that are deeply rooted in history, and to uncover the specifics of individuals' collective memory, this study conducted oral history interviews with a total of 23 people on Uray Street. Winter 2019 (pre-COVID-19). All interviews were video recorded. The age distribution of the participants was 17 people after 60 years, 2 people over 50 and 4 street residents aged 25-40. These different age groups help us understand change by understanding the physical and social condition of the

street over time. During the oral history interview, the respondent was asked to tell their life story in relation to the spatial structure of Uray Street. They had to describe everyday life on the street.

When the research findings were examined, it was seen that cultural activities were mostly mentioned about the street. However, it was emphasized that these socialization activities were more intense before the 2000s. From this point of view, it can be said that the street functions as a place of cultural socialization. One participant talked about his memories of the street as follows: *“resting and pleasant places of Uray street residents are located in the immediate vicinity of Uray street. Ziya Pasha Casino with a view of the pier on the beach and Mersin Kiraathanesi, I remembered all these spaces. And these spaces were important for the social life of Mersin”* (From the Oral History interview with E.A.).

Another participant emphasized that the street is also used at night and has entertainment venues, and Ziya Pasha casino is famous here. *“People went there for both have a dinner, listen to music, dance and drink.”* He explained: *“...it was a comfortable place where you could dance and entertained freely but this freedom was like a learning ceremony. You could look around and how people behaved each other and how they entertained”* (From the Oral History Interview with S.G.).

Another participant stated that the street is commercially important:

“Traders and partnerships in Uray street are the most prominent entrepreneurs of the surrounding cities and countries. Kayseri-based people in Mersin were in the iron and construction sector trade. Southeastern based people in Mersin were made pulses and cereals trade. And the Beirut and Halep based people trade on cotton and pulses in the logistics function. Mersin's production and marketing of citrus sector entrepreneurs Uray street as another face of Uray street was taking their place in the economic life. Uray street has been a street gate to the old and new ones of the people of Mersin. It was not for the source of employments, but the entity of sea and harbour is the main factor for the commercial. It is possible to say that the main reasons for the rapid increase in the population of Mersin and the migration from Mersin targeted to Anatolia are the employment opportunities in Uray street and the surrounding piers. The gains of business and trade on Uray street in Mersin has taken its place in the economic history as the beginning of the capital accumulation of the people of Mersin. How can we forget the monumental places like Azakhan and Tashan in this intense economic and commercial life? It is the most indicator of international commercial life in Mersin in the languages spoken in and around the Uray street. Commercial language of Uray street residents is Turkish, Arabic, French, English, Greek” (From the Oral History Interview from the M. T.).

One of the respondents expressed his emotions about the street as: *“I had really important memories about the street which was changed my life completely. It was the place where I met with my wife. I went to street for promenading almost every day. Three or four times, I saw a girl who was shining like a star on the street. I was really curious about her, and I wanted to meet her but I couldn't know how. By chance, one day I saw her with one of my friends from high school sitting in Ahmet and we met. Then, we got married for almost 55 years now”* (From the Oral History Interview with S.Ö.).

‘Uray Street was an important street with high commercial activity, where merchant inns (Azakhan, Tas Han, Susok Han), shops, warehouses, banks and post offices were located. Uray Street, where maritime trade was intensively

carried out, was especially important in terms of its relationship with the sea and the piers. As far as I know, it must have been in the 1930s or 40s, I'm not sure, but there was a rail system called decovil on this street. Thus, with this rail system, Uray Street was in a position to connect the railway station and the main pier of the city. There were entertainment venues and pavilions here in the evenings. But I also remember Akkahve' (From the Oral History Interview with Y.S.).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The changes and transformations highlighted in the respondents' oral history interviews fall into two broad categories. Known as the heart of the city until the 2000s, Uray Street has lost its former importance and vibrancy as commercial space has moved west of the city, particularly with the opening of the new Forum shopping centre. Allusions to the physical layout of the street, its size and the activities taking place there show that social interaction has played an important role in shaping the growth of the street space, leaving a lasting impression on the memory of every citizen. The spatial context of the street in question, both the activity on the street and in the public space, is significant, as citizens often remember it with shared meanings and responses.

Oral history interviews emphasized Mersin's identity as a port city, and spaces such as Akkahve and Azakhan were mentioned as spatial components associated with Uray Street and highlighted the street's commercial identity. This study examines streets as correspondences to urban spaces in urban memory, using methods that use personal testimonies and oral information as



Figure 1. Uray Street before the 20 th century (Source:Salt research, Harika-Kemali Söylemezoğlu archive).



Figure 2. Uray Street after the 20 th century (Source: Personal archive).

data. In this vein, oral history interviews are conducted with people who use and experience Uray Street on a daily basis, in an effort to access and analyse information recorded in the collective memory of the city's residents as a whole. As a result of this research, the memory of the city has been obtained as a collective memory that is registered in the memory of the street users of Uray and shows various similarities. In other words, this study uncovers the relationship between memory and space, as well as the relationship between users of different ages in the coastal city of Mersin Ulay Street, exploring places that leave lasting traces in their memory. Over time, the experience becomes one with the space, allowing street users to feel a sense of belonging and memories to live on in memory.

CONCLUSION

Cities that have changed and grown with the progress of immigration, industry and new technology are gradually losing their past, history, traditions, customs and traditions are gradually disappearing or being forgotten.

Technological progress, population growth and mobility that come with the development or reproduction of capitalism make cities gradually forget their past and create problems of urban identity. Memory and spatial research should be increased to document the city's lost or forgotten past and present, to pass it on to future generations and to build urban identity and urban consciousness. Nora (1989, p.8) defines memory as '*a dynamic operational phenomenon*'. Urban collective memory, on the other hand, expresses spatial, social and temporal continuity in the urban environment. Underlining the importance of memory, he argues that without memory, it is not possible to interpret, analyse, make suggestions for the future or make improvements in current urban and social conditions. This situation confirms Hayden's (1996, p.49) argument that '*a politically conscious approach to urban conservation... should emphasize public processes and public memory*'.

Streets can also be defined as temporary and permanent commercial areas that are part of everyday life, meeting places and intimate environments where we meet friends. Or take it a step further, it can sometimes be compared to the living room or dining room, where urbanites spend long stretches of their daily lives. On the other hand, the changing social and spatial structure of the city over time also affects the street, changing and transforming its identity.

Authentic spaces in an individual's daily life reflect his experiences. The living space is not only a passive arena in which social life takes place, but also an additional element of social life. Changes and transformations in social practices and meanings of places lead to changes in the experiences of individuals. This transformation also affects the relationship of the city that interacts with the street. Thus, the social and spatial markers of the urban environment can be read and identified in the changes of the social and spatial structure.

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