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Exploring Social Representations of Mersin as a Place and Türkiye With the Cognitive Mapping Method

ªEzgi Mehmetoğlu[1] (iD)

ªArş. Gör., Psikoloji Bölümü, Mersin Üniversitesi, Mersin, Türkiye

Abstract

The representation of place is studied by many different disciplines, such as geography, urban planning, and sociology. Studies on the representation of place share the idea that the representation of place consists of geographical, social, and cultural elements. This study was carried out to examine the representations of Mersin University students regarding Mersin and Türkiye, and their behavioral practices in Mersin. In the study, social and cognitive representations were reached through cognitive mapping. For the purpose of the study, the sample of the study consists of 130 students studying at Mersin University. One of the main differences in these representations is that the representations of Türkiye and Mersin are independent and unrelated to each other. The most important finding is that; Mersin University, important urban spaces, and neighboring countries are almost never included in the cognitive maps of university students. Social and political criticisms against Mersin and Türkiye were frequently seen on the maps. In the maps of the participants, it was determined that the use of place practices differed according to gender. Compared to men, women's place usage practices and place usage diversity are quite limited. In the study, the perceptions of Mersin University students about Mersin were discussed from the perspective of environmental psychology in light of the findings.

Keywords: Mental representation, cognitive map, Mersin, place image.

Bilişsel Haritalama Yöntemiyle Bir Yer Olarak Mersin ve Türkiye'nin Sosyal Temsillerini Keşfetme

Özet

Yerin temsili; coğrafya, kent planlama ve sosyoloji gibi birçok farklı disiplin tarafından incelenmektedir. Yerin temsili üzerine yapılan çalışmalar, yerin temsilinin hem coğrafi, hem sosyal hem de kültürel unsurlardan oluştuğu fikrini paylaşmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Mersin Üniversitesi öğrencilerinin Mersin'e ve Türkiye'ye ilişkin temsillerini ve Mersin'deki davranış pratiklerini incelemek amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmada sosyal ve bilişsel temsillere bilişsel haritalama yoluyla ulaşılmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda, araştırmanın örneklemini Mersin Üniversitesi'nde öğrenim gören 130 öğrenci oluşturmaktadır. Bu temsillerdeki temel farklılaşmalardan biri Türkiye ve Mersin'e ilişkin temsillerin birbirinden bağımsız ve ilişkisiz olmasıdır. En önemli bulgu ise; üniversite öğrencilerinin bilişsel haritalarında Mersin Üniversitesi'nin, önemli kent mekânlarının ve komşu ülkelerin neredeyse hiç yer almamasıdır. Mersin ve Türkiye'ye yönelik sosyal ve siyasi eleştiriler ise haritalarda sıklıkla görülmüştür. Katılımcıların haritalarında mekân kullanım pratiklerinin cinsiyete göre farklılaştığı saptanmıştır. Kadınların erkeklere kıyasla mekân kullanım pratikleri ve mekân kullanım çeşitlilikleri oldukça sınırlıdır. Çalışmada, Mersin Üniversitesi öğrencilerinin Mersin'e dair algıları elde edilen bulgular ışığında çevre psikolojisi perspektifiyle tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Bilişsel temsil, bilişsel haritalama, Mersin, yerin imgesi.

Introduction

The concept of place indicates multiple viewpoints from which interrelationships may concentrate between the geographical, psychological, social, anthropological, economic, and philosophical content. The physical environment construct is a physical as well as a social phenomenon (Proshansky, 1978). Place addresses not only geometrical differences, but also characterizes somewhere that is the materialization of human existence. It may have embodied symbols and values which are visible in urban areas (Lineu Castello, 2010). Place is one of the main concepts of environmental psychology and structure that affects both human behavior and which is also is affected by human behavior. It also forms the theoretical basis for the basic concepts of environmental psychology, such as place attachment and place identity.

Place has never been only an object. It contains meaningful experiences. These experiences contain various symbols and emotions. These symbols are also approved by society (Shamai, 1991). Relph (1997) says that a sense of place is an innate ability in order to connect with the world. The sense of place concept is a type of awareness used in order to criticize the environment. A sense of place is like transferring traditions to the next generation. It can be combination of symbolic meanings, attachments, and satisfaction of spatial features held by an individual or group (Stedman, 2002). John Agnew (2014) has investigated the devaluation of place in social science. Losing value of place infers that both community and the place can be overshadowed. In this way, place has lost social meaning and is pressured by way of commodification (Duncan & Agnew, 1989). In addition, the organization of place is signed with legal meanings. These legal buildings (religious buildings, borders) are built on the basis of obligations and rights. They have a sense of continuity as they are frequently used. These buildings are rooted in tradition and are often remembered for being used traditions (Halbwachs, 1950).

Place is often used in conjunction with the social network, the environment, and other networks associated with the environment. The place contains subjective meanings to those who experience it. These relations with the environment include social, emotional, and symbolic meanings related to the context. Activities provide the formation of the relationship with the place, the attachment to that place, and the meanings built there. In order to understand this structure, it is necessary to investigate the related structures and functions established within the place (Göregenli, 2010).

People obtain various identities throughout relationship with place. The environment we interact with tells us who we are in human relations. These multiple identities may change over time, and with the dimensions of the place (Graumann, 1983). Place meanings are combined with local environmental concerns. Gustafson (2001), in his study of the meaning of place, asked participants to list the important places in their lives and to define what they meant to them. The responses of the participants were analyzed and three categories determined: self, others, and environment. The self-category describes the person's life stages, experiences, activities that connect the person to that place. The other categories include the situations that the person builds with people living in the neighborhood, and include recognition, anonymity, and the characteristics and behavior of indigenous inhabitants. These three

categories are related to different dimensions. For example, the self-environment category includes both objective and subjective information about the place. The self-environment category includes both being known and anonymity. Shamai (1991) defined the meaning of place in three stages. The first phase is place belonging, the second phase is place attachment and the third phase is place loyalty. There are no clear boundaries between these phases.

The city differentiates itself as a diversity of traditions and functions. The physical arrangements made in the city affect the behavior of the city residents. This situation sometimes changes the behavior as a result of changing the urban space; sometimes the needs of the city residents require the physical change of the city. The reflection of this difference on the external appearance of the city is slower. While the habits associated with the physical environment change, this situation forces the environment to change as well. This state of change is related to the collective memory of the group based on spatial images (Halbwachs, 1950).

Place Attachment

Place attachment is a process of creating a memory that cannot be explained by the stimulus-response relationship, which includes many different places from the most micro area to the macro based on childhood experiences (Göregenli, 2010). It represents the link in our relationship with places throughout our lives. While the continuity of the place with which the relationship is established strengthens the attachment to this place, changing place damages this relationship.

Place attachment, in its simplest form, represents the process of a person's subjective relationship with the place. These experiences depend on symbolic and personal meaning. The symbols have a variety of multiple meanings. As a summary, place attachment interconnects the individual symbols. Humans attribute meaning to the place, and this meaning creates place attachment by way of these symbols and sense. Physical settings interact and shape attitudes, beliefs, and attachments (Stedman, 2002). While interacting with a place for a long time increases the attachment to the place; changes in the place negatively affect the place attachment.

Place attachment can touch different levels of functions for individuals, groups, and cultures. It may link people to others or cultural values by way of symbols or by being reminded of childhood (Low & Altman, 1992). When people attach to a place, they often state that the effect of a place's history, which has its own roots, is more than the emotional ties it has with people (Lewicka, 2008). For this reason, the living spaces of one's own family members, or the places where they are with them, are places with high commitment. Another factor is that migration influences place attachment. Studies have shown that locals have a higher level of commitment than that of immigrants (Hernández, Carmen Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, & Hess, 2007). Korpela (1989) who examined place attachment studies the self-regulatory role of the physical environment and place attachment. According to the study, the properties of the place, activities concerning the place and being together with others, comfort, and pleasure, being able to express oneself comfortably, privacy and belonging, anonymity, security, rooting, familiarity, and reputation are all seen as increasing place attachment. In their study, Ujang and

colleagues (2015), who consider place attachment as one of the criteria for place-making in the context of place reorganization, mention three factors that constitute place attachment: place dependence, sense of belonging and rootedness, and place identity. The lack of connectivity of the physical areas with place meanings and feelings affects the broader physical, cultural, and emotional contexts negatively (Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). In addition, damage to this attachment harms place attachment and place identity. For this reason, it is important to organize the physical change of places in line with the demands of the people who use that place, so that place attachment and place identities are not damaged.

In understanding people's relationship with the place, their practices and memories with the place show us attachment to the place. In line with this study, understanding Mersin in the minds of the participants will also show us their place attachment.

Place Identity

Place identity is a structure that contributes to the commitment of people to a place; it deals with place attachment. The identity of the place is the personal experience of the person, and emotion acquired as a result of daily life practices. Place identity identifies the physical relationship between place and the person's identity. It is an individual, unique structure. Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983) explains place identity as:

> "Individuals do indeed define who and what they are in terms of such strong affective ties to 'house and home' and/or neighborhood and community... Place-identity is influenced by a wide range of person/physical setting experiences and relationships based on a variety of physical contexts that from the moment of birth until death define people's day-to-day existence. What emerges as 'place-identity' is a complex cognitive structure which is characterized by a host of attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meanings and behavior tendencies that go well beyond just emotional attachments and belonging to particular places."

For example, a person's relationship with the person they greet in the street they live on, the bench on the street where they sit and listen, the corner where they feed the stray animals can express the place identity of the person living on this street. Many people can go to the same street and sit on the same bench. On the other hand, the relationship we establish with the place becomes unique together with our personal characteristics. This is the place's identity.

In the physical characteristics of a space, individual interaction of place, social or individual beliefs, feelings, goals, and the behavioral tendencies continue throughout life. It makes the socialization processes in the physical world unique (Proshansky, 1978). The individual interaction with the place expresses the subjectivity of the person's self-properties and experience with the place. It takes place with relationships established outside the home. Place identity, which is one of our multiple identities, has a temporal dimension, beginning with the familiar and non-familiar distinction within the group in which we are born (Graumann, 1983). The places and people we define as family when we are born define me/us and the outsider/other. Over time, these boundaries change with our socialization processes. It changes with the person's life-long experiences. Changing of self over time causes changes in experiences. Thus, the place identity also changes with the self.

According to Lalli (1992), by conceptualizing the place in different ways, it plays a role in the formation and maintenance of individuals' identity. In the sense of continuity provided by the

environment, it is reflected in the individual's self-knowledge and the way individuals express their identities.

Proshansky (1978) indicates that place identity has variety of dimensions. The organization of the knowledge, beliefs, and memories of people has experience with the physical environment, which constitutes the cognitive-descriptive dimension. This dimension shows how a place is arranged, with its concept, belief, color and other physical characteristics. The affective-evaluative dimension deals with the structural features of the environment, not only with structural features but also includes a repertoire of emotions and preferences.

Place identity and place attachment affect and reproduce each other. The place attachment and place identity include a process of experience, which involves both collective memory and autobiographical memory. It determines the person's experience related to the place and place attachment. This process also includes the construction of the meaning of the place. In this loop, both memory and meaning are reproduced. The characteristics and context of the place play a role in the production of these meanings in the relationship of a person with the place.

Place attachment, place identity, and the meaning of the place are complementary and feeding structures. The person creates the meanings of the place with his/her own experiences in the environment. These experiences, which contain symbols and emotions, represent the characteristics of the place. These meanings allow for personal attachment to the place, and, over time, the person acquires the place identity.

The clearest concept is place identity, which is formed as a result of subjective experiences with place. However, the meaning of place, sense of place, place attachment, and place identity are structures that affect each other, and which cannot be separated from each other with rigid boundaries.

Considering the purpose of the study, with the representations of the university students about the city, it is aimed to determine the important public spaces of the city, the criticism of the city, and the needs of the city. In addition, understanding Mersin within Türkiye and exploring representations and criticisms of Türkiye is another aim of the study. The personal spaces indicated on the maps will show place identity and location of these places in the lives of the participant will show place attachment in the results.

Social Representation

Social representation takes on the function of interpretation of the unknown in society. In the process of communication network in society, information is reproduced and shared within the society. As a result of this communication network, social representations of the produced information come to the fore (Moscovici, 1988). Moscovici explains social representations as:

> "..systems of values, ideas, and practices with a two-fold function: first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in and master their material world; and second, to facilitate communication among members of a community by providing them with a code for naming and classifying the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history"(Moskovici, (1973, s. 13).

Social representations encountered by individuals or groups are the product of the mental activity process of rebuilding realities and attributing a specific meaning to them. It is an organized whole of opinions, attitudes, beliefs, images, and information on a particular subject. To the extent that the objective characteristics of a particular situation are not present for individual, the individual's representations of this situation indicate that he/she acts as objective data and affects his/her behavior (Bilgin, 2002). Social representations, which are cognitive tools to provide understand, recognize and name the truth, include categories, classifications, and value-judgments. They are conditions and agents of interpersonal relations since interpersonal relations occur according to experiences (Bilgin, 2005).

One of the aims of this study is to explore the social representations of Mersin and Türkiye, which are the symbols and thoughts that the participants convey about Mersin and Türkiye in their minds.

Cognitive Maps

Cognitive maps are a combination of information and images that people have regarding the environment in which they live with their meanings and symbols in their minds. Unlike geographical maps, they contain images developed by people in relation to the world. Cognitive mapping, come up with by Tolman, is a process that brings together memories of people's spatial environment, recalling these memories, coding, and the resolution of spatial information (Downs, Stea, & Boulding, 2017). Cognitive mapping occurs through the process of information collecting, storing, and recalling. The reactions of people when are faced with different places mostly depend on their perceptions. These perceptions concerning physical features of the environment will be shaped by cultural and individual factors in order to create cognitive images and representations, which will further emerge as simplified models of reality. These images affect human spatial behavior. Cognitive mapping is a way of imagining place and studying spatial behavior. Building a more livable city for people is through the study of behavioral practices shaped by psychological and mental representations of people (Göregenli, 2010).

There are many studies conducted in Türkiye with cognitive mapping. Karasu and colleagues (2017) examined what is needed to improve relations between Türkiye and Armenia and representations of Türkiye with university students and non-governmental organizations through questionnaires and cognitive mapping. The findings made visible both the cognitive and social representations of Türkiye and the steps that would improve the relationship between the two countries. Tuzkaya and colleagues (2015) investigated representations of Eastern and Western Türkiye through cognitive mapping. Sudaş and Göregenli (2013) analyzed representations of Europe through cognitive mapping with university students. The results indicate that Türkiye's relations with Europe for university students have developed on ideological background more than geographical basis. In her study, Karakuş (2007) examined the meaning of İzmir Kültürpark for the people of İzmir and its representations about Kültürpark through questionnaires and cognitive mapping. The findings of the study showed the representations and meanings of the İzmir Fair and the construction process of this meaning.

This study considers the behavioral practices of the participants by considering place identity and place attachment framework. The social representations of Mersin and Türkiye are examined through cognitive maps. The political climate in the country, considering the position of the social-cultural and the geographical features in Mersin is examined through the eyes of the participants.

This study is conducted to explore the social representations of Mersin University students regarding Mersin and the relationship between Mersin and Türkiye in their minds.

In this study, while Mersin in the minds of the participants showed the identity of Mersin on the basis of their personal experiences with Mersin; The feelings, belonging indicators, and loyalty expressed about Mersin indicate both the place identity and the sense of Mersin for the city for the participants.

Method

Participants

The study was conducted by gathering cognitive maps from 130 students from Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Psychology, Sociology, Mathematics, Philosophy departments of Mersin University. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Demographic characteristics of the participants and types of maps

Variable		n	Percentage
Sex	Female	50	38
	Male	80	62
Age (in years)	Female	21.7 (mean)	-
	Male	22.3 (mean)	-
Department	Unknown	1.00	0.77
	Electrical & Electronics Engineering	64.00	49.23
	Philosophy	18.00	13.85
	Mathematics	20.00	15.38
	Psychology	15.00	11.54
	Sociology	12.00	9.23
Longest place lived	Mersin	30.00	23.08
	Other	98.00	75.38
	Unknown	2.00	1.54

Procedure

The current study focuses on investigating the social representation of Mersin and Türkiye by way of cognitive maps. Ethnic origins of the participants were not asked in the study; Instead, only place of birth was asked. In this direction, the effect of the participants' being born in Mersin or coming to Mersin for various reasons on their representation was examined. The ethics approval was granted by the ethics committee of "Toros University" (Number: 23.06.2023/86).

Firstly, exploring students' behavior related to the city, an A3 size paper are given to students and then, "Close your eyes and think about Mersin and Türkiye and then transfer what you have in your mind on paper," statement was indicated by researcher. Participants transferred Türkiye and Mersin on a single A3 paper. Secondly, students transferred what's on their minds about Türkiye and Mersin on the paper.

Prior to the main analysis, cognitive maps were classified according to the drawing style and afterwards items in the maps were analyzed with a quantitative method regarding item type (geographic feature, symbol, text). Types of drawings on maps include the categorization of what is transferred to the map. The texts, symbols, geographical features, or the presence of several of these transfer types on the map determine the type of that map. Finally, all features on the maps were reanalyzed with Van Dijk critical discourse which explores how these discursive resources are sustained and reproduced in social, political, and historical contexts analysis in order to determine the symbolic meanings of the items. The maps in the appendix are named according to the text and symbols conveyed by the participants. In a classic map example, the shape of Türkiye transferred to the map and the places where Türkiye's geographical regions are located, the transfers related to that region are seen. On the map indicated in Appendix 6, Marmara Region with high-rise buildings-construction, Aegean Region with olive trees, Mediterranean Region with sun, sea, and tail elements such as boats, Central Anatolia Region with child brides, Southeast Anatolia Region with conflict thoughts and Eastern Anatolia Region with animals. and finally, the Black Sea Region was represented by precipitation (See Appendix 6). The results are presented below.

Results

All of the 130 maps were classified as symbolic (n = 63), geographic (n = 4), or geographic-symbolic (n = 35) and the maps were classified as other types (n = 28) by the researcher. These maps were investigated according to geographic and symbolic components. Items drawn on maps were coded into excel file one by one then analyzed according to the types of the items. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Types of maps

	Unknown	4	3.08
	Geographic	4	3.08
	Geographic- Text	1	0.77
	Geographic - Symbolic	35	26.92
Type of maps	Graphic	1	0.77
	Text	3	2.31
	Symbolic	63	48.46
	Symbolic - Graphic	14	10.77
	Symbolic - Text	70	53.85

As a result of the analysis of the cognitive maps, we see that Mersin is mentioned in eleven different categories: Symbols, Social system critique of the community, Null, Immaturity, Belonging, Mersin University, Nationalism, Touristic Elements, Negative thoughts against the Syrians, Monuments and Places and Climate. These categories are composed of three main structures, consisting of the physical and social conditions of the city, critics of the city, and city-related experiences.

Nine categories come to mind when Türkiye is mentioned: Criticism of the power and form of government, Poor urbanization, Criticisms of society, War, Criticism of the economy, Characteristics of geographical regions, Feeling of individual entrapment, Nationalism, Touristic items. These include representations of geographic regions, their feelings, and thoughts about the country, their criticisms and various places.

After the instructions directed to the participants, some of the participants drew only Mersin on the maps, some drew Türkiye and Mersin as two separate structures, and some drew Mersin as a part of Türkiye. The student population which indicated Mersin with Türkiye together is only 30% of sample. While some of the students transferred Türkiye to the paper with the country's neighbors, some did not. The %7 of the student population which showed Türkiye with neighboring country. Not transferring Türkiye to paper with neighbors also indicates the representation of Türkiye's relationship with other countries in the minds of university students. Türkiye seems unrelated and separate from other countries. The results are quite striking in terms of the representation of Türkiye and Mersin.

Geographic Components

Items drawn in the maps were coded one by one, and then thematic analysis was used according to the types of the items. The geographic components included a total of 94 items. Those items included only the neighborhood of Türkiye (10) and regions of Türkiye (84). While the Black Sea Region is represented by expressions such as green, wooded, precipitation, natural, north; Mediterranean region is shown on maps with sea, sand, and palm trees. Marmara Region, Istanbul, crowded, industry, over-construction, risky area, obscurity; Aegean Region; indicated by calm, cordon, immigration, olive tree, and Izmir. Southern and Eastern Anatolia; In the Central Anatolia Region, with terrorism, livestock, terrestrial, darkness, war, planes, and bombs; Ankara is represented on maps with Cappadocia, Fairy Chimney, and conservative people. In addition, twelve different places in the minds of the participants were also included in the maps. These places were Fethiye, Antalya, Konya, Diyarbakir, Van, Agri, and Bitlis.

Symbolic components

Social Representations of Türkiye

To examine social representations of Türkiye and Mersin; The symbols, texts and drawings stated by the participants were primarily categorized by thematic analysis. In the second stage, the relationship between the structures that the participant transferred to the map was examined and if the participant did not have any criticism, only the frequency of the items transferred on the map was taken.

The frequencies taken from the specified symbols, elements and criticisms were examined on the basis of gender and place of birth. Since it is a descriptive study, comparisons were made on the basis of frequency, and no statistical test was used for analysis. Frequencies of representations of Mersin were shown in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Symbolic items were researched to understand the social representations of Türkiye through Van Dijk critical discourse analysis. Three main categories were identified; (i) critiques toward the conditions of Türkiye, (ii) sense of pressure on individual, and (iii) items of Türkiye.

Categories were created with the symbols and written expressions drawn by the participants. The first category involves criticism of Türkiye, which consists of 4 separate categories. The first category consists of criticism of the power and form of government, corruption, domestic violence, violence against women, abuse of religion, injustice, animal rights problems, and poor-quality education. This category mostly consists of criticisms of Türkiye's main administrative problems. Criticism of the state administration, gender discrimination, and inadequacies in the education system were mentioned totally 54 times. The characteristics of the maps are presented in Appendix 6 and 7.

The second category consists of criticisms of society. This category mentioned 34 times. Pollution, backwardness, gossip, and child brides are included in this category. The category of war is indicated 29 times, and is the third category, which includes war, conflict, death, martyrdom and external threat. Another category includes poor urbanization. Destruction of nature increased shopping centers and unplanned construction constitutes this category. This category mentioned 18 times. The fifth category consists of criticism of the economy; particularly events experienced in the last year are frequently included in maps. In total, this category was specified 17 times. The depreciation of the Turkish Lira, an increase in gasoline prices, unemployment, poverty, and income-expense imbalance were also mentioned.

Another important category represents feeling of individual entrapment. Symbols indicating that they often felt under pressure were found on the maps of the participants. The political pressures in the country were expressed by human figures that have been obstructed and violated by symbols, such as the prison, cages, prohibition of speech, and railings indicated on the maps. The map of Türkiye, shown in a total of 7 symbols, is symbolized by a sense of entrapment.

The last category showed representations regions of Türkiye. Türkiye were defined by several characteristics of regions. Eastern and southeastern Anatolia are identified with 12 features: cold, migration, terrorism, lack of development, government violence, mountainous, exhilarant, war, livestock, darkness, and peace. The Marmara Region is represented by poor construction, chaos, Istanbul, overcrowding, Istanbul Strait, the capital of the economy, obscurity, and unimaginable concepts. Ankara, the capital city of Türkiye, is defined on the maps by the presidential palace, wars and expulsions. The central Anatolian region, including Ankara, is represented by conservatism, Ankara and Cappadocia. The Black Sea region is represented by rainfall, natural life, and greenery. The

Mediterranean region is shown with tourist items and the sea. The Aegean Region is represented on the maps by holidays, calmness, and tranquility.

In addition, participants were indicated positive assessment of Türkiye. Attachment towards Türkiye, with positive feelings was expressed; belonging, love, being a livable country, such as freedom featured.

As a result of the analysis, it was found that there are many nationalist symbols that come to mind when Türkiye is mentioned. Nationalism category which had included flag, patriotism, and wolves were among a total of 25 items expressed as representing Türkiye. In addition, Syrians fleeing the war in the last five years were also shown, through a small number of students represented in Türkiye. There were also negative attitudes expressed regarding Syrians in Türkiye.

The participants in Türkiye highlighted tourist items. Natural resources, climate, sea, hot, sunbed, and holiday items were mentioned a total of 16 times in the maps shown. Examples are given in the appendix map for the representation of Türkiye. These include male dictatorship (Appendix 3), authoritativeness (Appendix 2), extinction of nature and urbanization, political pressure, the distinction between classes and conservatism (Appendix 2), violence against women, and animal rights problems (Appendix 6), injustice (Appendix 2). In addition, the depreciation of the Turkish lira (Appendix 4), unemployment, and malpractice are frequently stated as critiques of Türkiye. Moreover, towns, resources, important historical and tourist monuments/buildings, and the climate are shown on maps (Appendix 8).

Social Representations of Mersin

The students' representations of Mersin were examined in three main categories: criticisms, feelings towards Mersin, and the symbols of Mersin. These categories are based on the frequency of the structures specified in the maps. 38 participants did not indicate Mersin on their maps. Some of the participants added texts to their drawings and some of them wrote texts and stated their representation to Mersin. In the study, place attachment was expressed by the participants through positive emotions/drawings and personal experiences stated. Criticisms and negative feelings about the city were included in the category of representations. When we examine the criticism of Mersin, we see that the most common criticism relates to society. This category include relationship between groups and criticism, which was mentioned 25 times in total, and includes such structures as class distinction, fights, insincerity, consumerism, and intolerance. Backwardness is a structure that was mentioned 16 times in total, and contains pollution, low technology, and unemployment. Another category includes criticism about urbanization. The urbanization category was identified 14 times in total. Structuring and the reduction of green areas are the most important elements. Another reason and category for criticism was traffic. Traffic problems and the inadequacy of the transport network was stated 10 times in total. The last category of criticism relates to Syrians. Criticism of Syrians' life practices was mentioned 10 times in total (Appendix 1).

Mersin maps were categorized according to the emotions of the participants. Female participants expressed 50% positive, 35.71% negative and 14.29% nötr feelings about Mersin. The feelings of male participants about Mersin were determined as 35.71% positive, 42.86% negative and 21.43% neutral.

The symbols representing Mersin are indicated by the participants a total of 173 times. The most expressed symbol was the beach. Items for the beach were specified 74 times in total. This category included boat, parks, fisherman, picnic, cat, and bicycle. These symbols refer to the activities or observations of the inhabitants of the city. The most indicated symbols after the coast are as follows: sea (49), tantuni (17), palm (14), citrus (8), green (8) and intersection (3). Regarding buildings and places mentioned, a total of thirty spaces were identified. The mentioned buildings/spaces were Mersin University (9), 52.kat (5), Toroslar (4), Seaport (4), Plateau (2), Industrial Zone (2), Forum Shopping Center (1), Lighthouse (1), Pozcu (1), Davultepe (1), Silifke (1), Tarsus (1), Bus Station (1) and Nuclear Power Plant (1). Concerning the properties of the spaces or structures mentioned, it is an important finding that they are all public spaces. In addition to specifying the public spaces of the inhabitants of the city, the main features of these spaces are that these spaces are places where groups satisfy their living spaces or needs. The shopping center and the bus station are on the basis of need. Other places mentioned are living spaces. One of the structures that spring to mind concerning Mersin is nationalism. The wolf, the emphasis on the Turkish flag and the hand signs symbolizing nationalism are mentioned in the study as symbols of nationalism. The items related to nationalism are indicated on the maps 13 times in total. Another structure in this category is related to personal belonging and personal memories. The "appropriated" places indicated by the participants with expressions such as "The cafe where I met with my girlfriend, under the umbrella I always wait for in front of the university", as well as on the maps with the place drawings, show a sense of belonging. These items are indicated on the maps 6 times.

The mean of representation of Mersin shows differentiation ratio based on sex and the longest place to live. Although men use more space (10.33%) in number than women (2.91%) women used more symbols on their maps (46.51%) than men (45.33%). It was found that men perceive Mersin as a more nationalistic city (3.33%) compared to women (1.74%). Another finding shows that women have more criticisms of society (25.58%) and the social system than men (14.67). The mental representation and symbols for Mersin are shown for gender in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1.

Mental Representation of Mersin for gender
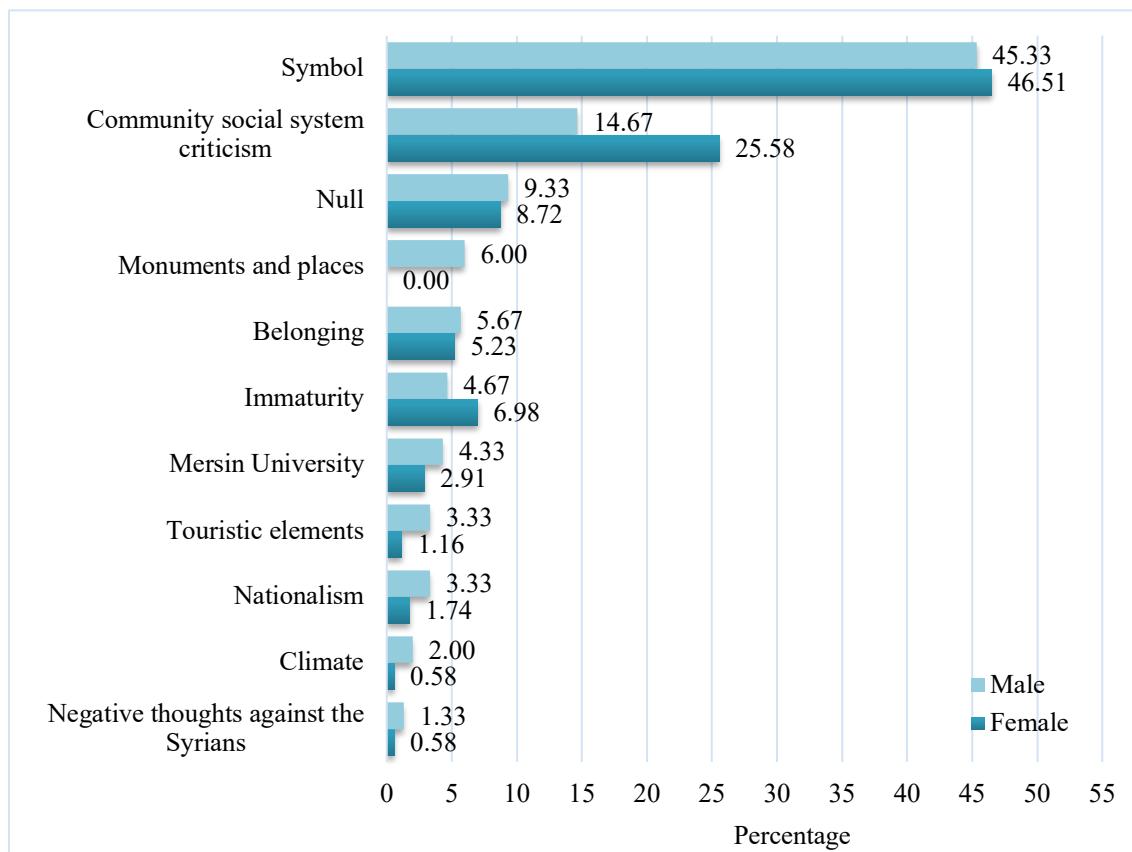
Figure 2.

Symbols about Mersin for gender
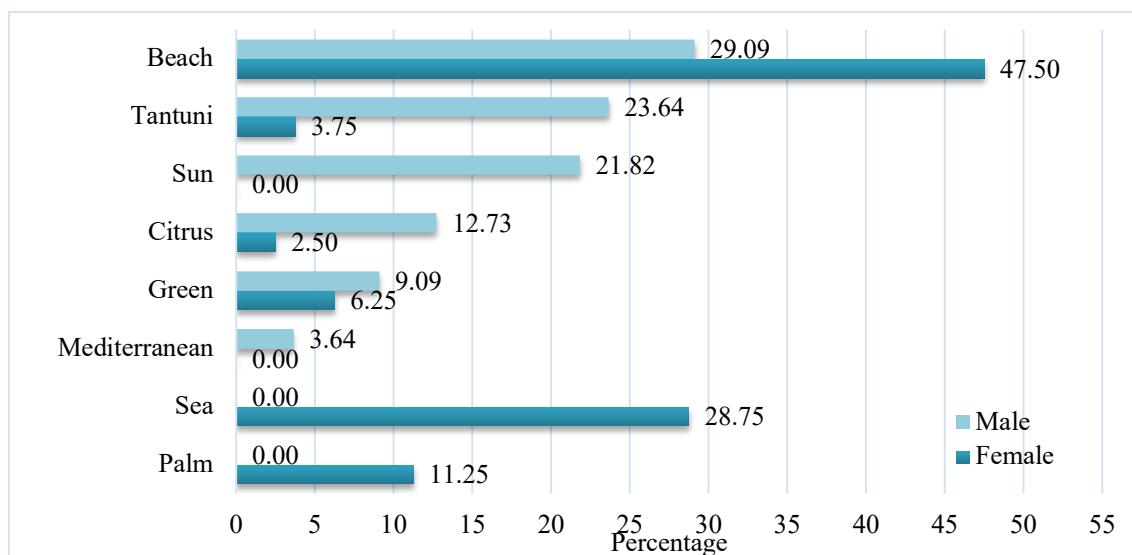
Natives and non-natives differ from each other. Natives gave more space (15.46%) to Mersin for their maps than those born in other cities (9.09%). On the other hand, those who came from outside

of Mersin described Mersin in more detail (73%) and with more elements than those who were born in Mersin (27%). Those who came to Mersin from other cities had more personal memories and belonging (5.67%) to Mersin in their maps than those born in Mersin (4.12%). The mental representation and symbols for Mersin are shown regarding place of birth in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3.

Mental Representations of Mersin regarding place of birth
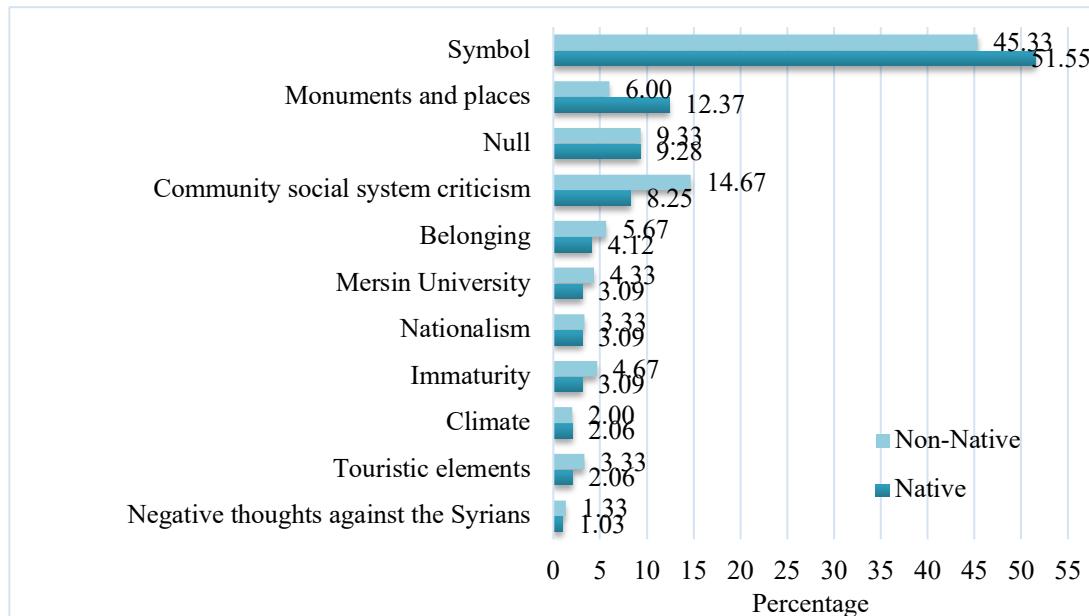
Figure 4.

Symbols for Mersin regarding the place of birth
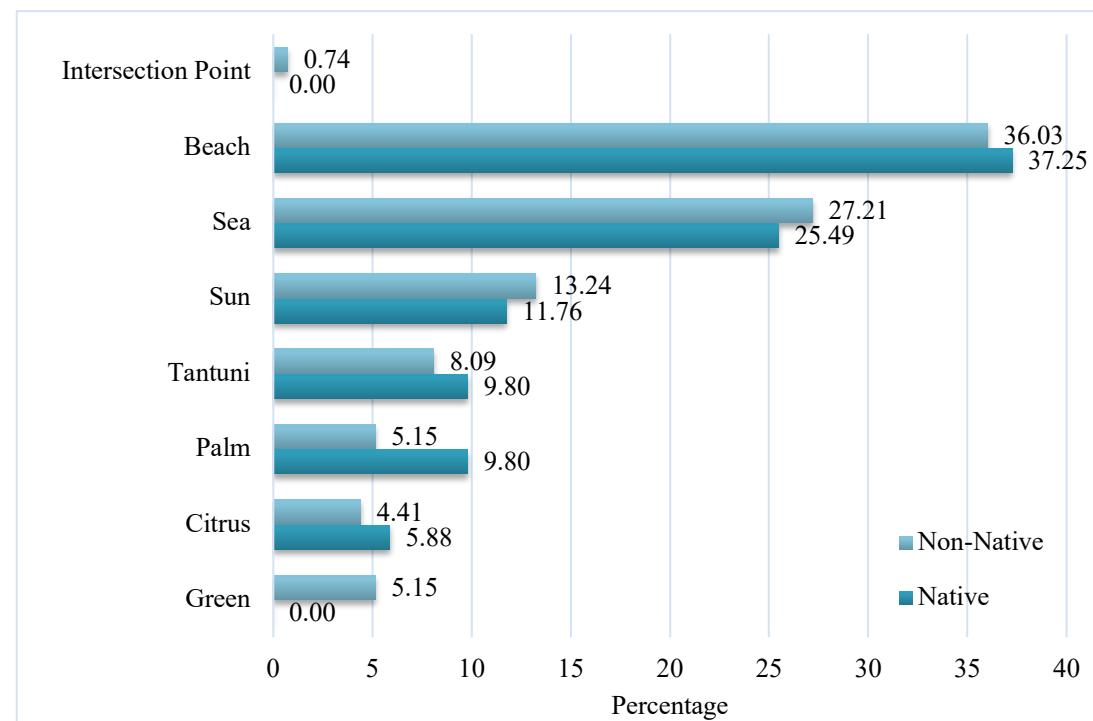
Those who were born in other cities found Mersin to be less developed, but nationalist, than those born in Mersin. However, non-native of Mersin found Mersin to be more touristy compared to those born in Mersin. The relationships, lessons, and activities they have established at the university constitute this category. They also put their emotional ties and personal memories of Mersin on their maps. It was found that these students were more critical of society compared to students born in Mersin. Their categories of criticism are class distinction and hierarchy, chaos, insincerity, and immigration. The participants indicating Mersin and Türkiye on a map together represented only 34% of the sample; The sample of students indicating neighbors of Türkiye constitutes only 8%. One of the countries mentioned was Cyprus, which is close to Mersin. Other countries mentioned were Bulgaria, Greece, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, and Georgia.

The representations of Mersin on the maps by the students show the meaning of the place for the students and the attachment they have established with these places. These representations are expressed with activities carried out in places, shapes or words that express emotions.

Discussion

The main goal of this study is to investigate the various social representations of Mersin and Türkiye. The second aim is to explore the attachment of university students to the city and their behavioral in their relationship with the city. We analyzed cognitive maps that were drawn by university students and critical discourse analysis reveals that there were three main categories: critiques toward the conditions of Mersin and Türkiye, a sense of pressure on individual, and items of Mersin and Türkiye.

When the findings of the study were examined, it was determined that besides the objective characteristics of the place, there are many individual meanings formed in line with the person's own experience. Participants embodied the meaning and placed identity on maps by sharing their subjective experiences with expressions such as "The stop in front of the school, heartbreak, typical student city, similar to Türkiye, my memories with teachers and students" and various symbols. This interaction of the person with the place indicates attachment to the place with symbols, feelings, and experiences related to the place (Stedman, 2002).

In the study, none of the monuments and squares in Mersin were mentioned by the participants. The fact that the only historical place mentioned is the Maiden's Castle, which shows that some of Mersin's historical and cultural values have lost their importance. While Ünlü (2017), which examines the historical and spatial characteristics of Mersin through oral history, reveals important places; No similar finding was found in our study. The only commonplace mentioned in the two studies is Mersin Port. This situation shows us that the use of the space has changed in the time and the cultural characteristics of the spaces have not been transferred.

In the construction of Mersin place identity, we see that the natural resources of the city are in front of its historical background. The cognitive and social representations of the city, together with the

participants' experiences with the city and what was conveyed to the participants about the city, were shaped on natural resources such as the sea, the coast, citrus, and palm trees.

Another important result is that the non-native students attach more than native students. Non-native group consisted of participants who were born outside of Mersin and came to Mersin for various reasons. This group indicate more symbols and places in the city. All these findings should be evaluated and new groups and methods should be used in order to increase the place attachment and life satisfaction of the residents of the city. In addition, it is seen that the feelings of native participants are only positive feelings on their maps; on the other hand, it was seen that the feelings of non-native participants on their maps were 45% negative, 45% neutral, and 10% positive feelings. This shows us that people are more attached to the places where they were born and lived for a long time. Another aim of the study is to examine students' representations of the university and their attachment to the university. The representation of Mersin University includes inadequate and negative features. Only the items that symbolize education, such as class, lessons, and books are represented. University, from Türkiye and Mersin, is expressed as an isolated structure. Mersin University is indicated on the maps at a rate of 3.09% by native students and only 4.33% by non-native students. This situation shows us the place of Mersin University in the lives of university students and the low level of students' attachment to the university. It is another interesting result is that there are no drawings on the maps of university students indicating any social organization or entertainment within the university. In addition, Mersin University is not shown in Turkey and Mersin on the maps but shown as a separate-disconnected structure.

In the past, the public sphere and activity were seen in Mersin where there was a greater number of public spaces and activities, as in other cities (Mehmetoğlu, 2017; Ünlü, 2017). The study shows that the number of public places and diversity of public place is now quite limited. Ünlü (2017) examined the relationship between urban memory and urban space in an oral history study with Mersin sample. When our study results were compared, it was seen that the only place mentioned in common in both studies was the port. Another important result is that the number of public places has decreased. When the number and variety of the places were examined, men indicated less space than women.

Concerning the representations of Mersin, apart from the influence and criticism of power, we realize a representation of tourist elements and nationalist figures. Maps were often drawn showing Mersin and Türkiye separately from each other. This situation shows us that the students perceive Mersin as disconnected and unrelated to Türkiye. There may be many factors that cause this situation: Interests, channel followings, social media usage, and preferences. This issue can be examined in new studies.

As we examine these structures, we see that they constitute the main structure of the government and criticism of the policies of Türkiye. The most important structure forms social representations concerning Türkiye in these policies and power. In addition to this main category, the physical characteristics of Türkiye's geographical area constitutes the basis of Türkiye's social representation. Türkiye's cultural and political situation is reflected in the map. The war category is seen with fears of

external powers, which are expressed by the sense of pressure on individual and pressure of power. Economic decline, with the depreciation of the Turkish lira, is seen as a significant problem in all regions of Türkiye with the rise in gasoline prices, especially in Istanbul, which is represented as the center of poor urbanization and the disappearance of green areas.

The Aegean and Mediterranean regions are represented by beautiful climates and tourist elements; Southeastern Anatolia and the Eastern Anatolia Region are represented by difficult climatic conditions and pessimism. On the other hand, previous studies showed that representation of eastern Türkiye is closely related with war (Peker-Dural and colleagues, 2018). The results of the study were similar to those of Tuzkaya and colleagues (2015). This situation shows that the social representations of the country have not changed, although they are in different cities of the country in a period of approximately five years.

Central Türkiye is consistently revealed as an area with a perception of war. One reason for this is the ever-changing political climate and the pressure on opposition groups. It is related to the sense of pressure on individual, the one-manpower, centralized management, pressure to change the way of life, political pressure, violation of special fields, and criticism related to authoritarianism. In addition, the relationship with Türkiye's neighbors and other countries is reflected on the map. Few of the participants reported on Türkiye's neighbors. In the specified map, the neighbors Türkiye are seen as an external threat.

With this study, the loved and criticized aspects of Mersin as well as the relationship between the city and Türkiye were discovered. With the findings of the study, the criticized aspects of the city can be strengthened, and arrangements can be made with the determined needs. In addition, in order to contribute to the memory of the city, places that cannot be transferred from the past to the present can be contributed by reviving them.

New researchers can reexamine this issue by supplementing it with various personality and group measures.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine the representation of Mersin University students about Mersin, Mersin University, Türkiye and their commitment to the city. As a result of the study conducted with cognitive mapping for this purpose, the criticisms about Türkiye and Mersin, the physical features in the minds of the participants and the attached places were determined on the maps.

In the study, Mersin University is very limited in the students' maps. This indicates the lack of connection that students have with the university as a place. In addition, the places where university students are in the city, the representation of these places in their minds and their criticisms of Mersin are included in the maps. It is an important finding that the squares are few in number among the places mentioned in the city.

While Mersin and Türkiye are stated together in some of the maps, they are indicated separately on some maps. This situation is thought to be related to the positioning of Mersin and Türkiye in the minds of the participants.

There are representations of the regions of Türkiye on the maps. Despite that, the number of neighboring countries specified is limited. This indicates the mental representation of the relations established with neighboring countries. In addition, criticisms against the government, damage to nature, urban construction, violations and criticisms against women's and animal rights are frequently indicated on the maps.

The study sheds light on both Mersin, urban space usage practices, physical and social problems in the city and structural problems in Türkiye from the students' perspective.

Due to the lack of similar studies in this field, it is expected to both fill an important gap in the literature and contribute to the literature by pointing out system problems.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Sample drawing depicting critique; negative attitude towards Syrians and war criticism.
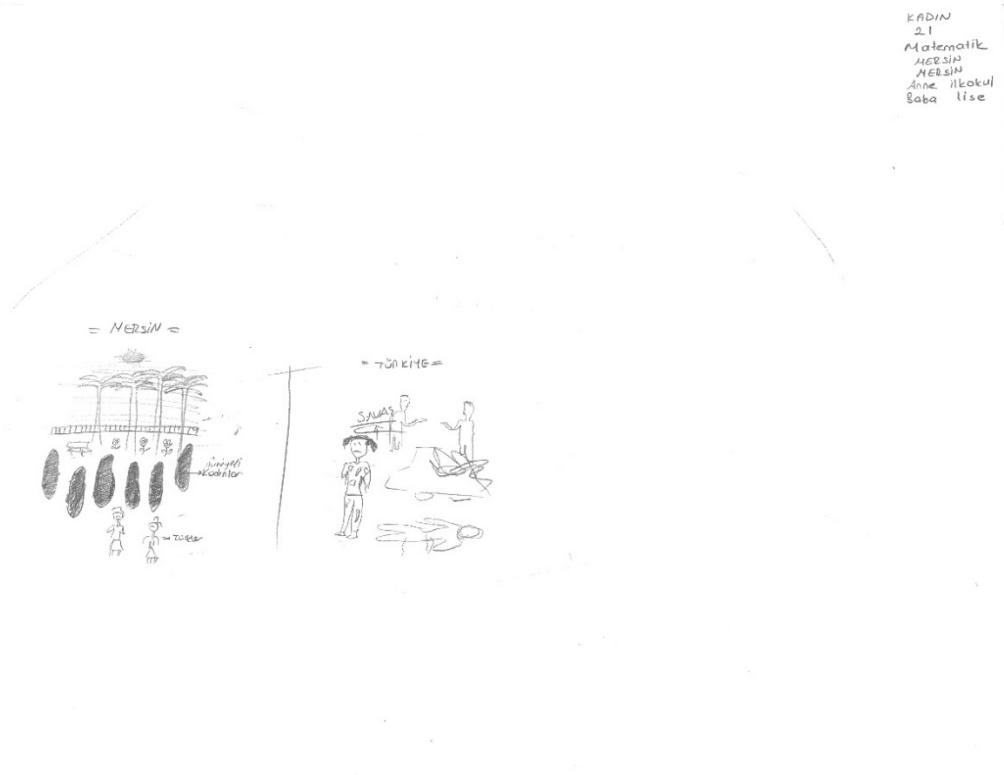

Appendix 2. Sample drawing depicting critique; political pressure and urbanization
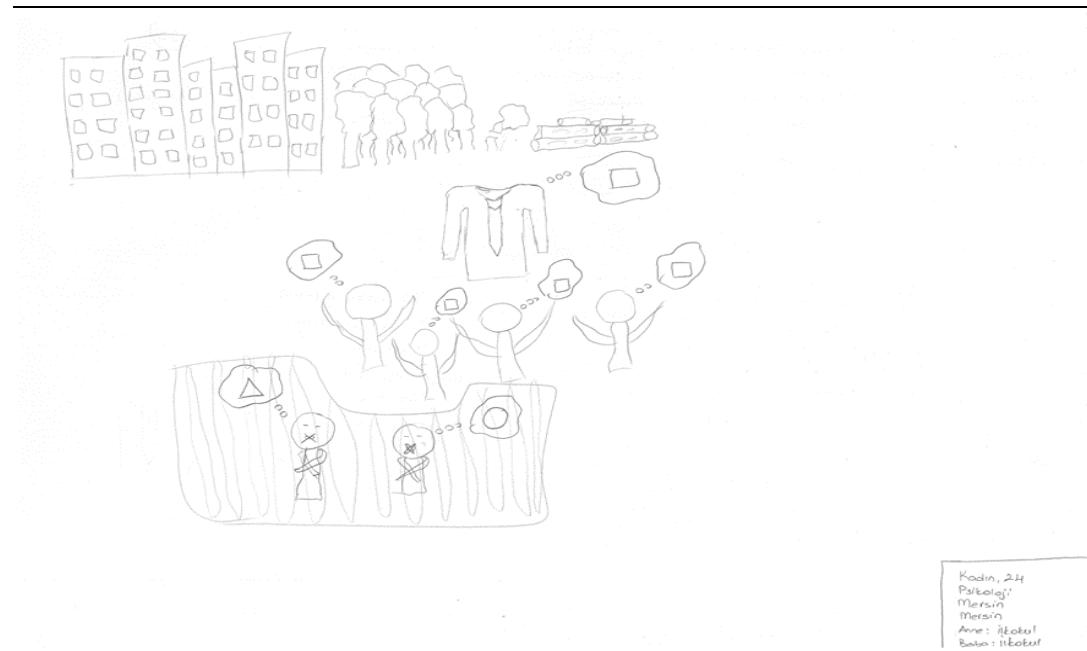
Appendix 3. Sample drawing depicting critique; a male dictatorship.


Appendix 4. Sample drawing depicting critique; the depreciation of the Turkish lira.
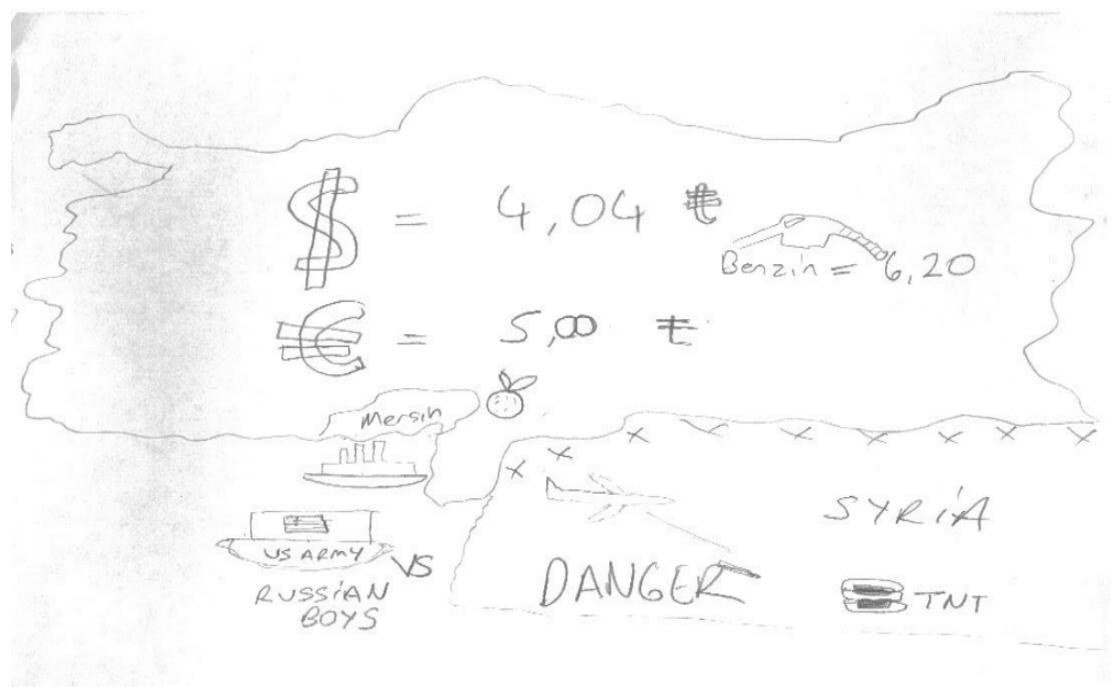
Appendix 5. Sample drawing depicting critique; war in Türkiye.

Appendix 6. Sample drawing depicting critique; war, urbanization, violence against women and animal rights problems in Türkiye.
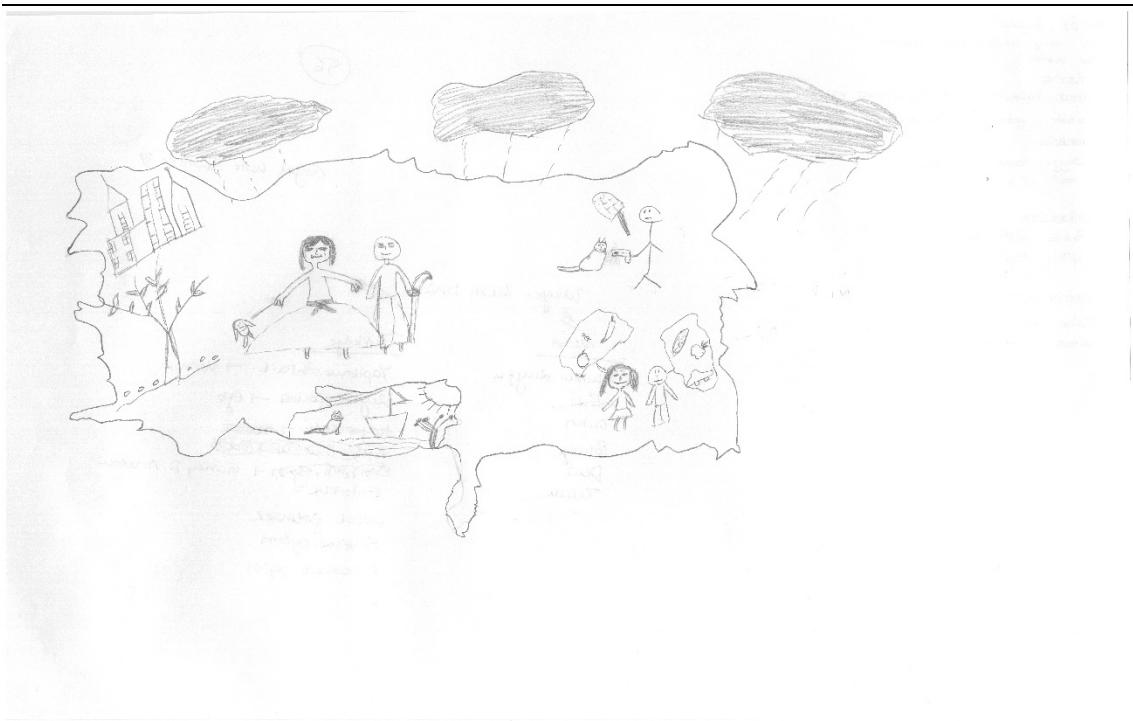
Appendix 7. Sample drawing depicting critique; sense of pressure on individual

Appendix 8. Sample drawing depicting features of regions in Türkiye
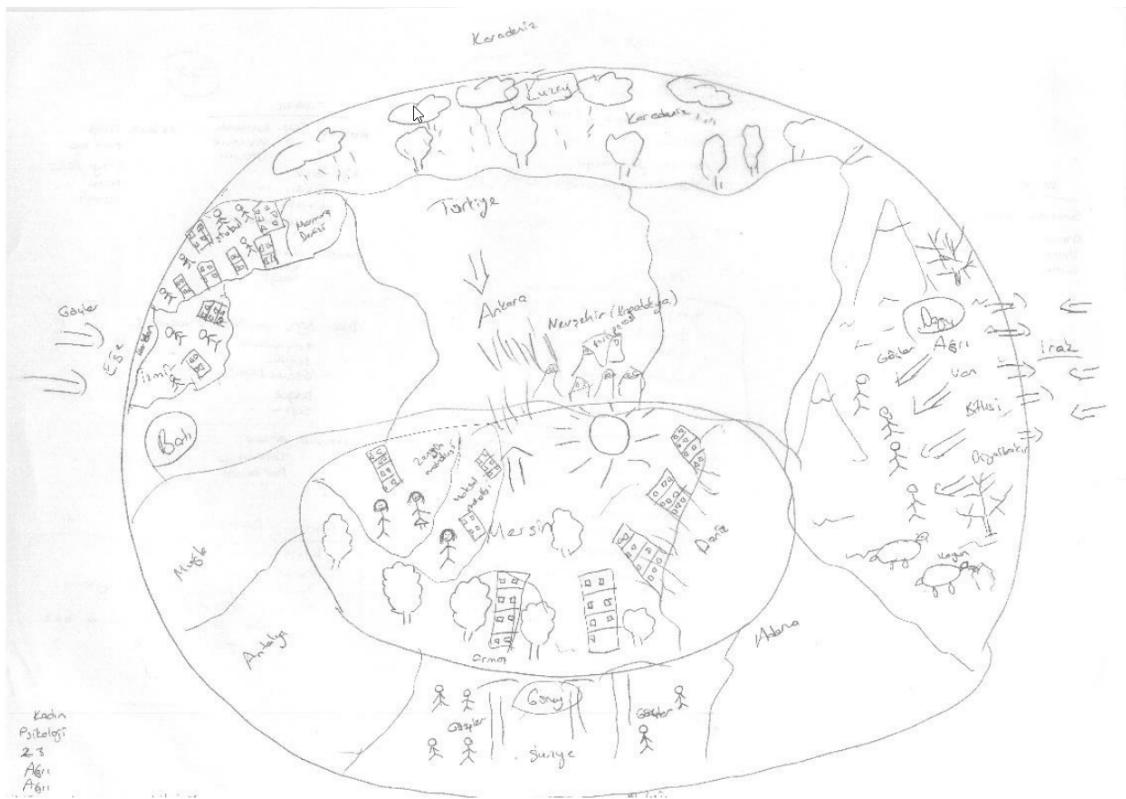
Appendix 9. Sample drawing depicting classic perceptions of Mersin (left picture in figure) and Türkiye (right picture in figure).

Appendix 10. Sample drawing war symbols and Nuclear Power Station of Mersin
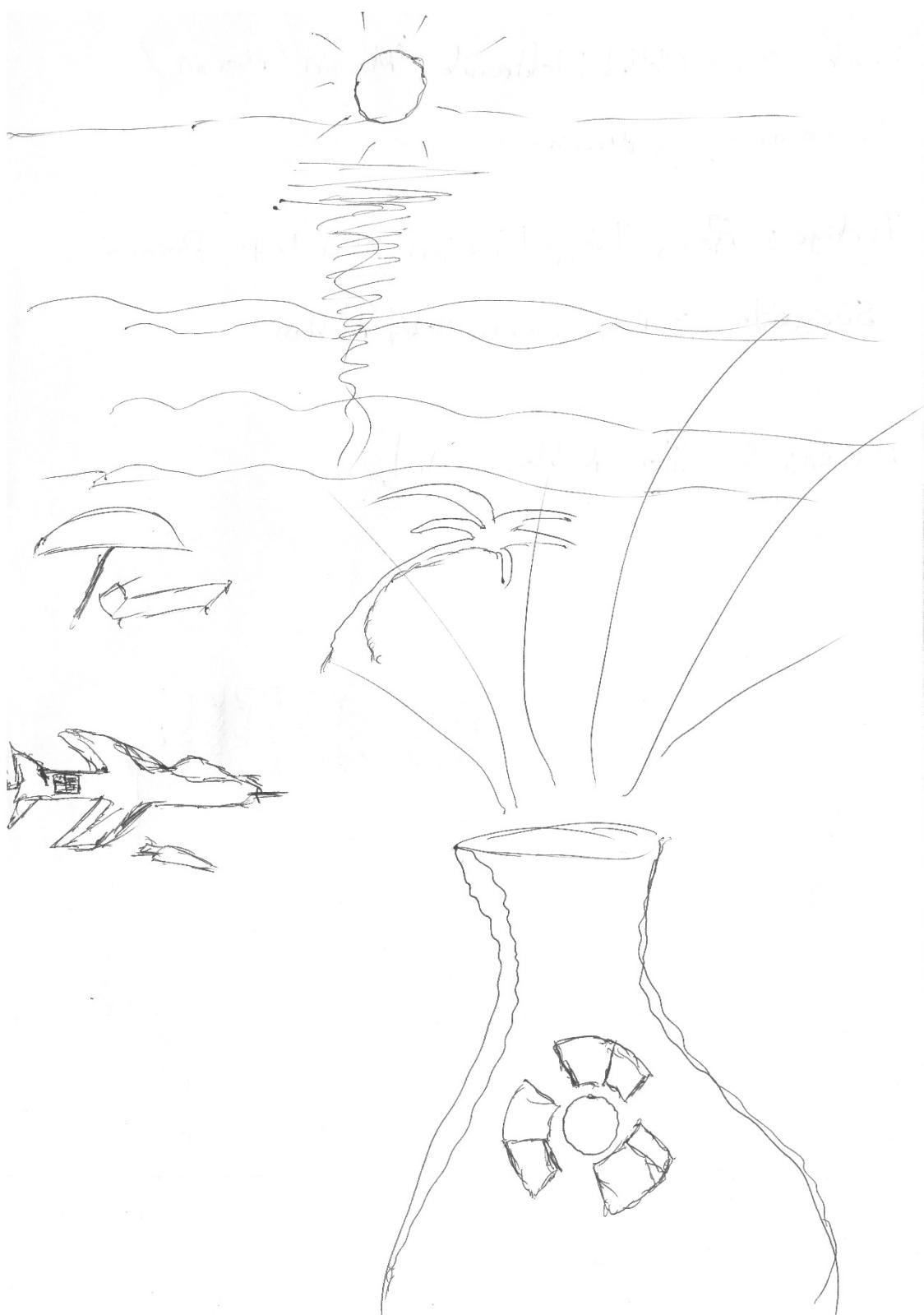
Attachment-1

T.C.
TOROS ÜNİVERSİTESİ
BİLİMSEL ARAŞTIRMA VE YAYIN ETİK
KURULU ONAY BELGESİ

Toros Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etik Kuruluna başvuran Mersin Üniversitesi İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi Psikoloji Bölümünde görevli Ezgi MEHMETOĞLU CÖMERT' in "**Exploring of social representations of Mersin as a place and Türkiye with cognitive mapping method**" adlı araştırması kurulumuz tarafından incelenmiş;

Bilimsel ve Etik Yönden uygun bulunmuştur.   **X**

Bilimsel ve Etik Yönden Geliştirilmesi gerekmektedir.

Bilimsel ve Etik Yönden Uygun Bulunmamıştır

Toros Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etik kurul Kararı	
Başvuru Formunun Etik Kurula Ulaştığı Tarih	19.06.2023
Etik kurul Karar Toplantı Tarihi ve Karar No	23.06.2023/86
Yer	Toros Üniversitesi Rektörlük Senato
Katılımcılar	Formda imzası bulunan üyelerimiz toplantıya katılmıştır.

KURUL BAŞKANI VE ÜYELER:

Prof. Dr. Abdullah ÇALIŞKAN	Başkan	İmza
Prof. Dr. Fügen ÖZCANARSLAN	Üye	Katılmadı (İzinli)
Prof. Dr. Sera Yeşim AKSAN	Üye	İmza
Prof. Dr. Adnan MAZMANOĞLU	Üye	İmza
Prof. Dr. Erkin ERTEN	Üye	İmza
Prof. Dr. Köksal HAZIR	Üye	İmza
Prof. Dr. Ünsal YETİM	Üye	İmza

Açıklama:

ASLI GİBİDİR

Reşit Serhat AŞKIN
TOROS ÜNİVERSİTESİ
Genel Sekreter