

## THE IMAGE OF A CITY IN THE HUMAN MEMORY: MERSİN SAMPLE

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the spatial transformations of Mersin city and its representations under the theoretical framework of collective memory. Within this scope we asked some questions to the people living in the city. By determining city images and places in these people's memories, it has been determined what is the urban images that exist in the memory of people living in this city and which have changed over the years. From the results, it is seen that the memory of people of different age groups has both different and common sign items about the city. With this work, it has revealed the urban imagery and collective memory which define the city of Mersin and changing over time in connection with the growing city.

**Keywords:** City Image, Collective Memory, Spatial Transformation, Mersin, Spatial Representation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Cities are spaces that have a dynamic structure that is constantly changing and developing and accommodate different communities aspects of social and cultural. People who live in a city can define the city with some imagery that they experience in the process they are in and consist in their memory.

Image is a mental representation of environment which is formed through accumulation of both concrete and abstract information of environment. The image is important because the ability to perceive and recognize the environment is crucial for being able to act and attain psychological satisfaction. Each person has unique image which is called personal image but there is also collective image of the city which can be described as the sum of personal images (Eraydın, 2014). According to Halbwachs (1992), the memory which is the result of the lives of the individuals, the socio-cultural environment they are in and the experiences they have established with the city, always occurs according to social codes although sometimes referred to as 'individual recall'. Memory is a collective formation that is produced by society, and therefore this formation should be called 'collective memory'. Individual memory cannot be described without social and physical environment in which the individual lives. Memory is a social and collective production in every way (Çalpak, 2012).

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Within the scope of the study in Mersin, some questions were asked about the people living in the city. By determining the city images and places in these people's memories, it has been determined what is the urban images that exist in the memory of people living in this city and which have changed over the years. From the results, it is seen that the memory of people of different age groups has both different and common sign items about the city. With this work, it has revealed the urban imagery and collective memory which define the city of Mersin and changing over time in connection with the growing city.

## 2. COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND CITY IMAGE

Memory is defined as the capability of encoding, storing and retrieving the information. New information is stored in the memory with the related existing information. In psychology, memory is classified in to three parts; short memory, intermediate memory and long-term memory. Short memory is defined as a temporary memory which is approximately ten seconds memory. According to Lang, (1974:91), first of all, the information which is sensed and perceptually encoded are transmitted to this memory and they 'compete with internally generated information' (Lang, 1974:91). And then in the intermediate memory, the regulation of sensory inputs in the short memory functions are transformed the sensory inputs in to processable information. The intermediate memory builds representation of the transmitted information from the temporary memory by using familiarization and discrimination functions (Lang, 1974). 'The intermediate central processing memory supports the recognition, discrimination and conceptualization functions of thought for up to a few hours' (Lang, 1974:91). Then the observer picks, organizes and gives meaning to the received data through his/her memory and purposes. This is the process where the images are formed. Then the images which is produced in the intermediate memory is transmitted to the long-term memory. 'The transferred images on a low-priority basis to the permanent memory and reprocessed there to consolidate them into a useful and relevant form' (Lang, 1974:91).

Image is formed and developed through the interaction of man and environment. The image is mental representation of environment which is formed through direct sensory interaction and indirect information, interpreted through observer's value system and stored in memory. In his book (*The Image of the City*) Kevin Lynch (1960) mentioned that environmental images are formed in a two-way and cyclical process. In this process, people select, organize and endow the environmental information with the meaning. According to Boulding (1961) image is the product of experience, memories, attitudes and immediate sensations. Thus image is not just an objective abstract picture of environment but a subjective and internal interpretation. It is formed through personal experience by each individual differently and as a product of the process of perception and cognition, an image guides spatial behavior and preferences in urban environment (Lang, 1987; Pocock and Hudson, 1978; Rapaport, 1977).

Regarding personal experiences in urban environment, every person has his/her own individual or personal image either well developed or not. This personal image which is formed according to personal values, memories and abilities changes and redefines as new information is included in to the existing picture. Although every mental image has a unique character containing one's perceived and cognitively organized data, there are some commonalities in these unique images and formed a new type of image. Kevin Lynch (1960) called it collective image and differentiated from personal image. According to him, personal image is more subjective that the background information of a person can affect. In other words, the personal image is affected by education level, gender, belief, social position, values and other personal characteristics. Collective image on the other hand needs a psychological

agreement. Personal image is a subset of collective one that the collective image of the city can be considered as the meta-image containing common issues. Additionally the personal image is developed related to the concerns of the collective image of the city. It is collective image which can be summarized as overlapped personal images.

While personal memories, emotions and feelings influence personal attachment, collective memories and shared experiences influence collective attachment to place. Collective memory has also strong linkage with physical structure of city and constitution of place identity. Maurice Halbwachs (1992), one of the most influential names on collective memory, states that certain elements in structure of urban environment are central in the formation of collective memory and identity. He added that collective memory is developed through physical images and representations and moreover the use of built environment over time. Moreover the signs and their symbolic meanings have contribution to the collective memory. 'The memory flowing from interaction between community and its collective use of the space is engraved in the cognitive recesses of the community, interwoven with social, historical and psychological components at the heart of a place's meaning. Recognition of the presence of memory as a component in the structure of place therefore has to be credited as an intrinsic attribute of the place, since it is memory that can stimulate the good (or bad) images evoked by a place' (Castello, 2010:183).

In relation with Christine Boyer's approach towards reading the city as an entity of collective memory, in this article a similar attitude towards the city, its constructed imagery and collective memory are embraced. 'Architecture and city places give particular form to our memories; they are the mnemonic codes that awaken recall... City's topographical landscape has been constantly restored, replaced and renewed from epoch to epoch. Yet the name of a city's streets and squares, the gaps in its very plan and physical form, its local monuments and celebrations, remain as traces and ruins of their former selves' (Boyer, 1994:322).

Collective memory has been central to the creation of community and the life of that community throughout history. Nevertheless, the structure and content of memory narratives have changed significantly from pre-modern, modern, and in to the global era. The collective memory is becoming the most important subject of the rapidly changing world today. It becomes harder to realize what is happening around us. As a result, finding new linkages between today, past and future become considerable. This combination between the past and the future exists in the idea of the 'place' (Boyer 1994:164). Like the memory flows through the life of a person, the place is also flows through. The value of history seen as collective memory –collective to its place- is that it helps us to understand the significance of the place, its individuality.

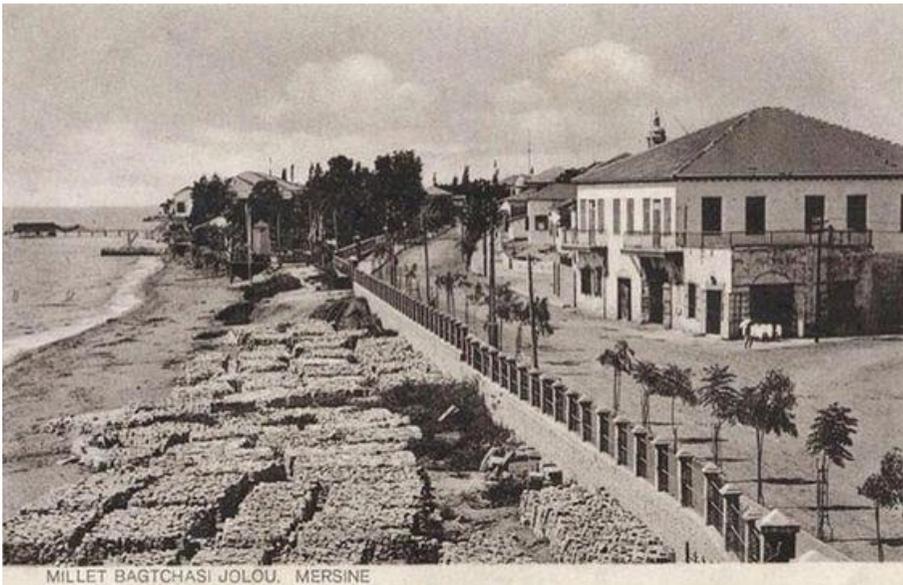
It is needed for the citizens to generate a sense of belonging and collective identity. This belonging can be created and felt in the public space, which is a shared environment characterized by mixing and cross-fertilization, shared public life, artistic expression and architecture, of the cities. It is the space that facilitates movement at various speeds. Public space provides a framework for the construction of collective memory, reflects class differences and conflicts (between cultures), and provides a setting for public performance events, whether part of institutional culture or of a more subversive nature (Boyer, 1994: 111). With its public space, a city is an agora, a forum, an organizational space, a place for creativity; a city is an engine for social change and a place where memories gather. Collective memory and the city can be concluded with the words; 'What happens in cities, happens in nations' (Boyer, 1994; 58).

In this research, we aimed to define the collective memory of the image of the city, community, culture, sense of belonging and identity to express the relationship between the city and the collective memory.

### 3. CASE STUDY: THE IMAGE OF THE CITY IN THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF INHABITANTS

#### 3.1. Aim of the Study

The case study is designed to find the transformation of collective memory of the inhabitants' image of the city. Derived from this main intention, the case study is built around the aspects of image. Aspects of image include the meanings attributed to the physical image, which consist of collective memories, cultural, local and historical values enhance imageability.



**Figure 1.** Mersin seaside and beach.(1910's) (Source: <http://wowturkey.com>)

#### 3.2. Method of the Study

Within this context we made in-depth interviews with the inhabitants of Mersin who are in different age groups. This research is a hermeneutical study that based on open-ended questions in in- depth interview. The in-depth interview for one person takes minimum two hours. This study is a pilot study which were conducted to 18 inhabitants to Mersin. The research group consists of 2 people who are over sixty years old, 6 people who are over fifty years old and 7 people who are between twenty five and forty years old and 3 children who are seventeen years old. These different age groups may help to define different time sequences. The comparison between different time sequences demonstrates the transformations of the collective memory of these users. The comparisons and the evaluations of city of Mersin for different time sequences will indicate the transformation of the space, experience and meanings on the urban space and this represents the transformation of collective memory. It is analyzed with content analysis method.

### 3.3. Results and Discussions

The comparisons and the evaluations for different age groups of Mersin inhabitants for different time sequences will indicate the transformation of uses, experiences and meanings on the Mersin city image and this represents the collective memory.

The important places in Mersin among different age groups change from social urban places to the places which interrupted people negatively. Furthermore, the physical, political, social, economic and psychological aspects and how they were used make these places more important through years.

The older ages of respondents who are over 50 years emphasized the importance of the city center (bazaar), Mersin Amusement Park (Atatürk Park), Mersin Hotel and Big Mosque. But on the other hand, the inhabitants of Mersin aged over 17-20 years old indicates the Forum Shopping Center as the important urban space.

Moreover, according to inhabitants of Mersin who are over 50 years defines Mersin as; *there were lots of orange trees in the city. There were no big buildings around the seaside. Everyone knows each other. There wasn't security problems in the city. There was only one bazaar in the city. And in every neighborhood, there was only the grocery store*. They remember the city with the smells of orange trees. And they mentioned the seaside a lot. *There was a beach near the seaside. We can swim everywhere in the city. When we were a child we made a small boat with tractor tyre and went to swimming. The sea were beautiful and clean*.



**Figure 2.** View from Mersin (Source: <http://wowturkey.com>)

Another respondent remembered that he was swimming in the sea when he was a child, too. Furthermore, there was a fair at the Atatürk Park. The park was in good quality in its physical features, designs and recreational characters. From the memories of the interview group this area was important recreation area for the daily life of the people who lived in Mersin. From the memories of one respondent; *I remember that Park from my primary school years. My parents took me there on the afternoons of summer days and I enjoyed my time there. It was like a safe and comfortable place in our district. My father and mother sat on its tea garden*

*where they could talk with other families and rested. It was like an adventure place in the middle of the city. Now when I think about those moments, I feel I was lucky having time in this meaningful park’.*



**Figure 3.** View from Mersin (2000's) (Source: <http://sunrtv.com>)

According to the memories of the research group, the seaside on its own appeared as the pedestrian place. The wide sidewalks of the seaside were the pedestrian environments where people could walk and even run if it was necessary. *'Seaside was the place of promenading. It was the place of afternoon walks'*. In the perceptions of the users of the seaside, it was like only a pedestrian area because of the lack of vehicles before 1960's.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Space as an entity represents economical, political and social context, its transformation is inevitable within the changing relations. Space in interaction with its environment and users, becomes an important subject of the construction and maintenance of memory, hence it radically altered the city image and its spatial practices in all senses, in parallel with its collective memory.

Today, Mersin has a totally different physical environment and totally different life. In the transformation process of Mersin from different meaning levels, it becomes the place of the new images and new urban culture. Unfortunately, these changes could not be the positive transformations which help the collective memories can be relayed by following the one another. People could not narrate the important places for their lives, the meanings of these places to the further generations because there are two different lives which are completely different in terms of social, physiological, and psychological terms. Within this context, it is hard to determine a collective memory in continuity. Mersin housed different memories but

unfortunately the memories after 1990's completely separated from each other. The memories after that time are all in individual levels.

City of Mersin transformed with the rapid change of the time and use. Today, the city has its new form and structure and gives the feeling of fear to its users. Because of the big immigration. It is not a safe place for them.

In conclusion, as Rudofsky emphasized today's cities grow with no concern for the future and with no thought of the community. The understanding of the local governments on the production of space completely exclude the human aspect. In this sense, the findings of the case study showed that today the point that we have arrived practically identifies with the loss of the meaning of Mersin city.

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