

The Urban Image of Konya in the Memory of Selçuk University Students

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Abstract

The urban image is a reflection of the ways in which individuals perceive, give meaning to, and code urban space in their memories. Due to their intensive spatial interactions and dynamic mobility, university students constitute an important stakeholder group in shaping the urban image. This study aims to examine the Konya urban image formed in the mental processes of Selçuk University students through the components of urban perception and spatial memory. Based on Kevin Lynch's "The Image of the City" theoretical framework, the methodology of the research relies on a questionnaire study conducted with 110 volunteer students studying at Selçuk University. The obtained quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software; within this scope, the relationships between the demographic characteristics of the participants and the primary elements forming the urban image (paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks) were examined via cross-tabulations and the Chi-square test of independence.

According to the analysis results, it was observed that the Konya urban image in students' memories is predominantly shaped along the axis of the Mevlana Museum and Alaaddin Hill in the historical city center, the Selçuk University Alaeddin Keykubat Campus—which is the daily living space of the students—and the tram line connecting these two nodes. Statistical analyses revealed that the gender variable does not create a significant difference in spatial image preferences ($p > 0.05$), whereas students' duration of residence in Konya creates a highly significant difference in their urban space usage practices and level of perceiving district boundaries ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, it was determined that participants' status of being local (from Konya) or non-local has a statistically decisive effect on their spatial wayfinding abilities within the city ($p = 0.0119$). The obtained findings provide significant recommendations in terms of student-oriented urban planning and landscape design strategies for the future of the city of Konya.

Keywords: Urban image, urban perception, spatial memory, Konya, Selçuk University

Introduction

The urban image embodies the processes of sensation, perception, and cognition in the interaction between the environment and humans, and it is formed in the mind through the experience of the environment. According to the environmental psychology literature, the psychological interaction of humans with the environment primarily begins with the process of perceiving stimuli from the physical environment through sensory channels and transforming them into mental maps. This initial stage of the process carries a universal characteristic, and environmental data are evaluated according to many perceptual evaluation criteria. Kevin Lynch addressed these fundamental perceptual principles put forward by Gestalt in his 1960 book *The Image of the City* within the framework of the concept of "legibility," mentioning that parts can be perceived together as a whole or individually. Differing from the sensory process, perception and cognition, which are treated as the second stage of the interaction between human and environment, vary on an individual basis. The primary reasons for this variation are personal differences such as age, gender, and education, which play an active role in the processes by which people evaluate the information they obtain through their senses. Lynch (1960), Warr and Knapper (1968), Rapoport (1977), and Lang (1987) emphasized that culture and social memory lie at the base of this differentiation, stating that the meanings attributed to the environment vary due to these differences, and therefore, the image in the mind varies from person to person (Eraydın, 2016). Conceptually, an "image" is an abstract dimension of emotion and perception, constituting a psychological reflection of a specific region or place in people's minds; it is a comprehensive arrangement of individuals' impressions, ideas, cognitions, evaluations, and emotions (Su et al., 2023).

Lynch (1960) defines the urban form components that enable the urban image to materialize on the mental map as five core elements. These physical elements, which directly affect the processes of individuals reading and making sense of their environment, are paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. These landmarks, which shape the urban image and the general character of the city, are defined as objects within the urban form that are easily discernible physically and function as an external wayfinding focus for individuals. Viewed from the perspective of cultural transmission, urban landmarks are an indispensable and inseparable channel for people to perceive urban spaces. Concurrently, these landmarks are also important carriers of urban history and culture, showcasing the unique characteristics of a specific city formed over time (Zhao et al., 2020). Cultural landmarks, seen as the "calling card" of the city, carry more meaning than simple architecture. Embodying the memory of a



city, these structures also exist as symbols that functioned in people's past lives. The well-known cultural landmarks of various countries all have unique and profound meanings. For instance, when it comes to cultural landmarks in Paris, the Eiffel Tower is always the first element that comes to mind. The tower entirely meets modern aesthetic standards, standing as the most eye-catching structure of its time and a symbol of industrial civilization. A cultural landmark should not be a superficial image project or an artificial landscape disconnected from its environment, but a structure that records the development of time, reflects the personality of the city, and is vividly memorized by people (Gao, 2020).

The urban landscape, on the other hand, is a product of human settlement activities, including tangible material elements as well as abstract connotations of value and significance, which are the projection of human-world relations and social relations in cities. This comprehensive cultural phenomenon is an intuitive carrier of urban image characteristics and cultural attributes, serving as an important tool for people to perceive and experience cities. A beautiful urban landscape is the foundation for the formation of collective memory and intensifying "nostalgia" among urban residents; it helps create senses of place and identity (Gao and Liu, 2021). The aesthetics of the urban landscape create a sense of place and identity by forming the basis for the collective memory of city dwellers. At this point, "landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors (Anonymus, 2026a).

From the moment it emerged, the theory of the urban image has determined the direction of urban architecture, exerting profound effects on the spatial planning and renewal of university campuses, thereby transforming into a research paradigm. Having become one of the most important theoretical frameworks in the field of urban planning and design today, this theory emphasizes people's subjective perceptions and cognitive approaches to the urban environment; it treats the city not merely as a totality of physical spaces, but also as a place possessing a unique meaning and image in people's minds. The development of this theory stems from in-depth research into the relationship between human cognitive psychology and urban space, and its purpose is to reveal how people construct the form, structure, and characteristic properties of a city in their minds. Studies on urban images allow researchers to better understand a city's identity, characteristics, and cultural connotations; thus providing a more humane and sustainable direction for the planning, design, and management of urban spaces (Wang et al., 2024).

Consequently, cities are not composed of physical spaces alone, but are complex structures shaped by the experiences and perceptions of individuals. The meanings that people assign to cities are formed in line with the individual and collective relationships they establish with that city. In this context, urban images are closely related to how individuals see, feel, and remember a city. Particularly, temporary yet active user groups, such as university students, both leave traces in the city they live in and reconstruct the image of that city through their personal experiences. Konya, with its historical depth, cultural diversity, and spatial character, generates strong urban images in many individuals. In this study, by analyzing the spatial relationship that university students studying in Konya establish with the city along the axis of their demographic characteristics, durations of residence, and statuses of being local, it has been revealed around which physical image elements of Kevin Lynch the perceptions of the city concentrate, and how the paradoxical relationships between the city's objective landscape aesthetics and its subjective social image are shaped.

Materials And Methods

Characteristics of the Study Area

The province of Konya, which constitutes the geographical focus of the research, is located in the south of the Central Anatolia Region, in the middle of the Anatolian Peninsula. Possessing an average altitude of 1,011 m and a surface area of 38,873 km², the population of the city is 2,343,409 as of the year 2026 (TÜİK, 2026). Continental climate conditions dominate the city, characterized by hot and dry summers, and cold and rainy winters; these climatic factors are of a nature that can directly affect university students' open space usage practices and perceptual processes regarding the urban image.

Selçuk University, which constitutes the institutional universe of the research, is among the most established higher education institutions in Turkey with its 60,287 active students, 493,470 graduates, 3,195 academic, and 4,365 administrative personnel. Incorporating 24 faculties, 7 institutes, 5 schools, 22 vocational schools, and 53 research centers within its structure, the university was founded on April 11, 1975, and possesses a deep-rooted history of 50 years (Anonymus, 2026b). This massive scale and urban dynamism possessed by the university reinforce the representativeness of the student sample over the urban image.

Research Materials

The primary material of the research consists of the raw data obtained from the questionnaire form prepared for Selçuk University students to measure urban perception and spatial experiences. As auxiliary materials, scientific books, articles, theses, and institutional internet resources belonging to the literature on urban image and urban identity were used. In the processes of collecting, organizing, and statistically analyzing the data, MS Office programs and SPSS 27.0 statistical software were utilized.



Research Methodology

The research was conducted in four fundamental stages extending from theoretical preparation to statistical reporting:

- **Identification of the Problem:** The research question and hypotheses were formulated by discussing the role of university youth on urban memory and wayfinding practices.
- **Literature Review and Questionnaire Design:** The theoretical infrastructure focused on urban image and urban identity was reviewed. In the light of the obtained theoretical inputs, a multidimensional questionnaire form was designed to measure the participants' demographic profiles as well as their mental images regarding the physical, cultural, and social elements of Konya, their cognitive relationships established with urban landmarks, their wayfinding practices, route routines, and feelings of spatial belonging.
- **Data Collection and Sample Selection:** The questionnaire study was carried out in line with the approval of the Ethics Committee of Selçuk University Faculty of Architecture and Design and by ensuring full compliance with the principle of volunteerism. In the field research, considering the universe size of 60,287 students, the minimum number of participants to be reached at a 95% confidence level and within a 5% margin of error boundary was calculated as 96 (Newbold et al. 2022; Seyhan & Güngör, 2025). However, in order to increase the statistical power and reliability of the research, a total of 110 valid questionnaire forms were reached face-to-face in different open and closed areas of the campus through a convenience sampling approach.
- **Statistical Analysis and Evaluation:** The collected data were transferred to SPSS software and coded in a digital environment. In the analysis process, first, descriptive statistics containing frequency (n) and percentage (%) distributions were performed to reveal the general trends, spatial preferences, and urban image frequencies of the participants. Then, Cross-tabulations (Crosstabs) were created and the Chi-Square (χ^2) Test of Independence was applied to uncover potential relationships between the demographic characteristics of the students, such as gender, age, education level, and origin (whether from Konya or not), and the components of the urban image as well as wayfinding abilities.

The statistically significant findings obtained from the analyses were conceptualized by linking them with the 5 core elements (paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks) in Kevin Lynch's theory of The Image of the City, and the ground was prepared for the conclusion/recommendations section of the study.

Research Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Participants

A total of 110 valid participants were included in the study. It has been certified in the case processing summary of the sample (Table 1) that there is no missing data. Female students constitute 64.5% (n=71) of the participants, while male students constitute 35.5% (n=39). When the age distribution is examined, it is observed that the vast majority of the sample (74.5%, n=82) consists of the dynamic young population in the 18–24 age range. According to education status, 58.2% (n=64) of the participants are high school graduates (active undergraduate students), and in the occupational distribution, 72.7% (n=80) are directly of student status. The fact that 74.5% (n=82) of the participants came from outside of Konya and started residing in the city lends an original quality to the study in terms of measuring the perception of the "temporary user experiencing the city from the outside" rather than the local population.

Table 1. Case Processing Summary

	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
What is your gender?	110	100,0%	0	0,0%	110	100,0%
What is your age range?	110	100,0%	0	0,0%	110	100,0%
What is your education status?	110	100,0%	0	0,0%	110	100,0%
What grade are you in?	110	100,0%	0	0,0%	110	100,0%
What is your occupation?	110	100,0%	0	0,0%	110	100,0%
Are you from Konya?	110	100,0%	0	0,0%	110	100,0%

Analysis of Konya's Urban Image According to Lynch's Five Primary Elements

Paths and Spatial Routines

In Kevin Lynch's theory, "Paths" are the channels, transit lines, and street axes along which the observer moves. The research findings demonstrate how the relationship university youth establish with transportation homogenizes their mental maps:

- The majority of the participants (81.8%, n=90) stated that they use "Public transportation (tram, bus, minibus)" the most in Konya.



- In parallel with this, 46.4% (n=51) of the participants replied "agree" and 44.5% (n=49) replied "strongly agree" to the statement "The routes I use while going from the campus to the city center have turned into a routine for me."

Regardless of gender, age, education, and duration of residence, this trend towards routinization carries an absolute weight across all demographic groups. This data clarifies that the most dominant "Path" element in the memories of Selçuk University students is the Campus-Alaaddin Tram Line. The fact that individuals utilize the same transit axis (the tram) every day causes urban perception to become confined around this main backbone, while other spatial components of the city remain in the background of their minds.

Edges and Perceptual Indecisiveness

According to Lynch, "Edges" are the linear elements that separate two districts or regions and function as barriers in the mind. Regarding the question of whether there are clear boundaries between districts in Konya, the sample displayed a very distinct variation:

- Females (38%, n=27), males (33.3%, n=13), and particularly young students in the 18-24 age group (42.7%, n=35) remained "Undecided" on this issue. On an educational basis, high school graduates and students showed indecisiveness, whereas postgraduate graduates and working individuals accepted the existence of clear boundaries.
- While 1st-grade (52.2%), 2nd-grade (56.7%), and 3rd-grade (36.8%) students were undecided about the existence of boundaries, 85.8% of 4th-grade students and 71% of graduates stated that there are clear boundaries between districts. Regarding the duration of residence, those living in the city for 3–5 years agree with the existence of boundaries at a high level (77.8%, n=14).

This finding shows that the ability to read urban morphology is entirely "experiential." Lower-grade students who are new to the city struggle to perceive and remain undecided about district boundaries (Edges) within Konya's flat and linear structure; conversely, individuals who transition to upper grades and spend more than 3 years in the city can successfully map the "boundary lines" where district identities diverge in their minds.

Districts and Functional Clustering

According to Lynch, "Districts" are the homogeneous urban areas that the observer can mentally enter inside of and that possess unique identifying characteristics. When the urban districts where participants spend time most intensively in the city of Konya are examined in general, the Selçuk University Alaaddin Keykubat Campus (40.0%, n=44), Housing Environment (25.5%, n=28), and Bosna Hersek Neighborhood (24.5%, n=27) come to the fore. This distribution indicates that the homogeneous urban districts in the minds of university youth are predominantly clustered around academic and residential functional areas.

Nodes and Social Interaction

Nodes are the urban focuses where people gather and where paths intersect.

- Among the participants who stated that there are frequently used meeting points (Nodes) in the city of Konya, 59.1% (n=26) identified the Selçuk University Alaaddin Keykubat Campus as the area where they spend the most time.
- Participants expressed that in their urban wayfinding practices, they directly reference symbolic/symmetrical structures and meeting points to find their way when lost.

The fact that 52.9% (n=13) of those who evaluated transportation opportunities (tram/paths) positively stated that they easily found their way in the city demonstrates that paths, landmarks, and nodes function as an integrated system feeding one another on the mental map.

Landmarks and Collective Memory

According to Lynch, landmarks are the prominent physical focuses chosen by individuals as visual reference points during their orientation processes in urban space. The participants' perceptions regarding the most important feature introducing the city of Konya in relation to their demographic characteristics were examined via a cross-tabulation (Table 2).

- Across all variables of gender, age, education, occupation, and hometown, the common imagery focus was "Mevlana and Sufi Culture" (46.4%, n=51). This rate is 49.3% in females and 41.0% in males.
- Similarly, when asked about the first place they would like to take a guest, the Mevlana Museum and Its Surroundings (58.2%, n=64) was selected as the absolute landmark (60.6% in females, 53.8% in males).
- While upper classes and graduates completely brought the Mevlana culture to the fore, 1st-grade students identified Konya more with natural areas and landscapes (Sille, Meram, etc.) (39.1%, n=9) and were equally divided between the Mevlana Museum (34.8%) and Sille Village (34.8%) when asked about the place they would take a guest.

The findings indicate that those who think there are symbolic and iconic structures in Konya directly identify the city with Mevlana. However, it has been determined that the 1st-grade students newly arriving in the city primarily record tangible green spaces and recreational landscapes (Sille, Meram) in their memories as landmarks, and as the duration of residence in the city extends, this perception of physical objects leaves its place to a deep-rooted and abstract cultural image like "Mevlana."



Table 2. Distribution of Participants' Perceptions Regarding the Most Important Feature Introducing Konya According to Demographic Variables

		<i>What is the most important feature that introduces the city of Konya?</i>						
		Bosna-Hersek Neighborhood	Natural landscape areas	Konya cuisine	Mevlana and Sufi culture	Historical and cultural landscape areas	S. U. Alaeddin Keykubad Campus	Other
What is your gender? What is your age range?	Male	%2,6 n=1	%15,4 n=6	%15,4 n=6	%41 n=16	%15,4 n=6	%2,6 n=1	%7,7 n=3
	Female	%1,4 n=1	%18,3 n=13	%12,7 n=9	%49,3 n=35	%8,5 n=6	%8,5 n=6	%1,4 n=1
	18-24	%2,4 n=2	%22 n=18	%13,4 n=11	%41 n=34	%11 n=9	%6,5 n=5	%3,7 n=3
	25-34	-	%6,3 n=1	%12,5 n=2	%62,5 n=10	%6,3 n=1	%12,5 n=2	-
	35-44	-	-	-	%83,5 n=5	-	-	%16,7 n=1
	45-54	-	-	-	%50 n=1	%50 n=1	-	-
	55-64	-	-	%50 n=1	-	%50 n=1	-	-
	65 years and above	-	-	%50 n=1	%50 n=1	-	-	-
What is your education status?	Postgraduate	-	-	-	%100 n=6	-	-	-
	graduate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	High school	%1,6 n=1	%23,4 n=15	%12,5 n=8	%40,6 n=26	%10,9 n=7	%6,3 n=4	%4,7 n=3
	graduate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
What grade are you in?	University	%2,5 n=1	%10 n=4	%17,5 n=7	%47,5 n=19	%12,5 n=5	%7,5 n=3	%2,5 n=1
	graduate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1. Grade	-	%39,1 n=9	%13 n=3	30,4 n=7	%13 n=3	%4,3 n=1	-
	2. Grade	%3,3 n=1	%16,7 n=5	%13,3 n=4	%30 n=9	%20 n=6	%10 n=3	%6,7 n=2
	3. Grade	%5,3 n=1	%10,5 n=2	%5,3 n=1	%73,7 n=14	-	-	%5,3 n=1
What is your occupation?	4. Grade	-	%28,6 n=2	%28,6 n=2	%42,9 n=3	-	-	-
	Mezun	-	%3,2 n=1	%16,1 n=5	%58,1 n=18	%9,7 n=3	%9,7 n=3	%3,2 n=1
	Not working	-	%8,3 n=1	%16,7 n=2	%58,3 n=7	%8,3 n=1	%8,3 n=1	-
	Retired	-	-	%50 n=1	-	-	-	-
	Public sector	-	-	-	%80 n=4	%20 n=1	-	-
	employee	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Are you from Konya?	Student	%2,5 n=2	%21,3 n=17	%12,5 n=10	%41,3 n=33	%12,5 n=10	%6,3 n=5	%3,8 n=3
	Private sector	-	%9,1 n=1	%18,2 n=2	%54,5 n=6	-	%9,1 n=1	%9,1 n=1
	Yes	-	%10,7 n=3	%25 n=7	%39,3 n=11	%25 n=7	-	-
	No	%2,4 n=2	%4,9 n=4	%19,5 n=16	%9,8 n=8	%48,8 n=40	%6,1 n=5	%8,5 n=7

Urban Aesthetics and the Image Paradox

Lynch's theory examines the psychological barriers that damage the urban image as much as it investigates the positive visual elements of the city:

- Both local participants from Konya (50.0% absolutely beautiful, 28.6% beautiful) and non-local participants (24.4% absolutely beautiful, 45.1% beautiful) find Konya highly successful in aesthetic terms. The most admired features of the city were determined as ease of transportation (72.0%, n=18), being planned/ordered (56.3%), and being calm/clean (56%).
- In response to the question "What is the feature of the city of Konya that you admire the least?", 49.1% (n=54) of the students, who admire the physical structure of the city to this extent, stated that "the people of Konya are closed-minded in terms of views," while 25.5% (n=28) specified the lack of social activities. The areas whose absence is felt the most in the city became cultural and artistic event spaces (42.7%, n=47).

These obtained findings clearly reveal the contradiction between "physical environmental satisfaction and social environmental barriers," which is frequently discussed in the literature of urban morphology and environmental psychology. The fact that the participants find the city's planning, spatial cleanliness, and functional transportation networks highly successful from an aesthetic perspective demonstrates that Konya's objective urban design quality is appreciated by the users. However, the same sample pointing out "the closed-mindedness of the local population" (49.1%) as the least admired feature of the city and emphasizing the "lack of cultural and artistic spaces" (42.7%) demonstrates that spatial perception harbors a double-layered paradox.

Effects of Demographic Variables on Spatial Preferences and Urban Image Perception

Spatial Preferences and Urban Image Perception by Gender

Relationship Between Gender and the Region Where Most Time is Spent in the City

The distribution of the spatial regions where participants spend time most intensively in the city of Konya according to their genders is presented in Table 3; concurrently, the results of the Chi-Square analysis empirically testing the effect of the gender variable on spatial usage practices are provided in Table 4.



Table 3. Distribution of Regions Where Most Time is Spent in the City by Gender

Gender	Bosna-Hersek Neighbor.	City (Alaaddin Zafer Square)	Center S.U. Hill, Keykubat Campus	Alaaddin The Neighbor./ House/ Dormitory Environment	Green Spaces and Parks	Total
Male	9 (%23,1)	2 (%5,1)	17 (%43,6)	11 (%28,2)	0 (%0,0)	39 (%100)
Female	18 (%25,4)	3 (%4,2)	27 (%38,0)	17 (%23,9)	6 (%8,5)	71 (%100)
Total	27	5	44	28	6	110

Table 4. Chi-Square Test Results Regarding the Relationship Between Regions Where Most Time is Spent in the City by Gender

Evaluation Criterion	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) / p
Pearson Chi-Square (χ^2)	3,768	4	0,438
Likelihood Ratio	4,812	4	0,307
N of Valid Cases	110		

It is observed that the most dominant focal point for both male (43.6%) and female (38.0%) students is the Selçuk University Alaeddin Keykubat Campus. The campus is followed by housing environments and the Bosna Hersek Neighborhood, respectively. As a result of the Chi-Square analysis performed, no statistically meaningful relationship was found between gender and the region where most time is spent ($\chi^2 = 3.768$; $p > 0.05$). This situation indicates that university youth experience the urban space within the framework of similar functional necessities (education and housing) regardless of gender differences, and the first urban 'district' image in their memories homogenizes along the axis of the S.U. Campus-Bosna Hersek Neighborhood.

Relationship Between Gender and the First Place to Take a Guest

The distributions of the participants' first choice of places to take an outside guest in the city of Konya according to their genders are presented in Table 5; concurrently, the results of the Chi-Square analysis empirically testing the effect of the gender variable on mental image and landmark selection are provided in Table 6.

Table 5. Distribution of the First Place to Take a Guest by Gender

Gender	Alaaddin Hill / Kültürpark	Meram Vineyards / Tavusbaba	Mevlana Museum and Its Surroundings	Sille Village	Historical Bazaars	Tropical Butterfly Garden	Total
Male	3 (%7,7)	2 (%5,1)	21 (%53,8)	8 (%20,5)	1 (%2,6)	4 (%10,3)	39
Female	2 (%2,8)	2 (%2,8)	43 (%60,6)	9 (%12,7)	2 (%2,8)	13 (%18,3)	71
Total	5	4	64	17	3	17	110

Table 6. Chi-Square Test Results Regarding the Relationship Between First Places to Take a Guest by Gender

Evaluation Criterion	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) / p
Pearson Chi-Square (χ^2)	3,944	5	0,557
Likelihood Ratio	4,215	5	0,519
N of Valid Cases	110		

When the distribution is examined, it is observed that the first choice of 53.8% of males and 60.6% of females is the Mevlana Museum and Its Surroundings. The second strongest image became Sille Village (20.5%) for males and the Tropical Butterfly Garden (18.3%) for females. According to the Chi-Square test result, there is no meaningful relationship between gender and symbolic space preference ($\chi^2 = 3.944$; $p > 0.05$). This finding proves that the counterpart of Kevin Lynch's "landmark" concept in the specific case of Konya is absolute at the collective memory level as the Mevlana Museum, regardless of gender differences.

The Effect of Temporal Experience on Spatial Preferences and Regional Belonging

The distribution of the regions where participants spend time most intensively across the city according to their duration of residence in Konya is presented in Table 7; concurrently, the results of the Chi-Square analysis empirically testing the effect of temporal experience on the ways of experiencing and encoding urban space in memory are provided in Table 8.

As a result of the Chi-Square analysis performed, a statistically highly meaningful relationship was detected between the students' duration of residence in the city and the regions where they spend the most time ($p < 0.001$):

- For students who are new to the city (less than 1 year) and those who have been there for a moderate period (1–3 years), the center of gravity in their memory is concentrated in the areas of the Bosna Hersek Neighborhood (42.9%) and the S.U. Campus (55.3%). During this period, the image of the city center is almost entirely absent (0% and 2.6%).



- As the duration of experience in the city increases, and particularly when it reaches 5 years and above, urban space usage practices change radically. While the campus dependency of those residing for 5 years and above regresses to 15%, their own neighborhood environments (45.0%), the city center (10.0%), and green spaces (10.0%) become dominant.

This finding directly aligns with the logic of the "level of environmental experience" in Kevin Lynch's theory. When a student first arrives in the city, their mental space is limited to narrow "districts" such as the campus and its immediate surroundings (Bosna Hersek Neighborhood); however, as the time spent in the city extends, their cognitive map expands, and they develop a more mature urban image by incorporating the macro-scale urban backbone (the city center, other districts, and parks) into their memory.

Table 7. Distribution of Regions Where Most Time is Spent in the City by Duration of Residence

Duration of Residence	Bosna-Hersek City Neighbor.	Center S.U. Alaeddin Hill & Zafer Square	Alaeddin The Keykubat Campus	The Neighbor./House/ Dormitory Environment	Green Spaces and Parks	Total
Less than 1 Year	6 (%42,9)	0 (%0,0)	5 (%35,7)	2 (%14,3)	1 (%7,1)	14
1-3 Years	11 (%28,9)	1 (%2,6)	21 (%55,3)	4 (%10,5)	1 (%2,6)	38
3-5 Years	2 (%11,1)	0 (%0,0)	12 (%66,7)	4 (%22,2)	0 (%0,0)	18
5 Years and Above	8 (%20,0)	4 (%10,0)	6 (%15,0)	18 (%45,0)	4 (%10,0)	40
Total	27	5	44	28	6	110

Table 8. Chi-Square Test Results Regarding the Relationship Between Regions Where Most Time is Spent in the City by Duration of Residence

Evaluation Criterion	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) / p
Pearson Chi-Square (χ^2)	33,195	12	0,0009*
Likelihood Ratio	32,404	12	0,001
N of Valid Cases	110		

***Significant level 99.9 % ($p < 0.001$)

Urban Wayfinding Ability of Local and Outside Participants

The distributions of the ease of wayfinding within the city according to the participants' locality status are presented in Table 9; concurrently, the results of the Chi-Square analysis empirically testing this relationship are provided in Table 10.

Table 9. Distribution of Ease of Wayfinding According to Being from Konya Status

Are you from Konya?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Yes	0 (%0,0)	1 (%3,6)	1 (%3,6)	11 (%39,3)	15 (%53,6)	28 (%100)
No	3 (%3,7)	4 (%4,9)	15 (%18,3)	40 (%48,8)	20 (%24,4)	82 (%100)
Total	3	5	16	51	35	110

Table 10. Chi-Square Test Results Regarding the Relationship Between Being from Konya Status and Ease of Wayfinding

Evaluation Criterion	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) / p
Pearson Chi-Square (χ^2)	12,862	4	0,0119*
Likelihood Ratio	14,484	4	0,006
N of Valid Cases	110		

*Significant level 95 % ($p < 0.05$)

As a result of the Chi-Square analysis performed, a statistically meaningful relationship was found between whether the students are local (from Konya) or not and their wayfinding skills in the city ($\chi^2 = 12.862$; $p < 0.05$):

- While 53.6% of local students from Konya state that they "strongly agree they find their way easily," this rate drops to 24.4% among students coming from outside the city.
- 18.3% of the students coming from outside the city remain "undecided" regarding wayfinding.

This situation indicates that the urban image does not consist of physical objects alone, but is directly related to "spatial familiarity and rootedness." Selçuk University students coming from outside are far from the city center (they are on campus), and since they cannot fully read the city, their mental maps are less distinct compared to local students.

When the effects of demographic variables on the Konya urban image and spatial preferences are examined; it is observed that the Konya urban image in the minds of Selçuk University students harbors a homogeneous structure in terms of "Gender" ($\chi^2 = 3.768$ and $\chi^2 = 3.944$; $p > 0.05$), whereas it exhibits a highly heterogeneous



structure in terms of "Duration of Residence in the City" ($\chi^2 = 33.195$; $p < 0.001$) and "Locality Status" ($\chi^2 = 12.862$; $p < 0.05$). This situation demonstrates that urban memory and image construction are directly related to urban legibility processes that expand in parallel with the duration of spatial experience and the status of being local.

When the findings are analyzed holistically, a distinct contrast between the tangible urban landscape and the abstract social climate stands out in the university youth's perception of Konya. Although the participants find the city "ordered and livable" on the axis of physical planning, environmental cleanliness, and ease of transportation, they experience difficulties in integrating with the city due to the scarcity of urban activities and the limitations of the socio-cultural fabric. Consequently, the Konya image identified in the mental maps presents a double-layered structure that carries physically rational and legible qualities, yet socially leaves a distance between the user and the space.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, the urban images and spatial perceptions of Selçuk University students regarding the city of Konya were evaluated multidimensionally within the framework of Kevin Lynch's (1960) urban morphology theory. Within the scope of the research, the spatial, social, and cultural relationships that university youth establish with the city were analyzed, and the reflections of these interactions on mental maps and collective memory were demonstrated through quantitative data.

The research results indicate that Selçuk University students encode Konya largely through a positive urban image in terms of physical environmental components. A vast majority of the participants find Konya aesthetically successful; they evaluate the city's planned-ordered structure, calm-clean character, and urban transportation opportunities as positive urban attributes. In contrast, it is a striking finding that nearly half of the participants characterize the people of Konya as "closed-minded" in terms of their socio-cultural approach and complain about the insufficiency of social activities in the city. This situation demonstrates that the high level of positive perception developed toward the morphological and physical sustainability of the urban space transforms into an image paradox within the "social environment" component that provides urban vitality and social integration.

The most dominant theoretical conclusion obtained in the study is that the urban image and spatial memory of Konya are absolutely shaped around the focus of Mevlana and Sufi culture, regardless of demographic layers. This cultural heritage was highlighted by the participants as the strongest image promoting the city, and it was declared at a high rate that an outside visitor to the city should first be taken to the Mevlana Museum and its surroundings. This data reveals that the counterparts of the concepts of landmark and node in Kevin Lynch's theory are absolute at the collective memory level with the Mevlana Museum and its immediate surroundings in the specific case of Konya. As a matter of fact, the students taking these symbolic/historical structures as landmarks in their urban wayfinding practices and moments of being lost confirms the orientation success of physical urban elements in cognitive maps.

The statistical cross-analyses of the research revealed that urban image construction is directly related to "spatial familiarity" and "duration of experience." The meaningful difference ($\chi^2 = 12.862$; $p < 0.05$) detected between local students (from Konya) and non-local students (from outside) in terms of ease of wayfinding proves the relationship of urban legibility with the level of taking root in the city. Similarly, the expansion of urban space usage practices from a narrow focus of the campus and Bosna Hersek Neighborhood (districts) toward the macro-scale urban backbone (city center, parks, and residential environments) depending on the prolongation of the residence period ($\chi^2 = 33.195$; $p < 0.001$) shows that urban experience is a dynamic parameter that matures mental maps. This perceptual deepening also manifests itself at the class level; while 1st-grade students newly arriving in the city prioritize tangible natural areas and recreational landscapes (Sille, Meram, etc.) as landmarks, the urban image evolves entirely toward abstract and deep-rooted cultural heritage elements (the perception of Mevlana) as students transition to upper classes and the graduation stage.

Finally, the students' declaration that the linear movement corridors (paths) between the campus and the city center turn into strong spatial routines over time demonstrates that urban consumption becomes uniform along specific transportation axes (the tram line). The Selçuk University Alaeddin Keykubat Campus, located on this routine line, functions not only as an educational area for students but also as the primary focal point (node) where they spend time most intensively and socialize. The fact that cultural-artistic event spaces and quiet/accessible study spaces are at the top of the areas whose absence is felt the most by students in the city offers strategic frameworks for urban planning processes in terms of revealing the expectations and spatial demands of university youth from urban spaces.

In line with these obtained empirical and theoretical findings, the following recommendations have been developed regarding student-oriented urban planning and landscape design strategies that will shape the future of the city of Konya:



- The elements of Mevlana and Sufi culture, which constitute the global and local urban identity of Konya, must be preserved in line with landscape architecture principles, and the urban aesthetics and pedestrianization corridors of the historical city center should be reinforced to support this image.
- In order to break the perception of "social closed-mindedness" in the urban image of outside students and to increase their bonds of belonging to the city in the early period, thematic city tours, interactive awareness programs, and socio-cultural festivals introducing urban morphology and identity should be organized at an institutional level.
- Along the Campus-City Center axis (especially tram and public transport routes), which is most intensively used by university youth and has turned into a routine in their minds, micro-landscape arrangements that increase pedestrian comfort, high-quality urban furniture, continuous bicycle paths, and urban design interventions with high visual legibility should be developed.
- Indoor and outdoor cultural-artistic event spaces, contemporary quiet study libraries, and recreational social meeting points (nodes) most demanded by students should be spatially increased and made accessible, particularly at the campus-city interface (Bosna Hersek Neighborhood and its surroundings).
- Sille, Meram, and other public green spaces/parks, which constitute the first landmarks in the minds of students with a short duration of residence in the city, should be more strongly integrated with urban transportation networks; the landscape aesthetic values of the city should be enriched with next-generation active green space designs that will contribute to the urban image.
- To strengthen the urban legibility of the Mevlana Museum and the Historical City Center Environment, which stand out as the absolute landmark of Konya in collective memory, night lighting designs, urban information-wayfinding signage compatible with the historical fabric, and digital urban guide infrastructures within the scope of smart city applications should be developed.

Furthermore, in future studies, the cognitive maps of students studying at different universities in Konya (e.g., Konya Technical University, Necmettin Erbakan University) could be analyzed comparatively; additionally, the city perceptions of different age, occupation, and socio-economic groups could be deepened through longitudinal research to monitor the change of the urban image over time.

Declarations

Ethical Approval Certificate

This study was approved by the Scientific Ethics Evaluation Board of the Faculty of Architecture and Design, Selçuk University (Decision No: 04/08, approved on 11 June 2026).

Author Contribution Statement

All contributions belong to authors.

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