

## Demographic change and operationalization of the landscape in tourism planning: Landscape perceptions of the Generation Z

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on Generation Z, which is one of the most intriguing groups in terms of the future of tourism. The research questions of this study focus on what the landscape components that attract the attention of Generation Z in a tourism destination embrace, and how this interest can be operationalized in the tourism planning of that destination. The research was designed with an interpretive approach as the perceptions regarding landscape will differ according to the social location of the tourists. On-site observation studies were conducted with volunteer members from Generation Z, data being collected, and then analyzed with content analysis. The main findings of the study are as follows: Generation Z members enjoy interacting with local residents at a destination; they find traditional architecture and everyday-life interesting; and morphology, one of the natural environmental characteristics, is fascinating to Generation Z.

### 1. Introduction

For creating effective tourism strategies, the ability to recognize changes and transformations in the tourism industry is crucial. As such, it has to be underlined that without an effective response to change, it is impossible to achieve success. The report of the [World Tourism Organization \(2010\)](#) and the [European Travel Commission \(ETC\) \(2020\)](#) on Demographic Change and Tourism emphasize that demographic changes in modern societies create new challenges and opportunities for tourism development. Accordingly, future generations' tourism behavior and attitudes are considered topics worth investigating ([Caber, Albayrak, & Crawford, 2020](#)). In this sense, it is evident that recent tourism studies increasingly focus on young travelers, particularly Generation Y today ([Cavagnaro, Staffieri, & Postma, 2018](#); [Migacz & Petrick, 2018](#)). Despite an increasing number of studies investigating the tourism characteristics of Generation Y, this generation is a sub-generation that is becoming increasingly interesting in socio-economic and socio-cultural terms: The [ETC \(2020\)](#) defines Generation Z as those born after 1996, yet there are differing views on different age categories for Generation Z. [Howe and Strauss \(2007\)](#), for instance, note that the distinction between Generation Z or Millennials and Generation Y is not clear. [Corbisiero and Ruspini \(2018\)](#), on the other hand, argue

that Generation Z distinguishes itself from Generation Y by its competencies in digital technology, new social media, and online activity.

In the current demographic structure of the world's population, major changes in travel demands are likely to occur as the young population grows and begins to travel as they become more affluent. Undoubtedly, this effect will not be the same in every country. These effects will be much more visible, especially in countries with high population growth rates. The [ETC \(2020\)](#) predicts a significant increase in tourism in regions with high fertility, such as Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, as Generation Z reaches adulthood. In this context, Generation Z's experiences and perceptions are crucial for the future of tourism in both developed and developing countries.

The emphasis on the spatiality of tourism is an important component of today's tourism research ([Jacobsen, 2007](#)). This is because, from a tourism perspective, we travel to see cities, buildings, and ruins, (that is, the landscape) ([Azara, 2008](#)). In fact, the world is not a landscape; rather, the viewers transform it into a landscape. Landscape is a creative process in which nature is interpreted through feelings. Therefore, landscape is a mental category ([Maciocco, 2008](#)). In addition, tourists are not only social beings, but are also spatial beings. During all of the stages of a trip, including travel planning, destination selection, experience at the destination, and return home, they are in contact with the

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place they are in. That is to say, they produce the place. Therefore, they are produced by the place. In other words, the modern understanding of space is based on the key assumption that spaces are more than just physical entities; they are also socially formed (Williams & Lew, 2014). Places are not only restricted areas, but also settings in which social relations and identities are formed, and a sense of space is developed (Agnew, 2015). This mutual interaction constitutes the tourist experience. The satisfaction and uniqueness of this experience is closely related to the destination's landscape. Landscape is recognized as a phenomenon encompassing a destination's physical, human, and perceptual appearance (Maciocco, 2008). Physical landscape emphasizes physical geography characteristics, such as morphological features, climate, and vegetation in a particular destination. Human landscape refers to elements built with direct human intervention, such as the destination's architecture, infrastructure features and traditional cuisine. Different social locations of tourists differentiate their perceptions of the expressed landscape components. Therefore, the landscape takes on a new dimension. Perceptual landscape, is characterized by the tourists' emotional states regarding the destination. These multidimensional features of landscape show that landscape analysis in destinations is a useful tool in developing holistic tourism policies. Accordingly, it is critical to have a thorough understanding of the landscape for effective tourism planning. As a result, the subject of this research is to experience landscape and to operationalize it in tourism planning.

It has been assumed that a destination with social, cultural, and spatial diversity and attractiveness will be beneficial in obtaining detailed findings concerning the experiences of Generation Z with landscape. Sivrihisar was selected as the study area. It is a small settlement with rich natural and cultural attractions, as well as a large tourism potential where tourism activities and facilities are new and rapidly developing. The study was performed by conducting field observations with a group of volunteer high school students and analyzing the results from such observations. The objective of the study is to find out how Generation Z perceives the tourism landscape and to discuss how landscape dimensions can be used in strategic tourism planning studies. In this direction, the two questions being investigated are, 'Which physical, human, and perceptual landscape features are of interest to Generation Z?', and 'How can Generation Z's tourism landscape preferences be operationalized in tourism planning?'. This study will shed light on the decisions to be taken and the activities to be carried out regarding tourism planning and marketing. It has to be underlined that there are no studies in the literature on how different generations perceive landscapes, how they experience landscapes, and how to measure landscape perception in-depth. In this regard, the research method and findings are expected to contribute to scientific knowledge, while also paving the way for future research.

## 2. Tourism planning and landscape

Tourism planning stands out as one of the key aspects of a destination's success (Costa, 2001). Although the understanding of tourism planning is developing, more research and experimentation are required to improve planning policies and principles (Inskip, 1988). Many destinations have become viable tourism attractions with appropriate infrastructure and adoption of an accurate and adaptable management plan (Sedarati, Santos, & Pintassilgo, 2019). Tourism is a development industry that necessitates holistic and prospective planning measures. Geography guides the negative externalities of tourism on the academic and social relevance of planning research in tourism geographies, as well as the industry's growth towards a path of development. In addition, based on a multidimensional research context, different contextual aspects of tourism development and planning around geographies should also be defined (Saarinen, Rogerson, & Hall, 2017). In this context, different correlations need to be analyzed. Recent tourism geography studies have fostered the development of more nuanced, ambiguous

understandings that provide a new perspective on how tourists interact with their surroundings (Williams, 1998). In the context of tourism geography, landscape, because of its concrete and heuristic nature, is the most essential geographical environment in an analysis of the evolving relations between the tourist and the place visited. Landscape is both a real scene for tourism and a great tool for analyzing geographical change through tourism because of its easy and ready accessibility, and its representational and relational properties (Terkenli, 2002).

Serving as both assets and boundaries for tourism development, landscapes provide an indirect context within which tourism is frequently conceived as a means of regional development (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015). One of the most comprehensive definitions of tourism landscape was made by Holloway and Hubbard (2001). They place their viewpoints on landscape into three groups. The first of these is the earth, as the earth's observable surface. The second is the visual landscape, as products created as a result of the relationship between people and societies. The last is the landscape, which is represented by common meaning systems. On the basis of this definition, the tourism landscape may be defined as a phenomenon made up of the natural and human environmental characteristics of the destinations, as well as of the perceptual environment created by tourists in relation to these characteristics. The mentioned definition also sheds light on the reasons for an increased interest in landscape in tourism research. The first reason for this interest is that the elements consumed in tourism activities are the nature, culture and emotion of the destination; in other words, the landscape. Accordingly, a destination's landscape elements correlate to tourism products and services. Therefore, in tourism as a type of consumption, tourists consume landscape. The second is that landscape also determines what to consume. This is because traditional or modern architectural characteristics, food, and music are not the same all over the world. This spatial difference also stems from the landscape. Thereby, the difference in landscape makes the destination unique and the consumption of tourists gains a spatial characteristic. In this sense, landscape shows what is possible for the destination, what should be overcome, what to struggle for, and what to fight against (Mitchell, 2005). The tourism landscape as a research topic necessitates contextual interpretation and cannot be considered independently from questions of positionality, historical and socio-cultural context, and its relationship with the viewer (Terkenli, 2004). Spaces are regarded as an integral part of tourism landscapes because of tourism's dominant influence on their character (Weaver, 1988). Therefore, landscape, can be said to provide a holistic perspective in destination planning.

## 3. Generational change in tourism and Generation Z

There is a school of thought that each generation's formative experiences shape their lifelong ideas, values, and behavior. Memories of formative years influence the travel decisions of a generational community today (Gardiner, King, & Grace, 2013). Therefore, the tourism demand mentioned for each generation brings various tourism dynamics, and this change is effectively used in the development of tourism policy. The change in the demands and motivations of older tourists is not as robust as that of young tourists. This makes youth related processes much more critical for the future of the tourism industry. Cavagnaro et al. (2018) explain this for three reasons. The first is the fact that young tourists traveling today are quantitatively too many. The second is the fact that the tourism choices of young people can lead to new attitudes towards tourism. The last is the expectation that young tourists will increase in number in the future. Therefore, it can be argued that Generation Z, one of the most interesting demographic groups, will play a critical role in terms of the future of the tourism industry and tourism geography (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019; Skinner, Sarpong, & White, 2018).

Generation Z is conceptualized in relation to mobility, social networks, and digitalization. Generation Z is generally considered to be caring, committed to intimacy, independent and self-loving, determined

and ambitious, as well as being prepared and cautious (Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya, & Solnet, 2021). In terms of behavioral characteristics, Generation Z has an undefined identity, and is dialog-enhancing and realistic. In terms of consumption habits, Generation Z's consumption values are based on unique, infinite, and ethical products (ETC, 2020). Another difference of the members of Generation Z is that they are in interaction with new technologies on a daily basis, particularly the Internet (Monaco, 2018). In times of economic crisis, this generation is easily influenced by the image and brand personality of a city, with the effect of social media (Priporas, Stylos, & Kamenidou, 2020). Generation Z recognizes the social media as an important part of marketing, possibly because they grew up in a highly commercialized world. (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). According to Yang and Wu (2007), young males have a higher cautiousness level before decision-making. At first, they prefer to evaluate, and a positive feedback is expected. On the other hand, young females do not evaluate the alternative purchasing style and are affected more easily by electronic marketing strategies.

Their habits necessitate the widespread use of communication and internet technology in the context of tourism as well. The needs of Generation Z tourists are also quite diverse. In this context, they have developed certain purchasing behavior. They make last-minute decisions, investigate opportunities, rely on word-of-mouth recommendations when choosing a destination, and maximize the use of resources and low-cost services (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). Generation Z has grown up in the age of globalization. As a result, factors such as financial crises, terrorism, climate change, and technology appear to be other influential developments in shaping their travel characteristics (ETC, 2020).

Generational theory is said to provide a valid framework for investigating consumer behavior. The generational theory assumes that each generation is characterized by the characteristics that can be directly attributed to the events experienced within its generation. As a result, knowledge obtained regarding generations has the potential to inform our understanding of attitudes, intentions, and behavioral trends in tourism (Benckendorff & Moscardo, 2013). Tourists' travel-related thoughts, decisions, and behavior are influenced by their generation (Li, Li, & Hudson, 2013). As a result, a generational analysis might be a beneficial segmentation tool that goes beyond explanation to uncover the underlying causes of tourism motivations (Huang & Lu, 2017). This

generation, whose share in the total population is increasing, especially in developing countries, also corresponds to a generation that travels frequently. This is also confirmed by the research conducted by Smith (2018). The 'Voice of a Generation' research also shows that Generation Z is dreaming or planning to travel, despite the COVID-19 pandemic (Contiki, 2021). In this regard, it is easy to predict that Generation Z will play a larger role in the future tourism industry, both in terms of tourists and tourism management. For this reason, it is essential to know the tourist experiences of Generation Z for the correct and effective planning of future tourism.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Study area

Sivrihisar is a city located in western Turkey, which is affiliated to the province of Eskişehir, one of the country's largest cities (see Fig. 1). Sivrihisar was established at the foothills of a volcanic rock mass called Sivrihisar Mountain. The mountain attracts attention with its sharp cliffs rising upwards towards the sky. The city is named after these cliffs. In terms of the climate characteristics of Sivrihisar, the winter months are cold and snowy, while the summer months are hot and dry. Sivrihisar is a remarkable tourism resort with its unique architectural texture (Cömert, Avdan and Şenkal, 2012), historical artifacts (Koç & Koç, 2021), important personalities (Boratav, 2020), cultural values (Gümüş, Gümüş, Yudar, Zeliha, & Sakarya, 2021), nature sports, nature and wildlife (Erdoğan, Ketenoğlu, Bingöl, Geven, & Arslan, 2011), and its flora and fauna, which include endemic species (Balpınar, Kavgacı, Bingöl, & Ketenoğlu, 2018; Koyuncu, Ataşlar, Tokur, Erten, & Ardiç, 2008). At the intersection of historical roads, it attracts the attention of visitors with a lot of heritage inherited from Phrygians, Romans, Seljuks, and Ottomans. In the city, significant ruins from these periods exist. This district is said to have given birth to many famous Turkish philosophers, including Nasreddin Hodja, Yunus Emre, Aziz Mahmut Hüdayi, and Hızır Bey. There are houses with a historical texture in Sivrihisar, on the one hand, and modern buildings on the other, creating an ambiance in which the old and new coexist. Sivrihisar is also a culinary destination, with dishes of geographical indication. All these elements constitute the tourism landscape of Sivrihisar.



Fig. 1. Sivrihisar's location map.

4.2. Research design

In the research design, the design called ‘the research onion’ by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016) was used. The layers of qualitative research design were designed as follows; the philosophy of research, theory building approach, methodology, research strategy, time horizon, data collection technique and analysis (see Fig. 2).

The interpretivism approach was used to determine the perceptions and experiences of Generation Z with the tourism landscape. According to interpretivism, it is critical for the researcher to understand the differences between people as social actors. ‘Social actors’ are crucial in this case. People interpret their own and others’ social roles, based on the meaning assigned to them. The interpretivist philosophy emphasizes entering the social world of the research subject and understanding the participants’ worlds from their perspective. From an interpretive perspective, situations are complex, but also unique. This perspective includes the meanings created by a certain set of conditions, and individuals coming together at a certain time (Thornhill, Saunders, & Lewis, 2009, p. 116). In this context, the landscape of Sivrihisar city was interpreted according to the perspectives and experiences of the participants.

In the research, an induction approach, which is a theory building approach, was adopted. This theory building approach was preferred because of the close understanding of the meanings that the participants attributed to the events and the research context, collecting qualitative data, providing a more flexible structure that will allow the research emphasis to change as the research progresses, understanding that it is a part of the research, and that there was no need for generalization (Thornhill et al., 2009, p. 127).

In this research, the qualitative research method was employed. The design used is the phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. This approach is a design for examining the participants’ perspectives, feelings, and thoughts on the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to understand how events and interactions are perceived by people. This then makes explaining an experience and creating a conceptual reality possible (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In phenomenological research, researchers appraise common views within and between groups rather than individual behavior (Lu & Chen, 2011). Therefore, a holistic understanding and description of how individuals perceive, describe, feel, remember, infer a phenomenon and how they share it with others is required (Patton, 2002).

The research is cross-sectional as it involves the study of a particular phenomenon at a specific time. The research was conducted in October and November 2019. Landscape, which constitutes the subject of the research, is a multidimensional concept. It includes both concrete and abstract components related to place. Therefore, the data collection technique of landscape should allow it to be experienced concretely and perceptually. Considering this requirement, it was decided that the most appropriate data collection technique is observation. Observation is

accepted as a technique that allows the researcher to contact the real world and to collect rich data that cannot be accessed by a questionnaire or a controlled technique (Barker, Flynn, & Pepper, 2002; Johnstone & Kanitsaki, 2006). Observation is a tool that enables the collection of rich and varied data, especially in spatial research. There are basically three techniques in the recording of data collected by observation, namely writing, voice recording, and video recording. Voice recording was preferred in the research. This is because it was intended to easily record the observers’ instantaneous reactions to concrete elements, such as housing, roads and trees, as well as to abstract landscape components, such as smells, sounds, and emotions, when they come into contact with the landscape.

4.3. Sample

In Turkey, there are 6,331,594 people between the ages of 15 and 19, 6,624,078 people between the ages of 20 and 24, and 12,955,672 people between the ages of 15 and 24 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2019). These figures show that Generation Z constitutes 17% of the total population. Therefore, Generation Z is also critical for the future of Turkish tourism. The purposive sampling method was used in the research. Participants in the study were selected among young people between the ages of 14–18. In this research, forty-eight students from Generation Z took part. Among the participants, the proportion of female students was 84% and the proportion of male students was 16%. Participation in the study was voluntary. Therefore, the high number of female students was entirely coincidental. All of the students were studying at the Eskişehir Eti Social Sciences High School and the Kenan Yalçın Anatolian High School.

Although involving young people in research in applied fields poses methodological challenges, ethically high-quality studies that emphasize their competence need to be disseminated. It was therefore necessary to actively involve children in the research process by employing creative methods that are sensitive to children’s competencies; for example, visual and participatory techniques (Canosa & Graham, 2016). In this study, the important ethical commitments asserted by Graham, Powell, Taylor, Anderson, and Fitzgerald (2013), which should guide all research involving children and youth, have been fulfilled. These include maximizing benefits for children, avoiding potential risks of harm and informing children, and obtaining their ongoing consent during and as a result of the research process. Furthermore, for the involvement of the children in this study, the consent of their parents, teachers, and the Provincial Directorate of National Education was obtained. Each group was accompanied by a form teacher during the site visit.

4.4. Data collection process

A guided tour was planned for the fieldwork to provide students with information about the region’s general history and characteristics. Certain preparations were made before collecting data with fieldwork. These preparations included, first and foremost, local administrators

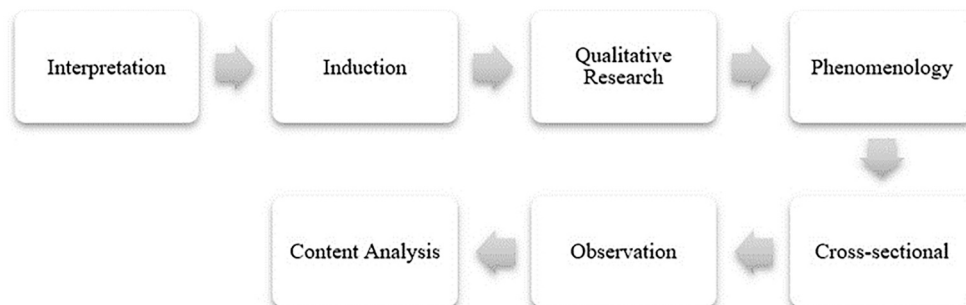


Fig. 2. Research design.



being contacted and informed about the planned research, and equipment and service cooperation being established. The entire city center was divided into thirty-five regions for the observation process. The participants were divided into thirteen groups, with each group responsible for a specific area. A workshop was held to provide information about the concept of landscape and fieldwork. During the workshop, the young people were taught how to observe and keep track of their observations.

In the fieldwork, students were first informed about the historical, cultural, and natural values of the city. After this, workshops where traditional handicrafts such as weaving are performed, which is an important cultural heritage component of the city, were visited. The students were then informed about the local Akbas dogs, which are an important component of the biodiversity. An attendant dressed as Nasreddin Hodja narrated the life of this most significant representative of Turkish folk humor, and two cultural architectural works, namely the Ulu Mosque, built in 1274, and the Kurşunlu Mosque, built in 1492, were visited. Zaimağa Mansion, Alemşah Cupola, the museum house belonging to the famous sculptor Metin Yurdanur, the Armenian Church and the Open-Air Sculpture Museum, which is located near the church, were also visited. After these visits, the trip was completed (Image 1) and lunch followed. After lunch, student groups visited the designated areas to carry out observation studies, and noted their observations in the field. The students used Google Maps for routing. They also made use of the ‘voice-to-text’ feature of Google Documents in recording their observation notes. This allowed easy recording of the instant reactions of the observers, while avoiding time loss caused by transcription. The students later sent their observation notes to the researchers. Emphasizing the physical and human landscape of the destination is concrete and relatively easy in observational notes. Therefore, to raise awareness of the perceptual landscape, in addition to the observational notes, the students were asked, ‘What is the most impressive thing in the city?’ and they were asked to ‘describe the city as sound, color, smell, and emotion’ in order to obtain more detailed information regarding their perception as students concerning the destination’s landscape; the data was therefore collected.

4.5. Data analysis

The data obtained from the observational notes and the gap filling questions (Appendix A) were harmonized by the researchers and prepared for analysis. The data was subjected to a content analysis. Content analysis is defined as the process of classifying qualified textual data into similar groups or conceptual categories to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes (Julien, 2008, p. 120). A deductive content analysis was made in the study. Accordingly, the obtained codes were organized into themes and analyzed in accordance

with the research aims. The Maxqda program was used to perform the analyses and the researchers produced codes and themes to verify them, independent from each other. While coding, it was preferred to use the code names given by the researcher. The participants were coded as S1, S2, ....., S48.

Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are commonly used in tourism research, such as conducting tourism information management and producing a comprehensive thematic map (Wei, 2012). The use of GIS for mapping in tourism aids in the production of maps of various themes and sizes based on user requirements, as well as the acquisition of cartographic information (Eboy, 2017). In this research, GIS were used for the mapping of the perceptual landscape. The words related to the emotional state of the participants appearing in the observational notes were compiled according to their frequency, and a database was created. After this, using this Kriging Method, maps related to the emotional state were produced. Kriging is a geostatistical technique that uses observed values at known locations to estimate the values of random areas at unobserved points (Shad, Mesgari, Abkar, & Shad, 2009).

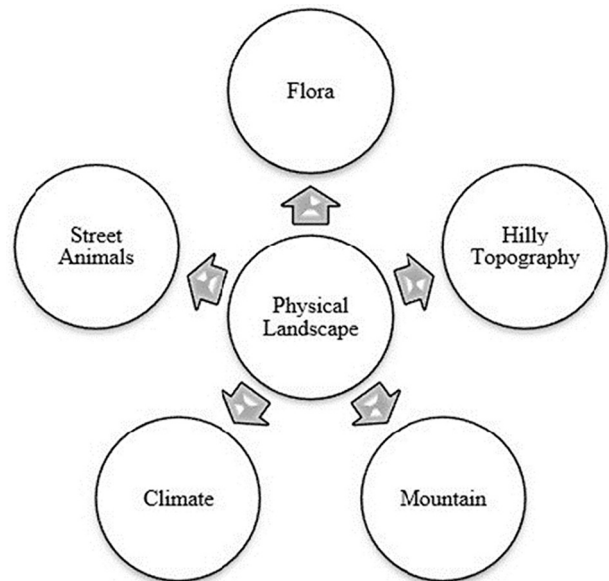


Fig. 3. Physical landscape components of the study area.



Image 1. Field trip.

5. Results

5.1. Physical landscape

The physical landscape characteristics of Sivrihisar city consist of five components; the vegetation, climate, mountains, rugged morphological conditions and stray animals (see Fig. 3).

The most characteristic component of the physical landscape of the city is the mountain chain which stretches across the north of the city. It was interpreted as one of the landscape components of the city by almost all of the participants. This situation is related to the fact that the mountain chain can be easily seen from various points within the city. The low slope of Sivrihisar city and its environs, combined with a lack of high points, makes the expressed morphological element quite unique in the region. This demonstrates that although most of the city and its immediate surroundings are located on flat land, the landscape of the city has been interpreted as an integral part with the mountains. Accordingly, unique structures proved to be interesting for Generation Z in terms of geomorphology. This also indicates that Generation Z interpreted the landscape characteristics of destinations through specific components rather than diversity. This uniqueness of the mountains also makes it a component that evokes admiration-like positive emotions in the participants.

- S1. "We could easily see the mountains when we looked around."
- S2. "The mountains are behind us, we are going steeply down the street."
- S3. "We are quite far from the mountains, but it is still possible to see them. I think the mountains can be seen from all over the city because of their height."
- S6. "The clock tower stands above the Armenian Church, right behind it there is a mountain lying to the left. From the top, Sivrihisar appears to be absolutely stunning. It is cold and blowing a little. It is a very impressive place."

Because of the mountains to the north of the city, the slope in the north of the settlement is steeper. Although it is inaccurate to say that the city has a rugged topography in general, it attracts attention as part of the city's physical landscape. In addition to the perception of the mountains as the most important element that constitutes the physical landscape of the city, the mountains' skirting is equally effective for Generation Z in understanding the landscape. This steeply sloping area also houses a significant portion of the city's tourist attractions. In addition, the central business region is situated where the slope begins to steepen. Although there is little roughness throughout the city, the participants interpreted the city as a monolithic unit with the mountains. The physical landscape is defined as an integrity consisting of city and mountains together.

- S6. "The road goes up a little, again sloping, there are trees."

The vegetation cover is another element of the city's physical landscape. This finding brings to mind the idea that vegetation has a lush existence, such as the presence of a rich forest cover in the study area. However, the study area is located in a region dominated by a continental climate. Therefore, the dominant vegetation cover is steppe. In this sense, this finding actually emphasizes the lack of diverse vegetation in the research area. The city center and recreational areas on the outskirts of the city, on the other hand, have a diverse range of plants and trees.

- S10. "There is, again, steppe vegetation around us. The trees are very sparse and we can see that most of them are pine trees."

As stated, the study area is located in a continental climate zone. As the fieldwork was conducted during the winter season, rainfall occurred at various times during the course of the fieldwork. The reason that

climate attracted attention was also related to the ongoing infrastructure works in the region. Because the city's infrastructure was being completely renewed, ongoing excavation work, combined with rainfall and the resulting water and puddles of mud, made walking quite difficult.

- S16. "Today the weather is between 9-12 degrees. Unfortunately, the weather, which was sunny in the morning and which I hoped would continue, did not cooperate with my wishes. After the short, but heavy rainfall, the uneven roads were covered with pebbles and mud, making the route difficult."

5.2. Human landscape

The human landscape of the study area consists of the bazaar, diversity in urban land use, recreational areas, infrastructure construction, urbanization and residences, traditional architecture, and a number of elements indicative of the transition from rural to urban (see Fig. 4).

In Sivrihisar city, there are three generations; the old city core, development areas of the city, and the transition from urban to rural. The traditional houses in the old city core are the most striking feature of Sivrihisar's human landscape. Having been around for hundreds of years, and used by different cultural and ethnic groups, these houses are also an element of cultural heritage. Traditional architecture is primarily concerned with houses. However, the old mosques, old shops, and the church to the north of the city were also architecturally interesting elements for the Generation Z students. Thereby, it can be argued that Generation Z loved the old city core; in other words, the traditional buildings.

- S22. "This building is one of the houses built during the Ottoman period, because there are motifs that show that it was built with Ottoman architecture."
- S13. "The doors of the houses here are original wooden doors, so they are very precious. We really see different architectural styles here. Almost all of the houses contain the word Allah made of tiles. Some of them have an Ottoman seal or a Turkish flag... We just saw the Nemani Fountain. The fountain also has Arabic texts on it and tiles. Beyond it, we encountered houses that resemble Odunpazarı Houses. The stairs of the houses are made of stone and there are both knobs and bells on the doors."

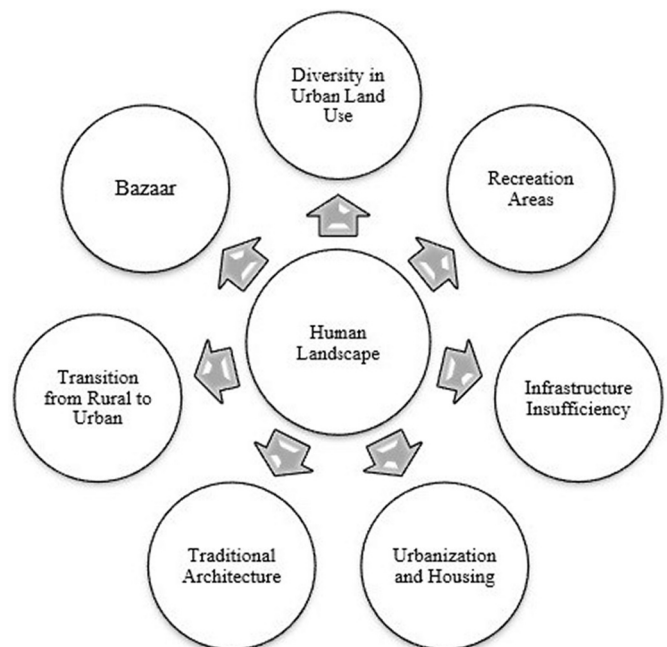


Fig. 4. Human landscape components of the study area.

The recreational areas of the city are a human landscape element. The recreational areas include not only green places, but also large functional areas that include lodging, dining, and drinking areas. The majority of the green places were designed to draw attention to Nasreddin Hodja, one of the city's most important symbols. Some have their names inscribed using Nasreddin Hodja, while others used Nasreddin Hodja sculptures to add symbolic value to the place.

**S32.** “There was a large park. It was a children’s playground with lots of trees and pergolas. This region was the most noticeable among the human elements. There was a Nasreddin Hodja monument in the park. We could easily see the mountains when we looked around. It was located in a small hotel right next to the park.”

**S30.** “There is a Nasrettin Hodhja park in the region, there is a stone structure in the park, and there are also areas for picnics. It is a green area, and there are also trees in it. There is also a hotel and a wedding hall near the park. The park can be considered as a human element in general.”

In the study area, urban land use is diverse. Industrial areas, residential areas, recreational areas, areas where schools are clustered, and empty places are remarkable functional areas. In this sense, Sivrihisar city has traditional urban land use characteristics. It can be said that the newly developed areas with multi-story residences do not appeal to Generation Z. The second component related to the human landscape is related to the urbanization process of Sivrihisar. Construction activities, particularly in the city’s south, are a prominent feature of the research area. Here, it is seen that the old city core and the central business areas are integrated. At this integration point, the bazaar has been set up, and the welcoming atmosphere created by the market has attracted the attention of Generation Z.

**S5.** “A construction is still possible, there is only one construction in front of us, it looks like a new building.”

**S13.** “...there are construction materials on the way.”

**S20.** “Because most of the people I saw know each other, they mostly addressed each other by name. There was an atmosphere of sincerity, especially in the bazaar. The women were having sweet conversations in a hurry.”

**S25.** “The socks with the superhero logo on the bazaar counter, which we could find in shops in Eskişehir, surprised me. I even wanted to buy them.”

Sivrihisar is a city according to the Municipalities Law. However, within the context of traditional debates about what constitutes a city, it is important to note that the city is in the process of transitioning from rural to urban. The houses on the outskirts of the city, in particular, are generally self-contained, and most people do small-scale plant production in their gardens. Furthermore, traditional materials and techniques, such as wood, adobe, or both, were used in the construction of the houses. Moreover, one of the most typical examples of the transition from rural to urban is the fact that the residents of these houses also engage in poultry farming.

**S19.** “We saw that these homeowners feed poultry, such as chickens in their gardens.”

**S2.** “In this area, I hear roosters and chickens, and this makes me think that poultry farming is concentrated in this area as well. The region is not too high. Agricultural equipment, as I can see, is quite extensive.”

5.3. *Perceptual landscape*

The perceptual landscape of Sivrihisar consists of elements that create positive and negative emotional states and various sounds and smells (see Fig. 5).

The factors that create a positive emotional state are quite diverse.

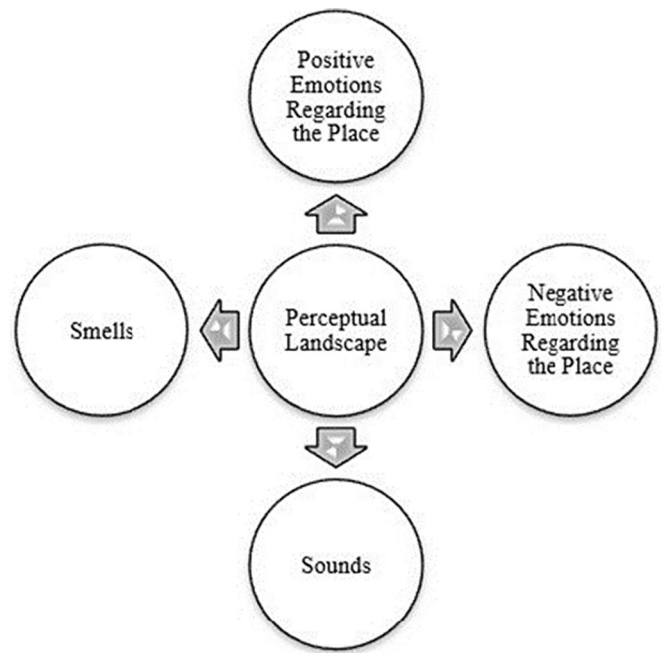


Fig. 5. Perceptual landscape components of the study area.

Positive feedback received as a result of interaction with local people, for example, aroused positive emotions in the participants. The small size of the city was characterized with such sincerity, and its quietness with tranquility by the participants. Recreational areas, in addition to these, aroused positive emotions in the participants. Infrastructure works are the main factors that aroused negative emotions. New residential areas were also landscape elements that aroused negative emotions in the participants.

**S16.** “People were very friendly and that made me feel very comfortable. The quietness and calmness of the city is also reflected in the people. So, I felt peaceful.”

**S6.** “On the way, an old woman noticed that we had come to visit this place and said, ‘My daughter, there is a martyrdom ahead, there is a church beyond it, they are very beautiful, go there too’. People are very friendly. I never felt like a stranger.”

The sounds and smells in various parts of the city attract attention as perceptual landscape elements. Cat, dog, and poultry sounds are the most characteristic ones. Quietness constitutes another element of the perceptual landscape. The soil smells, the bread smells and the food odors of the food and beverage enterprises in the central business area are the most remarkable smells. Aside from these, one of the region’s odor-related characteristics is the use of wood and coal as energy sources in homes.

**S3.** “Two things caught my attention while wandering inside; the sounds I hear around and the architecture of the buildings. I often heard dogs barking and rooster sounds in this area. Besides, I frequently heard the azan (call to prayer), people talking, and the sounds of vehicles, such as cars and buses during the trip.”

**S28.** “We heard a lot of dogs barking and saw a lot of dogs.”

**S21.** “There is a smell of wood. It is like there is the warmth of old houses with stoves.”

Fig. 5 depicts the distribution of positive and negative emotions associated with the field of study. When the maps in Fig. 5 are examined, the positive emotional state is intense in the northern region, which constitutes the old city core. This is the area with prevalent traditional architectural elements. It also corresponds to the central business area of



the city. For this reason, urban mobility is high. This made it more possible for the participants to interact with the local people. The area in the northwest of the Kümbet Mosque is associated with both positive and negative emotional states. The negative emotions are not based on disliking the region, but rather on liking it. The participants regarded the buildings that had not been restored, or that were incomplete, as important cultural heritage elements. These have also been interpreted as attractions that can be introduced to tourism. The lack of effort to preserve and keep these buildings alive, elicited negative emotions in the participants, such as anger and sadness.

**S31.** “There is an Armenian church built in 1881, it has no features left

due to restoration, they painted the walls white.”

**S40.** “Now we are in front of an old bathhouse, it is demolished. It was restored twenty years ago, but because it was neglected, it has become a bad place. I guess people are throwing garbage and suchlike here. It made such an impression on me. I am very sorry to see this, it is really sad. After all, this is our history.”

Another area where the positive emotional state is intense is the recreation area in the south of the city. Located in one of the newly developing areas of the city, this recreational area offers a positive perceptual landscape with the rest, along with the eating areas it offers to its visitors.

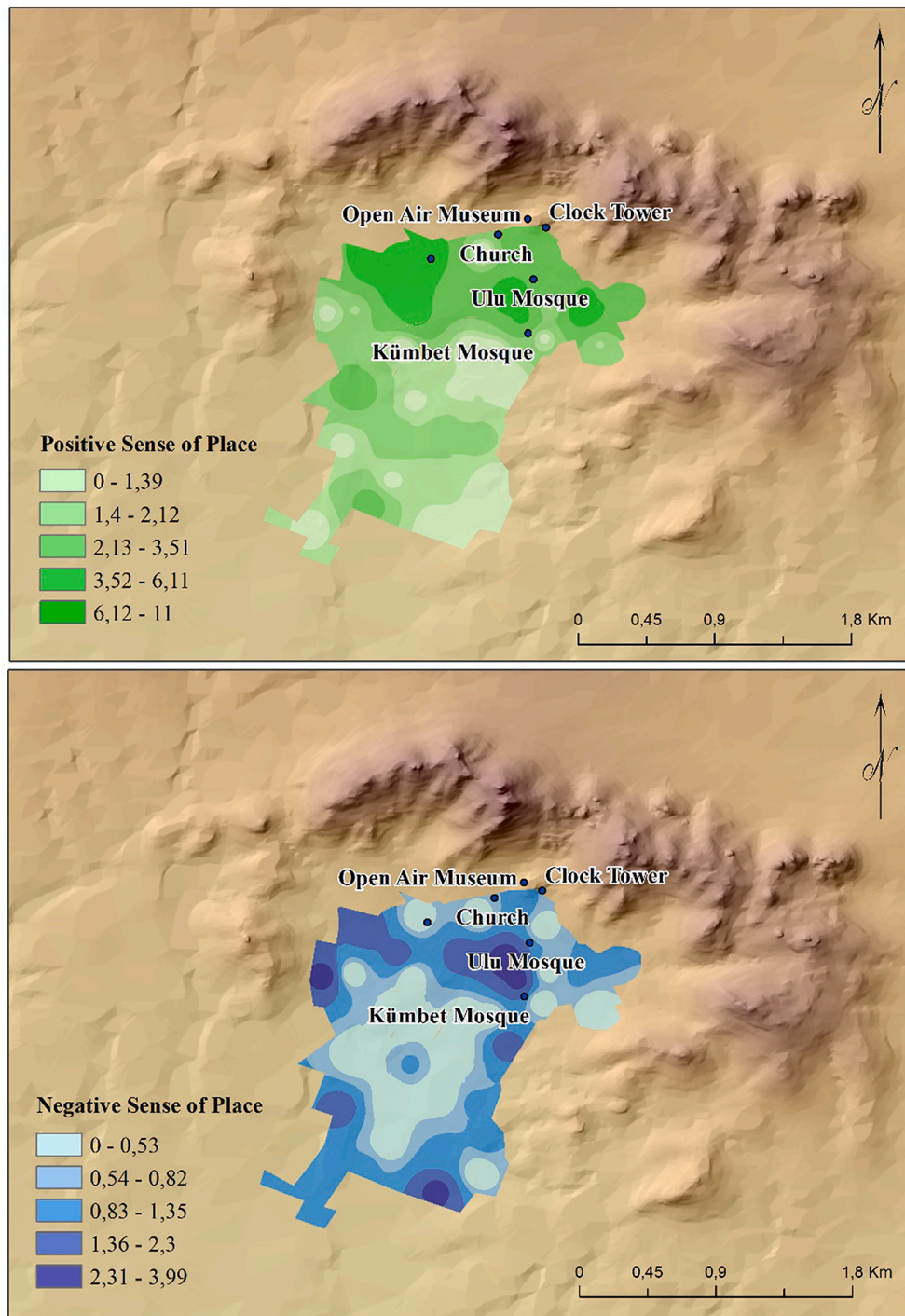


Fig. 6. Sense of place.



S25. “Nasrettin Hoca Park is a human element both for fun and for picnics. It also has a hotel and a wedding hall. The tomb of Nasreddin Hodja’s daughter is there. There is also a statue of Nasreddin Hodja. Nasrettin Hodja Park has a very large playground. Its greenery and park were very beautiful. Seeing Nasreddin Hodja’s daughter’s tomb was also a pleasant and sad experience.”

5.3.1. Findings on the mapping of perceptual landscape

Apart from the region mentioned above, there are two other areas where a negative emotional state is characteristic. The first is the area to the southeast of the city and the other to the northeast. The area in the southeast is where newly developing residential areas are located. It has been labeled a ‘soulless’ area because it has no attraction from a tourist aspect. The area in the northeast is a region where old residences are located and where urban agricultural activities still continue. The area was therefore described as quite ‘desolate’ and many of the participants did not feel safe or comfortable there (see Fig. 6).

S15. “The area seems to be completely abandoned, extremely desolate.”

S11. “It was also a soulless area, with residents rarely leaving their homes. We also came across empty or abandoned houses in some places.”

5.4. Short summary interview findings

The question, ‘What is the most impressive thing in the city?’ asked to the students after the observation reveals that the historical buildings, church, watch tower, Zaimağa Mansion, and the Ulu Mosque, namely the buildings involved with the traditional architecture, impressed students the most. Most of the students replied, “If Sivrihisar were a smell, it would be the smell of soil.” To the question, ‘If Sivrihisar were a sound, what sound would it be?’ the participants commonly answered, “An animal sound.”

The question, ‘If Sivrihisar were a color, what color would it be?’ was significantly answered as brown by most of the participants. It was followed by the colors gray and yellow, respectively. It is possible to see the presence of positive and negative emotions in the findings obtained after the observation study. The question, ‘If Sivrihisar were an emotion, what emotion would it be?’ was answered by the majority of the students as tranquility and happiness. There were also students who answered sadness and loneliness. The most striking of the elements they liked the most were the buildings with historical value. These are the Ulu Mosque, the Zaimağa Mansion, the Clock Tower, and the Church. In

addition, streets as public places and local people were also considered as interesting elements. In the context of these two elements, it can be stated that daily and public places are noteworthy for Generation Z. Finally, the mountains, which are the most visible element of the city’s landscape, are the tourist attraction that most attracted the attention of the participants (see Fig. 7).

6. Discussion

Several studies have been conducted on the behavior and preferences of younger generations, particularly Generation Y and Generation Z (Baum, 2020; Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021; Weiler, 2005). Understanding Generation Z correctly is critical in developing effective tourism policies. In this context, this study is intended to determine how Generation Z perceives landscape, and to discuss how to use landscape dimensions in determining tourism planning strategies.

The physical landscape of Sivrihisar is made up of five elements; vegetation, climate, mountains, rugged morphological conditions, and stray animals. Considering the physical landscape characteristics of Sivrihisar, the most interesting element for the Generation Z students were the mountains extending to the north of the city. The mountains were considered to be extremely effective in understanding the landscape. Indeed, the physical landscape of the city, as a whole, has been interpreted in relation to the mountains. The Generation Z students’ perception of Sivrihisar’s vegetation, climate, rugged morphological conditions, and stray animals stems from the perception of the environment as being critical and interesting for them. This finding, regarding the interest of Generation Z in the environment, is consistent with the research of Su, Tsai, Chen, and Lv (2019).

Generation Z’s human landscape definition for the study area consisted of the central business area, diversity in urban land use, recreation areas, infrastructure construction, urbanization and residences, traditional architecture, and a number of elements that are indicators of the transition from rural to urban. An ability to communicate intimately with the local people has emerged as one of the interesting points of Sivrihisar’s human landscape. The locals’ welcoming approach towards young tourists played a key role in the establishment of positive emotion-based social networks. In this regard, the students in this study regarded communication with the locals as an opportunity to learn and experience the culture of the region. The desire of Generation Z to communicate with locals is consistent with earlier studies (Sirakaya & McLennan, 1997; UNWTO, 2016; Haddouche & Salomone, 2018; Tavares, Sawant, & Ban, 2018; Xu & Tavitiyaman, 2018; Robinson & Schänzel, 2019; Traditional architecture is a prominent element in the human landscape in the choice of destination (Slivar, Aleric, & Dolenc,

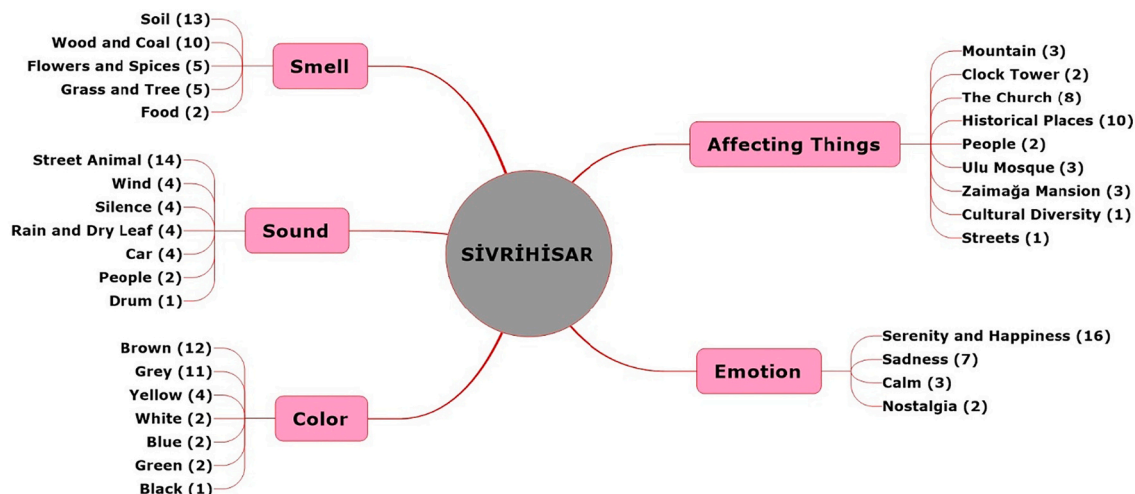


Fig. 7. Content analysis results.

2019). This finding is confirmed by research that shows that traditional architecture provides a favorable impression of the destination in the eyes of tourists (BEBKA, 2020; Özoğul Balyalı & Günay Aktaş, 2020). Another finding is related to recreational areas. It is emphasized that the majority of Generation Z youth visit urban recreational areas (Binti Ghani, 2019). No research was found in the relevant literature describing Generation Z's preferences for the central business area, diversity in urban land use, a lack of infrastructure, urbanization and housing, or other aspects that are indications of the transition from rural to urban.

When visiting a new place, people sometimes experience something that goes beyond the physical or sensory characteristics of a place. This is often referred to as 'sense of place' or 'genius loci' in urban planning jargon. In this context, the 'value' for tourists in the tourist experience is largely based on emotions (Hosany, Hunter-Jones, & McCabe, 2020). Although many planners neglect the emotional aspects, there are also a number of city planners who are aware of the importance of emotions on the site (Fathullah & Willis, 2018). Although the relationship between the built environment and emotional aspects of human beings has received increased interest in urban planning research in recent years, it remains a relatively new approach in the field of tourism geography (Raslan, Al-Hagla, & Bakr, 2014). Therefore, it makes it possible to conclude that emotions play a key role in understanding tourist behavior and experiences (Cohen & Areni, 1991). From the perspective of the tourism experience, sensory experiences are said to be unforgettable for children, affecting their future preferences (Schänzel & Lynch, 2016). Research findings show that students' experience processes at the destination are closely related to emotion and 'sense of place'. Everyday life is at the center of Sivrihisar's attraction towards a perceptual landscape. Everyday life perception consists of emotions, sounds, and smells. The diversity of the settlement and the difference in the social locations of the tourists have also been effective in the process of creating different emotional states in the same regions. Only two areas elicited negative emotions regarding the place. These areas are located on the city's eastern region and are situated where the settlement texture is sparse and people are less visible in daily life. The young tourists interpreted this situation as factors causing agitation and anxiety, effective in creating a negative emotion towards the place. Most of the students described Sivrihisar with a sense of tranquility and happiness, the smell of the soil and the sound of animals. Selectivity in perception may have been effective for the smell of soil as the fieldwork was performed on a rainy day and for animal sounds as they had encountered the Akbaş dogs. The natural vegetation of the city is steppe, and the volcanic mountains to the north are the most important factors in making the brown color a part of the city's identity. It was found that the studies on Generation Z's emotions, as well as their perceptions of the sound and smell of a place, are missing in literature.

## 7. Conclusion

Generation Z will play a significant role in the future tourism industry. As a result, understanding the tourist experiences of Generation Z is critical for accurate and effective tourism planning. We anticipate, by conducting this research, to be able to analyze the landscape through the eyes of Generation Z and to contribute to planning. In this context, this study has two key contributions.

The first contribution of this study is that the landscape perception is examined from the viewpoint of Generation Z, based on the fact that their attitudes and behavior will affect tourism. Geomorphologically unique elements attract the attention of Generation Z. Although the city tourism and cultural tourism experience were experienced, the young students perceived the mountains and the city as a monolithic unit. Another sign of Generation Z's interest in natural elements is the positive sense of place for recreational areas, with green and rich plant diversity in a steppe-dominated topography. In addition, although they did not like the newly developed multistory residential areas of the city,

they also reflected positive moods in the recreational areas enriched with cultural elements. Therefore, included in city and cultural tours, routes to visit geomorphological structures, and natural tourism resources, individually or with a guide, could be created to provide tourists with authentic experiences (Bachi, Ribeiro, Hermes, & Saadi, 2020; Kim, 2014). Although Generation Z has grown up with urbanization and even a metropolitan view of the world, technology and digitalization, they love a small city, traditional architecture, cultural elements, and streets and markets as public spaces. Moreover, they felt concerned about the lack of protection of these elements and enjoyed physical contact and communication with the local people. The fact that Generation Z considers the multistory buildings as soulless and finds the uninhabited areas scary, while they find the landscape components they like to be sincere and calm, will contribute to the sense of place literature. Considering these findings in terms of economic added value, they are important for the planning of future destinations. The environmental and sociocultural sensitivities of this generation seem to encourage the development of more sustainable tourism. However, the chief importance of these findings is that it is an important clue for how younger tourists have unforgettable tourist experiences.

The second significant contribution of this study is that it facilitates entering the social world of Generation Z and understanding the landscape from their point of view by presenting landscape perception with an interpretative perspective rather than using a quantitative method. The landscape perception that affects the destination image of a destination should be handled with an interpretative perspective. To achieve this, it is important to take a phenomenological approach rather than numerical methods. The results of this research show that a phenomenological perspective can reveal Generation Z's perception of the landscape in a more in-depth fashion. New methodological approaches are needed to incorporate people's perceptions into destination planning and management (Bachi et al., 2020). We are of the opinion that observing and touring a city is a strong tool for collecting data on its landscape. Distinctive, abstract, and concrete characteristics of a destination significantly contribute to the destination image. The image of a destination can be emphasized by its landscape, which reveals its distinctiveness. Landscapes must be understood in their spatial and temporal contexts in order to be planned (Marcucci, 2000). In destination planning, evaluating the landscape from an interpretative perspective, keeping subjective experiences alive and evaluating experiences can serve as tools for destination branding. Additionally, research involving social participation should be conducted in order to reveal how Generation Z tourists perceive and interpret landscapes.

### 7.1. Limitations of the study and future research

The landscape perception that affects the Generation Z image of a destination should be interpreted based on the relevant destination and culture. Therefore, comparisons could be made by conducting research based on different destinations and cultures. The subject of youth quarantined under pandemic conditions will also contribute to the literature and practice. This situation should also be interpreted as a limitation of the research. Future studies could be conducted to examine and compare the landscape perception of different generations.

### Compliance with ethical standards

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### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Öznur AKGIŞ İLHAN:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Data curation, Visualization, Investigation, Supervision, Validation, Writing - original draft, Writing - Review, and Editing. **Tuğçe ÖZOĞUL BALYALI:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation,

Visualization, Investigation, Supervision, Validation, Writing - original draft, Writing - Review, and Editing. **Semra GÜNAY AKTAŞ**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Investigation, Supervision, Validation, Writing - original draft, Writing - Review, and Editing

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

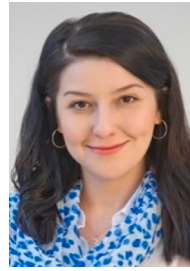
Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2022.100988>.

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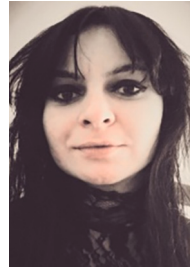
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