

Turkey in Minds: Cognitive and Social Representation of "East" and "West"

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Abstract : Perception, evaluation and representation of the environment have been the subject of many disciplines including psychology, geography and architecture. In environmental and social psychology literature there are several evidences which suggest that cognitive representations about a place consisted of not only geographic items but also social and cultural. Mental representations of residence area or a country is influenced and determined by social-demographics, the physical and social context. Thus, all mental representations of a given place are also social representations. Cognitive maps are the main and common instruments that are used to identify spatial images and the difference between physical and subjective environments. The aim of the current study is investigating the mental and social representations of Turkey in university students' minds. Data was collected from 249 university students from different departments (i.e. psychology, geography, history, tourism departments) of Ege University. Participants were requested to reflect Turkey in their mind onto the paper drawing sketch maps. According to the results, cognitive maps showed geographic aspects of Turkey as well as the context of symbolic, cultural and political reality of Turkey. That is to say, these maps had many symbolic and verbal items related to critics on social and cultural problems, ongoing ethnic and political conflicts, and actual political agenda of Turkey. Additionally, one of main differentiations in these representations appeared in terms of the East and West side of the Turkey, and the representations of the East and West was varied correspondingly participants' cultural background, their ethnic values, and where they have born. The results of the study were discussed in environmental and social psychological perspective considering cultural and social values of Turkey and current political circumstances of the country.

Keywords : cognitive maps, East, West, politics, social representations, Turkey

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