

FROM APPRECIATION TO STEWARDSHIP: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY OF BIODIVERSITY PERCEPTIONS, NATURE CONNECTEDNESS,
AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSES IN VALİDEBAĞ GROVE

by

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ABSTRACT

FROM APPRECIATION TO STEWARDSHIP: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF BIODIVERSITY PERCEPTIONS, NATURE CONNECTEDNESS, AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSES IN VALİDEBAĞ GROVE

This thesis examines how Validebağ Grove, a relatively unstructured and biodiverse urban green space in Istanbul, shapes visitors' experiences of nature connectedness, emotional well-being, and engagement in the preservation efforts. A phenomenological approach is employed and in participant selection purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling methods are used to ensure a diversity of perspectives are reflected. Based on nineteen semi-structured in-depth interviews with regular visitors, the study highlights multiple intersecting themes. Participants described the grove as a sanctuary from urban stress, where unstructured terrain and encounters with biodiversity fostered psychological restoration, emotional resilience, and a sense of autonomy. In addition to being a source for aesthetic joy and wonder, biodiversity also emerged as a catalyst for ethical concern, care, and stewardship. Emotional responses to ecological degradation—especially eco-anxiety, grief, and anger—were widely reported and often coped through strategies such as nature exposure, humor, and selective engagement. Although many participants expressed deep attachment to the grove, engagement in the ongoing preservation movement was ranged from symbolic support to sustained resistance. Engagement was shaped by ethical values, social bonds, and structural constraints such as safety concerns, economic precarity, political disillusionment, and generational differences. These findings contribute to environmental justice discourse by showing how inequalities affect not only access to green spaces but also the ability to participate in grassroots movements. Ultimately, Validebağ Grove emerges as both a site of collective meaning-making and a contested urban common—an ecological refuge under threat and a space where emotional, ethical, and political dimensions of environmentalism converge.

ÖZET

TAKDİRDEN KORUMAYA: VALİDEBAĞ KORUSU'NDA BİYOÇEŞİTLİLİK ALGILARI, DOĞAYLA BAĞ KURMA VE DUYGUSAL TEPKİLER ÜZERİNE FENOMENOLOJİK BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Bu tez, İstanbul'da nispeten yapılandırılmamış ve zengin biyoçeşitliliğe sahip bir kentsel yeşil alan olan Validebağ Korusu'nun ziyaretçilerin doğayla bağlantılılık, duygusal refah ve koruma çabalarına katılım deneyimlerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım benimsenmekte ve katılımcı seçiminde çeşitli bakış açılarının yansıtılmasını sağlamak için amaçlı, kartopu ve uygun örnekleme yöntemleri kullanılmaktadır. Düzenli ziyaretçilerle yapılan on dokuz yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeye dayanan çalışma, birden fazla kesişen temayı vurgulamaktadır. Katılımcılar koruyu, yapılandırılmamış arazisinin ve alan tanıdığı biyoçeşitlilikle karşılaşmaların psikolojik restorasyonu, duygusal dayanıklılığı ve özerklik duygusunu beslediği, kentsel strese karşı bir sığınak olarak tanımladılar. Biyoçeşitlilik, estetik bir neşe ve hayret kaynağı olmasının yanı sıra etik kaygı, özen ve savunuculuk için bir katalizör olarak da ortaya çıktı. Ekolojik bozulmaya karşı duygusal tepkiler -özellikle eko-kaygı, keder ve öfke- yaygın olarak bildirildi ve genellikle doğada zaman geçirme, mizah ve seçici katılım gibi stratejilerle başa çıkıldığı iletildi. Birçok katılımcı koruya derin bir bağlılık ifade etse de, devam eden koruma hareketine katılımları farklılık göstermektedir. Katılım biçimleri sembolik destekten sürekli direnişe kadar uzanmakta ve etik değerler, sosyal bağlar ve güvenlik endişeleri, ekonomik güvencesizlik, siyasi hayal kırıklığı ve nesiller arası farklılıklar gibi yapısal kısıtlamalar tarafından şekillendirilmektedir. Bu bulgular, eşitsizliklerin yalnızca yeşil alanlara erişimi değil aynı zamanda taban hareketlerine katılma olasılığını da nasıl etkilediğini göstererek çevresel adalet söylemine katkıda bulunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Validebağ Korusu hem bir kolektif anlam yaratma alanı hem de tartışmalı bir kentsel ortak alan olarak ortaya çıkıyor; tehdit altındaki ekolojik bir sığınak ve çevreciliğin duygusal, etik ve siyasi boyutlarının birleştiği bir alan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Explanation
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
CNS	Connectedness to Nature Scale
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
INS	Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale
IPA	İstanbul Planlama Ajansı (Istanbul Planning Agency)
MEB	Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (Ministry of National Education)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NR	Nature Relatedness Scale

1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization has reshaped cities worldwide, bringing both opportunities and challenges. While stimulating the economy, urbanization often leads to significant social, environmental, and psychological costs (United Nations, 2019). As cities grow, it becomes harder for citizens to access green spaces. Meanwhile, research consistently highlights the crucial role of nature exposure in fostering overall well-being, reducing anxiety, and promoting healthier lifestyles (Ventriglio et al., 2021). The absence of accessible urban green spaces can aggravate mental health problems, contributing to higher levels of depression, anxiety, and diminished quality of life (Bratman et al., 2019; Barragan-Jason et al., 2023). Correspondingly, there is a growing interest in understanding the psychological and environmental benefits of preserving urban green areas (Lev et al., 2020; Marsella, 1994; Palliwoda et al., 2017; Meng et al., 2024).

The metropolitan city of Istanbul, Türkiye's most crowded city and economic hub, exemplifies the complex relationship between urbanization and its ecological costs. As one of the fastest-growing cities globally, Istanbul has experienced unprecedented urban sprawl over the past few decades (Cengiz et al., 2019). The city's population has risen to almost 16 million, driving demand for housing, commercial development, and transportation networks (TurkStat, 2023). This expansion has placed immense pressure on the city's remaining green spaces, leading to the loss of urban biodiversity and public recreational areas as development projects prioritize economic gains over environmental preservation (Erdönmez & Atmış, 2021; Güneralp et al., 2021).

Especially since the 1980s, Istanbul's urban landscape has been drastically transformed by the increasing commercialization of public spaces (Şahin, 2015; Özlüer et al., 2016). As Istanbul expanded into a global financial center, economic policies encouraged the privatization and commodification of land, favoring real estate development, commercial enterprises, and tourism over the preservation of public green spaces (Güneralp et al., 2021). This shift has led to the gradual encroachment of commercial projects on historically communal areas, limiting public access and altering the urban ecosystems of the city (Akbulut & Bartu Candan, 2014; Erensü & Kahraman, 2016; Genoud, 2018). Between 1990 and 2018, Istanbul lost approximately 21.92% of its forest cover and urban green areas due to construction projects and re-zoning efforts. Large-scale constructions such as highways, housing estates, and mega-infrastructure projects have intruded into critical natural habitats. This loss has significantly reduced biodiversity, fragmented wildlife, and stripped residents of vital public green spaces (Cengiz et al., 2019; Bozkurt & Basaraner, 2024).

A key aspect of commercialization was the privatization of public parks, forests, and waterfronts. As Istanbul's land prices skyrocketed, these spaces have been repurposed to accommodate shopping malls, high-end residential complexes, and entertainment venues. Green areas that once served as community gathering points have been transformed into luxury residential compounds and private event spaces, reducing free and open access to nature for urban residents (Cengiz, Atmış, & Görmüş, 2019; Doğan & Stupar, 2017).

This trend reflected a shift in the concept of public space, where commercial interests redefine leisure and socialization as consumer-driven activities. Heavily commercialized, controlled environments have replaced spaces that traditionally fostered informal social gatherings and cultural interactions. The demolition of public spaces in favor of capital has also reshaped Istanbul's urban identity. Places like Taksim Square and Gezi Park, which were historically significant as public gathering spaces, have been targeted for redevelopment projects that prioritize commercial gains (Gürcan & Peker, 2015). The 2013 Gezi Park Protests were, in part, a reaction to this phenomenon, as activists opposed a government-backed plan to commodify one of the last remaining urban green spaces in central Istanbul (Turhan, 2017). The movement also highlighted broader public discontent over the increasing privatization of public lands and the erosion of civic spaces (Akbulut & Bartu Candan, 2014).

The commercialization of public green spaces has exacerbated urban inequality, as access to nature has increasingly become a privilege of the wealthy. High-end residential projects often incorporate private green spaces, such as gated community parks and exclusive recreational areas, while the broader population faces dwindling access to freely available nature (Perkins, 2015).

Currently, many of Istanbul's new residential complexes integrate some forms of green spaces within their private enclosures, creating an exclusive urban ecology that benefits only property owners and affluent residents. Meanwhile, publicly accessible green areas, especially in lower-income districts, continue to shrink due to unchecked urban sprawl and infrastructure expansion. This trend disproportionately affects marginalized communities, particularly those living in densely populated working-class neighborhoods, where parks and open areas are already limited (Doğru et al., 2020). Many commercial urban development projects have also adopted greenwashing strategies as a way of marketing themselves as environmentally friendly. For instance, developers frequently promote projects with artificial green spaces—such as vertical gardens, rooftop terraces, and decorative tree-lined avenues—to mask the ecological costs of large-scale urbanization. However, these elements are often aesthetic rather than functional, providing little ecological benefit compared

to natural forests or relatively wild urban groves (Heynen, Kaika, & Swyngedouw, 2006; Lefebvre, 1991; Lev et al., 2020). A prominent example is the Istanbul Canal Project, which claims to include green corridors along its route while simultaneously threatening to destroy thousands of hectares of farmland, forests and important biodiversity hotspots. Similarly, the construction of Istanbul Airport was justified with promises of reforestation projects despite its direct role in deforestation and wetland destruction (Çakır et al., 2008).

The increasing commercialization of public green spaces has had direct consequences for public health and individual well-being. Research has shown that access to green areas is critical for mental health, air quality, and temperature regulation, particularly in dense urban environments like Istanbul (Gómez-Baggethun & Barton, 2013). However, as parks and natural areas are transformed into commercial zones, fewer residents have the opportunity to engage in stress-relieving outdoor activities such as walking, jogging, or simply enjoying green landscapes (İnal, 2022). Moreover, the loss of communal green spaces weakens social cohesion, as fewer public gathering spots remain available for informal social interactions. In contrast to freely accessible parks, commercialized spaces impose behavioral constraints and economic barriers that discourage spontaneous public engagement (Pérouse, 2014).

Community-driven environmental activism surged across the city from the mid-1980s onwards as citizens rallied to protect remaining urban green spaces (Şahin, 2015; Özlüer et al., 2016). Public resistance against the privatization of green areas has intensified in recent years. Local communities, environmental activists, and civil society organizations have mobilized to protect Istanbul's remaining natural spaces from commercial encroachment. These grassroots movements highlight the broader struggle for urban environmental justice, advocating for sustainable urban policies that prioritize public access to green spaces over commercial profits (Ünal, 2014). The fight for nature conservation in Istanbul is not only about protecting biodiversity but also about defending the right to an inclusive and livable city for all its residents (Lefebvre, 1996).

This evolving environmental movement reflects a growing awareness of the link between urban green areas and public health. This awareness is further supported by recent research, such as a study conducted during COVID-19 restrictions in Istanbul's Kadıköy district, which found that regular visits to urban green areas significantly alleviated stress and improved mental health (Erdönmez & Atmış, 2021). Although studies specifically focusing on Istanbul remain limited, existing research consistently emphasizes the critical role of urban green spaces in enhancing the well-being and mental health of urban residents (Barragan-Jason et al., 2023).

Validebağ Grove, a cherished relatively wild urban green space on the Anatolian side of Istanbul, is one such area facing intense pressure that makes it a focal point for both environmental activism and urban policy debates (Lev et al. 2020; Bal & Baruh, 2020; Doğan, 2015). It is the second largest urban green space on the Anatolian side, with an area of 35,4 hectares (IPA, 2021; Validebağ Gönüllüleri Derneği, n.d.) and has immense ecological and cultural significance, for residents living around the site. The grove preserves rare plant species and old-grown trees and serves as a crucial component of Istanbul's urban biodiversity. In addition to its ecological functions, the grove is also important for recreation, bird watching, environmental education, and other community-driven activities (Boyalı & Baykan, 2024).

Given this context, this study adopted a phenomenological qualitative approach by conducting 19 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the regular visitors of the Validebağ Grove to explore these visitors' nature connectedness inclinations, biodiversity perceptions, emotional responses, and their impacts on well-being and mental health. The phenomenological approach has its roots in the philosophical traditions of Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl and has recently been increasingly adopted in social sciences for studying lived experiences in real-world contexts. For instance, a phenomenological analysis has been used to explore how individuals interpret phenomena such as identity, trauma, social belonging, and environmental interactions (Schutz, 1967). Schutz emphasized that phenomenology examines how members of society describe their everyday world, and mainly how individuals construct meaning from their experiences through consciousness (Schutz, 1970). Therefore, this approach was chosen due to its ability to collect a diverse set of different perspectives, ensuring a deeper understanding of the layers of these individuals' relationships with the Validebağ Grove. This approach enables the participants to provide their unique insights into the following research questions of the study.

1. How does the relatively high levels of biodiversity and unstructured nature of Validebağ Grove influence visitors' experiences, nature connectedness, and well-being?
2. What are the psychological, social, and ethical motivations driving participants' engagement in the environmental social movement at Validebağ Grove?
3. Which factors demotivate a visitor to engage in the social movement within the Validebağ Grove?
4. How do visitors experience eco-anxiety and other emotional responses in relation to ecological degradation, and what coping strategies do they employ?

2. STUDY AREA: VALİDEBAĞ GROVE

Validebağ Grove, also known as Adile Sultan Grove, is a popular urban green space located on the Anatolian side of Istanbul at the intersection of the Koşuyolu neighborhood in Kadıköy and the Acıbadem, Altunizade and Barbaros neighborhoods in Üsküdar. The grove has a history dating back to the 18th century. Back then, it was a summer resort for the patriarchs; later, it became a public space with various functions, including an orphanage and a sanatorium (IPA, 2021). Today, there is a state hospital, a state high school, a hotel serving teachers of MEB, a nursing home for the elderly, a storytelling school, a research center, three cafes, a restaurant, and two parking areas in its territory. However, this grove has still unstructured parts where high biodiversity of plants, birds, and anthropoids can be observed (IPA, 2021).

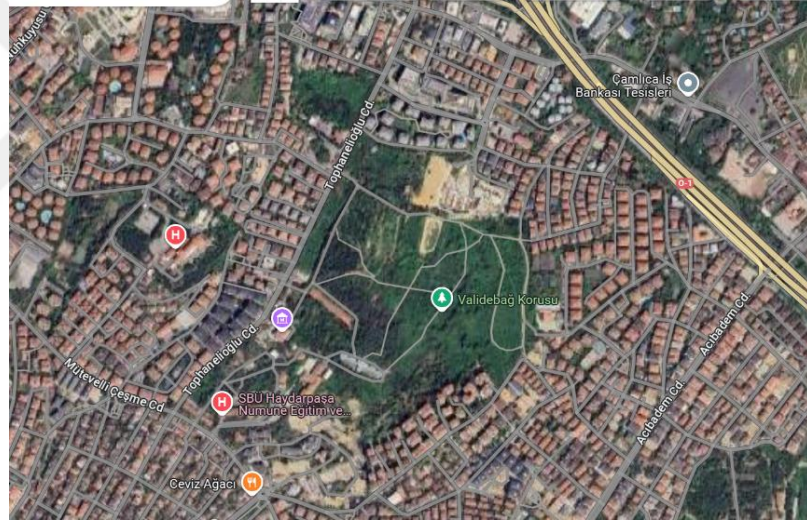


Figure 2.1. Validebağ Grove, located at the intersection of neighborhoods in Üsküdar, Istanbul. Screenshot from Google Maps, 2025.

There are several stakeholders on this site. Validebağ Grove is owned by the General Directorate of National Real Estate, under the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization. The grove is allocated to various entities for specific uses, with 17,729 square meters designated to the Ministry of Health and 75,347 square meters to the Ministry of National Education, while the remaining 261,000 square meters are under the jurisdiction of Üsküdar Municipality. In 1999, following efforts by residents and grassroots organizations, the Istanbul Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Board No. III designated the entire grove as a Grade One natural site area (Boyalı & Baykan, 2024).

2.1. A Brief History of Validebağ Grove

Validebağ Grove has undergone several transformations since the Ottoman era. It has served various purposes, such as being a hunting ground, botanical garden, educational institution, healthcare center, and cultural heritage site. These historical transitions have shaped the grove, reflecting changes in ownership, urban policies, and conservation efforts over time.

According to the earliest records, the area was a hunting and recreation ground during the reign of Sultan Selim III. The first major transformation occurred in the mid-19th century when Sultan Abdülmecid, who was Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan's son, took a keen interest in botany. During this period, a large-scale botanical garden was established, enriched with plant species from both domestic and international sources. The extensive fruit orchard, of which the site's visitors still value remnants, was created back then. This orchard was comprising over 573 different fruit species, including cherries, oranges, quinces, apples, and pears (Kolay & Memiş, 2017).

Ownership of the land has changed multiple times over the years. Initially gifted to the Altunizade Family in 1853, the grove was later reclaimed by the Ottoman palace in 1861 during Sultan Abdülaziz's reign. In 1863, the Sultan demolished an existing mansion and commissioned the construction of the Adile Sultan Pavilion, designed by Nigoğos Balyan, a prominent imperial architect. Around the same period, Sarkis Balyan designed and built the Abdülaziz Hunting Lodge, further solidifying the grove's role as an imperial retreat. By the late 19th century, the pavilion became the residence of Sultan Reşad's consort, Darülâlem Kadın, until her passing in 1909 (Kolay & Memiş, 2017).

Later, Validebağ Grove underwent another shift in function. Between 1916 and 1917, the pavilion was repurposed as an orphanage for girls. Following the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, the grove and its associated buildings were designated for educational use. In 1927, the Ministry of Education converted the site into a preventorium (a tuberculosis treatment center). Under the guidance of Mustafa Necati, an influential early republican minister of education, a unique healthcare and education model was introduced, where tuberculosis patients received simultaneous treatment and formal education from certified teachers. The pavilion's roof was removed in 1928 to enhance therapeutic conditions and transform the upper floor into a solarium for patient recovery (Rasimoğlu, 2017).

The need for expanded healthcare facilities led to the construction of the Validebağ Sanatorium in 1939, which played a vital role in the fight against tuberculosis. The solarium, however, was dismantled in 1971, and an additional sloped roof was added. By 1973, the establishment of the Teachers' Hospital led to the pavilion falling into disuse. However, during the late 1970s, the grove gained renewed cultural significance as it became the filming location for *Hababam Sınıfı*, a widely beloved Turkish film series (Atay, 2019).

2.2. Validebağ Grove as a Natural Habitat

Urban green spaces are vital for maintaining biodiversity and ecological balance within metropolitan areas (Chapin et al., 2011). These areas serve as refuges for diverse plant and animal species, offering essential ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, air purification, and microclimate regulation (Gómez-Baggethun & Barton, 2013). Validebağ Grove is one such ecologically significant urban green spaces, home to rich biodiversity.



Figure 2.2. Storks resting in Validebağ Grove during migration. Image retrieved from validebag.org.

The grove's role in supporting bird migration and providing a habitat for local species reflects its broader ecological value. This reinforces its importance as a refuge for wildlife within Istanbul's expanding urban landscape. However, the long-term consequences of continued urbanization and fragmented habitats threaten to disrupt this ecosystem and potentially diminish the grove's capacity to sustain biodiversity (Atay, 2019).

Studies have identified 81 tree and shrub species within Validebağ Grove, categorized into 25 distinct groups, reflecting its botanical richness. The grove is home to 3,419 trees, encompassing a diverse range of species, including oak (*Quercus* spp.), pine (*Pinus* spp.), and cedar (*Cedrus* spp.),

alongside various fruit trees such as apple (*Malus domestica*), pear (*Pyrus* spp.), and plum (*Prunus* spp.). Among these, 15 monumental oak trees, estimated to be 400–500 years old, hold particular ecological and historical significance. Additionally, there are nine other monumental trees, including Judas trees (*Cercis siliquastrum*), Aleppo pines (*Pinus halepensis*), mastic trees (*Pistacia lentiscus*), which enhances the grove's status as a natural heritage site (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Department of City Planning, 2019). A complete list of tree and shrub species is provided in Appendix B, Table B.1.

The grove also supports diverse avian population, with 168 bird species recorded through systematic observations (Cornell Lab of Ornithology, n.d.). Common species include the Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*), Great Tit (*Parus major*), Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica*), and Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*). Less frequently observed species, such as the Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) and European Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), further highlight the ecological importance of this habitat for migratory and resident bird populations (Atay, 2019). A complete list of the grove's bird species is given in Appendix C, Table C.1.

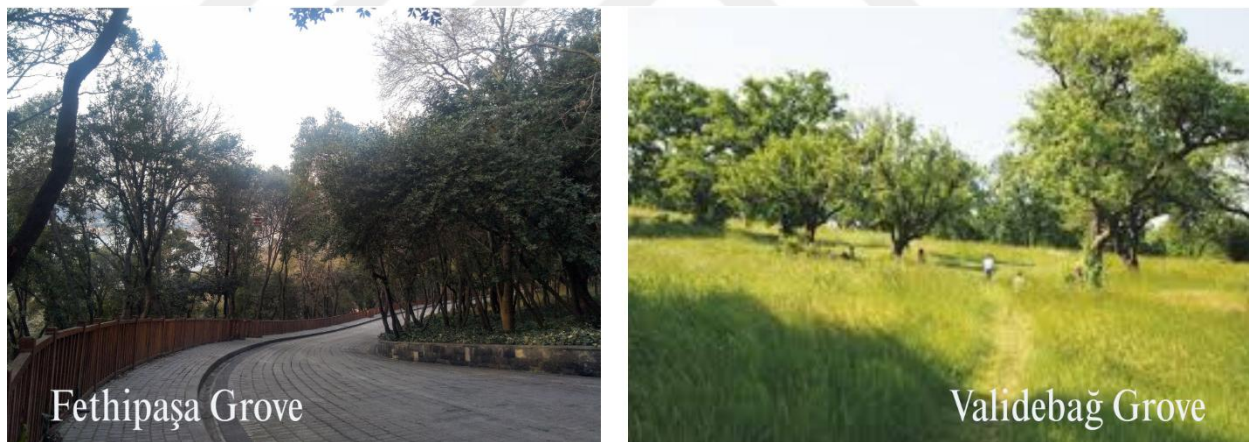


Figure 2.3. Comparison of Fethipaşa and Validebağ Groves in Üsküdar, İstanbul. Composite image created by the author using an original photo (2025) and an image retrieved from validebag.org (n.d.).

Validebağ Grove differs from conventional city parks, and even from other groves in İstanbul, due to its natural characteristics and unmanaged, unstructured condition, as illustrated in the Figure 2.3 above. Once the structured small area around the main entrance is passed, the rest of the grove can be explored through paths that developed over time due to human interactions with nature. This lack of intensive management allows plant succession and wildlife interactions to occur with minimal human interference, creating a dynamic and self-sustaining ecosystem. There is a sense of "natural habitat" in the urban setting because of its high biodiversity, old-growth trees, and large open spaces. Additionally, the grove offers an escape from İstanbul's dense urban environment to solitude in

nature. These characteristics align with the criteria outlined in Lev et al.'s study (2020), making Validebağ Grove an important example of a *relatively wild* urban green space.

2.3. Validebağ Grove as A Public Space

For decades, Validebağ Grove has been visited daily by many individuals for diverse reasons. Beyond serving as a green refuge in the concrete urban fabric, the grove supports a unique intersection of social life. While some individuals use the area for exercise and relaxation, others visit for environmental education, birdwatching, and community-driven activities (Boyalı & Baykan, 2024). For instance, a regular bird-watching group systematically documents both local and migratory bird species, contributing to citizen science efforts (Cornell Lab of Ornithology, eBird n.d.; validebag.org, n.d.). Several kindergartens bring their students to the grove to enjoy and learn from nature. Also, the Kozalak Association, an environmental NGO, organizes regular educational trips to Validebağ Grove hosted by academicians who are experts in biodiversity studies, making the grove an informal learning hub for urban dwellers (kozalak.org.tr).

The grove's role as a public space has evolved over time, shaped by shifting urban governance and social movements. As mentioned above, it transitioned from an Ottoman imperial retreat to a socially significant institution, housing a preventorium and sanatorium for teachers and children during the early Republican era. However, following the economic transformations of the 1980s, the neo-liberalization of Istanbul's urban landscape redefined the grove's role within the city (Boyalı & Baykan, 2024; Yıldız, 2015). Its public accessibility contrasts with the increasing privatization of green spaces in Istanbul, which has kept demonstrating its role as a *commons*—a space that is collectively maintained and socially significant (Castells, 1983; Lefebvre, 1996; Boyalı & Baykan, 2024).

Urban green spaces like Validebağ Grove have been systematically marginalized in favor of privatization and commercial development, resulting in conflicts over its use-value and exchange-value (Castree, 2008). The grove has faced increasing pressures for commodification, with proposed park projects aiming to integrate it into broader urban capitalist expansion (Boyalı & Baykan, 2024).

Despite these pressures, Validebağ Grove has remained a contested public space, actively defended by residents and environmental organizations. Local activist groups emphasizing the grove's ecological and communal significance have resisted top-down redevelopment plans. The grove provides a space where grassroots democracy thrives, as exemplified by the numerous public

gatherings, protests, and educational workshops that take place within its borders (Bal & Baruh, 2020).

Ultimately, Validebağ Grove exemplifies the intersection of urban nature and public space, where environmental, social, and political dynamics interact. As a site of everyday life, historical continuity, and civic activism, the grove validates the crucial role of urban green spaces in fostering community, education, and resistance against commodification (Akbulut, 2014). It remains a living example of how public spaces can function as arenas of social interaction, environmental stewardship, and urban identity (Castells, 1983; Stuiver, 2023).

2.4. The Struggle for Validebağ Grove and the Rise of a Conservation Movement

The 1980s and 1990s marked a critical period for Validebağ Grove, characterized by urban expansion and increasing land development pressures. While a significant portion of the grove was still being protected, adjacent land parcels were repurposed for large-scale residential projects, such as Validebağ Residential Compound and Çamlıca Mansions. Additionally, in 1986, part of the grove was allocated to Marmara University. In 1991, efforts to preserve the pavilion resulted in its conversion into the Validebağ Teachers' House and Cultural Center (Atay, 2019).

In the late 1990s, proposals to commercialize Validebağ Grove through the construction of cafes, event venues, infrastructure projects, and residential developments became a focal point of public contention (Yıldız 2015; Boyalı & Baykan, 2024). Alarmed by this agenda, residents formed the Altunizade Citizen Initiative in the year 1997 (Validebağ Volunteers Association, 2020). This grassroots movement marked the beginning of organized efforts to protect the grove against urbanization's damaging effects. In time, the Citizen Initiative evolved into Validebağ Volunteers Association and Validebağ Defense, and their advocacy led to the grove being declared a protected natural and historical site in 1999 (Bal & Baruh, 2020; Doğan, 2015).

A milestone in conservation efforts was achieved in 1999 when the Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Board designated Validebağ Grove as a 1st Degree Historical and Natural Protected Area. In 2002, a 1/5000-scale Conservation-Oriented Master Plan was introduced to safeguard the area against urban encroachment. Nevertheless, continued development pressures necessitated multiple revisions of the conservation plan, with proposals submitted in 2007 and 2013, though none received full approval (Atay, 2019).



Figure 2.4. Screenshots of posts of Hilmi Türkmen (2019) and Sinem Dedetaş (2024) on X about their intentions for Validebağ Grove (x.com). Composite image created by the author.

Despite this protection status, Üsküdar Municipality's attempts to alter the grove's land designation continued. Threats of commercialization and large-scale construction projects have persisted. In response, local activists mobilized through protests, newsletters, and legal actions to defend the grove's integrity. In 2012, Üsküdar Municipality proposed transforming Validebağ into a Hyde Park-style recreational area (Türkmen, 2014), but local environmental activists successfully blocked this initiative. Although legal battles often resulted in court decisions favoring conservation, the municipality's efforts to invalidate these decisions persisted (Doğan, 2015). Later, in 2019, the municipality announced plans to convert the grove into a "Nation's Garden" (*Millet Bahçesi*). In a public statement on X (see Figure 2.4), then-mayor Hilmi Türkmen described the site as “a vast area that our people have not been able to benefit from adequately for years, and which needs to be reorganized,” adding that they were planning to redesign Validebağ Grove “in accordance with its original nature” and turn it into “one of Istanbul’s largest and most natural nation’s gardens” (Türkmen, 2019). This move was perceived as a sign implying further interference with the ecosystem by the locals. However, a public petition with 11,000 signatures successfully halted the project, reflecting the ongoing civic engagement in preserving the grove's ecological and historical integrity (Atay, 2019).

During the campaigns for the last municipal elections, protecting Validebağ Grove became an electoral pledge of the opposition's candidates. CHP's candidate, Sinem Dedetaş, positioned herself as an ally of grassroots activists, pledging to protect Validebağ from development pressures. In an interview just a few weeks before the election, she repeated her commitment by stating: *"Validebağ actually has a strategic plan about what will happen, or rather, about what won't happen. In the new period, we say that Validebağ is a grove and will remain a grove. This is our general principle, our discourse"*. She also reinforced this message in a public statement on X (see Figure 2.4), declaring, *"Validebağ is a grove and it shall remain a grove! We will protect our grove with the power of the public and the citizens."* (Dedetaş, 2024). Her promise was a direct response to longstanding concerns over municipal interventions in the grove and reinforced the role of citizen advocacy in shaping local environmental policy. She was elected as the new mayor of Üsküdar Municipality in March 2024. Currently, Üsküdar Municipality is working on implementing an "Ecosystem-Based Management Plan" for Validebağ Grove, prepared by Dr. Cihan Erdönmez with input from civil society. The plan outlines strategies to balance conservation with community expectations sustainably. While this collaborative effort by Üsküdar Municipality sets a model for local administrations, it also demonstrates the influence of the conservation movement within the grove (Şahna & Belgin, 2024; Erdönmez, 2021).

Validebağ Grove's preservation highlights the critical role of grassroots mobilization in protecting urban green spaces. For local activists, the grove represents not only an ecological asset but also a vital public space that contributes to community well-being (Boyalı & Baykan, 2024). Their relentless struggle to preserve this grove emphasizes the significance of relatively wild urban green areas in mitigating the adverse effects of urbanization on citizens.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW: NATURE CONNECTEDNESS, BIODIVERSITY PERCEPTIONS, ECO-ANXIETY, AND COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

The literature review begins with an overview of the theoretical foundations of nature connectedness to establish a framework for this study. It subsequently explores the role of biodiversity in shaping human interactions with nature, emphasizing its psychological and emotional benefits, recreational value, and importance in urban settings. The review also investigates how biodiversity promotes socio-cultural engagement, influences multisensory experiences, and contributes to conservation efforts. Furthermore, it analyzes the relationship between nature connectedness, mental health, eco-anxiety, and environmental activism, taking into account the strengths and limitations of the methodologies used to assess these connections. This comprehensive approach provides a nuanced understanding of how biodiversity and nature connectedness influence well-being and participation in environmental activism among urban residents.

3.1. Nature Connectedness and Well-being

In 1984, Edward O. Wilson, a biologist and naturalist, published *Biophilia* presenting the idea that humans have an innate connection to nature based on our evolutionary journey, and this connection is important for our health and well-being (Wilson, 1984). Hence, he discussed that preserving biodiversity and protecting natural habitats is crucial. Stephen Kellert, a psychologist and expert in biophilic design, expanded Wilson's idea, and argued that biophilia includes an emotional and aesthetic connection to nature. Together, they presented the biophilia hypothesis (Kellert & Wilson, 1995). These works on biophilia paved the way for developing the concept of nature connectedness, which emerged as a new concept in literature in the 2000s. Nature connectedness is a complex concept that includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Schultz, 2002). It refers to an individual's subjective sense of connection to nature as feeling part of, related to, caring for, and responsible towards it (Schultz, 2001).

The concept of nature connectedness is somewhat abstract and relates to an individual's subjective sense, yet it is not immeasurable. Various tools are created to measure people's nature connectedness scales (Martin et al., 2020). The oldest one was the Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale (INS) developed by Schultz (2001), but it was simple and highly abstract. A few years later, Mayer and Frantz presented the Connectedness to Nature Scale (CNS) (2004), and then, Nisbet et al. (2009)

provided the Nature Relatedness Scale (NR). These latest ones are multidimensional scales that are more successful at assessing people's cognitive, affective, experiential, and behavioral connection to nature (Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Nisbet et al., 2009).

Research utilizing the more recently developed scales has revealed a positive correlation between nature connectedness and willingness to participate in conservation efforts. Even though self-reported data has its limitations, the CNS and NR tools offer meaningful insights into general tendencies, as evidenced by their widespread use in relevant studies (Capaldi et al., 2014). The related questionnaires used by these studies are as shown in Appendix F, Figure F.1 and F.2.

The growing body of literature on nature connectedness has shown a relation between nature experiences and happiness, mental health, well-being, and nature connectedness (Barragan-Jason et al., 2023; Bratman et al., 2019; Capaldi et al., 2014; Howell et al., 2011; Sierra-Barón et al., 2023). One of the most influential correlational meta-analyses, evaluating 30 studies that used INS, CNS, and NR tools, was conducted by Capaldi et al. in 2014 to explore the relationship between nature connectedness and happiness. This analysis showed that when individuals spend more time in nature, they benefit from the positive effects of nature exposure on mental health and well-being. Moreover, when individuals felt better due to their contact with nature, they developed a sense of connectedness to nature and started to spend more time in it, leading to a positive feedback loop (Capaldi et al., 2014).

3.2. Eco-anxiety and Eco-activism

Eco-anxiety, defined as the chronic fear of environmental catastrophe, has become a significant psychological concern in recent years (Coffey et al., 2021; Parmentier et al., 2024). Numerous factors contribute to this emotional distress, including increased media exposure to climate change content, frequent discussions about environmental issues, and personal perceptions of the impact of these changes (Kricorian & Turner, 2022). The psychological burden of eco-anxiety can be profound, causing deepened depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Foster, 2022).

On the other hand, the complex relationship between eco-anxiety and activism is worthy of closer examination. Scholars agree that eco-anxiety may lead individuals to engage in pro-environmental behaviors (Jain & Jain, 2022; Lutz et al., 2023; Davidson, 2023). Some interpret this engagement as a coping mechanism (Lutz et al., 2023). However, others assert that it can promote ecological activism demanding political change (Stanley et al., 2021; Davidson, 2023). For instance, while Jain and Jain's

(2022) study showed that individuals with high levels of eco-anxiety and environmental concern are more likely to engage in eco-activism, Davidson (2023) added a political dimension to this discussion. According to Davidson, eco-anxiety highlights the instability of today's politics and expresses a deep-seated desire for a meaningful change. Therefore, he argued that this awareness can motivate individuals to become more involved in environmental activism and advocacy.

3.3. Biodiversity and Well-being

Besides being crucial in maintaining ecosystems' resilience, biodiversity also enriches human experiences. An increasing amount of research demonstrates that diverse ecosystems contribute to overall well-being and enhance emotional fulfillment. Especially recent studies focus on the powerful impact of urban biodiversity on city dwellers' daily experiences. Below I review the relevant literature on the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of biodiversity enjoyment.

3.3.1. Psychological and Emotional Benefits

Biodiversity-rich environments have been consistently linked to enhanced mental well-being. Monroy-Gamboa et al. (2025) found, for instance, that individuals living in biologically diverse areas experience higher levels of emotional satisfaction and cognitive restoration. The underlying cause of this phenomenon was the visual and sensory stimulation provided by the varied flora and fauna that help alleviate stress and foster a sense of tranquility.

Similarly, Meng et al. (2024) study showed that interacting with biodiversity in green spaces positively influences emotional states and contributes to overall well-being. Importantly, nature-relatedness appears to mediate this relationship: Individuals who feel more connected to nature are more likely to perceive biodiversity in ways that benefit their mental health. Garcia and Waeber (2024) examined how people develop psychological connections with restored landscapes, particularly in reforested areas. They concluded that biodiversity in these contexts is perceived as a source of renewal and hope. Likewise, Bonthoux and Chollet (2024) highlighted how rewilding cities increases biodiversity appreciation, thereby strengthening people's attachment to natural environments. Accordingly, our regular interactions with nature, accompanied by biodiversity observation, often foster deep emotional bonds. This connection enhances well-being, which then incentivizes environmental stewardship (Garcia & Waeber, 2024).

Building on these insights, Jorgensen and Tylecote (2007) introduced the concept of “urban wild” spaces—unstructured and unmanaged pockets of nature within cities—and emphasize their potential for cognitive restoration and emotional resonance. In contrast to highly structured “manicured” parks, such environments may evoke both unease and inspiration, providing a setting for imaginative engagement and reflective thought. Contemporary literature increasingly points to the distinct mental health benefits of wild, biodiverse, and less-manicured green spaces, often described as *urban novel ecosystems*, *informal greenspaces*, or *unstructured nature*. Unlike conventional urban parks, these environments evoke a deeper sense of immersion, exploration, and connection to nature, often resulting in greater restorative effects, enhanced mood, and stronger nature connectedness. Studies emphasize how these wild spaces support psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and even social cohesion (Cheesbrough et al., 2019; Cameron et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2023; Cooper et al., 2024). This perspective offers a valuable lens for interpreting the varied and sometimes ambivalent meanings participants in this study assigned to Validebağ Grove.

Studies have also investigated the role of sensory stimulation. The common ground for these studies is that exposure to biodiversity makes our experiences in nature more captivating. The diversity of life provides a rich repertoire of sights, sounds, scents, and textures that engage multiple senses simultaneously, enriching the overall gratification of being in nature and stimulating our senses. For instance, Meng et al. (2024) asserted that sensory stimulations, such as plants in various forms and colors, melodic bird calls, and leaves rustling in the wind, create a perception of the environment that echoes in our consciousness. Additionally, the tactile experience of walking through unstructured landscapes while feeling soft moss or uncut pebbles underfoot, the rough bark of trees, or the cool touch of fresh water in a stream further connects individuals with nature on a physical level and reinforces emotional attachment to nature. These sensory elements evoke a sense of wonder and induce a deeper appreciation of biodiversity (Bratman et al., 2019; Marshall et al., 2023; Meng et al., 2024).

Similarly, Marshall et al. (2023) emphasized that urban green spaces with high biodiversity provide multisensory enjoyment. Those areas are not only visually appealing but also engaging on an auditory and olfactory level. The scent of blooming flowers, the earthy aroma after rainfall, and the seasonal changes in foliage intensify the immersive quality of biodiverse spaces. Their study also revealed that individuals who experience nature through the senses tend to develop a stronger ecological consciousness. This suggests that sensory enjoyment of biodiversity has the potential to inspire conservation awareness and foster a sense of responsibility toward protecting natural habitats (Bratman et al., 2019; Marshall et al., 2023).

Furthermore, environmental psychology studies indicated that gently sparking multiple senses in nature can lead to improved mental well-being, reduced stress levels, and heightened cognitive restoration (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1995; Hartig et al., 2014). Exposure to the dynamic and unpredictable elements of a biodiverse environment activates curiosity and stimulates the brain, eventually leading to creativity and emotional resilience (Ulrich, 1984; Joye & van den Berg, 2011). This reinforces the idea that, in addition to being an ecological asset, biodiversity is also a constituent factor for our health and happiness.

As evident in the literature, biodiversity transforms outdoor experiences from simple encounters into deeply immersive and memorable interactions, strengthening the bond between us and the natural world. The sensory engagement biodiversity promotes, in turn, can play a pivotal role in shaping attitudes toward nature conservation, as people are more likely to protect environments that bring them joy, relaxation, and inspiration.

Research has also shown that individuals are more attracted to biodiversity-rich environments for leisure and recreational activities, compared to less-biodiverse sites. These landscapes make outdoor activities such as hiking and birdwatching more enjoyable (Garcia & Waeber, 2024). Encounters with diverse species in those areas add to the embrative aspect of nature and increase people's engagement with their surroundings. Even small wildflower meadows in urban settings foster a sense of well-being among city residents, serving both ecological and recreational purposes (Marshall et al., 2023).

Herein, urban biodiversity plays a crucial role in improving residents' quality of life by encouraging outdoor activities. As Bosch (2024) highlighted, city dwellers vitally benefit from green spaces that provide air purification, temperature regulation, and aesthetic value. These spaces offer opportunities for relaxation and community interactions, making biodiversity an essential component to cherish in urban planning.

3.3.2. Social and Cultural Dimensions of Biodiversity

Biodiversity, with its rich variety of life, plays a significant role in enhancing social connections by fostering community engagement with nature. Bosch (2024) provided an insightful exploration of how the integration of biodiversity into urban development can prompt a range of socio-environmental benefits. The author suggests that biodiverse environments serve as potent catalysts for social interaction and community building. These natural spaces, when incorporated into urban

planning, have the potential to foster outdoor activities, strengthen social bonds, and encourage local communities to participate actively in conservation efforts. Thus, biodiverse settings emerge as more than just ecological reserves; they become dynamic social arenas that facilitate shared experiences and a more profound sense of connection with nature, making us feel part of a larger ecosystem (Bosch, 2024; Ari, 2024). This perspective underscores the importance of recognizing the human-nature relationship and its role in shaping resilient communities. By acknowledging the social dimensions of biodiversity, we can better understand the complex interplay between ecosystem health and human well-being, thereby informing more holistic approaches to urban development and conservation (Ari, 2024).

Biodiversity has also played a pivotal role in shaping cultural identities, traditions, and history, nurturing a deeper connection between humans and nature. Parallel to this recognition, the evolution of conservation approaches, as outlined by Ari (2024), has shifted from exclusionary practices to biocultural conservation. This paradigm shift has opened new ways for engagement, allowing individuals who form meaningful bonds with nature to participate actively in conservation initiatives. Accordingly, by embracing biocultural conservation, we acknowledge the interconnectedness of biodiversity and cultural heritage, fostering a sense of stewardship and responsibility towards the natural environment (Ari, 2024). This work also highlights the importance of appreciating the social dimensions of biodiversity conservation, emphasizing the need for inclusive approaches that engage local communities and promote a sense of ownership and pride in their natural heritage.

3.3.3. Measuring the Enjoyment of Biodiversity

Quantifying the enjoyment of biodiversity is especially challenging, largely due to the variability in individual experiences and perceptions. Recently, Breitschopf and Bråthen (2023) investigated how plant biodiversity is perceived and appreciated, demonstrating that individuals' appreciation is more closely linked to perceived rather than actual biodiversity. Their study highlighted the critical role of biodiversity literacy, showing how cultural background and personal experience influence what people recognize and value in biodiversity. As a result, they found biodiversity enjoyment emerges as a subjective yet widely relevant human experience.

In a related urban context, Shwartz et al. (2014) explored the “people–biodiversity paradox” through experimental work in city gardens. Their results revealed that while people tend to express strong preferences for diverse species, they frequently underestimate actual species’ richness. Moreover, socio-economic factors influence appreciation, but public participation and targeted

communication efforts were identified as key in enhancing biodiversity perception and awareness. Complementing this, Meng et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of nature relatedness—a personal trait reflecting one's emotional and cognitive connection to nature—as a stronger predictor of biodiversity perception than demographic factors like age, gender, or education. Their findings shifted attention toward internal, relational factors in understanding how people engage with nature. Together, these studies underscored the importance of environmental education, public health strategies, and community-driven initiatives that consider both subjective experiences and social contexts to promote biodiversity appreciation across diverse populations.

Overall, the literature shows that the well-being and enjoyment that biodiversity presents is deeply intertwined with human psychology, recreation, cultural identity, and sensory experiences. The research underlines the importance of preserving and integrating biodiversity into urban habitats, for improving resiliency in ecological, psychological, and social layers.

3.4. Public Space, Social Justice, and Collective Resistance

The interrelation of environmental justice, spatial politics, and collective resistance lies at the heart of critical urban theory. It has proven essential for understanding contemporary urban green space conflicts like the one at Validebağ Grove. Among those who shaped this discourse, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Manuel Castells, and Jürgen Habermas are the most influential.

Henri Lefebvre's foundational concept of the *right to the city* reframes urban space not as a neutral container but as a socially produced field of struggle (Lefebvre, 1996). Accordingly, the right to the city is both a call for inclusion and a transformative claim to reshape urban life by reclaiming control over public space and resources. This principle is reflected in the conflict at Validebağ Grove, where residents confront commercial encroachment against their relationships with a biodiverse, unstructured, and emotionally restorative urban green space.

David Harvey (2008) extends this framework by placing the right to the city within the context of neoliberal urbanization, interpreting it as both a collective demand and a revolutionary project. He argues that urban space is increasingly commodified through privatization, displacement, and ecological degradation—trends that are visible in Istanbul's real estate-driven transformations and the commercialization of ecologically and socially significant commons such as Validebağ. For Harvey, reclaiming urban nature is not just an environmental act but a class-based resistance to capital's expansion into the urban commons (Harvey, 2008).

Manuel Castells (1983) contributes to this sociological perspective, highlighting how public urban spaces function as crucibles for collective identity and grassroots mobilization. In *The City and the Grassroots*, Castells emphasizes that urban social movements often arise from struggles over daily needs—housing, public services, and accessible nature—which can be translated into the need for dignity and recognition (1983).

Jürgen Habermas (1984) introduces the communicative dimension of justice, emphasizing the role of public discourse and deliberative democracy in legitimizing political action. The central concept in his theory is the *public sphere*—a space where rational dialogue among citizens enables the formation of collective will. The public sphere is embedded in what Habermas calls the *lifeworld* (*Lebenswelt*)—the background of shared meanings, cultural norms, and everyday experiences that enable communicative action (1984).

All the concepts above have been widely applied to urban politics. Therefore, while exploring the case of Validebağ Grove, this study draws on them to understand how spatial conflicts, emotional attachment, and ecological consciousness meld into a form of collective resistance.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a phenomenological approach by conducting 19 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the regular visitors of the Validebağ Grove. A phenomenological approach was chosen for its ability to collect a diverse set of different perspectives, ensuring a deeper understanding of the layers of these individuals' relationships with the grove. The approach also helped to explore how individuals construct meaning from their daily experiences with the grove. The semi-structured interview questions were designed to explore the participants' degree of connection with nature, biodiversity perceptions, their influence on their well-being and mental health, experiences of eco-anxiety, and motivations toward environmental activism.

4.1. Philosophical Background of the Phenomenological Approach

The concept of phenomenon, defined as "that which appears, reveals itself, and manifests through experience" (Blackburn, 1996: 345), originates from the Ancient Greek term *φαινόμενον* (*phainomenon*), which translates to "that which is brought to light." This definition emphasizes that a phenomenon is not merely an external object but rather something given to our senses. This foundational understanding of the phenomenon underlies the work of both Kant and Husserl, shaping their respective uses of the term and their broader philosophical inquiries (Bozdoğan, 2024).

The phenomenological approach has its roots in the philosophical traditions of Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl, both of whom sought to investigate the nature of knowledge and reason. Phenomenology, as formulated by Husserl, is a methodological framework that aims to study consciousness and lived experience as they are directly given to human perception (Husserl, 1983). This section explores the historical and philosophical foundations of phenomenology, emphasizing its origins in Kantian epistemology and its advancement in Husserlian thought, as well as its applications as a method in the social sciences.

4.1.1. Kant: The Concept of Phenomenon and the Limits of Knowledge

Immanuel Kant's work in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) is foundational to phenomenology. Kant introduced a crucial distinction between *phenomena* (appearances) and *noumena* (things-in-themselves). He argued that we do not have direct access to reality as it exists independently (*Ding an sich*) but only as our cognitive faculties structure it. According to Kant, our knowledge is shaped

by the way our minds impose order on sensory data. In other words, what we perceive as reality is conveyed by the structures of human intellect. This position implies that our experience of the world is never purely objective, as it is always filtered through *the categories of the mind*, such as space, time, and causality (Kant, 1998).

Immanuel Kant's philosophical framework significantly influenced the development of phenomenology as a method by highlighting that these inherent structures of our cognition sculpt our perception. He discussed that we can never comprehend noumena, emphasizing the limitations of our understanding of reality in its true form (Kant, 1998).

4.1.2. Husserl: The Birth of Phenomenology and the Concept of Epoché

Building upon Kant's insights, Edmund Husserl transformed phenomenology into a rigorous philosophical method, aiming to study consciousness as it is directly experienced without presupposing the existence of an external reality like Kant's *noumena*. His phenomenology is often described as "a return to the things themselves," meaning that philosophy should focus on how things are perceived rather than making assumptions about an external world (Bozdoğan, 2024).

To achieve this, Husserl introduced *phenomenological reduction (epoché)*, a method of bracketing all prior assumptions about reality and focusing purely on the structure of experience. By suspending judgments about the external world, phenomenologists aim to analyze experience in its purest form, uncovering its essential structures. Unlike Kant, Husserl rejected the noumenon and argued that everything we study is already part of consciousness. For Husserl, the experience itself is the source of meaning, and his method of *epoché* allows for the direct examination of human consciousness, while Kant focused on the structures that mediate perception. This marks a significant shift from Kant, who treated knowledge as a function of the categories of the mind. In contrast, Husserl sought to analyze how meaning is constituted in the experience itself (Bozdoğan, 2024).

4.1.3. Husserl's Adaptation of Phenomenology as a Method

Edmund Husserl's adaptation of phenomenology as a method represents a call to return to the traditional role of philosophy—a role that had been overshadowed by positivism and empirical sciences in the 19th century. He argued that philosophy should reclaim its Greek origins as a search for wisdom rather than merely aligning itself with the methodologies of the natural sciences

(Creswell, 2016). This philosophical foundation shaped phenomenology into a descriptive method rather than an explanatory one.

Phenomenology, as a research approach, focuses on phenomena that we are aware of but may not fully comprehend in-depth and detail (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2009, p. 72). These phenomena include perceptions, habits, orientations, and concepts that manifest in everyday life. However, simply encountering these phenomena does not equate to fully understanding them. Husserl's phenomenology provides a framework to study these personal perceptions systematically, instilling confidence in the research process and the reliability of the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2009).

As mentioned above, the core of Husserlian phenomenology is the *epoché*, or "bracketing," which refers to the suspension of preconceived judgments and assumptions to engage with a phenomenon in its purest form (Creswell, 2016, p. 78). This step ensures that researchers do not impose their own interpretations but instead allow the phenomenon to reveal itself as experienced and/or perceived by individuals. By setting aside preconceptions, researchers seek to access the essence of lived experiences, making phenomenology an ideal approach for uncovering deeply embedded but often unnoticed aspects of human perception.

Another foundational aspect of Husserl's method is intentionality, which asserts that consciousness is always directed toward an object of awareness. According to Husserl, reality cannot be reduced to a mere separation between subjects and objects. Instead, it should be studied as it emerges in the semantic world of the perceiver. This rejection of the subject-object dichotomy is crucial in phenomenology, as it emphasizes that meaning is not something imposed on an object (e.g., interviewee) by the subject (e.g., the interviewer) but instead emerges through conscious experience. This philosophical insight enlightens us about the nature of reality and the role of intentionality in shaping our understanding of it, which is crucial in the context of this research (Creswell, 2016).

Husserl's methodological adaptation also influenced later phenomenologists, particularly Hans-Georg Gadamer. While Husserl emphasized the descriptive nature of phenomenology, later thinkers such as Gadamer expanded it into an interpretative process, suggesting that phenomenology is not only about describing experiences but also about interpreting how individuals make sense of them within a broader historical and social context (Regan, 2012).

4.1.4. Phenomenology in Social Science Research

As phenomenology evolved, it became increasingly integrated into the social sciences. Researchers in sociology, psychology, education, and anthropology found phenomenology useful for studying lived experiences in real-world contexts. The approach provided a means to explore how individuals interpret phenomena such as identity, trauma, social belonging, and environmental interactions (Schutz, 1967).

Phenomenology's emphasis on subjective meaning-making and the rejection of a strict subject-object dichotomy made it particularly valuable in qualitative research (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Scholars such as Alfred Schutz further adapted Husserl's ideas to develop phenomenological sociology, which examines how individuals construct meaning within their social worlds (Schutz, 1970). By emphasizing experience and perception as central components of reality, phenomenology became a powerful tool for exploring social structures and human behavior from an experiential perspective. Schutz's work laid the foundation for subsequent scholars like Thomas Luckmann and Peter L. Berger, whose paradigm significantly shaped modern sociological theory and empirical research methodologies, including ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, socio-scientific hermeneutics, and the biographical narrative approach (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Phenomenology within sociology, often referred to as phenomenological sociology, examines the concept of social reality (*Lebenswelt*) as a product of intersubjectivity, analyzing how individuals construct social reality through shared meanings and interactions (Garfinkel, 1967). Furthermore, Schutz emphasized that phenomenology examines how members of society describe their everyday world, mainly how individuals construct meaning from their experiences through consciousness (Schutz, 1970). His contributions influenced ethnomethodology, a field pioneered by Harold Garfinkel, which examines how people create social order in everyday interactions (Garfinkel, 1967). The broader adoption of phenomenology in the social sciences has enabled researchers to analyze complex social phenomena through first-person experiences and meaning-making processes.

In summary, Husserl's phenomenological method provides a structured approach to studying personal, real-life experiences through bracketing assumptions, emphasizing intentionality, and rejecting the rigid subject-object distinction. By adopting this method, researchers can uncover how individuals construct meaning in their experiences, making phenomenology a powerful tool for exploring human perception, cognition, and engagement with the world. Its later adoption into social

science research has enabled a deeper understanding of human interactions, identities, and cultural phenomena through first-person experiences.

4.1.5. Phenomenology in Environmental Social Sciences

In recent years, phenomenology has become an increasingly preferred methodology within environmental philosophy and environmental social sciences. Phenomenological approach has been used to understand the emotional, existential, and place-based dimensions of human-nature relations, helping philosophers and researchers investigate how individuals perceive, feel, and assign meaning to their experiences in natural and semi-natural settings (Bannon, 2016).

For example, *Nature and Experience: Phenomenology and the Environment*, edited by Bannon (2016), is a comprehensive study that explores how phenomenology captures the richness of embodied experiences in nature—such as stillness, wonder, or discomfort—that are often overlooked in rationalist or behaviorist models. These approaches have also been adopted in contemporary studies that examine how green spaces become meaningful through everyday encounters. An early example is Loder's (2014) study in which they use phenomenological methods to explore how office workers in Chicago and Toronto perceive prairie-style green roofs compared to traditional sedum roofs. In their dissertation study, Burroughs (2024) applies a phenomenological approach to exploring how home gardening and urban foraging practices foster nature connectedness through layered meanings of care, aesthetic pleasure, resistance, and grief. A recent ethnographic-phenomenological study by Furlong et al. (2025) on allotment gardening in low-income urban neighborhoods shows how such spaces foster emotional resilience, community belonging, and identity. This literature reflects a broader methodological turn toward understanding the affective, ethical, and symbolic dimensions of human-nature encounters. Phenomenology, with its emphasis on lived experience, offers a valuable framework for environmental justice, therapeutic landscapes, and participatory urban design by foregrounding how individuals experience and interpret green spaces as part of their daily life (Bannon, 2016; Yang, 2024).

Caracciolo (2021) and further reinforce this emphasis by combining phenomenological inquiry with ethnographic methods to explore how people narrate their lived experiences of the nonhuman world. Their study highlights the value of in-depth, metaphor-rich interviews for revealing the affective and symbolic dimensions of human–nature relations—an approach that resonates with this thesis's focus on personal narratives and the emotional meanings attached to urban green spaces like Validebağ Grove.

4.2. Field Research

4.2.1. Participant Selection and Recruitment

Participants were recruited primarily using a *purposive sampling strategy*, supplemented by *snowball sampling* to expand the participant pool. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are deliberately selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objective—in this case, their engagement with Validebağ Grove (Palinkas et al., 2015). Initially, recruitment was conducted through messages sent to several WhatsApp groups consisting of individuals actively engaged with Validebağ Grove. This purposive approach ensured that participants had a meaningful connection to the grove, aligning with the study's focus on lived experiences. Five members responded positively and four of them participated in the study, while one of them -a young activist woman- could not participate due to timing and scheduling difficulties. In addition to the purposive sampling, both to diversify sample and to reach regular visitors who were not members of those WhatsApp groups, I employed snowball sampling, a method where existing participants refer to others who meet the study criteria (Noy, 2008). Majority of the participants (12 people) were reached through this method.

Additionally, *convenience sampling* was used to reach participants on-site at Validebağ Grove. This is another non-probability sampling method in which participants are selected based on their accessibility and willingness to take part in the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). To employ this method, I visited the grove in the afternoon on the 4th of February 2025 and approached various visitors who were enjoying their tea under the trees at the tea garden in the grove's entrance. I invited them to participate in an interview. Three of them agreed to share their experiences, while five others declined. This approach allowed for the inclusion of diverse perspectives from visitors, though it also introduced a potential limitation, as participation was based on individual willingness. While convenience sampling ensures accessibility and feasibility, it may result in certain groups being underrepresented, as those who chose not to participate may have had different experiences or perspectives on the grove.

This combination of three non-probability sampling methods was used to maximize the diversity of the representation of different experiences while ensuring that the participants had a relevant engagement with the grove. As such, only those participants were included in the study who visit the site at least once a month. I also attempted to diversify demographic factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status as much as possible in the selection process. However, it is important to note

that highly educated individuals, particularly those with bachelor's and master's degrees, were overrepresented in the sample, while younger visitors were underrepresented. This is partly due to the demographic composition of the grove's regular visitors. As revealed in the survey results of Atay's study (2019), the regular visitors of the grove are primarily individuals aged 50+ years old, and a significant portion of visitors have a higher education level (bachelor's or master's degrees), indicating that the grove is frequently visited by well-educated individuals. Additionally, individuals younger than 25 years old were less willing to participate in interviews. Of course, both the use of phenomenological approach and the non-probabilistic sampling methods employed in the study do not allow for any generalizability of the findings. However, as I have noted earlier, the aim and the nature of the phenomenological approach is indeed an exploration of the subjective experiences and the construction of meanings by different individuals instead of generalizability and representativeness.

4.2.2. Data Collection and Interview Process

The semi-structured interview questions provided flexibility to delve deeper into relevant topics, as the phenomenological approach suggests. To ensure the relevance and clarity of the interview questions, they were reviewed by two academic experts in environmental psychology and qualitative research methods. Their feedback guided the refinement of the questions to better align with the study's phenomenological orientation and research aims (Flick, 2009). While I started with a predefined set of interview questions listed in Appendix F, I frequently asked additional questions depending on participants' responses. Many of these additional questions sought clarification or further explanation, as each individual had a unique relationship with the grove and nature in general. Participants often introduced their own concepts and vocabulary when expressing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, which required follow-up questions to understand their perspectives fully. This flexible approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' subjective experiences.

In addition to audio recordings, I took notes during the interviews, recording particularly striking or thought-provoking statements. I also noted the concepts, terms, and words participants used when answering questions. These notes supplemented the transcription process and contributed to a deeper understanding of emerging themes.

The interviews were conducted between October 6, 2024, and February 4, 2025. Their duration ranged from 35 to 75 minutes, depending on the varying levels of participant engagement and the

depth of the conversations. Seven interviews were conducted via online video calls, while the other twelve took place in person; this mixed format allowed for flexibility in participation. All participants were eager to share their experiences and feelings, and each of them completed the interview with no questions left unanswered—their high level of engagement provided rich and nuanced insights into the research.

4.3. Data Analysis

During data analysis and interpretation, I employed a triangulation strategy that integrated three key dimensions: (1) empirical field materials, including interview transcripts, field notes, and situated observations within Validebağ Grove; (2) theoretical insights drawn from existing literature on nature connectedness, eco-anxiety, and environmental justice; and (3) the researcher's own reflexive engagement and embodied familiarity with the grove. This multi-faceted approach strengthened the interpretive depth and trustworthiness of the findings (Denzin, 2012; Patton, 2015).

The interviews were transcribed via Transkriptor App for further analysis based on open coding methods to reveal and categorize emerging themes (Guest et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2021). The thematic analysis combined insights derived both from existing literature and field data (Flick, 2009). The demographic details of the participants are summarized in Table 4.1, and the distribution of key demographic characteristics are shown in Figure 4.1 below. Additionally, a detailed table compiling each participant's visit patterns, motivations, perceived benefits, emotional responses, and views on urbanization and biodiversity can be found in Appendix A, Table A.2.

Participants were also asked about their income levels. The lowest monthly income among them was 15,000 TL, the highest was 50,000 TL, and the average was approximately 24,700 TL. However, this information was ultimately excluded from the final table as it did not provide meaningful analytical value in the interpretation of the data. Although the monthly fixed incomes of retired participants appeared lower than those of the working ones, there was no significant difference in their overall economic well-being. This is primarily because all participants under the age of 50—except for two of them—were responsible for supporting at least one other person and paying monthly rents. In contrast, all retired participants owned their homes and were generally responsible for their own expenses. This contrast reflects broader structural dynamics: Older generations often benefit from higher homeownership rates and accumulated wealth. On the other hand, younger, working-age generations are under economic pressure, with rising housing cost burdens and lower asset accumulation. Such generational disparities have been documented in both cross-national studies and

in the Turkish context, where younger adults are identified as the most vulnerable group in terms of housing affordability and tenure insecurity (Yıldırım, 2023; Marcinkiewicz, 2023).

4.4. Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants (Bearman, 2019; Parmentier et al., 2024). Numeric IDs were assigned to participants to ensure anonymity. Furthermore, to protect the privacy of participants, specific demographic details—such as exact age, gender identity, and professional titles—are not shown in the table and are summarized here instead. The youngest participant was 25 years old, the oldest was 68, and the average age of all participants is 45. Most participants identified as either female (9 participants) or male (8 participants), with two individuals describing themselves as non-binary or queer. Their professional backgrounds covered a wide range of fields, including the arts, healthcare, education, academia, urban planning, information technology, and small business ownership. Participants lived at various distances from the grove, ranging from less than 100 meters to approximately 3 kilometers. These modifications were made to ensure anonymity and reduce the risk of identification. The required ethical approval from the Boğaziçi University Institutional Review Board in Social Sciences and Humanities (SBİNAREK) was received under application number 2023-30T.

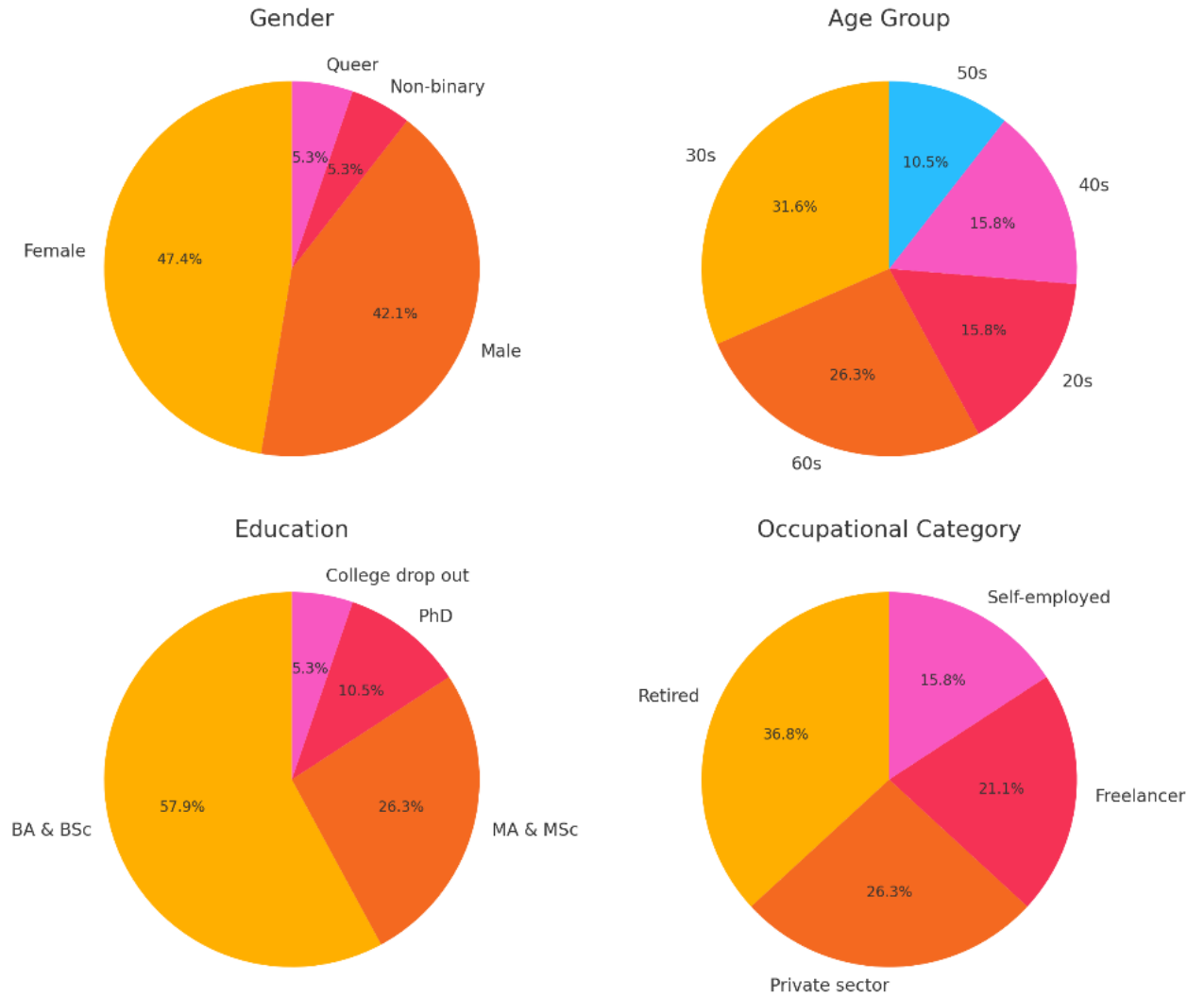


Figure 4.1. Distribution of key demographic characteristics of participants.

Table 4.1. Participants' demographic characteristics and frequency of visit.

Code	Age Group	Education	Occupational Category	Frequency of Visit
P1	30s	MA	Freelancer	Daily
P2	30s	PhD	Private sector	2-4 times a week
P3	30s	College drop-out	Self-employed	2 times a month
P4	30s	BA	Freelancer	Weekly
P5	20s	MSc	Private sector	2 times a month
P6	20s	MA	Private sector	Weekly
P7	40s	BA	Self-employed	2 times a month
P8	40s	BSc	Private sector	2 times a month
P9	20s	BA	Private sector	Weekly
P10	30s	BA	Freelancer	Weekly
P11	30s	BA	Freelancer	Weekly
P12	50s	BSc	Retired	Daily
P13	60s	PhD	Retired	Daily
P14	60s	BA	Retired	Daily
P15	60s	MA	Retired	Daily
P16	40s	MA	Self-employed	Daily
P17	50s	BA	Retired	2-4 times a week
P18	60s	BA	Retired	2-4 times a week
P19	60s	BA	Retired	2-4 times a week

5. RESULTS: CORE AND UNIQUE THEMES EMERGING IN THE INTERVIEWS

This chapter delves into the findings of the study by examining the themes that emerge from analyzing the experiences, perspectives, and reflections of participants regarding Validebağ Grove. The analysis is based on comprehensive thematic coding derived from interviews with regular visitors to the site. By carefully examining their narratives, I identified several significant motifs connected to their relationship with nature, psychological responses to environmental changes, motivations for activism, and their experiences in the face of ongoing urbanization and ecological challenges. These insights are categorized into two main sections: core themes and unique themes, showcasing the richness of participants' experiences and underscoring the importance of their advocacy efforts. This structure aims to deepen our understanding of the intricate connections between nature, biodiversity, well-being, eco-anxiety, and environmental activism. Table 5.1 below summarizes the themes emerging in this study, including the sub-themes for each theme whenever needed.

The first section spotlights motifs that resonated with most participants, including their sense of connection to nature, appreciation for biodiversity, feelings of eco-anxiety, and grassroots activism. These findings directly relate to the research questions, which investigate how Validebağ Grove affects nature connectedness, well-being, and the motivations behind environmental activism. Additionally, this section presents themes that were not anticipated in the initial steps of the study but emerged as significant additional insights during the field study, such as the ethical dimensions of activism and the emotional challenges associated with long-term engagement. Unique themes, on the other hand, reflect the views expressed by a small number of participants, particularly highlighting women's relationship with the grove.

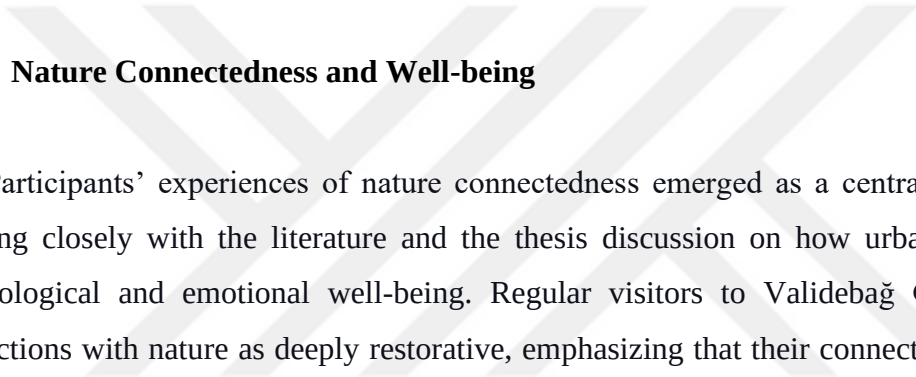
By presenting these findings, this chapter seeks to address the overarching research questions and contribute meaningfully to the existing literature on urban green spaces, mental health, eco-anxiety, and environmental activism. The chapter is followed by a discussion of these findings' implications for understanding how relatively "untouched" urban green spaces like Validebağ Grove can nurture ecological and social resilience, well-being, and collective action in the face of environmental challenges.

Table 5.1. Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Nature Connectedness and Well-being	Psychological and emotional well-being Restorative effects
Appreciation of Biodiversity	Sensory stimulation Social and cultural dimensions Psychological and emotional benefits
Structured vs. Unstructured Green Spaces	Preferences for relatively wild spaces Psychological and sensory benefits
Urbanization-Driven Environmental Loss	Validebağ Grove as a refuge
Commercialization and Commodification of Nature	Impact on Validebağ Grove Green Washing Socioeconomic divide Impact on public health and well-being
Emotional Responses to Nature's Decline and Coping Strategies	Eco-anxiety and anger Eco-grief and hopelessness Coping mechanisms
Practices, Motivations, and Meanings of Environmental Activism	Forms of engagement and activist identity Place attachment Emotional motivations Biodiversity awareness Community and solidarity Distrust in authorities Social justice struggles Personal transformation and emotional costs
Barriers to Engagement	Generational divides Socioeconomic constraints Political disillusionment
Distrust in Institutionalized Activism	
A Gendered Perspective	Safety and accessibility Women's empowerment

5.1. Core Themes Identified in the Study

The in-depth interviews revealed that Validebağ Grove plays a significant role in fostering a deep sense of nature connectedness, with positive implications for mental health and overall well-being. This connection is reflected in the language that participants used to describe their experiences. The word cloud analysis highlighted recurrent concepts such as *peace*, *tranquility*, and *relaxation*. These words reflect the restorative effect the grove has on visitors.



5.1.1. Nature Connectedness and Well-being

Participants' experiences of nature connectedness emerged as a central theme in this study, aligning closely with the literature and the thesis discussion on how urban green spaces foster psychological and emotional well-being. Regular visitors to Validebağ Grove described their interactions with nature as deeply restorative, emphasizing that their connection to the grove is not merely physical but also emotional, spiritual, and cognitive. This aligns with the concept of biophilia, which posits that humans have an innate affinity for nature, supporting mental health and well-being (Wilson, 1984; Kellert & Wilson, 1995).

Feelings of peace, relaxation, and a sense of belonging were frequently described by those spending time in Validebağ Grove. One participant (P1) expressed this connection by stating, *"When I'm here, I feel like I'm home. There's a sense of wholeness that I don't find anywhere else in the city."* Several interviewees highlighted how being surrounded by the grove's relatively unstructured, biodiverse environment provided them with a refuge from the chaos and stress of urban life. P4 shared, *"Every time I enter the grove, I feel like I am stepping into another world where I can breathe freely."* Another participant, P5, remarked, *"The grove feels like an island of peace in the middle of the city, and I often feel my stress melting away as I walk through it."* This supports existing research indicating that urban green spaces play a vital role in reducing anxiety, improving mood, and fostering overall well-being (Bratman et al., 2019; Barragan-Jason et al., 2023).

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like I can finally breathe again." Another participant (P8) remarked, *"Being in the grove reduces my stress. It's like nature absorbs my worries and replaces them with a sense of calm."* The restorative effect of being immersed in nature was emphasized, highlighting the grove's ability to create a sense of grounding and emotional stability. One participant (P6) noted, *"Whenever I feel anxious, I come here and just sit among the trees. It helps me reset, like pressing a mental refresh button, and suddenly my worries don't seem so overwhelming."* Spending time in the grove also helped participants manage feelings of loneliness. One participant (P19) said, *"When I'm here, I don't feel alone. The grove makes me feel connected—to nature, to life, to something bigger than myself."*

The findings also revealed that the grove serves as a space for cognitive restoration and emotional regulation, consistent with the Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Several participants described how spending time in the grove helped them to “reset” mentally, allowing them to return to their daily lives with a clearer perspective. P2 noted, *"When I walk through the grove, my thoughts settle into place. I feel lighter and more at peace."* This supports the idea that nature exposure can alleviate mental fatigue and contribute to cognitive and emotional resilience (Ulrich, 1984; Joye & van den Berg, 2011).

Moreover, the importance of sensory engagement in fostering nature connectedness was emphasized. The diverse range of sounds, scents, and visual elements within the grove were frequently mentioned as key factors in creating a deeply immersive experience. This finding aligns with research showing that sensory stimulation in biodiverse environments enhances the psychological benefits of nature exposure (Marshall et al., 2023; Meng et al., 2024). As P3 stated, *"The scent of the trees, the rustling of the leaves, and the sight of birds moving through the branches—it all feels like a symphony that calms my mind."*

These results are consistent with the argument that urban green spaces, particularly those with high biodiversity and a relatively unstructured layout, provide a unique opportunity for fostering nature connectedness, enhancing well-being, and alleviating stress (Capaldi et al., 2014). The positive feedback loop between nature connectedness and well-being, as discussed in the thesis, was evident in participants' narratives. Many described how their positive experiences in the grove deepened their connection to nature, motivating them to spend more time there, which in turn further improved their mental health and sense of belonging (Capaldi et al., 2014).

5.1.2. Appreciation of Biodiversity

Participants' reflections on the significance of biodiversity emerged as a critical theme, reinforcing the importance of urban green spaces as sites of rich ecological value. Many participants emphasized that the diverse plant and animal life within Validebağ Grove played a crucial role in their overall experience of space. This aligns with the arguments regarding how biodiversity enhances the sensory, cognitive, and emotional aspects of nature connectedness (Bratman et al., 2019; Marshall et al., 2023).

Sensory Stimulation Through Biodiversity

Encounters with a variety of species were often described by participants as sources of wonder and joy. One participant (P8) shared, *"Seeing different types of birds, insects, and plants makes me feel like I'm stepping into a living, breathing ecosystem. It's a reminder of how complex and beautiful life can be."* Another one (P5) noted, *"Every time I visit, I see something new—a different bird, a flower I hadn't noticed before. That sense of discovery makes each visit feel special."* These reflections underscore the enriching impact of sensory experiences in biodiverse environments on mental and emotional well-being, as supported by existing research (Bratman et al., 2019).

P3 described the impact of multisensory experience powerfully: *"When I'm here, I focus on what I can see and hear—the birds, the leaves, the sunlight. It helps me ground in the present."* The multisensory stimulation was highlighted by P7 too: *"It's not just about what you see—it's about what you hear, like the rustling leaves and the sounds of insects. It makes me feel more alive and connected."* This statement aligns with findings that multisensory engagement in nature fosters deeper connections to the environment, enhancing the overall experience (Meng et al., 2024).

Emphasizing the movement observed in natural environments, P1 contrasted it with the static nature of urban settings: *"The worst thing for the brain is stillness. Everything is in motion, but the things humans make are usually static, fixed, and rigid. Nature isn't like that. There is always movement. The leaves move, the birds move. The branches of a tree are curved. Nothing is straight."* This observation highlights the dynamic nature of biodiverse environments, which supports cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation, as noted in the literature (Bratman et al., 2019; Marshall et al., 2023).

Social and Cultural Dimensions of Biodiversity

Biodiversity in Validebağ Grove also played a crucial role in fostering social connections and cultural continuity among participants. P7 emphasized how encounters with biodiversity led to social interactions: *"Whenever I notice a new bird or plant, I love sharing that moment with others. It becomes a conversation starter, and it feels like we're connecting through nature."* Another participant (P10) noted: *"I often visit the grove with friends, and we explore the different trees and birds together. It's become a shared ritual that brings us closer, and it makes us feel like a community within nature."*

Biodiversity was also linked to cultural significance and intergenerational engagement. One participant (P10) highlighted this connection: *"I grew up hearing stories from my parents about the trees, bushes, mushrooms, birds, and wild animals in this very same city. Coming here now, I feel like I'm continuing that connection with nature across generations."*

These insights align with the argument in the present study that biodiversity fosters not only individual experiences but also a sense of community, cultural continuity, and shared connection to nature.

Psychological and Emotional Benefits of Biodiversity

The diverse biodiversity within the grove contributed to participants' sense of well-being and mental restoration. P2 shared an experience of encountering a praying mantis: *"Out of nowhere, a huge praying mantis can appear in front of you. It's an amazing creature. You look at it, and it looks at you. You greet it and move on."* This story highlights how unexpected encounters with wildlife can evoke feelings of wonder and connection. Such experiences serve as a reminder of the grove's relatively wild nature and the unpredictable beauty of natural environments, fostering a deeper sense of connectedness and appreciation for biodiversity (Bratman et al., 2019).

One participant (P6) explained, *"The variety of life here—the trees, the birds, the insects—makes me feel like I'm part of something larger. It gives me a sense of balance and connection that I don't get anywhere else in the city."* Observing birds and listening to their songs provided a sense of peace for P1, who noted, *"Listening to the different bird calls makes me feel like I'm part of this place, like it's welcoming me."* This sentiment was echoed by P8, who stated, *"Being surrounded by so many*

living things gives me hope—it's like nature's way of reminding us that even if I feel stuck, life goes on."



Figure 5.2. Various bird species observed in Validebağ Grove: 1. Yellow wagtail, 2. Eurasian wren (young), 3. Eurasian hoopoe, 4. Common snipe, 5. Honey buzzard. Composite image created by the author using original photos by Babuccu (n.d.).

Drawing on the metaphor and evolutionary logic that reminds Wilson's biophilia concept (1984), P11 emphasized the emotional and cognitive benefits of biodiversity: *"Diversity keeps life from becoming monotonous. Like, if I see two blue butterflies, then a red one, and then a ladybug lands on my hand—that's so much better than just having mastic trees everywhere. Diversity triggers serotonin. It makes me feel good. We are serotonin-releasing beings in the face of variety, probably because evolutionally it increases our chances of survival. Diversity increases potential for life—and that's never a bad thing."*

These reflections support findings in the literature that emphasize the role of biodiversity in promoting mental health benefits, such as reduced stress and improved mood (Meng et al., 2024).

5.1.3. Structured vs. Unstructured Green Spaces

Participants expressed a clear preference for unstructured, relatively wild spaces like Validebağ Grove over structured parks. This theme aligns with the literature on how unstructured green spaces provide a more immersive, natural experience that enhances nature connectedness and well-being (Marshall et al., 2023).

Preferences for Unstructured, Relatively Wild Spaces

Many participants highlighted the natural, relatively untouched character of Validebağ Grove as a key factor in their preference for spending time there. P3 suggested that the untouched areas support biodiversity, making their experience richer and more dynamic:

"I prefer this place because it feels wild. It's not like a city park where everything is manicured and controlled. Here, I can connect with nature in its purest form. In Validebağ, I once saw a raven. I also came across birds I had never seen before and later had to look them up. That's what makes the grove special—small surprises that you wouldn't find in a park where everything is controlled. [...] If you leave nature alone, it thrives in its own way. When you don't interfere, birds can nest where they want, and plants grow in their own rhythm. In Validebağ, there are places where nature still follows its own course, and that's why you can encounter unexpected species."



Figure 5.3. A raven photographed in Validebağ Grove while chasing a crow (Babuccu, n.d.).

Participants often contrasted the grove with structured parks that feature paved pathways, playgrounds, and formal landscaping. P14 explained, *"In structured parks, everything feels artificial. It's designed for specific activities, and you're constantly aware of being in a controlled space. Validebağ feels like a piece of real nature that hasn't been tamed."* Similarly, P10 emphasized the sense of freedom provided by the grove: *"Here, I feel free. There are no strict paths to follow or designated areas. You can walk wherever you want, sit wherever you feel comfortable, and interact with nature on your own terms."* Echoing this sentiment, P12 said, *"There's a sense of freedom here that you don't find in structured parks. You're not restricted to paths or rules. You can explore and lose yourself in the greenery."*

This preference for unstructured spaces aligns with research suggesting that relatively wild green areas offer a deeper sense of nature immersion and foster a stronger connection to the environment (Bratman et al., 2019; Doğru et al., 2020).

Psychological and Sensory Benefits of Unstructured Green Spaces

Participants described a range of psychological and sensory benefits associated with spending time in unstructured spaces. P9 shared, *"When I'm surrounded by natural greenery, with no fences or fixed pathways, I feel a sense of calm and release. It's like my mind can wander freely."* P10 added, *"The textures, scents, and sounds of a semi-wild place like this create an experience that's richer and more relaxing than any manicured park."*

The opportunities for spontaneous exploration and sensory engagement were also emphasized. P16 remarked, *"In structured parks, you're limited to walking on paths or sitting on benches. Here, you can touch the plants, walk off the paths, and be fully immersed in the environment."* P18 noted, *"Walking on earth instead of concrete feels grounding. Seeing untrimmed trees and wild plants is refreshing because it's not trying to fit into a perfect image—it's just nature being itself."*

These insights reflect the argument that unstructured green spaces offer psychological benefits such as stress reduction, mental restoration, and a sense of freedom that structured parks may lack (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Jorgensen & Tylecote, 2007; Watson et al., 2023).

Moreover, the sense of autonomy and empowerment experienced in unstructured spaces emerged as a crucial theme. Unlike structured parks that are often designed and controlled by central authorities, Validebağ Grove allows individuals to interact with nature on their own terms. This contrast reflects a desire for freedom from the constraints of highly regulated urban life, where decisions and movements are frequently dictated by external forces. P10 emphasized, *"Here, I feel like I have control over my experience. I'm not being told where to go or what to do, and that feeling is empowering."*

Participants viewed unstructured spaces as places where they could reclaim a sense of agency often lost in the structured and controlled aspects of city life. This perspective aligns with the research that experiences of autonomy and self-determination in nature can enhance mental well-being and foster resilience against the stresses of modern urban living (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Korpela et al., 2014). Participants' preference for unstructured, semi-wild green spaces like Validebağ Grove

underscores the importance of preserving natural areas in urban environments. The psychological and sensory benefits associated with these spaces highlight the need to prioritize unstructured, ecologically rich green areas over overly designed, formal parks to support mental health and foster a deeper connection to nature.



Figure 5.4. Nature “*being itself*” in Validebağ Grove. Photograph by Burak Malkoç, in 2025 and used with permission.

5.1.4. Urbanization-Driven Environmental Loss

In the face of ongoing environmental degradation and habitat loss caused by urbanization across Istanbul, participants expressed significant concerns. They highlighted how Validebağ Grove serves as a vital refuge against these impacts. Many described the grove as a unique escape from the intense urbanization and its negative consequences. In contrast, green spaces like Validebağ provide essential psychological and ecological benefits (Arı, 2024; Doğru et al., 2020).

Validebağ Grove as a Refuge from the Negative Effects of Urban Life

Amidst the rapid urbanization of Istanbul, participants emphasized how Validebağ Grove serves as a rare sanctuary. P14 noted, *“The rest of the city is becoming concrete, with fewer trees and more buildings everywhere. Coming to Validebağ is like stepping into a different world where nature still exists.”* Similarly, P18 added, *“In most parts of the city, there’s no place left to breathe. This grove is one of the last places where we can find real nature.”*

This sense of contrast was central to many participants’ experiences. The grove’s relatively untouched environment offers a stark counterpoint to the rigid urban landscape. P3 reflected, *“The city makes me feel alienated—everything is structured, predictable, concrete. But when I’m in Validebağ, especially in the deeper parts where it’s untouched, I don’t feel out of place. I feel like I belong there.”* Echoing this, P2 said, *“In the city, you are constantly on alert—watching for cars, dealing with noise, always in survival mode. But in Validebağ... I can actually breathe, listen to the wind in the trees, and feel like I’m in a place that isn’t designed for human control.”*

Participants also described the grove as a sensory refuge. P10 shared, *“When I walk through the grove, I feel like I’m in a forest. But outside, it’s just traffic, concrete, and noise.”* P1 noted, *“The air here is cleaner. You can actually hear birds, feel the breeze, and smell the trees.”*

Many described the grove as a vital space for mental relief. P12 shared, *“In the city, everything feels overwhelming... But when I’m in the grove, it’s like the chaos stops, and I can finally breathe.”* P19 added, *“When I’m in the grove, I don’t feel alone. There’s a sense of community and connection with nature that reminds me I’m part of something bigger.”* Losing the grove, they emphasized, would mean losing a mental health refuge. P10 warned, *“Without places like this, people will be left with nowhere to escape the relentless pressure of urban life.”*

Additionally, some participants argued that the grove helps ease the urban heat. P17 explained, *“In the summer, the rest of the city feels like an oven. But here in the grove, it’s cooler. The trees provide shade and keep the temperature down.”*

P15 stressed the grove’s increasing importance in the presence of urban development: *“With the city expanding and more buildings going up, we need places like Validebağ more than ever.”* P14 cautioned, *“If we don’t protect places like this, soon there won’t be any real nature left in the city.”*

Everything will be concrete, and future generations will have nowhere to connect with the natural world."

5.1.5. Commercialization and Commodification of Nature

The commercialization and commodification of nature emerged as a significant concern among participants, who highlighted how such processes threaten the ecological and social value of Validebağ Grove. Many described feeling worried about the increasing pressures to transform green spaces into profit-driven projects. This aligns well with research showing how commercialization can undermine the intrinsic and communal value of urban green areas (Heynen et al., 2006; Gómez-Baggethun & Barton, 2013).

Impact on Validebağ Grove

The impact of commercialization on participants' experiences with Validebağ Grove was evident. Many felt that the grove's authenticity and value lay in its relatively unstructured, biodiverse character. P8 noted, *"Validebağ Grove is special because it feels wild and untouched. If it gets commercialized, it'll lose the very qualities that make it valuable to people and to the environment."*

Expressing frustration, P14 stated, *"There's constant pressure to commercialize this place—to turn it into another park with cafes or event venues. But this isn't just a piece of real estate; it's a living ecosystem that belongs to everyone."* Echoing this sentiment, P16 said, *"Privatization always starts with small steps—adding a parking lot here, putting up a cafe there. Before you know it, nature is replaced by profit-driven structures."*

Luxury Development, Green Washing and the Socioeconomic Divide in Access to Green Areas

The issue of commercialization leading to reduced access and a loss of authenticity in green spaces was a recurring theme. P18 shared, *"Once you commercialize a place like this, it becomes a commodity, and not everyone can access it freely. It's no longer about nature—it's about generating revenue."* P16 referenced coastal green areas like Kalamış Park on the Asian coast of Istanbul as examples, stating, *"It's no longer about being in nature; it becomes about your purchasing power. Places that used to be for everyone are now only accessible if you can afford to spend money there."* This reflects concerns in the literature about how commodification transforms public green spaces into exclusive, profit-oriented areas, limiting opportunities for equitable access (Perkins, 2015).

Examples of luxurious apartment complexes and gated communities being built around formerly accessible green spaces were also mentioned. P16 stated, *"They take a beautiful green area, build luxury apartments around it, and marketize it as exclusive access to nature. It's not about nature anymore, it's about selling a lifestyle to the wealthy."* P18 added, *"We've seen this happen with parks along the coast—once they build luxury residences nearby, ordinary people can't use these areas freely. It becomes a place for those who can afford to live there."*

P14 described how former police housing near Validebağ Grove was demolished and replaced with luxury suites: *"That place used to be police housing. There were two buildings. The police were removed, the buildings were demolished. And now? It's a luxury suite. They must be thinking the same thing about this place."*

Another concern raised was the risk of “greenwashing,” where projects are marketed as environmentally friendly but prioritize profit over genuine conservation efforts. P17 explained, *"They call it an 'eco-park' or a 'nation's garden,' but it's just a way to sell the land. The environment is used as an excuse for profit."* Emphasizing the illusion of public benefit, P16 shared, *"They present it as if it's for the public good, but in reality, these projects often end up excluding people and limiting genuine access to nature."*

Impact on Public Health and Well-Being

The commercialization of green spaces was also seen as reducing access to nature, which serves as a vital space for stress relief and mental health. P16 stated, *"Turning places like Validebağ into commercial areas takes away one of the few places where people can come to relax, unwind, and forget about their stress. It has impacts on our mental health."* Viewing the grove as an essential space for psychological refuge, P8 mentioned, *"When they commercialize green areas, they take away places where people find peace. It makes the city feel even more overwhelming."*

Concerns over how commercial projects might introduce noise, pollution, or reduce air quality were also expressed. P14 shared, *"Commercial projects around the grove mean more traffic, more pollution, and less clean air for people who rely on this place for fresh air."*

Participants emphasized the need for protecting urban green spaces as public commons that are accessible to all. P19 summarized this by saying, *"Nature shouldn't be something you have to pay for. Places like Validebağ should remain free and open for everyone to enjoy."*

5.1.6. Emotional Responses to Nature's Decline and Coping Strategies

This section explores how participants emotionally respond to the perceived decline of nature—both globally and in the context of Validebağ Grove—with a focus on eco-anxiety, grief, anger, and personal coping strategies. While feelings of helplessness and sorrow were prevalent, many individuals also demonstrated ways of adapting, resisting, or reinterpreting their emotional responses. Although concerns about climate change, biodiversity loss, and urban encroachment were often expressed in broad terms, participants frequently brought the discussion back to Validebağ Grove as both an ecological and emotional anchor.

Eco-Anxiety and Anger

Eco-anxiety emerged as a prominent emotional theme, as participants voiced fears about the accelerating pace of ecological destruction. They spoke of a general sense of fear, helplessness, and even suffocation when confronted with news of deforestation, biodiversity loss, or climate-related disasters. This aligns with the conceptualization of eco-anxiety as a chronic fear of environmental doom that impacts psychological well-being (Coffey et al., 2021; Parmentier et al., 2024).

P6 described this vividly: *“My breathing gets tight. It creates a claustrophobic effect on me. If I’m overexposed to these kinds of news, I feel like I can’t breathe properly. It’s a physical sensation.”* This physical reaction to eco-anxiety exemplifies how emotional responses to ecological issues can manifest somatically. Similar descriptions of embodied distress appeared in other interviews, underscoring a recurring theme of psychological overwhelm in the face of planetary change. P16 also reflected, *“When I hear about more trees being cut down or another green space being destroyed, I feel a weight on my chest. It’s like I can’t breathe properly until I’m in a place like Validebağ Grove, surrounded by nature.”* Similarly, P7 said, *“I feel this deep sadness and helplessness when I think about the state of our planet. Sometimes it’s overwhelming.”* P2 connected their anxiety to the water scarcity they witness in the region where their summer house is: *“Due to over-population during summers, in Bodrum, there is water only two days a week. That’s just how it is. And it’s not because of poor infrastructure or mismanagement. Bodrum has no water. The reservoirs and lakes have dried up; they’re gone.”*

In addition to feelings of fear and sadness, participants also described frustration and anger as part of their eco-anxiety. These emotions usually stem from broader worries about ecological crises and societal structures that prioritize profit over conservation. P1, for example, articulated their

frustration with systemic issues: *“The frustration isn’t just about the harm done to the grove, but about the whole system that prioritizes profit over life.”* P17 also expressed frustration with the destruction of nature from a moral and existential perspective: *“It’s frustrating that a being that many religions call the most honored creation... has no problem destroying everything in plain sight.”* These statements reflect a broader disillusionment with humanity’s destructive relationship with nature.

Intense anger surfaced when P6 discussed environmental harm caused by industrial production: *“I got so angry! If it was this easy to clean up air pollution during the pandemic, why aren’t we doing it now? It makes me furious to know that they could change things but choose not to.”* Despite the physical anxiety symptoms they described, rather than feeling fear for the future, P6 said, *“I don’t worry about death or what will happen to the planet two generations from now. That doesn’t create anxiety for me. What I feel is anger—why aren’t we doing better right now?”* P3 captured this dynamic between appreciation for nature and demoralization over its destruction: *“Nature remains a source of wonder, but knowledge of its degradation is a persistent burden.”*

Others, like P4, described anger over repeated mistakes in environmental decision-making: *“It makes me angry that we keep making the same mistakes, prioritizing profit over nature. It feels like fighting a losing battle, and that’s hard to process.”* This reflects Davidson’s (2023) findings that eco-anxiety can manifest as political anger. However, as seen in P4, P6, and P3’s narratives, this anger often coexists with resignation or sorrow, suggesting that emotional responses to ecological crises rarely fall into rigid categories.

Eco-Grief and Hopelessness

Some participants also described a quieter sorrow—grief over what has already been lost rather than anxiety about what is yet to come. This form of eco-grief was often rooted in resignation rather than urgency. P4 expressed it this way: *“I just feel a bit of grief when I see how much we’ve lost already.”* P1 added, *“I feel more sadness than anxiety... It’s like grieving something you know you can’t save but still love.”*

This grief was echoed in feelings of longing for natural phenomena that once seemed normal but have now disappeared. P19 said, *“How does it make me feel? It creates hopelessness,”* while P18 observed, *“Now, everywhere you look, things are either drying up or receding.”* Reflecting a more

personal nostalgia, P19 added, *“I wish I could see some snow at this time of year. I wish I couldn’t take my car out or that it would slide back on the Koşuyolu slope. I actually miss that.”*

P11 spoke of this grief with clarity: *“There aren’t many natural areas left in the world... they are almost gone.”* Yet this emotion did not necessarily produce anger. Instead, P11 described a state of detachment and emotional exhaustion: *“It’s more like weariness, hopelessness.”* Their reflections emphasized an understanding of the systemic and structural roots of ecological destruction, which paradoxically made them less angry and sadder. This grief also involved reflection on human nature and societal inertia. As P11 put it, *“Human-centered thinking is a natural phenomenon—part of our existence... Maybe things can get better, but there are reasons why they aren’t improving right now.”*

P6, who expressed their anger loudly, also articulated grief through a powerful reflection on biodiversity loss. Their sentiments highlight the emotional complexity of eco-anxiety, where outrage and sorrow exist side by side, reinforcing the deep personal value participants attach to nonhuman life. *“For instance, my favorite animal is the giraffe, and they’re going extinct. Why? Because they have no habitat left. That’s something we could fix. We shouldn’t even know how many giraffes are left in the world—there should be so many that it’s not even countable.”*

Coping Mechanisms

In facing these overwhelming emotions, participants adopted various coping mechanisms, including nature immersion, selective exposure to information, pro-environmental behaviors, humor, and activism.

Nature immersion—particularly within Validebağ Grove—was a key source of relief. P11 emphasized that spending time in green spaces like the grove provided emotional relief and helped them cope with feelings of grief. P3 described their own coping approach: *“That’s why I go to Validebağ. It’s not about saving the world—it’s just about experiencing something good while it still exists.”*

Some individuals manage eco-anxiety, anger, and grief by curating their digital environments to limit distressing content. P6 shared their strategy: *“I only follow accounts that share good news. I managed to ‘tell’ TikTok’s algorithm that I don’t want to see bad news. I created a bubble for myself where I only get good news.”*

This interplay between passive detachment and active engagement was also evident in P3's reflections. P3 reflected on this emotional burden: *"When I think about it, it's really depressing. But I know I can't stop it, so I try not to let it affect me too much. I just feel sad about it and move on."* This quote illustrates one form of coping via emotional detachment, which was echoed by several participants who expressed sadness but chose not to dwell in helplessness. This illustrates how some participants attempt to manage eco-anxiety through emotional distancing. P3, on the other hand, described a mix of humor and fatalism: *"Murphy's Law: 'Smile, because tomorrow will be worse.' That's how I deal with it. If the world is doomed, at least enjoy what's left."*

For others, eco-anxiety and anger served as a catalyst for making pro-environmental choices and supporting the ongoing social movement. P8 said, *"I channel my anxiety into action. I sign petitions, talk to people about what's happening here [Validebağ Grove], and try to make sustainable choices."* P1 also mentioned how they make pro-environmental choices daily and said: *"If I didn't do something, the anxiety and anger would weigh heavier. It's how I fight hopelessness."* Through action, these individuals reclaim their agency, alleviate feelings of powerlessness in the face of environmental decline, and overcome personal eco-anxiety with daily action.

P16 also exemplifies how eco-anxiety can transform into a proactive force. They describe a pervasive concern about ecological destruction, especially the commercial threats to Validebağ Grove. Rather than succumbing to despair, they channel their frustration and sadness into activism. This aligns with Lutz et al. (2023) and Davidson (2023), who argue that chronic concern about environmental degradation can lead individuals to action. Their experience also reflects Stanley et al.'s (2021) finding that eco-anxiety can become a motivating force rather than a paralyzing one.

Remarkably, P18 and P19 emphasized the importance of staying engaged in life and community as a way of breaking out of environmental hopelessness. While they participate in the movement at Validebağ Grove as supporters, they also find emotional grounding through cultural engagement: *"To break the hopelessness? Well, we try to stay engaged in life. We participate in social activities. What does that include? Music. We've been involved in a Turkish classical music chorus for about 26-27 years. And, of course, our grandkids. Their existence helps a lot."*

Even for those who did not engage directly in activism, witnessing collective efforts to protect Validebağ Grove served as a source of hope. P5 shared, *"The fight to protect Validebağ Grove renews hope, even though my eco-anxiety and sense of despair are high."* These accounts suggest that hope

can emerge both from personal action and from observing or affiliating with collective resistance efforts, reinforcing a shared sense of meaning and resilience.

Ultimately, the emotional responses shared by participants—ranging from anxiety and grief to anger and action—highlight the multifaceted ways people experience and cope with degradation of nature. These emotions are deeply embedded in personal histories, ethical worldviews, and the socio-political context of Validebağ Grove. Though nature cannot erase grief entirely, it provides space for reflection, solace, and emotional resilience. Notably, while some participants expressed withdrawal or despair, many found pathways toward resilience, whether through activism, nature immersion, or cultural engagement. These varied responses reveal the complex ways people process ecological loss. The role of green spaces like Validebağ highlighted once more: These natural sites serve as emotional havens that sustain both individual and collective hope. Understanding this emotional terrain is essential for developing compassionate, inclusive approaches to environmental advocacy—ones that honor both grief and the hope embedded in action.

In the following section, I explore how these emotional responses shape different forms of environmental engagement and expressions of identity among participants.

5.1.7. Practices, Motivations, and Meanings of Environmental Activism

Although the sense of responsibility for preserving Validebağ Grove intensifies eco-anxiety, it also motivates individuals to resist threats through action. The findings suggest that a personal connection to the grove is one of the strongest motivators. Many participants engaging in the social movement in Validebağ Grove initially visited the site for recreational purposes but gradually developed a sense of ownership and responsibility. This bond to space—both as a mental refuge and a physical environment—translated into active participation in conservation efforts.

Forms of Engagement and Activist Identity

The participants reported varying levels and forms of engagement in relation to the environmental movement surrounding Validebağ Grove. The data reveals a rich continuum of activism, ranging from direct, sustained involvement in collective action to more passive or symbolic forms of support. Participants' reflections indicate that activism is not understood as a fixed category but as a fluid and personally negotiated identity shaped by contextual, emotional, and structural factors.

When participants were asked how they conceptualize “activism” and whether they identify as “activists”, their responses suggest that these terms carry diverse meanings and are often viewed with ambivalence. For some, activism was associated with organized, confrontational public action, while others framed it as a broader commitment to environmental ethics and everyday practices. This divergence shaped how individuals positioned themselves in relation to the movement in the grove.

For example, P1 described themselves as a “passive anarchist,” someone who prefers instinctive and personal responses to environmental issues rather than joining formal activist organizations. *“No, I have never been part of any group. (laughs) I am a pacifist,”* they said, distancing themselves from the label “activist” despite their deep concern for the Grove and willingness to engage in direct resistance if the Grove were under immediate threat. This framing reflects a broader sentiment among several participants who support the movement’s goals but do not embrace the activist label due to ideological or personal preferences.

P3, who had participated in previous protests and joined a vigil at Validebağ Grove, also expressed a nuanced relationship to activism: *“I do feel responsible for nature’s preservation, but that doesn’t mean I will start an initiative or lead a movement. If there’s already a struggle happening, and I believe in it, I join in.”* For P3, activism is contextual and reactive rather than identity-driven—supporting causes when needed but not embodying the role of an activist as a constant persona. P10 also adopted this intermediate stance. While they do not define themselves as activists, they emphasize their ideological support for the movement and their readiness to participate in times of urgency.

Others, like P2 and P6, engaged through passive forms such as signing petitions or voicing support in private conversations. These individuals did not consider themselves activists either but expressed admiration for those who participated more visibly. P2, for instance, opted for petition signing as a safer form of contribution: *“I haven’t been actively involved in any activist group within the grove, but I sign petitions when I come across them at Validebağ Grove. I trust the organizations advocating for the grove and feel I’m contributing by supporting their efforts.”* P6 remarked, *“I don’t want anything to happen to the Grove. And I really respect the people there. They are there for 24/7... Of course, the logical thing would be to stand with them, but... I just sign petitions.”*

Participants like P18 and P19 demonstrated active solidarity with the movement through supportive roles—regularly attending protests, engaging in cultural activities, and helping raise awareness—yet explicitly rejected the activist label. P18 noted, *“We are always with them,*

supporting them, joining everything they do. But since we don't participate consistently, we can't call ourselves activists." Similarly, P19 explained, *"Being an activist means being a professional in that field. You take it up like a job. We help, we support, but we are not activists of this movement in that sense."*

P16, by contrast, exemplifies sustained activism that becomes a defining element of personal identity. Their trajectory—from visiting the Grove for solitude and well-being to taking part in formal campaigns, biodiversity monitoring, and ecosystem-based planning—illustrates how nature connectedness can evolve into committed environmental advocacy. *"Activism has become professional for me,"* they explained, indicating a lived integration of activism into everyday life.

P17 presented a more assertive articulation of activist identity, stating, *"Sometimes, I join the watch of the Validebağ Defense group, and meetings... but as I said, I am not a militant."* This distinction suggests that while P17 considers themselves an activist, they differentiate between their role and that of what they call 'militants'—individuals who exhibit unrelenting, full-time dedication to the cause. They added, *"If there's a fire, if the municipality brings in bulldozers again, I go for those things,"* suggesting a reactive yet committed form of involvement grounded in situational urgency.

This distinction underscores how some participants perceive activism as requiring constant, full-time dedication and a formalized role within the movement. Instead, they prefer to describe their efforts as voluntary support or civic solidarity. Nonetheless, their contributions—ranging from selling activist calendars to organizing music for morale—form a crucial infrastructure of collective resistance, even if not acknowledged under the activist title.

Overall, participants' engagement with the environmental movement cannot be easily classified as active or inactive, committed or indifferent. Their narratives highlight a spectrum of involvement shaped by personal identity, political trust, socioeconomic conditions, and emotional readiness. Activism, for many, is not a static identity but a relational, circumstantial stance—activated by urgency, muted by fear, or expressed through symbolic solidarity rather than visible protest.

Place Attachment and Emotional Motivations

Participants who actively engage in the environmental movement to protect Validebağ Grove expressed a range of motivations for their activism. Their reasons were often shaped by personal

experiences, emotional connections to the grove, and broader concerns about urbanization, environmental justice, and community well-being. This section explores the key factors driving visitors to become activists, highlighting their sense of duty, personal attachment, and resistance to urban exploitation.

The deep emotional bond that many participants have with Validebağ Grove played a crucial role in motivating them to act. P13 explained, *"This place is part of my daily life. I walk here, I rest here, and I've built memories here. The idea of losing it feels personal, like losing a part of myself."* Similarly, P11 emphasized the psychological comfort the grove provides: *"I don't just see trees and grass; I see a space that gives me peace. That's worth fighting for."*

The proximity of the grove to participants' homes meant that environmental threats were not abstract but visible and tangible in their daily lives. For instance, P12 expressed, *"I fight for the grove because it feels like part of my home. Losing it would feel like losing a part of who I am."*

Intergenerational continuity also played a significant role in participants' connection to the grove. P15 remarked, *"I grew up playing here, and now my children do too. I want to make sure they have the same opportunity in the future."* Highlighting the grove's significance in their personal history, P7, a Haydarpaşa Highschool graduate, shared, *"This is not just a green space. It's a living memory for me and many others. The thought of it being destroyed makes me feel like a piece of my history is being erased."*

Biodiversity Awareness in Fostering Environmental Stewardship

Participants frequently articulated how the rich biodiversity of Validebağ Grove serves as a catalyst for environmental awareness and a deepened sense of responsibility. P6 remarked, *"When I see how many different species coexist here, it makes me want to protect this place even more. It feels like a responsibility to preserve it for future generations."* Echoing this sentiment, P8 noted, *"Knowing that so many species rely on this grove makes me realize that protecting it isn't just about us—it's about all life that depends on it."* This aligns with the broader scholarly view that biodiversity not only enhances individual experiences of nature but also cultivates pro-environmental values and behaviors (Bratman et al., 2019).

Other participants expanded upon this relationship between ecological richness and stewardship. For instance, P10 shared how personal exposure to biodiversity led to actionable change: *"After*

spending time here, I started planting native plants in my own garden. I want to create a little ecosystem that supports local wildlife, just like Validebağ Grove does." Similarly, P12 reflected, "Once you realize how much life this place sustains, you can't help but feel protective. It's like being a guardian of something sacred."

P16 offered a particularly vivid account of how biodiversity influences their commitment to stewardship, illustrating the profound emotional and ethical dimensions of their engagement: "We even protested for weeds—things beyond what you can imagine. And why? Because we are a community that resisted even for saving the habitats of tortoises and larvae hidden among those weeds... We fought to stop the mowing of grass just to protect the turtle's habitat. And not just tortoises—there are butterfly larvae too. Their habitat is here as well. The Grove awakens such unique things in me. Now we're happy because the grasses have grown tall—it means the butterflies are starting to emerge." Their reflections also revealed a personal ecology shaped by multispecies relationships and localized knowledge: "We have generations of dogs here, they're always under our watch. They all have names. We know each of their personalities, what they'll do. We have our own world there. It's nice."

P11 introduced a layered ethical and evolutionary argument for standing up for biodiversity, grounded in both emotional resonance and scientific logic. They noted, "There aren't many places left in the city. It's a beautiful space for people—but also for the animals and plants that live there. Where else can they go? What can they do? The trees have taken root. We don't really have the right to interfere with their existence. What motivates me is an ethical reason." They further articulated that transforming the grove into a manicured urban park would be harmful, asserting, "It would reduce biodiversity. That would be bad for biodiversity—and bad for us too. On the other hand, diversity increases potential for life—and that's never a bad thing."

Collectively, these narratives reinforce the notion that biodiversity within urban green spaces can cultivate a personal and collective ethic of care. Participants described a transformation in perspective—from passive enjoyment to active guardianship—prompted by their awareness of the grove's ecological complexity. This dynamic supports the argument that contact with biodiverse environments fosters environmental stewardship by strengthening emotional, ethical, and behavioral commitments to conservation (Garcia & Waeber, 2024; Marshall et al., 2023; Meng et al., 2024; Bonthoux & Chollet, 2024; Ari, 2024).



Figure 5.5. A tortoise grazing among weeds in Validebağ Grove. Photograph by the author in 2020.

Fear of Loss and Urban Encroachment

A strong sense of urgency motivated many activists, who expressed deep concerns about the rapid loss of green spaces in Istanbul. Specifically, the risk of urbanization and habitat destruction further drove participants to engage in advocacy. For many, the transition from passive enjoyment to active engagement is driven by the realization that remaining silent is no longer an option. An outstanding statement shared by one of the activists, P12 represents shared feelings among the group; *"I started by just enjoying the grove, but when I saw the threats of construction, it didn't feel like an option to stay silent."*

Concerns about the continuous encroachment of development projects were frequently expressed. P9 stated, *"The city is being swallowed by concrete. Every time a green space disappears; we lose something that makes urban life bearable."* Echoing this sentiment, P16 noted, *"We've seen it happen before—small green areas turned into construction sites. If we don't fight for Validebağ, it will be next."*

Frustration over the incremental nature of development was also highlighted. P14 expressed, *"They say it's just a small part of the grove they'll change, but we know how it works. First, a little development, then more. Before you realize it, the whole place is gone."* Similarly, P16 noted, *"Ignoring what's happening here would feel like complicity. If we allow one green space to disappear, what stops them from taking the next one?"*

Community, Solidarity, and Collective Power

Community and solidarity emerged as pivotal motivators. For many participants, activism was not only about environmental protection but also about community empowerment. These participants reported that this movement in the grove fostered relationships with like-minded people, deepening their commitment to the cause. Gathering around a shared purpose created social bonds and strengthened community resilience, as echoed in P12's words: *"Everyone who shows up for the grove feels like part of something bigger. It's not just about trees—it's about the neighborhood, the animals, and the memories."*

P13 explained, *"Fighting for Validebağ has brought people together. We are not just protecting trees; we are building solidarity and showing that we have a voice."* Several participants emphasized that activism strengthened their sense of belonging. P10 shared, *"Before I joined the movement, I didn't know many people here. Now, I feel part of something bigger, a community that cares and takes action."* Reflecting on the importance of collective effort, P16 stated, *"When we protest together, when we take action together, we show that they can't just erase this place without resistance. We have power in numbers."*

Distrust in Authorities and Structural Critique

A recurring theme among participants was their deep distrust of government policies and corporate interests that threaten nature. Many viewed state involvements in environmental destruction as deliberate rather than incidental. P11 expressed this most clearly:

"There are power groups that actively push for decisions that make things worse. For example, there are governments that allow them to establish mining sites and promote carbon-emitting fuels for energy, for electricity. Then there are wars. These are all harmful things for nature. However, the same governments also don't really care about the situation because of the short-term profits they all gain from it."

Their reflections emphasize the systemic nature of ecological destruction and the difficulty of addressing it when those in power continue to benefit from its perpetuation. Frustration with this reality was evident among participants. P16 remarked, *"They call it 'development,' but we all know what it means—destroying nature for profit."* Similarly, P4 voiced skepticism about institutional promises: *"Promises are made about 'green projects,' but in the end, these places get privatized and*

commercialized. We can't trust the authorities to protect this neighborhood and this grove; we have to do it ourselves."

P18 highlighted the inconsistencies in public policy, pointing to the contradiction between rhetoric and action: *"On one hand, they talk about the importance of green spaces for well-being. On the other hand, they approve of projects that destroy them. It's hypocrisy."*

This distrust aligns with broader critiques of greenwashing and the commercialization of nature, as discussed in previous sections (Heynen et al., 2006; Gómez-Baggethun & Barton, 2013). Participants' perspectives underscore a widespread belief that environmental protection cannot be left in the hands of the state or corporate interests but must instead be actively defended by local communities.

Environmentalism as a Social Justice Struggle

Activism was viewed by many participants not only as a fight for nature but as part of a broader struggle for social justice. They viewed protecting Validebağ Grove not just as an environmental duty but as a matter of justice and responsibility. P10 explained, *"I don't see this as just about nature; it's about fairness. The powerful take whatever they want, but this place belongs to all of us. Standing against them is the right thing to do."* These participants pointed out how urban development disproportionately benefits wealthy elites while restricting public access to natural spaces. P14 noted, *"They take public land, develop it, and then tell us it's for the people—but it's only accessible if you can afford to be there. It's not just about trees, it's about who gets to have nature and who doesn't."*

Linking environmental destruction with economic inequality, P17 stated, *"When green spaces disappear, it's not the rich who suffer. They have their private gardens, their summer houses. It's people like us who lose the last places we can go to without spending money. This is more than just an ecological fight. It's about standing against a system that prioritizes profit over people's well-being."* P15 echoed this opinion and connected their resistance to a broader critique of capitalist urban planning, *"This isn't just an environmental struggle; it's about who controls the city. Green spaces should belong to everyone, but they are being handed over to corporations, turned into private developments. Our activism is about reclaiming what is ours."* This perspective aligns with environmental justice literature, which argues that access to green spaces and environmental health are deeply intertwined with socioeconomic inequality (Bullard, 1990; Agyeman et al., 2016).

Personal Transformation and Emotional Costs

Several participants reflected on how their engagement in activism transformed their perspectives and daily lives. For some, involvement in activism fundamentally changed how they saw themselves and their role in society. P10 shared, *"I used to feel powerless about the destruction of nature, but now I know that collective resistance matters. I've learned that our voice has weight."* P14 described how the experience altered their sense of agency: *"I came here just to walk and relax, but the more I learned about the threats to this place, the more I felt responsible. Now, I see myself as an activist."* This personal transformation was often accompanied by a shift in lifestyle choices, with participants becoming more conscious of their consumption habits, environmental impact, and political engagement.

On the other hand, long-term engagement in activism often took a psychological toll on participants. Many described feelings of exhaustion, frustration, and burnout from the continuous struggle against powerful interests. P13 shared, *"There are days when it feels like even though we fight, they will always find a way to take more. It's exhausting."*

Among those who openly reflected on the emotional burden of activism, P16 offered a particularly vivid account. They explained, *"Fighting for a cause like this is not just about showing up at protests. It wears on your mind, your body, your relationships. In Turkey, your thoughts start changing in a way where you can't just live in the moment, it's very exhausting... But I got used to it. Even though it wears me down from time to time, you develop a way to cope. It becomes a way of life."* Despite the toll it takes, their commitment remains unwavering, driven not by short-term victories but by long-term goals. For P16, activism has become deeply embedded in their identity, shaping their worldview and everyday routines. *"If I can feel good under a tree for just 2-3 minutes, that's a good thing for me. Taking my morning walk is a good thing, but in my head, there's always an open window: 'What are they trying to do here?' 'How can we stop this?' Activism has become professional for me."* Their experience illustrates how sustained environmental struggle can lead to a lasting transformation in perspective, turning involvement into a way of being.

To cope with these challenges, participants developed various strategies, such as leaning on the activist community for emotional support, taking breaks when needed, and finding moments of joy in nature itself. As an example, P12 said, *"When it all feels overwhelming, I remind myself to just enjoy the grove—to sit, breathe, and remember what we're fighting for."* P15 also emphasized the

importance of collective resilience, saying, *"We support each other. When one of us feels too drained to continue, others step in. That's the only way we keep going."*

5.1.8. Barriers to Engagement: Generational Divides and Socioeconomic Constraints, and Political Disillusionment

Despite widespread emotional attachment to Validebağ Grove and a shared concern over its future - motivations that are expected to drive activism- many visitors phrased clear limitations in their capacity or willingness to engage in the environmental movement actively. These barriers, while multifaceted, unite around interrelated themes of political anxiety, socioeconomic precarity, generational dynamics, and institutional disillusionment. Rather than reflecting apathy, these narratives highlight the structural and psychological barriers that shape selective or absent participation in collective action.

A recurring theme among non-engaged participants was the fear of being labeled a dissident in an increasingly repressive political context- a concern that is further amplified by observable patterns of state intervention against protesters throughout Türkiye (Özen, 2020; Öztürk, 2023; Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2024). Most of those participants had been involved in the Gezi Park movement, and the memories of police crackdowns during these protests (Turhan, 2017) continue to resonate with them. This underlying anxiety manifests as a reluctance to participate in public demonstrations or vocal opposition, reinforcing the idea that environmental activism carries disproportionate personal risks (Mert, 2016). Political risks and job security also shape reduced participation in direct activism. P2, who supports environmental protection through passive participation, noted, *"I used to participate in protests frequently. But now, I don't anymore. My profession makes it risky."* As P3 reflected, *"I joined a vigil for Validebağ Grove one night, but that was all I could do. I have responsibilities, and I can't risk more. The Gezi protests were enough to show me what could happen."* Even individuals who strongly identified with environmental values often felt deterred by this broader climate of intimidation. P4 underscored this dilemma: *"I want to do more, but I feel like there are risks involved. Just being at the protest once made me anxious because I kept thinking about what would happen if things escalated."* This sense of residual trauma exemplifies where the memory of past repression continues to inhibit present-day mobilization.

Economic hardship emerged as another critical axis of disengagement. Participants emphasized that activism, in practice, often presumes a degree of socioeconomic stability—an assumption many could not meet. P1 pointed out, *"Not everyone can afford to be here. Some people simply don't have*

the time or resources to dedicate to activism, even if they care deeply." P5 offered a stark articulation of this dilemma: *"I am deeply concerned about the ecological crisis and its consequences. I do think the system must change, but as I am in a constant survival mode financially and psychologically, I don't have the time or energy to engage in activist movements to demand this change from the political authorities. I'm also scared. The political and economic climate discourages me."* Their statement reflects the dual burden of economic fatigue and political disillusionment, both of which limit the viability of sustained activism.

Generational divides further complicated patterns of engagement. Older participants often recalled a longer legacy of political involvement and a greater willingness to confront risks. In contrast, younger individuals expressed more pronounced constraints related to time, precarity, and institutional cynicism. As P12, who defines themselves as an activist, noted, *"Many young people care deeply, but they have to work long hours just to survive. Not everyone has the privilege of attending protests or meetings."*

Participants also expressed a more profound generational disillusionment with the efficacy of social movements themselves. As P6 poignantly observed, *"I feel like we, as a generation, don't truly believe in what we are doing. It's like we speak up just a little, but deep down, we have already accepted defeat."* They further noted the long-standing political status quo as a source of this disillusionment: *"We've been under the same government for twenty years. There are people who have never seen anything different. Maybe that's why we don't really fight—we don't believe change is possible."*

This sense of hopelessness was echoed in participants' distrust in institutional continuity. As P1 critically remarked, *"Sometimes one person says one thing, but someone else says another, and suddenly the laws change."* Their observation, which is shared by other participants as well, illustrates the perceived fragility of political gains and the uncertainty surrounding state commitments to environmental preservation. This unpredictability undermines faith in sustained institutional collaboration and reinforces a preference for non-institutional or individualized forms of ecological engagement.

In summary, the findings reveal that barriers to environmental activism in Validebağ Grove are not merely individual or motivational but deeply embedded in the intersections of political repression, economic inequality, and generational life cycles. The structural weight of these constraints

underscores the need to rethink how movements can create more inclusive and accessible modes of engagement that account for differing capacities and vulnerabilities across the social spectrum.

5.2. Unique themes

5.2.1. Distrust in Institutionalized Activism

One of the participants explained their reasons for not engaging in the movement with their distrust in institutionalized activism. P9's reluctance to engage stemmed not only from broader structural barriers mentioned above but from a profound disillusionment with the ideological fractures within activist circles. They expressed skepticism toward the involvement of political parties in environmental struggles, questioning whether such actors prioritized genuine ecological concerns over political capital:

“By the way, this is not just about Validebağ. Validebağ is merely a reflection of a broader issue. I think this is a much more general problem. Institutional parties are like this, too. Since we work with them, I can say this quite comfortably. They are still very closed structures because there is a political gain there—a political rent, so to speak.”

Their statement underscores a perception that environmental movements may become entangled in factionalism and instrumentalized for political gain—deterring broader participation and eroding trust in collective action initiatives.

5.2.2. A Gendered Perspective: Women's Relationship with the Grove

The relationship between women and Validebağ Grove emerged as a nuanced theme in participants' narratives, revealing both a sense of safety and empowerment as well as lingering concerns about security. Some female participants expressed appreciation for the Grove as a uniquely accessible and safe natural space in an otherwise urban setting, while others highlighted the persistent societal challenges that prevent them from fully engaging with the space, especially at night.

Safety and Accessibility: Contrasting Views

For some women, Validebağ Grove represented a haven within the city, offering a rare opportunity to experience nature without the restrictions often encountered in urban life. One

participant described the Grove as *"one of the few places where I feel truly at ease. It's open, welcoming, and unlike structured parks, it doesn't impose rules on how I move or exist within it."* She emphasized the importance of the Grove in providing a space for women to enjoy nature without the constraints often found in more structured, surveilled environments.

However, other participants expressed hesitations, particularly regarding safety after dark. One participant stated, *"I love coming here during the day, but at night, I wouldn't feel comfortable. It's isolated, and the city's general safety issues apply here as well."* Another participant shared a similar concern, explaining, *"As much as I love this place, I don't come here alone in the evening. It's different for men; they don't have to think twice about these things."*

Symbolic Connection to Adile Sultan and Women's Empowerment

Beyond the themes of safety and accessibility, one participant made a unique connection between Validebağ Grove and its historical namesake, Adile Sultan. Adile Sultan (1826–1899) was an Ottoman royal figure, poet, and philanthropist known for her dedication to women's education and social welfare. She was the only Ottoman princess to have her works published and was instrumental in founding schools for girls. However, it was her mother, Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan, who was one of the most prominent philanthropists of her time, known for her contributions to education, health, and public welfare. The Grove's name, Validebağ, is derived from her title *Valide* (mother), signifying her role as a central maternal figure in the empire. This connection between the grove and strong women figures adds another layer of meaning to the space.

One of the female participants spoke of those Sultans with deep respect, seeing them as inspiring figures in the context of the Grove. *"This place carries the name of a woman who was strong, educated, and visionary. That means something. It makes me feel like this can be a place for women's empowerment, just as she would have wanted."*

She also found deeper meaning in the Grove's name, reflecting on the Turkish words *"Valide"* (mother) and *"Bağ"*, which means not only "vineyard/fruit garden" but also "connection." She expressed fascination with how these meanings align with her own life as a single mother providing for her daughter, elder sister, and mother. *"I think about how 'Valide' means mother and how I, as a mother, find refuge here. 'Bağ' means connection, and I feel deeply connected—to nature, to history, and to the women before me who must have walked these same paths. It makes me feel like I belong here."*

This perspective positioned the Grove not only as a green refuge but also as a symbolic space where women's history and activism could intersect. She further shared her vision for organizing gatherings, workshops, and initiatives aimed at women's empowerment within the Grove. *"Why not use this space for something meaningful? Imagine a series of events here—women's circles, skill-sharing workshops, educational programs. We could honor Adile Sultan's legacy while creating something truly impactful."*

She also envisioned using the Grove as a site for self-defense classes for women, emphasizing the importance of physical empowerment alongside intellectual and social engagement. *"It's not just about coming together to talk, but also about gaining real-life skills that help women feel safe and strong. A regular self-defense workshop here would be a powerful way to reclaim this space for ourselves,"* she explained.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Nature Connectedness, Biodiversity, and Well-Being in Validebağ Grove

This section explores the first research question: How does the relatively high level of biodiversity and unstructured nature of Validebağ Grove influence visitors' experiences, nature connectedness, and well-being? The data from this study reveals a powerful interplay between the grove's ecological characteristics and visitors' psychological and emotional experiences. These findings resonate strongly with, but also expand upon, existing literature on nature connectedness and restorative green space experiences.

6.1.1. Nature Connectedness and Psychological Well-Being: A Reciprocal Relationship

Participants consistently described Validebağ Grove as a space of tranquility, restoration, and emotional refuge. This aligns with foundational research on biophilia and more recent work showing positive correlations between nature connectedness and well-being (Barragan-Jason et al., 2023; Bratman et al., 2019; Capaldi et al., 2014; Howell et al., 2011; Sierra-Barón et al., 2023). Participants often used expressions such as feeling “whole,” “free,” or “at home” in the grove, illustrating how affective ties to place are linguistically embodied and deepening their psychological attachment—a pattern consistent with Capaldi et al.'s (2014) findings on the feedback loop between nature contact and emotional well-being.

What distinguishes this study is the extent to which participants attributed these effects not merely to general nature exposure, but specifically to the grove's unstructured, biodiverse, and relatively wild character—an element less emphasized in existing literature (Jorgensen & Tylecote, 2007; Lev et al., 2020). Conventional urban park designs often prioritize order and accessibility, but these findings suggest that wilder, less controlled environments may offer deeper restorative and psychological benefits (Watson et al., 2023). This highlights a need for urban planners and environmental psychologists to move beyond standardized green space paradigms and consider how untamed landscapes influence well-being (Cheesbrough et al., 2019).

6.1.2. Sensory Engagement, Unstructured Spaces, and Perceived Agency

While previous studies have documented the restorative effects of nature exposure (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Hartig et al., 2014), the findings from Validebağ Grove highlight the importance of multisensory immersion and the perceived autonomy of movement in enhancing those effects. Participants often described their experiences using words such as “flowing,” “organic,” and “alive,” emphasizing how the grove felt distinct from the structured, sterile environments of typical urban parks. These expressions reflect not only sensory engagement but also an affective relationship with the space itself—where the terrain, sounds, and textures collectively created a living atmosphere.

Participants assert that the grove's rich biodiversity and relative wildness enhanced sensorial stimulation, as they described the richness of bird calls, the scent of soil after rain, or the feeling of soft moss underfoot. These experiential elements directly align with the work of Meng et al. (2024) and Marshall et al. (2023), who emphasize the role of biodiversity-driven sensory stimulation in fostering stronger nature connectedness and emotional fulfillment. However, this study deepens those findings by emphasizing the psychological significance of movement and unpredictability in biodiverse environments—elements not sufficiently highlighted in existing research.

A particularly novel finding was the way participants linked unstructured spaces to a sense of personal agency. Unlike formal parks with designated paths and fenced-off areas, the grove allowed visitors to explore freely, reinforcing their sense of autonomy. Participants described the grove as a space where they could “walk on earth instead of concrete,” experience “nature being itself,” and move without the constraints of “fences” or “strict paths.” Beyond mere sensory engagement, these reflections underscore a more profound psychological impact. Many emphasized that the grove enabled them to “move freely” and “interact on their own terms,” contrasting this with structured parks, where visitors feel “told where to go.” This spatial autonomy reflects a form of everyday democratic practice that challenges the technocratic rationalism of formal urban planning. The grove's unpredictability, sensory richness, and informal paths support the co-creation of meanings and experiences—embodying what Habermas (1984) would call a shared lifeworld that is under threat from systemic erasure. For many, the grove represented “a place where I can just be,” offering a rare sense of spatial freedom that fostered both psychological relief and empowerment. This supports the argument that unstructured nature may contribute to personal resilience (Jorgensen & Tylecote, 2007). Thus, the study highlights a potential under-theorized link between unstructured biodiversity-rich environments and psychological agency, inviting further research on the relationship between spatial freedom and mental well-being.

Many participants expressed their appreciation for the lack of rigid trails, describing how the curved, uneven paths and organic landscape design made them feel more engaged with their surroundings. They frequently emphasized the freedom to roam and the organic flow of the landscape as central to their experience of connection. This preference for unstructured paths also aligns with Meng et al.'s (2024) concept of the multi-sensory imprint of biodiverse landscapes, where melodic bird calls, rustling leaves, varied textures underfoot, and the organic flow of winding paths come together to resonate in one's consciousness and deepen emotional attachment. As also noted by Bratman et al. (2019), these sensory elements not only foster connection but evoke a lasting sense of wonder and embodiment—qualities participants in this study linked directly to their affinity for Validebağ Grove's natural form.

6.1.3. Biodiversity as a Psychological Anchor

The grove's high ecological diversity emerged not only as an aesthetic or sensory asset, but as a source of cognitive and emotional grounding. Participants frequently remarked that encountering new species—birds, insects, plants—offered a sense of discovery, inspiration, and peace. Words such as “unexpected,” “magical,” and “surprising” frequently appeared in participant descriptions, conveying the emotional resonance of encountering diverse life forms in the grove. These spontaneous responses highlight biodiversity not just as ecological richness but as an affective stimulus that evokes awe, curiosity, and comfort (Ulrich, 1984; Joye & van den Berg, 2011).

This supports findings from Meng et al. (2024), who note that diverse ecosystems enhance emotional regulation and promote well-being. However, this study adds to the literature by emphasizing that biodiversity also fosters existential meaning-making: participants often interpreted biodiversity as a reminder of life's resilience, complexity, and beauty. Several expressed this sentiment with phrases like "life goes on here no matter what," "it reminds me how small I am," or "everything has its place and rhythm here."

Participants' sense of existential connection was not merely introspective but often carried undertones of optimism grounded in the grove's flourishing diversity. Some described how witnessing seasonal changes in foliage or observing the migration of birds made them feel attuned to the natural rhythms of life. These cyclical patterns were seen not only as markers of ecological richness but as reminders of continuity, renewal, and their own embeddedness in the broader cycle of life. These reflections suggest—echoing Garcia and Waeber's (2024) findings that biodiversity in

restored and reforested areas evokes feelings of hope and renewal—that biodiversity in Validebağ Grove may similarly serve as a symbol of vitality and potential recovery.

Interestingly, this sense of wonder sometimes operated independently of ecological knowledge. Even those who could not identify species by name described feeling “grounded” or “awakened” by the sheer diversity they encountered. This supports Meng et al. (2024), who suggest that biodiversity enjoyment is not contingent upon scientific or ecological literacy but arises through direct experience and affective resonance. These findings nuance earlier claims that biodiversity appreciation depends on ecological literacy (Breitschopf & Bråthen, 2023), showing that deep affective responses can emerge through sensory immersion alone. While some studies argue for the role of education or guided interpretation in enhancing biodiversity perception (Shwartz et al., 2014), participants in this study often experienced wonder and stewardship motivations independently of formal ecological knowledge—suggesting that embodied and relational experiences may be equally powerful in fostering care for nature.

Some participants reported actual behavior changes beyond emotional resonance. Some even reported taking concrete actions inspired by their connection to the grove—for example, beginning to plant native species at home to replicate and support local biodiversity. These participant accounts provide empirical support for claims that biodiversity-rich experiences can transform into everyday ecological practices.

In terms of Research Question 1, this study confirms and extends the literature on nature connectedness, biodiversity, and mental well-being. While it supports established theories like biophilia and attention restoration, it also challenges researchers to move beyond sanitized, controlled “green space” paradigms. The findings suggest that semi-wild, biodiverse, and unstructured environments provide unique psychological, sensory, and existential benefits that deserve further exploration.

This study also raises new questions about the role of spatial freedom and movement autonomy in environmental psychology. The data suggest that the ability to explore and engage with unstructured landscapes contributes not only to emotional well-being but also to a sense of personal agency. Future research may benefit from integrating dimensions such as environmental autonomy, unpredictability, and movement freedom into models of nature-based well-being.

6.2. Motivations and Barriers to Engagement in Environmental Activism at Validebağ Grove

This section explores the complex interplay of emotional, ethical, and structural factors that shape both engagement and disengagement in the environmental movement at Validebağ Grove. It is guided by two closely related research questions: What are the psychological, social, and ethical motivations driving participants' engagement in the environmental activism movement at Validebağ Grove? Which factors demotivate a visitor to engage in the social movement within the Validebağ Grove? The findings point to a wide spectrum of engagement, influenced by emotional, ethical, social, and structural factors. Participants' motivations for involvement in activism were deeply rooted in personal connections to the grove, a sense of moral responsibility, and collective belonging. At the same time, barriers such as political disillusionment, economic precarity, and generational differences played a critical role in shaping levels and forms of engagement. These findings complement (Akbulut & Bartu Candan, 2014; Castree, 2008; Heynen et al., 2006; Agyeman et al., 2016) and, in some cases, challenge key discussions in the environmental activism literature, including those by Capaldi et al. (2014), Bratman et al. (2019), and Davidson (2023). The specific arguments complemented or challenged by these findings are elaborated in the following subsections, where each theme is discussed in relation to the relevant literature.

These findings also align with critical urban theory, which frames struggles over urban green space as more than environmental—they are deeply political, ethical, and relational. The movement at Validebağ Grove reflects not only political claims but also the preservation of shared lifeworlds, everyday democratic practices, and the defense of urban commons against neoliberal encroachment (Castells, 1983; Habermas, 1984; Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2008).

6.2.1. Emotional Attachment and Ethical Responsibility

One of the most prominent drivers of activism was participants' emotional attachment to Validebağ Grove. Many described the grove as a part of their everyday life, using phrases such as "a place that holds my memories" or "an extension of home." This affective bond is often translated into an instinctive drive to protect one's immediate living environment—a reflexive form of territorial care grounded in defending the spaces that sustain their social and emotional lives. While this aligns with earlier studies on place attachment and stewardship behavior, this research emphasizes how spatial intimacy and lived familiarity can transform passive appreciation into active resistance. This also shows similarity with Castells' (1983) argument that grassroots resistance often emerges from the defense of everyday life and shared space, not abstract ideology.

This form of embodied ethics extends the concept of environmental justice beyond rights-based discourse, highlighting how affective and territorial attachments serve as powerful catalysts for collective resistance (Temper et al., 2018). These findings also resonate with Castree's (2008) conceptualization of use-value and exchange-value. While institutional actors often view green spaces like Validebağ Grove in terms of their exchange-value—that is, their potential to generate capital—participants primarily defended the grove for its use-value: as a meaningful, lived, and shared space. Their instinctive attachment and reflex to protect it reflect a defense of everyday life against commodification.

Participants also framed their engagement as a moral responsibility, using language such as "doing the right thing" and "fighting for fairness." These expressions echo the literature on ecological citizenship and environmental justice, emphasizing how ethical consciousness motivates activism. Such sentiments emerged not merely as ideological commitments but as grounded, place-based reactions to perceived threats—aligning with recent debates in environmental ethics that stress relational understandings of justice and responsibility (Akbulut, 2014; Temper et al., 2018). These place-based emotional responses can also be seen as expressions of a shared lifeworld in Habermas's (1984) sense: a background of meanings, values, and social relations co-constructed through daily interaction. In the case of Validebağ, participants' emotional bonds to the grove became catalysts for political consciousness, underscoring how resistance often arises from affective and embodied relationships to place, but not from abstract ideology alone.

Many participants also expressed a biocentric valuation of nature and life itself—grounding their engagement in a profound appreciation for nature's intrinsic value beyond utility or proximity. Several used phrases like "life itself has value," "we must protect it just because it exists," and "nature has a right to thrive, with or without us." These reflections illustrate a spectrum of ethical orientation, spanning from reflexive habitat defense to deeply rooted moral commitments.

In particular, participants' appreciation of the grove's biodiversity emerged not only as an emotional or aesthetic response, but also as a key source of ethical motivation and protective behavior. Sensory and affective encounters with the grove were described as catalysts for action: witnessing the coexistence of many species deepened their desire to protect the area, framed as a responsibility not only to themselves or future generations, but to all life that depends on it. These insights echo findings in the literature linking biodiversity engagement with environmental stewardship and pro-environmental behavior (Bratman et al., 2019; Bosch, 2024).

6.2.2. Community, Collective Identity, and Belonging

Community emerged not only as a context for action but as a source of affective motivation. Participants referred to the movement as a "circle of care," "extended family," or a place of "shared responsibility." These experiences suggest that activism is not only a strategy for ecological defense but also a process of collective worldmaking. While existing literature acknowledges the social bonding aspect of activism (Bal & Baruh, 2020; Bosch, 2024; Arı, 2024), this study contributes a richer understanding of how place-based movements foster a collective identity intertwined with affective belonging. Rather than simply mobilizing people, the movement transforms relationships among individuals and between people and the grove. This transformation resonates with Castells' (1983) view of urban space as a medium through which grassroots movements produce new forms of collective identity. Validebağ Grove becomes not only a meeting place but a living symbol of shared responsibility, civic participation, and resistance to top-down governance.

This contrasts with more institutionalized models of environmental engagement where participation is often formalized, campaign-based, or framed through policy advocacy. The Validebağ movement demonstrates how community-driven, emotionally anchored, and relationally organized activism can be more enduring and inclusive than top-down engagement models.

6.2.3. Distrust in Institutions and Resistance to Commodification

Participants' narratives reflect a strong sense of distrust toward governmental bodies and official discourse around "green development", viewing state-led projects as ideologically incompatible with ecological values. Many saw public projects as veiled forms of privatization, using terms like "greenwashing," "fake sustainability," and "backdoor commercialization." This critical stance highlights a more profound form of disillusionment—one not just about broken trust, but about fundamentally conflicting worldviews between the community and decision-makers.

While political ecology literature often emphasizes structural causes of environmental degradation (Castree, 2008; Heynen et al., 2006; Akbulut & Bartu Candan, 2014), this study shows how distrust is not merely reactive but constitutive of activist identity. Resistance to commodification was described not only as policy critique but as defense of a particular way of life rooted in non-commercial values, collective ownership, and public ethos. Participants used expressions like *"we don't want this place to become another entertainment venue,"* *"right to access to nature should not*

be sold," and *"this grove is not for profit—it's for people"* to articulate their rejection of commercial logic.

These statements not only reflect emotional attachment but also point to a deeper political consciousness about urban commodification and spatial justice. This critique reflects the broader struggle between *use-value* and *exchange-value* (Castree, 2008), where local communities resist the reduction of ecologically and emotionally meaningful spaces into commercial assets. Validebağ Grove, in this context, represents a collective stand against the erasure of shared and lived meaning under urban development paradigms. This nuanced articulation of anti-commodification sentiment adds to discussions of environmental justice by foregrounding cultural and symbolic meanings of nature beyond economic frames (Agyeman et al., 2016; Akbulut & Bartu Candan, 2014).

6.2.4. Varied Forms of Engagement and Fluid Activist Identity

Participants' reflections revealed a nuanced spectrum of engagement, ranging from highly committed activism to more informal, supportive roles. Notably, this theme emerged directly from the field rather than being anticipated in the literature review. The diverse forms of involvement—ranging from symbolic support to institutional grassroots participation—reflect the strength of the study's phenomenological methodology, which allowed participants' lived experiences and conceptualizations of activism to shape the analytical categories rather than being constrained by predefined categories as in the surveys used in earlier research. While some participants expressed reluctance to self-identify as "activists," describing themselves instead as "helpers," "supporters," or "occasional joiners," others openly embraced the activist identity and took part in the institutionalized grassroots organizing within the grove. These included participating in formal meetings, contributing to the preparation of events and petitions, or maintaining regular presence in activist watch groups (Bal & Baruh, 2020).

This diversity shows that simply labelling individuals as "activists" and "non-activist" is not applicable in Validebağ case. While some saw activism as a core part of their identity and were deeply embedded in organized resistance, others engaged intermittently or symbolically, guided more by emotion and contextual readiness than ideological commitment. These findings are in line with previous discussions on civic activism as relational and dynamic rather than static (Bal & Baruh, 2020) and further highlight that participants' perceptions of activism often transcend institutional definitions. The findings thus support critiques of binary models in social movement literature and contribute further by illustrating how meaningful engagement occurs across multiple registers—

whether formal or informal, continuous or sporadic, vocal or quiet. In this sense, Validebağ Grove also functions as what Habermas (1984) terms a *public sphere*—a site for deliberative engagement and intersubjective exchange. Through spontaneous gatherings, informal dialogue, and collective action, participants articulate shared visions of justice, care, and ethics that go beyond institutionalized forms of activism.

Rather than viewing activism as a fixed category, this study underscores its fluid and relational nature—an unfolding process shaped by life circumstances, emotional readiness, and social belonging. The implication is clear: movements benefit from embracing flexible and inclusive models of participation that reflect this complexity and resonate with participants' lived realities.

6.2.5. Barriers to Engagement: Generational and Structural Constraints

Although emotional attachment and moral conviction were strong, they were not always sufficient to mobilize action. Almost all the younger participants who are aged below 50s expressed disengagement due to structural and psychological constraints, including political fear, precarious employment, and hopelessness about change. These findings are parallel to a growing body of literature documenting the erosion of political trust and civic hope among youth, particularly in Türkiye's increasingly authoritarian context (Bee, 2021; Binbuğa, 2024; Öktem & Akkoyunlu, 2016; Uzun & Keçecioğlu, 2024). As Penpecioglu and Taşan-Kok (2016) argue, neoliberal state practices combined with authoritarian state interventions have led to political alienation among educated youth, especially in urban settings. Similarly, Reichert (2017) highlights how Turkish youth, even when abroad, experience persistent structural barriers to meaningful political participation, reinforcing disengagement.

While participants who are over 50 years old benefited from economic security, available time due to retirement, and prior activist experience, younger participants often described themselves as being “trapped in survival mode.” This contrasts with much of the global literature portraying youth as the vanguard of environmental activism (Capaldi et al., 2014; Bratman et al., 2019; Davidson, 2023), and it challenges idealized assumptions of youth agency in environmental movements. Although earlier studies emphasized that nature connectedness and eco-anxiety are correlated with active participation in stewardship movements (Capaldi et al., 2014; Bratman et al., 2019), this research's findings complicate this narrative. Despite high levels of eco-anxiety and strong emotional attachment to the grove, younger participants articulated a deep sense of hopelessness and political

futility. As echoed by Bee and Kaya (2017), civic engagement is frequently hindered by external conditions such as economic precarity, job insecurity, and systemic repression.

Several participants also emphasized that systemic transformation, rather than individual behavioral change, was necessary to address ecological degradation. However, these structural critiques did not consistently translate into sustained movement participation. The dissonance between ecological awareness and political engagement reveals an important insight supported by broader regional studies: Young people are increasingly politically conscious yet institutionally estranged (Accornero, 2019; Mantu, 2023).

In addition to these material barriers, another reason for disengagement emerges as distrust in institutionalized activism. While many participants cited concerns over state repression and personal risks, a few raised deeper ideological critiques. As P9 expressed, their hesitation to engage stemmed from disillusionment regarding how political parties and even activists have used social movements for their own ideological agendas. This mirrors findings by Özdüzen et al. (2024), who highlight the rise of anti-political identities among youth, driven by a perception that institutions—both governmental and civil—are politically compromised. Likewise, Onursal-Beşgül and Gökçe-Kızılkaya (2017) demonstrate how youth councils in Türkiye often replicate hierarchical and exclusionary structures, fostering skepticism rather than inclusion. Similarly, institutional activism in Validebağ Grove is sometimes seen as perpetuating elitism or instrumental politics, as articulated by a limited number of participants. This finding shows that when individuals experience a sense of disconnection from activist organizations, this disconnection can lead to partial engagement or total disengagement, as observed among the participants of this research.

This divergence highlights a key contribution of the study: emotional and psychological factors alone are insufficient without the structural conditions that enable civic action. It also illustrates the value of the phenomenological methodology adopted in this research. By focusing on participants' lived experiences, the phenomenological approach illuminated contradictions and ambivalent dynamics—especially the dissonance between emotional connection and political disengagement—that might have remained obscured within more deductive research designs. Thus, intergenerational dynamics in civic engagement must be re-theorized beyond romanticized assumptions and simplistic causal models.

6.3. Gendered Experiences and Feminist Meaning-Making in Urban Nature

Although this study did not set out to examine gender explicitly, some participants introduced themes related to gendered experiences, spatial agency, and symbolic meaning-making during their interviews. These narratives, arising naturally through the phenomenological approach, highlighted how women connect with Validebağ Grove not merely as a natural area but also as a socially contextualized and emotionally significant location. From perceptions of safety and embodied movement through the Grove to reflections on its historical associations with figures like Adile Sultan, participants offered interpretations that illuminate the intersection of gender, space, and nature connection. While these perspectives do not represent the majority of the sample, their richness warrants analytic attention as they offer important insights into how environmental meaning is shaped by lived social positionalities. This section explores how gender shaped participants' experiences of safety, empowerment, spatial belonging, and civic engagement within the Grove.

While most participants described Validebağ Grove as a source of psychological restoration, emotional regulation, and sensory engagement, a more nuanced picture emerged concerning how this sense of well-being was experienced by women. A few female participants expressed concern about personal safety, particularly when visiting the Grove alone at night or entering more secluded interior areas. These hesitations were shaped not by the Grove itself but by broader societal conditions that often restrict women's spatial autonomy in urban environments (Koskela, 1997; Madge, 1997; Kern, 2021).

However, these concerns cannot be generalized. One participant described the Grove as a space of empowerment and safety, even during nighttime visits. She emphasized the rarity of finding such a place in Istanbul, noting that she felt confident enough to walk alone through the site after dark. At the same time, she described taking precautionary measures—such as moving quietly, avoiding headphones, and staying alert to her surroundings—suggesting that her comfort was conditional rather than absolute.

These contrasting perspectives highlight how unstructured green spaces like Validebağ Grove carry different affective and embodied meanings depending on individual experience, gendered spatial practices, and the broader social dynamics (Thalberg, 2019). As one participant explained, the Grove is “one of the few places where I feel truly at ease... unlike structured parks, it doesn't impose rules on how I move or exist within it.” However, others acknowledged maintaining a degree of vigilance when navigating these same spaces. These reflections challenge common claims about

nature's therapeutic effects by emphasizing the intersection of gender, urban safety, and emotional connectedness—underscoring how even sanctuary-like environments are navigated through layers of social awareness and adaptive strategies (Pain, 2001; McDowell, 1983).

Beyond its ecological and psychological functions, Validebağ Grove was also interpreted by some participants as a space rich with symbolic, feminist meaning and social memory. This dimension appeared in narratives that referenced the Grove's historical association with Adile Sultan, an Ottoman princess known for her commitment to women's education and public welfare. Through this lens, the Grove was not simply a green refuge but a site of maternal legacy, empowerment, and intergenerational continuity (Beebe et al., 2012).

One participant reflected on the significance of the name Validebağ, interpreting the words "*Valide*" (mother) and "*Bağ*" (garden or connection) as personally meaningful, especially in relation to her identity as a single mother. This etymological resonance deepened her affective attachment to the grove and formed her vision of the grove as a potential site for women-centered initiatives—from educational gatherings to community-based empowerment programs. Such interpretations suggest that urban green spaces may serve as loci of feminist memory and affective identification, particularly for those seeking continuity between personal experiences and broader historical narratives (Elias & Rai, 2019).

Urban nature's role in encoding gendered historical memory receives limited emphasis in many environmental discourses (Moeini, 2023). However, in this case, the Grove was described not just as an ecological asset but as a living monument to care-based ethics and solidarity. Participants' reflections demonstrated how gender and environment intersect in ways that blur conventional boundaries between environmental and social justice frameworks (Anguelovski et al., 2020).

While "formal" activism was often associated with protests, legal campaigns, or organized resistance, participants also described alternative forms of engagement that emerged from relational care and community-building practices. Several women envisioned the Grove as a space where relational, educational, and protective actions could be enacted through workshops, communal gatherings, and skill-sharing initiatives. These forms of participation, though less visible than conventional activism, were no less significant in fostering ecological awareness and stewardship. One participant expressed a desire to organize self-defense classes, storytelling circles, and educational programs within the Grove—not as a substitute for protest but as a complementary form of reclaiming space and asserting women's presence in the environmental movement. These forms

of engagement align with what scholars have termed "everyday environmentalism," in which acts of care, protection, and presence constitute environmental stewardship through embodied and relational means (Morrow & Parker, 2020; Kemp, 2001). Also, these practices challenge a narrow framing of activism as necessarily confrontational or institutional, instead pointing to an inclusive understanding rooted in emotional labor, spatial reclamation, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge (Bizarria & Palomino-Schalscha, 2022).

It is important to note that this study was not designed with a gender focus on mind, and no direct questions were posed about participants' experiences in the Grove in relation to their gender identity. Nonetheless, these insights emerged organically within interviews and suggest promising directions for future research. The findings of the study also resonate with broader scholarship on gendered geographies of fear and freedom in public green spaces (Koskela, 1997; Pain, 2001; Kern, 2019).

6.4. Emotional Responses to Environmental Degradation and Coping Strategies

This section addresses the final research question: How do visitors experience eco-anxiety and other emotional responses in relation to ecological degradation, and what coping strategies do they employ? Throughout the interviews, participants used emotionally charged language to describe their experiences—speaking of feeling “suffocated,” “worn out,” “angry,” or “weighed down.” Others described the grove as a “lifeline,” a place where they could “breathe again” or “feel grounded.” These expressions offer vivid insight into the emotional vocabulary people use to navigate the intersection of ecological loss and personal meaning. The findings reveal a rich emotional landscape encompassing anxiety, grief, anger, detachment, and frustration. Participants' reactions were not static; they fluctuated in intensity and character depending on the context, ranging from personal sorrow to political outrage. Importantly, these responses were embodied, socially mediated, and deeply tied to both the global environmental crisis and the local significance of Validebağ Grove.

While the literature review focused on eco-anxiety and political anger—two dominant emotional themes in current environmental movement research—this study uncovered additional affective responses that emerged organically from participants' narratives. In particular, feelings of eco-grief, hopelessness, and emotional exhaustion were prominent, even though these emotions were not initially emphasized in the theoretical framework. Similarly, concepts such as place attachment and affective responses to space were not central to the original research design but became analytically significant through participants' accounts (Lewicka, 2011; Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2021). Their emergence highlights the value of qualitative inquiry in revealing underexplored dimensions of

environmental affect and lived experience. This reflects the study's phenomenological approach, which used semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore participants' lived emotional experiences and meanings. Using open coding methods while analyzing the data allowed key emotional and thematic patterns to emerge inductively from the narratives even if they were not considered during pre-field preparations.

6.4.1. From Attachment to Anxiety: Emotional Responses to Ecological Threats

All participants exhibited a strong sense of connection to nature, both in general and specifically to Validebağ Grove. These emotional attachments shaped how they perceived and responded to ecological degradation. When discussing the global state of nature, participants expressed diffuse sadness, existential worry, and moral outrage. However, when they spoke about threats to Validebağ Grove, their reactions became more immediate and visceral. Words like "devastating," "frustrating," and "claustrophobic" were used to describe what it felt like to witness local degradation.

In line with literature on eco-anxiety (Coffey et al., 2021; Parmentier et al., 2024), many participants described a chronic emotional burden related to environmental destruction. However, the study adds nuance by revealing that this burden was not purely anticipatory or global in nature. It was also rooted in the here-and-now—infused with sensory memories and personal histories tied to a specific place. This place-based eco-anxiety illustrates how global concerns can be intensified by localized threats.

Notably, emotional responses extended beyond anxiety and grief. Many participants expressed frustration or moral anger toward systemic actors—developers, policymakers, or society at large—often using terms like “infuriating,” “negligent,” or “profit over life” to describe their sentiments. As Davidson (2023) argues, eco-anxiety and moral anger can reflect a broader dissatisfaction with political inaction and a yearning for systemic change. Participants articulated outrage not just at ecological harm but at humanity's failure to act despite available knowledge, describing their emotions as “furious,” “infuriated,” and frustrated that industries “know better but don't act.” Others conveyed a quieter grief and weariness, using terms like “detachment” and “emotional exhaustion” to capture their responses to what they saw as structural inertia.

Emotions did not fit neatly into categories. Several participants shifted between awe, grief, and anger in the course of a single conversation. For example, a participant might reflect lovingly on the grove, only to later describe despair at the giraffe's extinction or fury at urban encroachment. This

emotional hybridity underscores the complexity of environmental affect and supports the need for interpretive frameworks that allow for overlapping and coexisting emotional states.

6.4.2. Coping through Withdrawal, Expression, and Action

In response to these burdens, participants employed a range of coping strategies that can be broadly categorized into emotion-focused and problem-focused approaches, though they were often interwoven.

Some participants practiced emotional withdrawal or selective exposure to avoid feeling overwhelmed. This aligns with findings by Kricorian & Turner (2022) and Foster (2022), who highlight the emotional toll of constant exposure to climate crisis content through news and social media. This included taking temporary distance from distressing news or using platform algorithms to filter content. Others sought solace in nature, especially in Validebağ Grove, which was frequently described as a source of grounding and emotional relief. Meanwhile, some participants used humor, philosophical reflection, or cultural engagement (such as music) to manage their distress. For instance, one participant described their approach as “smiling because tomorrow will be worse,” blending fatalism with a desire to emotionally endure.

For others, especially those active in the Validebağ resistance movement, activism was the primary coping mechanism. Many described it to transform feelings of helplessness into meaningful action, often using terms like “fighting hopelessness,” “doing something,” or “not collapsing.” Activism was not only an ethical response but also a means of reclaiming agency and emotional stability. This supports findings from Jain & Jain (2022), Lutz et al. (2023), and Stanley et al. (2021), who argue that eco-anxiety can catalyze pro-environmental action when paired with a sense of agency and community.

Even participants not directly involved in activism described the symbolic power of collective action as a source of hope. Words like “uplifting,” “inspiring,” and “a reason to keep believing” were used to describe how simply witnessing the movement offered emotional relief and reaffirmed a sense of solidarity in the face of systemic inaction.

However, long-term activism also came with emotional costs. Participants described burnout, exhaustion, and strain on personal well-being and relationships. Phrases such as “mentally draining,” “weighs on your body,” and “sometimes too much” were commonly used to convey the toll of

ongoing engagement. To manage these challenges, many leaned on collective support, restorative pauses, and moments of quiet presence in the grove. These narratives underscore that while activism can be a form of coping, it is also emotionally demanding. Recognizing both its restorative and taxing dimensions offers a more complete understanding of how individuals sustain long-term engagement in environmental struggles.

6.4.3. Temporal and Intergenerational Dimensions of Eco-Anxiety

Participants' reflections revealed that eco-anxiety was not only place-based but temporally layered. Many expressed concerns not just for the present, but for future generations. This sense of intergenerational grief—often described as mourning for what future generations may never experience (Jain & Jain, 2022; Davidson, 2023)—was especially apparent among grandparents or parents walking with their children in the grove. Words like “a vanishing future,” or “we’ve already lost too much” surfaced repeatedly.

However, emotional tone varied across generations. Older participants often expressed a resigned acceptance, shaped by life experience and a longer historical perspective—often using phrases such as “we’ve seen worse,” “we’re still standing,” or “it’s not the end yet,” reflecting a surprising sense of perspective and emotional resilience compared to younger participants. Younger participants, by contrast, voiced sharper emotions—exhaustion, hopelessness, or indignation—reflected in expressions like “nothing will change,” “we’re too late,” or “we’re being robbed of a future.” These heightened feelings may reflect the broader pressures younger generations face, including economic insecurity, political instability, and a pervasive sense of social precarity, which amplify their sensitivity to ecological decline.

7. CONCLUSION

This thesis explored how Validebağ Grove, a relatively wild and biodiverse urban green space in Istanbul, shapes individual experiences of nature connectedness, emotional well-being, eco-anxiety, and environmental activism. Grounded in phenomenological methodology and enriched through in-depth interviews with regular visitors, the study offers several important contributions to environmental psychology, urban sociology, and the broader discourse on environmental justice.

7.1. Revisiting the Research Questions

The findings confirm that the unique ecological and spatial qualities of Validebağ Grove—its unstructured layout, rich biodiversity, and relatively unmanaged terrain—play a central role in fostering psychological restoration, emotional resilience, and a deep sense of place. Participants consistently associated their well-being with the sensory, cognitive, and existential affordances of the grove. These results extend prevailing theories in nature connectedness by illustrating how relatively wild urban environments, as opposed to manicured green spaces, uniquely enhance emotional engagement and perceived autonomy.

Moreover, biodiversity emerged not only as an aesthetic or ecological attribute but as a profound psychological anchor. Direct encounters with the unexpected rhythms of nonhuman life—whether birdsong, seasonal foliage, or the coexistence of diverse species—elicited strong affective responses such as awe, wonder, and comfort. These findings challenge assumptions that ecological literacy is a prerequisite for appreciating biodiversity (Shwartz et al., 2014; Breitschopf & Bråthen, 2023). Rather, participants demonstrated that sensory immersion and relational presence alone can catalyze ecological stewardship and affectionate care (Meng et al., 2024).

Across the narratives, the mental health benefits of the grove were clear. Participants repeatedly described how time spent in the grove alleviated symptoms of stress, anxiety, and urban fatigue. This affirms the broader body of literature linking exposure to green space with improved psychological health and underscores the need to preserve such restorative environments in dense urban settings (Wilson, 1984; Kellert & Wilson, 1995; Marsella, 1994; Gómez-Baggethun & Barton, 2013; Palliwoda et al., 2017; Capaldi et al., 2014; Bratman et al., 2019; Lev et al., 2020; Erdönmez & Atmış, 2021; Ventriglio et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2024). The grove was not simply a background for daily routines—it was described as an active agent in emotional healing, existential grounding, and

recovery from life's pressures. These testimonies add to the growing empirical consensus that access to relatively wild urban nature is a public health imperative (Jorgensen & Tylecote, 2007; Cheesbrough et al., 2019; Cameron et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2023; Cooper et al., 2024).

With respect to environmental activism, the study revealed a multifaceted terrain of motivations, identities, and barriers. Emotional attachment to the grove, ethical responsibility toward nonhuman life, and a strong sense of community belonging were primary motivators for participants' engagement in grassroots resistance. Yet activism was not uniformly conceptualized or experienced. Participants enacted their environmental concerns through a wide spectrum of involvement, ranging from formal protest to informal solidarity, reflecting a dynamic and relational understanding of civic agency.

Importantly, the study identified the structural and generational constraints that complicate participation in environmental movements. Particularly among younger individuals, high levels of nature connectedness and ecological concern coexisted with feelings of hopelessness, economic precarity, and political disillusionment. While emotional bonds with nature and eco-anxiety were expected to serve as direct motivators for activism, these findings revealed that activist engagement is profoundly shaped by generational privilege and long-term security. Older participants of the study—often retirees with secure housing and financial stability—noted that they participate actively and consistently in environmental advocacy. In contrast, younger individuals frequently cited job insecurity, fear of political retaliation, and psychological fatigue as barriers to public engagement. This generational divide not only informs who can afford to act but also exposes the unequal distribution of safety and resources within contemporary urban activism.

The emotional landscape surrounding ecological degradation was also complex and layered. While eco-anxiety and political anger aligned with patterns observed in recent literature, this study uncovered additional dimensions, such as eco-grief, emotional exhaustion, and philosophical detachment. Participants coped with these burdens in various ways—including nature immersion, selective withdrawal, humor, cultural engagement, and activism. Notably, even those not directly involved in activism found symbolic strength and emotional solace in witnessing the collective struggle for the grove, highlighting the importance of community narratives in sustaining hope. Furthermore, participants' engagement with these emotions underscores the dual function of Validebağ Grove—as both a site of healing and of anxiety—shaping not only well-being but also emotional vulnerability.

Finally, gendered experiences also informed how the grove was perceived and utilized. For some women, the grove provided a rare sense of safety and autonomy within an urban setting, becoming a symbolic space of empowerment. Others, however, emphasized lingering fears related to visibility, safety at night, and societal norms, thereby revealing the limits of accessibility even in ostensibly inclusive spaces. One participant's vision of using the grove as a space for feminist education and community organizing exemplifies the possibility of reimagining urban green spaces as inclusive hubs for collective agency and empowerment (Bizarria & Palomino-Schalscha, 2022; Morrow & Parker, 2020; Anguelovski et al., 2020).

Participants' critiques of commercialization and distrust of greenwashing were strongly evident throughout the narratives. The grove was perceived not only as a natural sanctuary but also as a frontline in the struggle against the commodification of nature. Efforts to transform public green spaces into commercial zones were viewed as assaults on both ecological integrity and social equity. These perspectives align with broader environmental justice discourses, which frame access to nature as a matter of social and spatial justice rather than individual privilege (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2008; Agyeman et al., 2016). For many, defending Validebağ Grove represented a broader resistance against urban policies that prioritize profit over public well-being.

7.2. Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

This thesis advances several theoretical insights. First, it deepens our understanding of how unstructured urban biodiversity fosters psychological agency, a theme recently theorized in environmental psychology (Rupprecht et al., 2015; Cheesbrough et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2024). Second, it contributes to eco-emotion research by offering a place-based, phenomenologically grounded account of how emotional responses to environmental change are experienced, managed, and translated into action—or inaction. Third, it reframes activism not as a static identity but as an evolving and context-sensitive relational practice shaped by personal histories, structural barriers, and socio-emotional readiness.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of a phenomenological approach in uncovering the nuanced, embodied, and affective dimensions of environmental experience. By prioritizing participants' lived narratives over predetermined constructs, this method enabled the emergence of unanticipated but analytically rich themes, such as the ethical framing of biodiversity, the emotional costs of long-term activism, and the gendered symbolism of public green space.

7.3. Implications for Policy and Practice

Findings from this study have concrete implications for urban planning, environmental policy, and public health. First, urban green space design should move beyond highly structured, ornamental models toward preserving and integrating relatively wild, biodiverse environments that foster more profound psychological and ecological benefits. Second, environmental education and outreach initiatives would benefit from acknowledging the emotional and existential dimensions of environmental loss, creating space for collective grief, meaning-making, and emotional resilience. Third, activist and policy frameworks must attend to the socio-economic conditions that constrain participation, ensuring that environmental movements remain inclusive and responsive to diverse forms of engagement.

Low-risk forms of participation—such as digital activism, educational outreach, and community-based conservation—may provide more accessible pathways for younger or precariously situated individuals. Advocacy strategies that emphasize solidarity over confrontation and recognize diverse ways of “doing activism” can help foster intergenerational collaboration and broaden the base of environmental resistance.

Validebağ Grove stands not only as an ecological refuge but also as a socio-emotional commons—an emblem of how natural spaces in urban settings anchor individual well-being, collective memory, and civic resistance. In defending this space, participants were not only preserving biodiversity but reclaiming the right to breathe, belong, and act in an increasingly commodified city.

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APPENDIX A: THEMATIC CODING AND PARTICIPANTS PROFILE TABLES

Table A.1. Themes, sub-themes, and corresponding thematic codes with key words/phrases

Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Codes	Key Words/Phrases (translated)	Key Words/Phrases (original)
Nature Connectedness and Well-being	Psychological and emotional well-being	Sense of belonging	<i>“feel like I’m home”, “sense of wholeness”</i>	<i>“evim gibi”, “benim bir parçam”</i>
		Emotional release, peace	<i>“peace”, “a sense of calm”, “feel lighter”, “breathe freely”</i>	<i>“huzur”, “rahatlama”, “hafifleme/hafif hissetme”, “rahatça nefes alma”</i>
		Connection to something greater	<i>“connected—to nature, to life”, “part of something bigger than myself”, “a part of nature”,</i>	<i>“doğa ve yaşamla bağlantı(lı/da)”, “kendimden büyük bir şeyin / doğanın parçası (olduğumu hissediyorum)”</i>
	Restorative effects	Stress relief	<i>“stress melting away”, “reduces my stress”, “absorbs my worries”</i>	<i>“stresim eriyip gidiyor/azalıyor”, “kaygılarımı çekip alıyor”</i>
		Emotional and cognitive clarity	<i>“worries don’t seem so overwhelming”, “clears my mind”, “my thoughts settle into place”, “mental refresh”, “helps me reset”</i>	<i>“kaygılandığım şeyler o kadar da boğucu görünmüyor”, “zihnim arınıyor”, “düşüncelerim yerine oturuyor”, “zihinsel tazelenme”, “resetlememe yardım ediyor”</i>
		Grounding and stability	<i>“grounding”, “sense of calm”, “emotional stability”</i>	<i>“topraklanma”, “rahatlama/rahatlık”, “duygusal stabilite”</i>
	Sensory engagement	Calming effect of nature exposure	<i>“scent of the trees”, “rustling of the leaves”, “singing birds”, “symphony that calms”</i>	<i>“ağaçların kokusu”, “yaprakların hışırtısı”, “kuşların şakıması/ötüşü/cıvıltıları”, “rahatlatan bir senfoni”</i>

Table A.1 continued

Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Codes	Key Words/Phrases (translated)	Key Words/Phrases (original)
Appreciation of Biodiversity	Sensory stimulation	Multisensory richness	<i>“see and hear”, “natural sounds”, “movement of leaves”, “colors [of ...]”</i>	<i>“görmek ve duymak”, “doğal sesler”, “yaprakların kıpırtısı”, “(çiçeklerin/böceklerin/kuşların) renkleri”</i>
	Social and cultural dimensions	Shared nature experiences	<i>“sharing that moment”, “conversation starter”, “shared ritual”, “connecting through nature”</i>	<i>“anı paylaşmak”, “sohbet açıcı”, “paylaşılan bir ritüel”, “doğa sayesinde bağlantı kurma”</i>
		Generational connection	<i>“stories [of urban wildlife] from my parents”, “continuing that connection”</i>	<i>“ailemden duyduğum şehirdeki yaban hayatı hikayeleri”, “bu bağlantıyı sürdürmek”</i>
	Psychological and emotional benefits	Awe, wonder and discovery	<i>“amazing creature”, “each visit feels special”, “unexpected species”</i> <i>“wonder”, “stepping into a living ecosystem”, “sense of discovery”</i>	<i>“müthiş bir yaratık”, “her ziyareti özel kılıyor”, “beklenmedik türler”, “hayret/merak”, “yaşayan bir ekosisteme adım atmak”, “keşif duygusu”</i>
		Biophilia and joy	<i>“a reminder of how complex and beautiful life can be”, “diversity trigger serotonin/makes me happy”</i>	<i>“yaşamın ne kadar karmaşık ve güzel olabileceğini hatırlatıyor”, “çeşitlilik serotonin salgılatıyor/beni mutlu ediyor”</i>
		Ecological embeddedness	<i>“a being among many others”, “part of something larger”, “sense of balance”, “connection”, “welcoming me”</i>	<i>“varlıklar arasında bir varlık”, “(benden) daha büyük bir şeyin bir parçası”, “(doğal) dengeyi hissetme”, “beni kucaklıyor/sarmalıyor”</i>
		Resiliency and continuity	<i>“being surrounded by living things”, “gives me hope”, “life goes on”</i>	<i>“canlı şeylerle çevrelenme”, “bana umut veriyor”, “hayat devam ediyor”</i>

Table A.1 continued

Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Codes	Key Words/Phrases (translated)	Key Words/Phrases (original)
Structured vs. Unstructured Green Spaces	Preferences for relatively wild spaces	Authenticity, surprise	<i>“feels wild”, “not manicured”, “not structured”, “small surprises”, “a piece of real nature”, “not tamed”</i>	<i>“yabanî hissettiriyor”, “yapılandırılmış değil”, “küçük sürprizler”, “hakiki doğadan bir parça”, “ehlileştirilmemiş”</i>
		Natural rhythms	<i>“nature in its purest form” “thrives in its own way”, “own rhythm”, “follows its course”, “natural cycles”</i>	<i>“en saf haliyle doğa”, “kendi bildiği gibi yetiştiriyor”, “kendi ritmi”, “kendi yolunda”, “doğal döngüler”</i>
	Psychological and sensory benefits	Immersion and calm	<i>“surrounded by/lose yourself in greenery”, “mind can wander freely”, “sense of calm and release”</i>	<i>“yeşillikle çevrelenmek/kendini yeşilin içinde kaybetmek”, “zihnim özgürce dolaşabilir”, “rahatlama ve salıverme hissi”</i>
		Richer sensory experience	<i>“textures, scents, and sounds”, “walking on earth”, “touching grass”, “rich and relaxing experience”, “refreshing”</i>	<i>“dokular, kokular ve sesler”, “toprakta yürümek”, “çimene dokunmak”, “doyurucu ve rahatlatıcı bir deneyim”, “yenileyici”</i>
		Freedom, autonomy, and agency	<i>“sense of freedom”, “walk/sit wherever you want”, “no strict paths”, “interact on your own terms”, “control over my experience”, “not being told where to go”, “empowering”</i>	<i>“özgürlük hissi”, “nerde istersen orada yürü/otur”, “mecburî patikalar yok”, “kendi istediğin gibi/canının istediği gibi etkileşime geçiyorsun”, “nereye gideceğin söylenmiyor”, “güçlendirici”</i>

Table A.1 continued

Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Codes	Key Words/Phrases (translated)	Key Words/Phrases (original)
Urbanization-Driven Environmental Loss	Validebağ Grove as a refuge	Contrast to urban life	“concrete”, “overwhelming”, “no place to breath”, “on alert”, “in survival mode”, vs “Validebağ is (...) a different world”, “[here] nature still exists”, “chaos stops”	“beton”, “bunaltıcı/boğucu”, “nefes alacak yer yok”, “alarm halinde”, “survival modunda”, vs “Validebağ bambaşka bir dünya”, “(burada) doğa hâlâ varlığını sürdürüyor”, “kaos duruyor”
		Alienation vs. belonging	“city makes me feel alienated/alone” vs “I feel like I belong here”	“şehir beni yabancılaşmış/yalnız hissettiriyor”, vs “buradayken (buraya/doğaya/bütüne) ait hissediyorum”
		Sensory refuge	“noise”, “city feels like an oven [heat]”, “polluted air” vs “listen to the wind”, “cooler”, “shade”, “cleaner air”	“gürültü”, “şehir fırın gibi sıcak”, “hava pis” vs “rüzgârı dinlemek”, “serin”, “gölge”, “temiz hava”
		Public health value	“relentless pressure of urban life” vs “place to unwind/ connect with nature”	“şehrin durmabilmez baskısı” vs “doğayla bağ kuracak/dinlecek/arınacak bir yer”

Table A.1 continued

Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Codes	Key Words/Phrases (translated)	Key Words/Phrases (original)
Commercialization and Commodification of Nature	Impact on Validebağ Grove	Loss of its unique qualities	“pressure to commercialize”, “privatization”, “profit-driven structures”, “replacement of nature”	“ticarileştirme baskısı”, “özelleştirme”, “kâr odaklı yapılar”, “doğanın yerinden edilmesi”
	Green Washing	Misleading framing	“eco-park”, “nation’s garden”, “excuse for profit”, “greenwashing”	“eko-park”, “millet bahçesi”, “kâr elde etmek için bahane”, “greenwashing/doğallığın pazarlanması”
	Socioeconomic divide	Restricted access	“not everyone can access”, “about purchasing power”, “only accessible if you can afford”, “exclusive access”	“herkesin erişimi yok”, “satın alabilme gücüyle ilgili”, “ancak paran varsa kullanıma açık”, “belli bir zümre için ulaşılabilir”
	Impact on public health and well-being	Mental health erosion	“takes away place to relax”, “impacts on our mental health”	“rahatlayacak yerleri yok ediyor”, “ruh sağlığımızı etkiliyor”
		Environmental harm	“more traffic”, “more pollution”, “less clean air”	“daha çok trafik”, “daha çok kirlilik”, “daha az temiz hava”

Table A.1 continued

Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Codes	Key Words/Phrases (translated)	Key Words/Phrases (original)
Emotional Responses to Nature's Decline and Coping Strategies	Eco-anxiety	Physical symptoms	<i>"tight breathing", "claustrophobic effect", "feels like drowning"</i>	<i>"nefes daralması", "klastrofobik etki", "boğulacak gibi oluyorum"</i>
		Mental/ emotional symptoms	<i>"anxious", "worried"</i>	<i>"kaygılı", "endişeli"</i>
	Anger	Anger and frustration	<i>"furious", "why aren't we doing it now?", "angry", "frustrated"</i>	<i>"öfkeli", "neden şimdi (daha iyisini) yapmıyoruz madem?!", "sinirli", "kızgın"</i>
	Eco-grief and hopelessness	Sadness and loss	<i>"grieving", "can't save", "things are drying up", "hopelessness", "fighting a losing battle"</i>	<i>"yas/yaslı", "kurtarılamayacak (biri gibi)", "her şey kuruyup çekiliyor", "umutsuzluk", "kaybedilen bir savaşı sürdürmek gibi"</i>
		Nostalgia	<i>"miss snow", "natural areas... almost gone"</i>	<i>"karı özliyorum", "doğal alanlar nerdeyse yok oldu"</i>
	Coping mechanisms	Avoidance	<i>"only follow good news", "create a bubble", "try not to let it affect me"</i>	<i>"sadece iyi haberleri takip ediyorum", "kendime bir baloncuk yarattım", "beni etkilemesine izin vermemeye çalışıyorum"</i>
		Humor and fatalism	<i>"smile, because tomorrow will be worse"</i>	<i>"gülümse, çünkü yarın daha da beter olacak"</i>
		Action-oriented responses	<i>"sign petitions", "make sustainable choices", "fight hopelessness"</i>	<i>"imza veriyorum/dilekçeleri imzalıyorum", "sürdürülebilir seçimler yapıyorum", "umutsuzluğa karşı direniyorum/savaşıyorum"</i>
		Connection and meaning	<i>"reminds me what we're fighting for", "grandkids help a lot"</i>	<i>"ne için mücadele ettiğimizi hatırlatıyor", "torunların varlığı çok yardımcı oluyor"</i>

Table A.1 continued

Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Codes	Key Words/Phrases (translated)	Key Words/Phrases (original)
Practices, Motivations, and Meanings of Environmental Activism	Forms of engagement and activist identity	Passive or symbolic support	<i>"sign petitions", "I support [the cause]", "trust the organizations", "respect those there 24/7"</i>	<i>"imza veriyorum", "mücadeleyi/davayı destekliyorum/haklı buluyorum", "oluşumlara güveniyorum", "7/24 orada olup nöbet tutanlara çok saygı duyuyorum"</i>
		Situational solidarity	<i>"if the Grove were under threat", "I join if I believe in it", "when there is an emergency"</i>	<i>"Koru tehlike/tehdit altındaysa", "nedenine inanırsam katılıyorum", "acil bir durum olduğunda"</i>
		Activism as lifestyle	<i>"professional activism", "like a job", "become a part of my identity/who I am", "I am an activist"</i>	<i>"profesyonel aktivizm", "iş gibi", "kişiliğimin/kimliğimin bir parçası", "aktivistim"</i>
		Distinctions within activism	<i>"not a militant", "partially engaged", "not a full time-activist"</i>	<i>"militanı değilim", "kısmen katılıyorum", "tam-zamanlı bir aktivist değilim"</i>
		Invisible labor and background roles	<i>"sell calendars", "organize music for morale", "engaged but not in the front line"</i>	<i>"takvimlerini satıyorum", "moral olması için müzik dinletisi düzenledik", "katılıyorum ama ön saflarda/planda değilim"</i>
	Place attachment	Emotional attachment	<i>"grew up here", "part of my home/who I am", "a living memory"</i>	<i>"burada büyüdüm", "evimin/kim olduğumun bir parçası", "yaşayan bir hatıra"</i>
	Biodiversity awareness	Stewardship and ethical motivation	<i>"many species rely on it", "about all life depends on it", "for saving the habitats of [species]", "for the animals and plants", "ethical reason", "responsibility"</i>	<i>"pekçok türün yaşamı Koru'ya bağlı", "bütün yaşam doğaya bağlı", "türlerin yaşam alanlarını/habitatlarını korumak için", "hayvanlar ve bitkiler için", "etik nedenlerle", "sorumluluk"</i>
	Community and solidarity	Collective power	<i>"part of something bigger", "brought people together", "power in numbers", "neighborhood"</i>	<i>"insanları bir araya getirdi", "kalabalığın/kitlenin/sayımızın gücü", "komşuluk"</i>
	Distrust in authorities	Systemic critique	<i>"power groups", "for profit", "hypocrisy", "can't trust authorities", "they don't care", "we have to do it ourselves"</i>	<i>"güç odakları", rant için", "ikiyüzlülük", "otoritelere güvenmiyorum", "umurlarında değil", "kendimiz yapmak zorundayız"</i>
	Social justice struggle	Equity and access	<i>"fairness", "belongs to all of us", "who gets to have nature", "standing against the system/commercialization/privatization", "reclaiming what is ours"</i>	<i>"adalet", "hepimize/herkese ait", "doğaya kimin erişimi olabileceği", "sisteme/ticarileşmeye/özelleştirme eye karşı", "hakkımıza sahip çıkma"</i>
	Personal transformation	Perception shift	<i>"I used to feel powerless... now I know that collective resistance matters/our voice has weight", "I came here just to relax...now I see myself as an activist"</i>	<i>"Eskiden güçsüz hissedirdim... şimdi biliyorum ki kolektif direnişin etkisi var/sesimizin bir ağırlığı var", "buraya sadece rahatlamak için geldim... şimdi kendimi activist olarak görüyorum"</i>
		Emotional cost	<i>"it's exhausting/overwhelming/drainin g", "open window in my mind", "professional activism"</i>	<i>"çok yorucu/bunaltıcı/tüketici", "aklımda hep açık bir sekme", "profesyonel aktivizm"</i>

Table A.1 continued

Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Codes	Key Words/Phrases (translated)	Key Words/Phrases (original)
Barriers to Engagement	Generational divides	Normalized loss	<i>“accepted defeat”, “never seen anything different”, “don’t believe change is possible”</i>	<i>“yenilgiyi kabullendik”, “başka bir şey görmedik ki”, “değişimin mümkün olacağına inanmıyoruz”</i>
	Socioeconomic constraints	Time and energy limits	<i>“constant survival mode”, “don’t have time or energy”</i>	<i>“sürekli survival modundayım”, “ne vaktim ne de enerjim var”</i>
	Political disillusionment	Fear and futility	<i>“can’t risk more”, “political climate discourages me”, “my profession makes it risky”, “scared”</i>	<i>“daha fazlasını riske edemem”, “politik durumlar gözümü korkutuyor”, “mesleğim gereği riskli”, “korkuyorum”</i>
Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Codes	Key Words/Phrases (translated)	Key Words/Phrases (original)
Distrust in Institutionalized Activism	-	Ideological fractures	<i>“fractures within activist circles”, “closed structures”</i>	<i>“aktivist çevrelerdeki fraksiyonlaşma”, “kapalı oluşumlar”</i>
Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Codes	Key Words/Phrases (translated)	Key Words/Phrases (original)
A Gendered Perspective	Safety and accessibility	Gendered safety concerns	<i>“wouldn’t feel comfortable at night”, “isolated”, “different for men”</i>	<i>“gece gitsem rahat hissetmezdim”, “izole bir yer”, “erkekler için farklıdır”</i>
	Women’s empowerment	Symbolic connection	<i>“place for women’s empowerment”, “Adile Sultan’s legacy”</i>	<i>“kadınların güçlenmesi için bir alan”, “Adile Sultan’ın mirası”</i>
		A public space for skill-building	<i>“self-defense workshops”, “women’s circles”, “skill-sharing programs”</i>	<i>“öz-savunma atölyeleri”, “kadın çemberleri”, “becerilerimizi paylaşacağımız programlar”</i>

Table A.2. Participants profiles

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Motivations for Visiting	Enjoying nature, well-being, grounding, emotional regulation	Cognitive clarity, solitude, existential reflection, calming, inspiration	Escape from urban chaos, reconnect with nature, regulate emotions	Emotional grounding, mental clarity, physical and psychological wellness	Hope renewal, emotional relief, perceived authenticity, inspired by biodiversity
Main Activities in the Grove	Meditation, jogging, nature observation, walking barefoot, hammock use	Walking, solitary reflection, academic work, singing, wildlife observation	Walking, fresh air, stargazing, birdwatching, mental retreat	Walking, grounding, birdwatching, climbing trees, lying on mat, playing with children	Spending time with friends, mental rest, observation of fauna
Perception on Validebağ Grove	Relatively wild, sacred, authentic, not artificial	Self-organized, imperfect, semi-wild, historical continuity, urban wilderness	Less human intervention, unstructured, authentic, niche urban wilderness	Partially wild, minimally intervened, magic-like, organically complex	Partially structured, some untouched areas; authentic and non-commodified
Experience of Biodiversity	Notices rich biodiversity; can name a few bird and tree species	Notices insects, fungi, turtles, enjoys surprises	Notices bird species, diverse plants, insects; enjoys surprise encounters	Notices wide range of birds, trees, textures, colors; multisensory fascination	Values realness and affective connection, fauna-focused
Health Impacts	Stress reduction, emotional and physical well-being	Mental clarity, stress relief, productivity boost, no distinct physical impact	Improved emotional well-being, mental clarity, stress relief	Major improvement in mental health, sleep, diet, emotional regulation	Reduces anxiety and depression, improves clarity, offers perspective
Perspective on Urbanization	Critical of artificial parks, values self-organized ecosystems	Critical of commodification, greenwashing, capitalistic planning	Critical of urban sprawl, loss of green spaces, ecological grief	Critical of commodification and human domination of nature, mourns ecological loss	Critical of commodification, urban structuring, loss of realness
Feelings about the State of Nature	Strong planetary distress; seeks refuge in the grove	Concern over climate crisis and systemic unsustainability; prepares defensively	Fatalistic tones; uses humor and detachment to cope with helplessness	From deep anxiety to melancholic acceptance and fatalistic hope	High eco-anxiety, especially about microplastics; avoids thinking about it

Table A.2 continued

	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Motivations for Visiting	Routine mental relief, emotional grounding, sensory engagement, companionship with dogs	Relaxation, socialization, mental recharge	Peace, escape from daily stress, emotional replenishment	Desire for calm, detachment from urban pressure, sense of freedom	Social bonding, sensory richness, nature appreciation
Main Activities in the Grove	Walking, sitting, listening to music, observing dogs and insects, smoking, resting	Enjoying nature, socializing, relaxing with partner and friends	Enjoying nature, socializing, solitary visits for tranquillity	Relaxation, reflection, escaping urban gaze, occasional socializing	Exploring trees and birds with friends; communal visits
Perception on Validebağ Grove	Partially natural due to reduced human interference over time	Values semi-wild setting and biodiversity; enriching and vibrant	Appreciates less-manicured structure, immersive and calming	Appreciates untouched, less-manicured space; medium for nature connection	Unstructured, wild; space of freedom and autonomy
Experience of Biodiversity	Trees, insects (beetles, caterpillars, mole crickets); observes variation with interest	Finds diverse ecosystem calming and aesthetically rich	Feels wonder and peace in face of biodiversity and natural rhythms	Enjoys semi-wild character and atmospheric richness; not detail-focused	Enjoyment of biodiversity; recognition of some bird, tree, and flowering plant species
Health Impacts	Reduces anxiety, offers mental clarity, temporary escape from urban stress	Reduces stress, improves mood, encourages balance	Promotes happiness, emotional stability, resilience	Improves mental and physical health; essential during pandemic	Reduces anxiety and mental fatigue, release of tension in the body
Perspective on Urbanization	Critical of excessive development, angered by vacant luxury sites, values organic integration	Concerned about loss of green spaces, mental health impacts	Critical of environmental degradation, values preservation	Critical of urban sprawl and development pressure; calls for inclusive planning	Critiques commercialization and spatial exclusion
Feelings about the State of Nature	Physical tightness, breathlessness, and anger; seeks refuge in walks and good news	Manages anxiety through nature exposure and community presence	High concern, alleviated through nature and small coping strategies	Anxiety about climate crisis; copes via immersion in nature and inclusive dialogue	Critical of commercialization and spatial exclusion

Table A.2 continued

	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Motivations for Visiting	Deep connection to untouched nature, mental clarity, ethical responsibility, enjoyment of biodiversity	Emotional attachment, ecological responsibility, physical health, communal experience	Sense of rootedness, appreciation for quietude and biological continuity	Attachment to public space, resistance to privatization	Intergenerational connection; protection of meaningful space
Main Activities in the Grove	Reading, walking, observing species, climbing trees, napping, frisbee, cycling	Walking, meeting friends, observing flora/fauna, activism, community building, sports	Walking, enjoying fresh air, observing seasonal changes, resting under trees	Cultural engagement, observing changes	Long-term personal and familial use; wants same access for children
Perception on Validebağ Grove	Values unstructured, untouched spaces	Interplay of living and non-living beings; values self-sustaining biodiversity	Calm, shaded, organic balance; cultural and ecological continuity	Loss of natural structure due to urban commercialization	Partially wild, socially inclusive; valued for its emotional and historical resonance
Experience of Biodiversity	Finds joy in biodiversity; observes interactions between flora and fauna with intellectual curiosity	High awareness of seasonal cycles, ecological interdependence, and species	Notices seasonal changes in trees and undergrowth, birds, wildflowers, and fruits	Witnessed decline in flora and fauna, including squirrels and birds	Engaged with birds and trees; notes changes across generations
Health Impacts	Significant boost to mental and physical health; absence from nature causes anxiety and tension	Considers green space essential for emotional and physical healing; prefers nature over medication	Reduces tension, breathing ease, emotional uplift	Fresh air, emotional clarity, connectedness to space	Improves mood and mental clarity; reduces stress and supports reflection
Perspective on Urbanization	Highly critical; sees urbanization and capitalism as ecologically destructive systems	Critical of commodification and state-led transformations; balances realism and idealism in land use politics	Concerned about destruction of long-standing green areas and creeping commercialization	Critical of gentrification and destruction of public heritage	Wants equitable and inclusive urban green access
Feelings about the State of Nature	Sadness, tension, hopelessness; copes through activism, and nature	Sorrow; countered through activism and community resistance	Climate grief; seeks comfort in daily rituals and observation	Strong concern about climate change and species loss	Emotional weight; exhaustion from continuous resistance

Table A.2 continued

	P16	P17	P18	P19
Motivations for Visiting	Emotional grounding, connection to nature, resistance to urbanization, scientific monitoring	Mental clarity, green access, microclimate benefit, philosophical reflection	Emotional refuge, physical activity, social connection	Emotional refuge, physical activity, social connection
Main Activities in the Grove	Walking, activism, biodiversity monitoring, reading, sunsets, community engagement	Walking, socializing, occasional support for protests, reflective solitude	Walking, socializing, observing seasons, activism support	Walking, socializing, observing seasons, activism support
Perception on Validebağ Grove	Cultural and ecological heritage site; semi-wild forest with sacred and historical value	Semi-wild, self-sustaining microclimate; one of the last accessible green spaces in Istanbul	Values semi-wild spaces, seasonal rhythms, tree diversity	Notices loss of wildness, mourns seasonal shifts
Experience of Biodiversity	Extensive observation of fauna and flora; 150+ bird species; personal monitoring and recording via apps	Observes frogs, small streams, trees, seasonal change; critiques human-driven ecological damage	Recognizes biodiversity loss, identifies trees and birds	Describes seasonal changes, fruiting cycles, and loss of squirrels
Health Impacts	Enhances mental resilience, provides sensory and emotional peace despite burnout	Psychological relief, sensory calm, physical ease through nature exposure	Improves oxygen intake, helps regulate mood and routine	Improves oxygen intake, supports emotional and physical balance
Perspective on Urbanization	Highly critical of commodification and gentrification	Highly critical; sees modern urban planning as alienating and ecologically damaging	Frustrated by commercialization, supports community resistance	Frustrated by commercialization, supports community resistance
Feelings about the State of Nature	Persistent vigilance and anger; channeled into long-term resistance	Grief, frustration, philosophical disappointment; sees extinction as deserved	Climate grief; engages in social resilience strategies	Deep loss and frustration; mitigated through community support

APPENDIX B: TREE AND SHRUB SPECIES IN VALİDEBAĞ GROVE

Table B.1. Tree and shrub species in Validebağ Grove (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Department of City Planning, 2019). Translated by the author.

Turkish Name	English Name	Scientific Name
Kermes Meşesi	Kermes Oak	<i>Quercus coccifera</i>
Dişbudak Yapraklı Akçaağaç	Ash-leaved Maple	<i>Acer negundo</i>
Yalancı Çınar Yapraklı Akçaağaç	False Sycamore Maple	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>
Ova Akçaağacı	Field Maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>
Çınar Yapraklı Karaağaç	Sycamore-leaved Elm	<i>Ulmus minor</i>
Menengiç	Terebinth Tree	<i>Pistacia terebinthus</i>
Çınar	Oriental Plane	<i>Platanus orientalis</i>
Akasya	Acacia	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>
Güvey Kandili	Japanese Pagoda Tree	<i>Styphnolobium japonicum</i>
Kokar Ağaç	Tree of Heaven	<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>
Katalpa	Northern Catalpa	<i>Catalpa speciosa</i>
Sofora	Japanese Pagoda Tree	<i>Styphnolobium japonicum</i>
Gürgen Yapraklı Karaağaç	Hornbeam-leaved Elm	<i>Ulmus glabra</i>
Kanada Kavağı	Canadian Poplar	<i>Populus × canadensis</i>
Ceviz	Walnut	<i>Juglans regia</i>
Zeytin	Olive Tree	<i>Olea europaea</i>
Dişbudak	Ash Tree	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
İhlamur	Linden Tree	<i>Tilia cordata</i>
Erik	Plum	<i>Prunus domestica</i>
Kiraz	Cherry	<i>Prunus avium</i>
Filbahri	Jasmine Tree	<i>Phillyrea latifolia</i>
Ayva	Quince	<i>Cydonia oblonga</i>
Elma	Apple Tree	<i>Malus domestica</i>
Maklura	Osage Orange	<i>Maclura pomifera</i>
Leylak	Lilac	<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>
Hanım Parmağı	Finger Grape	<i>Vitis vinifera</i>
Çitlenbik	Hackberry	<i>Celtis australis</i>
Kurtbağrı (Japon)	Japanese Privet	<i>Ligustrum japonicum</i>
Armut	Pear Tree	<i>Pyrus communis</i>
Palmiye	Palm Tree	<i>Arecaceae family</i>
Muşmula	Medlar	<i>Mespilus germanica</i>
İncir	Fig Tree	<i>Ficus carica</i>
Laz Kirazı	Cherry Laurel	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>

Table B.1 continued

Turkish Name	English Name	Scientific Name
Akçakesme	Mock Privet	<i>Phillyrea angustifolia</i>
Badem	Almond	<i>Prunus dulcis</i>
Çoban Püskülü	Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Hint Leylağı	Crape Myrtle	<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i>
Fındık	Hazelnut	<i>Corylus avellana</i>
Japon Ayvası	Japanese Quince	<i>Chaenomeles japonica</i>
Kelebek Çalısı	Butterfly Bush	<i>Buddleja davidii</i>
Erguvan	Judas Tree	<i>Cercis siliquastrum</i>
Defne	Bay Laurel	<i>Laurus nobilis</i>
Zakkum	Oleander	<i>Nerium oleander</i>
Yaprağını Dökmeyen Kartopu	Evergreen Viburnum	<i>Viburnum tinus</i>
Kuşkonmaz	Asparagus	<i>Asparagus officinalis</i>
Mavi Servi	Blue Cypress	<i>Cupressus arizonica</i>
Şimşir	Boxwood	<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>
Yasemin	Jasmine	<i>Jasminum officinale</i>
Taflan	Cherry Laurel	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>
Pitosporum	Pittosporum	<i>Pittosporum tobira</i>
Alıç	Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Fıstık Çamı	Stone Pine	<i>Pinus pinea</i>
Sahil Çamı	Maritime Pine	<i>Pinus pinaster</i>
Karaçam	Black Pine	<i>Pinus nigra</i>
Kızılçam	Turkish Pine	<i>Pinus brutia</i>
Doğu Mazısı	Oriental Arborvitae	<i>Platycladus orientalis</i>
Himalaya Sediri	Himalayan Cedar	<i>Cedrus deodara</i>
Doğu Ladini	Oriental Spruce	<i>Picea orientalis</i>
Gül	Rose	<i>Rosa spp.</i>
Servi	Cypress	<i>Cupressus sempervirens</i>
Porsuk	Yew	<i>Taxus baccata</i>
Glediçya	Honey Locust	<i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>
İspirya	Spiraea	<i>Spiraea spp.</i>
Orman Sarmaşığı	Forest Ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>
Asma	Vine	<i>Vitis vinifera</i>
Adi Kurtbağrı	Common Privet	<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>
Top Akasya	Globe Acacia	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i> 'Umbraculifera'
Akdut	White Mulberry	<i>Morus alba</i>
Büyük Çiçekli Manolya	Southern Magnolia	<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>
Lübnan Sediri	Lebanon Cedar	<i>Cedrus libani</i>
Meşe	Oak	<i>Quercus spp.</i>

Table B.1 continued

Turkish Name	English Name	Scientific Name
At Kestanesi	Horse Chestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>
Ak Söğüt	White Willow	<i>Salix alba</i>
Lale Ağacı	Tulip Tree	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>
Ateş Dikeni	Firethorn	<i>Pyracantha coccinea</i>
Karadut	Black Mulberry	<i>Morus nigra</i>
Şeftali	Peach	<i>Prunus persica</i>
Ortanca	Hydrangea	<i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i>
Herdem Yeşil Cehri	Evergreen Buckthorn	<i>Rhamnus alaternus</i>
Böğürtlen	Blackberry	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>

APPENDIX C: AVIAN SPECIES OBSERVED IN VALİDEBAĞ GROVE

Table C.1. Avian species observed in Validebağ Grove (Atay, 2009). Translated by the author.

Turkish Name	English Name	Scientific Name
Karabatak	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Gri Balıkçıl	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Balaban	Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>
Erguvani Balıkçıl	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Gece Balıkçılı	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Kara Leylek	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
Leylek	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Çeltikçi	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Arı Şahini	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
Kara Çaylak	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Yılan Kartalı	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Saz Delicesi	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Çayır Delicesi	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
Atmaca	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Yaz Atmacası	Levant Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter brevipes</i>
Şahin	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Kızıl Şahin	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
Küçük Orman Kartalı	Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>
Kerkenez	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Aladoğan	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>
Delice Doğan	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Bıldırcın	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
Çulluk	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>
Karabaş Martı	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Gümüş Martı	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Hazar Martısı	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>
Kaya Güvercini	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Tahtalı	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Kumru	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Üveyik	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Küçük Kumru	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
İskender Papağanı	Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
Yeşil Papağan	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Guguk	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>

Table C.1 continued

Turkish Name	English Name	Scientific Name
Çobanaldatan	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>
Ebabil	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Boz Ebabil	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>
Ak Karınlı Ebabil	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>
Arıkuşu	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
Gökkuzgun	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
İbibik	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Boyunçeviren	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
Alaca Ağaçkakan	Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>
Küçük Ağaçkakan	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>
Tarlakuşu	Sky Lark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Orman Toygarı	Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
Kum Kırlangıcı	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Kırlangıç	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Kızıl Kırlangıç	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
Ev Kırlangıcı	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
Ağaç incirkuşu	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Çayır incirkuşu	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Sarı Kuyruksallayan	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Dağ Kuyruksallayanı	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Ak Kuyruksallayan	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Çıtkuşu	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Dağ Bülbülü	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Karatavuk	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Tarla Ardıcı	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>
Öter Ardiç	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Kızıl Ardiç	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>
Ökse Ardicı	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Saz Kamışçını	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Çalı Kamışçını	Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>
Ak Mukallit	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais pallida</i>
Maskeli Ötleğen	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
Kara Boğazlı Ötleğen	Rüppell's Warbler	<i>Sylvia ruppelli</i>
Çizgili Ötleğen	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>
Küçük Akgerdanlı Ötleğen	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
Ak Gerdanlı Ötleğen	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
Boz Ötleğen	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>
Kara Başlı Ötleğen	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>

Table C.1 continued

Turkish Name	English Name	Scientific Name
Orman Çıvgını	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
Çıvgın	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Söğütbülbülü	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Sürmeli Çalıkuşu	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>
Çalıkuşu	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Kızılgardan	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Benekli Bülbül	Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>
Bülbül	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
Kara Kızılkuyruk	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Kızıl Kuyruk	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Çayır Taşkuşu	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
Taşkuşu	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>
Boz Kuyrukkakan	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Kuyrukkakan	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Benekli Sinekkapan	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Küçük Sinekkapan	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>
Halkalı Sinekkapan	Collared Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicollis</i>
Kara Sinekkapan	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Uzun Kuyruklu Baştankara	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Mavi Baştankara	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>
Büyük Baştankara	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Sıvacı	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Bahçe Tırnaşıkkuşu	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
Sarı asma	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
Kızıl Sırtlı Örümcekkuşu	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
Kara Alınlı Örümcekkuşu	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>
Kızıl Başlı Örümcekkuşu	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>
Maskeli Örümcekkuşu	Masked Shrike	<i>Lanius nubicus</i>
Alakarga	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Saksağan	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Küçük Karga	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Ekin Kargası	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Leş Kargası	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Sığırcık	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Serçe	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Söğüt serçesi	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
Ağaç Serçesi	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
İspinoz	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>

Table C.1 continued

Turkish Name	English Name	Scientific Name
Dağ ispinozu	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
Küçük iskete	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Florya	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Saka	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Kara Başlı iskete	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>
Kocabaş	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Sarı Çinte	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Kara Başlı Çinte	Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>
Kiraz kuşu	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
Tarla Çintesi	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>

APPENDIX D: HERBACEOUS, TUBEROUS, AND BULBOUS PLANTS IN VALİDEBAĞ GROVE

Table D.1. Herbaceous, tuberous, and bulbous plants in Validebağ Grove (Atay, 2009). Translated by the author.

Turkish Name	English Name	Scientific Name
Hatmi türleri	Hollyhock species	<i>Alcea sp.</i>
Sarımsak türleri	Garlic species	<i>Alium sp.</i>
Mavi farekulağı	Blue Pimpernel	<i>Anagalis femina</i>
Papatya türleri	Chamomile species	<i>Anthemis sp.</i>
Geven türleri	Milkvetch species	<i>Astragalus sp.</i>
Dağsümbülü türleri	Bellevalia species	<i>Bellevalia sp.</i>
Şalgam türleri	Turnip species	<i>Brassica sp.</i>
Sarmaşık türleri	Giant Bindweed	<i>Calystegia sylvatica</i>
Çobançantası-kuşkuş otu	Shepherd's Purse	<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>
Köpükotu türleri	Bittercress species	<i>Cardamine sp.</i>
Çan çiçeği türleri	Bellflower species	<i>Campanula sp.</i>
Diken türleri	Thistle species	<i>Carduus sp.</i>
Peygamber çiçeği türleri	Knapweed species	<i>Centaurea sp.</i>
Sarmaşık türleri	Bindweed species	<i>Convolvulus sp.</i>
Yabani havuç	Wild Carrot	<i>Daucus carota</i>
Engerek otu	Viper's Bugloss	<i>Echium sp.</i>
Eşekhiyarı	Squirting Cucumber	<i>Ecbalium elaterium</i>
Turnagagası, Çoban iğnesi	Stork's-bill species	<i>Erodium sp.</i>
Sütleğen	Spurge species	<i>Euphorbia sp.</i>
Asaotu	Giant Fennel	<i>Ferula sp.</i>
Rezene	Fennel species	<i>Foeniculum sp.</i>
Yoğurt otu	Bedstraw species	<i>Galium sp.</i>
Turnagagası	Geranium species	<i>Geranium sp.</i>
Tavşancıl otu	Hogweed species	<i>Heracleum sp.</i>
Kahkaha çiçeği	Morning Glory species	<i>Ipomoea sp.</i>
Ballı baba	Dead-nettle species	<i>Lamium sp.</i>
Mürdümük	Pea-vine species	<i>Lathyrus sp.</i>
Keten otu	Flax species	<i>Linum sp.</i>
Ebegümeçi	Mallow species	<i>Malva sp.</i>
Yabani nane	Wild Mint	<i>Mentha sp.</i>
Dağ sümbülü	Grape Hyacinth	<i>Muscari sp.</i>
Unutma beni	Forget-me-not species	<i>Myosotis sp.</i>

Table D.1 continued

Turkish Name	English Name	Scientific Name
Nergis	Daffodil species	<i>Narcissus sp.</i>
Kedi nanesi	Catnip species	<i>Nepeta sp.</i>
Emzik otu	Golden-drop species	<i>Onosma sp.</i>
Yıldız	Star-of-Bethlehem species	<i>Ornithogalum sp.</i>
Canavar otu	Broomrape species	<i>Orobanche sp.</i>
Yonca	Wood Sorrel species	<i>Oxalis sp.</i>
Gelincik	Poppy species	<i>Papaver sp.</i>
Şekerci boya otu	Pokeweed species	<i>Phytolacca sp.</i>
Sinir otu	Plantain species	<i>Plantago sp.</i>
Tavşanbıyığı	Bluegrass species	<i>Poa sp.</i>
Madımak	Knotweed species	<i>Polygonum sp.</i>
Parmak otu	Cinquefoil species	<i>Potentilla sp.</i>
Düğün çiçeği	Buttercup species	<i>Ranunculus sp.</i>
Mürver	Dwarf Elder	<i>Sambucus ebulus</i>
Adaçayı türleri	Sage species	<i>Salvia sp.</i>
Uyuzotu	Scabious species	<i>Scabiosa sp.</i>
Sıracıotu	Figwort species	<i>Scrophularia sp.</i>
Kanaryaotu	Groundsel species	<i>Senecio sp.</i>
Yapışkanotu	Campion species	<i>Silene sp.</i>
Kafesotu	Comfrey species	<i>Symphytum sp.</i>
Karahindiba	Dandelion species	<i>Taraxacum sp.</i>
Kekik	Thyme species	<i>Thymus sp.</i>
Yemlik	Goat's-beard species	<i>Tragopogon sp.</i>
Üçgül	Clover species	<i>Trifolium sp.</i>
Pıtrak	Turgenia species	<i>Turgenia sp.</i>
Sığırkuyruğu	Mullein species	<i>Verbascum sp.</i>
Yavşanotu	Speedwell species	<i>Veronica sp.</i>
Fiğ	Vetch species	<i>Vicia sp.</i>
Menekşe	Violet species	<i>Viola sp.</i>

APPENDIX E: BUTTERFLY SPECIES OBSERVED IN VALİDEBAĞ GROVE

Table E.1. Butterfly species observed in Validebağ Grove (Atay, 2009). Translated by the author.

Turkish Name	English Name	Scientific Name
Erik Kırkangıçkuyruk	Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>
Kırlangıç Kuyruk	Old World Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>
Küçük Beyaz Melek	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Yalancı Beyaz Melek	Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>
Yeni Benekli Melek	Eastern Bath White	<i>Pontia edusa</i>
Büyük Beyaz Melek	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Sarı Azamet	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>
Orakkanat	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>
Benekli Bakırkelebeği	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
Küçük Ateş Kelebeği	Lesser Fiery Copper	<i>Lycaena thersamon</i>
Minik Sevbeni	Sloe Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium acaciae</i>
Büyük Sevbeni	Ilex Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium ilicis</i>
Lampides	Pea Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>
Çokgözlü Esmer	Brown Argus	<i>Plebeius agestis</i>
Mavi Zebra	Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>
Kutsal Mavi	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>
Çokgözlü Mavi	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
Çitlembik Kelebeği	Nettle-tree Butterfly	<i>Libythea celtis</i>
Tavuskelebeği	Peacock Butterfly	<i>Aglais io</i>
Atalanta	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Diken Kelebeği	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
Anadolu Yırtıkpırtığı	Southern Comma	<i>Polygonia egea</i>
Karaağaç Nimfalisi	Large Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>
Benekli İparhan	Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea didyma</i>
Karanlık Orman Esmeri	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>
Küçük Esmer Boncuk	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>
Çayır Esmeri	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
Melikes	Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>
Hatmi Zıpzıpı	Southern Marbled Skipper	<i>Carcharodus lavatherae</i>

APPENDIX F: QUESTIONNAIRES

Predefined questions asked to participants

- 1) How often do you visit Validebağ Grove, and what brings you here?
- 2) How do you feel when you are in nature, specifically in Validebağ Grove?
- 3) Do you feel a sense of connection to nature? If so, how does it manifest for you?
- 4) Do you believe that spending time in nature influences your mental health and well-being?
Have you noticed any changes in those areas since you have started visiting Validebağ Grove?
- 5) What are your thoughts on the current state of the environment in Türkiye and globally?
- 6) Have you ever felt distressed or anxious about the state of the environment? If so, how do you cope with these feelings?
- 7) Do you engage or have you ever engaged in any type of environmental/ecological activism?
What motivated your participation?
- 8) In your opinion, how does the structure and high biodiversity of Validebağ Grove impact your experience?
- 9) What is your perspective on the conservation efforts of Validebağ Grove?
- 10) Do you think it is important to protect this ecosystem? If so, why?

Please answer each of these questions in terms of <i>the way you generally feel</i> . There are no right or wrong answers. Using the following scale, in the space provided next to each question simply state as honestly and candidly as you can what you are presently experiencing.		
1 Strongly disagree	2 3 Neutral	4 5 Strongly agree
___1.	I often feel a sense of oneness with the natural world around me.	
___2.	I think of the natural world as a community to which I belong.	
___3.	I recognize and appreciate the intelligence of other living organisms.	
___4.	I often feel disconnected from nature.	
___5.	When I think of my life, I imagine myself to be part of a larger cyclical process of living.	
___6.	I often feel a kinship with animals and plants.	
___7.	I feel as though I belong to the Earth as equally as it belongs to me.	
___8.	I have a deep understanding of how my actions affect the natural world.	
___9.	I often feel part of the web of life.	
___10.	I feel that all inhabitants of Earth, human, and nonhuman, share a common 'life force'.	
___11.	Like a tree can be part of a forest, I feel embedded within the broader natural world.	
___12.	When I think of my place on Earth, I consider myself to be a top member of a hierarchy that exists in nature.	
___13.	I often feel like I am only a small part of the natural world around me, and that I am no more important than the grass on the ground or the birds in the trees.	
___14.	My personal welfare is independent of the welfare of the natural world.	

Figure F.1. CNS questionnaire (Mayer & Frantz, 2004, p.513)



NR-Self

My connection to nature and the environment is a part of my spirituality

My relationship to nature is an important part of who I am

I feel very connected to all living things and the earth

I am not separate from nature, but a part of nature

I always think about how my actions affect the environment

I am very aware of environmental issues

I think a lot about the suffering of animals

Even in the middle of the city, I notice nature around me

My feelings about nature do not affect how I live my life

NR-Perspective

Humans have the right to use natural resources any way we want

Conservation is unnecessary because nature is strong enough to recover from any human impact

Animals, birds and plants have fewer rights than humans

Some species are just meant to die out or become extinct

Nothing I do will change problems in other places on the planet

The state of nonhuman species is an indicator of the future for humans

NR-Experience

The thought of being deep in the woods, away from civilization, is frightening

My ideal vacation spot would be a remote, wilderness area

I enjoy being outdoors, even in unpleasant weather

I don't often go out in nature

I enjoy digging in the earth and getting dirt on my hands

I take notice of wildlife wherever I am

Figure F.2. NR questionnaire (Nisbet et al., 2009, p.724)