

Classification and Ranking of Ecotourism Resources of Küre Mountains National Park

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Abstract—Ecotourism, which is a nature-based tourism activity and is expected to be one of the most crucial tourism movements in the future, promotes nature and local culture while exhibiting a responsible understanding of tourism that protects the environment. Ecotourism, therefore, attempts to understand environmental harmony and the environment, is ecologically and socially responsible, and aims to provide economic contribution to local communities while protecting natural and cultural resources.

Each of the natural and cultural landscape elements is a resource for ecotourism activities. The study deals with Kastamonu section of the Küre Mountains declared a national park in 2000 and recognized as a “Gift to the Earth” by WWF Turkey. The area has rich resource values, national and international importance and sensitive ecosystems. Within the scope of the study, six points of attraction from the national park were selected, and an expert group was asked to make a checklist on landscape analysis and consumer services and then to rate these areas. According to the landscape analysis criteria, Valla Canyon obtained the highest score. Almost all points of attraction were found to have negative points in the consumer service criteria assessment prepared for the needs of visitors.

Keywords—Ecotourism, Küre Mountains National Park, Landscape Analysis, Consumer Services

I. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is one of the issues that the developing countries focus on. In parallel with economic, technological and political developments and changes, tourism activities have also been subject to great changes. The concept of ecotourism, which is especially prominent in mountainous and forest lands, is also regarded as an important rural development tool.

The concept of ecotourism, first used by Hector Ceballos Lascurain in 1983, is described as “a form of tourism that includes environmentally responsible visits to unspoiled or pristine natural areas with a specific goal such as studying, observing and experiencing the landscape, wildlife or wilderness” [1]. Ecotourism activities constitute a tourism approach that is conscious of the use of natural environment, socially responsible and economically productive [2]. Ecotourism activities undertake ecological and cultural tasks such as protecting nature as it is, providing resources for nature-related scientific research, protecting vulnerable ecosystem areas, providing alternative livelihoods for those living in these areas, and supporting the development of countries [3, 4]. It particularly forms an important source of employment for those living in mountainous areas with geographic disadvantages unsuitable for economic activity [5]. Ecotourism, therefore, necessitates the understanding of supporting rural economy and protecting the natural environment.

Ecotourism activities are generally organized to see landscapes, topography, water characteristics, plant and wildlife, and to learn about cultural life in areas where the interesting characteristics of nature are preserved and still largely intact (especially nature reserves). Getting to know the rural life, the highland and village houses for accommodation, and the local cuisine in visited destinations are among the characteristics of ecotourism [6].

In this context, while contributing positively to the promotion of natural and cultural areas with ecotourism, it is possible to protect the sensitive ecosystem areas and elements, as well as transforming them into centers of attraction via the income obtained from visitors [7]. For this study, nationally and internationally significant Küre Mountains National Park, one of Turkey’s 9 and Europe’s 100 hotspots, was selected. Firstly, 6 different points with high attractiveness were determined in the National Park, and a checklist was created with landscape analysis and consumer services sub-criteria. It is thought that the obtained data will also create a data source for local administrations.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Kastamonu section of the Küre Mountains National Park, located on the Kastamonu and Bartın province borders of Western Black Sea Region of Türkiye (Figure 1).

This area was recognized as a “Gift to the Earth” by WWF Turkey in 2002. It is the only national park in the country awarded a Pan Parks certification. It is one of Turkey’s 9 and Europe’s 100 hotspots. In 2000, the borders of 37,000 ha of the 114,000 ha planning area were drawn with the principle of participation, and it was declared a national park. The area is rich in natural, cultural and aesthetic resources. It contains deep canyons, dolines, straits, waterfalls and numerous caves [8].

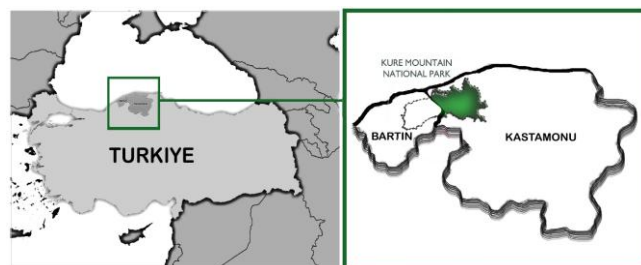


Fig. 1. Location of Küre Mountains National Park

The study consists of 3 main stages. In the first stage, literature survey has been carried out by examining the national and foreign sources related to ecotourism and the national park area. The second stage is the field study. Landscape architects (2), city planners (2) GIS expert (1), tourist guides (2), forest engineers (2), and an archaeologist jointly conducted a field study to determine 6 different points of attraction. Then, a checklist was created for these points of attraction based on Alaeddinoğlu and Can’s [9] work.

The checklist contained landscape analysis and consumer services sections. Under the landscape analysis section, the existence of the following structures was surveyed: landscape variety, view quality and width, geological properties of the region, diversity of flora and fauna, river or lake shore, recreation opportunities, and the uniqueness of the landscape. Then, the expert participants were asked to grade the first criteria on a scale of one to ten (low to high) in order of importance. Under the consumer services section, the presence of souvenir shops, barbecue pits or picnic tables, drinking water, first aid or phone, shelters, accommodation and dining facilities were examined. The expert group evaluated consumer services with either “yes” or “no” answers.

III. FINDINGS

The study aims to determine the tourism development potential of the area with significant natural resources and the priority attraction areas in line with these findings and to evaluate these areas according to specific criteria. To this end, six important points of attraction have been determined for Ilgarini Cave; Azdavay and Ilıca Falls; Horma, Çatak and Valla Canyons. The landscape analysis and consumer services checklist assessment are given below (Table 1).

Table 1: Checklist

A- LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS (1, 2,...,9,10)	Ilıca Waterfall	Ilgarini Cave	Çatak Canyon	Valla Canyon	Horma Canyon	Azdavay Waterfall
1- Landscape variety	6	6	9	9	7	8
2- Quality and Width of the view	8	6	9	9	8	8
3- Geographical properties of the region	6	8	7	9	8	7
4- Diversity of flora	7	7	7	8	8	7
5- River or lake shore	9	4	7	7	9	9
6- Recreation or adventure opportunities	7	7	8	9	8	6
7- Rocks, cliffs or canyons	6	8	9	10	10	5
8- Wildlife level	7	7	7	7	7	7
9- Diversity of fauna	8	7	6	7	8	6
10- Uniqueness and extraordinariness	7	8	7	9	8	5
Total	71	68	76	84	80	68
B-CONSUMER SERVICES (Y-N)						
1-Souvenir shops	No	No	No	No	No	No
2-Barbecue pits and picnic tables	No	No	No	No	No	No
3-Drinking water	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
4-First aid or emergency phone	No	No	No	No	No	No
5-Trash cans	No	No	No	No	No	No
6-Recognized by GPS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
7-Shelters	No	No	No	No	No	No
8-Reception areas	No	No	No	No	No	No
9-Banks or seats to enjoy the view	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
10-Accommodation and dining facilities	No	No	No	No	No	No

According to the landscape analysis, Valla Canyon ranks first (84). It is followed by Horma and Çatak Canyons, and then relatively known Ilıca Waterfall, Ilgarini Cave and Azdavay Waterfalls. Ilıca Waterfall is located in Ilıca Village and has a vertical drop of 15 metres. The natural pool, formed where the water drops, is surrounded by a wide variety of vegetation, and it looks exotic. According to landscape analysis, this feature was given the highest mark. Formed in 160-220 million years during tertiary and quaternary periods, Ilgarini is the world's fourth largest cave with its 858 m length and 250 m depth. The stalagmites and stalactites within the cave are nearly a million years old [8, 10]. Because of its geological features, Ilgarini received high marks in the 3rd and the 7th questions of the study. Çatak Canyon is surrounded on both sides by high cliffs and forest areas, 7 km of which can be passed by boat or swimming [11]. The results of the study support the literature. It is observed that the beauty, diversity and the rock formations of the landscape received high points. Valla Canyon is 12 km long, and with its depth of 1.100 meters in some places, it is very difficult to [8]. The canyon scored the highest in the criterion of interesting rock formations (10 points) and received high marks in recreational facilities, geological properties, landscape beauty and diversity, and uniqueness and extraordinariness criteria (9).

According to the landscape analysis findings, Valla Canyon obtained the highest total score (84). Horma Canyon, which is easier to pass compared to the other canyons, starts from Horma village and ends 3,5 km later in Ilıca Waterfall. The canyon contains small lakes and waterfalls and is more accessible. Receiving high points (10) in rock formations criterion, it ranked second in the landscape analysis of the points of attraction. Azdavay Falls received high points in the criterion of water and it shared the lowest total points (68) with Ilgarini Cave.

An examination of the consumer service analysis indicators shows that Ilıca Waterfall, Ilgari, Çatak and Valla Canyons received just one positive mark (recognition by GPS) while all other indicators were answered negatively. The same applies to Azdavay Waterfall as only the criterion of drinking water received a positive answer. All criteria for Horma Canyon got negative answers.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

There are significant differences between rural and urban areas, in terms of both income level and living conditions, and the gap between the two is increasingly widening. The ecotourism sector, which makes an important contribution to

the development of rural areas, comes into prominence in this situation.

In this study, the points of attraction for ecotourism of Kastamonu section of the National Park were rated. Accordingly, the results obtained are as follows:

The landscape analysis reveals that Valla Canyon is the most important area of attraction. It received higher or equal scores compared to other points of attraction in the criteria of diversity of landscapes, quality and width of views, geological features, recreation and adventure opportunities, cliffs and canyons, the uniqueness and the extraordinariness. It is followed by Horma Canyon, Çatak Canyon, Ilıca Waterfall, Azdavay Waterfall and Ilgarini Cave respectively. In terms of water, the other 5 points of attraction also scored high with Ilgarini cave being the only exception. In the wildlife criterion, all the points of attraction were rated equally (7 points). In the criteria of adventure and recreation, Valla and other canyons shone through. These features are crucial in terms of tourism activity.

The area is very problematic in terms of consumer services. Although it sports important natural and cultural resources for ecotourism, the services provided for the visitors are rather insufficient.

Souvenir stands, small units, equipments (snack bars, trash cans, seating units, rain shelters) compatible with local architecture should be placed within certain intervals for domestic and foreign visitors. Besides, trekking maps promoting natural resources of the area need to be prepared for incoming visitors. The area can be accessed through entrances in Pınarbaşı and Azdavay, but these locations lack security, promotion offices, conservation officers and tourist guides. There is a visitor center in Pınarbaşı county, but it is not close to the entrance, and this is not enough for such a large (37,000 ha) park. In order to ensure the balance of conservation and utility, the establishment of museums, botanical gardens and educational offices for various age groups is important. Cooperating with the villagers and training them in various ways to provide food and beverage facilities in the villages close to areas with high attractiveness is also important for visitors.

It is thought that the study could provide directions for local administrators, non-governmental institutions, and

nationally or internationally funded implementation projects, and it could constitute a basis for incoming visitors.

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