

## The Role of Crete Immigrants in Development of Guest Housing in Bodrum

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**Abstract:** Bodrum lived through two significant wave of migration from Crete Island in 1897 and 1923 and many Turks were domiciled in Bodrum after the population exchange. A touristic dynamism started in Bodrum in 1958. Thereupon, bodrum tourism and promotion foundation was established in 1959. Since, the number of hotels and guest houses were inadequate in Bodrum those days, this foundation asked the immigrants to open up their houses for tourists. Then the Crete immigrant families started to rent their rooms to tourists. Thus, the concept of guest housing developed. Nowadays Bodrum is one of the most significant tourist attractions and entertainment centers of Turkey. The purpose of this study is to reveal the role of immigrants in development of guest housing concept in Bodrum. For this purpose, secondary resources were made use of and the 10 Crete immigrants landlords were verbally interviewed. As a result of this study, it was observed that concept in Bodrum started when the immigrant families from Crete and Kos opened up their houses for tourists and continued until the number of hotels increased with the Law of Tourism Incentive in 1982.

**Key words:** Crete immigrants, guest housing, tourism, bodrum, Turkey

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### INTRODUCTION

As a result of Cretan Revolt and Greco-Turkish Population Exchange Agreement in 1923, many Turks were forced to leave Kos and Crete and migrate to Bodrum in Turkey. The arriving immigrants were settled down in houses left by the Greeks. Although the immigrants were all Turkish and Muslim, the local people of Bodrum did not accept the immigrants at the beginning (Mansur and Guler, 1999). The local residents of Bodrum were engaged in agriculture and thus they were all wealthy but due to the scarcity of available jobs in Bodrum, the immigrants had financial difficulties (Mansur, 1972). The first group of tourists arrived to Bodrum in 1958 with a Greek ship named Tiypaldos. In addition, the famous man of letters, the Fisherman of Halicarnassus also invited his intellectual friends to Bodrum. Thus, Bodrum made acquaintance with the first tourists. Thereupon, Bodrum Tourism and Promotion Foundation was established under the presidency of Rutu Gur in 1958. Although, its primary objective is to promote Bodrum in Turkey and in the world, one of the activities of this foundation is to arrange accommodations for tourists. Since, the number of hotels and guest houses was inadequate in Bodrum in those days, this foundation asked the immigrants to open up their houses for tourists (Mansur, 1972). The immigrants, who, at first hesitated to open up their houses, began to make money and eventually turned their houses into guesthouses. At the end of this study, it is found out that guest housing concept in Bodrum has

started when the immigrant families from Crete and Kos opened up their houses for tourists and continued until the number of hotels have increased with the Law of Tourism Incentive in 1982. Guest housing concept which is a significant factor that initiates and improves tourism in Bodrum, made a positive contribution to promotion of Bodrum and this led to economic and social development of the destination.

**The migrations from crete to bodrum:** When the Ottoman Empire conquered Kandiye (Heraklion), the largest city of Crete Island, in 1669, the Crete Island became a part of the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman Empire ruled the island for nearly 250 years. The Muslims from different parts of Anatolia were forced to migrate to the Balkans in order to balance the Muslim-non-Muslim population in Greece and the Balkans. The Turkish population moved back to Anatolia with two major migration waves. The first wave of migration was the process of escape from Greece in 1897; the second wave was the migration process for the Turks in Crete together with the population exchange agreement in 1923 ([www.lozanmubadilleri.com](http://www.lozanmubadilleri.com)). The migration process began immediately after World War I. The events which reshaped the social, political and demographic characteristics of Greece and Anatolia and caused radical changes on both sides of the Aegean Sea, occurred in that period (Hirschon, 2000). As a result of the Greco-Turkish Population Exchange Agreement which was signed after the Lausanne Peace Treaty of June 24, 1923, the migrations from Greece have increased. One of

the migration routes was from Crete to Bodrum. With its natural beauties and historical and cultural assets, Bodrum is one of the most significant tourist attractions and entertainment centers of Turkey. The history of Bodrum which is located on the crossing point of the Mediterranean and the Aegean, dates back to 2000 BC Halicarnassus (Bodrum), the capital of Karia Civilization, was a significant coastal town in ancient times. The Mausoleum which is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World is located in Bodrum. Today, Bodrum Castle which was built by the Knights of Saint John (Rhodian Knights), attracts tourists as Underwater Archaeology Museum. Bodrum has been the home of many civilizations and let in immigrants throughout the history. The immigrants, who arrived to Bodrum through population exchange, had a great impact on the development process of today's modern Bodrum.

The Cretan Turks were settled in Kumbahçe neighborhood located on the sea shore. This neighborhood has been known as the Cretan Neighborhood for nearly a hundred years. The Turkish families used to live on the hinterland of Bodrum, away from the sea (Mansur and Gulner, 1999). While the local residents of Bodrum were engaged in agriculture and trade, the Cretan immigrants were struggling to earn money through fishery and sponge fishing. Therefore they became acquainted with guest housing after the arrival of first groups of tourists to Bodrum. Tuncer Ergünu, who may be considered as one of the first tourists, summarizes modest guest housing services in Bodrum as follows: "They would make money and we would sleep on clean sheets and soap-scented pillows and it was inexpensive". Entertaining guests is one of the most important traditions in Anatolia, just like practicing a divine duty. The best plates, towels, softest beds and canvas pillows are always kept clean and reserved for the guests. The Cretan Turks were able to provide their guests with the experience of "being guests" in the best way possible (Mansur and Gulner, 1999). They always offer the finest of everything and the most candid affection, friendship and hospitality to their guests.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Oral history interview method has been used in this study and 10 people (P1, P2, ..., P10) were verbally interviewed. Those reference people were selected among Cretan immigrants, who were engaged in guest housing for a while or who witnessed that period. The people, who had a good knowledge with good narrating skills were determined through recommendations and snowball sampling method was adopted. Secondary sources were

also utilized and the literature research was completed by using documents and visual materials. The authors made the best effort to analyze and interpret the narrations in a realistic way and to support these narrations with the secondary sources, such as newspapers, magazines and books about Bodrum history and immigrants.

Oral history is a method, where the people from various communities and cultures are interviewed and their memoirs and experiences are recorded (Thompson, 2006). The interviews were completed between July 1, 2013 and December 20, 2015 and the interviews were conducted by asking open ended questions to the participants and by recording and videotaping the answers by permission of the participants. The interviews were then deciphered and documented by Turkish History Foundation. In these narrations which were analyzed and interpreted through a realistic viewpoint, a historical text was created by using overlapping stories and significant parts. The memoirs were compiled and the authors tried to reach the information missing in recorded history.

Content analysis method is used in this study. According to Cohen and Morrison (2007), content analysis is "the process of summarizing and specifying the main contents and messages of the written information" (Bilgin, 2006). In this study, the statements obtained through oral history interviews conducted have been read and analyzed carefully and the words which describe the characteristics of the immigrants, who had an influence on guest housing activities. It is first necessary to conceptualize the obtained data and then to arrange them within a logical frame in accordance with those concepts and to determine the themes that explain the data. Within this context, the pre-determined words in the interviews were given codes. Coding means processing the meaning of the message (Bilgin, 2006). The data coded by the researchers are grouped and categorized by three specialists of this field. Categorization is the process of gathering the codes and finding the common points and the process of classification in accordance with those common points. And then the findings obtained through these categories were reviewed.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings were coded by selecting the words from the deciphered interviews related to the immigrants and guest housing from the interviews conducted with the reference people. These codes were categorized by three academicians specialized in this field. The specialists reached a consensus over seven categories and these categories were reviewed within the scope of this study. These categories are "modernity and foresightedness",

“female operators/entrepreneurs”, “incentives”, “family business”, “hospitality”, “cleanliness/meticulousness” and “cooking skills”.

**Modernity and foresightedness:** Modern and foresighted people were among the most significant influences on the onset of guest housing. These characteristics were necessary for opening their houses to foreign people and for providing accommodation services. The people emigrated from Crete were considered more modern and foresighted under the conditions of that period. Some examples of modernity and foresightedness which stands out as the most repeated category in the interviews are as follows:

“The modern Cretan immigrant women gradually adopted guest housing business. The local residents of Bodrum would find it very strange in the early years. Guest housing improved tourism in a very short time” (P1)

“The Cretan immigrants paved the way for guest housing concept since they were more open and modern than the rest of us. The people, who had two or three extra rooms, separated those rooms and built bathrooms in them and began to rent their rooms” (P9)

“The Cretan Neighborhood is located in the eastern part of Bodrum. They knew more about Europeans. They were modern and more prone to tourism. Their houses were closer to each other and to the sea” (P4)

**Female operator/entrepreneur:** When the deciphered interviews are analyzed, it is observed that the authorities preferred the immigrants over the local residents to provide accommodation services for the tourists visiting Bodrum and that the immigrants were considered more suitable for this job because of their entrepreneurial spirit (Mansur, 1972). Since men already had jobs and houses were considered feminine spaces, women came into prominence in guest housing. Some examples regarding the devotion of women in guest housing activities are as follows:

“Some customers used to visit and congratulate us. We had established such facilities that they would say they had stayed in 5-star hotels but they had never seen such clean and comfortable rooms. They were always satisfied with our services. My husband would go to work and my children would go to school; I used to do everything by myself from cleaning to ironing. That’s how I financially supported my family”. (P3) “We have improved our services over the years. I used to manage the entire place by myself as a woman, my husband had another job” (P2)

**Incentives:** It is observed that Tourism and promotion foundation gave a moral and financial support to promote guest housing (Mansur and Guler, 1999). The main purpose of guest housing was to find neat and clean houses for tourists. First, the suitable candidates, who would support this initiative, were determined. And then the houses were inspected, the houses suitable for accommodation were identified and the residents of those houses were persuaded and informed and about the future of tourism. The cretan immigrants were asked to allocate two out of three rooms in their houses for guest housing. The statements regarding the incentives provided for their engagement in guest housing are as follows:

“At first, we were compelled to open up our houses as guest houses under the guidance of Osman Nuri Bilgin because we didn’t know anything about tourism. Then he visited our houses, designated the suitable houses for tourism. Thus, we gradually became engaged in guest housing” (P2)

“Since the Fisherman of Halicarnassus used to visit us occasionally, all of his guests used to stay in our guest house. And then this business began to progress gradually and continued. Everyone, who were living in Cretan neighborhood in a decent house in Bodrum, began to turn their houses into guest houses. The Tourism Foundation provided financial assistance for clean and new mattresses and sheets. This encouraged guest housing in Bodrum. And then this business improved and continued. We opened our house to the guests until 1963 and then we opened Artemis Pension” (P9)

“At first, we couldn’t get used to the idea of tourism in Bodrum. Rustu Gur and other members of the foundation encouraged us and told us that they would help us. A group of tourists had just arrived then. He came and checked our houses and distributed the tourists among the suitable ones. I had two rooms, I gave them one of the rooms and went to stay at my mother’s house and they stayed in our house. Then things progressed, the members of the foundation gave us some money to buy new quilts, sheets etc. We also expanded our house through our own means and paid our debts thanks to tourism” (P8)

**Family business:** The fact that the immigrants initiated guest housing by opening one or two rooms in their houses for the tourists obliged the entire family to participate in this business activity. However, they outsourced employees and created employment when the population of the household was not enough. The following example is given regarding this matter:

“We were also running a family business while providing guest housing services. We used to employ one, or two employees especially in summer so we used to provide employment opportunities. Both we and our employees were able to support ourselves in winter time” (P1)

**Hospitality:** The Cretan immigrants were different from the local residents of Bodrum with their traditions, cuisine, language and hospitality. It is very important for Cretan women to offer the best service to their guest, in other words, they are very hospitable. The interviewed participants supported this with the following statements:

“They would treat customers as their guests, they would never get enough and visit again and again. The immigrants were very hospitable (P9)

“Thus, we met many good families, opened our houses and entertained them. And they spoke well of us with their relatives and friends and thus, our hospitality became famous and we had many customers over the years, ... , (P2)

“We, the Cretans, are more modern, foresighted, outgoing and hospitable people (P8). Since, the

Cretan women were at home at all times, they became engaged in guest housing. They were renting their rooms” (P6)

**Cleanliness/meticulousness:** Being nature lovers themselves, the Cretan immigrants turned their houses into well-kept flower gardens containing various flowers. Their houses, gardens and tables were always clean and neat. Especially the Cretan women were known as hard-working, meticulous and self-disciplined people:

“Guest housing activities in Bodrum improved when the families began to visit from other countries and from Ankara Istanbul. I love cleaning and I am very rigorous, but we, the Cretan immigrants, all care about cleanliness” (P2)

**Cooking skills:** The Cretan immigrants, who migrated to the Mediterranean and Aegean Coasts, had the opportunity to maintain their own cuisine and food culture due to the idiosyncratic geography of those areas. They were able to find the herbs in Bodrum which were very common in Cretan cuisine. The Cretan women are both known as excellent cooks and they also love to have guests over and to entertain them:

“We are good cooks, we dress very neatly and we are talkative. The Cretans love to help each other. Whoever had a vacant room, they would always be happy to help. We would always invite guests over for dinner and we would definitely make them taste our food” (P8)

“From what I heard from the old folks, the first restaurant in Bodrum was the restaurant of Ali Doksan family, who migrated from Crete Island. Their restaurant still offers service. An assortment of various dishes came up when they combined Bodrum’s own cuisine with their own traditional dishes” (P7)

## CONCLUSION

As a result of Cretan Revolt of 1897 and Greco-Turkish Population Exchange Agreement of 1923, the Cretan immigrants were settled mostly on Mediterranean and Aegean coasts due to the similarities on the climatic conditions and lifestyles. They moved to Bodrum and maintained their own lifestyles in there. The immigrants began to live together in the same region and created a typical Cretan Neighborhood over the years.

The immigrants, who spent most of their time on the coastal areas and who were acquainted with fishery and prone to handicrafts, maintained their professions in Bodrum, as well. However, economically struggling Cretan immigrants got the opportunity to generate a side income when tourism became popular in Bodrum.

Bodrum Tourism and Promotion Foundation was founded in 1959 by some tradesmen, merchants and civil servants. The sole purpose of the foundation was to put Bodrum on the map. Osman Nuri Bilgin had an active role in this foundation. This foundation provided the opportunity for Cretan immigrants to meet the tourists. Bodrum began to be associated with tourism around 1958. In those days, tourists were having hard time to find a decent place to stay. Guest housing began, when the Cretan immigrants began to open up their houses to host tourists. Although the Cretan immigrants could not adopt the idea of hosting strangers in their houses, even though they put it on par with entertaining guests, their hospitality, scrupulousness, extroversion and indulgence led them to get used to this business in a short time. The people, who began to generate significant amounts of income, expanded their houses. Some of them took things one step further and continued to get involved in hotel business which started out as guest housing. However, the concept of guest housing completely disappeared when new facilities were built together with the Law for the Encouragement of Tourism in 1982.

In this study, most frequently repeated seven categories in development of guest housing have been determined. These categories are “modernity and foresightedness”, “female operators/entrepreneurs”,

“incentives”, “family business”, “hospitality”, “cleanliness/meticulousness” and “cooking skills”. The characteristics discussed under these categories show that the Cretan immigrants had a significant role in development of guest housing in Bodrum.

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