

## Product Life Cycle of the Blue Cruise in Turkey

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**Abstract:** The beginning of blue cruise in Turkey dates back to 1946, when a number of intellectuals, poets, authors, artists and politicians, went on a blue cruise and the voyage deviated from its aim and became commercialized. The blue cruise concept in Turkey which has a considerably long coastline, started when the fishermen in Bodrum began to use their spongers and fishing boats for this purpose in 1962. Therefore, the need for marinas increased and this issue was discussed in the Second Five Year Development Plan (1968-1972) and the first marina in Bodrum was put into service in 1976. Blue cruise began to improve when new yachts suitable for blue cruise were built and set out on journey together with the Law on Tourism Incentive in 1982. After the period of development, cabin charters and package tours that also appeal to domestic tourists were designed as from the 2000's, the products were diversified and the blue cruise continued to maintain its market presence. The Blue Cruise have made a great contribution to the economy of Turkey and created a brand value. The purpose of this study is to analyze the blue cruise concept in Turkey as per its product life cycles based on the statements of yacht owners, employees, travel agencies which primarily offer service on yacht tourism and the local residents, who live in Bodrum and Marmaris and who witnessed the period from the beginning of the blue cruise concept to the present day. Within this context, the blue cruise is discussed in terms of its outset, development, maturing and regression periods.

**Key words:** Blue cruise, yachting, product life cycle, Bodrum, Turkey

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### INTRODUCTION

The blue cruise, where the Fisherman of Halicarnassus and a couple of his intellectual friends set sail for the first time for a cultural tour in 1946 has gone through various changes over the years and became a key constituent of yacht tourism. In the first blue cruise, it was aimed to discover and promote the coasts, coves and the ancient cities, before exploiting those areas for tourism. However, it is observed that these cruises deviated from their initial aim and became commercial activities. The 1960s are considered as the period when tourism began to strike up in Bodrum.

The blue cruise concept in Turkey which has a considerably long coastline, started when the fishermen in Bodrum began to use their spongers and fishing boats for this purpose in 1962. The planned period of tourism in Bodrum became a current issue with the Second Five Year Development Plan (1968-1972). Two marinas which were projected with this plan, were built in Bodrum and Kuşadası (Ercanik, 2003). This concept began to improve when new yachts suitable for blue cruise were built and set out on journey together with the Law on Tourism Incentive in 1982. The former/old spongers became the new blue cruise captains. While in the beginning the blue

cruises were carried out with a few changes on spongers and fishing boats, new boats were began to be built with government support for the sole purpose of blue cruise after the 1980's. After this period of development, cabin charters and package tours that also appeal to domestic tourists were designed as from the 2000s, the products were diversified and the blue cruise continued to maintain its market presence. The maturing period which takes a little more time than other periods, also outlasts the other phases in the case of blue cruise and the blue cruise has not yet entered into the period of regression.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the blue cruise concept in Turkey as per its product life cycles based on the statements of yacht owners, employees, travel agencies which primarily offer service on yacht tourism and the local residents, who live in Bodrum and Marmaris and who witnessed the period from the beginning of the blue cruise concept to the present day. Within this context, the blue cruise is discussed in terms of its outset, development, maturing and regression periods. This is an important study in terms of revealing the life course of the blue cruise concept and thus, maintaining sustainability of this concept in Turkey, which has 8.140 km of total coastline and suitable climatic conditions and coastal structure for blue cruise tours

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Oral history method is adopted as the data collection method in this study with a qualitative analysis approach. 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 with 11 people (P1-P11) were completed between June 21, 2013 and April 18, 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 people with best narrative skills among the yacht owners, travel agencies and operators and the people, who witnessed the period from the beginning of the blue cruise concept to the present day. 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. The data obtained through the interviews are analyzed in accordance with the product life cycles of Kotler (2003).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Product life cycle of the blue cruise:** A Blue Cruise, also known as a Blue Voyage (Turkish: Mavi Yolculuk) or Blue Tour (Turkish: Mavi Tur) is a term used for recreational voyages along the Turkish Riviera, on Turkey's southwestern coast along the Aegean and Mediterranean seas. The cruise allows participants to enjoy a week-long trip aboard the iconic local gulet schooners to ancient cities, harbors, tombs, mausolea and intimate beaches in the numerous small coves, lush forests and tranquil streams that lace the country's Turquoise Coast ([www.turkeytravelplanner.com](http://www.turkeytravelplanner.com)). Starting in the mid 1940's, a small group of Turkish intellectuals started what has come to be called Mavi Yolculuk, the Blue Voyage, visits by boat along Turkey's Aegean coastline to (re)discover the ancient sites that were then unknown to many of them and to establish links with ancient civilisations that they saw as their ancestors (Albachten, 2012).

Product life cycle is a model which assumes that the products, like human beings, have a life line and they are born, grow, mature and die just like people. This model which is also called as the product life curve, is developed over the assumption that the development and change of product sales occur within a certain form and diagram (Yukselen, 2003; Uygur, 2007). The length of each phase and the experiences within each period are different for each product. The blue cruise which is considered a touristic product, is analyzed as follows in terms of product life cycles:

### **Starting period: sponge fishing boats and blue cruise:**

The starting period is the releasing/launching phase of a new product. Since it is new on the market, the product is obscure and unknown to the people. The sales are quite low and the costs are high (Mucuk, 2001). The product does not have any direct competitors; the competitors will eventually emerge as the product attains a place in market. The technical specifications of the product should be frequently changed and the defects and malfunctions should be eliminated. First, the customers should be informed about the existence and qualities of the new product (Mucuk, 2001). Sponge fishing has always been a significant occupation for the people of Bodrum. It is also observed that together with the population exchange, many Cretans settled in Bodrum and began diving. Mustafa Denizaslani, Ibrahim Doksan and Omer Kaptan began sponge fishing in Bodrum for the first time in 1929 and Ali Karayel in 1945. Sailboats were replaced with motor boats in 1950's. Being a difficult occupation, sponge fishing is both risky and brings low income. Thus, the boats were eventually turned into blue cruise boats:

You need to dry those sponges within 15 days or sometimes within one month. Every day, we used to stack and press the sponges when they were still wet. The sponges are fished out in a pitch-black color. We kill the sponges by exposing them to direct sunlight and extract their milk at night by squeezing them under our feet. We started to use diving masks, this became popular in 1961; we used to see the sponge, dive down and get it. Sponge fishing was very hard as you see. That's why we preferred blue cruise" (P2)

The Greek were the mediators in sponge business and trade. Thus, the people of Bodrum have established their own Sponge Association. However this time, the sponge sources began to deplete. Consequently, tourism became the ideal source of income and the people of Bodrum began to realize this. The Fisherman of Halicarnassus, who initiated the concept of blue cruise, also supported the people of Bodrum with his deep knowledge on sponge fishing:

My father was a sponge exporter. The sea was full of sponges back then. The Fisherman of Halicarnassus wrote letters to Florida, Japan and Germany on behalf of my father. Then my father began to receive orders and prepared sponges as per those orders" (P1)

The promotion efforts of the fisherman of Halicarnassus and his friends come to fruition. Bodrum

began to gain international recognition and to exhibit its beautiful underwater nature and coves. At the end of 1961, the local government invited 13 club chairmen and their families from Brussels to Bodrum in order to promote Bodrum in Europe. The 37 of the invitees came to Bodrum in 1962 and stayed in Artemis Pension which was the first guest house in Bodrum and which was run by the family of P5. He was fluent in English and Greek, he agreed to show them around, but they could not find a suitable boat for the guests:

“I asked my fishermen friends, we removed the fishing nets and cleaned the boats. They stayed for three weeks, I took them around many caves with interesting structures and colors and to the best diving sites in Bodrum in that 12 days. They filmed their entire trip and they loved it. They called me on their last day and told me that our country was beautiful and that ‘Bodrum comes third after the Red Sea and Kenya about the underwater world’” (P5)

Many divers from Belgium and the Netherlands came back in June 2, 1963 for diving and shooting a documentary in Bodrum. The following statements are from the memoirs of P8 on how they accommodated the 16-meter fishing boats of his father Ali Cengiz named Nesrin and Artemis for blue cruise:

“The guests decided to visit and split up into groups. But we did not have a suitable boat. My father had a 16-meter boat named Artemis. Fishing boats... We built 10-15 seats like banks. The guests took their sleeping bags with them and spent the nights in them. That was the first chartered tour in Turkey and it took place in June 2, 1963. They shot a documentary series with 13 parts named “The life of a Turkish sponge diver” under the directorship of Pierre Lovi. We set out from Bodrum with five crew members and 22 Belgians. We sailed to Antalya and Side and came back after 22 days. As the people watched these documentaries, Bodrum, Antalya and Side began

The outbreak of sponge disease in 1986 and the subsequent sponge fishing ban and popularization of cheap and artificial sponges undermined the sponge fishing business and thus, sponge fishing slowly vanished. The transition period from sponge fishing to blue cruise began when they built restrooms and water tanks to their old boats and began to set off for blue cruises without any cabins:

“The local residents of Bodrum were very hospitable, lovable and humble and were having financial difficulties. As a matter of fact, it was 1960 when I first arrived, there was a boat named Ali Baba. It was an open-top tour boat with seats. It was not as comfortable as today’s yachts. The owner of the boat was very friendly (P3)

“Inter-ministerial Marina Planning and Investigation Commission” was established in 1967 in Turkey and the proceedings commenced regarding marinas. In the Second Five Year Development Plan (1968-1972) period, establishment of a chain of marinas was projected and the Ministry of Transportation was speculated for the operation of these facilities. In the late 1970’s, yacht tourism was put on the agenda within the body of the Ministry of Tourism and Promotion and suitable locations for marinas were determined. Development plans were designed by the State Planning Organization and the Marinas in Bodrum and Kuşadası were put into service respectively in 1976 and in 1977 (General Directorate of Maritime Commerce, 2015). The shipyards in Bodrum met maintenance and repair needs of all yachts throughout Turkey. There are in Bodrum twenty three such boat to twelve people (Mansur, 1972).

Since, it was difficult to control the coasts after the Cyprus Operation in 1974, these diving activities were banned for a while. The young people of Bodrum participated in courses offered by Istanbul Maritime College to improve themselves and to become captains. Ismail Kasa became the first person to receive a license between 1968 and 1969. In the later years, Ysmet Cengiz, Mehmet Barut, Serif Oncu and Mehmet Yavaş had also received their licenses and the people of Bodrum began to get ready for blue cruise activities and the demand for blue cruises had increased. However, the number of boats in Bodrum was not adequate to meet the increasing demand. Aksona Mehmet remembers that small boats were used for blue cruises. He remembers the following names: “Bahar Teknesi, Guneş Aycicek, Gunay Abi and Hurmalı Nejat, Ysmet Cengiz.”

**Development period: luxury consumption:** The demand increases and so does the revenue in the period of development. Leading companies gain significant profits. This rate of return allows new competitors into the market, sometimes the product is imitated and sometimes new customer types are targeted and the product is developed (Mucuk, 2001). While the blue cruise tours which have been organized with a number of various additions on sponger boats for many years, satisfied domestic and

foreign tourists, this phenomenon became a form of luxury consumption in 1980's. The boats with no cabins and showers have been replaced with more comfortable yachts, which were more suitable for the blue cruise concept. These gulet-type boats were built by the ship builders of Bodrum and became world-famous. The gulets of Bodrum, which were totally made of wood and built through traditional methods in the shipyards of Bodrum, had a great impact on the development of the blue cruise tours with their aesthetic and nostalgic structures. The coves on the Aegean and Mediterranean coastline have many historical, cultural and natural heritages with their ancient ports and one-of-a-kind nature. Gulet-type boats can easily approach to those coves and this makes these yachts more suitable for blue cruise tours:

After many years, durable and beautiful boats were built from pine trees. Tirhandil (the most common type of gulet) and gulet-type boats were the most common types of boats which were also acknowledged by the authorities. Their sizes grew bigger and bigger each year and some of them reached 35-40 m. The first examples of yacht tourism were organized on those boats. They made me fall in love with Bodrum. The sea was so crystal-clear in those coves that you could see and count the pebbles at the bottom of the sea. The coves in Gokova were mostly preferred. The yachts were rented. It came to a point, where those boats got bigger, more luxurious and beautiful" (P10)

A couple of beds in poorly ventilated rooms and a shower hose on the decks of modified fishing boats were enough to go on with. The sole purpose was to swim in those crystal clear coves and to eat fish and drink plenty of raki. As the demand continued to increase, more comfortable and larger gulets with private bathrooms and hot water began to be built especially by the Cretans (Mansur, 1991). The government began to support yacht tourism when the Law on Tourism Incentives No.: 2634 came into effect in 1982 and began to attract a few remaining sponge-divers. Husnu Gumuş who played a significant role in drafting this law, gave the following statements regarding those days:

"We made a great effort while drafting Law on Tourism Incentives No: 2634 in 1982. The contents of the law served as a model throughout the world as the one and most significant regulation especially on yacht tourism after 1982. We prepared the contents of the Regulation on Yacht Tourism by keeping abreast of the latest

developments in the world and in the Mediterranean. Thus, yacht tourism was enacted in Turkey for the first time in history" (P7)

The regulations regarding marina and yacht investment and industry were put into practice with the Regulation on Yacht Tourism which was introduced in 1983 based on this law. After 1985, the boats suitable for blue cruise were began to be built one after another. In 1983 and 1985, Cengiz Oral's, Mustafa Danaci's, Mehmet Yavaş's and Aksona Mehmet's boats became the other boats to join blue cruises:

"I had a boat built in 1980. I put toilets-showers in each room and a separate toilet-shower for the personnel. They used to set sail for blue cruises with sponge boats and diving boats; to offer charter blue cruise tours in Bodrum, I put twin engines and each had 165 HP" (P9)

In the meantime, the promotions of blue cruises gained momentum. British Mail on Sunday newspaper published an article that praised the blue cruises in 1985. A singer recorded an album named "Mavi Yolculuk (the Blue Cruise)". A documentary named the Blue Paradise (Mavi Cennet) was prepared in 1985. In 1989, an actor prepared a parody that told the events that occurred during a blue cruise. Azra Erhat's books and articles, where she narrated the blue cruise, have also contributed to the promotion. The Ministry of Tourism supported the people, who wanted to participate in international fairs and prepared introductory films. All of these were the factors that influenced the promotion of blue cruise. After 1985, the travel agencies have also began to organize blue cruises. Era Tourism Travel Agency (1981) and Tussock Cruising (1984) hosted Dutch and British tourists. In 1989, Erman Aras organized internationally recognized "Bodrum Cup" boat racing. Era Sailing Club was opened in 1992. This club familiarized the kids with sailing and the future blue cruisers were raised. Thus, investments were made to train and educate people, who would get behind the wheel and the number of qualified personnel increased. Another remarkable development was that Greece purchased blue cruise boats from Marmaris and Bodrum in 1992 and new routes were designated in cooperation with Greece.

**Maturing period; cabin charter system in blue cruise tours:** It is best to try and retain market share in maturing period. The sales and costs increase but the turnover decreases. Since, many other competitors have broken into the market, the environment becomes highly

competitive. The potential consumers in the target market should be persuaded to purchase the product or the market volume should be increased by entering into new market segments. It is aimed to increase the number of users of the product. Increasing the sales volume will also increase the purchasing frequency of the customers. In order to minimize the adverse impacts of this period, changes should be made on the product features, the quality of the product should be increased and differentiated (Kotler, 2003).

The competition and the number of yachts have increased drastically in the maturing period of the blue cruise. While there were only four blue cruise boats in Bodrum marina in 1980, there are now 5800 registered boats in 2015. A new touristic product, the cabin charter system, has been developed by providing various alternatives in blue cruise tours. The advantages of the cabin charter system are that it is not necessary to participate as a group and that it reaches more people. Thus, it is observed that many people from different nationalities come together, tolerate their cultural differences and make new friends. The owner of a yacht agency gave the following statements regarding the changes in those days:

“Back in those days, the yachts were rented by specific groups and they would go on excursions. The blue cruise was known as a ‘luxury holiday for reach people’. We made the blue cruise accessible for everyone with this cabin charter system. Then again, this type of vacation is cheaper than staying at hotels. Cabin charter model now works like a charm in Turkey. We have domestic and foreign guests, who have been visiting for 10 consecutive years. We have many guests from Greece and Italy” (P4)

Being a relatively new touristic product, cabin charter system also led to some significant changes in distribution channels. While the yacht owners used to sell their own services in the past, they began to reach more customers through tour operators and travel agencies. Now the domestic tourists are also included within the target market. The long-term (minimum 7-8 nights) blue cruise tours in the development period became more flexible (minimum 3-4 nights) in this period; different prices were set for various types of yachts with different features and the prices became accessible for everyone. Alternative routes have also been designated for short-term excursions.

**Period of regression:** At this period, the product sales drop and profitability ratios reduce. Products may be recalled from the market due to the changes in customer needs and increasing competition. In this case, discounts or cutting down the promotion budget may be recommended (Uygur, 2007). When the life cycles of the blue cruise activities in Turkey are analyzed, it is observed that the blue cruise concept is now in maturing period and has not yet entered into the period of regression. 2014-2023 regional plan of South Aegean Development Agency includes plans for improving yacht tourism in a region including Bodrum, for extending this concept throughout the entire year and for increasing service quality.

## CONCLUSION

The Fisherman of Halicarnassus has come up with the idea of a blue cruise and he put his idea into practice by himself. Sabahattin Eyuboglu, the eponym of the blue cruise, has practiced, carried out, materialized and spread out the idea of blue cruise. For expedition in 1946 and traditionalized those excursions. Those excursions inspired many books, paintings, poems and reports and the blue cruise became a movement/trend. Since, the first blue cruise led by the fisherman of Halicarnassus did not have any commercial purposes, it was not included in this study. When the product life cycle of the blue cruise is analyzed, it is observed that the starting period of this model began when the sponger boats were turned into blue cruise boats. This journey which began when a commission from Brussels wanted to shoot a documentary film about the blue cruise in 1962, entered into its period of development when the Law on Tourism Incentives was enacted in 1982. In this period, the sponger boats fell completely into disuse and gulet-type luxury yachts built in Bodrum came into prominence. The target market, mostly the foreign tourists, create their own groups and rented the yachts for minimum 7-8 nights together with their crew members. In this period, the prices were high and the product is considered upscale. In the early 2000's, the blue cruise concept entered into its maturing period due to increasing competition and thus product differentiation became a common solution and the companies managed to reach more customers. Blue cruise began to appeal to the domestic tourists and to offer hotel room-like comfort with the cabin charter system. The flexibility in durations and prices of the blue cruise tours led to alternative routes.

Currently being in its maturing period, the blue cruise has not yet entered into its period of regression due to the factors, such as naturally protected coves, historical, cultural and natural heritages, suitable sea depth and climatic conditions, crystal clear and tranquil sea and pristine and untouched nature. Schooner-type boats which have been in service since 2000, became popular all over the world and this type of boats began to be known as bodrum-type schooners all around the world. The blue cruise have made a great contribution to the economy of Turkey and created a brand value. The blue cruise had a striking influence on promotion of Bodrum and created a positive image. Schooner and tirhandil-type boats have become globally-known international brands. The promotions, government support and other product development efforts gave results and the sector began to grow not only by attracting foreign tourists but also domestic tourists. Thus, the blue cruise became a tourism product with a competitive advantage in Turkey.

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