

A Research on the Determination of the Tourism Potential of Natural and Cultural Resources at Çoruh Watershed Area (Yusufeli Region): A Case Study

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Abstract: In this research, the general tendencies of native and foreign tourists have been determined. Surveys were conducted in the area in 1994-1995 and during the 4th Whitewater World Championship in 1993 in order to discuss the expectations of Turkish and foreign tourists about the natural and cultural values of Çoruh Watershed area. The Yusufeli Region of the Watershed Area of the Çoruh River is a potential tourism area with its distinguished landscape where recreational and nature tourism activities can be carried out.

Key words: Soft tourism, nature tourism activities, rural recreation, çoruh watershed area

INTRODUCTION

The very existence and long-term success of tourism depends not only on the management of cultural resources, human-built attractions and infrastructure, but also on the conservation and protection of the natural environment in which tourist experiences take place^[1]. Several researcher have examined the impact of leisure behavior on the physical environment^[2-8]. Others have focused on the sensitivity of the ecotourists who are in close contact with the nature^[9-10].

Socio-cultural and environmental aspects of international tourism are related to the way people learn about each other's way of life and thoughts and how they interact with the environment^[11]. The natural environment is crucial to the attractiveness of almost all travel destinations and recreation areas^[12]. The environmental dimension in tourism is an important factor, because areas where nature is spoiled and polluted are less attractive to tourists^[9]. Tourists are attached to areas with environmental quality and recreation/tourism amenities. Increased numbers of visitors and accommodation often degrade the quality of the environment and threatens the natural resource base. Thus, tourism is affected in a negative way by low-quality environment^[13].

One class of tourism often cited as a type of tourism that attempts to minimize the negative effects of traditional tourism is nature tourism or ecotourism. A large controversy exists over the true definitions of nature tourism and ecotourism with authorities alternatively arguing that they are valid tools of sustainable

development or that they are simply new marketing ploys^[14-15].

Nature tourism and ecotourism, are rapidly growing components of the international tourism industry^[16]. The term "green tourism" was adopted, for the first time, in rural areas where, in order to maintain quietness and pleasantness, it was necessary and convenient to avoid the extremes of mass tourism^[17]. "Nature" tourism^[18], "ecotourism"^[19], "alternative" tourism^[20-21] can all be considered forms of green tourism, which are environmentally conscious and soft in character^[9]. The term ecotourism is defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people^[22].

In particular, nature tourism, travel to natural areas such as national parks or to areas of great natural beauty or ecological interest, has become increasingly popular. However, without careful planning and management, tourism can have adverse impacts on the environment and on indigenous people and their cultural values^[23]. Traditional tourism is a source of not only income but also environmental pollution and landscape resource destruction. How to leave landscape resources to future generations is the key to sustainable development of tourism. Ecotourism industry could be an approach to sustainable use of landscape resources^[24]. Some indigenous people are exploring innovative ways to harness tourism to support the traditional elements of their land-based economy, rather than being consumed by the industry. The "authenticity" of this tourism experience represents a major asset as well as a significant

management challenge^[25]. As a result of this, the concept of “sustainable tourism”, contains the basic goals of developing the environment, economy and tourism, has emerged^[5,26,27].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Çoruh Watershed Area (Yusufeli Region) is located in the North-East Turkey (Fig. 1) and Çoruh Watershed Area is rich in natural, cultural and historical values. The area has rich opportunities (untouched nature sites, forests, glacier lakes, many rivers and falls, rich plants, wild life, caves, strange interesting, geological formations, plateaus, mountain areas) for tourism and recreation.

The land around the province of Artvin in north-eastern Anatolia is covered with steep and impassable mountains. The Çoruh River winds through this mountainous area until it reaches the Black Sea. The Çoruh Watershed Area is found in an underdeveloped region with regard to the tourism industry due to the fact that the country’s development plans have not given high priority to tourism^[28].

Çoruh Watershed Area has been considered an important natural resource for agricultural irrigation, because of however recently tourist use of the area has become popular widespread interest in river sports such as rafting, canoeing and water skiing. The 4th Whitewater World Championship was held on the Çoruh River in July 1993. In the championship, which hosted competitors from 30 different countries a conference with “One World One River” as a slogan also took place^[29].

Besides the fact that Çoruh river is one of the fastest running rivers in the world, because it found within steep mountains, which makes it a good site for sports such as trekking and mountain climbing. Also it has great big potential for alternative tourism activities such as paragliding, hunting, bird watching, photo-tourism, camping, picnicking and fishing^[30].

Other remarkable richness’ of the area are historical ruins (churches, mosques, bridges and towers, castles, tombs), high plateaus settlements which are located at various altitudes with their activities (traditional, festivals), preserved traditional life and culture (traditional homes architecture, handwork, rich cultural cuisine, various social activities, ethnographic and folklore motifs).

Knowing that the study area has many characteristics relating to tourism, a questionnaire was circulated in 1994-1995 to discuss the expectations of Turkish and foreign tourists about the touristic potential of the area and in the presentation of its natural and cultural resources. Questionnaires forms were prepared in English,

Table 1: Distribution of tourist sites according to factors that tourists prefer

Factors	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents ^a
Quiet and calm	45	17.44
Easily accessible	9	3.49
Clean air	37	14.34
Beautiful view	60	23.25
Forest admiration	12	4.65
Temperate weather	9	3.49
Unspoiled nature site	76	29.46
Other factors	10	3.88
Total	258	100.00

^aRespondents marked more than one choice

Table 2: Distribution of preferred natural and cultural sites by tourist’s values

Natural and cultural values of tourism	Number of respondents	Percents of respondents ^a
Natural beauties	61	17.68
Çoruh river facilities for water sports	61	17.68
Suitable sites for trekking	68	19.71
Rich plant and wildlife	21	6.09
Plateaus and festivals	27	7.83
Interesting folklore motives	29	8.40
Natural resource values (caves, falls, geomorphologic formations)	17	4.93
Historical ruins	54	15.65
Other	7	2.03
Total	345	100.00

^aRespondents marked more than one choice

Table 3: Distribution of tourist activities

Types of activities	Number of respondents	Percents of respondents ^a
Long distance nature walks-trekking	60	19.05
Water sports (rafting-canoeing)	43	13.65
Taking part in festivals	20	6.35
Hunting	2	0.64
Observing interesting folklore motives	23	7.30
Camping	36	11.43
Observing floristic variety	7	2.22
Observing wildlife	15	4.76
Photo tourism	5	1.59
Bird watching	3	0.95
Observing natural resources (geologic views, caves, falls, etc.)	7	2.22
Sports fishing	0	0.00
Visiting historical sites	51	16.19
Hiking	32	10.16
Climbing-Mountaineering	5	1.59
Paragliding	0	0.00
Other activities	6	1.90
Total	315	100.00

^aRespondents marked more than one choice

Table 4: Reasons for tourists’ limited benefit from the area

Reasons	Number of respondents	Percents of respondents ^a
Temperature	0	0.00
Difficulties in accessibility	76	30.77
Solidarity	5	2.05
Crowd	0	0.00
Not finding what they were seeking	34	13.76
Lack of security	1	0.40
No guides	32	12.95
Inefficiency tourist and recreational facilities	67	27.12
Difficulty of pre-planning visits	21	8.50
Other reasons	11	4.45
Total	247	100.00

^aRespondents marked more than one choice

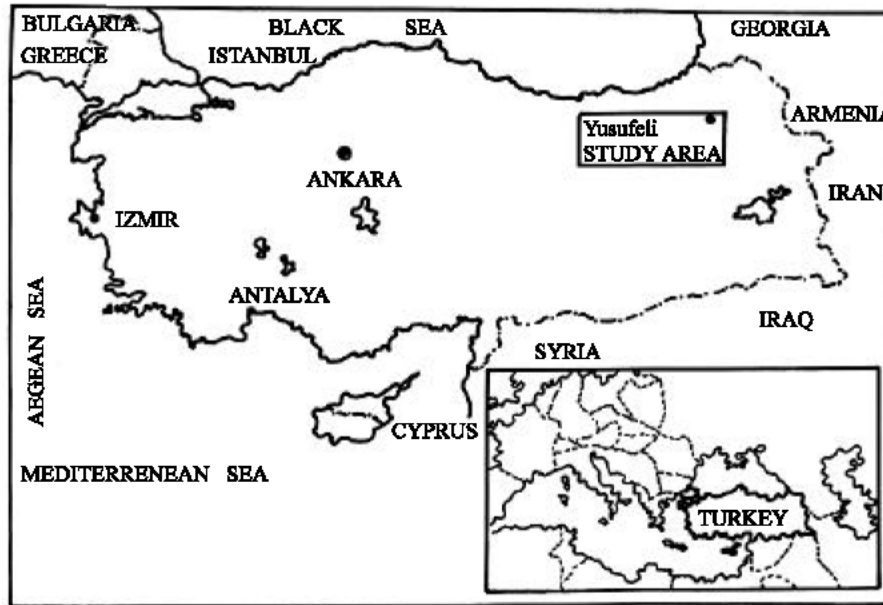


Fig. 1: Geographical location of the study area

Table 5: Reasons preventing tourists from participating in water sports

Reasons	Number of respondents	Percents of respondents ^a
Not clean	43	28.29
Lack of equipment	37	24.34
Difficult access	40	26.32
Difficulty in finding guides	11	7.24
Lack of safety	0	0.00
Difficulty finding needs	14	9.21
Other reasons	7	4.60
Total	152	100.00

^aRespondents marked more than one choice

French and German and tourists visiting the area completed the questionnaires by themselves. The questionnaires were distributed primarily in nature-oriented tourist destinations.

Questionnaires were distributed to 110 foreign tourists, but only 87 of them were analyzed due to missing and wrong answers. The number of questionnaires analyzed is only 87 because there were limited number of tourists and some refused to take part. Those tourists who answered the questionnaire were from 15 different countries, the majority being from England (20%), Holland (14%), France (12%) and Germany (11%). There were more male than female respondent in the survey (59 and 41%, respectively).

The question “What kind of touristic activities do you take part in?” was asked in order to find out the types and popularity of the touristic activities found in the region (Table 3). According to the analysis the ranking of activities is; trekking (19.05%), visits to historical sites (especially Armenian and Georgian churches-16.19%), water sports (rafting, canoeing 13.65%), camping (11.43%)

and hiking (10.16%). Answering the question “Can you benefit sufficiently from the areas where you participate?”, 83% stated that they could not. Tourists were asked for the reasons of their limited use of the area (Table 4).

According to Table 4, 30.77% of the tourists had difficulty in accessing the area and stated that existing roads should be improved or alternative roads should be built. Besides accessibility problems, they stated that tourist facilities were not sufficient and that they need for food, accommodation and guides could not be satisfied. Other reasons were lack of the cleanliness and a tourism bureau and water shortages.

The Çoruh river is an extremely suitable site for rafting. Çoruh river has hosted the fourth Whitewater World Championship on a 75 km route Rafting has had a primary role in making the area well-known. A question was asked of tourists who came for only for rafting. They were asked to what extent they could benefit from the river and whether the Çoruh river was suitable for this sport. Eighty seven percent stated that they could not benefit sufficiently from the river. The reasons preventing them from benefiting are found in Table 5.

Most said (28.29%) that the river was polluted and expressed concern about waste being put into the water. Accessibility (26.32%) and lack of facilities (24.34%) were the second and third reasons. Other reasons were that there is no map of the Çoruh river showing the race course and in addition arrangements had not been made for emergency conditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Natural resources, are being lost in both quality and quantity, because of intensive demand and use. The result for this, especially in our country where population growth is not controlled, is that the consumption of resources increases with the increasing demand. Nevertheless, it is unavoidable that there is increased demand for natural resources. Natural resources should serve development and progress and tourism is a candidate for the economic use of these resources.

Tourism volunteers have headed towards natural areas (that have preserved its natural quality) and have used an approach which could sustain the environment, in the light of previous experiences and minimize the risk of destruction of natural areas.

This study, is an attempt to determine the first signs of environment degradation. It has the potential to prevent the destruction of natural resource as a result of intensive use, especially in those areas which were caught unprepared by tourism pressure. Factors that are important in protecting and preserving the environment are not understood properly and the inability to balance protection and use, while presenting natural resources for touristic activities, needs to be remedied.

There are many examples of negative effects of tourism pressure on rural areas found in untouched environments, especially those caused by tourists^[10,31,32].

This kind of tourism, stresses the idea that it is necessary for any tourism firm which aims at profit maximization to take precautions in order to minimize environmental damage. The justification is that nature is an economic source for tourism and it is imperative to sustain this source. Environmental quality is a factor that must not be overlooked because it increases the productivity of tourism. The goal of this understanding of tourism, is not profit maximization, but to increase the life expectancy of the resource by taking precautions to protect the original environment of the area. In order to successfully use natural resource for tourism, especially for areas which wish to be protected and sustained and which are attraction centers, the preferences of the people who use the area must be known. Protection and development can be ensured if the inhabitants of the area can adjusted to changing conditions.

The Çoruh Watershed Area has neither the tourist facilities nor the reputation of other tourist destination in Turkey where the sea, beaches and sun are the main attractions. This situation has effected investments in the area negatively and thus tourists are not aware of the many tourist resources of the area.

In the recent years, Turkish and foreign tourists have been arriving in the area because of the rising popularity

of soft tourism and because of the fourth Whitewater World Championship held on the Çoruh river. The number of Turkish tourists is far less than foreigners.

Soft tourism is becoming popular in developing countries and is being considered as an important tool for regional development. The aim is to create a rational and active tourism plan based which is based upon an inventory of natural and cultural resources the infrastructure and a socio-economic analysis of the area. A nature-friendly approach is important so as not to repeat the same mistakes as in areas of mass tourism. Nature conscious tourists, who have selected the area for their holiday, have a sensitivity to nature protection and give importance the environment problems.

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