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## Assessment of Rural Tourism in Turkey Using SWOT Analysis

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**Abstract:** In the study, current and future situations of rural tourism in Turkey were criticized by means of SWOT analysis technique. As a result, Turkey has important rural tourism potential, but initiatives, investments and promotion for rural tourism are inadequate and slow compared to main tourism destinations in Mediterranean countries. Turkey can be one of the most important rural tourism centres in the world in the medium term if true policies are applied in the context of changes in the world tourism and the preferences of tourists.

**Key words:** Rural tourism, SWOT analysis, Turkey

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### INTRODUCTION

Turkey is a country situated at crossroads of three continents: Asia, Europe and Africa. It occupies some 780 thousand km<sup>2</sup> of land and is surrounded by 8000 km of coastline. According to the results of 2000 population census, the population of the country is 67 803 927. Nearly 35% of the country population live in rural areas. The number of villages are nearly 37 thousand and about two-thirds of them have populations below 500. Besides, one-thirds of rural dwellers live in the villages located within and adjacent to the forests.

The need to redress regional imbalances and to improve income distribution among various sections of society is engaging the attention of policy makers. The creation of employment, the improvement of rural living standards and the reversal of the trend towards migration of rural populations to urban areas are some of the main objectives of Turkish government's rural development policies (Muthoo and Onul, 1996).

At the beginning of 1990s, Turkey has decided to diversify tourism in order to compete with western countries. The basic philosophy of new tourism concept of Turkey can be summarized as tourism activity in four seasons, throughout the country and evaluating cultural, historical, environmental potential of the country. In this context, Turkey is working on two types of alternative tourism. The first type includes botanical, air balloon, water-related, thermal and health, physical recreation, religious and cultural tourism. The second type, closely related to the first, includes camping and caravan, bird watching (ornithology), winter sports, hunting (sportive fishing and wild animals) and golf tourism (Pinar, 1996; Tavmergen and Oral, 1999). Northern and Central Anatolian actors are busy promoting rural and highland

holidays, soft tourism activities like rafting, trekking and caving while local partners along the Southern coast are busy developing mass tourism activities (Goymen, 2000).

Rural tourism is at the introduction stage of tourism product life cycle since it is a new activity in Turkey. Therefore, the number of research dealing with rural tourism is limited. And also there is a difficulty in gathering and disseminating data. In order to look the future clearly and make accurate policies drawing the whole picture of rural tourism in Turkey is very important. In this context, the aim of the study is to evaluate current constraints for and future possibilities of rural tourism sector point of view of conservation of natural, historical and cultural values, sustainable rural development and integrating tourism, agricultural and rural development policies of Turkey with those of the EU.

### THE CONCEPT OF RURAL TOURISM

Rural tourism is a multi-faceted activity: It is not just farm-based tourism. It includes farm-based holidays but also comprises special interest nature holidays and eco-tourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism and, in some areas ethnic tourism (Bramwell and Lane, 1994).

Lack of studies on rural tourism is compounded further by the absence of a commonly accepted definition as to what constitutes rural tourism. Sometimes rural tourism is equated with farm tourism (Oppermann, 1996). Some authors include outdoor recreation and tourism in National Parks and wilderness areas into rural tourism (Ladki, 1993; Owens, 1984); but Derno (1991) excludes them. On the other hand, Pearce (1990) discusses second homes in the context of rural tourism.

## **RURAL TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN TURKEY**

In recent years local governors and NGOs throughout the country have been trying to benefit from rural tourism via supplying all historical, natural, cultural and religious values in both domestic and foreign tourism markets. Some of the activities are summarized as follows:

- Urgup municipality has decided to apply a project aiming at introduction of rural life in the Cappadocia region. Total budget of the project is 50 million dollars and it will be organized by Magic Life International. In the context of project, both domestic and foreign visitors will attend village wedding ceremonies, cook traditional rural meals, milking cows and sheep.
- In the Valley of Kizilcukur, located in the district of Ortahisar, Nevsehir province local governor is organized a tour for tourist to see the sun. Because this area is a good place where the sun rises and sets best in the world. Every year nearly 30,000 tourists visit the place paying nearly \$1.5 per day.
- Camel wrestling is organized in many villages and counties of Mediterranean (Burdur, Isparta and Antalya provinces), Marmara (Balikesir and Canakkale provinces) and Egean regions (Izmir, Manisa, Mugla and Denizli provinces) during winter season.
- In the last two years, soap opera were made in rural areas of Turkey (i.e. Asmalı Konak in Cappadocia-Nevsehir, Kinalı Kar in Cumali Kizik-Bursa, Hekimoglu in Sirince-Izmir). In addition, Turkish films named Sun Shines from the East, Taste at the Summits and Heads or Tails were made in Cappadocia. Therefore, many people go to villages mentioned above to see actors and actress, visit historical places and live nostalgia.
- In recent years some tourism agencies have organized tours covering the route of Silk Road.
- Some rural people who were trained by professionals joint paralyzing activity in rural areas of Erzincan and Mugla provinces.
- There are some private organisations supplying rural tourism service in Southwest part of Turkey. One of them is HUZUR VADISI (peaceful valley in Turkish). It is a holiday retreat, which offers yoga, holistic and walking holidays and alternative therapies at a beautiful traditional restored farmstead in a secluded mountain valley on Fethiye coast. Tourists are accommodated in comfortable nomadic yurts, a special highlight of the holiday. Another professional rural tourism activity is organized by

TOHUM presents an opportunity to visit and live in traditional villages, cook with the local women, participate in daily life with donkey rides, organic farming, folk dancing and other activities.

- Black Sea Region of Turkey is suitable for eco-tourism and plateau tourism. In the context of rural tourism projects, some local governors are establishing or restoring wooden cottages in the highlands to accommodate tourists. During the holiday visitors have an opportunity breathing fresh air, eating traditional meals and sightseeing the exotic flora and fauna.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

SWOT analysis technique was used in order to explain current constraints and future possibilities of rural tourism in Turkey. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. A SWOT analysis is essentially a brainstorming session on the key variables that affect a firm's/sector's performance (Henricks, 1999; Houben *et al.*, 1999).

In the study following methods were used in order to collect data: i) throughout the year 2004, all TV programmes showed in 20 TV channels related to tourism, rural life, cultural activity, mountain, etc were watched, ii) 10 provinces and their counties and villages were visited in different geographical regions of the country, iii) reported speeches were made with rural dwellers in order to define possible potential sources for rural tourism, iv) literature was reviewed to have background information about rural tourism and their likely effects on rural people and areas, v) government policies were examined to learn their views on rural development and rural tourism.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of SWOT analysis of rural tourism in Turkey are given in Table 1.

Promotion of rural tourism as a new product is very low in Turkey, compared to western countries. However, in recent years there has been an increase in the number of television programmes focused on rurality and also rural tourism in Turkey. Everybody except that these programs have an important role in the introduction of rural dwellers' life style, flora and fauna and historical and cultural values in rural areas to urban people desiring to see different places, to live adventure and to be in a natural environment. Some of the programmes are summarized as follows: Adrenaline on the BRT, Caravan and Adventurer on STV, Vital Point on NTV, Discoverer on ATV, From Foreign to Native

Table 1: SWOT analysis of rural tourism in Turkey

Strengths	Weaknesses
Tourism Encouragement Act No: 2634	Difficulties in marketing of rural tourism products at international markets
2010 Tourism Vision of Turkish Government	Lack of scientific meetings related to rural tourism at local and national level
Declaration of the year 2002 as "International Year of Mountains"	Difficulties in gathering and disseminating data
Unspoiled environment and flora and fauna	Inadequate academic study on rural tourism
Unlimited hospitality of Turkish rural dwellers	Lack of co-ordination among rural NGOs
Changes in the preferences of tourists	Limited number of accommodation
Extraordinary landscape	Not speaking of foreign languages by rural people
Near to main tourist markets geographically	
Supplying exotic combination of west and east	
Opportunities	Threats
Having opportunity for tourism throughout Turkey in four seasons	War possibility in neighbor countries (e.g., in Iraq, Balkans and Middle East)
Developments in awareness of urban people to nature, undiscovered destinations, etc.	Well-organized rural tourism centers in Europe (i.e., Austria, Spain, Scotland)
Increase in the number of TV programs focusing on to rural areas	Affects of 11 September events in the USA on world tourism
Young and dynamic population in rural areas to be adopted the concept of tourism easily	Decrease in domestic tourists' household income
Candidacy of Turkey for membership to the EU	
Constructing 15000 km of double-road	
Suitable places for some TV or cinema films	

County on *İşık TV*, *Telecritics* and *Rainbow* on *TGRT*, *Traveller* on *Kanal 7*, *Let's Visit and See* and *In Eddies* or *whirls: Anatolia* on *TRT1*, *Sea Magazine*, *Zeugma: Yesterday, Today and Turnover* on *TRT2* and *Mr. Tourism and Holiday Guide* on *TV8*, *Nostalgia* on *Flash TV*, *Things that we have not seen and heard* on *Star*.

### CONCLUSION

Turkey has an important potential for alternative tourism. However, rural tourism resources have not been used for the development of less favoured areas of Turkey at adequate level due to terrorism in the Southeast part of Turkey since second half of the 1980s. Therefore, the rural areas, only in the Black Sea region, Mediterranean and Aegean regions, are opened to mass and also highland tourism activities. As starting the end of 20th century, the terrorism activity stopped (erased) by Turkish government. It is expected that the number of foreign tourists visiting rural areas will increase in the medium or long run (Guclu, 1998; Turkish Daily News, 2000) as parallel to increase in the number of incentives, initiatives and investments towards rural milieu in the short term. Another obstacle for the development of rural tourism in Turkey is war in neighbour countries because Turkey is located in a difficult geography (Balkans, Middle East and Central Asia), where many wars happened during the last two decades (i.e., Gulf War, Iraq-USA War, Israel-Palestine War, Yugoslavia, Azerbaijan-Armenia War).

To sum up, "I want to feed and live in the place where I was born" is the slogan of people living in rural areas. To achieve this aim, there is a need to develop new employment opportunities in rural areas in addition to agriculture. Many successful applications throughout the world show that rural tourism can create additional income for especially rural youth and women.

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