

# Measuring the Awareness Level of Local Tourists in Their Tourism and Environment Relations: A Research in Tarsus

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*Abstract – the purpose of the research is to determine the differences in the level of awareness on the tourism and environmental relations of local tourists traveling to Tarsus from different regions of Turkey and to determine whether these differences differ according to the demographic characteristics of the tourists participating in the research (gender, age, education, living city etc.) The sample of the research is composed of 110 local tourists visiting different touristic destinations of Tarsus town. The survey method was used to reach the data. The questionnaire, consisting of 21 questions, was filled by the participants in face-to-face negotiations.*

Keywords: Tourism, Environment, Local Tourist, Tarsus

## I. Introduction

Developed and developing countries are faced with the noise, stress, traffic and environmental pollution caused by industrialization and rapid urbanization. Having these problems increasing day by day may cause people to requests more entertainment, traveling, resting etc. and may increase the demand towards tourism activity. In recent years tourism has become one of the largest sectors of the world. Nine tenth of employers throughout the world is employed in tourism sector and the incomes obtained from tourism constitute approximately 6% of the global gross national product (Demirel, 2010).

The development of tourism contributes to the development of the social and cultural development processes while enabling the national economy to develop nationally and internationally (Kuter ve Ünal, 2009:146). The high number of tourists participating in tourism activities causes natural-cultural and historical environments in touristic regions to get damaged. The understanding of the coupling relationship between tourism and the environment is important due to the

complex interaction in environmental effects induced by tourism (Tang, 2015:11).

These losses can be a social, economic and environmental damages. The unconscious use of tourism resources leads to destruction of natural resources, increase of tourism activities and environmental pollution and damage of marine pollution in coastal areas, destruction of forests and destruction of cultural and historical structures resulting from travels with groups (Ayaş, 2007: 61). The tourism sector, which creates positive effects on economic, cultural and social areas, causes extreme natural resources usage, wrong place selection, destruction of natural areas which are touristic products, destruction of coastal and historical values (Mansuroğlu, 2006: 36).

Increasing pressure of tourism on the society, increasing mass tourism in coastal regions, alternative tourism types and places become more attractive by tourists, natural and rural areas are preferred more. Alternative forms of tourism provide protection of the natural and cultural environment, protection of local people and income from tourism. Alternative forms of tourism are a form of tourism that is in harmony with the environment (Kervankiran, 2014: 134).

## II. Literature review

**Tourism and Environment Awareness.** The tourism sector has become one of the largest income sources of developed and developing countries in the 21st century. The positive and negative effects that it creates are now the subject of researches. One of the most important effects of tourism is undoubtedly its negative impact on the environment. The relationship of tourism with the environment is important for the continuity of the sector. With mass tourism, people move in groups and cause natural cultural and historical sites to be destroyed. The protection and development of the environment is important in terms of maintaining the existence of the human generation (Gündüz, 1999: 10).

After the 1960s, problems that are damaging environment began coming on the agenda; and the measures and policies towards environment problems started being determined (Çınar, 2001; Sencar, 2007: 53). Mass tourism has made it possible for tourists in coastal areas to spend money on leisure activities such as holiday villages, accommodation, eating and drinking, entertainment, etc., and reveals their usages of the enterprises in the region exceeding their capacities.

This touristic process, which is mainly focused on consumption revealed itself as:

- Visual pollution due to concretization in terms of construction,
- Environmental pollution in terms of distribution, density, resource use in ecological environment,
- Pollution-related species losses and degradation of ecological balance,
- Socio-cultural differences and cultural disruption in anticipation of incompatibility.

Today, the developed world countries have developed various types of tourism to provide more respect for the

natural environment, protection and sustainability in order to overcome the problems created by mass tourism, which is focused on consumption. These types of tourism are ecotourism, sustainable tourism and environmental tourism (Kısa Ovalı, 2007).

Sustainable tourism is defined as a development type that provides the protection of the environment with which the human being is in interaction, without getting damaged and changed and that maintains the cultural integrity, ecologic processes, biological diversity and systems that maintain the life as well as where all natural resources are managed in a way to meet the economic, social and aesthetic needs of humans and tourists as well as the needs of the next generations visiting the place (Okçaşoğlu, 2006: 97). The concept of sustainable tourism suggests that the relationship between environment and tourism is interrelated (Gündüz, 1999: 26-27).

**Tourism and Green Marketing Concept.** The concept of green marketing was discussed for the first time in the 'ecological marketing' seminar that the American marketing union was organized in 1975, and so took part in the literature (Giritlioğlu, 2015: 179). Green or environmental marketing is, as a concept, environmental and nature-protecting marketing activities aimed at meeting consumer needs and desires (Seyhan and Yılmaz, 2010: 54). According to another definition, green marketing is a type of marketing designed to meet people's desires and needs while at the same time aiming at minimizing harm to the natural environment while meeting these demands and needs (Altunöz, 2014: 158). Green marketing is a type of marketing that ensures sustainability of scarce resources and embraces sustainability, while at the same time enabling the community to be conscious and sensitive to the environment (Giritlioğlu, 2015: 179-180).

The tourism sector can survive with the protection of natural resources and the environment. Due to the tendency of tourists participating in tourism activities towards natural and cultural values, the fact that their education level is high and they are in an environmentally friendly approach during the purchase; businesses are tending to green marketing (Güneş, 2011: 45-46).

**General Information about Tarsus and its Tourism Potential.** Livelihood of the people of the region is predominantly agriculture. Tarsus is a developed industrial town after Mersin. Tarsus is the largest district of Mersin, located in the Mediterranean region of Turkey, which brings Europe and Asia together. According to the census of the year 2016, the population of the town is 329,494. (<http://www.tarsus.bel.tr>).

Tarsus has a very rich history and is an important town for some religious beliefs. It is believed that the cave where Ashab-i-kehf (Seven Sleepers), which is on the Surat al-Kahf in the Qur'an, is in Tarsus. One of the authors of the Bible (New Testament) Paulus was also born in Tarsus. For this reason, it is also considered as pilgrimage place by Christians. Besides these, the world's first sewer Historical Roman Road and the Roman bath are in Tarsus. The Cleopatra Gate is among the oldest remains of the city. Taşkuşu cave 10 km northwest, the

waterfall and particularly the Tarsus Dam are places to visit and have excellent history and natural beauty in terms of tourism (<https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarsus>).

**Studies Made Related to the Subject.** Survey technique was applied by Okçaşoğlu (2006) in order to measure the consciousness levels of the tourism environment and the differences in the level of consciousness among the employees who operate four hotels in the Antalya Kundu region and customers with various nationalities. According to the results of the study, it is stated that there is no difference in consciousness levels between employees and customers in relation to tourism and environment. Kervankiran (2014) assessed the tourism development and the effects of the local people in Beypazarı in April coming out with the development, with the participation of 250 participants in the study, and according to the result of the study, it has positive social, communal and environmental effects.

Kelkit (2003) investigated the effect of the industry on the environment in Çanakkale province, investigated the problems encountered during the application and examined the site selection of natural socio-cultural and economic structure of Çanakkale by the industrial development. As a result of the study, pollution of the environment, air pollution and pollution of the coastal areas were detected. Various solutions have been proposed to overcome these negative problems. In a research made by Emekli and Baykal in 2010 in Bornova region on the level of awareness of the local people with survey method, it was found that, although the people of the region have no knowledge about rural tourism, they are aware that they are tourism livelihoods and that they are aware of the protection of the environment.

### III. Method

**The Purpose of Research and Hypotheses.** The purpose of the survey is to determine the level of consciousness of tourism and environment related local tourists traveling to the province of Tarsus in Mersin province and determine whether they differ according to their demographic characteristics. Below are hypotheses based on the purpose of our research. These are;

*H1: There is a relationship between the accommodation facilities, that local tourists traveling to Tarsus prefer, and the region where they live.*

*H2: There is a relationship between the gender of indigenous tourists traveling to Tarsus and their thoughts of supporting environmental protection factors.*

*H3: There is a meaningful relationship between the ages of local tourists traveling to Tarsus and their reasons of preferring Tarsus.*

*H4: There is no difference in regards to the most important environmental problems that hotel customers from different country groups lead to tourism.*

**Selection of Universe and Sampling.** The universe of the research is formed by local tourists who travel to the touristic places of the Tarsus district of Mersin province. Since there is no possibility of reaching the whole of the universe, the way of sampling was preferred. The sample of the research is composed of 110 local tourists who

travel to different touristic places of Tarsus. In determining the sample, 'probable random sampling' technique was used among 'probability sampling methods'.

**Data Collection Instrument.** Survey technique was used in the research. A questionnaire consisting of 21 questions, open ended and closed ended, was distributed to measure the level of consciousness of local tourists in relation to tourism and environment. In order to measure the different opinions of the individuals participating in the survey, blank options were provided under the name of "other". In order to avoid evasive answers to questions, the questions are usually sorted in a specific order, avoiding from those difficult to understand. In 2006, a scale developed by Kudret Aslı Okşaşoğlu "to measure the impact of tourism and environment relations on tourists and workers" was used.

**Analysis of the Data.** The data obtained from the study were analyzed by SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) statistical program.

The answers for the questionnaire comprised of 110 respondents. Their age was between 18 and 67, the average age of respondents being 34. 53,6% of the respondents were female and 46,4 % male. The respondents came from different cities of Turkey and in order to keep the responses anonymous, the cities were grouped into regions. Respondents' different accommodation preferences are classified according to accommodation facilities in the region. The majority of respondents came from the Mediterranean region. The number of respondents from the Aegean region is only one. The most preferred accommodation by respondents is the city hotels.

TABLE 1  
DISTRIBUTION OF AGE GROUPS, RESIDANCE AND ACCOMODATION

Age Groups	Male		Female	
	f	%	f	%
18-24	17	15,5	16	14,4
25-31	10	9,1	8	7,2
32-38	4	3,6	7	6,3
39-45	7	6,3	8	7,2
45+	13	11,9	20	17,5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>46,4</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>53,6</b>
Residence	f	%	f	%
Mediterranean Region	30	27,3	40	36,1
Central Anatolia Region	7	6,3	6	5,6
Marmara Region	6	5,6	6	5,6
Black Sea Region	2	1,8	4	3,6
Eastern Anatolia Region	3	2,7	1	0,9
Southeastern Anatolia Region	3	2,7	1	0,9
Aegean Region	0	0	1	0,9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>46,4</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>53,6</b>
Accommodation	f	%	f	%
City Hotel	14	12,7	18	16,3
Holiday Village	5	4,6	12	10,8
Hostel	9	8,2	10	9,2
Mountain/Forest Hotel	9	8,2	5	4,6
Camp	2	1,8	3	2,7
Others	12	10,9	11	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>46,4</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>53,6</b>

H1: There is a relationship between the accommodation facilities, that local tourists traveling to Tarsus prefer, and the region where they live.

$ki^2=12,995$ ,  $sd=8$   $p=0,773$

There is no statistical difference because  $p > 0.05$ .

H2: There is a relationship between the gender of indigenous tourists traveling to Tarsus and their thoughts of supporting environmental protection factors.

$ki^2=4,778$ ,  $sd=6$   $p=0,427$

There is no statistical difference because  $p > 0.05$ .

H3: There is a meaningful relationship between the ages of local tourists traveling to Tarsus and their reasons of preferring Tarsus.

$ki^2=20,147$ ,  $sd=7$   $p=0,219$

There is no statistical difference because  $p > 0.05$ .

"Impact of Wastes" had the highest frequency score of this indicator group and "Plant-Animal Genesis Exhaustion" received the lowest. According to respondents, second important environmental problem is "Destruction of the Natural Environment", third important environmental problem is "Contamination of Natural Environment", fourth important environmental problem is "Irregular Urbanization", fifth important environmental problem is "Wildlife Deterioration" and sixth important environmental problem is "Traffic jam".

TABLE 2

INDICATORS OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS CAUSED BY TOURISM

Environmental Problems/ Regions	Mediterranean	Central Anatolia	Marmara	Black Sea	Eastern Anatolia	Southeastern Anatolia	Aegean	TOTAL
	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	f
Impact of Wastes	52	12	10	4	2	1	0	81
Destruction of the Natural Environment	48	10	8	6	2	1	1	76
Contamination of Natural Environment	43	8	7	5	1	1	0	65
Irregular Urbanization	38	7	5	2	1	3	1	47
Wildlife Deterioration	22	5	4	4	1	2	0	38
Traffic jam	11	3	4	3	2	1	0	24
Plant-Animal Genesis Exhaustion	4	1	2	2	1	1	1	12

H4: There is no difference in regards to the most important environmental problems that hotel customers from different country groups lead to tourism.

$ki^2=19,752$ ,  $sd=9$   $p=0,622$

There is no statistical difference because  $p > 0.05$ .

## Conclusion

Negative impacts from tourism occur when the level of visitor use is greater than the environment's ability to cope with this use within the acceptable limits of change. Uncontrolled conventional tourism poses potential threats to many natural areas around the world. It can put enormous pressure on an area and lead to impacts such as soil erosion, increased pollution, discharges into the sea, natural habitat loss, increased pressure on endangered species and heightened vulnerability to forest fires. It

often puts a strain on water resources, and it can force local populations to compete for the use of critical resources. Tourism also contributes positively to the surrounding area both physically and culturally. Physically, natural and historical resources are protected. Culturally it helps to improve the quality of activities such as art, folklore, festival, theater and to live for many years.

With their behaviors and decisions, consumers have a substantial impact on the environment. Choices regarding food or modes of transportation, for instance, influence greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to climate change. As voters, people can further support or dismiss environmental policies. Since it is very difficult for consumers to recognize the environmental consequences of their actions, public knowledge about the issue may be limited. Even if consumers are aware of their environmental impacts, they may be unwilling to change their behaviors because of the costs or inconveniences involved.

The present thesis aimed to examine people's knowledge about the environmental consequences of consumer behavior, as well as their willingness to reduce these environmental impacts. Both aspects were investigated for the domain of climate change and food consumption.

The environmental and tourism awareness levels of the domestic tourists staying in Tarsus region are not related to the variables investigated. The level of consciousness of the research group towards tourism and environment relation is concentrated in certain topics. These issues are mostly not related to the negative effects of the tourist on the environment. It is about issues that tourism service providers and local governments are influential. Tourists are more aware of the physical effects of damage to the environment.

The environmental awareness of tourists living in nearby areas is higher than others. This can be related to the sense of ownership of the tourists living in nearby provinces. Infrastructure problems of Tarsus, which is a rich tourism region, also cause negative opinions to be formed. In future research, foreign tourists can be included in the research. In this respect, the attitudes of domestic and foreign tourists towards the environment can be evaluated comparatively. In addition, research on the sensitivity of employees and decision makers to the environment in the tourism sector will ensure that future research is more comprehensive. The impact of environment-based lessons given during the education life of tourists on tourist behavior can also be considered in future research.

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