

Sustainable Environment in Tourism Policies: The Case of Turkey

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Abstract

Tourism is a sustainable sector which serves different industries if it is put to good use. However, the loss of this economic revenue due to the environmental destruction is possible. Tourism policies on sustainable environment are put into practice both because of economic reasons and in order for next generations to live healthily. Considering practices in Turkey, it can be helpful to compare them with different examples and making a general evaluation for developing efficient policies. Undoubtedly, the process of making and putting policies containing both economic and environmental concerns into practice is difficult so a comparative case study will be useful.

***Keywords:** Environmental Sustainability, Tourism Policies, Tourism.*

1. Introduction

Global warming, population growth, change in security risks, increasing travel and transportation facilities led to some changes in tourism policies. One of the issues causing these changes is environment. It is seen that environmental conscience has increased in tourism policies as in the other policies. Analysis of tourism policies for the most realistic and practicable sustainable environment is useful in order to get tangible data. In the light of this data, it is expected to design, renew and amend tourism policies on sustainable environment. In the first part of the article the concept of sustainable environment is described and the relationship between tourism policies and environment is emphasized. In the main part first, the practice of tourism policies in Turkey is explained and then tourism policies on sustainable environment are compiled. Then, tourism policies developed with the same purpose and providing different clues from the world are explained and an overall evaluation is made for comparison.

2. Environment and Tourism

In this part the concept of sustainable environment and formation of environment based tourism policies is presented. This part is considered necessary to show the importance of sustainable environment and to make clear that tourism is not a threat to environment.

2.1. Sustainable Environment

Especially with global warming, the issue that whether the human race has a liveable world or not has started to be discussed. Furthermore, scientific studies have been carried out related to the world waiting for next generations in short and long terms. Different scenarios are developed for the problems directly or indirectly connected to each other such as decreasing forests and air pollution, yield reduction in agricultural lands and decreasing usable water resources. Moreover living in a clean environment is expressed as a human right.

Sustainable environment is defined by different theories and disciplines. Generally, a definition like nature's being exposed by the human effect at minimum level and therefore causing the least damage to human beings and other living creatures with which the human beings share the ecosystem will be suitable. Furthermore as nearly each tourism area is considered to be a part of the nature, one shouldn't forget environment needs to be accepted as the capital in tourism and the capital should keep its existing value or appreciate. As a result, it can be understood that nature is the living space of human beings and other living creatures and it has a direct effect on tourism. Thus, nature should be preserved for the sustainability of human beings, other living creatures and tourism revenue.

2.2. The Importance of Environment in Tourism Policies

Stopping environmental pollution as soon as possible and solving this problem by affecting human life at minimum level are aimed. Humans have made changes in various fields in the hope of living in a better environment and leaving a cleaner world to the next generations. Some practices from industry to agriculture existing as individual precautions are available. Secondary practices can be mentioned except for installing filters in factories' chimneys, realizing encouraging practices on recycling, imposing deterrent penalties to reduce the damage to the environment.

Environmental policies towards tourism businesses are generally secondary. Although these policies are directly for the sake of protecting environment and inspiring environmental consciousness, they play second fiddle to policies in some areas considering short term effects and scope. For instance, a factory's disposing its wastes into the rivers, threat of nuclear power plants on environment or man's destroying the forests seem to be more important than a hotel lack of solar power as heating system or unconscious garden irrigation. In fact, if a hotel having hundreds of rooms dispose its waste water directly into the river, lake or sea without purifying, it is as important as the other wrong practices in daily life that worry environmentalists.

On the other hand, tourism is a significant source of income for many countries. It takes an important place in the government implementations just as industry and agriculture even though it falls below the service sector. The main reason for this is tourism is not exhaustible except environmental deterioration (Kızılırmak, 2011). Furthermore, it has several other economic benefits like employment area it provides and foreign currency inflow and increase in tax income. Optimizing the use of this source and causing minimum or no damage to environment are significant for the sustainability of this income. Yet tourism plans prepared without considering environmental concerns destroy the nature in the region and also as well as establishments, tourists can cause damage to the environment (Archer et al., 2005). The relationship between tourism and environment is explained as supplying main input and production activities from environment and secondly finding the tourism input damaging environment (Briassoulis and Straaten, 2000). Therefore, environmental consciousness plays an important role in designing and changing tourism policies. The importance of this is directly proportional to the importance of tourism in sustainable development. When the economic and social impacts of tourism are considered, it can be seen that reducing the negative effects is necessary.

Tourism is an economic tool so it is aimed to reduce costs and increase revenue. Installing solar power panel on the roof of a hotel's building, supplying the necessary mechanism to recycle waste water, training the employees in this aspect and encouraging guests in that effort mean increasing costs in short and medium terms. However, advertising, and discounts using this cost or preparing promotions can increase brand popularity and earnings in short time. As a result of this misperception, even if the businesses increase their revenue in short term, not only themselves but also the other businesses around it, the other sectors like agriculture and all the

locals can make loss following the destroyed environment. The importance of environmental approach in tourism policies stems from this mistake.

The issues of tourism and environment have lost their popularity because of terror, war and energy issues in political processes since the 20th century. However, they have always taken place in related literature and have been taken into consideration in legislative process of developed and developing countries. Even though there isn't agreement among the countries, the supported view is to include environment-friendly practices in tourism policies. These practices are sometimes obligatory, sometimes encouraging. Tourism policies towards sustainable environment are undoubtedly vital because:

- a) Sustainable environment is a promise and hope for next generations,
- b) A liveable environment is a human right,
- c) One of the most important tourism centres is nature,
- d) Tourism is essential for economic life.

Considering that nature is the capital of tourism, the need of leaving a healthy and liveable environment to next generations, which is a human right, should be cared by non-governmental organizations, entrepreneurs and investors, and also individuals. Thus, it is natural that legislative bodies pursue related policies by taking the electors' and tax payers' desire and their own national interest into consideration.

3. Turkey's Tourism Policies

A ministry is in charge of executing tourism policies in Turkey like in many other countries. On the other hand, there are several ministries authorised to work in the fields related to tourism. Except for the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, Ministry of Environment and Urbanisation, Ministry of Development, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources are directly or indirectly related to the field. The main responsible institution Ministry of Culture and Tourism is organised centrally, provincially and internationally. Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Higher Board works under the body of provincial organisation.

Like in the other democratic countries, the legislative and executive power in Turkey is also influenced by the actors like non-governmental organisations, interest groups, and locals. These powers take action in accordance with desire and expectation of absolute majority, in other words with public benefit, which is at least the target. On the other hand, as a result of neoliberal economic system and lobbying activities it can be seen that tourism and short/medium term economic income it provides are a bit more important than environmental concerns.

In this part, tourism policies towards sustainable environment are explained. First, the related practices in Turkey and then various practices from different countries are included in the study. After that, a general evaluation is made.

3.1. Tourism Policies Towards Sustainable Environment

Although international standards are available for designing policies towards sectors, national characteristics pay important role due to the factors like economy, geographical conditions and market share. Even there are some views that local authorities' developing their own sectoral policies instead of the centre's will bring more efficient results. On the other hand, tourism policies towards sustainable environment are more universal because the data obtained as a result of scientific studies doesn't vary from region to region. However, different tacks can be taken considering the field of tourism sector or geographical conditions. For instance, the expected result from the solar energy system in a tourism business located in a region with less

sunny days is not same as the one in a region close to the equator. In this regard, one can expect diversification and authenticity in policies.

The priority in designing tourism policies towards protection of environment is environmental concerns. Increasing absolute revenue of businesses, compensating expenditure made by the government or business as soon as possible and keeping the holiday standards of tourists are among the other aims. When all these objectives are evaluated, it is seen that advisement is necessary for designing policies. Except for central and local authorities, representatives of businesses like associations or chambers, and environmental specialists can also be a part in developing a proposal. Thus, the ones who are competent at their fields can work out cooperatively.

3.1.1. Case of Turkey

The same or similar ones of examples in Turkey can be seen in other countries. There are two main reasons for that. The first one is regional or international agreements, the second is the obligation of consistency among environment friendly tourism policies.

The law related to the field in Turkey is as follows (Official Journal, 2005):

“Tourism businesses are run considering natural assets, biological diversification, preservation and utilization balances of social, cultural, historical and local values, and considering sustainability of tourism resources. The facilities take the required precautions preventing the damage by their wastes to the environment. Under no circumstances can waste water be poured into the outdoor rivers, lakes or seas without being refined in accordance with the parameters and standards stated in regulations related to waste water. Solid wastes cannot be left in the rivers, lakes, seas, and such receiving environment, and in the areas where the environment may be affected negatively. The facilities located in the municipal border take necessary precautions to keep the wastes until the municipality collects them in accordance with the regulations related to solid wastes. The facilities located outside the municipal borders take necessary precautions for keeping the wastes in order to prevent bad smell, pollution and insects, and disposing them by using healthy methods. Food and drinks are kept under appropriate temperature to prevent them from spoiling. (...)”

Furthermore, the article below is available in the Law for the Encouragement of Tourism approved in 1982 (Official Journal, 1982).

“(...) Other buildings and facilities useful for public can be constructed and run provided that natural and cultural features of the area will not be damaged, tourism businesses will not be destroyed, and the structure will be in accordance with construction plan and permission of the Ministry. The seas, lakes and rivers and their coasts cannot be used in a destructive way. Making use of these places such as taking sand, pebbles or stones is subject to permission by the Ministry in accordance with the Law of Cruise and Hydrographic Services numbered 1738 on condition that the opinion of Naval Forces Command is received.”

In addition to these, several implementations (such as Environmental Effect Evaluation, TS EN ISO 14001 Environmental Management System, Energy Efficiency Law) are available. Some of them are related to tourism. Even if the model practice isn't included directly, one of the political practices indirectly contributing to examples is “Special Environmental Protection Area” project. Taşlıgil (2008, p. 80) states that “protection of nature is performed with this practice aiming at *“environmental protection, solution of environmental problems,*

determination of protection and utilization conditions and necessary revision in construction plans” Apart from “Special Environmental Protection Area” project, the Ministry carries out protection studies on natural protected area and natural heritage in three different levels in accordance with the agreement of Protection of Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution (T.R. Ministry of Environment and Urbanisation, 2016). The issue of protection is included in the Ninth Development Plan (2007-2013) within the framework of governmental policies on environment towards sustainable tourism (Official Journal, 2006). The result of the study of the Ninth Development Plan hereby has been evaluated in the Tenth Development Plan (T.R. Ministry of Development, 2013) as follows:

“(…) Great progress has been made in prevention of environmental pollution by controlling the emissions, widening protected areas and protecting biological diversity, in improvement of environmental quality and sustainable management of natural resources..”

Supporting renewable energy sources and eco efficiency are emphasized in this last plan and the goal (Article 877) in following is set:

“The sustainable tourism practices will be improved and sociocultural and environmental problems of tourism will be reduced within the framework of environment friendly and responsible tourism”

Tourism is referred in the Article 11 of the Environmental Law approved in 1983 (Official Journal, 1983). This reference on tourism regards the managers as responsible for setting up, maintaining and running infrastructure systems of waste water in tourism establishment areas. Legal steps on protection of biological diversity and evaluation of eco-tourism potential are involved in 2023 Tourism Strategy and 2007-2013 Action Plan (T. R. Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007). Although a special place isn't given to the environment in this study laying a burden on local agents and private sectors, it is indirectly related to the environment as all suggestions focus on clean environment. In case of destruction of the environment, eco-tourism cannot be done anyway.

Ministry of Culture and Tourism changed the practice of Environment Friendly Business Certificate (Pine Tree Symbol) that has been conducted since 1993 and given to accommodations having fulfilled required conditions with a more efficient practice. Green Star (Environment Friendly Accommodation Facility Certificate) practice aiming at protecting environment, developing environmental consciousness, encouraging environment friendly structuring and management in touristic accommodation facilities consists of matters such as water saving, increasing energy efficiency, decreasing consumption of environmentally hazardous substances and amount of wastes and use of renewable energy (T.R. Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Directorate of Investments and Establishments, 2016a). After the establishments present the required file to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, they are inspected as the result of evaluation and if it is approved. In the inspection, after their scope and scoring conditions are examined, the establishments considered to be enough are given their certificates.

Facilities get different scores according to the required qualifications in their applications and the ones getting adequate scores are given this certificate. The facilities taking part in two main categories which are holiday and town and totally in ten different classes become entitled to receive the certificate on condition that they get the required score. Scoring system is determined according to totally 122 articles in ten categories like general management, education, arrangements in bedrooms of facilities and ecological architecture (TUYUP, 2016). Use of renewable energy is the one providing the best score. Use of green energy from the solar energy panels to sea water use is encouraged accordingly.

The number of Green Star facilities is 336 by 30 June 2016 and these facilities consist of three, four and five star hotels, boutique hotels, special accommodation facilities, apart hotels, tourism complexes and holiday villages (T.R. Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Directorate of Investments and Establishments, 2016b). These facilities are encouraged by government support in their electricity expenses.

The research conducted on Green Star Hotels in Gaziantep and Hatay has shown that when the guests leave their rooms, the electricity turns off automatically, they use environment friendly detergent and disinfectant and they offer some other special purpose applications like use of armatures on taps and showerheads and smoking (Giritlioğlu and Güzel, 2015). In the same study, it has been concluded that some practices like planting and recycling of wastewater are inadequate. The researchers have suggested renewable energy obtained from the Sunlight considering the number of sunny days in the two cities of field study. In practice, this suggestion means a saving for the manager in medium or long term even though it seems to cause high costs in short term. Furthermore, it can be suggested that neighbour establishments can cooperate and make a joint investment. Despite the limitation of two cities in the referred article, it is possible to evaluate this in general considering the whole Turkey and even nearby countries.

In Turkey, the practice of Blue Flag certification awarded by International Environmental Education Foundation to the beaches, marinas and yachts fulfilling certain standards is applied. According to the statistics of 2016, among 49 countries Turkey is one of the countries having the most areas with Blue Flag (Blue Flag, 2016). Also the Green Key eco label brought to life by International Environmental Education Foundation is a civil society initiative. However, considering numbers it is seen that this practice hasn't attracted as much attention as Green Star. While the number of establishments with Green Star certificate is nearly 400 according to 2016 statistics, the number of establishments receiving Green Key is 72. However, Turkey comes the seventh among all the participant countries (Turkish Environmental Education Foundation, 2016).

National and international non-governmental organisations also carry out some studies on environmental issues directly or indirectly related to tourism. Unfortunately even if these studies are sometimes limited to a meeting held between the parties, it is a fact that some important steps have been taken. For instance, WWF Turkey conducted significant studies in Great Menderes Basin which is important for both tourism and agriculture in coastal Aegean. The region that is attractive for the activities like birdwatching, religious tourism, cultural tourism and summer tourism is at the same time appropriate for agriculture with its fruitful lands. In the densely populated region Great Menderes River has become a risk for all economic and environmental opportunities due to both excessive watering and pollution. However, with the project of "Water to Bafa Crops to the Aegean", the related Non-Governmental Organisation realized water saving by 50% and yield increase by 50% and organized an experience sharing trip on practices in Konya (WWF, 2016). These kinds of studies based on voluntariness show their effects in a short time and work in long term since they are intended for conscious behaviour.

Turkey is a country that has regionally developed in golf tourism in recent years. Even though the income obtained from golf tourism is relatively higher than most other fields of tourism, some environmental criticism is available. Several non-governmental organisations published publications on environmental effects of golf tourism. Some critics argue that although many more trees are planted than cut down for golf courses (three times at least), forestlands aren't composed of only trees but they have a unique ecosystem. According to these critics, new forests cannot be created only by planting young trees and new fields cannot be as effective as destructed forests in a short time.

3.1.2. Examples in the World

Blue Flag certification encouraging environmental consciousness and local authorities to show this sensitivity is a practice seen in many countries besides Turkey. Top five countries with the most blue flag beaches in Mediterranean Region according to 2016 data are respectively Spain, Turkey, Greece, France and Portugal (T.R. Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Directorate of Investments and Establishments, 2016c). Green Key, which is similar to Green Star practice in Turkey and which is designed by International Environmental Education Foundation, exists in many countries including Turkey.

Sub-sectors like cultural tourism, historical tourism and religious tourism have generally become prominent in terms of minimizing the negative effect on environment. In this sense, one of the most attractive examples is formed by local people's joining in tourism activities. This practice can be seen in different places of the world and considered within cultural tourism. Since the locals' living as they are make them attractive for tourism, urbanisation or the other structuring practices having environmental effects are limited. For instance, even though aboriginal Australians don't want to stand out with their potential for attracting tourists, they became dominant actors in their countries together with cultural tourism (Mercer, 2005). Furthermore, the Ibans in Malaysia are in a similar position in Batang Ai National Park and the public look positively at getting profit from the tourist visits (Bratek et al. 2007). A struggle occurred between two sectors in the 1990s in Ha Long Bay region of Vietnam. It was necessary to make a choice between coal mining destroying natural structure and unique nature of the region in case of unsystematic management and destructing forestry with which local people earn their living and tourism (Sinh, 1998). This region is a popular destination in terms of natural and cultural tourism today. On the other hand, the damage caused by mining has been replaced by environmental damage caused by tourism and the mangroves and local algae have started to be destroyed.

Especially agriculture and culinary tourism seen in Mediterranean are relatively new practices for both protecting nature and making use of agriculture and tourism sustainably. Culinary tourism, which can also be dealt with cultural tourism, is a field needed to be evaluated separately considering the demand nowadays. Production of olive oil with traditional methods in Spain and promotion of this in events such as fairs or festivals contribute to tourism in the country (Gülhan, 2016). Activities like grape harvesting, local food festival tours and cuisine courses are related to culinary tourism. In Mexico, Taiwan and Spain cuisine courses are offered at homes like hostels by local people, which attract great attention (Kesici, 2012).

There are some enterprises for tourists who consider nature to be an attraction itself. Amazon forests and national parks around make the countries like Guyana and Suriname prominent in tourism. Destroying these areas with natural view and beauty which have direct effect on life quality and healthy environment and building settlements, factories or golf courses instead can be a choice but keeping these areas as they are and including them in tourism sector is convenient.

The two most striking practices related to the fact that nature itself is considered to be capital can be observed in two different continents. One of them is Great Barrier Reef and the other is whale watching in Iceland. There are initiatives by both related authorities and Non-Governmental Organisations for protecting Great Barrier Reef. Australian and Queensland governments work for protecting this wonder of nature via laws and projects, and aim at increasing tourism income directly. In the 2050 plan that is one of many projects brought to life, political authorities have included different actors like scientists and non-governmental organisations in the process instead of deciding unilaterally and have started initiative with consensus. Even though Iceland sometimes replied positively to international reactions and pressures, it hasn't forbidden whale hunting yet. The country can earn income from tourists who visit there for whale watching. In Iceland where whale hunting is still allowed as in Norway and

Japan, works for protecting whales are conducted by non-governmental organisations like International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). However, these creatures having an important role in marine ecosystem are still killed in high rates. The price of whale watching on a few hour boat tour is 85 USD Dollars per person in Iceland and when the other expenses of tourists are considered, economic concerns are expected to lead governments in this direction.

3.2. General Evaluation

Blue Flag and Green Key certifications in international field and Green Star practice in Turkey both encourage establishments for conscious action and provide customers with the same sensitiveness. Regarding this, effective studies can be carried out. Non-governmental organisations and local authorities can enable tourists to grasp these features and encourage establishments. Furthermore, apart from eco-label practices, there are other efforts related to tourism. Some studies on negative sides of different labelling practices like documents, classes and flags are available. Ignorance of more efficient practices by establishments and less exposure of individuals to these practices can be a disadvantage.

It is seen that environment should be protected and culinary tourism (gastronomy/food) should be attached importance in sustainable agriculture and sustainable tourism policies (Örki, 2016). Various examples are available in this field. These examples causing minimum damage to the environment are models needed to be analysed for sustainable development. One of the common points between tourism and agriculture sectors is climatic and environmental situation (Holden, 2016). Tourism policies brought to life relatedly are important for protection of agricultural sector as well as enabling higher efficiency. In addition to these, positive effects on sustainable environment are available. The same care should be taken for cultural tourism related to local people in Australian and Malaysian cases. As it is seen in the results of Bertan's (2009) research on a thermal and natural tourism destination, as long as the environment is protected, sources of income obtained from tourism will be sustainable and so it is needed to raise local community's awareness. At this point, the related central and local authorities, and non-governmental organisations should do their part.

Sport tourism gaining momentum all over the World in recent years and specifically golf tourism are followed by many investors and brought to life with tourism incentive policies. Socio-economic status of sportsmen and tourists interested in golf is an important reason for this. On the other hand, this tourism field has many negative effects on environment. Designing sustainable environmental policies within tourism policies is so comprehensive that the people specialized in single field can't manage it. Since this mistake is often made, unfortunately some important clues can be overlooked. For instance, Demirkol's (2010) opinion about filling with solid wastes and building golf courses without destroying forests in these areas is worth considering even though its cost is high.

It is a political process to prepare a law and putting it into effect but interest groups indirectly take part in shaping this political process. Tourism policies designed considering environmental concerns undoubtedly coincide with benefits of the country in long term. Non-governmental organisations bear responsibility of raising the awareness of all individuals and leading political actors accordingly. Otherwise, it should be foreseen economic concerns can outweigh, which will benefit in short/medium term but cause irremediable loss in long term.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, tourism is an economic sector having essential importance. It, directly or indirectly, plays a significant role in national economy. The most important thing that makes tourism attractive is environment. Protection and improvement of environment make tourism

sustainable. Destroying environment as a result of regarding short term benefits means that tourism incomes will run out sooner or later. At this point, the need for protection of environment should be emphasized for tourism incomes to continue and increase.

Legislative process is shaped by politicians but it will be appropriate to take the opinion of real or legal entities from different fields in the stage of evaluating environmental and economic concerns. Taking steps after getting the opinion of scientists, non-governmental organisations, local authorities, business managers and sometimes local people will produce much more efficient results.

Implementation of various incentive programs on environmental protection and consciousness by local or national governments should be provided. Promoting works and informing potential customers about eco-labelling can be done, which will increase the earnings of businesses and encourage the other establishments.

The study has shown that organisations and institutions like political authorities, non-governmental organisations and establishments are effective actors in environmental friendly tourism policies. All of these are structures composed of individuals and when personal influences of individuals are taken into consideration, raising environmental awareness since childhood is an inevitable reality. It shouldn't be forgotten that a child having environmental awareness can be an active name in a political authority, NGO or business. At least it could be ensured that these individuals don't damage the environment.

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