

SWOT ANALYSIS OF PLATEAU TOURISM POTENTIAL OF KARABAĞLAR PLATEAU WITH ITS AUTHENTIC ENVIRONMENT¹

Filiz Gümüş DÖNMEZ²
Cafer TOPALOĞLU³

Abstract

People who want to get rid of the stress and fatigue of everyday life have recently started to head for rural areas rather than coastal strips. One of the touristic activities in rural areas is plateau tourism. Plateau tourism, which is among the purpose-based tourism types, is to direct the usual highland activities on the plateau areas to the touristic purposes. The Karabağlar Plateau in Muğla shows a remarkable difference from the other plateaus due to its geographical formation and its lower altitude than the city center, and this place has an authentic characteristic being mentioned as the plateau to go down not to climb up. In this context, the purpose of this research is to conduct SWOT analysis of the features of the Karabağlar Plateau located in Muğla Menteşe and having a different structure by its geographical and cultural characteristics than the other plateaus and its cultural values that can be evaluated through touristic purposes. It is expected that this study can shed light on the activities of the investors and local government stakeholders who will take the initiative to transform the Karabağlar Plateau within the scope of plateau tourism.

Keywords: Karabağlar Plateau, Muğla, Plateau Tourism, Tourism Types, SWOT Analysis

Jel Codes: Q56, R58

ÖZGÜN YAPISIYLA KARABAĞLAR YAYLASI'NIN YAYLA TURİZMİ POTANSİYELİNİN SWOT ANALİZİYLE DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

Öz

Son dönemlerde günlük hayatın stresinden ve yorgunluğundan kurtulmak isteyen insanlar kıyı şeritlerinden ziyade kırsal alanlara yönelmektedirler. Kırsal alanlarda yapılan turistik faaliyetlerden birisi de yayla turizmidir. Amaçlarına göre turizm türleri arasında yer alan yayla turizmi, yayla sahalarında klasik yaylacılık faaliyetlerinin turistik amaçlarla değerlendirilmesidir. Muğla'da bulunan Karabağlar Yaylası coğrafi oluşumu ve şehir merkezine göre daha alçakta yer alması sebebiyle diğer yaylalardan dikkat çekici bir farklılık göstermektedir ve yaylaya çıkılan yer değil, inilen yer olarak anılmasıyla birlikte kendine özgü bir oluşum sergilemektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmanın amacı Muğla Menteşe'de yer alan ve diğer yaylalara göre kendine özgü coğrafi ve kültürel yapısı ile farklı bir yapıya sahip olan Karabağlar Yaylası'nın özellikleri ile turizm kapsamında değerlendirilen ve değerlendirilebilecek kültürel değerlerini SWOT analizi tekniğiyle ele almaktır. Yapılan çalışmanın Karabağlar Yaylası'nın yayla turizmi kapsamında faaliyet göstermesi için girişimde bulunacak olan yatırımcılara ve yerel yönetim paydaşlarına yol göstermesi beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karabağlar Yaylası, Muğla, Yayla turizmi, Yaylacılık, Turizm türü, SWOT analizi

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² Department of Tourism Management, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Muğla, Turkey, filizgumusdonmez@gmail.com

³ Department of Hospitality Management, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Muğla, Turkey, ctopaloglu@mu.edu.tr

Introduction

People who lived in villages and rural areas years ago flocked to the fun and lively life of the city and the coastal areas and caused sea-sand-sun tourism and mass tourism to develop in these regions. With the development of information technology, the increase in national income per capita, and the facilitation of transportation opportunities, mass tourism has become widespread and the number of people participating in sea-sand-sun tourism has increased rapidly. This rapid increase has led to excessive intensity in tourism destinations and this intensity has caused the rush and stress in business life to continue even on holiday. As the time passed by, it became harder for people to live and go on a holiday in those regions due to pollution of the environment, water and air, and the increase in concretion.

Today, people are turning to other types of tourism that are accepted as an alternative to sea-sand-sun tourism but found in the literature as a type of tourism according to their purpose in order to find calm and peace to the villages and rural areas that they abandoned years ago. The main reason why different types of tourism are mentioned by different researchers is that tourism types are intertwined and not separated from each other by exact lines. On the other hand, another reason for the emergence of tourism types is the development stages which the tourism sector has shown, and accordingly tourism has been divided into sub-categories and tourism types have been formed (Kozak et al., 2015). In this context, concepts such as rural tourism, agricultural tourism, plateau tourism, hunting tourism, cave tourism, and golf tourism should be considered as tourism types and not alternative tourism types.

With this regard, the areas with natural, green, abundant and fresh air as well as calm and peaceful environments are the most important destinations that affect tourism demand (Atasoy, Reis, and Sancar, 2009). Moreover, the climate is one of the most important factors in the preference of touristic destinations (Matzarakis et al., 2004). In the previous studies conducted, it became clear that climate is the third most important factor in the preference of touristic destinations (Hamilton and Lau 2005; Lin et al., 2006). Thus, in many parts of the world, along with the changing nature of rural areas, these areas have begun to be regarded as tourism and leisure activities (Butler et al., 1998). Additionally, the historical and cultural values in the rural areas increase the reasons for preferring these areas and provide a natural, clean and quality living environment for the visitors (Kurdoğlu et al., 2009).

Located in the southwest of Turkey, Muğla has very valuable tourist destinations and natural, cultural, historical and architectural beauty. In addition, Muğla is famous for its famous attractions such as Bodrum, Marmaris, Fethiye, Göcek, Dalyan, Köyceğiz and Datça with its blue sea, lush nature, long and clean beaches and tourist activities like rafting, jeep safari, parachute, and hiking. In recent years, other types of tourism that are suitable for the inner parts in Muğla rather than the coastal tourism have also started to stand out. The reasons for this are the intense density in Muğla's coastline, the pursuit of calm and peaceful life, the tendency towards nature instead of living in a crowded environment, and curiosity about natural life. As well as coastal tourism in Muğla, one of the tourism types that have begun to develop is plateau tourism.

The aim of this study is to examine the characteristics of the Karabağlar Plateau which is located in Muğla Menteşe and has a different structure than the other plateaus and the cultural values that can be assessed and evaluated within tourism. In this research, firstly the concepts of plateau and plateau tourism were included, and plateau tourism potential in Turkey is evaluated.

Next, activities carried out within the scope of plateaus and other plateau activities of the Karabağlar Plateau which is not considered as a plateau tourism center yet on the official site of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism but frequently mentioned most often with its different natural structure are analyzed. Finally, the study is completed by providing suggestions for the local governments and

entrepreneurs for the further development of the plateau tourism activities in the Karabağlar Plateau. It is expected that this study can shed light on the activities of the investors and local government stakeholders who will take the initiative to transform the Karabağlar Plateau within the scope of plateau tourism. In addition to this, the prevalence of plateau tourism in Muğla, which mostly comes into prominence by its sea-sand-sun tourism, can create a new market in tourism and contribute to tourism income of the region.

1. The Concepts of Plateau, Plateau Activities and Plateau Tourism

The word plateau means "a living area that is used for sheltering and settling in the summer, in the form of a sub-village settlement, feeding the barn animals during the summer season and rarely for agricultural activities" (Özden, Atmis and Menemencioğlu, 2004; Sözer, 1990). Additionally, Bay and Çalışkan (2014) stated that plateau is "the place where the farmers spend their summer with the animals, grazing their animals by using the grass on the ground or a place used for these purposes since before". The word plateau (yayla) is of Turkish origin and it is derived from the combination of the "yay" base, which means summer in the Old Turkish language, and the spreading act (yaymak), which means to graze the animals open and scattered (Alagöz, 1993: 1). The plateau activities express elevation and varying weather conditions due to elevation. Plateaus are cooler settlements that receive more precipitation than the plains. In general, with the warming of the air in the plains and the climate starting to drown, people tend to climb up to cool places such as plateaus to graze their pastures (Ertürk and Atasoy, 2010). As a result of this, a culture of plateau life has appeared. The origins of plateau activities date back to the Central Asian Turkish Culture. The economies of the Turks living in Central Asia were based on livestock. Therefore, they used to look for grassland to graze their animals and live a nomadic life. As a result of these developments, the willingness of the Turks to graze the animals revealed the concept of plateau (Ertürk and Atasoy, 2010; Önal and Dursun, 2012).

Plateaus are described as secondary settlements outside the city or village center that are connected to the main living area with socio-economic ties but separated from the center and the villages (Şişman, 2010). A region or area must have certain qualities to be able to be a plateau. Plateaus are generally located over the forest boundary, but their altitude and physical characteristics are not suitable for agriculture while they are rich and wide in vegetation cover (Göl, 2004).

The concept of plateau activities involves people taking their animals to higher places in the summer months, staying in the highlands during the spring and having some economic activities there. This is a seasonal movement and it usually coincide with summer months. In addition, all activities of those who participate in this movement are considered as the plateau activities. The plateau activity consists of three parts in general: preparation for plateau, journey to plateau and living in plateau (Şişman, 2010).

Recently, the content of the plateau activity has changed compared to the old times. These changes seem to be influenced by factors such as migration from rural areas, social, economic and cultural changes in the population, changes in consumption and life preferences, development of irrigation systems in the villages, and increase in transportation opportunities (Ertürk and Atasoy, 2010).

In the past, the plateau activities used to be carried out in order to cultivate and graze animals, to obtain animal products, to prepare grass for the animals in winter, and to have a cool environment (Doğanay, 2011; Sezer, 2015). Even in the early periods, all family members would migrate together from the city center or the villages but with the emergence of professions requiring day and night shifts and the prevalence of trade, industry and service sector, those who travelled to plateaus included children and elderly people while the other members of the families were busy with their jobs in the city centers (Sezer, 2015).

The above-mentioned differentiations have brought about many changes. The plateau activities began to be carried out in order to spend leisure time, relax, enjoy and cool in a clean and healthy

environment rather than grazing animals (Doğanay, 2011). These developments in the area of plateau activities constitute plateau tourism among the tourism varieties. In this context, the plateau tourism can be defined as "a type of tourism that is the result of the actions of people who love to live in nature and travel to places of high altitude usually for daily use or short stay" (Gündüz and Topaloğlu, 2016: 1). On the other hand, Dalgıç and Birdir (2015: 4) defined plateau tourism as "a tourism activity which is performed by the lovers of nature or adventure enthusiasts in high altitude places usually for daily use or short stay." Plateau tourism is a type of tourism that is offered with more special products with different characteristics from traditional tourism. Mountains, winter, nature, green, forests, caves, rivers, natural nutrition, different climate, being away from noise and other pollution, and touristic product components such as sports, hiking, swimming, festivals, hunting, cycling and skiing are all the factors which make the plateaus tourism attractive (Sezer and Kılıç, 2015, Tekin, 2016). Their natural structure, traditional life culture and relaxing atmosphere have made the Anatolian Plateaus a tourist attraction center. In particular, the seasonal cool weather in the plateaus at summer time offers a nice and fun leisure time activity for people who want to get rid of the stifling, tiring and boring life of the city. Thus, plateaus have transformed their traditional activities and have shifted to the scope of plateau tourism and this type of tourism has especially gained importance in the Black Sea, Mediterranean and Aegean regions of Anatolia. Compared to the coastal areas, plateaus are becoming more and more attractive touristic destinations with their less degraded environment, the greenery and natural environment they possess, the unique traditional and cultural structure, and most importantly being distant from city's tiring and boring structure. Above all, because plateaus have cool and refreshing climate and they are regarded as alternative to hot and stifling weather of the country in summer season, they also start to have a touristic function (Azima et al., 2012, Doğanay, 2011; Ertürk and Atasoy, 2010; Sezer, 2015; Sezer and Kılıç, 2015).

One of the most widespread areas of plateau activity in Anatolia is the Eastern Black Sea Region (Atasoy et al., 2009). On the other hand, other country sides with high and wide plains of mountainous regions of Turkey are also suitable for plateau activities (Sözer, 1990). However, despite every region suitable for plateau activities in Turkey has the unique landscape and natural beauty, rich flora and fauna, it is not yet considered within the scope of plateau tourism. The reason for this is the lack of interaction between the local government and local people living in these regions and the lack of urban district planning (Özgen, 2010). In this regard, the development of plateau tourism in other regions is among the 2023 tourism strategy plans (Şerefoğlu, 2009).

In the summer months, migrants climb up to these areas to cool down and graze their animals. Locations at which the plateau tourism is done in Turkey are shown in the Figure 1. 26 plateau tourism destinations have been announced so far in Turkey. As seen in Figure 1, the most prevalent area of plateau tourism is the Eastern Black Sea Region, followed by the Mediterranean and Aegean regions (kulturturizm.gov.tr, 2018).

Figure 1: *Provinces with Plateau Tourism in Turkey*



Source: Retrieved on 23rd January, 2018 from <http://yigm.kulturturizm.gov.tr/TR,11538/yayla-turizm-merkezleri.html>

2. Karabağlar Plateau in the Scope of Plateau Tourism

2.1. Authentic Environment, Location and Properties of the Plateau

The Karabağlar Plateau is located in the center of Muğla. With Muğla being announced as the metropolitan city, the central district is named as Menteşe and Karabağlar Plateau is now located in the Menteşe district. Menteşe is located at an altitude of 630-740 meters above sea level. However, Karabağlar Plateau positioned very near the center of Menteşe is located between 617-625 meters which means it is located lower than the district center (Ertürk and Atasoy, 2010).

Picture 1: *Karabağlar Plateau Map*



Source: Taken by the authors.

The Karabağlar Plateau has quite a variety of tree species due to its favorable climate. The most basic tree species are the elm trees and plane trees. Other species such as wild pear (ahlat), pine, abele, guilloche, juniper, willow, samphire, myrtle, blackberry, and acorn are also growing. In addition to the tree species, there are weed species such as thistle, hibiscus, poppy, mustard, cockscomb, nettle, erodium, pigweed, thyme, bellis perennis, sorrel, clustered dock, chamomile, centaurea diffusa, purslane, anchusa, chenopodium foliosum, teucrium polium, aruncus, asparagus, wild radish, and wild clover. One of the plants growing in the Karabağlar Plateau and having an important place in the plateau culture is the "saffron flower" which is called "göç" (migrate) in the local language. The reason of giving such name is that it blossoms in fall and this coincides with the time when the travel from plateau to the center starts. Additionally, one of the most important plants grown up until the

recent times in Karabağlar Plateau is tobacco, but because of the restrictions on the tobacco plantation these fields replaced by oil and fruit trees (Çınar, 2011).

Picture 2: "Saffron (Migration) Flower" symbolizing the time of migration to the plateau



Source: M. U. Çağlayan, (2010). *Muğla ve Muğla Üniversitesi Rehberi, Akademik Bilişim: 27.*

The Karabağlar Plateau is considered to be the main source of Muğla's cultural texture and community structure. On the other hand, this plateau is an important residential center which is used for both agricultural and animal husbandry purposes and having rest which thus creates economic mobility. Moreover, the Karabağlar Plateau is not in the position of a plateau where classical plateau activities are experienced. As noted earlier, the plateau includes activities such as travelling to higher altitudes to graze animals and accommodate in that area for some time. However, the situation in this plateau is significantly different than the others. It is located at a lower altitude and its climate, vegetation cover, natural environment and geographical structure hold plateau features. Therefore, it is called as a plateau "not to climb up but to go down". In addition to livestock in the Karabağlar Plateau, many activities are being carried out such as farming, agricultural production, animal nutrition, vegetable and fruit cultivation, resting and leisure time area, cultural and economic mobility. Karabağlar Plateau is a living area where Muğla Mentеше's summer and winter food needs are met and its economic activity is constantly maintained (Çınar, 2010; Çınar, 2011; Ertürk and Atasoy, 2010).

In Karabağlar Plateau, there is also a perpetual social and cultural life in which the majority of the year is spent. This plateau covers an area of approximately 50.000 acres and the land areas are generally divided into 3 acres. These areas are called home and they generally have the same characteristics. In homes, there are wood-crested houses consisting of two floors with two or four rooms. These homes are surrounded by trees, especially with elm trees, and there are wells in each of them. The names of the divided districts of the plateau are generally referred to by their coffee-houses (*kahvehane*) such as Gökkiye, Bakkallar, Hacı Ahmet, Kadıkahvesi, Kozlu, Narlı, Kır Kahvesi, Cihanbeğendi, Vakıf, Elmalı, Tozlu, Ayvalı, Keyföturağı, Berberler, and Süpüroğlu. These shops are located between the old plane trees and serves as the commercial and cultural center of the plateau (Çınar, 2010; Çınar, 2011; Ertürk and Atasoy, 2010).

2.2. Migration to the Plateau and Daily Life

In Karabağlar Plateau's name, there is contrast as it involves both "bağ" and "yayla" words. The word "bağ" represents agriculture while the word "yayla" stands for livestock. However, from the historical sources, it is understood that the region was used for agriculture and livestock before the 15th century. Hence, both "bağ" and plateau are used together referring to the name of this place (Çınar, 2010). Furthermore, it is said that the settlement in this plateau may have been realized in line with the policy of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire followed a policy of settlement in order to keep the warrior and rebellious Turkmen/Nomads under control by ending their nomadic lifestyle and get tax to force them to live a resident life. For this reason, during the Mentеше Beylik (Principality) period, the fields in the Karabağlar Plateau were distributed to the people and the people were settled in the region (Yiğit, 2009).

The migration time to the Karabağlar Plateau starts with the arrival of spring. Before the migration, maintenance and necessary arrangement in the plateau houses are done. The garden and the fields are planted with saplings and seeds. With the greenery of the seeds and the saplings, the excitement of migration to plateau begins. In spring, people travel to plateaus between April 23, National Sovereignty and Children's Day and May 5, Hidirellez, and the process is completed at the latest in June (Çınar, 2011; Ertürk and Atasoy, 2010).

With the end of the migration to the plateau, a rush to a different life and culture emerges on the plateau. Also, the social relations between the people living on plateaus and the urban people travelling there restart again in every migration season. The main source of income for local people living on the plateau is fruit, vegetables and animal husbandry. Urban people migrating to plateaus in summer contribute to the production process at the weekend or after the work. In the Karabağlar Plateau, women are the first to start the day both in summer and winter, and here the women have a great importance. With the first lights of the morning, women are busy with preparing food to be taken to the field in the summer, caring and milking the animals at home, and cleaning the house. On the other hand, even in winter women again get up early for housework such as preparing breakfast, looking after animals, and preparing children for school. Besides, they have the responsibility of going to the bazaar, planting and hoeing the fields, mopping the floor, preparing food and cleaning the dishes, and caring for the children. Men, on the other side, take care of the outer parts of the house, vineyards and orchards works, preparation of the tools, and doing the heavy work in general. Nevertheless, women are of great help for men while they are engaged in doing these works (Çınar, 2010; Gürün, 2004).

Karabağlar Plateau is trying to keep neighborhood relations warm and sincere. There are two types of neighborhoods: the neighborhood of fields and the neighborhood of houses. Although this tradition has begun to disappear for younger generations and today's urban understanding, it is traditional to visit the neighbors in the evening and to help one another. The sense of neighborhood is also important in the activities happening in the plateau such as wedding, circumcisions, mevlids (religious ceremonies), death, and birth, and everybody helps each other (Çınar, 2011).

In the daily life of Karabağlar Plateau, there is a special importance of coffee-houses. These places are significant in the daily life of the people as a cultural and commercial center. The most distinguishing feature that separates these coffee-houses from the others is that they are located next to the grocery store, mosque, restaurant, bakery, butcher, blacksmith, and barber shop. Additionally, buryan kebab is cooked and served in the tandooris in the coffee-houses. The water well and the elm and plane trees in the garden of the coffee-houses are the best examples of a well-established system. Contrary to the other coffee-houses where people smoke, play cards or okey game, which brings negativity to the mind, the ones in this plateau are almost like monuments of culture and commerce. Moreover, the plateau coffee-houses are social areas that allow the local people, urban people and the nomads to come together and socialize. Nowadays, the reorganized coffee-houses serve as unique places for the visitors to eat food, relax and have a nice time (Çınar, 2011).

Some vegetables and fruits grown on plateaus are consumed in summer, while some are prepared and stored as winter food, and the rest are sold on the market. Vegetables and fruits produced in large quantities are sold wholesale in the field. One of the most popular works in Karabağlar Plateau is vegetable drying. In order to ensure that the drying process is carried out properly, an environment free of air, sun and moisture is required. Therefore, the air in the plateau is one of the most suitable places for the drying process. Primary fruits and goods that are dried in summer involve bulgur, tarhana (a dried foodstuff made chiefly of curds and flour used for making soup), peppers, aborigines, tomatoes, okra, beans, black-eyed pea, corn, figs, pears called "kak", quince and apples. Drying is generally carried out in July and August. It is also known that in the past, calf, goat, and kid meat were also roasted and dried and kept in this way. Paprika paste, pickles made from mixed vegetables,

composters made from fruit dryers and sausages made from beef are other products of preparations for winter (Çınar, 2010; Çınar, 2011).

Following the summer days in plateau, the season heads towards the autumn. Until that time, winter foods were prepared, and barley, wheat and corn were harvested and cultivated in the fields and stored in the warehouse. It is time for urban people who came to plateau for summer months other than the local people to travel back to the city center and it is vintage season. Thus, the plateau season is closed until the next season.

2.3. Touristic Value and Potential of Karabağlar Plateau

As discussed in previous chapters, the Karabağlar Plateau, which is characterized by being both a vineyard and plateau, differs from other plateaus by its being a place to go down but not to climb up, is also one of the important cultural and historical beauties of Muğla (Gürün, 2004). The efforts to bring the Karabağlar Plateau to tourism have gone as far as fifty years ago. Although both local governments and entrepreneurs have started to work on this issue, it is seen that successful results have not been obtained until now.

Cultural Coffee-houses: When looking at the current tourism values of the Karabağlar Plateau, it is necessary to talk about cultural coffee-houses in the first place. Of all 21 coffee-houses, only 5 of them serve the domestic tourism as touristic facilities including the ones in Keyföturağı, Süpüroğlu, Bağlarbaşı, Ayvalı, and Sece.

Picture 3: Cultural Coffee-Houses in the Plateau



Source: Taken by the authors.

From past to present, the Karabağlar coffee-houses have been serving as the liveliest centers of social life, where light comedy (ortaoyunu) and puppet shows are held, oil wrestling is organized, groceries, masjid, bakery, restaurants, butchers and barbers are together (www.muqlakulturizm.gov.tr). However today, only a few of these shops offer restaurant service with the support they receive from domestic tourism.

Karabağlar Melon Competition: One of the activities carried out in order to reveal the agricultural value, rather than the livestock activities, of the Karabağlar Plateau and revive the disappearing agricultural production is the melon competition. In the contest held within the scope of Muğla Culture Festival, the melon competition is held in the branches such as the best melon flavor, smell, shape, color and size. This competition encourages farming in the region and helps farmers to evaluate their crops. In addition, the melon competition is done in a festive environment and the visitors who come to the contest are served “keşkek” (a traditional dish made of pounded meat and wheat) and they watch folk dances (Çınar, 2010).

Picture 4: *Symbol of the melon competition on the plateau and bicycle road project*



Source: *Taken by the authors.*

Bicycle Road: The Karabağlar Plateau is 3 kilometers from the center of Muğla. It is located among a large quantity of trees mainly including plane and elm trees. Many visitors are impressed by the nature, culture, history, clean and cool air of the plateau. One of the projects recently carried out here is the bicycle road project (www.mugla.bel.tr). Through this project, bicycle road markings have been made in certain parts of the plateau. However, the project should be made more comprehensive, and promotion and marketing activities for the plateau should be done in this respect.

Gastronomy tourism: Muğla has also become popular with its unique food culture and gives the opportunity to visitors to taste these delicacies in tourist facilities in the Karabağlar Plateau. Especially tarhana soup, dried pepper, buryan kebab, stuffed mumbar, tandooris, desserts, breast, lamb stew, stew, stuffed chicken, sour chicken and herb dishes are among the most famous dishes of the region (www.mugla.bel.tr). The fact that the region is rich in terms of food culture also allows the region to develop in terms of gastronomy tourism.

Hobby gardening and agricultural tourism: Due to its fertile soil structure and favorable climate, the Karabağlar Plateau is well suited to grow almost any kind of vegetable and fruit. Supporting hobby gardening on the plateau or agricultural tourism activities to increase the potential and development of the region is thought to raise the tourism value and also contribute to the region. The examples can include the participation of tourists in the harvesting of olives or fruit-vegetables at harvest time in the plateau or the hobby gardening activities held in short-term rented summer houses.

Picture 5: *Examples of Hobby Gardening*



Source: *Taken by the authors.*

Boutique hotel or pension management: The Karabağlar Plateau is a place where visitors come only for excursion purposes and the local people who have summer houses permanently live. Apart from that, there is no opportunity to stay for a short time or to rent a house. In order to develop and activate the plateau economy, establishing boutique hotels can be encouraged with the support of entrepreneurs and local government or the local people living there can transform one or two rooms of their houses into pensions so as to serve for the visitors.

Picture 6: *Structures in the plateau that can transform into boutique hotel or pension*



Source: Taken by the authors.

Horse safari: One of the other activities that can be done on the Karabağlar Plateau is horse safari because natural structure of the region is suitable for horse safari tours. Such activities are thought to help the promotion and introduction of the plateau to the visitors. In addition, Muğla Rahvan Horse Races are already organized in the province since 1993. Rahvan is a word that passed from Persian to Turkish and means passenger. Raising passenger horses requires special training (Çınar, 2010). In this context, horse safari tours can be done in order to better promote the Karabağlar Plateau and to ensure that visitors have a pleasant time there.

3. Research Methodology

This research is aimed at determining the potential and the unique structure of the Karabağlar Plateau within the scope of plateau tourism. In this regard, the literature review is conducted about the history

of the Karabağlar Plateau through written, printed, and electronic sources, and information about plateau tourism and the authentic environment of Karabağlar Plateaus is discussed. A field trip was done to determine the current situation in Karabağlar Plateau and assessment was made. In the light of the data obtained by the researchers, the SWOT analysis of the potential of plateau tourism in the Karabağlar Plateau was conducted. To this end, this study intends to present the strengths and weaknesses and opportunities and threats for future in the context of plateau tourism in Karabağlar Plateau.

3.1. Findings about the Potential of Plateau Tourism in Karabağlar Plateau

A SWOT analysis was carried out to evaluate the potential of plateau tourism in the Karabağlar Plateau. SWOT analysis is an analytical tool that is widely used in strategic planning, formed from the first letters of the English equivalents of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats concepts (Piercy and Giles, 1989). SWOT analysis is a technique aimed at determining the strengths and weaknesses of a firm, industry, investment, country or geographical region due to its individual characteristics, and the opportunities and threats arising from environmental factors that can or cannot be controlled for the future (Karadeniz, Kandil and Önal, 2007: 196).

With the detailed description of the factors involved in the SWOT analysis, the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies are addressed; opportunities are revealed and measures against threats are taken (Dyson, 2004). After detailing the factors involved in the SWOT analysis, what needs to be done is to identify the strategic recommendations by relating the parameters in the rows and columns (Uçar and Doğru, 2005). While the strengths stated in the SWOT analysis are seen by the other party, the opportunities are spontaneous and natural. Weaknesses and threats must be minimized or reset with creative and innovative ideas (Piercy and Giles, 1989). In knowing and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the country or regions in plateau tourism in detail, SWOT analysis in the context of tourism has an important place in the selection of the most appropriate strategy for the objectives of that region (Ercan, Dalgin and Atak, 2017).

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of Plateau Tourism in Karabağlar Plateau

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>S1. Due to the mild climate, plateau tourism is to be implemented for 12 months including winter</p> <p>S2. The people of the plateau are warm and sincere towards the guests from the outside</p> <p>S3. People living on the plateau have the proper plateau activities based on their lifestyle and the continuation of plateau culture</p> <p>S4. There are local bazaars in plateau and city center where the products grown in the plateau are sold</p> <p>S5. There are places suitable for plateau activities such as agricultural fields, horse safari and bicycle roads</p> <p>S6. There are many plant-tree species on the plateau attracting tourists who are interested in these species</p> <p>S7. The plateau region, in essence, has a natural structure preserved intact</p> <p>S8. Because the plateau is located on the transit route of Antalya, Aydın, İzmir and Denizli, it is within the bounds of the travel agencies passing through the region.</p>	<p>W1. Regarding plateau tourism, the people of the region are not conscious or do not have enough knowledge</p> <p>W2. Projects and entrepreneurship stories related to plateau tourism in the region have not yet been fully successful</p> <p>W3. Although it is on the transit route of Antalya, Aydın, İzmir and Denizli, it is not included in tour programs</p> <p>W4. There is a lack of activities regarding the introduction and promotion of the plateau in terms of tourism</p> <p>W5. There is a lack of accommodation such as pensions and guesthouses for visitors coming for touristic purposes</p> <p>W6. Karabağlar Plateau falls behind famous resorts such as Marmaris, Fethiye and Bodrum which are known for their sea-sand-sun tourism, and it has no brand value.</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>O1. Increasing interest in tourism types such as plateau tourism rather than sea-sand-sun tourism</p> <p>O2. The potential to become a tourist attraction by cooperating with the travel agency that organizes the tour to the region</p> <p>O3. State/local government support for local entrepreneurs who will develop plateau tourism</p> <p>O4. Near the plateau, there are attractions such as beach, antique city, cultural and historical places</p> <p>O5. Providing business areas especially for housewives with the plateau tourism in the region</p> <p>O6. Plateau tourism will make a currency boost in the region.</p>	<p>T1. Increased environmental problems due to unplanned construction and the possibility of deterioration of natural structure</p> <p>T2. Despite the plateau tourism potential, the plateau may remain inactive because of the lack or limited number of initiatives or unsuccessful project attempts</p> <p>T3. Local entrepreneurs are reluctant and unconscious to invest in Karabağlar Plateau</p> <p>T4. Alteration and disappearance of culture of local people in the plateau over time with the increase in intercultural interaction</p> <p>T5. Touristic demand fluctuation due to increased security problems.</p>

When the related literature is examined, it is less likely to find the studies that have examined the regions with high tourism potential by the SWOT analysis. However, rural tourism potential of the regions was assessed by Akca (2006), Ercan et al. (2017), Kızılaslan and Ünal (2014), Ongun, Gövdere and Çiçek (2016), Polat, Özdemir and Özdemir (2014), Zhang (2012) and it is also seen that thermal tourism potential is assessed by SWOT analysis by Sandıkçı and Özgen (2013).

Based on the national and international literature on plateau tourism, the strong and weak aspects, opportunities and threats of the Karabağlar Plateau located in the Menteşe District of Muğla Province are presented in Table 1.

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that the strengths of Karabağlar Plateau is more in terms of plateau tourism than its weaknesses. The strengths of the plateau include the unspoiled nature, the possibilities of plateau activities for 12 months, being located on the transit route and the ease of transportation, and the positive and warm approach of the people living in the plateau people to the guests. On the other hand, the weaknesses involve the limited or unsuccessful number of initiatives about plateau tourism, insufficient promotion and marketing strategies, not being on the route of travel agencies arrived at the region, and limited accommodation facilities.

Increasing interest in tourism types such as plateau tourism rather than sea-sand-sun tourism, being appropriate for plateau tourism, potential to become a tourist attraction by cooperating with the travel agencies, state/local government support for entrepreneurs who will develop plateau tourism, business opportunities for local people living on the plateau in the case of the development of plateau tourism, and income-generation effect of tourism activities in the region are among the opportunities of the plateau. However, fear of environmental degradation on the plateau and deterioration of the natural environment, remaining inactive due to inability of finalizing the projects that have already started or unsuccessful project results, alteration and disappearance of culture of local people in the plateau over time with the increase in intercultural interaction, and touristic demand fluctuation due to increased security problems are the possible threats for the plateau.

4. Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions

It is seen that the Karabağlar Plateau has a very favorable structure and potential in terms of plateau tourism together with its historical, natural and cultural values as well as fertile lands and authentic geographical structure. Recently, there have been actions and projects undertaken by both local government and entrepreneurs to promote tourism in this plateau. Yet, it is observed that these activities are still on the onset and they cannot provide sufficient success in terms of plateau tourism.

The Karabağlar Plateau is primarily different than the other plateaus because it has an authentic characteristic being mentioned as the plateau to go down not to climb up. Besides, indigenous trees, cultural destinations, various tradesmen in the coffee-houses in ancient times, growing vegetables and fruits, food culture and life style are the other cultural assets of Karabağlar Plateau. Nevertheless, it is evident that these invaluable cultural assets have remained only at the local level. According to the result of the SWOT analysis carried out in this context, it is necessary to support the tourism potential of the region in the presence of the opportunities that it has by using the strengths of the plateau.

At this point, it is necessary to match the opportunities that the plateau has to its strengths. It is an advantage because the interest in plateau tourism has started to increase and the climate of Karabağlar Plateau is suitable for such tourism for 12 months. Because the locals living on the plateau are hospitable and friendly, the plateau is convenient and close to the land, air and sea transportation, and because the locals continue to enjoy the plateau activities on the plateau, the plateau tour can be included in the tour programs of the travel agencies.

Guesthouses and self-catering apartments for tourists can be built on the plateau, providing job opportunities for housewives and foreign exchange income to the region. With local government/state support, projects failing in the region or projects to be done can become successful.

On the other hand, the fact that local people do not have sufficient knowledge about tourism, sudden development of plateau tourism may cause unplanned or illegal construction in the region, which poses a threat to the natural structure. In addition, promotion and marketing activities should be done in order to avoid Karabağlar Plateau to be overshadowed by famous holiday resorts like Marmaris,

Fethiye and Bodrum and to be not affected by tourist fluctuations. It is also necessary to educate and provide trainings for the local initiatives in order to make the projects that can be done about the plateau tourism useful and convenient for plateau tourism.

Increasing the number of the activities that can be done in the plateau such as horse safari, hobby gardening, agricultural tourism, cycling, and gastronomic tourism can make the plateau more attractive. Thus, this will increase the touristic value of the plateau, extend the length of the accommodation in the plateau, which will create job opportunities for the people living on the plateau and increase the income level.

There are many foods unique to the Karabağlar Plateau and Muğla in the region. Again, the sale of honey, tarhana, olive and olive oil, dried peppers and dry foods in small stalls will enable women living on the plateau to enter the business life and benefit from their products.

In the light of the SWOT analysis carried out in this study, suggestions were made for the assessment of Karabağlar Plateau in terms of plateau tourism. The realization of all these suggestions can only be possible with the cooperation and support of local government, entrepreneurs and local people. Moreover, it is of utmost importance that all these activities are done without destroying the natural, architectural, historical and cultural texture.

In this study, the plateau tourism value and potential of the Karabağlar Plateau was assessed by SWOT analysis technique. The future studies can focus more on the opinions of the local people regarding the development of plateau tourism in Karabağlar. In addition, demands and expectations of visitors regarding the activities that can be carried out on the plateau can be studied. Thus, both entrepreneurs and local administrations can be better informed about the development of plateau tourism in Karabağlar in line with the anticipations of the visitors.

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