



## **SWOT - TOWS ANALYSIS OF URLA DESTINATION'S ALTERNATIVE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

*Research Article*

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### **ABSTRACT**

As the opposite of mass tourism, alternative tourism provides opportunity for personalization, cultural self-involvement and interaction with the locals. Since customization becomes quite popular nowadays, alternative tourism appears to be an attractive and suitable choice for the tourists. In this study, Urla is examined according to its alternative tourism potential. The first part of the study provides brief information about Urla district in Izmir, Turkey and briefly emphasizes alternative tourism benefits. The second section focuses on Urla district and the alternative tourism applications of the destination namely; festival tourism, heritage tourism, new-culture tourism, camping tourism, trekking tourism, yacht and sailing tourism, wine tourism, gastronomy tourism, adventure tourism and eco- tourism. A SWOT Analysis on Urla's alternative tourism is derived and included in the final part where appropriate strategies and suggestions which are likely to optimize the strengths and opportunities, to eliminate or strengthen the weaknesses and to handle the threats are developed. Thus, the suggestions are provided according to the results of the analysis and include grouping the alternative tourism types for synergy and selection of one or two groups according to the SWOT Analysis results. With the TOWS Analysis, results may enlighten the business owners, policy makers and academicians and give some tips on how Urla's alternative tourism potential may be optimized.

**Key Words:** Alternative tourism, SWOT Analysis, TOWS Analysis, Urla

**JEL Codes:** M10, Z39

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## INTRODUCTION

In their book, “...last two decades can be placed in historical perspective” says Smith and Eadington (1992:4). Starting from late 60’s and early 70’s, alternative tourism is often being referred to as a form of travel that is more personal and authentic. It promotes interaction with the local people, communities, and the environment. Any type of soft tourism product may be referred as an alternative tourism product. It has been discussed in the literature (e.g. Butler, 1990) that if the alternative tourism creates value for the region or kills the authenticity. Thus, as a conclusion, due to the positive impacts it brings with applications, alternative tourism is considered more ethical, responsible, sustainable and community friendly when compared with mass tourism activities. Despite the negative effects of alternative tourism, this study focuses on the positive aspects and tries to explain the selected location Urla’s potential in alternative tourism while providing strategies for development of alternative tourism products.

Urla district is chosen as a subject for analysis for this study since it seems to lag behind the general tourism development pattern of Turkey even though having a huge potential for many sorts of alternative tourism types. The region has a great demand for mass tourism and 3S, though the potential for alternative tourism types seems to be even more promising but not optimized at all. Therefore, the study tries to highlight the potential of alternative tourism types of Urla district, which was brought as a solution to the costs and disadvantages global mass/3S tourism development brings. Also, the study tries to provide a pathway to the tourism business owners, policy makers and academicians on the improvement of alternative tourism activities in the region.

## ALTERNATIVE TOURISM APPLICATIONS IN GENERAL

Despite the rapid increase of global mass tourism development, alternative tourism, though it has its’ costs is also increasing as a counter act to decrease the negative impacts of mass tourism (Cohen, 1987; Butler, 1990). As a definition, compared to hard and main stream mass tourism, it is a different type of tourism which minimizes the negative impacts, provides a special interest tourism for special segments and focuses on customer satisfaction by providing tailor made services to these niche segments (Belias et al., 2018). As Pearce (1992:19) states, alternative tourism, as variously defined in the literature, rarely occurs as one of the classes in the typology literature.

As a diversified tourism product, alternative tourism provides various tourism offerings like gastronomy tourism, slow tourism, agri-tourism, museum tourism, adventure tourism, shopping tourism, culinary tourism, camping tourism, caravanning tourism, dark tourism, eco-tourism, medical tourism, heritage tourism, natural tourism, health tourism, wellness tourism, culture tourism, MICE tourism, sports tourism, yacht tourism, hunting tourism, bird watching tourism, trekking tourism, cave visiting tourism, entertainment tourism and such similar niche tourism products (Jovicic, 2016; Erdogan and Kuter, 2017). Each one is unique to it self, provides unique characteristics and differ from mass tourism with their niche and similar characteristics. As stated, there are many types of alternative tourism but the common characteristic of each type is that it segments a very homogeneous target group demanding the similar things in their tour packages or travel experiences. Thus, for synergy in management and more efficient applications, it is possible to group various alternative tourism products under six main categories as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Different groups of various alternative tourism types**

<b>Types</b>	<b>Sub Types, Activities and/or Examples</b>
Business related tourism	MICE, Trade fairs, Education etc.
Culture and heritage tourism	Museum tourism, Dark tourism, Heritage site visits, Pop-culture tourism etc.
Health related tourism	Medical, Health, Wellness, Organic farming etc.

Hedonic tourism	Luxury shopping, Cruise, Specific gastronomy, Wine and culinary etc.
Life-style related tourism	Slow tourism, Urban tourism, SPA, Entertainment, Agri-tourism, Adventure, Youth, Volunteer etc.
Nature and sports tourism	Water sports, Trekking, Snow sports, Rural tourism, Cycling, Outdoor, Recreation, Rafting, Bird watching etc.

Adapted from: Pektes, F. (2018). The effect of lifestyle on the demand for alternative tourism, International Journal of Management Economics and Business, 14(1), 187-198.

There are many benefits that alternative tourism applications bring to a destination (Weaver, 1991; McGehee, 2002; Boxill, 2004; Pirnar, 2011; Anthonisz and Mason, 2019; Testa et al, 2019). Main ones are the revenue generation where the alternative tourists are willing to spend for their unique travel experiences. Another is the improvement in local employment and quality of life levels of residents. Sustainability is another one and alternative tourism applications, also, support specific know-how and expert practice in travel agencies, accommodation facilities and related business operations. Alternative tourism applications have the advantages of niche marketing products, since the satisfied tourists become loyal customers who have positive thoughts about the destination and positively impact effective word of mouth advertising. They are also believed to increase the social movement towards responsible tourism and sustainability and aid voluntary tourism. Improvement in destination image and better relations with locals and tourists are other stated benefits of alternative tourism applications (Isaac and Eid, 2019).

### URLA DISTRICT AND ALTERNATIVE TOURISM

Urla is a town located 35 km from Izmir city center (see Figure 1), the 3rd biggest city of Turkey and 45 km away from Cesme, a famous tourism destination (Unsal and Kurucu, 2016; Zogal and Emekli, 2018). Urla has a population of 49.000 and is located in the same name Urla peninsula. It is a very modern town where most of the residents consist of wealthy and well-educated people.

Urla district has a huge potential for many sorts of tourism. The mild suitable climate, rich ancient history, touristic investments and natural ecological beauty of the area makes the district an important source for tourism industry (Iriguer and Ozdoğan, 2017). The potential of the district is

suitable to extend the touristic season and to increase the kinds of tourism products offered. Urla is famous with its cuisine and becoming quite popular for gastronomy tourists (Kargiglioğlu and Kabacik, 2017). In addition, the town hosts many gastronomical festivals like International Urla Artichoke Festival (Bakirci et al, 2017), Barbaros Oyuk Festival (Farm Scarecrow Festival), Traditional Herb Festival, International Village Theatres Festival, Nohutalan Cantaloupe Festival, Sardine Festival and the Literature Festival. In addition, Urla hosts a traditional 2600-year-old Harvest Festival, which has been organized cooperatively by the Chamber of Agriculture and the Municipality of Urla for 20 years now. Agriculture and organic farming are also important development areas of Urla district (Turkmen, 2016).

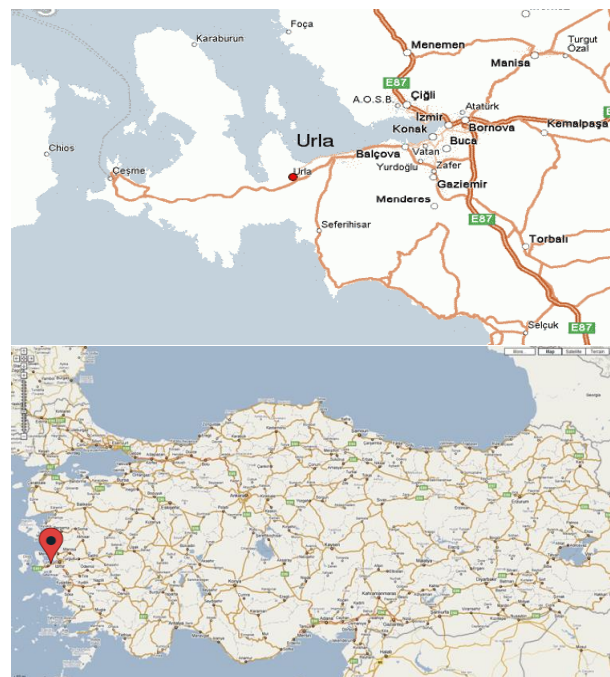


Figure 1: Turkey Map and Urla District

“Urla has a rich agricultural hinterland and organic farming that Urla is selected as one of the pilot areas in Izmir Metropolitan Area under Agriculture and Rural Development Financial Support Programme 2010” (Karakayaci and Ozcan, 2011:31)

Urla’s rural touristic assets are very rich in variety and they are dispersed as normal villages, coastal seaside villages and forest villages (Emekli and Soykan, 2008). Altogether, there are 14 villages of Urla and some of these villages are very unique like the 1000 years old Özbek village with interesting heritage and natural resources. Bademler Village, owns Turkey’s first and only village theatre (Ersoy, 2017). In addition, Urla was the first olive oil production center of Anatolia and has heritage sites as Klazomenai antique city and Limantepe (Karakayaci and Ozcan, 2011:). World’s biggest olive oil history museum (Kostem) is located in Urla and projects like Ankara University Mustafa V. Koç Marine Archeology Application and Research Center (ANKÜSAM) and Liman Tepe Underwater Excavations make the district very appealing for heritage and culture tourists.

Urla has a nice marina and the sea around the Urla marina is clean, the wind and the coastline is suitable for sea sports and yachting. With the help of Urla Yacht Club (URİYAT) district hosts many sea sports, sailing races and competition events periodically.

When assets of Urla district is studied, it is understood that; festival tourism, gastronomy tourism, yacht tourism, sports tourism, culture tourism, education tourism, thermal tourism, religious tourism, agri-tourism eco-tourism, wine tourism, trekking and similar eco-friendly tourism types are becoming popular and have a high potential alternative tourism types for it (Ivonavo, 2012; Zagralli and Akbaba, 2015; Kose 2017; Iriguer and Ozdoğan, 2017). Thus, the potential of the district to attract specialized interest groups and nature friendly affluent tourists by innovative alternative tourism products is high.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Recently Urla known as a promising alternative tourism destination in Turkey, so it was needed to investigate this potential to understand how this

potential can be turned into action. With this motivation, aim of this study was to derive a preliminary SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis of alternative tourism potential of Urla district and to figure out the most promising ones for improvement to guide practical destination implications.

Qualitative research method was preferred and both primary and secondary research data (Icoz, Pirnar and Gunlu, 2010; Pirnar and Icoz, 2010; Pirnar, 2011; Velibeyoglu, 2016; Iriguer and Ozdoğan, 2017; Zogal and Emekli 2018) were used. For the secondary data collection, literature review and other documents were searched about Urla’s strategic position and alternative tourism potential by using keywords combination. For the primary data collection face-to-face interview technique was used. Interviews were held with using semi-structured forms with open-ended questions. Questions derived depending on the literature review, which are shown in Appendix 1, were used. Judgmental sampling was used and 20 respondents were selected from managers (Owners/managers of tourism enterprises in Urla) and residents in Urla.

SWOT Analysis was preferred for this study since it has proved itself to be proper method in similar researches. SWOT has been used many times in the literature to evaluate the present situation and to offer suggestions for the future applicable strategies pairing the strengths and weaknesses of the destinations alternative tourism potential to opportunities and threats relating to the environment (Akca, 2006; Ivonavo et al, 2010; Fons et al, 2011; Ajmera et al, 2015).

## **SWOT and TOWS Analysis of Alternative Tourism Potential of Urla District**

SWOT Analysis is a method including the detailed investigation of the present situation of a company, firm, product, service, district etc. where strengths and weaknesses related to the analyzed subject and opportunities and threats that are related to the surrounding economic, politic, social and cultural environments are analyzed. The opportunities and threats should be related to the areas that have effect on the subject’s activities and success. (Tribe, 2010; Sariisik, Turkay and Akova, 2011).

**Table 2: SWOT Analysis of Alternative Tourism Potential of Urla District in Turkey**

<p><b>Strengths (S)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increasing popularity of Urla</li> <li>2. Climate is suitable for season extension</li> <li>3. Potential for alternative tourism types like festival tourism, gastronomy tourism, yacht tourism, slow food tourism, rural tourism, culture tourism, wine tourism education tourism, thermal tourism, religious tourism, agri-tourism, sports tourism, eco-tourism, wine tourism, trekking and heritage</li> <li>4. Hosts many different festivals</li> <li>5. Coastal shores are long</li> <li>6. Owns quite a number of unique heritage sites like Klazomenai Antique City</li> <li>7. Existence of Izmir Institute of Technology with a techno park. Techno parks serve as tools for the creation of advanced technology and competitiveness</li> <li>8. Urla marina and organization of many yacht sailing races</li> <li>9. District is very near to important tourism destinations</li> <li>10. Existence of many wineries.</li> <li>11. Projects like Ankara University Mustafa V. Koç Marine Archeology Application and Research Center (ANKÜSAM) and Liman Tepe Underwater Excavations</li> <li>12. World's biggest olive oil history museum (Kostem)</li> <li>13. Existence of interesting boutique hotels and recreational areas</li> <li>14. Innovative products like the art street, bicycle route</li> <li>15. Urla-Cesme-Karaburun Peninsula Sustainable Development Strategy 2014–2023', as a subsequent part of Izmir Regional Plan produced by Izmir Regional Development Agency</li> </ol>	<p><b>Weaknesses (W)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Resource allocation conflict between improvement / development and protection issues</li> <li>2. Population growth and increasing immigration</li> <li>3. Inconsistent marketing messages and lack of cooperation for promotional efforts of Urla's tourism</li> <li>4. Need for special interest tourism employee training</li> <li>5. Insufficient number of qualified tourism staff</li> <li>6. Need for more specialized travel agencies for alternative tourism types</li> <li>7. As a transportation mode sea is almost not utilized in Urla</li> <li>8. The restoration efforts of historical and cultural buildings are insufficient.</li> <li>9. Not utilizing modern management techniques like quality management, strategic planning, benchmarking and innovation</li> <li>10. Need for an integrated approach for regional alternative tourism developments</li> </ol>
<p><b>Opportunities (O)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Growing interest in alternative tourism types in global market</li> <li>2. Increase in new special interest markets like festivals and gastronomy</li> <li>3. Changes in psychographics of the consumer groups,</li> <li>4. Changes in consumer needs and changing trends towards sustainability, ecology and such</li> <li>5. Increase interest in sustainability issues</li> </ol>	<p><b>Threats (T)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Severe global competition</li> <li>2. Economic problems</li> <li>3. Decline in the number of species, endangered species habitat loss</li> <li>4. Regional competition</li> <li>5. Increasing water pollution, air pollution and soil pollution</li> <li>6. Huge increase in land and housing prices.</li> </ol>

The data gathered from qualitative interview method are analyzed and a SWOT analysis table (see Table 2) is derived from replies of the interview. The derived SWOT analysis table of Urla district’s potential for alternative tourism types involves a detailed examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the district, and the opportunities and threats happening within its’ external environments.

TOWS Analysis relates to situational analysis and provides possible applicable strategies (Weirich,

1982; Bradford and Duncan, 2000). Related to the alternative tourism SWOT analysis, TOWS strategies are shown as; S/O (pursue opportunities that are good fit to the strengths), W/O (overcome weaknesses to pursue opportunities), S/T (identify ways to use strengths to reduce vulnerability to external threats) and W/T (establish a defensive plan to prevent weaknesses from making it highly susceptible to external threats) strategies which are gathered from the interviews at Table 3.

**Table 3: TOWS Analysis of Urla (Strategies for alternative tourism development)**

<p><b>S/O Strategies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a unique and innovative Urla brand focusing on sustainability image and it’s alternative tourism potential</li> <li>2. Promote to specific target segments like culture tourists, gastronomy tourists, culture tourists etc.</li> <li>3. Use cultural and natural beauties to create a differential image of Urla</li> <li>4. By focusing on unique projects, resources and strengths of Urla, promote the brand accordingly</li> <li>5. Emphasize the sustainability, quality and price differentiation in promotion</li> </ol>	<p><b>W/O Strategies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use innovative marketing</li> <li>2. Try to overcome the pollution problems</li> <li>3. Reduce red tape and ease the formal procedures for projects supporting environmental protection and development in alternative tourism.</li> <li>4. Focus on niche markets for special interest groups</li> <li>5. For cost minimization and productivity, go for strategic partnerships and alliances</li> <li>6. Establish standard quality by investment and enterprise certifying and documentation</li> <li>7. Apply and sustainable management systems including/emphasizing ecological ones</li> </ol>
<p><b>S/T Strategies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use innovative management and cost reduction strategies</li> <li>2. Offer different package alternatives for special interest tourists.</li> <li>3. Offer innovative and tailor-made special interest tour packages</li> <li>4. Stress the price-value proposition in promotions</li> <li>5. Applying a promotional mix of Urla directed to target niche customers through green channels emphasizing sustainability</li> </ol>	<p><b>W/T Strategies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use modern marketing and branding tools for lasting image of Urla brand</li> <li>2. Use a consistent promotional message focusing on a good deal for quality- value proposition</li> <li>3. Use all the combinations of suitable 8 P’s marketing mix</li> <li>4. Apply a coordinated regional policy for alternative tourism development in Urla</li> <li>5. For synergy, establish regional cooperation and destination marketing platform for Urla</li> </ol>

TOWS Matrix demonstrates the probable success strategies of Urla, depending on its strengths and on overcoming its weaknesses. It also shows destination’s strategies for taking advantage of alternative tourism opportunities and coping with threats.

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

SWOT - TOWS Analysis creates shortcuts for decision-makers, which are convenient. The findings indicated that alternative tourism types like; festival tourism, gastronomy tourism, yacht tourism, sports tourism, culture tourism, wine tourism education tourism, thermal tourism,

religious tourism, agri-tourism, sports tourism, eco-tourism, wine tourism, trekking and heritage and slow tourism are indeed very suitable alternative tourism types for Urla district where there seems to have huge growth potential. For practical implications, the alternative tourism groups of nature and sports, culture and heritage and finally life-style segments are found to be more suitable for Urla destination. Thus, the survey and SWOT Analysis and TOWS Analysis results indicate that the suggestions stated below are vital points for the development of Urla's alternative tourism applications.

- Application of festival tourism, gastronomy tourism, organic farming, yacht tourism, sports tourism, culture tourism, wine tourism education tourism, thermal tourism, religious tourism, agri-tourism, sports tourism (cycling, trekking, and such ecological sports), eco-tourism, wine tourism, heritage and slow tourism / slow food as applicable and suitable alternative tourism types,
- Encouragement of sustainable tourism development,
- Certification of the human resources for sustainable applications,
- Supporting the technological improvements and superstructure development in alternative tourism projects,
- Focusing on niche markets for special interest groups like gastronomy tourists,
- Providing opportunity for cost minimization and productivity, look for strategic partnerships and alliances and merger options,
- Establishing standard quality by investing in enterprise certifying and standard documentation,
- Applying quality and sustainable management systems including/emphasizing ecological ones,
- Focusing on green marketing and sustainable/renewable energy sources,
- Using a consistent promotional message focusing on a good deal for quality- value proposition,
- Focusing mainly on festival marketing, gastronomy tourism, rural tourism, organic farming and heritage and culture tourism,

- Applying suitable 8 P's (place, promotion, product, price, people, process, physical evidence and productivity) marketing mix for Urla as a marketing strategy focusing on sustainability,
- Applying a promotional mix directed to target niche customers through green channels emphasizing sustainability,
- Improving organic food farming and sustainable restaurants in the district,
- Identifying barriers, encouraging usage of permits and legislation for the alternative tourism growth,
- Involving local community in sustainability and increasing local participation with the help of training,
- Forming Urla district's tourism destination platform for solid results in regional improvement in alternative tourism applications,
- Conducting periodical alternative tourism inventory of Urla district and determining problem areas for improvement,
- Working on zoning plans and reinforcing clustering subcategories of various tourism types (zoning through development of alternative tourism types within clusters),
- Finding and allocating the necessary funds for Klozomenai Antique City and Limantepe Excavations since 80% of the work is not completed yet,
- Conducting the new marina projects,
- Urla's museum project should be completed.

As a result, for SO (maxi-maxi), ST (maxi-mini) and WO (mini-maxi) strategies common keyword is found to be "innovation". Therefore, it is advised that Urla district, which has a high tourism and high alternative tourism potential, must efficiently use the creating innovative tools and strategic applications to attract both local and foreign tourists. Suggestions listed above are for the policy makers, local government, professionals and business owners. Those suggestions must be included both in the local governments and private sector businesses' strategic plans.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research, as many others, has some limitations. First limitation is the constraint of timing. Also the limited sample size is another one, where the numbers of the respondents were 20 for primary data gathering. For further research it is suggested to conduct not only qualitative, but also a related quantitative analysis with a greater sample size for the study. Also, other marketing and management analysis types like PESTEL etc., maybe added to the conducted SWOT Analysis of the study. Altogether, the SWOT Analysis, TOWS Analysis and suggestions might act as a benchmark and provide a road map for similar destinations with the same destination appeals.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Interview Questions

1. Do you think Urla district may be regarded as a suitable destination for alternative tourism types like thermal and health tourism, yacht tourism, sports tourism, culture tourism, religious tourism, agri-tourism, gastronomy tourism, eco-tourism, wine tourism and festival tourism? If you agree, please indicate the most suitable 3 that has a potential for improvement?
2. Do you thing the alternative tourism potential of Urla district is utilized in full for alternative tourism purposes? If no, why do you think the reason is?

3. State the;

- a. Strong points (strengths) of Urla district's alternative tourism
- b. Weak points (weaknesses) of Urla district's alternative tourism

4. In order to promote and improve the alternative tourism types and associated markets in Urla district name the related;

- a. Opportunities
- b. Threats

taking into consideration the impacts that may come from all the economic, politic, social, legislative, cultural and technological external environments.

5. Explain;

- a. What should be the S/O and W/O strategies applicable for Urla district's alternative tourism development and improvement?
- b. What should be the S/T and W/T strategies applicable for Urla district's alternative tourism development and improvement?

6. Which one of the alternative tourism types stated below are suitable for Urla district's tourism promotion when its' natural and cultural resources and district characteristics are taken into consideration (Please mark and number the most suitable 5)

- Slow food trend
- Gastronomy tourism

- Festival tourism (Artichoke Festival, Barbaros Oyuk Festival (Farm Scarecrow Festival), Traditional Herb Festival, International Village Theatres Festival, Nohutalan Cantaloupe Festival, etc) \_\_\_\_\_ (you may state your suggestions)
- Camping
- Sailing and yachting
- Sports \_\_\_\_\_ (you may state the kind of the sports)
- Rural tourism
- Agri-tourism
- Organic and sustainable agriculture
- Organic farming
- 3<sup>rd</sup> age group (special tours for people aged 65 and over years)
- Historical and cultural heritage
- Eco-tourism
- Education aimed tourism
- Bird watching
- Youth tourism
- Adventure tourism
- Visits to wine production places and wineries
- Popular culture tourism (concerts, fairs etc.)
- Religious tourism
- Caravanning
- Trekking
- Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_