

Social Barriers Against Implementation of Tourism Planning: Case Study of Sapanca

Turizm Planlamasının Uygulanmasının Önündeki Sosyal Engeller: Sapanca Örneği

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Öz: Sakarya'nın Sapanca ilçesi son yıllarda önemli bir destinasyon olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bununla birlikte bölgede turizmin olumlu ve olumsuz etkileri de belirgin bir şekilde hissedilmeye başlanmıştır. Bu makale, Sapanca destinasyonu özelinde turizm planlarının uygulanmasını engelleyen sosyal engellerin incelenmesine odaklanmaktadır. Kolektif bir bağlamda turizm politikalarının genel faydaları artırmak için neden etkili bir şekilde uygulamaya geçilemediği ve sosyal unsurların nasıl engel teşkil ettiğini açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bunun için çalışmada katılımcı olmayan gözlem tekniği kullanılmıştır. Araştırmacı, bireylere ve vakalara doğrudan müdahale etmeden mevcut literatürden içgörüler elde ederek sahada uzun vadeli, objektif gözlemler gerçekleştirmiştir. Sapanca örneğinde, yerel halkın, işletmelerin ve kamu otoritelerinin, kolay ekonomik kazanımların cazibesi nedeniyle turizm planlarının uygulanmasına yönelik sosyal bir engel teşkil ettiği açıkça görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Turizm politikaları, turizm planları, turizm gelişimi, sosyal engeller, Sapanca*

Abstract: Sapanca, a district in Sakarya, has emerged as a significant destination in recent years. Alongside, both the positive and negative impacts of tourism have become markedly noticeable in the region. This article focuses on the examination of social barriers hindering the implementation of tourism policies, specifically in Sapanca destination. It aims to elucidate why, in a collective context, tourism policies cannot be effectively executed to enhance the overall benefits and how social elements act as impediments. To achieve this, the study employs the technique of non-participatory observation. The researcher conducted long-term, objective observations in the field, drawing insights from existing literature without direct involvement with individuals and cases. In the case of Sapanca, it becomes apparent that the local community, businesses, and public authorities pose a social barrier to the implementation of tourism policies due to the lure of easy and substantial economic gains.

Keywords: *Tourism policies, tourism planning, tourism development, social barrier, Sapanca*

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1. Introduction

Strategic planning is considered a significant activity within organizations (Whittington and Cailluet, 2008). However, it is observed that there is a limited interest in the field of tourism management within the tourism literature. One of the academics aware of this gap mentions that "strategic management in tourism literature receives relatively little attention" (Athiyaman and Robertson, 1995). Similarly, Soteriou and Roberts (1998) point out the low priority of tourism management in the tourism literature.

This situation does not align with the perception of tourism planning. Many academics working in the field of tourism planning argue that tourism developed as an unplanned activity in the last four to five decades (Inskip, 1991). Until the 1960s, tourism was evolving without a systematic planning consciousness (Tosun and Jenkins, 1996).

Gunn (1994), emphasizing the importance of tourism planning, explains the necessity of tourism planning with five fundamental reasons. Firstly, the societal impacts of tourism, both positive and negative aspects, should be taken into consideration. Second, due to increased competition among tourism destinations, strategic planning becomes even more critical. Third, tourism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, thus requiring careful planning and management. Fourth, tourism can harm natural and cultural resources, emphasizing the need for planning in terms of sustainability. And last, tourism affects everyone living in any environment, making the participation of the local community in tourism planning inevitable.

The main objective of this article is to examine why, despite the abundance of destination planning theories and knowledge in the tourism literature, they have not been successfully implemented at the practical level. Despite the rich theoretical foundation in the field of tourism, we aim to focus on the practical challenges and deficiencies encountered in tourism planning and management in the field. By understanding why these theories in tourism planning have not yielded the desired results, our goal is to provide a framework for developing more effective tourism management strategies.

Sapanca is a touristic town of Sakarya region, Türkiye. It was only logical to choose Sapanca destination for the research since the town has shown significant development and grown rapidly in recent years as a tourism destination in Türkiye. Sapanca Lake is a natural attractiveness with the green surrounding of the town and one other major reason for Sapanca to become popular is being close to mega city Istanbul which is nearly 1 hour away. With numerous bungalow options and camping sites, Sapanca is facing lots of negative and positive impacts of tourism.

1.1. Rationale of the Research Subject

Tourism is a sector of significant global importance, with economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts. Tourist destinations are the focal points of tourism, and planning these destinations is a critical factor for their sustainable development. Tourism planning involves the creation of strategies to shape the future development of these destinations, while destination planning aims to implement these strategies in the field. This conceptual framework will address the fundamental relationship between tourism planning and destination planning, explaining key concepts in the literature and the primary focus of this study. Additionally, it examines how these two concepts complement each other to understand why tourism planning theories have not succeeded in practice.

1.2. Tourism Planning

Tourism planning has emerged out of the need to manage and sustainably develop the tourism sector, considering its economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts (Bianchi, 2018; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2007; Lohmann and Netto, 2016). Effective implementation of this planning process is vital for minimizing the negative effects of tourism and promoting sustainable tourism practices (Almeida, Costa, and Silva, 2017; Bianchi, 2018). Simultaneously, tourism planning is designed to maximize the benefits of tourism for local communities and efficiently manage tourism resources (Ampong, 2018; Gibson, 2009). In this context, planning can be evaluated as a collection of ideas and principles aimed at controlling the spatial distribution over time (Inskip, 1991; Gunn and Var, 2002). Tourism planning has the potential to offer long-term benefits to both businesses and local communities by ensuring the sustainable development of tourist destinations.

The importance of tourism planning extends beyond effective management of tourist destinations; it also holds significant strategic importance in terms of community involvement and environmental sustainability. The growth of tourism provides new opportunities for local economies but simultaneously increases pressure on natural and cultural resources. Therefore, tourism planning aims to ensure that local communities derive maximum benefits from tourism while minimizing environmental damage. This planning process influences the long-term success of businesses in the tourism sector and promotes collaboration between local governments and civil society organizations responsible for managing tourist destinations, creating a culture of participation and sharing that encompasses a broader section of the community. Within this framework, tourism planning is considered an important tool for achieving both economic and social sustainability by promoting balanced growth of tourism and meeting the expectations of various stakeholders.

Despite the rapid growth of tourism, tourism planning studies have not kept pace and have not adequately adapted to practical applications, failing to contribute as expected to the development of tourism science (Costa, 2001). This was initially the case when tourism planning was limited to physical and economic projects. Early tourism plans were created in isolation and did not consider the consequences or environmental impacts of tourism activities (Yüksel, 2002). However, different approaches were developed in the field of tourism planning, and six basic planning approaches were identified: sustainable development, systematic, integrated, inclusive, ongoing, and flexible approaches (Tosun and Jenkins, 1996). One of these approaches, the inclusive planning approach, highlights four fundamental elements of tourism planning: goal setting, identifying policy alternatives, comparing input-output values, and implementing decisions (Yüksel, 2002).

Tourism planning encompasses the process of setting future goals, creating strategies, and making choices from among alternatives (Mills and Morrison, 1998:264). This process aims to offer an enhanced and enriched customer experience and satisfaction, increase economic and business success, and integrate local communities and regions while promoting the sustainable development of tourism (Gunn and Var, 2002). Tourism planning has the potential to provide long-term benefits to both tourism businesses and local communities by encouraging the sustainable development of tourist destinations. In this context, tourism planning aims to strike a balance by promoting the balanced growth of the tourism sector and meeting the expectations of various stakeholders while creating a harmonious and sustainable environment.

2. Method

2.1. Research Paradigm:

This research adopts an exploratory paradigm, aiming to gain in-depth qualitative insights into the social and cultural dynamics of tourism development in Sapanca, Türkiye.

2.2. Data Collection:

Non-participatory observation served as the primary data collection method. Between March 2021 and August 2023, the researcher directly observed the selected setting on weekdays and weekends at different times of day to capture diverse experiences. Observation technique is a widely used data collection method in the social sciences, in which the researcher systematically records the behaviors, interactions, and cultural characteristics of individuals in a specific social setting by being present in that environment (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). The observer's role is a significant factor in this technique and determines how participative or non-participative the researcher is in the observed environment. Four different observation techniques shape the observer's role: complete participant observation, participant observation, semi-participant observation, and complete observer observation (Büyüköztürk, et al, 2016). The data obtained through the observation technique is recorded using field notes or observation forms. Field notes are notes written by the researcher in their own words, describing their observations, while observation forms aim to systematically record observation results based on predetermined criteria (Karasar, 2017: 157-158).

The observation technique has great potential in understanding the social context and obtaining in-depth data (Corti et al, 2014). This method may be more time-consuming and costly compared to big data usage but provides researchers with comprehensive analysis through rich and detailed data (Jagadish et al., 2014). However, the data collection process with the observation technique also comes with ethical responsibilities. Researchers must protect the privacy of the individuals they observe, obtain their consent, and take care not to harm them (Gahi, et al, 2016).

2.3. Setting and Participants:

The focus area was the central district of Sapanca, encompassing areas popular with tourists (lakefront promenade, souvenir shops, restaurants) and those frequented by locals (markets, residential neighborhoods). Observations targeted specific groups, including:

- Tourists: Solo travelers, families with children, young couples, and senior travelers were among the observed groups.
- Locals: Long-term residents, young adults, and shopkeepers were observed to understand their perspectives on tourism development.

Observation Focus Points:

- Tourism-related activities: Observation centered on how tourists engaged with various activities (boat tours, souvenir shopping, dining, lakefront strolling).
- Local businesses: Interactions between tourists and local shopkeepers, cafes, and restaurants were observed to understand economic and cultural exchange.
- Resident perspectives: Observations involved informal conversations with locals to capture their feelings towards tourism development, its impact on their lives, and their interactions with tourists.
- Infrastructure and superstructure: Changes in the built environment, including new hotels, restaurants, and shops, were documented to assess the physical landscape's transformation due to tourism.
- Tourist-local interactions: Specific attention was paid to observe everyday interactions between tourists and locals in public spaces, markets, and tourist sites to understand the nature and frequency of these encounters.

2.4. Data Recording and Analysis:

Field notes were used to capture detailed observations in the researcher's own words, including dialogues, nonverbal cues, and descriptions of the setting and atmosphere. Observations were later analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns, themes, and key insights relating to the research questions. To ensure reliability and validity, triangulation of data through diverse observation points and informal interviews with locals was employed.

3. Findings

When observing and evaluating the social barriers to the development of tourism in Sapanca, it has become evident that these barriers can be categorized into two main groups: the local population and the public authorities. To enhance the comprehension of the findings, it is deemed appropriate to present them under two distinct headings.

3.1. Social Barriers Arising from the Local Population

The social barriers to the implementation of tourism policies in Sapanca, arising from the local population, can be further divided into two distinct periods for a better understanding. In the early period, Sapanca's local population and local entrepreneurs were introduced to tourism. During this period, visitors were mainly day-trippers from neighboring provinces and Middle East Gulf Region visitors who began to visit Turkey during that time. In this period, restaurants, souvenir shops, and large-scale accommodation businesses were the pioneers in benefiting from tourism. Additionally, local government policies in the city started to change towards tourism, transforming Sapanca from a suburban town to a tourism center and altering its image.

It is estimated that in the early period, the local population of Sapanca felt the effects of tourism to a limited extent. Although traces of that period can be found, it was not directly observed by the researcher. In the mature period, the development of tourism has accelerated significantly, and the effects of tourism have become more tangible. With the mature period, there has been a rapid increase in the number of accommodation and food and beverage businesses in Sapanca. Simultaneously, promotional and marketing activities related to tourism have intensified, and Sapanca has become a well-known destination regionally.

These developments have led to an increase in property prices in Sapanca. Two factors have been observed to play a significant role in this increase. First, the demand for land for new investments has significantly increased the value of the land and property owned by the local population. Second, due to the rapidly increasing demand for tourism, especially given the favorable geographical structure of the region, day-to-day house rental and bungalow-type accommodations have become widespread. This increase in property values has led to a significant financial gain for individuals selling or renting out their properties.

This situation is seen as the most significant social barrier to the implementation of tourism policies in Sapanca. Property values in the region have increased two to four times more than in other cities, independent of inflation trends and the increase in the value of assets nationwide. The unexpected and relatively effortless income increase has created resistance among the local population to continuing tourism activities at any cost.

Another essential barrier to the effective implementation of tourism policies is the ease with which businesses can earn substantial income due to the high spending power of tourists. The majority of tourists visiting Sapanca come from the Gulf Region of the Middle East and from Istanbul. Due to the exchange rate and the high income levels of tourists from the Gulf Region, the costs of services such as food and beverage, accommodation, souvenir shopping, transportation, and car rentals in Turkey are very attractive to them. Furthermore, most of the visitors from Istanbul are individuals with limited time but high spending power, often working in high managerial positions or owning businesses with high returns. They choose to visit Sapanca because of its proximity to Istanbul, natural beauty, and privacy. This explains the generosity of domestic tourists from Istanbul when it comes to spending money.

Both of the aforementioned groups of visitors are eager to spend money, enticing local businesses to easily earn high income. This situation has led to a faster increase in prices for food and beverages, car rental and transportation services, accommodation fees, daily necessities, construction maintenance and repair labor and material prices compared to other cities. As a result, the local population wants to protect this easy and relatively high income at any cost.

3.2. Public Authority-Originated Social Barriers

Public authorities in Sapanca, which include local municipalities, district governors, and local offices with jurisdiction limited to the Sapanca area, play a critical role in the social barriers associated with tourism development. These public institutions are reliant on the local social and economic dynamics in Sapanca and acting independently or against their interests would be irrational.

As tourism activities matured, as previously mentioned, the local community expressed a strong determination to sustain this movement at any cost. This situation significantly limits the maneuvering space for local municipalities, which are directly responsible for the local residents. Nevertheless, the need for investments to cater to the demand brought about by tourism activities has increased the revenues of the municipality. Enhancing a city's infrastructure, environmental regulations, expanding social facilities, and creating recreational areas are among the standard duties of any municipality. However, these responsibilities not only generate a relatively low income for the municipality but also incur significant expenses. However, in Sapanca, this changed in tandem with the maturation of tourism. Increased land usage, land sales, and other factors have significantly boosted the municipality's revenue, and infrastructure and superstructure investments began to serve not only the local residents but also the tourists. This has accelerated the economic return of the municipality's expenditures. Moreover, the municipality could carry out the investments and expenditures it is obligated to make without experiencing significant income losses. This holds true not only for the municipality but also for local offices and public institutions. The firm determination of the local community has a considerable impact, making it challenging for public institutions to oppose the will of the local residents.

4. Discussion

Tourism planning in emergent countries is mainly focused on supply and market. Tosun and Timothy (2001) maintain that infrastructure and building such physical improvements as hotels have reinforced planning in underdeveloped countries. Tourism planning only concerns with the opening of the new branch of hotels or refining transportation infrastructure to ease access. There is an inefficient use of inadequate resources and the use of development that prioritizes economic development. The impacts of tourism development on the social, cultural, and environmental areas are ignored. This summary of lack of vision fits with the overall situation in

Sapanca region as the findings show. Especially; social, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism are either have little importance or ignored completely by the ones who benefit from tourism economically.

Cultural barriers in the literature include the history of colonialism (Sarr et al., 2020) and community awareness (Adebayo & Butcher, 2021; Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). Other cultural barriers include mistrust (Adebayo & Butcher, 2021), power disparities (Kala & Bagri, 2018; Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019), unequal distribution of costs and benefits (Nguyen et al., 2020), and conflict of interests (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). Among these; community awareness, power disparities, unequal distribution of costs and benefits are worth mentioning for this paper according to findings. One can reach the conclusion that locals in Sapanca have little awareness about the sustainability of tourism and the region or even no awareness at all. Also, considering public-authority oriented barriers within this paper, being in charge comes with heavy responsibilities in both way, to the public and to the environment itself even it conflict with locals' short-term interests. Unequal distribution of costs and benefits is also one of the major concerns that this paper highlights in Sapanca region. Some locals gain unexpected financial benefits directly or indirectly while some others face the consequences of wicked activities related to tourism.

Tosun and Timothy (2003) discusses the arguments for and against community participation in tourism development, and suggests that social barriers such as lack of education, awareness, trust, and representation can prevent local people from having a meaningful role in tourism planning and decision making. Likewise, according to findings, this paper supports to question the effectiveness or even participation of locals within tourism decision-making processes.

5. Conclusion

Tourism activities bring both physical, economic, and social benefits and drawbacks. Increasing these benefits and minimizing the negatives is possible by adopting the right tourism policies and plans. However, in some cases, priorities and interests change. This study attempts to identify the social barriers that hinder the effective implementation of tourism policies and plans in Sapanca, primarily focusing on the local residents' ability to easily generate high income from housing, local businesses dealing with visitors with high spending capacity, and public authorities creating barriers for tourism policies due to increased revenues and the pressures and demands of the local community.

The concept of local residents refers to the general population living in the region. Individuals' needs range from simple to complex, and these needs are easily understandable. Until an individual's economic needs are met, it cannot be expected that they will prioritize more complex ecological and aesthetic needs. Therefore, it is entirely understandable that local residents overlook environmental and social negative effects when facing the opportunity to easily generate high income. Similarly, local businesses, established to make a profit, are operated or employed by members of the local community. Given their purpose to make a profit, they should not be expected to voluntarily accept regulations that could deprive them of their income. Local public institutions exist to meet the needs of the local community and provide services. Moreover, these institutions are accountable to the local community directly through democratic elections. Therefore, it should not be expected that they take steps contrary to the interests of the local community.

Despite all these justifications, it is not concluded that the social barriers to the implementation of tourism policies in Sapanca are logical and correct. The purpose of tourism policies is to maximize the social, economic, and physical benefits of tourism and make it sustainable. However, expecting individuals to make rational and long-term decisions on complex issues that require coordinated work from various scientific disciplines and experts is not right. Therefore, leaving decisions on such issues to the current will and interests of the local community can result in increased harm in the long run.

Theoretical Implications: The study reveals how entrenched power structures within local communities can act as social barriers to sustainable tourism policies. It sheds light on the need for recognizing and addressing power imbalances between residents, businesses, and authorities for effective policy implementation. The research suggests exploring alternative narratives for promoting sustainable tourism that resonate with local communities. Emphasis on immediate financial benefits might be less effective than highlighting long-term community well-being, cultural preservation, and environmental protection.

Practical Implications: Paper reveals that designing tourism policies that share economic benefits more equitably among local residents, businesses, and public authorities can reduce resistance to implementation. Engaging local communities in tourism planning through interactive workshops, stakeholder forums, and citizen panels can increase buy-in for sustainable policies. Also, one may try to explore alternative income sources for residents beyond tourism, such as supporting local agriculture, promoting cultural heritage, and developing creative industries. It might be useful to implement financial incentives or tax breaks for businesses that adopt sustainable practices, such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, and responsible resource management.

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