

The Problems That Affect the Development of Eskişehir's Tourism from the Visitors' Perspective

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Eskişehir, founded on the banks of Porsuk river by the Phrygians, is one of the most important crossroads of Turkey. In terms of cultural resources, the Phrygian valley that has Yazılıkaya Monument in its center, Pessinus (Ballıhisar) and Han underground city are touristic attraction points. Apart from these, there are several tombs, mosque complexes and mosques that belong to Seljuk and Ottoman eras, and many other historical structures from Republic era. Among these, Seyyid Battal Gazi and Kurşunlu Mosque Complexes, Alaaddin Mosque, and the tombs of Yunus Emre, Şeyh Şücaaddin Veli, Nasreddin Hoca and Edebali can be listed as the most significant sites for religious tourism. Odunpazarı houses, Atlıhan bazaar, Museum with 14 themes, and several special festivals are among the cultural attractions of the city. In addition to its cultural wealth, Eskişehir is rich in terms of natural scenery, cuisine and shopping facilities; but it has not achieved the desired potential within Turkey's tourism sector.

Literature includes a limited number of studies that aim to determine tourism problems for different destinations. A study about Eskişehir in this context has been found in neither international literature (Becker, 1987; Johnson, 1995; Tompson, et al., 1995; Clements and Georgiou, 1998; Warnaby, 1998; Turner and Reisinger, 2001; Seckelmann, 2002; Dickinson and Robinsons, 2008), nor national literature (Dinçer and Kızılırmak, 1998; Çakır, 2002; Duman and Yağcı, 2004; Öztürk and Seyhan, 2005; Tunçsiper and İlban, 2006; Türksoy, 2007; Akkılıç and Günalan, 2007; Yılmaz, 2007; Çakıcı et al., 2008; Bilgin, 2008; Akbulut, 2010). The problems found in this study are related to infrastructure and superstructure, promotion and marketing, educated personnel, finances, product diversification and organization.

Method

Eskişehir is not attracting the desired number of tourists despite having several natural, historical and cultural resources that can be marketed as touristic products. Eskişehir has been gaining momentum in especially in local tourism lately; however, the majority of the tourists are daily visitors. Pointing out the problems of Eskişehir, a city that is wanted to be a pioneer in terms of city tourism will lead to the solutions to those problems by authorities, and to the better management of a resource that will raise tourism income. Therefore, determination of the problems affecting the development of

Eskişehir tourism and calling the attentions of the authorities has been aimed, and a study towards the tourists has been conducted.

The domain of the research is the tourists visiting Eskişehir. Within this domain, tourists visiting Odunpazarı, the most attractive destination in Eskişehir, have been chosen as the sample space. Contemporary statistics software has been used to analyze the data obtained. Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis have been done in line with the nature of the study. Whether different demographic groups perceive the problems of Eskişehir's tourism differently is tested via t-test and ANOVA test. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach Alfa) of the scale of the analysis has been found to be 0.908.

Findings

General information about the tourists participating in the survey is given in Table 1. 58.2% of the visitors are female. Tourists of age within 16-30 are the majority with 51.6%.

The data obtained from the study has been analyzed using exploratory factor analysis. First, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was verified with the Barlett test (Chi-square = 1391.84; df = 120; significance ,000) and the Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy index (0.877). At the end of the analysis, a 5-factor structure that explains 71.047% of the total variance has been obtained. Table 3 shows the average ratio of agreement of the participants with the statements given that are related to the problems affecting Eskişehir's development. Among the statements related to infrastructure and superstructure, "Eskişehir has adequate number of food establishments." was the most agreed with 3.69 level of agreement, whereas "Eskişehir's intracity transportation is adequate for the tourists." was the least agreed with 3.18. The averages related to infrastructure and superstructure show that the visitors find the infrastructure facilities more inadequate than the superstructure facilities.

Among the problems related to the diversification of products, the statement "Eskişehir has tourism diversity." has the lowest agreement level with 3.13, which is also the lowest among the entire survey. The fact that competition is high and tourism areas are diverse requires diversity within touristic products. The visitors have shown agreement with the statements related to promotion and planning above average (3,70 – 345). The statements with the highest agreement level are related to attitude. Among these, "The residents of Eskişehir has a sufficient level of tourism consciousness." has the highest level survey-wide with 3.99. This shows that residents of the city are conscious about the importance of tourism and tourists, and that is perceived positively by the tourists. The agreement levels with the statements "The quality of service of the establishments in Eskişehir are adequate.", "The education and skill level of the personnel in accommodation establishments in Eskişehir is adequate." and "The quality of service of food establishments in Eskişehir is adequate." are 3.87, 3.59 and 3.29 respectively. The fact that these values are above average indicates that the visitors are pleased with the service quality. The analysis results of the hypothesis show that demographics play a role in the perception of factor dimensions, and there are significant differences in problems related to product diversification, promotion, attitude and quality of service. Especially, the marital status and levels of income and education of the visitors play a significant role.

Results and Discussion

According to the participating visitors, the most significant problems affecting the development of tourism in Eskişehir are related to infrastructure and superstructure, and product diversification. The development of tourism in a region primarily depends on infrastructure and superstructure investments. Problems in destinations that have not completed their infrastructure and superstructure (such as transportation, accommodation, food and environment problems) are repellent to the tourists. On the other hand, the ever-changing expectations of the tourists and the fact that the decision of touristic expenditure depends on various factors enforces innovation in production. Therefore, offering different facilities to the consumers is a significant way of gaining the upper hand in competition. A destination can benefit from product diversification by offering various recreational facilities to the consumers (Yıldız, 2009). Cost used to be the most important factor in choosing vacation sites in the past years. Recently, diversity and quality has become equally important. So, regions that intend to improve their tourism should also improve their infrastructure and superstructure facilities, along with their tourism facilities. According to the factor analysis, it is possible to say that there are problems with promotion, attitude and quality of service in Eskişehir in addition to infrastructure and superstructure, and product diversification.

In the study, data obtained from visitors of Eskişehir has been used, which show that there are meaningful differences between different demographic groups in the perception of the problems affecting the development of tourism in Eskişehir. The results indicate that marital status, level of education and income cause differences in perception. As the level of education and income increases, so does the level of perception of the problems. The problems with product diversification are more apparent to the visitors with higher levels of education. It can be inferred that visitors with higher levels of education wish to have diversified products and services instead of more traditional ones. Similarly, visitors with higher levels of income see more problems with service quality. There is a direct proportion between level of income and the expectation of service quality level. Also, marital status is found to be another important factor in the perception of problems. Married visitors tend to agree with the statements related to the problems with promotion, attitude and service quality more than single visitors.