



## Evaluation of Social Carrying Capacity of Topkapi Palace by Employees and Visitors

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### Introduction

It can be stated that the concept of density in tourism literature is closely related to mass tourism. Tourists travelling as groups may also cause density in terms of time and place (Akış, 1999, p.36-37). Today mass tourism is not preferred in order not to cause destruction of the sources. Nevertheless due to certain characteristics and attractiveness of some destinations and because holiday preferences may concentrate on certain time periods, this type of tourism is sometimes inevitable.

The concept of carrying capacity has gained importance after some undesired events occurring in touristic areas. In the grand scheme of things carrying capacity is the relationship between human activities taking place in the universe and the carrying power of the universe. In “UNESCO Biosphere Conference” held in Pairs in 1968 and in “Ecological Dimensions of International Development Conference” held in Washington it was emphasized that this relationship is mostly influensive on environmental carrying capacity (Southgate and Sharply, 2002, p.238). The concept of carrying capacity in tourism literature was first used in 1964 in Lucas’s study dealing with visitors’ perception of wild life in a place where people go canoeing. In this study it was stated that carrying capacity is related to environmental elements (Fennell, 2002, p.46-47).

The same concept which is generally used for touristic regions or areas can appear in some studies with different names. For example the concept of carrying capacity was referred as “carrying power” by Toker (1995, p.74) and “tourism capacity” by Bozok (2002, p.44). Toker (1995, p.74) defined carrying power as “optimum density in a place at any time for visiting tourists and people living in that visited place”. On the other hand World Tourism Organization defines carrying capacity as “the visitor level which allows high satisfaction of visitors staying in a place, but at the same time effects sources of that place at a minimum level”.

### Material and Method

In fact discussions on the conceptual nature of carrying capacity make studies to be conducted on that subject difficult. Therefore, in this study descriptive method revealing the situation in the application area has been employed.

According to the information supplied by the administration of Topkapı Palace, it was the most yielding destination in 2006 and witnesses the highest number of visitors (a yearly average of 2.100.000 people). Within the framework of the study an interview form was prepared for the employees of the museum who consistently control and guide the visitors and their answers were interpreted. On the other hand visitors were also asked a few questions considering the employees. For this purpose about 900 visitors were interviewed and the issues revealed by these interviews were covered in this study as long as they were related to the field of study.

### **Findings**

Director, vice director and experts working at the administrative section of Topkapı Palace agree on the following statements:

- Topkapı Palace is subject to dense visitor demand and used more than its carrying capacity.
- During the education period disordered and unplanned visits of student groups cause some problems.
- Rule-violating visitor behaviors show an increase parallel with the increase of visitor density.
- Extra expenses emerging parallel with the increase at visitor density forces the limits of carrying capacity.
- Problems with the environmental arrangements are also experienced when the visitor density increases.

It is observed that a rather large number of visitors agree particularly on the statement related to security when compared with the other issues mentioned in the interview, which shows that visitors' perception of security is positive. On the other hand some visitors expressed their discontentment about the behaviors of the security staff. Though the number of visitors who were mistreated by the security staff is small, this situation can be considered as an outcome of intensity encountered at the palace.

### **Conclusion**

It can be stated that some findings obtained from this study show that limits of social carrying capacity are being forced at Topkapı Palace. The findings were partly obtained from the interviews made with employees. Briefly talking it is seen that during the interviews palace staff dealt with the problems related to visitor density. They expressed that unfavorable visitor behaviors increase and neither material nor moral values of the area are cared at crowded times. Besides they emphasized that negative behaviors tend to rise also parallel with free entrance and there is an urgent need to raise the awareness of the visitors.

At Topkapı Palace visitors are hosted by the palace staff and it is seen that the staff highly agree on the statements related to their perception of crowded visitors. The results of the study suggest that they also have difficulties controlling crowded groups. Therefore it can be concluded that problems related to social carrying capacity are present at the palace. However these problems are not usually reflected as negative behaviors to the visitors.

It is possible to use pricing strategy mentioned in the literature to prevent intensity. On the other hand marking up the entrance fees over a standard limit may cause discontentment with the visitors. The concept of demarketing would not be a suitable method considering the cultural mission Topkapı Palace has. Handling Topkapı Palace as a destination and planning by taking the needs of destination management into consideration would be reasonable.

As stated in the literature hosts are one of the most important sides of social carrying capacity. As in Topkapı Palace case hosting mission is undertaken by the staff, they should definitely be asked for their opinions particularly on how to manage visitors, how to eliminate the aspects which influence carrying capacity in a negative way and the right type of planning to improve the visiting and of the area. Employees' contribution to the issues of planning and management should be ensured.