



## Metaphoric Perceptions of Tourist Guides Regarding the Destination Image of Van Province

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### Abstract

This research examines the metaphors developed by tourist guides that play an important role in the formation of the destination image. It is aimed to determine the perceptions of the Van province destination image of the tourist guides through metaphors. The fact that tour guides have a key role in affecting tourists' destination perceptions' is the importance of this research. The problem of the research is that there is no study in the literature that reflects the destination image of Van from the point of view of the guides. By using qualitative research methods, a phenomenological approach was used to understand the perceptions of tourist guides towards Van. As a result of the interviews with 29 guides living in Van, the guides developed 25 different metaphors about Van. Positive metaphors are 17 and 9 are negative. The 'pearl mullet' metaphor was included under the themes of both negative and positive metaphors. Among the metaphors, the most frequently repeated metaphor is "paradise" for Van. Some guides associate the city of Van with the metaphor of "paradise", indicating that Van has all kinds of beauty. Different guides emphasized the harmony of ethnic diversity living in Van with metaphors such as "miniatürk", "mosaic", "marbling art", "a garden with many different fruits". On the other hand, the guides also described Van with metaphors such as "an ore that needs to be unearthed", "an abstract treasure waiting to be discovered", "an unfinished poem because its poet died", and "sleeping beauty". These negative metaphors point to the discourse that what needs to be done is not done enough for the development of the province of Van. The research outputs will guide each tourism stakeholder working to improve the destination image of Van.

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## 1. Introduction

The image creation process, by its nature, is a process of creating value together by all stakeholders. One of the stakeholders in the tourism sector is tourist guides. Tourist guides are stakeholders that attract tourists to destinations, have them come back and recommend the place and contribute to creating a positive destination image. When a tourist visits a tourism destination, the tourist's perception of the destination image is affected by the guide. Therefore, guides play an important role in building an attractive and unique image necessary for the development of tourism.

Metaphor is a structure of our cognitive system (Casey & Moran, 1989). Metaphors affect the way we perceive the world, categorize experiences and organize our thoughts (Casakin, 2007). In a rapidly changing social world, metaphors offer new ways to understand ongoing transformations when existing dictionaries are inadequate (Adu-Ampong, 2016). This new way is nothing different from the expression of the feelings and thoughts in our memories through words. Different words compatible with the changing social world, make it easy to interpret and explain destinations. Evaluating the destination image through metaphors can serve as a tool to understand the context, in which a particular metaphor for a destination emerges and to evaluate its usefulness in terms of tourism.

The destination image perceptions of guides are reflected in their behavior and discourses in the guiding process. As Urry (1990) emphasizes, the various discourses of tourist guides provide a lens through which the tourist gaze is

directed. Therefore, determining the destination image perceptions of the guides through metaphors may allow us to gain a more in-depth understanding.

In the literature, no study has been found in which the destination image perceptions of tourist guides towards the province of Van are examined through metaphors. In the process of creating a positive image, it is thought that it is important to determine the destination image perceptions of tourist guides towards the province of Van, which affect and change the perceptions of tourists regarding the image of a destination. In this context, the aim is to examine the destination image perceptions of tourist guides in Van through metaphors.

## 2. Literature

Destination image is defined as the whole of individuals' beliefs, ideas, and impressions about destinations (Crompton, 1979: p. 18). According to another definition, destination image expresses not only the perceptions of individuals regarding the qualities of destinations, but also the holistic impressions that destinations leave on tourists (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991: p. 43). Image is an important element for destinations, because places can be understood through their images or people's perceptions of them (Kavaratzis, 2017). Many studies emphasize the importance of creating an attractive and unique destination image in tourism development (Mackay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Hsu et al., 2004; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). It is noteworthy that the word 'heaven' is used when describing the destination in most holiday advertisements. Undoubtedly, this definition has been one of the easiest ways to connect with a target audience to highlight the image of the destination and to make the destination attractive. In this sense, the metaphors used when defining destinations become highly functional (Butler, 1980 as cited in Belhassen, 2020; Cheer et al., 2019; Cohen, 1972 as cited in Belhassen, 2020). Metaphors represent, in many cases, a way of looking at, seeing, understanding and indeed reordering the world. In the relevant literature, the 'tourist area life cycle' (Butler, 1980 as cited in Belhassen, 2020), which aims to describe the development of the destination, is the 'tourist bubble', which physically expresses the experience of tourists traveling to different regions by bus while staying at a holiday resort or a backpacker residential area. It can be seen that metaphors, such as those from Cohen, (1972, as cited in Belhassen, 2020) are used. Metaphors such as 'overcrowding' and 'resilience' (Cheer et al., 2019) are examples of metaphors that have emerged recently.

Tourist guides, who know the characteristics of destinations well and undertake the task of explaining these features to incoming tourists, play a leading role in creating a destination image. Guides, who describe the urban architecture, food culture, traditions, and local people of a destination, have a significant impact on tourists, in particular, the direct communication of tourist guides with tourists deepens this effect.

It is important for destinations that want to gain a competitive advantage to determine the features that will enable them to become brands, and to look for ways to benefit from these features (Altunbaş, 2007). Metaphors are common in everyday language and therefore play an important role in our cognition (Adu-Ampong, 2016). In creating a destination image, metaphors can be used as a tool to produce innovative and creative solutions. Therefore, determining the destination image perceptions of tourist guides, which affect tourist views through metaphors, can contribute to image creation studies.

## 3. Method

The qualitative research method was used in the research. The phenomenological approach was used to understand the perceptions of the guides towards the province of Van. In the phenomenological approach, it is understood how people in a certain situation perceive events and interactions. Therefore, it is possible to explain an experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, pp. 25-26). The understanding of phenomenology enables one to focus on the destination image based on the nature of the experience (Rodrigues et al., 2011).

In phenomenological research, purposive sampling types are used in the selection of participants (Ersoy, 2017, pp. 108-110). In this direction, twenty-nine tourist guides, who act as guides for the province of Van, constitute the sample of the research. Six of the guides are women and twenty-three are men. Their ages range from twenty-six to forty-six. Two of the guides are registered with the Ankara Chamber of Guides and the others are registered with the Şanlıurfa Chamber of Guides.

Metaphors can be used to classify certain phenomena from a different perspective (Schmicking & Gallagher, 2009). Metaphors are especially useful in conveying comprehensive and abstract concepts, such as images (Hill &

Levenhagen, 1995). Therefore, it was attempted to determine the perceptions of the destination image of the guides through metaphors. A structured interview form was prepared to determine the destination image perceptions of Van of the guides. The opening question read: ‘If you could compare Van to something (animate, object, machine, and suchlike) in the form, what would that thing be? Please fill in the blanks. I liken Van to ..... ; because .....’. The form was sent to all of the guides by way of a Whatsapp group, where they share their professional issues. Participants were informed about the scope of the study and their consent was obtained. The data collection process was carried out between 20-23 June, 2021.

Content analysis was performed on the data obtained through the questionnaire. The metaphors were coded separately by the researchers and put into their final form by making comparisons. The real names of the participants were not included in the study. The participants were named such as TG1, TG2, ..., and TG29.

#### 4. Results

The metaphors developed by the tourist guides for the province of Van are given in Table1.

**Table 1.** Metaphors developed by tourist guides

<i>Metaphor</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Paradise	3 Times
Garden	2 Times
Music	2 Times
Pearl Mullet	2 Times
Treasure	1 Time
Ore	1 Time
Van Cat	1 Time
Hangzhou City (China),	1 Time
Coeur D’Alene, Idaho (USA)	1 Time
America Waiting to be Discovered	1 Time
An Unfinished Poem	1 Time
Marbling Art	1 Time
Oasis	1 Time
Pearl of the East	1 Time
The Capital of Civilization	1 Time
Miniaturk	1 Time
A Closed Box	1 Time
Sleeping Beauty	1 Time
Basil	1 Time
A Star far Away	1 Time
A Monster That Can’t Get Enough	1 Time
Rubik’s Cube	1 Time
Novel	1 Time
A Confused Individual	1 Time
Mosaic	1 Time

*Source: Researchers*

Twenty-nine tourist guides participating in the research developed twenty-five metaphors. The most frequently repeated metaphor for the province of Van by the guides is ‘Paradise’ (n=3). It is determined that the most repeated metaphors are ‘garden’ (n=2), ‘music’ (n=2), and ‘Pearl Mullet’ (n=2), respectively. Apart from these, each of the twenty-one metaphors was produced by different tourist guides.

The metaphors developed by the tourist guides are grouped under themes based on the meaning and features of the words. The metaphors obtained are grouped under two themes; 'positive metaphors' and 'negative metaphors'. The 'pearl mullet' metaphor was included under the themes of both negative and positive metaphors.

#### 4.1. Positive Metaphors

It was understood that the tourist guides participating in the research associated the province of Van with positive metaphors. There were seventeen metaphors under this theme: paradise; novel; treasure; garden; Hangzhou; miniaturk; marbling art; basil; Coeur d'Alene; pearl of the east; oasis; mosaic; music; capital of civilization; pearl mullet; Van cat; and rubik's cube. A number of expressions in this theme are given below:

**TG1:** *"I liken Van to a novel; the language is simple, but the content is deep and meaningful because this is where my story begins."*

**TG2:** *"I liken Van to an abstract treasure waiting to be discovered because I see a great power that can attract people with its natural and historical beauties."*

**TG3:** *"I liken Van to original music. Because I think it is an unique urban texture that simultaneously contains various opportunities that address the needs of modern times, with its location close to the sun with the taste of a highland, its fresh air every season, its sincere people, the harmonic color of the cosmopolitan cultural structure that smells of history."*

**TG4:** *"I liken Van to a colorful flower garden because as you travel, your travel comes."*

**TG6:** *"I liken Van to Hangzhou, China because in the city of Hangzhou there are beautiful bays, restaurants, and a vibrant economy, as well as historical, religious, and tourist structures in and around the lake. "*

**TG8:** *"I liken Van to the capital of civilization because history starts here."*

**TG9:** *"I liken Van to a garden with many different fruits because it has contained many different religions and civilizations throughout history."*

**TG10:** *"I liken Van to heaven because I think it is the first among Turkey's most important cities in terms of nature, culture, sanctity, and importance"*

**TG11:** *"I liken Van to Pearl Mullet and Van cat because fish cannot live without water. The people of Van are lakeless and there is no such thing as a cat."*

**TG12:** *"I liken Van to a brain teaser because there is every color, every language, and every race there."*

**TG14:** *"Van is like heaven because it has running waters, tourism and agricultural activities, and flora and fauna resembling paradise."*

**TG15:** *"Van is like Miniaturk. It always contains a piece of all the beauties of Turkey."*

**TG17:** *"I liken Van to Ebru Art. The combination of different colors and tones creates a unity with tremendous beauty, just like the corpus stemming from our common heritage and the ethnic diversity of our geography."*

**TG19:** *"Van is like basil because when you first look from the outside, it is no different from a normal plant. However, as time passes, its pleasant and indescribable smell and texture affect our entire soul. It is also a place where historical, social, and cultural values are understood as they live and touch us."*

**TG21:** *"I liken Van to a tune that affects people deeply because every listener will find something for himself. Those who live that melody are always a little sad and sometimes cheerful like a mischievous child; Those who listen to the tune from afar are curious for more."*

**TG22:** *"I liken it to Coeur d'Alene, which is in the state of Idaho in America because the air, the lake, and the island in the middle of the lake are just like the lake, island, and air in Van."*

**TG23:** *I liken Van to the pearl of the east because there is nature, history, culture, everything."*

**TG24:** *"I liken Van to an oasis in the middle of arid climate and steppe because, with its historical and geographical natural beauties, this oasis standing in the middle of the desert is almost an evil eye bead."*

**TG29:** *"I liken Van to a mosaic because it is a place where many cultures and different civilizations lived and their traces continue around Lake Van."*

## 4.2. Negative Metaphors

It was determined that the guides used negative metaphors besides positive ones. Under this theme, the guides produced nine metaphors: ore; a confused individual; a monster that can't get enough; an unfinished poem; Pearl Mullet; a closed box; sleeping beauty; America waiting to be discovered; and a star far away. Certain of the expressions in this theme are given below:

**TG5:** *"I liken Van to an ore that is waiting to be mined under the ground and that no effort is made to extract it because Van is a city whose real potential is not used in every sense."*

**TG7:** *"I liken Van to a confused individual because he has not yet decided what kind of person he will be."*

**TG13:** *"I liken Van to a paradise waiting to be discovered, actually a paradise of unknown value because if you look for natural beauty, there is water (Van sea), which is the source of civilization. If you look for mountains, for example, there are mountains to feel safe with, and if you seek the fertility of the soil, there is that too. There is a geography where living things live comfortably. On the other hand, the people living here do not know its value. Since tens of generations did not live in the region without interruption, its value was not appreciated. Its value could have been better known."*

**TG16:** *"I liken Van to a monster that can't get enough when he eats because there is no institution or employee with merit, and that gets Van nowhere. Despite the high season of tourism, all the hotels are empty."*

**TG18:** *"I liken Van to an incomplete poem because its poet died. This is because the meaning is very deep, but the words are not complete, the feelings it gives are very beautiful, but there is no rhyme. Everyone who reads this poem tries to add something in their own way, but they do not see that the poem is starting to lose its meaning. Even if it is written on a Gazelle's skin in golden letters, this poem will still be meaningless this time. A poet needs to complete this beautiful poem."*

**TG20:** *"I liken Van to Pearl Mullet because he is also experiencing the process his fish went through; he is struggling to survive; he is trying to survive."*

**TG25:** *"I liken Van to a closed box with all mysteries unsolved because it is a place that contains many stories, but cannot be told as it deserves. Van needs a serious brand and advertising strategy, and this strategy needs a serious plan that needs to be established. When we realise this plan, we can discover the mysterious stories about Van, and then we can understand the tourist value it deserves."*

**TG26:** *"I liken Van to sleeping beauty because Van has always suffered from three great curses (wars, earthquakes, and rocky terrain) in its historical adventure going back 5000-7000 years as a settlement, and 3000 years ago since the Urtians. It is an unfortunate province that has never progressed socially and economically because it carries its legacy to this day. I liken this stagnation to a state of sleep. On the other hand, Van is a beautiful city with natural, historical, and partly cultural riches. This situation reminds me of the beautiful, but unfortunate, fairy tale hero 'Sleeping Beauty'."*

**TG27:** *"I liken Van to America waiting to be rediscovered because despite having great wealth, I know that he has the potential that will make a name for himself, waiting for someone to come and reveal all his riches."*

**TG28:** *"I liken Van to a very distant star because it is as bright as a star, but because it is far away, no one can see it."*

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Tourists' perceptions of destination, which are formed spontaneously while visiting the province of Van, create the general image of the destination, and those who contribute more concretely to the formation of this image are the guides working in the Van region. Every word formed regarding Van in the cognition system of the guides is transferred to the tourists during spoken transmission. For this reason, it is important to examine the metaphors used by the guides in-depth.

The association of a number of the guides with the metaphor 'heaven' indicates that Van has various beauties and charms. Different guides emphasized the harmonious ethnic diversity of the people living in Van with metaphors, such as 'miniatürk', 'mosaic', 'marbling art', and 'a garden with many different fruits'. These metaphors can help tourists create a perception of a destination image that opens up more room for tolerance. On the other hand,

the guides also described Van with other metaphors, such as ‘an ore that must be unearthed’, ‘an abstract treasure waiting to be discovered’, ‘an unfinished poem because its poet died’, and ‘sleeping beauty’. These statements can be a source for the development of a more passive destination image for Van. This passive image may mean that something is not considered worth doing for Van, that sufficient resources are not transferred, that it is not supported for its development, and it also indicates that it should be discovered implicitly or that sufficient promotion and investment should be made.

These negative metaphors point to the discourse that what needs to be done is not done enough for the development of the province of Van. Tourist guides are the most observant of a destination. Therefore, destination image studies could be carried out by taking their discourses into account. In this research, the perceptions of the guides regarding the destination image of Van province are examined through metaphors. Different studies could be conducted involving tourists and local people. Metaphors that provide in-depth understanding, and reflect our knowledge from different angles, can serve as tools in the study of creating a destination image.

Based on the results of the research, the following suggestions were presented to the tourism stakeholders.

- First of all, all tourism stakeholders (local people, non-governmental organizations, development agencies, local governments, Van Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, tourist guides, travel agencies, educational institutions, accommodation businesses, food and beverage businesses, transportation businesses, tourists and students) should work collaboratively for the development of the Van province.
- Destination management organization should be established.
- The job descriptions of the institutions and organizations that will take place in the organization should be determined.
- Planning, organizing, directing, coordination, and control units should be established for the development of the destination image within the organization.
- Training should be given to the local people to raise awareness about the destination image of Van.
- Promotional activities highlighting the unique features of Van should be increased.
- Entrepreneurs who will invest in the development of Van should be encouraged with projects.

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