



# Geographies t u d Planning Tourism s



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# Geographies Planning Tourism

StudioS

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## Geographies, Planning & Tourism StudioS

### Content

### Pages

Editorial

I-V

### Research Article

Havva Gözgeç Mutlu

*Bibliometric Analysis of the "International Journal of Spa and Wellness"*

1-13

*"International Journal of Spa and Wellness" Bibliyometrik Analizi*

Ertan Düzgüneş

*Türkiye'de Korunan Alan Yönetim Planlarının Katılımcı Boyutunu Analiz Etmek İçin Yeni Bir Yaklaşım*

14-31

Duygu Karabıçak-  
Günaydın

*A New Approach to Analyzing the Participatory Dimension of Protected Area Management Plans in Türkiye*

Esin Deniz Aydın

*Sürdürülebilir Turizmin Gelişiminde Kültürel Mirasın Rolü: İstanbul Kalkhedon Bölgesi Örneği*

32-46

Ali Yüce

*The Role of Cultural Heritage in Sustainable Tourism Development: The Case of Istanbul Kalkhedon Region*

Zekeriya Aksoy

*Google Haritalar Yorumları Kullanılarak Turistlerin Unutulmaz Tur Deneyimlerinin İncelenmesi*

47-58

*Examining the Memorable Tour Experiences of Tourists Using Google Maps Reviews*

Aybüke Özsoy

*7500 Sayılı Kanun Değişikliğinin Turist Rehberliği Öğrencilerinin Kariyer Kararlılığına Yansımaları*

59-74

*Reflections of Law No. 7500 Amendment on Career Decidedness of Tourist Guidance Students*

## Editorial

We are pleased to present the first issue of the fifth volume of GPT-StudioS, bringing together five original research articles at the intersection of geography, planning, and tourism. Each study addresses a current issue with a unique methodological approach and contributes to the field by creating a strong link between theory and practice.

The first article focuses on a specialized academic journal in the rapidly expanding field of SPA and wellness tourism. Titled “Bibliometric Analysis of the International Journal of Spa and Wellness,” the article by Mutlu offers a bibliometric overview of articles published in the International Journal of Spa and Wellness between 2018 and 2024. Based on Scopus data, the study identifies publication patterns, thematic concentrations, and country-level contributions, providing strategic insight into the structure and growth of wellness tourism literature.

The second article, focusing on participatory environmental management, proposes an innovative method to assess the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in protected area planning. Titled “A New Approach to Analyzing the Participatory Dimension of Protected Area Management Plans in Türkiye,” the article by Düzgüneş and Karabıçak Günaydın applies this approach to Saros Bay Special Environmental Protection Area. Using expert surveys and stakeholder information forms, the study quantitatively evaluates plan effectiveness and highlights the need for enhanced legal and participatory mechanisms.

Extending the sustainability focus into the realm of cultural heritage, the third article explores how historical sites can be reinterpreted within tourism strategies. Titled “The Role of Cultural Heritage in Sustainable Tourism Development: The Case of Istanbul Kalkhedon Region,” the article by Aydın and Yüce investigates how the Kalkhedon (Kadıköy) district, long overshadowed by urbanization and demographic change, can contribute to sustainable tourism. The findings emphasize the importance of environmental sensitivity, cultural continuity, and local collaboration.

Shifting the lens to digital platforms, the fourth article examines how tourists’ experiences are shaped and remembered through online reviews. Titled “Examining the Memorable Tour Experiences of Tourists Using Google Maps Reviews,” the article by Aksoy analyzes 731 Google Maps reviews using a phenomenological approach. The study develops a theoretical model of eight core components, including shared experiences, knowledge, guide quality, and local culture, showing how digital content becomes part of the tourist memoryscape.

The fifth and final article engages with current discussions in tourism education by exploring the impact of legal change on students’ professional orientation. Titled “Reflections of Law No. 7500 Amendment on Career Decidedness of Tourist Guidance Students,” the article by Özsoy draws on survey data from 177 students. The findings show that the amendment to Law No. 7500 has increased students’ professional anxiety and shaped their career expectations, emphasizing that career decidedness is influenced not only by personal attributes but also by structural factors.

These contributions reflect interdisciplinary perspectives and offer both theoretical insights and practical solutions to emerging issues. We extend our sincere thanks to all contributing authors, the reviewers who supported the evaluation process, and the editorial team for their work in preparing this issue. We look forward to meeting you again in future volumes.

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## Bibliometric Analysis of the “International Journal of Spa and Wellness”

### “International Journal of Spa and Wellness” Bibliyometrik Analizi

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#### Abstract / Öz

This study presents the first bibliometric analysis of the International Journal of Spa and Wellness (IJSW) to assess its academic influence, publication trends, and thematic research focus. IJSW was chosen for this analysis due to its specialized focus on SPA and wellness tourism—an emerging and rapidly growing niche in health tourism. Unlike broader wellness and wellbeing journals, IJSW provides a dedicated academic platform for SPA tourism research, making it a key source in this field. However, despite its increasing contributions, no systematic bibliometric evaluation of the journal has been conducted to date. To address this gap, this study employs bibliometric analysis using data retrieved from the Scopus database, covering all articles published in IJSW between 2018 and 2024. Microsoft Excel and VOSviewer 1.6.20 software were used for data processing and visualization. Overlay Visualization was applied for citation analysis, while Network Visualization was used to identify key research topics through keyword analysis. The results indicate a steady increase in IJSW's academic influence, with notable growth in publication and citation counts. The most cited authors, the countries contributing the most, and the prominent research themes have been identified, with “wellness,” “tourism,” “wellness tourism,” “Spa,” and “well-being” emerging as the most dominant topics, respectively. The findings underscore IJSW's role as a critical platform in SPA and wellness tourism research and provide valuable insights into emerging trends and future research directions.

*Bu çalışma, International Journal of Spa and Wellness (IJSW) üzerine gerçekleştirilen ilk bibliyometrik analizi sunarak derginin akademik etkisini, yayın eğilimlerini ve tematik araştırma odaklarını değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. IJSW, SPA ve wellness turizmine odaklanan özel bir akademik dergi olması nedeniyle bu çalışmaya konu edilmiştir. Sağlık turizminin hızla büyüyen bir alt dalı olan SPA turizmi, giderek artan bir akademik ilgi görmektedir, IJSW bu alandaki temel kaynaklardan biri olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Ancak, derginin akademik katkıları üzerine sistematik bir bibliyometrik değerlendirme bugüne kadar yapılmamıştır. Bu boşluğu doldurmak amacıyla, çalışmada 2018-2024 yılları arasında IJSW’de yayımlanan makaleler üzerinde Scopus veritabanından elde edilen verilere dayalı bir bibliyometrik analiz gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veri işleme ve görselleştirme için Microsoft Excel ve VOSviewer 1.6.20 yazılımları kullanılmıştır. Atıf analizleri için Overlay Visualization, anahtar kelime analizi için ise Network Visualization yöntemleri uygulanmıştır. Sonuçlar, IJSW’nin akademik etkisinin istikrarlı bir şekilde arttığını ve yayın ile atıf sayılarında önemli bir yükseliş yaşandığını göstermektedir. En çok atıf alan yazarlar, en fazla katkı sağlayan ülkeler ve öne çıkan araştırma temaları belirlenmiş olup, “wellness” “turizm”, “wellness turizmi”, “Spa” ve “well-being” sırasıyla en baskın konular olarak tespit edilmiştir. Bulgular, IJSW’nin SPA ve wellness turizmi alanında önemli bir akademik platform olarak konumunu güçlendirdiğini göstermekte ve alandaki yükselen eğilimler ile gelecekteki araştırmalar için değerli içgörüler sunmaktadır.*

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## 1. Introduction

SPA tourism encompasses travel experiences focused on relaxation and rejuvenation, typically including treatments like massages, facials, and other health-related therapies. While overlapping with SPA tourism, wellness tourism offers a broader scope, covering activities that promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being, such as yoga camps, meditation sessions, and holistic healing practices (Smith & Puczkó, 2014). The significance of SPA and wellness tourism extends beyond personal health benefits, playing a critical role in the global economy. This sector has become an



essential component of the broader health tourism industry (GWI, 2023).

According to estimates from the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), the wellness tourism market is expected to more than double between 2022 and 2027, with expenditures anticipated to surge dramatically from \$651 billion in 2022 to \$868 billion in 2023, reaching \$1 trillion in 2024, and ultimately \$1.4 trillion by 2027 (McGroarty, 2023). In 2023, the SPA market size grew significantly, rising from \$65.21 billion in 2023 to \$72.97 billion in 2024, with an annual compound growth rate (CAGR) of 11.2% (The Business Research Company, 2024).

With the growing interest in SPA and wellness within academia and the business world, the “International Journal of Spa and Wellness” (IJSW) was launched in 2018. IJSW focuses on publishing both academic research and practical insights related to best practices in areas such as SPA design and management, wellness tourism and accommodation, medical tourism, health and wellness, sustainable environments, innovations in wellness technologies, health psychology, beauty, fitness, nutrition, holistic medicine and complementary practices, and education and training. Reflecting the diversity and complexity of the field, articles in IJSW include research papers, case studies, reports, and book and conference reviews (Taylor & Francis, 2024).

The IJSW was first published in 2018 under the editorship of Dr. Eleni (Elina) Michopoulou (Taylor & Francis, 2024). Since its inception, the journal has released 18 issues, including two special issues, and has been indexed in major bibliographic databases such as Scopus. As of 2023, IJSW holds a citation score of 2.7 and is classified in the Q3 quartile (Scopus, 2024). As one of the few specialized academic journals in the SPA and wellness tourism field, IJSW plays a crucial role in advancing research and bridging a significant gap in the literature.

To assess the journal’s scientific impact and development, bibliometric analysis is a widely used method that quantitatively evaluates scholarly publications. According to Van Raan (2005), this approach examines various metrics, including citation counts, author collaborations, keyword trends, and publication patterns. By analyzing data from academic databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar, bibliometric studies help identify research trends, assess academic influence, and map the evolution of a specific field. As Schwert (1993) highlights, establishing a bibliometric profile of a journal provides historical insights that contribute to a critical evaluation of its growth and significance.

In recent years, specific analyses of scientific journals have garnered increased attention, with numerous studies published on the topic. For example, Mulet-Forteza et al. (2018) conducted a bibliometric analysis of the Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing, identifying it as a leading journal with contributions from authors, institutions, and countries worldwide. Kumar et al. (2020) examined publications in the Journal of Heritage Tourism from 2006-2019, identifying core themes such as cultural heritage, sustainable development, and intangible heritage. Sigala et al. (2021), in their analysis of the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management (2006-2020), highlighted themes such as tourism experiences, service quality, and sustainability. Göral and Kılınç (2023) analyzed Tourism Management using bibliometric methods, determining that the most productive authors were British and the most active institution was the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

As one of the few journals dedicated exclusively to SPA and wellness research, the IJSW serves as a key academic resource for advancing knowledge in this specialized area of health tourism. This study conducts a bibliometric analysis to evaluate the journal’s scientific impact and publication performance. Unlike broader wellness and wellbeing-oriented journals, IJSW specifically focuses on SPA tourism and related topics. By providing a dedicated platform for research in this niche field, IJSW makes a significant scholarly contribution, making it an ideal subject for bibliometric assessment.

As one of the few academic journals dedicated specifically to SPA and wellness research, the IJSW serves as a vital resource for knowledge production and academic advancement in this specialized area of health tourism. This study conducts a bibliometric analysis to assess the journal’s scientific impact and publication performance. Unlike broader journals that focus on wellness and wellbeing, the IJSW distinguishes itself by placing a specific emphasis on SPA tourism and its related subjects. By offering a dedicated platform for research in this niche field, the journal represents an ideal subject for bibliometric evaluation.

The bibliometric analysis of IJSW provides an objective assessment of its research contributions and scientific influence. The analysis not only highlights the journal’s academic visibility but also serves as a valuable reference for understanding the overall dynamics of the field and identifying new research opportunities.

This study presents the first-ever bibliometric analysis of IJSW. While previous bibliometric studies have generally focused on the broader wellness research landscape, no systematic study has specifically examined IJSW’s academic influence, citation patterns, or publishing trends. In this context, the primary aim of this study is to conduct a



bibliometric analysis of IJSW, providing an in-depth observation of the evolution of its scientific publications. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the total publication and citation counts in IJSW?
2. Which are the most highly cited core articles in IJSW?
3. Who are the main researchers, institutions (units/faculties), and countries contributing to IJSW?
4. What are the primary journals cited in IJSW?
5. Which universities are affiliated with contributing researchers?
6. What are the main topics covered in IJSW articles?

## 2. Method and Data

This study conducts a bibliometric analysis of the publications in the “International Journal of Spa and Wellness” from 2018 to 2024. The study was conducted between August 25-30, 2024. Bibliometric analyses are commonly used to understand research trends, performance assessments, and the knowledge structure within scientific fields (Hood & Wilson, 2001). Bibliometric methods provide a comprehensive overview of academic research related to a field or journal by identifying leading trends in publications, citations, authors, keywords, and institutions (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). VOSviewer is a software specifically developed for bibliometric analyses, preferred for its ability to process large datasets and support various types of analyses. VOSviewer has the capacity to handle extensive bibliometric datasets (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). Compared to traditional multidimensional scaling (MDS) methods, it provides more accurate and meaningful mappings (Waltman et al., 2010).

In the first stage of this research, articles published in IJSW between 2018 and 2024 were retrieved from the Scopus database. Scopus is a widely used, comprehensive, and reliable bibliographic database, particularly notable for its extensive coverage of the social sciences (Archambault et al., 2009). It is a multidisciplinary database owned by Elsevier Publishing and has provided citation analyses since 1996.

Although all published articles are available on the journal’s website, utilizing Scopus offers several advantages in the data collection and analysis process. First, Scopus provides systematic and reliable bibliometric data, including citation analysis, author collaborations, publication trends, and keyword distributions essential components of a comprehensive bibliometric study. Additionally, Scopus offers advanced filtering options that allow for the precise selection of publications within a specific timeframe, facilitating efficient data extraction and analysis using bibliometric software. Since such analytical tools are not available on the journal’s website, Scopus enhances the academic rigor and scope of the study by enabling a more structured and comparative evaluation of the journal’s impact within the broader research landscape.

Within the scope of this research, journal performance-based analyses were conducted, focusing on IJSW’s publication years, publication counts, and citation numbers. Additionally, author, country, and institutional citation analyses were performed, along with an evaluation of the most cited journals, the most cited articles within IJSW, and keyword distributions.

For the analysis, Microsoft Excel and VOSviewer software were utilized (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). VOSviewer creates visual maps of bibliographic data, such as authors, institutions, countries, and keywords, allowing for a structural analysis of scientific fields (Waltman & Van Eck, 2010).

In this study, overlay visualization was employed for author, country, and institutional citation analysis. Citation count was selected as the weighting measure to reflect the impact of citations, while the average citation score (ACS) served as the scoring metric. According to the VOSviewer manual, assigning weights to elements or links based on attributes such as citation count or publication count enhances their prominence in the visualization. In the overlay visualization, items are colored based on their scores, with default colors ranging from blue (indicating low scores) through green (medium scores) to yellow (high scores) (Van Eck, & Waltman 2023).

Furthermore, network visualization was used for keyword analysis to identify conceptual structures and research trends. This method was chosen for its effectiveness in visualizing relationships and clustering keywords (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). Occurrences was selected as the weighting metric to reflect keyword frequency. Network visualization also facilitated topic clustering, where node size indicates keyword importance, and link density represents relationship strength. This analysis helped identify key research trends and core topics (Waltman et al., 2010).

The parameters in this study publication counts, citation analyses (by author, country, and institution), most cited

articles and journals, and keyword analysis were chosen based on their relevance to understanding IJSW's academic influence and thematic evolution. Also, ethics committee approval from the institution was not required for this study.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Publication and Citation Structure of the Journal

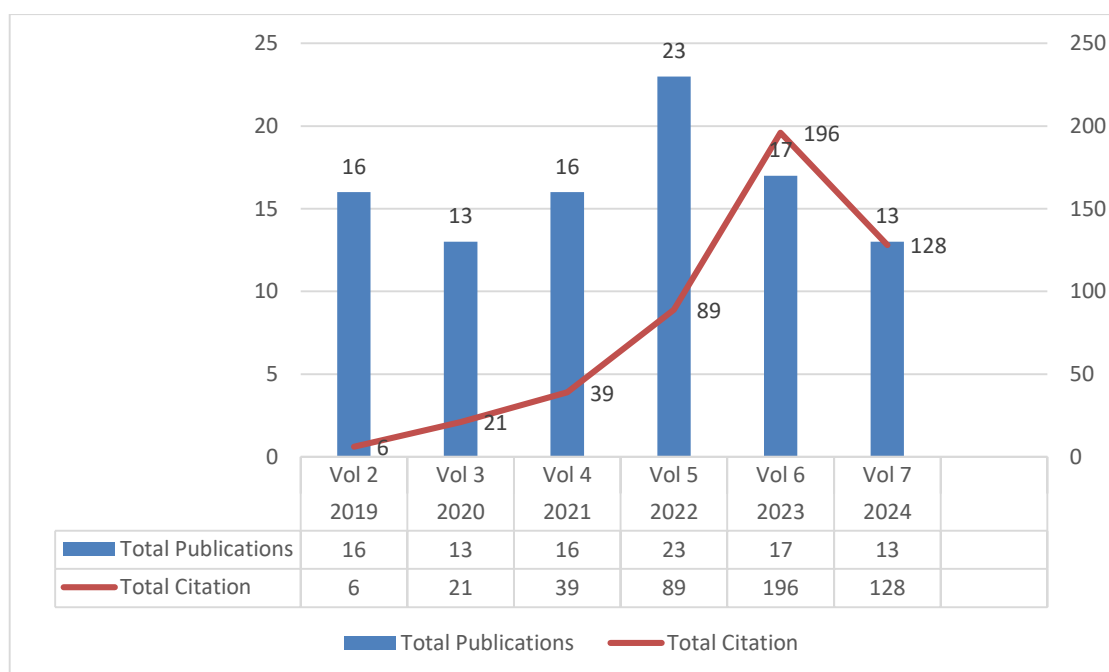
Between 2018 and 2024, IJSW published 118 articles. As of August 26, 2024, the journal received a total of 482 citations, with an h-index of 12. All publications in the journal are in English. Figure 1 shows the total number of publications in IJSW from 2018 to 2024, distributed by year. Table 1 details annual productivity from 2018 to 2024 using various metrics, presenting the number of publications per year and volume along with cumulative numbers for these publications.

**Table 1.** Annual productivity of IJSW

Issue								
Years	Volume	1	2	3	TP	CP	TI	CI
2018	Vol 1	10	7	7	20	20	3	3
2019	Vol 2	6	5	5	16	36	3	6
2020	Vol 3	5	8		13	49	2	8
2021	Vol 4	8	9		16	65	2	10
2022	Vol 5	8	7	8	23	88	3	13
2023	Vol 6	8	6	4	17	105	3	16
2024	Vol 7	5	8		13	118	2	18

**Note:** TP: Total publications, CP: Cumulative publications, TI: Total issues, CI: Cumulative issues

Source: Scopus IJSW page

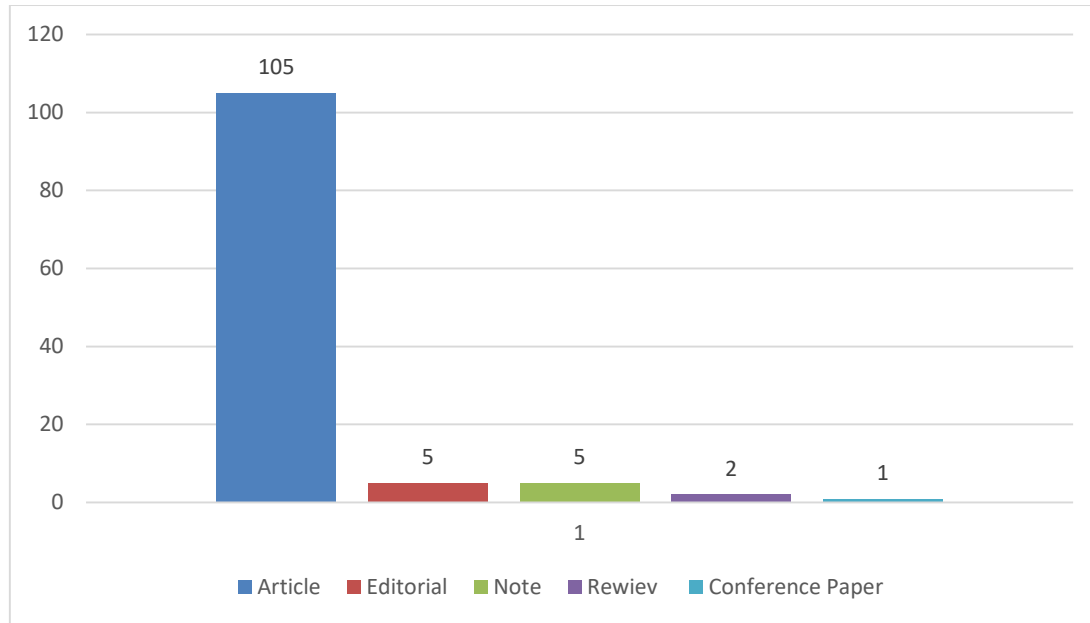


**Figure 1.** Number of publications and citations by year

Source: Scopus IJSW citation page

According to Figure 1 and Table 1, the annual publication count of IJSW has shown fluctuations each year. The journal began with a total of 20 publications in 2018, experienced a decrease to 16 publications in 2019, and subsequently displayed more stable productivity in 2020 and 2021, with 13 and 16 publications, respectively. In 2022, a significant increase to 23 publications was observed, marking 2022 as a peak year for the journal's productivity. Publication counts for 2023 and 2024 were recorded at 17 and 13, respectively. The cumulative publication count clearly reflects the

journal's growth over the years. Starting with a cumulative publication count of 20 in 2018, the total rose steadily each year, reaching 118 by 2024. Metrics for total scores and cumulative scores demonstrate the journal's progress over the years, not only in publication numbers but also in other criteria. By 2024, cumulative scores for the journal had reached 18. As of August 27, 2024, citation counts, starting with only 3 citations in 2018, grew steadily to 6 in 2019, 21 in 2020, 39 in 2021, 89 in 2022, 196 in 2023, and 128 in 2024. The numerical distribution of different publication types in IJSW is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Distribution by publication type

Source: Scopus, IJSW page

This distribution is visualized as a bar chart, which displays “articles” as the category with the largest share, totaling 105 publications. Additionally, there are 5 publications each in the editorial and note categories, 2 review articles, and only 1 conference paper.

As of August 28, 2024, the top 10 journals most cited by IJSW and their citation counts are listed in Table 2. Table 2 also presents the top 10 contributing universities and the number of contributing authors affiliated with these universities. Figure 3 provides content based on institutional contributions, while Table 2 is organized according to contributing universities.

**Table 2.** Information on journals cited by IJSW and universities contributing to the journal

Journals Cited	Number of Citations	Contributing Universities	Number of Contributing Authors
Tourism Management	139	University of Derby	22
International Journal of Hospitality Management	78	University of Nottingham	6
Journal of Travel Research	76	Pannon Egyetem	5
Annals of Tourism Research	72	Budapesti Metropolitan Egyetem	5
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	52	AGH University of Krakow	3
International Journal of Spa and Wellness	52	University of Nottingham	3
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	49	Tartu Ülikool	3
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	47	Budapest Business University	3
Current Issues in Tourism	43	Tartu Ülikooli Pärnu Kolledž	3
Sustainability Switzerland	40	Derby Business School	3

Source: Compiled by the author from the journal page on the Scopus database.

Table 2 summarizes the journals cited by IJSW and the universities that contributed to it. The most cited journal is *Tourism Management*, which received 139 citations, with the highest number of contributing authors (22) from the University of Derby. The *International Journal of Hospitality Management* ranks second with 78 citations, with the University of Nottingham as its leading contributor.

**Table 3.** *Top 10 most cited publications of IJSW*

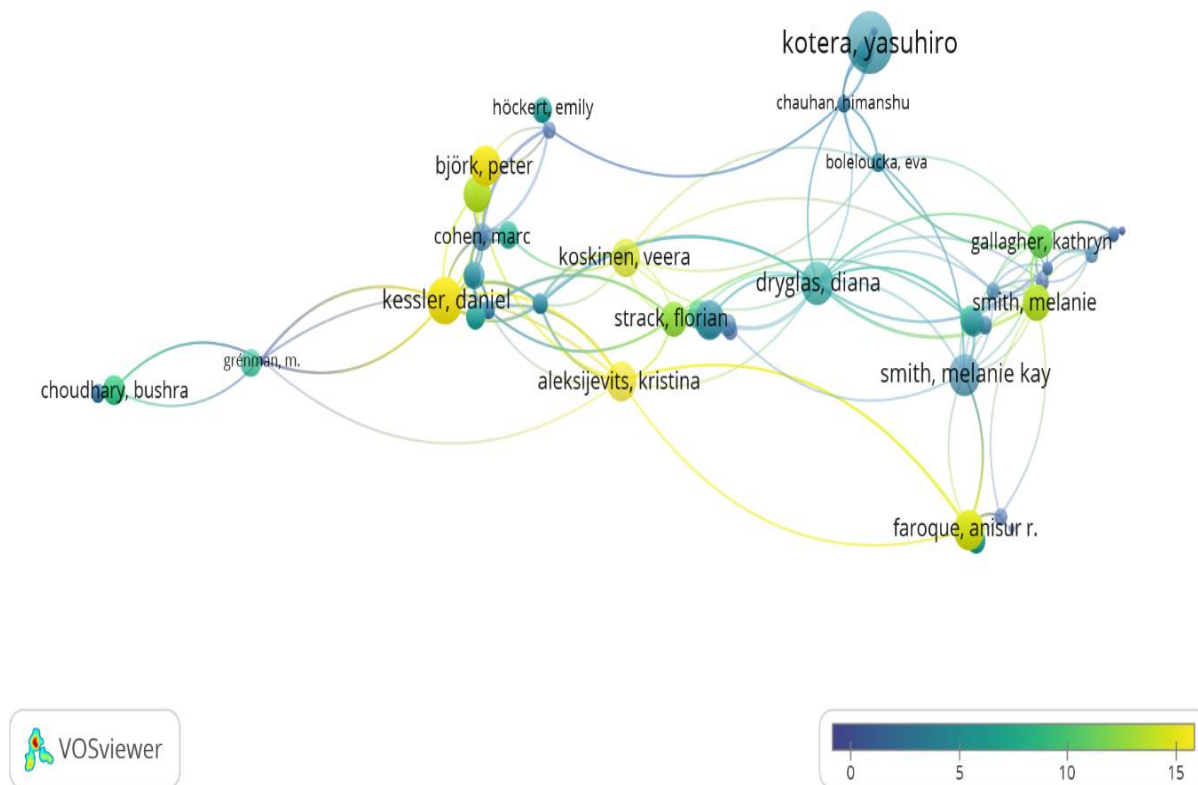
Publication Title	Authors	Year	Citations
De-stigmatising self-care: impact of self-care webinar during COVID-19	Kotera, Y.	2021	29
The wellness tourist motivation scale: a new statistical tool for measuring wellness tourist motivation	Kessler, D., Lee, J.-H., Whittingham, N.	2020	21
Consumer motivation and behaviour when selecting a wellness holiday destination	Aleksijevits, K.	2019	16
Towards a better understanding of memorable wellness tourism experience	Sthapit, E., Björk, P., Coudounaris, D.N.	2023	15
Effect of social media influence on consumer's purchase intention of organic beauty products: the role of customer's engagement and generativity	Gani, M.O., Roy, H., Rahman, M.S., ... Gupta, V., Prova, H.T.	2023	15
Tourism and wellbeing: transforming people and places	Pope, E.	2018	15
Visual analysis of the international wellness tourism WOS literature from 1992 to 2019	Wang, L., Togtokhbuyan, L., Yadmaa, Z.	2021	14
Life in a pandemic: intersectional approach exploring experiences of LGBTQ during COVID-19	Bhalla, R., Agarwal, S.	2021	14
Spa tourism as a part of ageing well	Koskinen, V.	2019	14
Integrating concepts of destination image, travel motivations, expectation, and future behavior to create a model of wellness travel intentions	Tiwari, R., Hashmi, H.	2022	13

**Source:** *Compiled by the author from the journal page on the Scopus database.*

Table 3 provides details on selected publications, authors, publication years, and citation counts. The most-cited article, “De-stigmatizing Self-Care: Impact of a Self-Care Webinar during COVID-19,” was published by Kotera Y. in 2021 and has been cited 29 times. This is followed by “The Wellness Tourist Motivation Scale: A New Statistical Tool for Measuring Wellness Tourist Motivation,” published in 2020 by Kessler, D., Lee, J.-H., and Whittingham, N., with 21 citations. Third is “Consumer Motivation and Behaviour When Selecting a Wellness Holiday Destination,” authored by Aleksijevits, K. in 2019, with 16 citations.

### 3.2. Author, Country, and Institutional Citation Analysis in IJSW

During the analysis, authors with at least one publication and one citation were selected, resulting in 183 of the 248 authors being included. In this study, author names were evaluated based on citation counts and the number of documents. Although the citation analysis draws on multiple publications per author, the specific works cited are not identified in the output. Additionally, some authors included in the citation analysis may have collaborated with other researchers on joint publications; however, not all of these co-authors were within the scope of the analysis. Consequently, listing authors in the references solely due to their association with those included in the analysis poses a risk of a scientifically and methodologically unjustifiable inconsistency. Therefore, references were omitted for authors mentioned solely in the author citation analysis section. Figure 1 presents the analysis results for the most-cited authors.



**Figure 1.** Citation analysis of authors publishing in the journal

**Note:** Of the 183 authors, the largest cluster of interconnected items consists of 98 items, which the program used to generate the visual

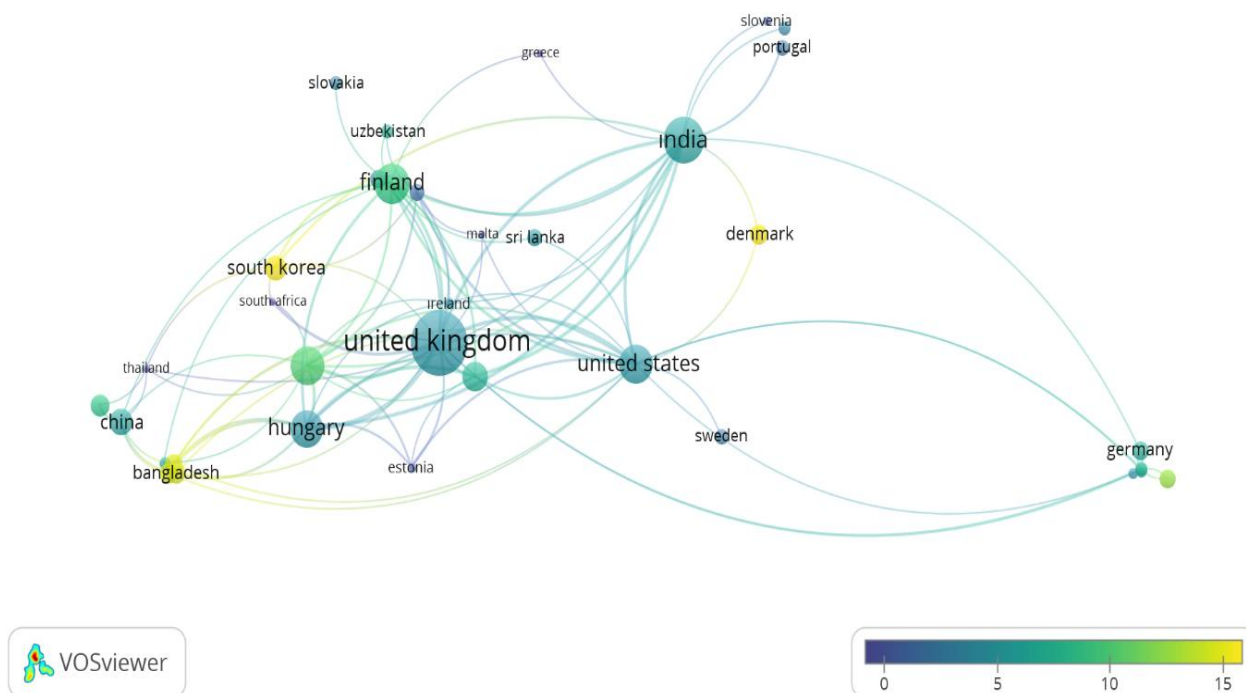
According to author citation analysis and Figure 2, the top 10 most cited authors in the dataset exhibit varying levels of citation impact as reflected in their ACS.

Authors with the highest ACS values include Kessler, D. (1 publication, 21 citations, ACS: 21.00), Lee, J. H. (1 publication, 21 citations, ACS: 21.00), and Whittingham, N. (1 publication, 21 citations, ACS: 21.00). These authors, despite having fewer publications, have achieved a high citation impact per publication. Similarly, Aleksijevits, K. (1 publication, 16 citations, ACS: 16.00) also demonstrates a strong ACS value. Authors with moderately high ACS values include Togtokhbuyan, L. (2 publications, 17 citations, ACS: 8.50) and Yadmaa, Z. (2 publications, 17 citations, ACS: 8.50). Dryglas, D. (3 publications, 18 citations, ACS: 6.00) also maintains a relatively strong citation impact per publication. Authors with lower ACS values, despite having a higher number of publications, include Kotera, Y. (9 publications, 38 citations, ACS: 4.22), Smith M. (5 publications, 17 citations, ACS: 3.40). While these authors have the highest total number of publications, their ACS remains lower due to the broader distribution of citations across multiple Works.

In analyzing country citations, each country with a minimum of one publication and zero citations was selected, resulting in 48 countries contributing to the journal. According to country citation analysis results, the United Kingdom ranks as the country with the highest number of publications (32) and citations (142) in the journal, resulting in an ACS of 4.44. India follows with 13 publications and 73 citations (ACS: 5.62), while Finland ranks third with 6 publications and 54 citations (ACS: 9.00).

The United States has 11 publications and 52 citations (ACS: 4.73), whereas Canada recorded 5 publications and 49 citations (ACS: 9.80). Hungary also contributed 11 publications with 48 citations (ACS: 4.36), while Poland has 4 publications and 29 citations (ACS: 7.25).

China published 4 documents with 23 citations (ACS: 5.75), and South Korea, despite having only 1 publication, received 21 citations (ACS: 21.00), indicating a high citation impact. Mongolia contributed 2 publications with 17 citations (ACS: 8.50), whereas Denmark recorded 1 publication with 15 citations (ACS: 15.00). Additionally, Bangladesh, Fiji, and Japan each have 1 publication with 14 citations (ACS: 14.00), while Spain has 3 publications with 13 citations (ACS: 4.33). Citation analysis results by country are shown in Figure 2.

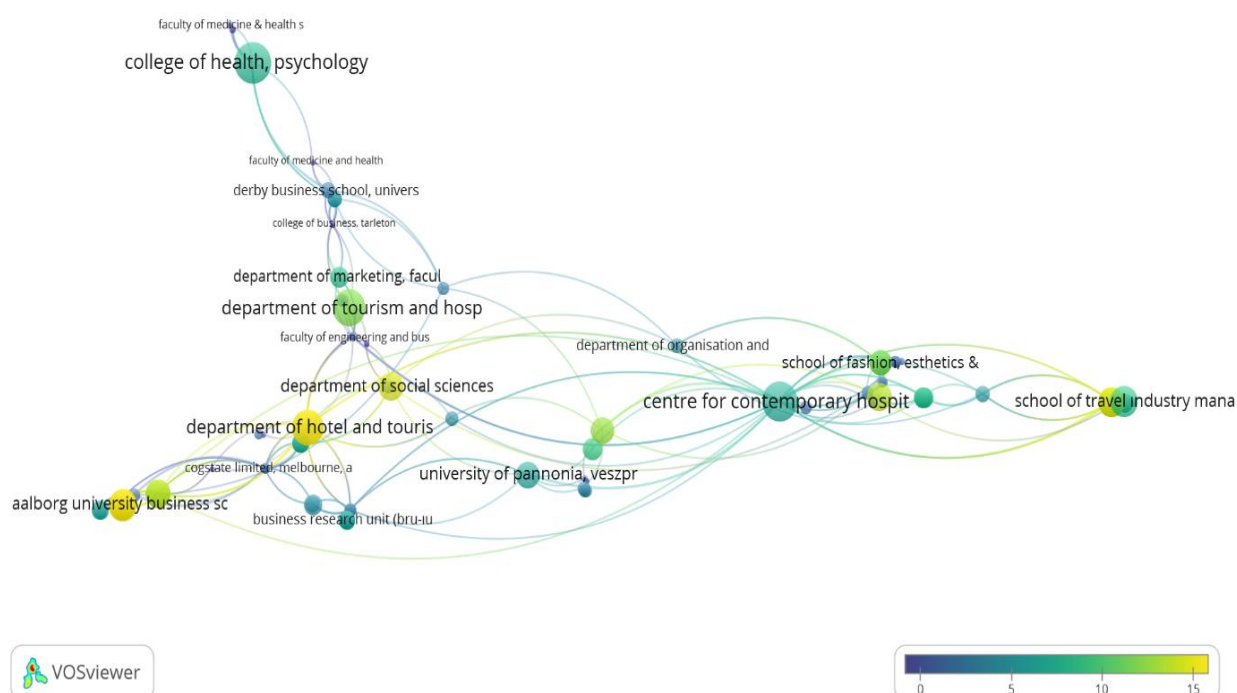


**Figure 2.** Country citation analysis results

**Note:** The largest cluster of interconnected items among the 48 countries consists of 35 items, which the program used to generate the visual

According to Figure 2, countries with the highest ACS are represented in yellow, indicating a strong citation impact per publication. These countries include South Korea (ACS: 21.00), Denmark (ACS: 15.00), and Bangladesh (ACS: 14.00). Countries with moderately high ACS values appear in green, reflecting a relatively strong citation impact. Among these, Canada (ACS: 9.80) and Finland (ACS: 9.00) demonstrate a particularly strong presence, while Mongolia (ACS: 8.50) and Poland (ACS: 7.25) also show notable citation performance. In contrast, countries with lower ACS scores appear in blue or blue-green, suggesting that their citations are more evenly distributed across a larger number of publications. These include the United Kingdom (ACS: 4.44), the United States (ACS: 4.73), Hungary (ACS: 4.36), and Spain (ACS: 4.33). Although these countries contribute a higher number of publications, their ACS remains lower due to the broader distribution of citations. India (ACS: 5.62) falls between blue-green and green, reflecting a moderate citation impact.

For institutional citation analysis, each institution with a minimum of one publication and zero citations was selected, identifying 190 institutions that have published in this journal. The citation analysis results by institution are shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Institutional (Unit) citation analysis results



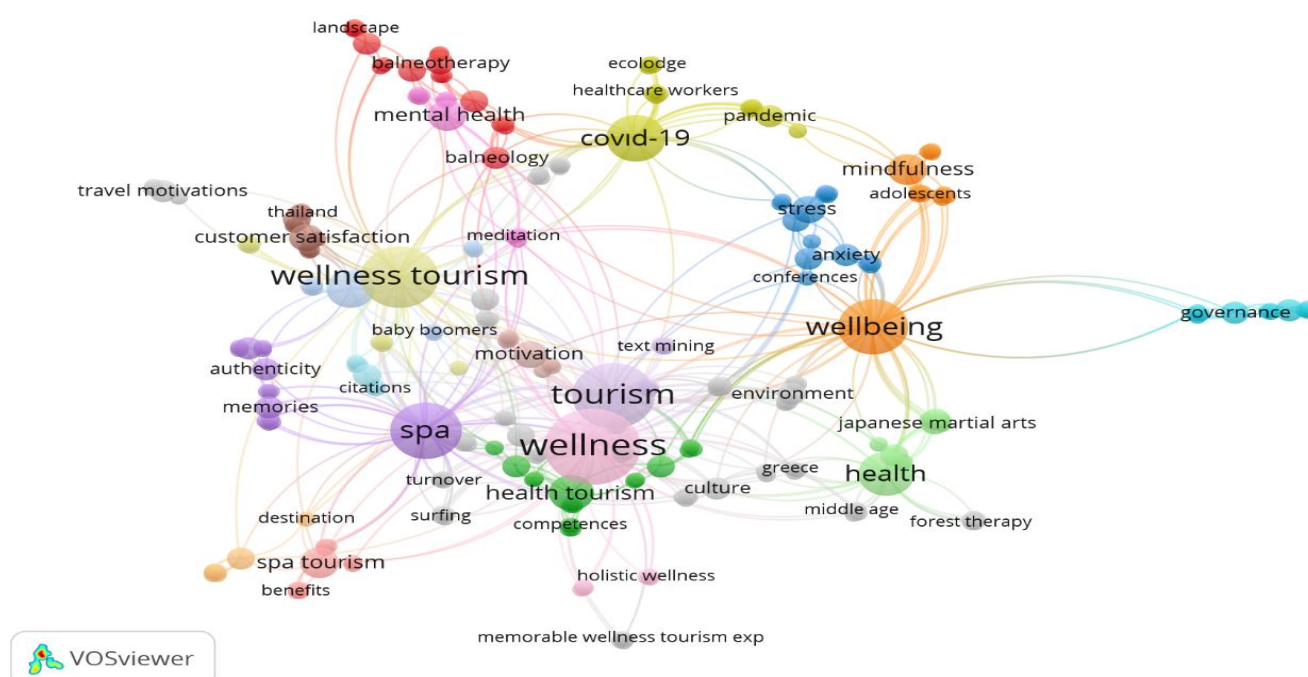
According to Figure 3 and the institutional citation analysis, institutions with the highest ACS exhibit a strong citation impact per publication. The Department of Hotel and Tourism Management at the Graduate School of Youngsusan University, South Korea, has 1 publication and 21 citations (ACS: 21.00), representing the highest ACS among the listed institutions. Similarly, the Aalborg University Business School, Denmark, and the Department of Marketing, Retail, and Tourism at Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom, each have 1 publication and 15 citations (ACS: 15.00), indicating a high citation impact relative to their number of publications.

Institutions with moderately high ACS values include the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India, which has 2 publications and 23 citations (ACS: 11.50). The University of Guelph, Canada, and the School of Economics and Business at the Mongolian University of Life Sciences each have 2 publications and 17 citations (ACS: 8.50). The School of Travel Industry Management at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, USA, also holds 2 publications and 17 citations (ACS: 8.50), demonstrating a consistent level of citation impact per publication.

Institutions with lower ACS values, despite contributing a higher number of publications, include the College of Health, Psychology, and Social Care at the University of Derby, United Kingdom, with 4 publications and 30 citations (ACS: 7.50). Similarly, the Centre for Contemporary Hospitality and Tourism at the same university has 4 publications and 27 citations (ACS: 6.75), while the HRSM Department at the University of Derby, Buxton, United Kingdom, has 2 publications and 16 citations (ACS: 8.00). These institutions, despite their higher research output, show a broader distribution of citations across multiple works, leading to a lower ACS.

### 3.3.Keyword Analysis

During the keyword analysis, terms with a minimum occurrence of one were selected, resulting in 374 keywords, all of which were included in the analysis. Keyword analysis revealed 15 key terms with distinct occurrence frequencies and total link strengths, illustrating major themes in the journal. "Wellness" emerged as the most frequently used keyword, appearing 23 times with a total link strength of 95. "Tourism" followed, appearing 17 times with a total link strength of 71. Other frequently used keywords included "Wellness tourism" (15 occurrences, total link strength: 57), "Spa" (13 occurrences, total link strength: 59), and "Wellbeing" (12 occurrences, total link strength: 57). Additionally, "COVID-19" (9 occurrences, total link strength: 37) and "Health" (8 occurrences, total link strength: 36) also appeared prominently. Keywords related to specific aspects of wellness and tourism included "Spas" (6 occurrences, total link strength: 24), "Health tourism" (4 occurrences, total link strength: 19), and "Mindfulness" (4 occurrences, total link strength: 16). Similarly, "Spa tourism" (3 occurrences, total link strength: 16), "Stress" (3 occurrences, total link strength: 13), and "Motivation" (3 occurrences, total link strength: 11) were also identified. Additionally, terms such as "Customer satisfaction" (3 occurrences, total link strength: 11) and "Anxiety" (2 occurrences, total link strength: 10) were included in the analysis. Figure 4 presents the Keyword Analysis Results.



**Figure 4.** *Keyword analysis results*

**Note:** The largest cluster of interconnected items among the 374 keywords consists of 73 items, which the program used to generate the visual.



According to Figure 4, the publications in the IJSW are divided into thematic clusters, each represented by a different color. The purple cluster is centered around the keyword *spa*. The pink cluster is centered around *wellness*, while the orange cluster is grouped around *wellbeing*. The light-yellow clusters focus on the keyword *wellness tourism*. The grey cluster is shaped around the keyword *tourism*, and the green cluster is centered around *health*.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the International Journal of Spa and Wellness (IJSW) from 2018 to 2024, focusing on the publication and citation structure, author and institutional contributions, country-based citation distribution, and keyword trends. The results provide an in-depth understanding of the journal's evolution, impact, and key research themes within the field of *spa and wellness tourism*.

The findings indicate that IJSW has experienced consistent growth in its publication output, reaching a total of 118 articles by 2024. The journal has also seen a steady increase in citations, accumulating 482 citations with an h-index of 12 as of August 2024. While the annual number of publications fluctuated over the years, a notable increase was observed in 2022, marking the highest productivity period. The distribution of publication types highlights that research articles constitute the majority of contributions, followed by editorials, notes, and a limited number of review articles and conference papers.

The citation analysis of publications in IJSW reveals the most influential studies in the field. The most-cited article, “De-stigmatizing Self-Care: Impact of a Self-Care Webinar during COVID-19” by Kotera (2021), has received 29 citations, highlighting the relevance of mental well-being in *wellness tourism* research. This is followed by “The Wellness Tourist Motivation Scale: A New Statistical Tool for Measuring Wellness Tourist Motivation” by Kessler, Lee, and Whittingham (2020), which has 21 citations, emphasizing the growing interest in understanding traveler motivations. Additionally, “Consumer Motivation and Behaviour When Selecting a Wellness Holiday Destination” by Aleksijevits (2019) has been cited 16 times, reflecting the significance of consumer decision-making in *wellness tourism*.

Author citation analysis reveals a diverse range of contributions, with certain authors achieving high ACS despite having a lower number of publications. Notably, Kotera has the highest total citation count (38), while Kessler, Lee, and Whittingham exhibit the highest ACS values (21.00), reflecting strong citation impact per publication. In terms of country contributions, the United Kingdom leads with the highest number of publications (32) and citations (142, ACS: 4.44). Other countries with significant citation influence include India, Finland, the United States, Canada, Hungary, Poland, China, South Korea, Mongolia, and Denmark, with South Korea achieving the highest ACS (21.00) despite a single publication.

Institutional analysis highlights the College of Health, Psychology, and Social Care at the University of Derby as the leading contributor, followed by the Centre for Contemporary Hospitality and Tourism at the same university. Institutions such as Youngs University (South Korea), Aalborg University Business School (Denmark), and Manchester Metropolitan University (United Kingdom) demonstrate high citation impact per publication, with ACS values exceeding 15.00. Also, the most cited journal as a source citation is *Tourism Management*.

In the keyword analysis, a total of 374 terms with a minimum occurrence of one were included. The analysis revealed that the dominant keywords are as follows: *Wellness*, *Tourism*, *Wellness tourism*, *Spa* and *Wellbeing*. Additionally, terms such as *COVID-19*, *Health*, *Mindfulness*, *Stress*, *Motivation*, and *Customer satisfaction* also appeared with relatively high frequency and link strength. These findings indicate that *wellness* and *tourism*-related themes are central within the journal's content.

The results demonstrate that IJSW plays a significant role in the academic study of *spa and wellness tourism*, serving as a platform for interdisciplinary research that spans *health*, *tourism*, *psychology*, *sustainability*, and *consumer behavior*. The study provides a foundation for future research by identifying core themes, leading contributors, and emerging trends in the field. Further bibliometric analyses and comparative studies with other leading journals may offer deeper insights into the journal's long-term impact and scholarly contributions. Notably, the main topics and trends highlighted in the study may guide *SPA* and *wellness* businesses in diversifying their services and adopting innovative approaches.

##### 4.1. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The use of Scopus may present certain limitations. Scopus covers a large number of journals; however, compared to other databases like Web of Science (WoS), it may not include certain high-impact or field-specific journals (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). The coverage of open access journals can also vary. For instance, Google Scholar indexes open access journals more comprehensively, while Scopus applies a more selective indexing policy. Additionally, citation data in Scopus can differ when compared to Web of Science and Google Scholar (Martín-Martín et al., 2018).

Future studies are recommended to conduct cross-analyses with Web of Science or domain-specific databases to obtain more comprehensive results. In particular, domain-specific databases such as PubMed (for medical and biomedical research), IEEE Xplore (for engineering), and SSRN (for social sciences) can provide more in-depth and extensive data in their respective fields. This approach can enhance the reliability and validity of research findings.

This study provides a bibliometric analysis specifically focused on IJSW. However, conducting comparative analyses with other leading journals in health tourism and wellness tourism could offer deeper insights into the field. Future research could explore IJSW's academic positioning in relation to other wellness tourism journals, compare citation and publication trends across different journals, and examine how the most frequently cited topics evolve over time.

#### **Ethics Committee Permission/Etik Kurul izni:**

It is hereby declared that all scientific and ethical principles were observed in the preparation of this study, and that all referenced sources have been properly cited in the bibliography. Ethics Committee Approval from the institution was not required for this study.

Bu çalışmanın hazırlanmasında tüm bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu, kullanılan tüm kaynaklara atıf yapılarak kaynakçada yer verildiği beyan edilir. Bu çalışma için kurumdan Etik Kurul Onayı alınması gerekmemektedir.

#### **Conflict of Interest/ Çıkar Çatışması:**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with any individual, organization, or institution.

Yazar, üçüncü kişi ve kurumlarla çıkar çatışmasının olmadığını beyan eder.

#### **Authors' contribution/ Yazar katkısı:**

The author contributes the study on her own.

Yazar, çalışmanın tümünü tek başına oluşturmuştur.

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# A New Approach to Analyzing the Participatory Dimension of Protected Area Management Plans in Türkiye

*Türkiye'de Korunan Alan Yönetim Planlarının Katılımcı Boyutunu Analiz Etmek İçin Yeni Bir Yaklaşım*

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## Abstract / Öz

The EU Habitat Directives and the Convention on Biological Diversity define stakeholder participation as an essential component in the preparation of protected area management plans and emphasize its importance in achieving biodiversity conservation goals. However, the legal framework in Türkiye remains insufficient in terms of identifying relevant stakeholders, clarifying participation methods, and defining the potential benefits, opportunities, and risks associated with stakeholder involvement. These uncertainties hinder the effective implementation of participatory approaches in protected area management and negatively impact the success of management plans. The aim of this study is to develop a new approach for analyzing the participatory dimension of protected area management in Türkiye by quantitatively measuring the effectiveness of management plans. In this context, the Saros Bay Special Environmental Protection Area (SEPA) was selected as a pilot case. The management type and key parameters of the area's management plan were identified, and its effectiveness was evaluated using a 3-point Likert scale based on expert questionnaires. The level of stakeholder participation in the planning process was analyzed using stakeholder information forms. According to the findings, the average effectiveness score of the management plan was calculated as 43.87, placing it in the "high" effectiveness category. These results highlight the need to strengthen protected area management plans in Türkiye through more effective participatory approaches and emphasize the importance of improving the relevant legal framework.

*AB Habitat Direktifleri ve Biyolojik Çeşitlilik Sözleşmesi, korunan alan yönetim planlarının hazırlanmasında paydaş katılımını zorunlu ve ayrılmaz bir bileşen olarak tanımlamakta; biyolojik çeşitliliğin korunması ve sürdürülebilir kullanımına yönelik hedeflere ulaşmada katılımcı süreçlerin temel bir araç olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Paydaşların bilgi, deneyim ve beklentilerinin yönetime yansıtılması, yalnızca planların sosyal meşruiyetini artırmakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda ekolojik sürdürülebilirliği de desteklemektedir. Ancak Türkiye'deki yasal düzenlemeler, katılım süreçlerinde paydaşların belirlenmesi, katılım yöntemlerinin netleştirilmesi ve katılımın yaratabileceği potansiyel fayda, fırsat ve risklerin tanımlanması açısından yetersizdir. Bu belirsizlikler, korunan alan yönetiminde katılımcı yaklaşımın etkin bir şekilde uygulanmasını sınırlandırmakta ve yönetim planlarının başarısını olumsuz yönde etkilemektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'deki korunan alanların katılımcı boyutunu matematiksel olarak tanımlayarak analiz eden yeni bir yaklaşım geliştirmek ve yönetim planlarının etkinliğini ölçmektir. Bu doğrultuda, Saros Körfezi Özel Çevre Koruma Bölgesi (ÖÇKB) pilot alan seçilmiştir. Alanın yönetim planının yönetim tipi ve belirleyici parametreleri tespit edilmiş, planın etkinlik düzeyi uzman anketleri ile 3'lü Likert ölçeği kullanılarak değerlendirilmiştir. Paydaşların yönetim planına katılım düzeyi ise paydaş bilgi formları aracılığıyla analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgulara göre, yönetim planının ortalama etkinlik değeri 43,87 olarak hesaplanmış ve "yüksek" etkinlik sınıfında değerlendirilmiştir. Bu sonuçlar, Türkiye'de korunan alan yönetim planlarının daha etkin bir katılımcı yaklaşımla güçlendirilmesi gerektiğini ve yasal düzenlemelerde bu yönde iyileştirmeler yapılmasının önemini ortaya koymaktadır.*

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## 1. Introduction

Since the Industrial Revolution, anthropogenic impacts- including technological development, population growth,

\* This study has been compiled from the master's thesis titled "Evaluation of the Participatory Approach Dimension of Special Environmental Protection Area Management Plans: The Case of Saros Bay Special Environmental Protection Area" prepared in the program of the Karadeniz Technical University Institute of Natural Sciences.



urbanization, destruction of natural resources, improper land use, deforestation, and drainage of wetlands- have significantly disrupted the natural balance (Ayiti & Babalola, 2022; Hanlon, 2016; Lee and Lim, 2020; Yu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2014). These disruptions have led to various environmental problems such as erosion, landslides, habitat loss, drought, floods, tsunamis, hurricanes, decline or extinction of numerous plant and animal species. Since the 1950s, increasing awareness of nature conservation (Düzgüneş & Demirel, 2018; Yalınkılıç & Yenilmez Arpa, 2005) has prompted initiatives by local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector to establish mechanisms aimed at minimizing these negative impacts. One such mechanism is the creation of protected area systems (Düzgüneş & Demirel, 2014; Düzgüneş & Demirel, 2018; Karabıçak Günaydın, 2022; Yıldırım & Yurdakul Erol, 2012).

Protected areas are geographically defined zones that are managed through legal and other effective means to ensure the long-term preservation of their natural and cultural values (IUCN, 2020; Juffe-Bignoli et al., 2017; T.C. Resmi Gazete, 1983a). These areas contribute to the sustainability of ecosystems by providing a range of ecosystem services, including biodiversity conservation, climate regulation, erosion and flood control, clean water supply, energy production, carbon storage, and opportunities for recreation and tourism (Bastian et al., 2012; Brander et al., 2020; Düzgüneş & Demirel, 2018; Sanderson et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2014).

Over the past five decades, the global coverage of protected areas has expanded significantly, reaching 25.4% by 2023. According to 2022 data, terrestrial protected areas (including inland waters) account for 15.79% of the Earth's surface, while marine protected areas cover 8.16% (Protected Planet, 2020). In Türkiye, the total protected area coverage stands at 12.07% (T. C. Çevre, Şehircilik ve İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı, 2022; T.C. Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2020; T.C. Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2022).

Among the various types of protected areas in Türkiye, Special Environmental Protection Areas (SEPAs) play a critical role in conserving biodiversity and are important destinations for both domestic and international visitors due to their rich natural assets. According to Environmental Law No. 2872 (T.C. Resmi Gazete, 1983b) SEPA are defined as "*ecologically significant areas of national and international importance, allocated to regulate and protect land and water ecosystems, biological diversity, natural resources, and associated cultural heritage against environmental degradation.*" As of 2023, there are 19 designated SEPAs in Türkiye, comprising 2.27% of the national territory. However, the uncontrolled influx of visitors places increasing pressure on these areas, threatening their ecological integrity. Therefore, there is a pressing need for participant, effective, holistic, and adaptive management plans that balance conservation and sustainable use. In this context, it is essential to ensure that all stakeholders-who benefit directly or indirectly from these areas- are involved in the planning process in accordance with their levels of interest and influence (T.C. Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2006; Toksabay Esen, 2012).

Although stakeholder participation in the management plans of protected areas in Türkiye has a legal basis, the framework regarding how participation processes should be conducted, who qualifies as a stakeholder, and which methods and tools should be used remains incomplete or ambiguous. In the literature, such uncertainty is frequently cited as having a direct negative impact on the applicability of plans, the level of local ownership, and the overall capacity for sustainable management (Demirayak, 2006; Düzgüneş & Demirel, 2018; Güneş, 2011). However, the existing body of research tends to address these ambiguities in qualitative terms, and quantitative models that examine the effects of such uncertainties on the effectiveness of management plans are extremely limited. The approach developed in this study aims to fill this gap by quantitatively assessing the extent to which legal and administrative uncertainties are reflected in the components of the management plan, as well as by measuring the relationship between stakeholder participation and management plan effectiveness using empirical data.

Management plans are a strategic document that define the management approach, objectives, activities, budget, and financial framework protected area over a specific time period (Güneş, 2011; Thomas & Middleton, 2003). They outline the goals, strategies, and actions necessary to conserve biodiversity, ecosystems, and cultural heritage, while ensuring effective implementation of conservation measures in line with the needs of local communities and stakeholders (Day et al., 2019; Остром & Nagendra, 2006; Roux et al., 2021). Research indicates that management plans are essential for assessing the impacts of human activities on biodiversity, balancing conservation priorities with sustainable resource use, and minimizing socio-cultural and economic pressures on local populations (Hardman et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2002).

A participatory approach emphasizes the active involvement of local communities and other relevant stakeholders (e.g., domestic, and international tourists, recreationists, NGOs, universities, project consultants, research institutes, and public authorities) in the planning, management, and long-term sustainability of protected areas (T.C. Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2007). Such approaches assist area managers in identifying resource values and related threats, as well as in formulating strategic actions accordingly (Ervin et al., 2010).

Participation promotes a sense of ownership, empowerment, and shared responsibility among stakeholders, contributing to more inclusive and transparent conservation practices (Conrad & Hilchey, 2010; Quintero-Urbe et al., 2022). Moreover, it helps prevent conflicts, fosters social equity, and enhances the overall effectiveness of conservation strategies (Dudley 2008; Fotopoulou et al., 2021). Research demonstrates that participatory approaches in protected areas can lead to improved biodiversity outcomes, stronger community support, and more effective environmental monitoring and adaptive management (Haller et al., 2008; Jacobs et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2006).

The level of stakeholder participation increases progressively from passive participation, which marks the lowest level of involvement, to spontaneous initiative, the highest level of participatory engagement.

In Türkiye, the majority of protected areas are managed through a centralized governance model, often fails to fully achieve conservation objectives (Güneş, 2011). This top-down approach, coupled with institutional conflicts, undefined responsibilities, fragmented authority, and limited financial resources, has led to significant weaknesses in protected area management (Demirayak, 2006). Within the framework of the European Union's Habitat Directives and the Convention on Biological Diversity, early and continuous stakeholder participation-beginning from the planning stage-is emphasized as a fundamental principle (T.C. Çevre ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2006). As a result, a shift is gradually taking place from centralized models toward more participatory and innovative governance structures.

The IUCN identifies four main types of protected area management, each requiring distinct governance approaches and levels of stakeholder participation (T.C. Çevre ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2006). These are "Type A (Centralized Government Management)", "Type B (Co-management)", "Type C (Private Management by Individuals and Organizations)" and "Type D (Community-based Management by local people and communities)" (Table 1). The level of stakeholder engagement and collaborative management increases progressively from Type A to Type D.


**Tablo 1.** *Management types and components*

Management Types  Management Plan Components	Type A	Type B		Type C	Type D
		B1- Collaborative Management	B2- Shared Management		
Managed by central protected area authority	x	x	x	-	-
Managed by the state	x	x	x	-	-
Existence of a hierarchical structure	x	x	x	-	-
Ruled by a single authority	x	x	x	-	-
Ruled by multiple authorities	-	-	-	x	x
Advisory board within management structure	-	x	x	-	-
Multi-stakeholder board within management structure	-	-	x	-	-
Protected area land is leased or purchased	-	-	-	x	x
Managed by private individuals	-	-	-	x	-
Managed by local people and communities	-	-	-	-	x

Stakeholder participation in effective and feasible protected area management is a reciprocal process that benefits both stakeholders and authorized institutions, and it can occur at seven different levels, as outlined in Table 2.



**Tablo 2. Levels of stakeholder participation in protected area management**

		LEVEL OF STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION						
		Passive Participation	Stakeholder Engagement through Information Provision	Stakeholder Engagement through Opinion-sharing	In-Kind Participation	Functional Participation	Interactive Participation	Self-initiated Participation
AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY	Stakeholder	It presents problems, solutions, alternatives, and possibilities in a balanced and objective manner, helping stakeholders to better understand the issues. Stakeholders tend to comply with decisions made by the authorities.	Provides expert opinions on issues - such as analysis, alternatives, or decisions- upon the request of the competent authority.	Participates stakeholders in joint decision-making processes, including the development of alternatives and identification of preferred solutions.	Contributes labor, materials, or financial resources to the process in exchange for institutional support or benefits provided by the component authority	Does not participate in the decision-making process related to protected area planning, but holds officially recognized authority in the implementation of decisions.	Stakeholders are actively involved throughout the entire process, from information gathering to final decision-making.	Stakeholders participate voluntarily and independently, without any formal invitation or external prompting.
	Authorized Institution	Stakeholders are informed about the decisions they are expected to comply with, without any opportunity to influence the decision-making process.	The competent authority collects feedback from local stakeholders on selected issues of its choosing, without guaranteeing influence over final decisions.	Local community representatives are invited to participate in planning meetings and serve on advisory boards, contributing input without holding final decision-making authority.	Provides financial assistance and logistical resources to stakeholders to support their involvement in the process.	Involves the public in jointly sharing responsibility for decisions made during the planning and management process.	Shares decision-making authority, implementation responsibility, and management power directly with stakeholders.	The competent authority neither authorizes nor supports the initiative; participation emerges independently through stakeholders self-mobilization.
TECHNIQUES USED IN THE PARTICIPATION PROCESS		Information is disseminated to stakeholders through one-way communication tools such as bulletin board announcement, printed materials, telephone calls, teleconferencing, emails, and television broadcasts.	Engages stakeholders through bilateral, interviews, group discussions, focus group meetings, surveys, and research studies to collect diverse perspectives and informed feedback.	Stakeholder engagement is facilitated through structured platforms such as committees, councils, conferences, workshop, and brainstorming sessions, promoting collaborative dialogue and shared planning processes.	Utilizes participatory appraisal tools such as resource flow mapping, seasonal calendars, opportunity matrices, on-site observations and cross-sectional analyses to gather local knowledge and co-produce planning insights.	Participation is driven by independent actors such as NGOs, unions, and advocacy groups through mechanisms like voting, lobbying, demonstrations, and trend analysis, often operating outside formal institutional structures.	Participation tools such as mapping, spatial modeling, Venn diagrams.	Participation tools such as seasonal calendars, wealth ranking exercises, and resource flow charts.
		The area is fully managed by the authorized institution.	Increase in the level of stakeholder control 					The area is entirely managed by the public.

Source: Brodie et al., 2011; Parks and Wildlife Commission, 2002

A successful management plan should incorporate 19 essential components to ensure its effectiveness, applicability, and comprehensiveness. These are shown in Table 3.

**Tablo 3.** *Components of a management plan*

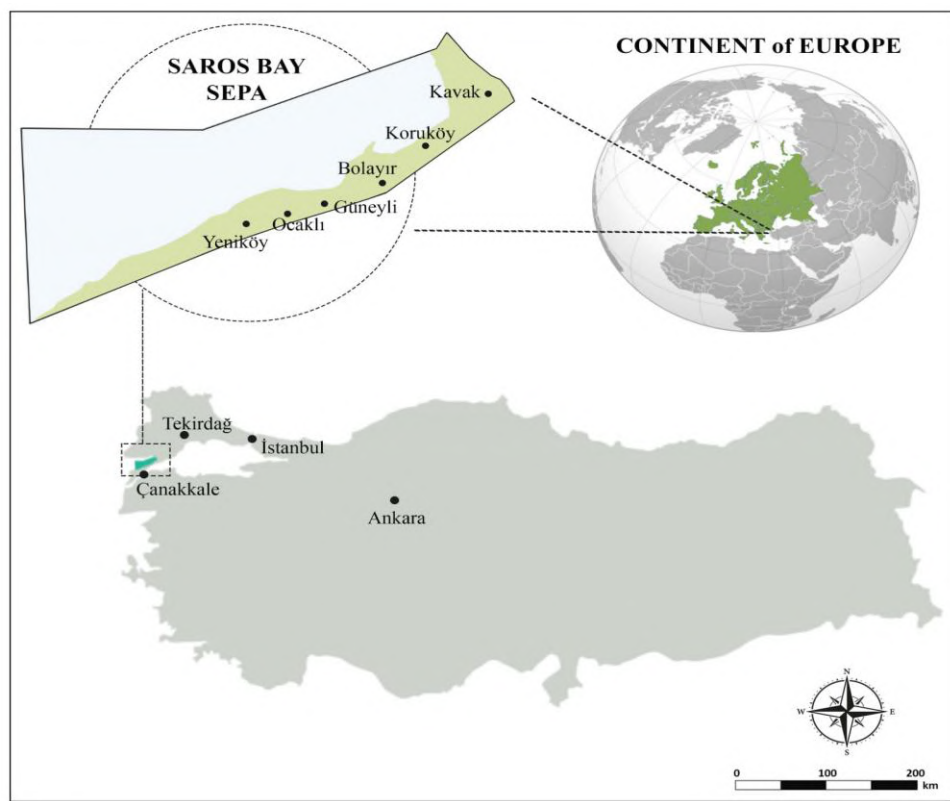
Component	Description
Dedication	Management staff must understand and commit to the process and its benefits.
Prepared by a Multidisciplinary Team	A diverse team ensures effective protection, planning, and implementation
Participation	Mechanisms should allow idea exchange to address threats and opportunities.
Accessibility	The plan must be accessible to all stakeholders and relevant users.
Realism	Reflects real threats, opportunities, and practical possibilities.
Adaptability	Must be flexible and responsive to changing conditions.
Systematic Approach	Decisions should be data-based and analytically grounded.
Sustainability	Should integrate environmental, social, and economic sustainability principles.
Stakeholder Interest Identification	All stakeholder interests must be considered and documented.
Adequate Physical Resources	All involved must have sufficient physical and technical capacity.
Formalization	The plan must be officially agreed and accepted by stakeholders.
Understandability	Threats and management issues must be clearly defined and understood.
Awareness Program	Should include awareness efforts for stakeholders and visitors.
Quality Over Quantity	Focus should be on content quality, not document length.
Preparation by Implementers	Should be created by those responsible for execution and implementation.
Clear Goals and Objectives	Must explicitly state management goals and strategies to reach them.
Innovation	Should consider new ideas and different stakeholder views.
Appropriate Volume	Must be concise yet comprehensive.
Process Orientation	Should align with strategic and process-based objectives.
Monitoring & Evaluation Program	Must include a clear M&E framework for ecological, social, and cultural indicators.

**Source:** T.C. Çevre ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2006; Thomas et al., 2003.

This study aims to develop a new approach to quantitatively assess and analyze the participatory dimension of protected area management in Türkiye, with a particular focus on evaluating the effectiveness of management plans. In this context, Saros Bay SEPA was selected as a pilot area. The type of management applied in the area was first identified based on the IUCN classification. Subsequently the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the participatory processes were assessed through expert evaluations and stakeholder analysis. Then, key components required for an effective management plan were identified based on a comprehensive literature review. These components were then prioritized and weighted by a group of 15 experts using a structured questionnaire, where each component was ranked on a scale from 1-20 in terms of perceived importance. The expert group consisted of technical staff and public officials directly involved in the preparation of the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan, academics specializing in protected areas and participatory planning, as well as NGO representatives and consultants experienced in evaluating management plans. In the next phase, the effectiveness of the management plan was quantitatively assessed. Each component was rated using a 3-point Likert scale (1-3) by the same expert group, based on their evaluation of how effectively each component had been addressed in the existing plan. Finally, a "Stakeholder Information Form" was developed to assess the participatory dimension of the management plan. This analysis focused on identifying stakeholders, evaluating their level of participation, and reviewing the specific methods and techniques used to engage them.

## 2. Method and Data

Saros Bay SEPA constitutes the study area. It is located within the borders of Gelibolu district of Çanakkale (Türkiye) province. Geographically, it forms a triangular-shaped bay with an indentation of approximately 60 km along the northern part of the Gallipoli Peninsula and southern cost of the Thracian, measuring roughly 75 km in length and 35 km in wide (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Location of the Saros Bay SEPA

As of 2010, the SEPA encompasses seven settlements; the town of Evreşe and Kavakköy, and the villages of Ocaklı, Güneyli, Bolayır, Koruköy, Yeniköy. While the areas include two islands, the total area (including islands) covers 191.45 km<sup>2</sup>, and the marine area (excluding islands) spans 538.76 km<sup>2</sup>, resulting in a combined total area of 730.21 km<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the presence of multiple settlements, the SEPA does not fall under a single administrative structure. Responsibilities are shared between local municipalities, village administrations, and the General Directorate for the Protection of Natural Assets, which operates under the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change.

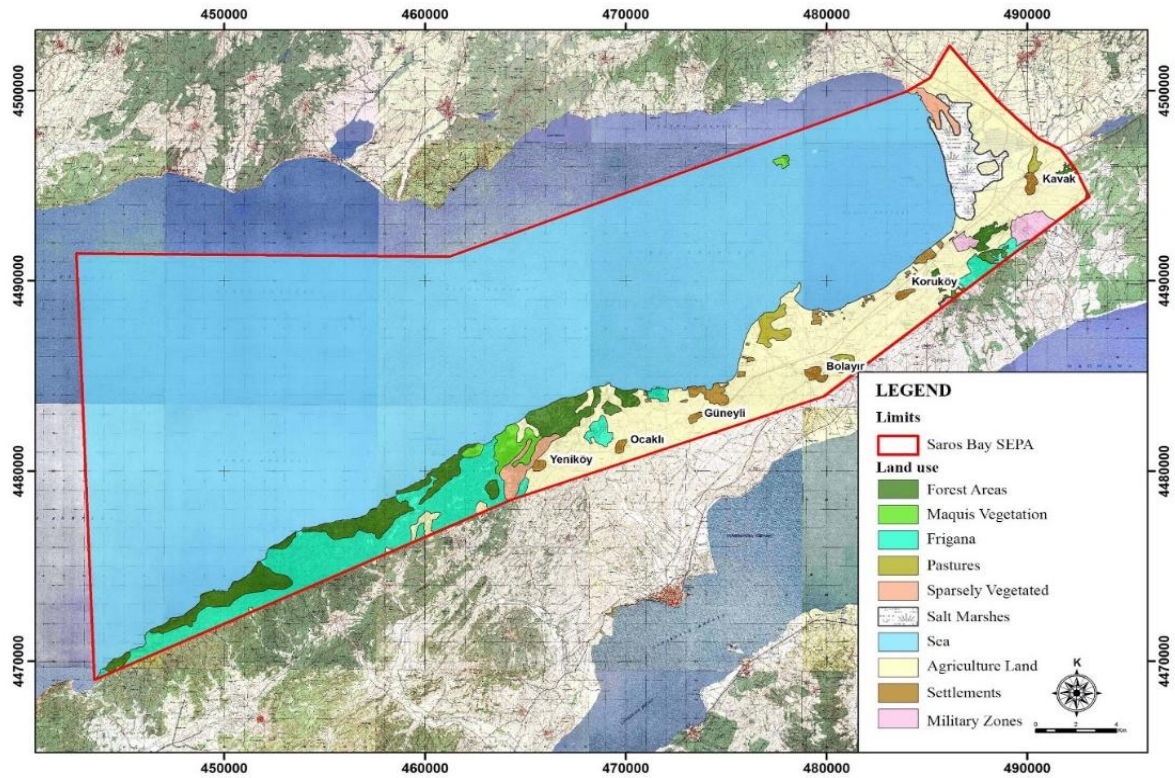
Marine areas account for 74% of the total area. In terrestrial sections, agricultural land is the most dominant land use type, covering 13.8%. Other land use categories include maquis vegetation, frigana, forest areas, sparsely vegetated land, pastures, salt marshes, settlements, and military zones (Table 4) (T.C. Çevre, Şehircilik ve İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı, 2018).

**Table 4.** Saros Bay SEPA land use types and ratios

Land Use	Area (ha)	Rate (%)	Land Use	Area (ha)	Rate (%)
Military Zones	117	0,2	Forest Areas	2026	2,8
Marine Areas	53994	74,0	Agriculture Land	10085	13,8
Frigana	3998	5,5	Salt Marshes	1000	1,4
Maquis Vegetation	408	0,6	Settlements	498	0,7
Pastures	359	0,5	Sparsely Vegetated Land	482	0,7
<b>Total</b>					<b>72967 ha</b>

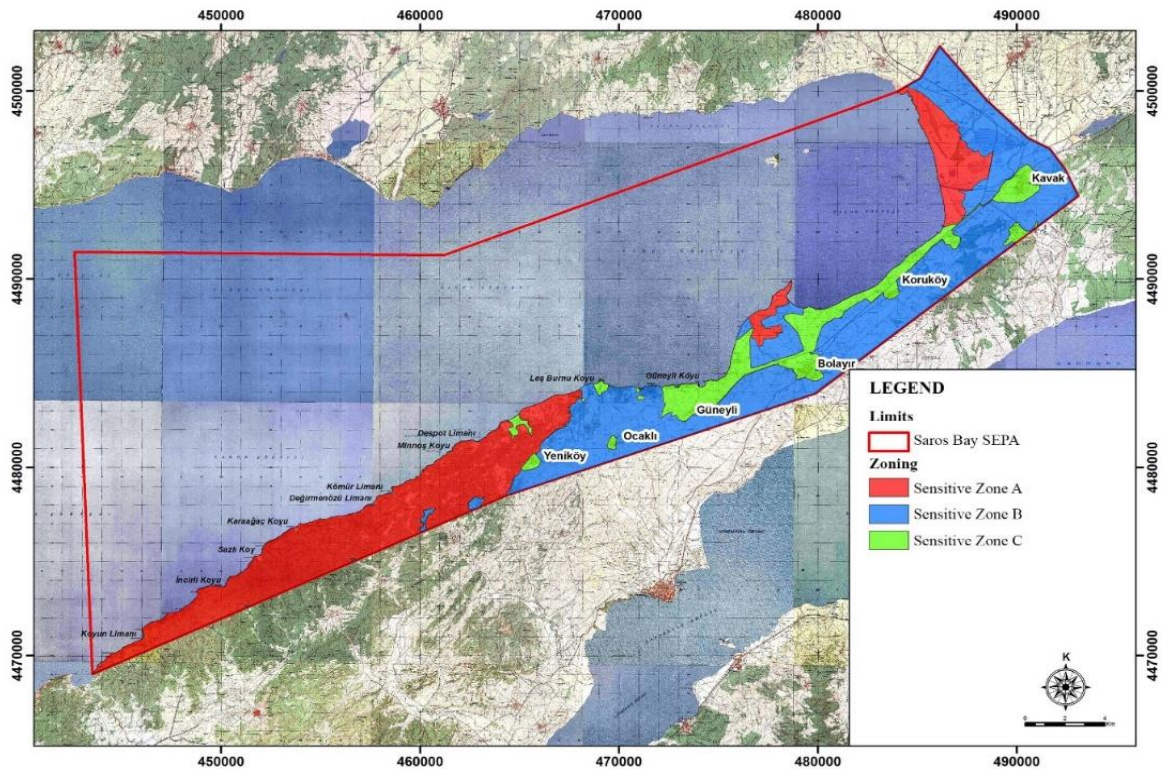
To the east of the area lies the Kavak Delta Wetland, an ecologically significant habitat that supports various bird and reptile species. Human settlements are sparse, with the highest concentration of secondary residences located along the coastal zones of Bolayır and Güneyli villages. The region also hosts two military facilities; Kömür Bay, a nationally important scuba diving site, and military installations including the 16th Ammunition Company Command and 18<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry Brigade under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps Command (Figure 2).





**Figure 2. Saros Bay SEPA land use map**  
Source: TVKGM, 2018

Although the entire Saros Bay SEPA is designated as a natural protected area, certain sections within the region are further classified based on ecological sensitivity into Categories A, B and C (Figure 3). Recreational activities permitted in the area include swimming, diving, water skiing, surfing, horseback riding, angling, land hunting, and cycling.



**Figure 3. Saros Bay SEPA zoning map (TVKGM, 2018)**  
Source: TVKGM, 2018

The analysis of the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan in terms of its participatory approach is structured in two main stages.

## 2.1. Analysis of the Management Plan

Management parameters were identified through an extensive literature review of the management types proposed by the IUCN for protected areas. Based on this framework, the parameters defining the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan were determined, and a matrix table was developed to map these parameters to IUCN management types.

Subsequently, a set of components to assess the effectiveness of the management plan was compiled from key sources in the literature (African Wildlife Foundation, 2006; Güneş, 2011; T.C. Çevre ve Orman Bakanlığı, 2006; Thomas et al., 2003).

These components were then evaluated by 15 experts familiar with the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan. Experts were asked to rank the components by their level of importance, and score their effectiveness using a 3-point Likert scale, where;

- 1 = low effectiveness,
- 2 = moderate effectiveness, and
- 3 = high effectiveness.

The purpose of applying the Likert method was to calculate both the average effectiveness score and the corresponding effectiveness category for each component, as well as for the management plan as a whole.

Effectiveness scores were calculated by multiplying the number of responses at each scale point (1–3) by the respective scale value, summing the results, and weighting them accordingly. The average effectiveness score for each component was obtained by dividing its total weighted score by the number of participants. Similarly, the overall effectiveness score of the management plan was calculated by summing the weighted scores of all components and dividing by the total number of participants.

To classify the effectiveness, five levels were defined, weak, low, moderate, high, and very high. The thresholds for each class were determined by dividing the maximum possible score of each component by the number of participants and then by five (the number of classes). The same method was applied to calculate the thresholds for the overall effectiveness classification of the management plan.

## 2.2. Analyzing The Participatory Dimension of the Management Plan

In addition to the quantitative methods developed to assess the effectiveness of the management plan, this study also incorporates qualitative analysis techniques such as content analysis and expert-based interpretive evaluation. In particular, qualitative methods such as literature review and document analysis were used to examine the management plans and participatory processes in depth. Expert opinions were not only used for scoring purposes, but also to provide interpretive insights into the quality of the plan's content, implementation capacity, and the nature of stakeholder engagement. Thus, by integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis.

In this stage of the study, the participatory dimension of the management plan was evaluated through the development of a "Stakeholder Information Form". The process began with a comprehensive stakeholder analysis, which involved identifying all relevant parties including both organized and unorganized actors the management plan.

Following the identification of stakeholders, the degree of participation in the management process was assessed. Since there is no universally accepted standard regarding in the extent, from, or methodology of stakeholder participation, flexible evaluation was deemed necessary. This flexibility accounts for the fact that different participatory approaches may yield varying degrees of success depending on the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional context of the region. Accordingly, the level of participation for each stakeholder group was determined based on participation types defined in the literature (Brodie et al., 2011; Parks and Wildlife Commission, 2002). Finally, the specific methods and techniques employed to engage each stakeholder group within the management planning process were analyzed to assess the inclusiveness and effectiveness of the participatory approach adopted in the plan.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Analysis of the Management Plan

#### 3.1.1. Determination of Management Type

An examination of Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan reveals that the area is managed by the General Directorate for the Protection of Natural Assets operating under the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, and functions as a centrally governed protected area. The management structure involves multiple public institutions, each with a degree of authority and responsibility in the decision-making process (Table 5).



**Table 5.** *Institutions and organizations responsible for the management structure*

Ministry of Environment and Urbanization General Directorate for the Protection of Natural Assets	Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communications, Çanakkale Port Authority
Ministry of Environment and Urbanization General Directorate of Environmental Management, Iller Bank Infrastructure Implementation Department	Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs General Directorate of Water Management
Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock General Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture	Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communications, Bursa Regional Directorate
Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of Environment and Urbanization	ARDSI Çanakkale Provincial Coordination Office
Çanakkale Regional Directorate of Forestry	Gallipoli District Special Administration
State Hydraulic Works 252 <sup>nd</sup> Branch Directorate	Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of Youth Services and Sports
Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism	South Marmara Development Agency
Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of Food, Agriculture and Livestock	Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Regional Directorate
Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of National Education	KOSGEB Çanakkale Service Center Directorate
Çanakkale Special Provincial Administration	Turkish Underwater Sports Federation

An advisory board also exists within the management structure, indicating a degree of stakeholder consultation. In line with the management types defined by the IUCN, the Saros Bay SEPA is therefore classified as Type B1: Collaborative Management, reflecting a cooperative governance model involving both central authorities and other stakeholders (Table 6).

**Table 6.** *Parameters indicating the management type of Saros Bay SEPA.*

Management Plan Components	Type A	Type B1	Type B2	Type C	Type D
Managed by central protected area authority	x	x	x	-	-
Managed by the state	x	x	x	-	-
Existence of a hierarchical structure	-	-	-	-	-
Ruled by a single authority	-	-	-	-	-
Ruled by multiple authorities	-	x	x	-	-
Advisory board within management structure	-	x	-	-	-
Multi-stakeholder board within management structure	-	-	-	-	-
Protected area land is leased or purchased	-	-	-	-	-
Managed by private individuals	-	-	-	-	-
Managed by local people and communities	-	-	-	-	-

### 3.1.2. Scoring of effective Management Components and Categorization of Effectiveness Values

The essential components of an effective management plan were prioritized by a panel of 15 experts, who ranked each component on a scale from 1 to 20 based on its perceived importance. Following this ranking, the components were weighted accordingly. The calculated weighting scores for each component are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.** *Weighted score of management plan components*

Management Plan Components	Weight Score	Management Plan Components	Weight Score
Clear Goals and objectives	217	Dedication	166
Sustainability	214	Formalization	161
Realism	205	Quality Over Quantity	160
Participation	197	Adaptability	127
Systematic approach	188	Understandability	126
Preparation by implementers	186	Monitoring & Evaluation Program	114
Prepared by a multidisciplinary team	183	Adequate Physical Resources	108
Innovation	172	Stakeholder Interest Identification	92
Process orientation	169	Accessibility	91
Appropriate volume	167	Awareness Program	87

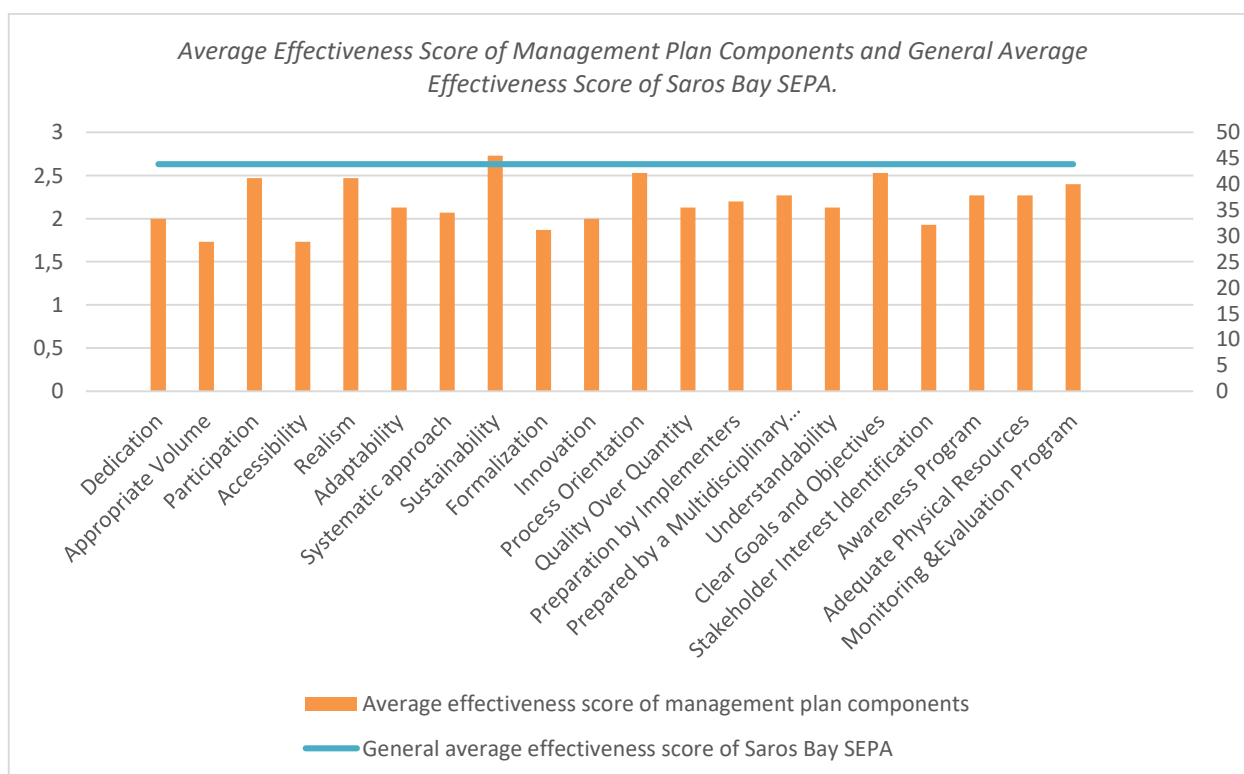
Each component was subsequently scored and weighted using a 3-point Likert scale. The average effectiveness score for each component was calculated by dividing the total weighted score by the number of respondents. Both individual

components and the overall management plan were classified into five effectiveness categories: weak, low, medium, high, and very high. The overall average effectiveness score of the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan was calculated as 43.87, corresponding to the “High” effectiveness category (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Average effectiveness scores and categorization of management plan components

Management Plan Components	Weighted Score	Measurement			Average Effectiveness Score	Effectiveness Category
		1	2	3		
<b>Dedication</b>	30	6	3	6	2,00	High
Appropriate Volume	26	5	9	1	1,73	Middle
Participation	<b>37</b>	2	4	9	2,47	Very high
Accessibility	26	4	11	-	1,73	Middle
Realism	<b>37</b>	1	6	8	2,47	Very high
Adaptability	32	3	7	5	2,13	High
Systematic approach	31	3	8	4	2,07	High
Sustainability	<b>41</b>	1	2	12	2,73	Very high
Formalization	28	6	5	4	1,87	High
Innovation	30	2	11	2	2,00	High
Process Orientation	<b>38</b>	-	7	8	2,53	Very high
Quality Over Quantity	32	3	7	5	2,13	High
Understandability	32	3	7	5	2,13	High
Preparation by Implementers	33	2	8	5	2,20	High
Prepared by a Multidisciplinary Team	34	2	7	6	2,27	High
Clear Goals and Objectives	<b>38</b>	2	3	10	2,53	Very high
Stakeholder Interest Identification	29	6	4	5	1,93	High
Awareness Program	34	5	7	3	2,27	High
Adequate Physical Resources	34	2	7	6	2,27	High
Monitoring & Evaluation Program	36	1	7	7	2,40	High
<b>OVERALL AVERAGE EFFECTIVENESS SCORE</b>				<b>43,87</b>		
<b>GENERAL EFFECTIVENESS CATEGORY</b>				<b>HIGH</b>		

The average effectiveness score of the management plan components and the general average effectiveness score of Saros Bay SEPA are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Average effectiveness score of management plan components and general average effectiveness score of Saros Bay SEPA



### 3.2. Analyzing the Participatory Dimension of the Management Plan

#### 3.2.1. Stakeholder Analysis

During the development of the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan, stakeholders who were likely to be directly or indirectly affected by existing or potential problems in the area, as well as by decisions made within the scope of management, were identified and included in the planning process. In addition to identifying the stakeholders involved in the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan, the stakeholder analysis also aimed to determine the level of influence and role of each stakeholder group in the decision-making process. This was evaluated by cross-referencing official records, types of engagement, and participatory techniques applied during the plan preparation. Based on this evaluation, each stakeholder's influence was interpreted in accordance with the participatory type presented in Table 9 and Table 10.

**Tablo 9. Stakeholders involved in the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan**

<b>PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</b>	
Ministry of Environment and Urbanization General Directorate for the Protection of Natural Assets	South Marmara Development Agency ARDSI Çanakkale Provincial Coordination Office
Ministry of Environment and Urbanization General Directorate of Environmental Management	Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of Food Agriculture and Livestock
İller Bank Infrastructure Implementation Department	Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs General Directorate of Water Management
Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock General Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture	Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communications
Gallipoli District Special Administration	Çanakkale Port Authority
Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Regional	Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of Youth Services and Sports Directorate
Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of Environment and Urbanization	Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communications
Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism	Bursa Regional Directorate Turkish Underwater Sports Federation
Hydraulic Works 252 <sup>nd</sup> Branch Directorate	Çanakkale Special Provincial Administration
Çanakkale Regional Directorate of Forestry State	KOSGEB Çanakkale Service Center Directorate
Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of National Education	
<b>GOVERNORATES</b>	
Çanakkale Governorship	Gelibolu District Governorate
<b>LOCAL GOVERNMENTS</b>	
Çanakkale Municipality	Ocaklı Village Mukhtar's Office
Gallipoli Municipality	Yenikoy Village Mukhtar's Office
Evreşe Town Municipality	Korukoy Village Mukhtar's Office
Kavakkoy Town	Güneyli Village Mukhtar's Office
BoLAYIR Village Mukhtar's Office	
<b>MILITARY INSTITUTIONS</b>	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Corps Command	Provincial Gendarmerie Command Environmental Protection Team
Coast Guard Çanakkale Group Command	Turkish Naval Forces Command
<b>UNIVERSITIES</b>	
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University/Department of Biology	
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University / Department of Fisheries Engineering	
<b>PRIVATE SECTOR</b>	
Turkish Electricity Distribution Co.	Altınoluk Planning
<b>NGOs</b>	
Güneyli Village Fisheries Production and Evaluation Cooperative	Yeniköy Village Agricultural Development Cooperative
Çanakkale Chamber of Agriculture	Evreşe Town Agricultural Development Cooperative
Gelibolu Chamber of Agriculture	Marine Clean Association
Güneyli Coast Beautification Association	Saros Diving Diving Club
Kavakköy Fisheries Cooperative	Canakkale Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Güneyli Village Production and Consumption Marketing Cooperative	

**Tablo 10. Stakeholder role and influence matrix**

Stakeholder Group	Role	Participation Type	Influence in Decision	Techniques Used
Public Institutions	Management authority	Functional	High	Workshops, focus groups
Governorates	Oversight	Expressing opinion	Moderate	Brainstorming, meetings
Military Institutions	Monitoring	Information provision	Low	Reports
Local Governments	Promotion	Passive	Low	Media, brochures
Universities	Scientific input	Information provision	Low	Field surveys
NGOs	Awareness	Passive	Very Low	Events, campaigns
Private Sector	Support	Passive	Very Low	Promotional activities

### 3.2.2. Determining the Type of Participation

Within the scope of the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan, stakeholders demonstrated varying levels and types of participation throughout the planning process.

Public institutions and agencies responsible for implementing management activities in the area typically participated by providing information and, to a lesser extent, by expressing opinions. Governorates and local governments, tasked with enforcing the plan in line with their legal mandates, contributed primarily by expressing opinions during the consultation phases. Local governments, while responsible for promoting the region, showed passive participation, with limited engagement in decision-making.

Military institutions, as land users, took part in monitoring and controlling illegal activities, with their participation limited to providing information. Universities contributed scientific data on terrestrial, marine, and bird species inventories upon request from the competent authority. While these academic studies supported conservation efforts indirectly, universities' roles remained limited to informative participation, without direct influence in decision-making.

NGOs and the private sector contributed to raising awareness of the region's ecological value through promotional efforts on local and national platforms. However, since they were not involved from the early stages to the final decision-making phases, their participation was categorized as passive. However, all stakeholders involved in the Saros Bay SEPA process were included through different participatory techniques. The current stakeholder participation types within the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan process is shown in Table 11.

**Tablo 11. Current participation with stakeholder groups**

Stakeholder Type	Participation Activity	Participation Technique	Participation Type
<b>Public Institutions</b>	SEPA management, illegal construction and water analysis inspection; maintaining tourism master plan; licensing of tourist attractions	Focus group interview, round table meeting	Functional Participation
<b>Governorates</b>	Establishing and operating the executive committee; evaluating implementation of the management plan quarterly	Brainstorming	Participation by Expressing an Opinion
<b>Military Institutions</b>	Monitoring and preventing illegal hunting; conservation and promotion of plant, bird species, and Posidonia meadows	Information and training activities	Participation by Providing Information
<b>Local Governments</b>	Underwater Diving training, identifying ecotourism areas; promotion of regional values via websites, promotional materials	Brochures, posters, promotional films, semi-structured surveys	Passive Participation
<b>Universities</b>	Research on terrestrial/marine plant and bird species; bird observation tower construction	Mapping and modeling, research and studies	Participation by Providing Information
<b>NGOs and Private Sector</b>	Producing film and interactive map production; broadcasting on local and national media	Brochures, posters, promotional products, promotional film	Passive Participation

### 3.3. Framework Principles of Participatory Approach

#### Aim

The main aim is to develop strategies that enhance the impact of management through appropriate participatory methods and techniques, ensuring both effective ecological protection and the long-term sustainability of natural resource values within SEPAs.

## Objective

- To identify the applicable management type and determine the stakeholders who have influence or decision-making authority in the management of SEPAs.
- To ensure the adaptability of the management plan to evolving conditions and unforeseen challenges through participatory mechanisms.
- To recognize and analyze stakeholders' interests and relationships to the area.
- To ensure the presence of awareness-raising programs both prior to and following participatory planning processes.
- To replace passive involvement with active engagement of all relevant stakeholders throughout the planning and implementation processes.
- To apply participation levels and engagement techniques tailored to the specific needs and capacities of different stakeholder groups.

## Methodology

- Formation of an expert team comprising professionals from diverse disciplines in alignment with conservation objectives.
- Design and implementation of training programs supporting sub-activities related to the participatory process.
- Identification and provision of adequate physical resources to support stakeholder participation.
- Development of a flexible work schedule that aligns with evolving environmental and administrative conditions.
- Formulation of strategic measures to mitigate potential conflicts and differences among stakeholders.
- Assessment and facilitation of stakeholders' access to effective transportation means, enhancing participation opportunities.

## Management Principles

- To identify stakeholder-specific problems through participatory processes and to develop strategic responses that offer viable solutions.
- To ensure coherence and consistency between decisions and their implementation in the field.
- To guarantee that all decisions and practices are transparent, understandable, and adaptable to changing conditions.

## 4. Conclusion and Discussion

In recent years, numerous initiatives have been undertaken to ensure the protection and sustainability of areas with special ecological and cultural value (Binboğa & Daşdemir, 2023; Bingöl & Arslan, 2021; Çelik & Çoruhlu, 2021; Dumlu & İhtiyar, 2017; Mota et al., 2023). In these areas, where restrictions on human activity were previously the primary means of protection, the desired level of conservation has not been achieved. This is largely due to the absence of management plans that are balanced in terms of conservation and utilization, participatory in nature, effective, and practically applicable (Akyol, 2020; Düzgüneş & Demirel, 2018; Yenilmez Arpa, 2011). This situation underscores the need for more effective, rational, and locally tailored protection and management approaches, rather than relying solely on traditional centralized government control.

In this context, the active participation of stakeholder groups in both the decision-making and implementation stages—as well as the integration of relevant policies, strategies, and programs into the management planning process—are considered key elements of rational and sustainable management (Güneş, 2011). Such an approach supports the conservation and sustainable use of natural and cultural resources by fostering cooperation among stakeholders in both planning and implementation. It promotes more inclusive and comprehensive decision-making by involving local communities, municipal governments, civil society organizations, and other relevant actors in the governance of protected areas (Homsy & Warner, 2020; Kovářová, 2020; Stanišić et al., 2021). In doing so, not only is the natural and cultural wealth of these areas preserved, but local communities also play an active role in the process and contribute directly to conservation efforts.

#### 4.1. Analysis of Stakeholder Participation Levels

Despite the emphasis on a participatory approach, findings from the Saros Bay SEPA case reveal that stakeholder participation remains limited in practice. Although 21 public institutions are formally included in the management structure, the actual depth and diversity of participation are low. Most stakeholder groups are involved either passively or in a consultative capacity—such as by providing information or opinions—rather than being actively engaged in decision-making or implementation processes.

Several interrelated factors contribute to this low level of participation:

- Legal ambiguity regarding who qualifies as a stakeholder and how their involvement should be structured,
- Unclear definitions of participatory methods and their appropriate use at different stages of the management process,
- Limited awareness and insufficient incentives for stakeholder engagement,
- A highly centralized administrative system, which discourages local initiative and shared responsibility.

In the United States, the basic guidelines for protected areas indicate that management authority is often delegated to local and community-based organizations (Choe et al., 2024; Koning & Avramoski, 2022). As a result, Type C or Type D management models—characterized by high levels of stakeholder participation—are commonly observed. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, national management plan guidelines emphasize the creation of management strategies through the active participation of multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder groups (Wildlife and Countryside, 2024).

In contrast, protected areas in Türkiye are primarily managed by centralized state authorities under a hierarchical administrative structure. According to existing legal regulations, protected areas generally fall under Type A management, where control rests with the central government. However, efforts to incorporate participatory approaches into protected area governance have recently gained momentum—particularly in regions such as the Yıldız Mountains Biosphere Reserve and Küre Mountains National Park, where participatory models have started to emerge.

The findings reveal that although certain management plan components received high importance scores (Table 7), their corresponding effectiveness levels remained relatively low (Table 8). Notably, components such as “Stakeholder Interest Identification” and “Accessibility” received lower effectiveness ratings, indicating that these areas were not adequately emphasized within the plan. This aligns with the stakeholder participation levels presented in Tables 10 and 11, which demonstrate that many stakeholder groups, particularly NGOs and private sector actors, were only involved at a passive or information-provision level and were not actively engaged in decision-making processes.

This outcome is consistent with earlier research highlighting the largely formal and symbolic nature of participatory mechanisms in protected area management in Türkiye (Demirayak, 2006; Düzgüneş & Demirel, 2018; Güneş, 2011). In contrast, successful participatory models cited in the international literature emphasize the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms where NGOs, universities, and local communities play active roles in both planning and decision-making, thereby contributing to greater plan effectiveness (Ervin et al., 2010; Koning & Avramoski, 2022; Wang et al., 2006).

The results of this study therefore underscore the importance of evaluating not only the number of participating stakeholders but also the quality and influence of their involvement throughout the planning process. Future management plans should particularly focus on enhancing active and functional participation in components that are ranked as highly important but currently exhibit limited effectiveness. Doing so may significantly increase the overall success and sustainability of management planning efforts.

#### 4.2. The Case of Saros Bay SEPA and Proposed Improvements

Saros Bay SEPA is administered by the central protected area authority, with 21 different public institutions formally contributing to its management. Due to the presence of an advisory board in the governance structure, the area is classified as a Type B1 collaborative management model. Nevertheless, to enhance the depth and effectiveness of participatory engagement, there is a need to revise existing legislation toward Type C or even Type D models. Although challenging under the current legal and administrative framework, this transition could be facilitated through concrete reforms, such as:

- Establishing mandatory local stakeholder boards,
- Developing clearly articulated participatory protocols, and
- Legally codifying stakeholder engagement techniques and responsibilities.

While the presence of an advisory board was one of the indicators considered in the classification of the Saros Bay

SEPA management model as Type B1 (Collaborative Management), this designation was not based solely on that criterion. The classification also took into account the involvement of multiple public institutions with defined roles in the implementation of the management plan, as well as the documented use of participatory techniques such as focus group meetings, stakeholder consultations, and workshops. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that a more comprehensive assessment of governance type would require additional indicators—such as the degree of stakeholder influence in decision-making, the frequency of participation, and the extent of shared responsibility in implementation. Future research could benefit from integrating these indicators into a more robust typological framework.

Furthermore, while legal reform was initially highlighted as a primary means of facilitating a shift toward Type C (Private Management) or Type D (Community-based Management) models, we recognize that legal change alone is insufficient. Successful transition to more decentralized and participatory governance structures also depends on complementary factors such as building local stakeholder capacity, improving institutional coordination mechanisms, providing financial and technical support, and fostering a culture of trust and collaboration. These elements have now been incorporated into the revised discussion to reflect a more holistic and realistic perspective on governance transformation.

In order to improve the average effectiveness score of the Saros Bay SEPA Management Plan and upgrade it to the "very high" effectiveness category, particular attention should be paid to the two components currently classified as medium: "Appropriate Volume" and "Accessibility."

- For the Appropriate Volume component, the management plan should be revised to align more closely with its objectives. This could include producing a more concise and goal-oriented document, with clearly defined thematic sections, the integration of visual tools (e.g., maps, diagrams), and the elimination of repetitive or overly technical content that might hinder accessibility for non-expert stakeholders.
- Regarding Accessibility, the current practice of publishing the management plan only on the website of the relevant ministry is insufficient. To increase stakeholder reach and awareness, the plan should also be disseminated through printed brochures, newsletters, community announcements, local television, social media, and public forums. Additionally, educational tools, such as short explanatory videos and infographics, can play an important role in increasing both visibility and understanding.

By implementing these targeted and practical improvements, it becomes more feasible to elevate both components to the "very high" effectiveness category—contributing to a more inclusive, transparent, and effective management structure.

Among the components already rated as "high" in effectiveness, further improvement can be achieved through the following measures:

- Ensuring that the management plan is prepared by a multidisciplinary team, including not only government officials but also practitioners, implementers, and community representatives.
- Clearly defining and integrating the interests of all stakeholders during the initial planning stages.
- Maintaining a planning framework that is adaptable, evidence-based, and open to diverse perspectives.
- By implementing these measures, the management plan can be transformed into a more process-oriented, qualified, and innovative document, better equipped to respond to emerging challenges.

For effective management, stakeholders should be involved in both fieldwork and planning activities in accordance with their knowledge, roles, and levels of interest. Participation can take various forms—ranging from passive and consultative involvement to functional, interactive, or even initiative-based engagement. As the level of participation shifts from passive to more proactive forms, its influence and transformative potential increase.

Given the ecological sensitivity and socio-cultural complexity of SEPA areas, it is essential to pursue the maximum feasible level of stakeholder participation, tailored to the context and characteristics of the region.

#### 4.3. Legal and Policy Barriers to Participation

- Precise and unambiguous provisions that define who participates, when, how, and with what tools,
- Specific techniques and stages of participation, adapted to the type of stakeholder and their area of influence,
- Identification of the benefits and risks of participation, along with measurable indicators for evaluating participatory performance.

By incorporating these elements, the legal framework would not only promote consistency and accountability but also

enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of conservation governance in Türkiye.

**Ethics Committee Permission/Etik Kurul İzni:**

It is hereby declared that all scientific and ethical principles were observed in the preparation of this study, and that all referenced sources have been properly cited in the bibliography. Ethics Committee Approval from the institution was not required for this study.

Bu çalışmanın hazırlanmasında tüm bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu, kullanılan tüm kaynaklara atıf yapılarak kaynakçada yer verildiği beyan edilir. Bu çalışma için kurumdan Etik Kurul Onayı alınması gerekmemektedir.

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The authors declare that they have no conflicting interest.

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Idea/Concept – E.D.,D.K.G.; Design and Design – D.K.G.; Auditing/Consultancy – E.D.; Sources – E.D.,D.K.G.; Data Collection and/or Processing; D.K.G.; Analysis and/or Interpretation – E.D.,D.K.G.; Literature Review - E.D.,D.K.G.; Writing E.D.,D.K.G.; Critical Review – E.D.

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# The Role of Cultural Heritage in Sustainable Tourism Development: The Case of Istanbul Kalkhedon Region

## Sürdürülebilir Turizmin Gelişiminde Kültürel Mirasın Rolü: İstanbul Kalkhedon Bölgesi Örneği

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### Abstract / Öz

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of cultural heritage in shaping sustainable tourism development in Istanbul's Kalkhedon (Kadıköy) region. Turkey's unique cultural and historical heritage is inadequately investigated and lacks prioritization in the context of sustainability concerning tourism's appealing aspects. The historical legacy of Kalkhedon is predominantly overlooked due to urbanization and population shifts. The historical ruins of Kalkhedon have largely remained in the shadow of urbanization and population changes throughout the 20th century. Existing literature has explored the relationship between cultural assets and tourism destinations from various perspectives. However, there is a significant gap in research that specifically examines the impact of historical and cultural heritage on sustainable tourism, particularly in regions like Istanbul's Kalkhedon. This study attempts to address the deficiency in existing literature by examining the impact of cultural heritage on sustainable tourism practices and its contribution to the overarching objectives of maintaining the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural integrity of the Kalkhedon region. The research was conducted using a qualitative method and a phenomenological design. Thematic coding was applied to the data collected from in-depth interviews with nine participants, and the analysis was conducted using MAXQDA software. Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that sustainable tourism not only contributes to economic development but also plays a crucial role in preserving cultural values and raising environmental awareness. Lastly, the study emphasizes the importance of environmental consciousness and local cooperation in sustainable tourism strategies, providing related recommendations.

*Bu çalışmanın amacı İstanbul Kalkhedon bölgesi örneği üzerinden sürdürülebilir turizmin gelişiminde kültürel mirasın rolünü araştırmaktır. Türkiye'nin sahip olduğu zengin kültürel ve tarihi mirasın yeterince araştırılmadığı ve turizmin çekici unsurları içerisinde sürdürülebilirlik kapsamında öncelikli olarak değerlendirilmediği görülmektedir. Nitekim Kalkhedon'un tarihi mirasının da büyük ölçüde kentleşme ve demografik değişimler nedeniyle göz ardı edildiği Kalkhedon'un tarihi kalıntılarının, 20. yüzyıl boyunca ağırlıklı olarak kentleşme ve nüfus değişimlerinin gölgesinde kaldığı görülmektedir. Mevcut literatürde kültürel varlıklar ve turizm destinasyonları arasındaki ilişkinin genel olarak ve farklı açılardan ele alındığı fakat özel olarak İstanbul Kalkhedon gibi tarihsel ve kültürel mirasın sürdürülebilir turizm üzerindeki etkisini açıkça inceleyen araştırmalarda önemli bir boşluk olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bu çalışma, kültürel mirasın sürdürülebilir turizm uygulamalarını nasıl etkilediği ve bölgenin çevresel, ekonomik ve sosyo-kültürel bütünlüğünü koruma gibi daha geniş hedeflere nasıl katkıda bulunduğu Kalkhedon bölgesi örneklemeden hareketle araştırarak literatürdeki boşluğu doldurmayı hedeflemiştir. Araştırma, nitel yöntemle ve fenomenolojik desen kullanılarak yürütülmüştür. Dokuz katılımcıyla yapılan derinlemesine görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler, tematik kodlama ile analiz edilmiş ve bu süreçte MAXQDA yazılımı kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları, sürdürülebilir turizmin yalnızca ekonomik kalkınmaya katkı sağlamadığını, aynı zamanda kültürel değerlerin korunması ve çevre bilincinin artırılmasında da önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak, çalışmada sürdürülebilir turizm stratejilerinde çevre bilinci ve yerel iş birliğinin önemi ortaya konarak bu doğrultuda çeşitli öneriler sunulmaktadır.*

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### 1. Introduction

Tourism plays a critical role in preserving cultural heritage and offering meaningful experiences to visitors while simultaneously contributing to global economic development (Dülğaroğlu, 2021). The evolving expectations and

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interests of tourists have shifted the focus from mass tourism, traditionally centered on sea, sand, and sun, to more diverse experiences such as cultural and historical exploration (Birinci et al., 2018). This transition highlights the importance of aligning tourism activities with sustainable development goals, particularly in preserving cultural and historical values (Akdağ & Üzülmöz, 2017; Ekerim & Tanrıseven, 2020). Given this, cultural tourism has become a popular alternative form of travel that goes beyond traditional experiences. In light of this, the ancient city of Kalkhedon provides an outstanding example of how to incorporate historical assets into sustainable tourist concepts.

The ancient city of Kalkhedon, placed near contemporary Kadıköy, Istanbul, is historically significant as it was founded by the Megarians in the 7th century BCE and was influenced by the Persians, Byzantines, and Ottomans (Meeprom & Fakfare, 2021). Despite its rich history, Kalkhedon's remnants have been largely overshadowed by urbanization and demographic changes throughout the 20th century (Chen et al., 2020). Hence, this study aims to examine the impact of cultural heritage on the development of sustainable tourism, using Kalkhedon as a case study (Lee & Xue, 2020; Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

The existing literature has explored the relationship between cultural heritage and tourism destinations from various perspectives. For instance, Abbasi et al. (2023) and Abubakar ve Ilkan (2016) give emphasis to the significant impact of social media on shaping destination images, highlighting the role of visuals and the effects of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM). Similarly, Acielma and Güngör (2021) underline the importance of strategic promotion through social media platforms and events to both conserve and promote cultural heritage. Akbaş (2020) examines the socio-economic benefits of tourism, juxtaposed with the negative impacts of mass tourism, through the case study of Sardis Ancient City. In contrast, Akinci and Helinc (2010) and Yuce (2023), explore the relationship between sustainable tourism and local community participation, focusing on regional development and income inequality. Further, Bachleitner and Zins (1999) investigate the economic development potential of cultural tourism in rural areas, while Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001) analyze how destination perceptions influence marketing strategies. Beerli and Martín (2004) provide an empirical examination of the factors shaping post-visit destination images and their influence on tourist behavior. In addition, Çelikkanat (2015) and Çalık and Ödemiş (2018) have examined the broader implications of cultural heritage on local communities; however, a significant gap remains in the literature concerning its specific role in shaping a sustainable destination image within localized settings, such as Istanbul's historical district of Kalkhedon. The evident lack of scholarly focus on Kalkhedon accentuates the necessity for targeted research in this context. Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate the influence of cultural heritage on the construction of sustainable tourism development, positioning Kalkhedon as a case study. To achieve this, a phenomenological research design is employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews to capture participants' perceptions regarding the role of cultural heritage in shaping sustainable tourism development in Istanbul's Kalkhedon region. Hence, the study aims to enhance strategic planning and destination marketing frameworks by highlighting the essential role of cultural heritage in sustainable tourism development.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Sustainability, Sustainable Tourism, Archaeotourism and Cultural Heritage

Tourism is broadly defined as the activity of traveling beyond one's usual environment for a period, shorter than one year, without seeking economic gain (World Tourism Organization [WTO], as cited in Jusoh et al., 2017). As Jusoh et al. (2017) emphasize, tourism encompasses more than leisure or vacation—it involves diverse forms such as cultural, gastronomic, religious, health, sports, and rural tourism. Leiper (1981) conceptualizes tourism as an open and dynamic system that interacts with its surroundings, while Akbaş (2020) draws attention to the sector's responsiveness to various lifestyle-driven demands, including accommodation and service needs. These perspectives highlight the interconnected and multifaceted structure of tourism.

Sustainability is a comprehensive idea that has been integrated into several sectors globally and possesses multiple definitions. Sustainability is the principle that current requirements must be fulfilled without compromising the ability of future generations to utilize these resources (Toka, 2008). Sustainability is crucial for the preservation of natural resources and the welfare of future generations. Sustainability necessitates the capacity to utilize resources without exceeding their thresholds by identifying the limitations that will maintain equilibrium between consumption and production. This comprehension has arisen from the decline in cultures' contact with nature (Kınacı et al., 2011). Sustainability denotes the utilization of essential resources within a system without significant depletion.

Sustainable tourism originated from the swift global changes that have adversely affected natural resources, diminished social and cultural values, and compelled the tourism industry to pursue solutions for these detrimental impacts (Özbey, 2002). Sustainable tourism relies on the principle that tourism must not adversely affect the environment, social structure, norms and cultural values (Garrod & Fyall, 1998). Sustainable tourism seeks to enhance

the welfare of local populations, promote visitor satisfaction, and save non-renewable resources.

The notion of 'sustainable tourism development' has achieved broad acceptance among global and domestic tourist entities. Sustainable tourism is globally acknowledged for delivering environmental, social, and economic advantages across all tourism forms (Lazano-Oyola et al., 2012). WTO characterizes sustainable tourism as 'tourism that prioritizes the requirements of tourists, the industry, the environment, and host communities, fully considering the present and future economic, social, and environmental repercussions' (WTO, 2005). Sustainable tourism ensures a long-term quality of life for local residents while enriching the experience for visitors (Choi & Murray, 2006).

As stated in the 1954 UNESCO convention (cited in Jusoh et al., 2017), cultural heritage includes both movable and immovable (tangible and intangible) assets that significantly enhance societal value in both material and moral aspects. Its protection serves as a bridge between past and present, while also fostering intercultural dialogue and contributing to the local economy (Pekerşen et al., 2019). Cultural tourism, in turn, plays a pivotal role in highlighting these values, reinforcing identity and diversity while simultaneously creating economic opportunities (Bachleitner & Zins, 1999; Pekerşen et al., 2019).

Closely linked to cultural tourism is archaeotourism, which specifically targets archaeological sites and relics, drawing visitors interested in ancient cultures and civilizations (Jusoh et al., 2017; Srivastava, 2015). Despite its similarities to cultural tourism, archaeotourism is considered a distinct field (Avrami, 2016). Unlike other cultural expressions, archaeological assets are non-renewable and irreplaceable parts of national heritage (Wurz & Van der Merwe, 2005), necessitating their meticulous conservation. In this regard, archaeotourism aligns with both sustainable tourism and cultural heritage management, particularly when infrastructure development is coupled with the empowerment of local creative economies (Jusoh et al., 2017; McKercher & Du Cross, 2002).

The need for sustainability becomes even more pressing given the rapid depletion of natural resources caused by industrialization, population growth, and technological advancement. Sustainability, derived from Latin, refers to the long-term maintenance of natural, economic, and cultural systems (Cebeci & Çakılcıoğlu, 2002; Özmehmet, 2008; Toka, 2008). Okuyucu (2011) and Koç (2008) categorize sustainability into movable (e.g., artworks) and immovable (e.g., buildings) types. In this framework, tourism must avoid exploiting environmental and cultural resources beyond recovery and ensure their continued existence for future generations (Toka, 2008).

Cultural heritage is not only a symbol of social identity and values but also a crucial element in cross-cultural communication (Albayrak, 2011). Within this broad framework, sustainable cultural heritage specifically addresses the preservation and intergenerational transmission of cultural and historical assets. Cultural tourism enables the experiential exploration of these values (McGehee et al., 1996), yet mass tourism—if not carefully planned—can lead to cultural erosion and environmental degradation (Çelikkat, 2015). Thus, the principle of sustainability becomes essential to balance economic gains and heritage preservation (Troel et al., 2005). As Durusoy (2003) points out, effective planning and the creation of new heritage routes can both protect and promote cultural assets. Similarly, when archaeotourism aligns with sustainable tourism principles, it can support both environmental integrity and cultural continuity (Choi & Murray, 2006).

## 2.2. Brand image, Tourist Satisfaction and Tourist Engagement

Brand image refers to consumers' perceptions of a brand, whereas destination image is shaped by collective impressions and individual perceptions of a destination (Crompton, 1979; Keller, 2013). This image influences tourist behavior, making it crucial for tourism research (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Destination images are assessed through cognitive and emotional dimensions, impacting tourist satisfaction and engagement (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011; Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Satisfaction, influenced by environmental, cultural, and socio-economic aspects, arises when tourists' expectations are met (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Tse & Wilton, 1988).

Tourist engagement is also influenced by self-image congruence with the destination's brand image, where alignment can enhance positive experiences and engagement (Gupta et al., 2018; Meeprom & Fakfare, 2021; Rao et al., 2022). For destination marketers, understanding these alignments and positioning destinations in line with tourists' values is crucial for engagement (Lee & Xue, 2020; Zhang et al., 2014). Cultural and environmental factors, including festivals, natural attractions, and the overall atmosphere, significantly impact tourist satisfaction (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014), while socio-economic factors like price inflation and inequality also affect satisfaction (Chen & Phou, 2013). Satisfied tourists are more likely to exhibit loyalty to the destination (Yoon & Uysal, 2005), emphasizing the importance of improving cultural, environmental, and socio-economic aspects to foster satisfaction and loyalty (Zhang et al., 2014).

## 2.3. Sustainable Tourism in Turkey

Cultural heritage in Turkey is protected based on official lists determined by the priorities of the state (Smith, 2006). Heritage items included in these lists are evaluated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the General Directorate



of Foundations and classified by regional preservation boards. As of 2008, there are 114,366 protected heritage items in Turkey, the majority of which are civil architectural structures and archaeological sites.

UNESCO's World Heritage Convention is a global initiative aimed at the protection of cultural and natural heritage. Between 1985 and 1998, Turkey included nine of its sites in the World Heritage List, and these sites play a significant role in the tourism sector due to their cultural wealth. However, the protection and management of these sites sometimes face issues such as insufficient planning and funding (Lockwood et al., 2012). Sites like Kalkhedon, when approached from a sustainable tourism perspective, can both preserve cultural heritage and increase tourism interest.

Turkey's tourist image has been evaluated through various studies. Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) pointed out that Turkey has a negative emotional image, while Baloglu and McCleary (1999) showed that Turkey has a more positive image compared to other Mediterranean countries. Furthermore, Turkey's attractiveness is rooted in national traits, including hospitality, with its cultural and historical treasures (Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002). Lastly, the influence of travel agencies and the authenticity of tourist experiences are also significant factors (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Method

This study investigates the role of cultural heritage in shaping sustainable tourism development in Istanbul's Kalkhedon region. Employing a qualitative research paradigm, it adopts an explanatory phenomenological design to gain deeper insights into participants lived experiences. Phenomenology provides a methodological framework that critically examines predefined concepts (Creswell, 2020; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). This approach emphasizes discovering the essence and meaning of experiences, often through in-depth interviews and open-ended surveys. The analysis of the data focuses on identifying shared themes and structures in participants' experiences, with the researcher setting aside personal biases to reveal participants' subjective perspectives (Sundler et al., 2019).

#### 3.2. Participant Selection

Purposive sampling was used to select participants from diverse professions in Kadıköy, following specific criteria (Morgan, 2008). In January 2024, a group of nine individuals was selected from various professions. According to the researchers such as Cresswell (2013) and Neuman (2014) qualitative research emphasizes sophisticated perspectives and comprehensive insights articulated in words, as opposed to the numerical facts that quantitative research depends on for generalizable conclusions. Therefore, for a phenomenological investigation, a sample of 3-10 participants from a homogeneous group is sufficient, provided that data saturation is achieved (Cresswell, 2013; Neuman, 2014). Purposive sampling ensures participants meet the study's criteria, unlike convenience sampling, where accessibility is prioritized. Participants, including hotel owners, tour guides, café and store owners, concierges, and homemakers, ranged from 34 to 78 years old and had lived in Kadıköy for 5 months to 55 years. The findings regarding the participants' demographic information are presented in Table1.

**Table 1.** Findings regarding participants' demographic information.

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation	Length of Residence in the Region
K1	Male	52	Hotel Owner	10 years
K2	Male	60	Tour Guide	55 years
K3	Male	38	Café Owner	3 years
K4	Male	41	Tour Guide	20 years
K5	Male	45	Shop Owner	45 years
K6	Male	34	Concierge	25 years
K7	Female	35	Service Staff	5 months
K8	Female	38	Tour Guide	8 years
K9	Female	78	Housewife	38 years

#### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The study aims to explore participants' perspectives on the role of cultural heritage in shaping sustainable tourism development in Istanbul's Kalkhedon region. The method of inquiry and interview questions were reviewed and validated by two experts in the tourism research industry. It was vital to refine the phrasing and remove leading questions by allowing experts to ascertain if the inquiries were relevant, clear, and aligned with the study's objectives. After experts validated the suitability of the interview questions, semi-structured in-depth interviews were employed for data collection. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an interview protocol, emphasizing confidentiality and voluntary participation. Each interview lasted 40-45 minutes and was recorded for accurate documentation.



In this study, questions were developed to explore the impact of sustainable tourism on businesses and neighborhoods. A literature review was conducted to identify key themes, focusing on the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of sustainable tourism. The main themes included: the effects of sustainable tourism on businesses and neighborhoods, its impact on daily lifestyles, the influence of cultural events on tourism, tourist expectations, and unique sustainable tourism practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between December 30, 2024, and February 2, 2024, at participants' locations and were later transcribed to gather detailed insights into their experiences and perspectives.

This study established three primary research topics to investigate how cultural heritages can facilitate sustainable tourist development in Kalkhedon. Initially, exploring how local individuals articulate the relationship between cultural heritage and sustainability. Secondly, it was essential to ascertain how cultural heritage contributes substantial value to the advancement of sustainable tourism. Last but not least, finding out how and to what degree the local community believes that cultural events and other sustainable tourism practices should be organized and implemented.

### 3.4. Interview Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of the interviews conducted in January 2024 were ensured through standardization, consistency, content validity, and diversity criteria. Interviews followed a structured protocol, enhancing reliability by maintaining consistent questions for each participant. Content validity was supported by ensuring the questions aligned with the study's objectives, with participants from a variety of professions contributing to the overall validity of the findings. Cross-validations for both validity and reliability were conducted by the author and reviewed by other experts in the field, ensuring the robustness of the research process and findings.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2021) approach. Thematic analysis involves carefully reading and coding the data to identify meaningful patterns and themes, which are then examined in relation to the research questions and literature. In this study, qualitative data were organized into a matrix for systematic analysis using MAXQDA software, enabling the identification of relationships between themes and patterns. This approach allowed for a detailed interpretation of the data, considering theoretical concepts and the researcher's subjective reflections on participants' experiences.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Contribution of Participants to Sustainable Tourism

Participants' perspectives on sustainable tourism contributions emerge in various themes. Business owners emphasize adding value to the region by offering high-quality products and effective promotion. Some focus on environmental awareness and service quality, while others highlight the importance of recycling and environmental care. Additionally, some participants underline the role of local business communication and marketing strategies in sustainable tourism. The key themes derived from participants' responses are presented as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *Contribution of participants to sustainable tourism*

Theme	Participant	Statement
Providing Quality Products	K3	"Efforts in our region are insufficient. We try to attract people with high-quality products, promotions, and qualified personnel."
	K5	"By supplying high-quality outdoor sports products to local and foreign customers, we add value to the region."
Providing Quality Services	K6	"Better and more beautiful service can contribute. I sometimes feel these contributions. Our hotel's environment and garden design align with Kadıköy's structure."
	K7	"Yes, we never fail to show kindness and courtesy to both foreign and local guests. We carefully maintain our venue and neighborhood."
Emphasizing Recycling	K1	"We have separate bins for recyclable and non-recyclable waste. We also collect battery waste separately. Over time, we will feel these contributions more."
Protecting Nature	K9	"I believe environmental care and respect for nature are the foundation of sustainable tourism."
Using Communication Strategies	K3	"Instead of focusing on my business as a tourism agency, I analyze my neighborhood and district. Local business owners' high education levels and effective use of the internet and social media enable them to reach tourists worldwide."

## 4.2. Impact of Sustainable Tourism on Daily Life

The impact of sustainable tourism on daily life appears in various themes. While business owners emphasize economic contributions and local development, some participants focus on environmental awareness and social effects. However, others believe that sustainable tourism has negative impacts. The following Table 3. presents key themes derived from participants' responses.

**Table 3.** *Impact of sustainable tourism on daily life*

Theme	Participant	Statement
Economic Contribution	K3	"Sustainable tourism increases the brand value of our businesses and helps us grow, contributing to the national economy."
	K4	"In Kadıköy, we offer food and shopping experiences, and we introduce tourists to Kalkhedon Ancient City and places of worship. This creates a lasting impression and benefits local development."
	K5	"Engaging in dialogue with people from different cultures benefits our environment. I believe it has a positive impact."
No Contribution to Society	K3	"Outside of my profession, sustainable tourism has not significantly impacted my environment because it has not yet expanded widely in my area."
Enhancing Social Dialogue	K7	"For social and trustworthy relationships, sustainable tourism fosters healthy communication and collective networks."
	K1	"I have become more aware and realized the need for extra caution. At work, I also warn the staff about this, trying to raise awareness."
	K8	"I believe sustainable tourism enhances the quality of life. In small towns, strong social bonds are closely related to this impact."
Negative Impact	K6	"It mainly affects those working in the sector. Some people react negatively due to political media influences, which harms sustainable tourism and affects tourists' perceptions."
	K9	"Unfortunately, the tourist profile has changed. Previously, environmentally conscious tourists visited, but now, most come from underdeveloped Arab countries for cheap shopping. They lack cultural curiosity, which hampers sustainable tourism and negatively affects our lifestyle."

## 4.3. Findings on the Impact of Cultural Events

Participation in cultural events and its relationship with tourism emerge in various themes. While some participants argue that the lack of regional cultural events reduces tourism potential, others emphasize how attending such events enriches life experiences. Some believe cultural activities can increase the number of tourists and are closely intertwined with tourism. Others highlight Istanbul's cultural heritage as a key attraction for tourists and stress that intercultural communication through events has a positive impact on tourism. These themes as it is shown in Table 4. illustrate the diverse perspectives on the role of cultural participation in tourism.

**Table 4.** *Findings on the impact of cultural events*

Theme	Participant	Statement
Emotional Enrichment	K3	"Before the pandemic, our region was more vibrant, theaters and cinemas were packed. Now, no effort is being made to attract the necessary potential."
	K7	"I felt that my spectrum of experiences expanded."
Increase in Tourist Numbers	K4	"Events and tourism are intertwined. The interaction is inevitable, but we need more attractive events to draw tourists."
	K1	"Cultural events and tourism go hand in hand."
Istanbul's Cultural Heritage	K8	"I believe that the inclusion of this event in UNESCO's World Heritage List has brought millions of tourists to our country."
Enhancing Intercultural Communication	K3	"From what I perceive through media, there has been a significant increase in mutual interest and interaction between foreign tourists and younger generations."
	K5	"Interacting with people from different cultures had a positive impact on me, making my social experience richer."

## 4.4. Findings on the Contribution of Cultural Events to Sustainable Tourism

According to participants' views, cultural events play a crucial role in sustainable tourism. Those emphasizing the potential of regional events to attract tourists believe they positively impact sustainable tourism. Some participants consider these events not only as a means to attract tourists but also as an additional source of revenue that benefits

the local economy as shown in Table 5. Others believe that cultural events broaden individuals' perspectives, while some suggest that local government-supported cultural activities can gain international recognition. Furthermore, certain cultural events are perceived as significant contributors to the country's global promotion.

**Table 5.** *Contribution of cultural events to sustainable tourism*

Theme	Participant	Statement
Provides Positive Contribution	K3	"Sustainable events unique to Kadıköy should be organized so that both local and international tourists can visit the area frequently."
	K4	"For example, poetry events are held at Nazım Hikmet Cultural Center in multiple languages, but tourists are unaware of them."
	K5	"I believe that attracting more tourists and visitors generates additional revenue for our country."
	K1	"Cultural events help society learn how to coexist harmoniously with nature, increasing environmental awareness."
Enhances Perspective	K7	"I believe cultural events transform us by broadening our perspectives and ways of thinking."
Provides an International Identity	K3	"If cultural activities are led by local governments rather than central authorities and are supported by various entertainment and performance events, they can gain international recognition. In my opinion, this would be the most effective promotion for sustainable tourism."
Increases Global Recognition	K8	"Approximately 10,000 tourists attend the Mevlevi Sema ceremonies at Galata Mevlevihanesi annually, generating significant financial and promotional benefits for our country."

#### 4.5. Findings on Tourists' Expectations Regarding Sustainable Tourism

According to participants, tourists' expectations regarding sustainable tourism are categorized into three main themes as it is shown in Table 6. These are diversity, environmental sensitivity, and cultural experiences. The expectation of diversity includes tourists' demand for unique experiences, such as cuisine, sightseeing, and local storytelling events. Environmental sensitivity reflects tourists' awareness of ecological issues and their interest in sustainability strategies. The expectation of cultural experiences indicates tourists' desire to explore and engage with different cultural elements. However, some participants observed that tourists primarily focus on gastronomy, with limited engagement in cultural activities.

**Table 6.** *Findings on tourists' expectations regarding sustainable tourism*

Theme	Participant	Statement
Increase Diversity	K5	"Tourists want more alternatives, a more relaxed environment, and greater access to historical sites."
	K4	"Offering the same things repeatedly is not interesting. Kadıköy already has a rich gastronomic scene and historic sites, but tourists should be taken to the courtyards of historic buildings and told their stories. The municipality should take the lead in this."
	K3	"Tourists seek experiences beyond conventional tourism products. They want the freedom and security to explore areas outside designated tourist spots."
	K6	"Recently, expectations have significantly declined. Everything has been standardized; we keep selling the same Bosphorus tours in a repetitive cycle. The Anatolian side tours should be strengthened, and the same concept should not be repeated."
Be Environmentally Sensitive	K1	"From my observations at our business, many guests have commented on our recycling bins and shared their thoughts on how important sustainability is."
	K8	"Some tourists, especially in well-developed tourism cities, expect the existing urban structure to be maintained and improved."
Revitalize Cultural Mosaic	K3	"Tourists seek different tastes and new experiences. They want to see Kadıköy's oriental and folkloric mosaic."
	K9	"Unfortunately, we only see tourists in the markets. They either sit in restaurants in large groups or queue up in front of confectionery shops. It seems like they are here only for gastronomy. Even if their guides explain things, the old charm of Kadıköy is missing."

#### 4.6. Findings on the Impact of Tourists' Expectations on Neighborhood Culture and Business Management

According to participants, tourists' expectations significantly influence neighborhood culture and business management. These impacts are categorized into four main themes as it is shown in table 7. These are making

tourism permanent in the region, ensuring economic development, increasing awareness of sustainable tourism, and enhancing environmental sensitivity.

**Table 7.** Findings on the impact of tourists' expectations on neighborhood culture and business management

Theme	Participant	Statement
Making Tourism Permanent in the Region	K3	"We strive to meet expectations. The decisions we make regarding our business aim to establish a lasting tourist presence in the area."
	K4	"Long-term tourism investments should extend across Kadıköy and Üsküdar. Simply explaining things to tourists is not enough; as guides, we provide information, but a broader strategy is needed to reach larger audiences."
	K6	"If we do not meet tourists' expectations, they will not speak positively about our country abroad. Tours on the Anatolian side should be diversified, and the same concept should not be repeated."
Ensuring Economic Development	K5	"Attracting more visitors means turning the business into both an economic and cultural meeting point."
Increasing Awareness of Sustainable Tourism	K1	"Being in the tourism sector for a long time has made us more conscious of sustainable tourism. From a societal perspective, we still need time, but through interaction and mutual influence, awareness will gradually increase."
	K7	"There is no negative impact. Through conversation and shared experiences, we develop a better understanding of each other."
Enhancing Environmental Sensitivity	K9	"Honestly, local people should first take responsibility for keeping their surroundings clean and contributing to the environment before considering tourist expectations. Unfortunately, we do not see much progress in this regard."

#### 4.7. Unique Practices in Sustainable Tourism

Participants were asked, "Can you describe the unique sustainable tourism practices of your business or the region you live in?" The responses were categorized into five main themes which are diverse menus, promotion of historical sites, environmental protection, preservation of cultural heritage, and local collaborations as shown in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Unique practices in sustainable tourism

Theme	Participant	Statement
Diverse Menus	K3	"We communicate with people from different cultures to learn about their culinary preferences and incorporate these recipes into our menu. By personally engaging with foreign visitors, we aim to encourage them to return."
Promotion of Historical Sites	K5	"We guide visitors and tourists by giving recommendations about historical sites in the area."
	K8	"The metropolitan municipality's 'Visit Istanbul' project allows people to explore the city's different aspects. The portal contains information, photos, videos, and maps covering history, cultural heritage, gastronomy, arts, and entertainment."
Environmental Protection	K6	"Our brand prioritizes service quality while maintaining green spaces around the hotel, preventing pollution, and aligning with urban planning standards."
	K1	"At Kalkhedon Hotel, we place stickers in all bathrooms reminding guests to save water. We have separate waste bins for organic, non-hazardous, and hazardous waste. All our lighting uses LED bulbs to conserve energy."
Preservation of Cultural Heritage	K7	"We prioritize preserving the character of our establishment while maintaining the neighborhood's original texture."
Local Collaborations	K3	"One of the best sustainable tourism practices is allowing foreigners to participate in food, drink, and music events in areas such as Kadıköy Bazaar, Bağdat Avenue, and the Marmara coastal strip, with strong support from local businesses and municipal institutions."
	K9	"During the tenure of former Governor Muammer Güler, Kadıköy was very vibrant. His wife, Neval, organized guided tours in every district. Although we covered transportation and food costs, we could visit mosques, churches, and historical sites with large groups, including retirees, housewives, and young people. Foreign tourists admired us, realizing the value we placed on our region. I find these initiatives unique and wish they were revived."

#### 4.8. Findings on the Importance of Sustainable Tourism

Participants were asked, “Why do you think sustainable tourism is so important?” The answers were categorized into three key themes as it is shown in Table 9. economic development, protection of national values, and ensuring sustainability for future generations.

**Table 9.** *Findings on the importance of sustainable tourism*

Theme	Participant	Statement
Economic Development	K3	“First and foremost, we think about our business. If the promotion of our region is done well and as it should be, not only our business but everyone in the area will benefit. Economic improvement will make local shopkeepers happy, places of worship will be better maintained, and Kadıköy youth will have the entertainment venues they deserve and platforms where they can see their preferred artists.”
	K4	“For me, raising awareness about tourism potential is crucial. It increases demand, and I’m not saying this just to increase revenue, but also to generate love and sympathy. Environmental regulation and the protection of historical textures are key investments.”
	K5	“Sustainable tourism is very important for continuity. In a country like ours, sustainable tourism is essential. If it develops further, more tourists will come, and local shopkeepers will benefit. We want to reach a qualified tourist profile, not just those who come to shop or eat and drink, but those who are curious about the land, history, geography, and who are willing to spend money in the process.”
Protection of National Values	K7	“Historical textures, memories, and stories are sometimes everything. Protecting them and working to preserve them is extremely valuable.”
	K8	“As a tourism professional, I believe that sustainable tourism plays a significant role in contributing to cultural and national values, both financially and emotionally.”
	K9	“I believe sustainable tourism will strengthen our national values, leave a sense of admiration for foreign cultures and make Turkey an attractive destination.”
	K3	“Every historical building in the area has an important history. Whether it was a noble family’s home, a structure from the Ottoman period, or represents the early days of the Republic, these values should not just be used for cafes or restaurants. They must be preserved and passed down to future generations.”
Ensuring Sustainability for Future Generations	K9	“For the sustainability of cultural heritage, it is important to protect the historical texture, maintain human relationships with love and respect, and control commercial activities in the area. By not giving the authority to open businesses to just anyone, we ensure the sustainability of cultural heritage.”
	K1	“It is our responsibility to keep the world clean. The more sensitive we are to our environment, the better the world will be for us and the generations that follow. We must remember that the world is our home, and just as we maintain our own homes, we must also care for the planet.”

#### 4.9. Findings on the Protection of Cultural Diversity in Kalkhedon

The participants provided a variety of suggestions for protecting and utilizing the cultural wealth of Kalkhedon in tourism. These suggestions are categorized into several themes, including promotion of the region, preservation of historical heritage, support for the historical texture, establishment of a collaborative platform, and raising awareness. The key findings based on participant responses are outlined in Table 10 below:

**Table 10.** *Findings on the protection of cultural richness in Kalkhedon*

Theme	Participant	Statement
Promotion of the Region	K4	“Tourism offices should play a more active role and utilize digital platforms more effectively. The region should be promoted through vibrant documentaries that leave lasting impressions.”
	K3	“Sustainable tourism is crucial, and social media is a great tool for effective promotion. We should target younger audiences through digital channels.”
	K8	“More advertisements and tourism programs should focus on the neighborhood’s history and culture. This would benefit local tradespeople and tourist guides.”
	K9	“We should focus on the region’s history, especially as a former fishing village and highlight its geographical value through specific initiatives.”



**Table 10.** Findings on the protection of cultural richness in Kalkhedon(continue)

Theme	Participant	Statement
Protection of Historical Heritage	K3	"Historical buildings should be restored quickly, and graffiti and spray-painting on walls should be prohibited with appropriate penalties. We also need to emphasize the preservation of green spaces."
	K6	"We need to change the attitude of locals towards tourists and increase monitoring to prevent damage to historical sites."
	K7	"Preserving the different flavors, textures, and even scents is essential for maintaining the region's cultural richness."
Support for the Historical Texture	K8	"It's important to highlight the area's historical texture, particularly the mosaic of different beliefs, churches, and mosques. More festivals should be organized to celebrate this diversity."
	K5	"We must protect and further promote the historical textures in the area to maintain its unique identity."
	K6	"We need to preserve the old tradespeople and businesses that reflect the cultural mosaic of the region, ensuring the sustainability of its historical fabric."
Establishment of a Collaborative Platform	K3	"Local authorities, residents, and business owners should come together on a common platform to discuss tourism and fully understand its impacts."
Raising Awareness	K1	"Raising awareness is crucial, and we should share information and educate people over time, even if it takes time."
	K7	"Local authorities should focus more on tourism-related issues and engage in conversations with the local population."
	K3	"We need to raise awareness among local authorities, residents, and especially young people, through educational efforts to sustain tourism."

#### 4.10. Findings on Actions Local Residents Can Take to Support Sustainable Tourism

In order to support sustainable tourism, the actions that local residents can take are shaped around several key themes. These actions include creating local collaborations, raising awareness, preserving historical heritage, and activating local governments. Residents have suggested strategies such as investing in and promoting digital platforms to attract more tourists. Volunteering and working in cooperation with local authorities for tourism-related initiatives is another prevalent theme. Additionally, residents emphasized the importance of conveying their expectations to local authorities and actively participating in projects that promote tourism. Encouraging dialogues with visitors and buying from local markets to support sustainable tourism are also among the suggestions.

When participants were asked, "What can we, as local residents, do to support sustainable tourism?" the responses revealed in Table 11. The following themes:

**Table 11.** Findings on actions local residents can take to support sustainable tourism

Theme	Participant	Statement
Creating Local Collaborations	K3	"If we unite, we can attract more tourists by investing in and promoting through foreign digital platforms."
	K8	"By volunteering and organizing free activities, we can engage people, raise awareness, and create a more conscious community."
	K9	"We can submit suggestions to the municipality and volunteer. I'm in."
Activating Local Governments	K4	"Tourism movement in Kadıköy and Üsküdar is unfortunately limited. Local authorities should be encouraged."
	K3	"We should unite and submit petitions to local authorities to communicate our expectations."
	K7	Residents can actively support local governments by offering project proposals: "We can develop projects and present them to the local government."
Preserving Sustainable Tourism	K5	"We can engage in more dialogues with visitors and take pride in our history."
	K6	"I personally shop for my family's needs at local fairs and regional food markets."
Raising Awareness	K1	"The most important thing is to raise awareness in our neighborhood and workplace. We must act accordingly to set an example."
	K3	"It is essential to discuss and understand what tourism brings and what it takes, without focusing on it as an aim."

#### 4.11. Findings on Participants' Personal Experiences and Contributions to Tourism

The contributions of participants to tourism manifest in several key themes. One participant, a business owner, highlighted environmental issues, such as inadequate trash bins and poor street cleanliness. In the context of preserving historical and cultural heritage, one participant shared concerns about historical buildings being damaged or converted into shopping malls. Another business owner emphasized the importance of interacting with tourists while also focusing on preserving historical and cultural heritage. Regarding increasing tourism awareness, a business owner argued that businesses have a social responsibility to protect cultural heritage and engage in deeper dialogues with visitors.

When participants were asked, "Can you provide more details about your personal experiences and contributions in this context?" the responses are detailed as it is shown on Table 12.

**Table 12.** *Findings on participants' personal experiences and contributions to tourism*

Theme	Participant	Statement
Lack of Attention to Waste Management	K3	"We take care of our business surroundings, but the district no longer pays as much attention to cleanliness. There are not enough trash bins, and more care should be given to street cleaning."
	K9	"I smoke too, but I don't throw my cigarette butts on the street. It's important for everyone to be sensitive to environmental issues."
Preserving Historical and Cultural Heritage	K6	"They are painting the walls of historical buildings, drilling them, and touching the trees. We warn them, but it's not enough. We should unite and inform local authorities."
	K7	"Turning a historical building into a shopping mall will cause cultural losses. We approached local authorities, but we did not get a positive response. It was going to be sold and turned into a shopping mall. This situation upset me and the other employees."
	K3	"We should not only interact with tourists but also engage more with historical and cultural heritage. As businesses, we should take responsibility for this heritage and provide visitors with a more profound experience."
Increasing Tourism Awareness	K5	"We can engage in more dialogues with visitors. As businesses, we should take more responsibility in this regard."
	K8	"As a tour guide, I told the tourists I was living in a neighborhood in Kadıköy, Istanbul, and explained the area's cultural richness, especially the performing arts, Süreyya Opera House, historical sites, places of worship, gastronomy, and transportation options. I suggest that they take a tour in this region."

#### 5. Discussion

The study aims to examine the views of the respondents on the impact of cultural heritage in promoting sustainable tourism development in Istanbul's Kalkhedon region. The findings reveal that sustainable tourism not only impacts economic development but also significantly contributes to the preservation of cultural values and the enhancement of environmental awareness. Participants emphasized that key reasons for supporting sustainable tourism include raising environmental consciousness, providing high-quality services to tourists, the importance of recycling, and the necessity of other sustainability measures. These factors are seen as foundational to a sustainable tourism approach. These findings align with Šimková and Holzner's (2014) study, which highlighted the importance of quality products and effective promotion strategies in contributing to sustainable tourism. Participants noted that, if the core principles of sustainable tourism are properly applied and promoted, the tourist potential of the region could be enhanced. The role of the local community in sustainable tourism is critical to maximizing both economic and cultural benefits. Participants also highlighted the significant role of tourist guides in the development of sustainable tourism and their contribution to the local economy. This finding is consistent with Şahin and Güzel's (2020) view, which emphasized that tourist guides should not only provide information but also act consciously to contribute to the local economy. Furthermore, the emotional connection that the local community has with the tourist destination was found to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism, echoing the findings of Šegota, Chen, and Golja (2022) as well as Prayag and Ryan (2011). In this context, it can be stated that the contributions of the local community not only support economic development but also strengthen the region's cultural identity and enhance social cohesion. This demonstrates that the sustainable tourism concept supports both economic and cultural benefits for the local community.

The findings also focus on the social impacts of sustainable tourism. Participants pointed out that environmental awareness and social impacts are intertwined, and these effects play a significant role in strengthening local identity. This aligns with the research findings of Lee & Xue (2020). The study also found that the local community's role in fostering healthy communication networks and increasing social interaction is vital to the success of sustainable tourism. Literature emphasizes the crucial role of communication and marketing strategies in increasing tourist engagement. Additionally, participants expressed concerns that media and political influences could create negative perceptions. This finding mirrors the emphasis in Çelikkanat (2015) on the local community's perspective on tourism and its decisive role in economic and social impacts.

Cultural heritage preservation lies at the heart of sustainable tourism. Participants expressed concerns that tourism could harm local lifestyles and stressed that the preservation of cultural heritage should be a priority for sustainable tourism. This finding is consistent with the views of Yaman Kocadağlı (2018) and Akova (2018), who noted that cultural activities contribute to the local economy and raise societal awareness. Participants stated that cultural events attract more tourists, invigorating the local economy and strengthening cultural identity. In this context, it is understood that cultural activities enhance the region's tourist appeal, creating both national and international recognition, and contribute to sustainable tourism.

Findings emphasize the need for careful consideration of the environmental, cultural, and economic dimensions of sustainable tourism. Participants highlighted the importance of using natural and cultural resources wisely. This finding is consistent with the results of studies by Çalık and Ödemiş (2018). Sustainable tourism strategies should encompass not only environmental aspects but also cultural and economic dimensions, as confirmed by participants' opinions. Participants also highlighted that local cooperation, and the preservation of cultural heritage are keys to the success of sustainable tourism. These findings support Akinci and Helinç's (2010) view that local cooperation and the preservation of cultural heritage are fundamental pillars of sustainable tourism.

In terms of preserving historical heritage, participants recommended that historical buildings should be quickly restored, wall damages should be prevented, local attitudes should be improved, and inspections should be increased. They also emphasized the need to preserve old businesses and establish establishments that reflect the cultural mosaic. These suggestions align with similar findings in the literature (Abbasi et al., 2023) and support the call for using social media as a promotional tool. The community's proposal to promote their tourist potential through digital platforms and collaborating with local authorities on voluntary projects encourages tangible steps towards contributing to sustainable tourism.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations**

This study investigates the role of cultural heritage in shaping sustainable tourism development in Istanbul's Kalkhedon region. It explores how cultural heritage influences sustainable tourism practices and contributes to the broader objectives of preserving the region's environmental, economic, and socio-cultural integrity. Participants emphasized that for sustainable tourism to succeed, a careful balance between environmental, cultural, and economic factors is essential. Specifically, the contributions of the local population to the tourism process have not only strengthened the region's cultural identity but also increased social cohesion, thereby solidifying the foundations of sustainable tourism. Additionally, the conscious contributions of local residents in preserving cultural heritage and taking environmental responsibility have helped increase the social impacts of sustainable tourism.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that sustainable tourism is not limited to economic benefits; it also provides significant contributions in cultural, environmental, and social dimensions. The statements of the participants highlight that the success of sustainable tourism is based on the active participation of local people and the importance of preserving cultural heritage. These findings align with similar studies in literature, underscoring the critical role of local communities in the success of sustainable tourism strategies. Therefore, it is emphasized that local contributions should be prioritized in the development and implementation of sustainable tourism, and the preservation of cultural heritage must be a central focus.

In line with these findings, a series of recommendations have been developed for the successful implementation of sustainable tourism. Firstly, it is essential to educate and raise awareness among the local population regarding sustainable tourism. A community that understands the environmental and cultural impacts of tourism activities will be more likely to adhere to sustainability principles. Secondly, involving local residents in the tourism process is a crucial step in preserving cultural heritage and increasing environmental awareness. In this context, training local guides and tourism workers is of great importance in ensuring that the core principles of sustainable tourism are embraced. Additionally, tourism activities should contribute to the local economy by encouraging local businesses and supporting establishments that reflect cultural heritage.

Another recommendation is to strengthen local partnerships and community-based projects. Local residents can promote tourism potential through digital platforms, contributing to sustainable tourism. In this regard, the effective use of social media and digital marketing strategies plays a significant role in increasing the region's national and international visibility. Moreover, it is recommended that local governments and relevant stakeholders collaborate to enhance monitoring for the protection of historical and cultural heritage and to expedite the restoration of old buildings. Finally, it is emphasized that sustainable tourism strategies should address not only environmental but also cultural and economic dimensions. To ensure the success of sustainable tourism, policies that encourage local participation and take concrete steps to preserve cultural heritage must be implemented.

## 7. Limitations

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of cultural heritage in fostering sustainable tourism, with an emphasis on the residents of Kalkhedon, whose lineage traces back to ancient times. The adoption of a phenomenological approach in qualitative research and the implementation of in-depth interviews yielded significant data regarding residents' perceptions, which are essential for ensuring that cultural heritage contributes to sustainable tourism development in a historically significant destination. Although thematic saturation was achieved with data from nine participants, further interviews could have yielded more nuanced outcomes, enhancing the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, employing a qualitative-based study facilitated the acquisition of comprehensive insights; nevertheless, it constrained the capacity to quantify the causal relationship regarding the impact of cultural heritage preservation on the establishment of sustainable tourism development. Ultimately, the execution of in-depth interviews may have resulted in a lack of impartial insights owing to the destination's historical and cultural affiliations.

## Ethics Committee Permission/Etik Kurul İzni:

This study, titled "The Impact of Intangible Cultural Heritage on the Formation of Sustainable Destination Image: The Case of Istanbul Kalkhedon", has received ethical approval from the Kapadokya University Ethics Committee (Decision No: E-64577500-050.99-60856, Date: 16.11.2023).

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Yazarlar, kendileri ve/veya diğer üçüncü kişi ve kurumlarla çıkar çatışmasının olmadığını beyan eder.

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with any individual, organization, or institution.

## Authors' contribution/ Yazar katkısı:

Idea/Concept – E.D.A.,A.Y.; Design and Design – E.D.A.,A.Y.; Auditing/Consultancy – E.D.A.,A.Y.; Sources – N.E.D.A.,A.Y.; Data Collection and/or Processing; E.D.A.,A.Y.; Analysis and/or Interpretation – E.D.A.,A.Y.; Literature Review - E.D.A.,A.Y.; Writing E.D.A.,A.Y.; Critical Review E.D.A.,A.Y.

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## Examining the Memorable Tour Experiences of Tourists Using Google Maps Reviews

### *Google Haritalar Yorumları Kullanılarak Turistlerin Unutulmaz Tur Deneyimlerinin İncelenmesi*

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#### Abstract / Öz

The advent of social media and online communities has facilitated interaction, commentary and the dissemination of reviews among tourists. Google Maps, a platform utilised by travellers, has evolved into a medium for documenting travel experiences, holiday recollections and complaints. In this context, user reviews on Google Maps are not only considered digital traces that document travel experiences, but also key elements in shaping tourists' perceptions, levels of satisfaction, and the memory construction of memorable experiences. A number of studies have recently been conducted to explore or understand memorable tour experiences, as they are very important indicators of tourist behavioural intentions. The purpose of the current study is therefore to explore the underlying dimensions of memorable tour experiences. Accordingly, data was collected through online reviews (731) posted about memorable tour experiences on Google Maps platform between 1 January 2022 and 10 February 2025. The data was analysed using a phenomenological approach and content analysis technique. In the results of the current study, a theoretical model of memorable tour experiences (MTEs) was developed with eight key components: shared experiences, knowledge, accommodation, professional guide, tour staff, hedonism, novelty, and local culture. The findings of the research contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of MTEs and augment the corpus of literature on tour experiences by incorporating MTEs through online reviews. The results of this study are discussed in terms of their practical and managerial implications, and recommendations for future research are proposed.

*Sosyal medya ve çevrimiçi toplulukların ortaya çıkışı, turistler arasında etkileşimi, yorumları ve değerlendirmelerin yayılmasını kolaylaştırmıştır. Gezinler tarafından kullanılan bir platform olan Google Haritalar, seyahat deneyimlerinin, tatil hatıralarının ve şikâyetlerin belgelendiği bir mecraya dönüşmüştür. Bu bağlamda, Google Haritalar'da yer alan kullanıcı yorumları, yalnızca seyahat deneyimlerini belgeleyen dijital izler değil, aynı zamanda turistlerin algıları, tatmin düzeyleri ve unutulmaz deneyimlere dair belleklerinin yapılandırılmasında belirleyici unsurlar olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Turistlerin davranışsal niyetlerinin çok önemli bir göstergesi olan unutulmaz tur deneyimlerini keşfetmek veya anlamak için son zamanlarda bir dizi çalışma yapılmıştır. Bu nedenle mevcut çalışmanın amacı, unutulmaz tur deneyimlerinin altında yatan boyutları keşfetmektir. Bu doğrultuda veriler, 1 Ocak 2022 ve 10 Şubat 2025 tarihleri arasında Google Haritalar platformunda unutulmaz tur deneyimleri hakkında yayınlanan çevrimiçi yorumlar (731) aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Veriler fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım ve içerik analizi tekniği kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Mevcut çalışmanın sonuçlarında, sekiz temel bileşenden oluşan unutulmaz tur deneyimlerinin teorik bir modeli geliştirilmiştir: paylaşılan deneyimler, bilgi, konaklama, profesyonel rehber, tur personeli, hedonizm, yenilik ve yerel kültür. Araştırmanın bulguları, unutulmaz tur deneyimlerinin daha kapsamlı bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmakta ve çevrimiçi yorumlar aracılığıyla unutulmaz tur deneyimlerini dâhil ederek tur deneyimleri üzerine literatürü zenginleştirmektedir. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, pratik ve yönetsel çıkarımları açısından tartışılmakta ve gelecekteki araştırmalar için öneriler sunulmaktadır.*

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is predicated on the creation of experiences, which are considered to be the fundamental aspect of travel. These experiences are frequently regarded as extraordinary, in that they diverge from the daily experiences of the individual (Cohen, 1979, p. 181). The correlation between memory and experience is a well-established concept that can be traced back to the foundational works in the field of environmental psychology (Hosany et al., 2022, p. 1468). The link between memory and experience highlights the dynamic and holistic nature of the tourism experience (Kastenholz et al., 2018, p. 192). The recollections of tourists from their travels, and the manner in which these memories are stored, are of significant importance to their future travel behaviours and subjective well-being. In the

highly competitive realm of the tourism sector, the ability to offer experiences that leave a lasting impression on tourists is a crucial factor in ensuring survival (Zare, 2019, p. 316). In the contemporary tourism industry, characterised by intensified competition among destinations, the pursuit of memorable tourism experiences has assumed a heightened significance. In order to maintain their competitive edge within the contemporary global tourism market, destination managers are required to provide visitors with experiences that are both memorable and distinctive (Kim & Ritchie, 2014, p. 1). The most significant outcome for tourists following a tour is the memory of their experience. This is of particular importance when it comes to the decision of whether to return (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017, p. 1084). The impact of memory on travel choices has been demonstrated to be a more significant factor than even the most persuasive advertising campaign (Marschall, 2012, p. 323).

A review of the extant literature pertaining to travel experience reveals a substantial corpus of studies employing qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Despite the extensive research conducted on travel experience, there is a notable paucity of studies exploring memorable tour experience (Güzel, 2014; Kul et al., 2024; Park et al., 2006). One of these studies was conducted by Kul et al. (2024) using quantitative research methods. The authors sought to explore the values perceived by tourists during cultural tours and to examine the moderating role of tour guide competence in the link among the perceived value, behavioural intentions of visitors, and satisfaction. The researchers developed a tool to gather data. It was found that the quality of cultural tour experiences affects satisfaction, and the role of the tour guide is also important in this regard.

Despite the abundance of literature focusing on travel experiences in tourism, a paucity of studies has been identified in the field of memorable tour experiences. Further studies are required to have a more comprehensive interpretation of memorable tour experiences (MTEs). The present research was developed to examine the fundamental dimensions of MTEs through the use of a netnography technique, which provides rich data. The principal aim of the present study is to determine the elements that comprise a MTE. This study makes a significant contribution to the extant literature on tour experiences by investigating in depth the aspects of memorable tour experiences and by presenting the management and operational consequences for travel agencies, tour operators and destination management organisations in developing strategies for tour experience planning.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Memorable Tourism Experience

In the field of memory research, scholars have identified numerous factors that contribute to the memorability of an event. These factors encompass affective feelings, cognitive evaluations, and the presence of novel events (Kim et al., 2012, p. 13). The human mind has an innate ability to process stimuli that are well-known and significant, doing so at a more profound level and with greater rapidity. It has been demonstrated that events that are unfamiliar, untypical or different are more easily remembered than those which are typical (Kim et al., 2012, p. 14).

The tourist experience is defined as a past personal event related to travelling that is able to be stored in the long-term memory (Larsen, 2007, p. 15). Within the domain of tourism marketing, it is imperative to analyse the dimensions of the tourism experience in order to ascertain how to enhance it, or indeed create a positive one (Hefny, 2021, p. 33). Destination management and service providers can facilitate the creation of effective tourism programmes by cultivating an understanding of visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds. This approach is conducive to the creation of memorable and fulfilling experiences, which in turn can lead to increased repeat visits and recommendations (Zare, 2019, p. 317). Memorable tourism experiences are those which are favourable and which are remembered and recalled by the individual once the activity has been completed (Kim, 2018, p. 857). Memorable tourism experiences can improve destination perception and personal attachment to a place (Kim et al., 2024, p. 315). It is therefore vital that the aspects of the tourist experience are assessed and managed very carefully, given their pivotal role in fostering tourist loyalty towards destinations (Hefny, 2021, p. 34). The provision of memorable tourism experiences to tourists is a key strategy for tourism destinations to maintain competitiveness in the tourism market. Due to the distinctive features and significance of these experiences, the transformation of tourism experiences into memorable ones represents the most challenging task for destinations (Li & Jiang, 2023, p. 4). In conclusion, the effective management and enhancement of the aspects of the tourist experience is essential in fostering tourist loyalty, the improvement of destination perception, and the maintenance of competitiveness in the ever-evolving tourism market.

### 2.2. Memorable Travel Experience

During periods of vacation, individuals typically relinquish their usual routines and become highly receptive to their surroundings. Tourists, in particular, frequently seek out novel and stimulating experiences while travelling (Zatori et al., 2018, p. 112). In the contemporary context, travellers have come to expect unique, gratifying and diverse experiences on their trips (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015, p. 292). They seek a variety of experiences that are

considered genuine, enriching, purposeful and inspiring (Hosany et al., 2022, p. 1467). It is widely accepted that a greater degree of participation results in a more memorable and rewarding experience for the consumer (Zatori et al., 2018, p. 112). While all travel memories may be used to inform future decisions, some are recalled more positively and thus carry more significance for future applications (Zare, 2019, p. 317), because travellers decide to visit a place because of positive travel experiences (Kim & Chen, 2019, p. 638).

Uncovering the components of memorable travel experiences has been the focus of a growing number of researchers. Tung and Ritchie (2011) utilised an in-depth interview to unearth the fundamental elements of memorable travel experiences, which they defined as comprising four dimensions: affect, expectations, consequentiality, and recollection. Kim et al. (2012) developed a measurement scale to understand and manage memorable experiences. Hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaning, knowledge, involvement and novelty are the domains of the scale. Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015) developed a reliable and valid instrument for measuring memorable travel experiences. This instrument comprises 34 items across ten experiential dimensions. Kim et al. (2019) examined the complex meaning of memorable travel experiences, identifying five thematic views: social interaction, destination attractiveness, excitement, novelty and learning. Kim and Chen (2021) aimed to ascertain whether there were variations in the ways in which individuals evoke memorable travel experiences. The findings of the study demonstrated that individuals retrieving the recollections using the recall method exhibited greater levels of trip satisfaction than individuals retrieving their trip recollections based on their beliefs. Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) conducted a study to investigate memorable tourism experiences and behavioural intentions. The results show that hedonism, local culture, involvement, and knowledge significantly impact behavioural intentions. This suggests that memorable travel experiences are influenced by emotional, cultural, cognitive and social factors.

### 2.3. Tour Experience

It is important to note that tours play an integral role in shaping the tourist experience by guiding tourists to explore specific attractions within a destination. The quality of these tours is fundamental in determining whether the experience is positive or negative (Ghanem & Shaaban, 2022, p. 210). Tours offer new information, relaxation, insight into other people's lifestyles and enjoyment, and well-planned experiences create fond memories that can increase satisfaction (Teichert et al., 2021, p. 2).

A review of the extant literature on tour experience revealed studies on tour guide performance, tour satisfaction, tour services and bus tour experience. Bowie and Chang (2005) sought to identify the variables that influenced customer satisfaction during a guided package tour service encounter. The principal objective of the study was on the quality of service provided by suppliers, and the importance of the tour leader with specific attention directed towards the itinerary and auxiliary support. The findings indicated that the tour leader's role was pivotal to the success of the tour product. In their study, Huang et al. (2010) examined the effectiveness of tour guides and their association with tourist satisfaction in the scope of package tours. Their findings indicated that tour guide performance exerts a significant direct effect on the satisfaction of tourists. Güzel (2014) conducted a study to explore the aspects of tour experience. The results indicated that tourists' emotional arousal positively affects post-experience behaviour, thus demonstrating it to be a main determinant of satisfaction and intentions related with post-experience. Atsız and Seyitoğlu (2023) investigated travellers' experiences of a day-long local guided shopping tours and identified primary elements of a day-long local guided shopping tour experiences: hedonic experience, guide, shopping companion, local interaction, learning, memorable experience and shop characteristics.

It is evident that tour guides are very important for visitor satisfaction, and the quality of the tour guide's performance affects both direct and indirect satisfaction. Emotional involvement in the tour has a positive effect on future behaviour and intentions, and good organisation of the tour, the quality of service and the attractions visited are all important for a memorable and satisfying tour experience.

## 3. Methodology

A phenomenological approach was employed to investigate the dimensions of memorable tour experiences using a netnography method. Phenomenology, as a methodological approach, aims to gain a profound understanding of direct experiences based on conscious actions (Ziakas & Boukas, 2013, p. 97). In particular, content analysis represents one of the most frequently employed data analysis techniques in the field of netnography (Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019, p. 51). Netnography, also referred to as online ethnography, enables researchers to obtain data in a more expedient and straightforward manner, circumventing direct contact with people (Vo Thanh & Kirova, 2018, p. 33).



### 3.1. Sample Group

The two leading travel agencies in the South-eastern Anatolia Region, which are featured on an online platform where users are able to post reviews, were selected as the focus of this research. A purposive sampling method was employed, with KT and MT travel agencies chosen for their high ratings and extensive reviews.

### 3.2. Data Gathering Method

For the objective of this study, user-generated content based on reviews by tourists on Google Maps platform was utilised for the purpose of data analysis. Google Maps platform was chosen for data collection, as online communities represent an optimal setting for netnographic research due to the abundance and accessibility of data they offer, particularly in light of the rapid expansion of the internet (Belz & Baumbach, 2010, p. 305). Additionally, Google Maps website satisfies five criteria for online communities, as outlined by Kozinet (2002, p. 63), which are useful for identifying suitable online communities in netnography research. These are: (1) a more focused group; (2) a greater number of posts; (3) a greater number of posters; (4) a more detailed data set; and (5) a greater number of interactions. Google Maps is a digital platform that enables all users to submit reviews and assign ratings to various services on a scale of 1 to 5. These publicly accessible reviews and ratings offer insights into user experiences (Akkaya et al., 2024, p. 381). The utilisation of reviews in this study is not regarded as human-related studies, given that Google Maps is accessible to the general public. Consequently, in this particular instance, ethical approval and consent from subjects is not a prerequisite for the study (Kozinets, 2010). Google Maps reviews have been conducted and employed as a means of assessing consumer behaviour, specifically in relation to the evaluation of products and services, and in the current digital age, characterised by the growth of the internet, e-commerce and online platforms, ratings and reviews have become more accessible, familiar and important than ever before (Laghbi & Al Dhoayan, 2024, p. 2). Most of the tourists utilise social media platforms such as Google Maps and TripAdvisor as a means of disseminating information and experiences acquired during the travel process (Aksoy & Kurt, 2024, p. 80). Tourists who have engaged with a tourism product or service are able to share their reviews related with their experience on social media at any point in time. Consequently, tourists may discuss their memorable travel experiences long after the fact, should they retain a recollection of their travels (Kodaş & Aksoy, 2022, p. 384).

The data were collected from Turkish-language reviews posted on Google Maps (n = 731), and the dates of the reviews were between January 2022 and February 2025. The Turkish reviews were translated into English by three professional translators proficient in both languages. 731 reviews were available at the end of this process.

### 3.3. Analysis of the Data

Netnography represents a significant methodology to analyse tourist experiences, because it enables the examination of reviews and feedback from individuals who have completed their travel experiences and shared their insights online. This approach enables the acquisition of a comprehensive understanding of tourist experiences (Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017, p. 320). In order to ensure that online communications occurred in an uninhibited and natural manner, passive netnography was employed to analyse the data. This approach entailed the observation of discussions in a covert manner, without engaging in interactions with the users (Tomej et al., 2023, p. 8).

In netnography, data can be categorised in a number of ways. Firstly, archival data can be considered, as well as co-created data and fieldnote data. Any existing data that has been collected by a researcher without the necessity of direct engagement in data collection or elicitation is defined as archival data. This data serves a historical record and cultural baseline (Kozinets, 2015, p. 10). Therefore, archival data were selected to analyse online reviews in this study.

**Table 1.** Open coding

Reviews	Open coding (line-by-line coding)
<i>"I had the chance to see very marvellous landscapes on the eastern black sea tour with KT Batman. Everything was very nice 😊 I would like to thank our bus drivers, tour attendant Engin and our professional guide Ali Rıza. Our guide was wonderful. He keeps the places visited alive at the same time with his narration. Tour staff made our trip unforgettable with their sincere and warm approach. In addition, the hotels we stayed in were very nice and the hotel food was delicious."</i>	Marvellous landscapes, our guide was wonderful, tour staff made our trip unforgettable, the hotels we stayed in were very nice, the hotel food was delicious

The reviews were collated and transferred to a Microsoft Word document for analysis. The data were subjected to three stages of analysis. Initially, the data were scanned to gain an in-depth understanding of them. In the second stage, the reviews were read and categories of MTEs were identified. Finally, the coding was completed. The coding process was



conducted in three phases: open coding, entailing a thorough analysis of all phrases and words (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 119) axial coding, involving the process of associating themes with their sub- themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 123); and selective coding, including the process of integration and refinement of themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 119).

**Table 2.** *Example of coding processing practice*

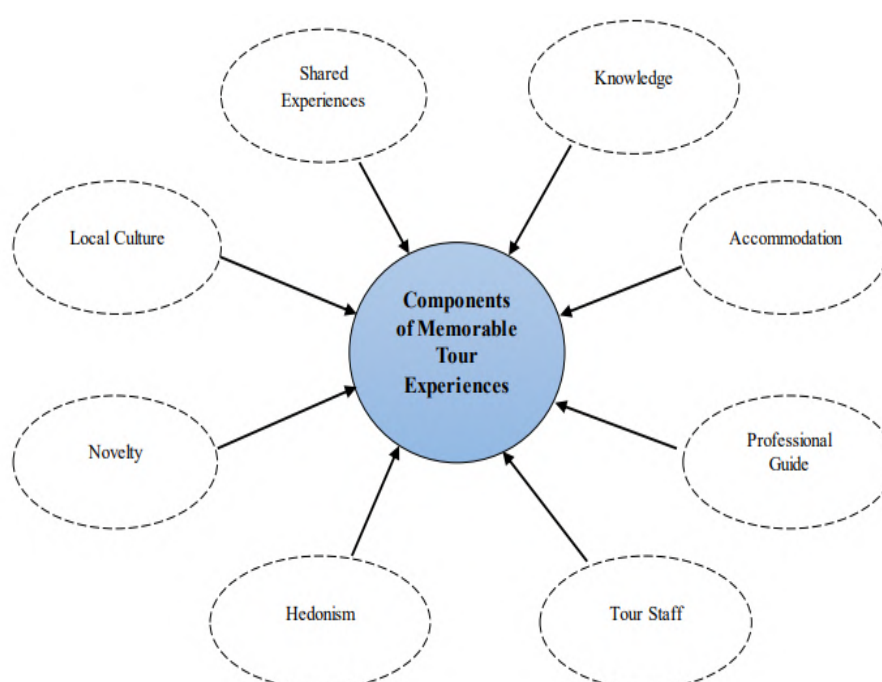
Open coding (line-by-line coding)	Subthemes (axial coding)	Main themes (selective coding)
Our tour guide was very energetic; We participated in many fun activities; invaluable learning experience; everything was perfect, very enjoyable and fun; We became a family; the tour was great!; It was something I had not experienced before; We made new friends; Our guide was very sincere and very, very friendly; We learnt a lot; The guide was very knowledgeable and professional; Tour staff made our trip unforgettable; The driver and tour staff deserve the most thanks; Hotels were very good; It was an unforgettable holiday; energetic tour guide.	Professional guide, bus driver, tour attendant, hotel	Professional guide, tour staff and accommodation as components of MTEs.

Each transcript of the reviews was subjected to a comprehensive analysis in order to extract specific information. The researcher identified 218 codes that summarised the data. The process of data analysis resulted in the axial coding of the data, which in turn permitted the reduction of the database to a limited set of themes. The process of axial coding enabled the components of MTEs to be defined. Subsequently, selective coding was undertaken, which entailed the integration of categories derived from the open and axial coding processes.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Memorable tour experience components

Eight sub-themes emerged from the netnography of tourists' memorable tour experiences, as follows: (1) shared experiences, (2) knowledge, (3) accommodation, (4) professional guide, (5) tour staff, (6) hedonism, (7) novelty, and (8) local culture. Furthermore, to provide additional support for the above sub-themes, extracts from the data were also included (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *The theoretical framework of tourists' memorable tour experiences*

- *Shared experiences*

Sharing experiences and the feeling of a family atmosphere were emphasised in several reviews. Codes extracted from these reviews such as “we became a family”, “we participated in many fun activities”, “friendly approach and sincerity”, “made us feel like family” and “thanks for the warm family atmosphere” underline the importance of shared experiences. This is evidenced by the comments below:

*“I have participated in a lot of tours, I have met lots of guides, but I have never had so much fun on a tour as I had fun with my Tevkeli guide. Thanks for the sincere and warm family atmosphere. I hope we will come across again in the next tour because it made us experience the most beautiful and fun.”*

*“Great tour...I participated in the Black Sea tour and I would like to thank the whole tour team, especially our Savaş guide and Bayram, the bus driver. Our guide Savaş made us feel like family with his beautiful narration, smiling face and sincerity. We went to different destinations other than the destinations included in the tour, so I would like to thank Mr Savaş again.”*

Tourists frequently travel in groups with the intention of spending time with family, friends, or significant others. This allows for the co-creation of shared experiences and memories, as well as the strengthening of familial or social ties (Liao et al., 2022, p. 1). The experiences of tourists shared with travelling groups and other tourists are often regarded as fond memories by those who have participated in the activity (Chandralal et al., 2015, p. 686). The extent to which travellers and employees share empathy and proximity influences the experience that is delivered to the tourist (Coelho et al., 2018, p. 161). The pleasure and enthusiasm of a trip is often heightened if it is undertaken with friends or as part of a group, rather than on your own (Chandralal et al., 2015, p. 686). Morgan (2006) posited that tourists’ positive memories were more likely to result from a plethora of options, moments of astonishment, shared experiences, local distinctiveness, and positive values (p. 312).

- *Knowledge*

The results show that knowledge is an important component of MTEs. Interpretive codes such as “broadened our horizons”, “opportunity to learn traditions and customs”, “we travelled and learnt”, “we learnt everything”, “the guide developed our cultural intelligence”, and “I learnt new things” are indicative of the significance of knowledge. The following reviews highlight the tourists’ search for knowledge:

*“The tour was great! I had a lot of fun and learnt new things. I plan to join their tours to other cities.”*

*“On a weekday, we travelled, learned and rested within a tour programme with the daily Diyarbakır culture tour. I experienced a pleasant tour. Thanks to our guide Mr Azat.”*

*“The tour was full of fun and the guide was competent, we both travelled, had fun and learned, we were very satisfied. I am glad I chose this travel agency.”*

Knowledge is a cognitive aspect of traveller which involves learning and educating (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010, p. 6). The knowledge gained from travel and leisure activities in destinations can be regarded as a component of overall travelling experience (Falk et al., 2012, p. 912). In recent times, tourism and leisure settings have emerged as a significant conduit through which individuals can gain insight, foster innovation and shape new perspectives for themselves and their communities (Moscardo, 1998, p. 4).

- *Accommodation*

A number of reviews indicate that accommodation accounts for a significant proportion of tourists’ MTE. An example of this can be seen in the codes taken out of the reviews, including “delicious food”, “a luxurious hotel”, “a wonderful hotel”, “kind hotel staff”, “a clean hotel” and “a nice hotel”. The importance of accommodation as a component of MTEs is underscored by the following reviews:

*“The energy of the tour was very high and I enjoyed it very much. The hotel we stayed in was very clean and the food we ate at the hotel was very tasty. In addition, the hotel staff were extremely kind. According to this, it was one of the best hotels I have ever stayed in. If I go on tour again, KT agency will definitely be my only choice.”*

*“The tour staff took care of us perfectly from the beginning to the end of the tour. I stayed in such a luxurious hotel for the first time. The breakfast we had at the hotel was delicious.”*

Hotels are regarded as vital amenities for tourists, offering a haven of comfort and security after a day spent navigating unfamiliar surroundings (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016, p. 146). A positive experience with the components of a tourist destination, such as accommodation, food and transportation, is a significant predictor of overall satisfaction with the trip (Sangpikul, 2018, p. 111). Tourists have a strong tendency to retain vivid memories of their holidays, and they often express a desire to return. Sharing opinions via social media constitute the most significant factors affecting accommodation preferences (Bose & Biju, 2020, p. 13032).

- *Professional guide*

A majority of reviews show that professional guide plays a crucial role in MTEs. Most of the visitors attended to a tour mentioned issues such as “very friendly”, “very intimate”, “knowledgeable and humorous” and “constructive and moderate nature” in the reviews they posted. This is illustrated by the following reviews:

*“In September, we participated in the Antalya Olympos tour. Our guide, Mr Tevkeli, was very very friendly. He took care of us very well. He had fun with us and laughed with us. We thank him very much. The journey is very tiring because it is a bit long, but it is really worth it. It will be an experience worth all your tiredness.”*

*“Everything went much better than I expected. Our tour was great. Our guides Mr Ramazan and Mrs Nurcan were very intimate. They were so sincere that I would like to go on my next tour with them. The quality of the tour increased a lot with our knowledgeable and humorous guides. I learnt a lot of new information at the end of the tour.”*

Tourist guides represent a crucial aspect of the tourist experience. As frontline personnel, they frequently serve as the initial encounter with tourists, and their performance can significantly influence the overall perception of the trip (Kapa et al., 2022, p. 1350). The quality of tourists' experience may be influenced by the services provided by tourist guides. Consequently, the provision of qualitative services by a tourist guide is essential to ensure tourist satisfaction (Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014, p. 33). The performance of a tour guide has been demonstrated to have a profound impact on the experience of visitors (Yu et al., 2004, p. 2). A significant proportion of tourists' experiences are shaped by the manner in which guides elucidate the intrinsic value of tourism assets in specific destination areas. This is because, the act of explanation facilitates a more profound comprehension among tourists of the authentic essence of the product under interpretation (Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014, p. 33). Therefore, a guide can be an invaluable resource for any tourist seeking to gain a deeper understanding of a foreign destination and to enhance the quality of their travel experience (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015, p. 304).

- *Tour staff*

A substantial body of reviews have demonstrated that the tour attendants and drivers play a pivotal role in shaping travellers' MTEs. The majority of reviews indicated that the tour attendants and drivers were welcoming, entertaining and helpful. Codes such as “very friendly”, “helpful staff”, “fun tour staff”, “very careful” and “very kind and sincere” are indicative of the significance of tour staff when it comes to tourists' MTEs. This is demonstrated by the given reviews:

*“The Aegean tour we participated with KT was very enjoyable. Our driver Süleyman and the tour attendant Erdal were very kind and sincere. It was a very nice, fun and reliable trip.”*

*“An excellent tour agency, carried out the programme without any disruption. It was a decent and pleasant tour. I would like to thank Mr Mehmet the guide, Mr Erdal the tour manager, Mr Serhat the driver. Our driver Mr Serhat was very careful and the tour attendant Mr Erdal was very friendly.”*

The quality of the interaction between staff and passengers is associated with MTEs, based primarily on the information gathered from passengers' observations. In some instances, either the driver or the tour guide served as an intermediary in facilitating communication between customers (Carreira et al., 2013, p. 238). It is evident that tourist guides and tour agency attendants can play a pivotal role in creating memorable experiences for leisure travellers. For those who prefer organised tours, guided by knowledgeable guides and other tour staff, the input of such professionals can be invaluable (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015, p. 304). Additionally, the quality of service provided by bus drivers and their social abilities are considered to be of considerable importance to tourists' experiences, given that they represent the human interface with whom passengers interact directly during their journey (Carreira et al., 2013, p. 238).

- *Hedonism*

Hedonism was emphasised in several of the reviews, and the codes such as “a lot of fun”, “a very pleasant time”, “unforgettable experience”, “this enjoyable tour”, “an unforgettable holiday”, “trip was really great”, “I enjoyed a

lot” and “a very exciting tour”, underline the importance of hedonism. This is evidenced by the following reviews:

*“We participated in the Gaziantep tour organised by MT travel agency. We had a lot of fun and had a very pleasant time.”*

*“Although it was my first tour experience, it was a tour that I enjoyed a lot and we had a lot of fun. They were really excellent as a team. It was an unforgettable experience for me.”*

The hedonic component of tourism activities has been a long-standing focus of research in the field. When engaging with tourism products and experiences, individuals tend to prioritise enjoyment and pleasure, which differentiates tourism from other activities and products (Kim, 2014, p. 36). Otto and Ritchie (1996) emphasised that tourism products and services are a form of consumption that is driven by hedonic motives and the pursuit of positive emotions and experiences, which are closely linked to feelings of happiness (p. 167).

- **Novelty**

The results of the review process indicate that the element of novelty plays a significant role in tourists’ MTEs. This is evidenced by the codes that emerged from the reviews, including “my first tour experience”, “a great memory for my first experience”, “new places”, “new people”, “for the first time” and “my first paragliding experience”. The importance of novelty is further highlighted by the following reviews:

*“I would like to express my love to our friendly guide Helin. For the first time I joined the tour of a woman guide and I was very pleased.”*

*“Normally I would never think of travelling with a tour, but I wanted to experience my first tour experience and I’m glad I did. It was a very very good, magnificent, legendary tour. I would like to thank especially our tour guide Mr Tevkele and our valuable captain Mr Sinan for their efforts. I would also like to thank the nice people we met on the tour.”*

The concept of novelty is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing various dimensions that have been previously identified in the literature. These include the experience of change from routine, escape, thrill, adventure, surprise, and the alleviation of boredom (Lee & Crompton, 1992, p. 738). Novelty can be defined as the experience of something new or unique, and it is associated with the desire to enjoy a distinctive, inaugural experience (Tugade et al., 2023, p. 11). The desire for novelty has become a significant factor motivating individuals to engage in travel (Kim, 2014, p. 36). The significance of the novelty factor for MTEs lends further support to the assertion that novel and distinctive events are more memorable than those that are mundane (Chandralal et al., 2015, p. 690).

- **Local culture**

A number of reviews demonstrate that local culture exerts a significant influence on tourists’ MTEs. This assertion is substantiated by the following excerpts from reviews, including “local culture”, “local songs”, “local people” and “local food”. The importance of local culture as a component of MTEs is emphasised in the following reviews:

*“Last week, I participated in a Diyarbakır cultural tour programme organised by KT travel agency. I experienced a pleasant tour with a wonderful guide. I learned a lot about the local culture and local people. We listened to some local songs in the bus and they were very energetic. I would like to thank our guide for the detailed information he gave about the local culture.”*

*“2 days ago I joined a Mardin tour. It was a very fun tour and the tour staff were very interested. We have a guide who knows the local people well and knows the local culture very well. I learnt a lot of new information about history, local food and local culture. It was my first time in Mardin, the shopkeepers I shopped and the local people I had the opportunity to chat with were very friendly and hospitable.”*

The recall of past experiences is high among tourists who have experienced local culture during their trip (Kim, 2010, p. 791). Morgan and Xu (2009) suggested that travellers who engage with the local culture and people are more likely to construct a distinctive and memorable travel experience (p. 230). It has been observed that tourists are more likely to be impressed by local experiences than by typical or prearranged tourist activities. These experiences may include visiting local villages, chatting with local people, and sharing local lifestyles and cultures (Chandralal et al., 2015, p. 685).

## 5. Conclusion and implications

It is of paramount importance for travel agencies and destination management organisations to investigate and comprehend the elements that contribute to a memorable tour experience. This process offers invaluable insights to

travel agencies, destination management organisations and tourism marketers, enabling them to devise effective strategies that enhance the travel experience of tourists. Travel experiences are a prominent area of study within the field of tourism, as they constitute a fundamental aspect of the tourism experience. Despite the existence of a substantial body of research on travel experiences within the field of tourism literature, (Bose & Biju, 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Kim, 2010; Morgan & Xu, 2009; Tugade et al., 2023) the extant body of studies pertaining to memorable travel experiences of travellers in the domain of tours is, at this juncture, in its nascent stages. In view of the paucity of literature investigating the characteristics of memorable tour experiences, the principal purpose of the present study is to elucidate the unexplored dimensions of such experiences through the utilisation of netnographic analyses. The results of the research contribute to a more sophisticated comprehension of MTEs and augment the corpus of literature on tour experiences by incorporating MTEs through online reviews. Moreover, this study provides a substantial addition to the existing literature by offering new perspectives on the concept of the memorable tour experience. This is achieved through the utilisation of the netnography approach, which has not previously been employed in the examination of MTEs. Consequently, the findings of this study represent a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge in this field.

The findings of this study align with those of previous research in the field illustrate that tourists' experiences of tours contribute to the memorability of their overall travel experience (Bigne et al., 2020; Chandralal et al., 2015; Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Kim, 2010; Kim et al., 2019). While previous studies have identified the links between travel and memorable experiences, this study goes further by pinpointing the specific elements that contribute to MTEs. This provides invaluable insights into how tourists engage with their tours. In summary, the present study identifies the constituent elements of MTEs. These are shared experiences, knowledge, accommodation, professional guide, tour staff, hedonism, novelty, and local culture. The components of MTEs identified in this study contribute to the existing body of literature, which has yielded similar results (Bigne et al., 2020; Chandralal et al., 2015).

From a theoretical perspective, the present study employed a netnographic approach to elucidate the constituents of memorable tour experiences. This is the inaugural attempt to comprehend MTEs through the lens of netnography. Furthermore, this study contributes to the existing literature on the dimensions of MTEs in several ways. In the study by Kim (2010), memorable travel experiences were explored using a structural equation modelling analysis. However, this study employed a netnographic technique to gain insight into the key dimensions of MTEs, and revealed notable differences in certain dimensions, such as tour staff and professional guide.

In terms of the practical implications of the research, it makes a notable enhancement to the extant body of literature regarding the function of tour experience in engendering memorable experiences. Furthermore, the study has managerial implications for travel agencies. The findings of the study indicate that data regarding tourists' perceptions of their memorable tour experiences is vital for the development of tour experiences that align with tourists' expectations and preferences. In particular, the findings of this study indicate that professional guides should possess a comprehensive understanding of the local culture. Tourists who engage with local culture during their travels exhibit a high level of recall regarding their past experiences (Kim, 2010, p. 791). In addition to this, travel agencies and professional guides should incorporate novel and distinctive activities into the itinerary, as new or different experiences are more memorable than more conventional and routine tourism experiences (Chandralal et al., 2015, p. 687). As tour experiences constitute a significant component of the tourism experience, the findings of the research emphasise the importance of the tour experiences obtained during the tour for travel agencies. The quality of the tour experience has a profound effect on the memorability of the overall tourism experience. Furthermore, the strength of this effect is amplified when the tour includes novel activities, is conducted in a comfortable manner, and the tour guide and tour staff are friendly and possess effective communication skills. The findings of the study indicate that shared experiences, knowledge, accommodation, professional guides, tour staff, hedonism, novelty, and local culture are of particular importance. The findings of this study suggest that travel agencies and tour operators should consider incorporating distinctive activities and fostering a family-like atmosphere through increased social interaction between visitors and service providers. Furthermore, it is recommended that all staff members exhibit kindness and hospitality in their interactions with customers and prioritize the delivery of high-quality service. By taking the findings of this research into account and acting in a proactive manner to address them, the travel industry can adapt to the changing needs and preferences of travellers, thereby promoting sustainable growth and development.

In terms of the limitations of the study, it should be noted that the findings cannot be generalised, given that the research was conducted utilising online reviews concerning memorable tour experiences of tourists attending a tour conducted by two leading travel agencies in the South-eastern Anatolia Region. Therefore, further research could be conducted in the context of travel agencies and tour operators providing services in other regions with a similar approach. Another limitation is the method of the study; future studies should utilise a quantitative research method



to examine MTEs. Finally, reviews posted regarding tourists' memorable tour experiences on Google Maps were investigated, so other travel websites such as Tripadvisor.com and Withlocals.com can be used to perceive MTEs, thus making valuable contributions to the existing literature.

**Etik Kurul İzni / Ethics Committee Permission:**

It is hereby declared that all scientific and ethical principles were observed in the preparation of this study, and that all referenced sources have been properly cited in the bibliography. Ethics Committee Approval from the institution was not required for this study.

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## Reflections of Law No. 7500 Amendment on Career Decidedness of Tourist Guidance Students

**7500 Sayılı Kanun Değişikliğinin Turist Rehberliği Öğrencilerinin Kariyer Kararlılığına Yansımaları**

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### Abstract / Öz

Career decidedness refers to the consistent attitudes and behaviours individuals show towards career goals and is increasingly valued in career development literature. Basically, this concept, which includes the stability of the individual in career choices, resistance against obstacles and determination to achieve career goals, is a critical component of the professional development process. In this context, the main purpose of the research is to determine the differentiation between the perceptions of the students studying in the undergraduate programme of tourist guiding and their career stability regarding the amendment to the Law No. 6326 on Tourist Guiding Law No. 7500 dated 27/04/2024. In the research, data were collected with a questionnaire, which is one of the quantitative research techniques. A total of 177 students studying at Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Department of Tourism Guidance were reached. According to the findings, the law amendment caused concerns about the tourist guiding profession and negatively affected students' career expectations and perceptions of the profession's future. Research findings show that, after the legal changes, students' anxiety about the tourist guiding profession, career expectations, and future perceptions vary significantly by career decidedness levels. The study emphasises that career decidedness is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by structural and environmental factors, and reveals that especially legislative changes can play a decisive role in the professional orientation of young individuals. In this context, the study draws attention to the need to establish a holistic relationship between educational policies, occupational laws and psychological factors.

*Kariyer kararlılığı, bireylerin kariyer hedeflerine yönelik sürdürdükleri kararlı tutum ve davranışları ifade eden, kariyer gelişimi literatüründe giderek önem kazanan bir kavramdır. Temel olarak, bireyin kariyer seçimlerinde gösterdiği istikrar, engeller karşısındaki direnci ve kariyer hedeflerine ulaşma konusundaki azmi kapsayan bu kavram, mesleki gelişim sürecinin kritik bir bileşenidir. Bu kapsamda araştırmanın temel amacı, 6326 sayılı Turist Rehberliği Kanunu'nda yapılan 7500 sayılı ve 27/04/2024 tarihli yasa değişikliğine yönelik turist rehberliği lisans programında öğrenim gören öğrencilerin algıları ile kariyer kararlılıkları arasındaki farklılaşmayı belirlemektir. Araştırmada nicel araştırma tekniklerinden biri olan anket ile veri toplanmıştır. Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi Turizm Rehberliği Bölümü'nde öğrenim gören toplam 177 öğrenciye ulaşılmıştır. Bulgulara göre, ilgili yasa değişikliği öğrencilerin turist rehberliği mesleğine dair kaygılanmasına sebep olurken, kariyer beklentilerine dair algılarını da etkilemiştir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin turist rehberliği mesleğinin geleceğine yönelik algılarını olumsuz etkilemiştir. Dahası araştırma bulgularına göre, öğrencilerin Kanun'daki değişiklikler sonrasında turist rehberliği mesleğine dair kaygı, kariyer beklentisi ve mesleğin geleceğine ilişkin algıları, kariyer kararlılık düzeylerine göre anlamlı farklılıklar göstermektedir. Araştırma, kariyer kararlılığının yalnızca bireysel özelliklerle değil, yapısal ve çevresel faktörlerle de şekillendiğini vurgulayarak, özellikle mevzuat değişikliklerinin genç bireylerin mesleki yönelimlerinde belirleyici rol oynayabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, eğitim politikaları, meslek yasaları ve psikolojik etmenler arasında bütüncül bir ilişki kurulması gerektiğine dikkat çekmektedir.*

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## 1. Introduction

In today's rapidly changing business world, career commitment stands out as a fundamental factor shaping individuals' professional development. Career decidedness is an important concept that expresses individuals' commitment to their career goals and plans. This concept includes the level of determination shown in the process of career choice



and the tendency to persevere despite the obstacles encountered on the career path (Savickas, 2002).

Many people experience indecisions when making a career choice (Gati & Kulcsár, 2021). This is a normal part of the career development process. However, a prolonged period of career indecision both delays the entry into professional life and negatively affects the psychological state of the person (Feldman, 2003; Viola et al., 2016). Although the career concept has become more flexible in today's business world, individuals who show a stable commitment to certain fields may have higher personal development and professional satisfaction (Ingersoll et al., 2002; Zhang et al., 2014). In this context, career stability is considered as a multidimensional structure that includes not only individuals' tendency to stay at work but also how they define and maintain their professional identity.

The amendments made to the Law No. 6326, which determines the legal framework of the tourist guiding profession, with the Law No. 7500 have had important consequences, especially for students in the preparation process for the profession. These new regulations include structural transformations that directly affect students' perceptions of the profession, career expectations and determination. In particular, the redefinition of foreign language proficiency requirements, the introduction of an admission exam to the profession, the existence of a professional segregation called Turkish Guiding, wage differences in Turkish or foreign language guiding activities, and prohibitions on commission-based income models stand out as variables that may be decisive on students' career determination. In addition, the opportunity to enter the profession with a short-term education granted to graduates outside the tourist guiding department may also negatively affect the perceptions of department students towards comprehensive education processes.

Based on all these, the main purpose of this study is to determine the differentiation between the perceptions of the students studying in the undergraduate programme of tourist guiding and their career decidedness towards the amendment of the Tourist Guidance Law No. 7500 dated 27/04/2024. In this context, it is examined how this legal regulation is perceived by the students and how this perception shapes their attitudes and plans towards their careers. The research makes an important contribution to understanding the relationship between legal regulations in the tourist guiding profession, professional attitudes and career determination. In particular, it contributes to the establishment of a more holistic relationship between educational policies and occupational laws by providing data to understand whether occupational uncertainties shape the career decisions of young individuals.

## 1.1. Literature Review

### 1.2.1. Career Decidedness

Career is a concept that refers to an individual's work history, occupation and working positions, and upward progression in an occupation and in life in general (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2006). Career stability, on the other hand, is a multidimensional structure that involves individuals developing a consistent, stable and long-term commitment to their professional lives (Miller, 2011). This concept includes the individual's capacity to resist the occupational difficulties encountered as well as dedication, perseverance and determination to adapt to the career he/she has chosen (Li et al., 2019; Savickas, 2002).

Many individuals may experience indecision in the career choice process (Xu et al., 2019). Although this is a natural part of the career development process, the prolongation of this process, especially until graduation, both delays the transition to professional life and negatively affects the psychological well-being of the individual (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2006; Arnold, 1989). On the other hand, individuals with high career stability exhibit a high level of professional identity development, work longer in their chosen occupational field and can evaluate career opportunities more effectively (Hirschi & Valero, 2017; Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010). In addition, it is known that these individuals show higher job performance, career satisfaction, job commitment and career adaptability in their professional lives (Earl & Bright, 2007; Hartung et al., 2022; Hirschi, 2014; Ng & Feldman, 2009). Psychologically, individuals who approach their careers with determination exhibit higher levels of psychological well-being, subjective well-being and life satisfaction; they also have lower levels of depression and occupational burnout and higher academic achievement due to having a specific goal (Arslan, 2022; Hirschi, 2011; Le et al., 2024; Lounsbury et al., 1999; Maslienko, 2024; Uthayakumar et al., 2010).

Career commitment is shaped by the interaction of individual characteristics (e.g. personality, values), environmental conditions (e.g. job security, supportive management), educational background and occupational socialisation processes (Aryee & Tan, 1992; Fearon et al., 2028; Yu et al., 2021). At the same time, in addition to individual factors such as self-efficacy, decision-making skills and tolerance to ambiguity, social support systems and economic conditions also play a decisive role in career decidedness (Hirschi et al., 2011; Restubog et al., 2014). On the other hand, career decidedness is a skill that can be learnt and developed. The development of this skill facilitates individuals to take the necessary steps to achieve their career goals and overcome the problems



they face more effectively (Glaize & Myrick, 1984; Arslan, 2022).

When the factors affecting career decidedness are evaluated within the framework of career development theories, 'career maturity', which is emphasised in Super's (1990) lifelong career development theory, stands out with individuals clarifying their professional identities and acting systematically in career planning (Ginzberg, 1972). Among the factors shaping career determination, cognitive elements, person-occupation fit and educational experiences play an important role. While Lent and Brown's (2013) social cognitive theory emphasises the effect of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations on determination, Holland (1997) states that the harmony between personality traits and professional environment strengthens this process. In addition, cultural dynamics also affect career determination; family expectations in collectivist societies and personal values in individualist societies come to the fore (Fouad & Kantamneni, 2008). All these theories reveal that career decidedness is a multidimensional process and is shaped by both internal and environmental factors.

When the career decidedness studies of university students in recent years are examined in the literature, the issue of career decidedness is generally related to quality of education, academic achievement and motivation (Bargmann et al., 2022; Işkın et al., 2024; İrge et al., 2020; Koyuncuoglu, 2021), psychological well-being (Arslan, 2022; Erhan et al., 2021; Kadakal & Gamze, 2023; Polat, 2022), career stress (Arslan & Uyar, 2020; Çöp, 2020; Gültekin, 2022; Le et al., 2024), artificial intelligence (Ak, 2022; Köse, 2025; Yazıcı, 2023). In addition, there are many studies aiming to determine students' career decidedness in general (Hartung et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2024; Karimi et al., 2024; Özkaya & Kılıç, 2023; Toyokawa & DeWald, 2020; Ulun, 2023; Yu et al., 2021). In the literature on tourist guiding, students have concerns about the difficulties arising from the nature of the job in their career planning. When the studies on this subject are examined, problems such as working conditions, sectoral problems, crises, epidemics make tourist guidance students think about their future plans (Büyükkuru, 2022; Cavus & Kaya, 2015; Gökdemir et al., 2021; Karacaoğlu, & Cankül, 2021; Pelit et al., 2021; Yetgin et al., 2018; Yılmaz, 2011). Understanding and supporting these factors in the career journey of university students is of great importance for both individual success and social development; therefore, holistic approaches that address academic, psychological and technological dynamics together play a critical role for effective career guidance.

### *1.2.2. Legal Development Process of Tourist Guiding Profession in Türkiye*

The tourist guide profession has been shaped by various legal regulations from the Ottoman Empire to the present day, and has become one of the indispensable elements of the tourism sector by gaining an institutional identity over time. In the 1890s, with the idea that non-Muslim guides damaged the image of the Ottoman Empire (Gülersoy, 1996) and as a result of the propaganda of minority groups against the Ottoman Empire, the first regulations were made on the guiding profession in order to take measures. The Regulation No. 190, dated 29 October 1890, went down in history as the first attempt to institutionalise the guiding profession (Albuz et al., 2018). In 1925, with the Decree No. 2730 on Interpreting and Guiding Foreign Travellers, the importance of education was mentioned and intensive standards were introduced for guidance (Istanbul Chamber of Guides, 2025). In 1929, the first interpreter guide course was organised by the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of Economics, and thus, for the first time, the principles of interpreter guide certificates, which had been distributed by the municipalities until then, were determined, and again for the first time, tourist guiding became a profession obtained as a result of an examination. In 1930, the issue of taxation of guides came to the agenda for the first time, and guiding was recognised as a profession under the law (Çimrin, 1995).

In 1963, an important development took place and the Ministry of Tourism and Promotion was established. The Ministry opened courses in big cities and kept the tourist guide profession under its supervision. In 1971, another important step was taken to standardise the profession and the Regulation on Interpreter Guide Courses and Interpreter Guides was published (Eser, 2018). With a regulation published in the Official Gazette in 1988, issues related to the supervision of guides were left to the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TÜRSAB) and other relevant associations, while courses could be opened by other organisations under the supervision of the ministry. However, this situation was transferred back to the ministry with another regulation published in 1990 (Official Gazette, 09.12.1988).

The 2012 Law No. 6326 on Tourist Guiding Profession is a turning point for tourist guides. In 2014, with the publication of the Regulation on Tourist Guiding Profession, tourist guiding has gained a professional status. The tourist guiding profession, which is structured through professional chambers and the union to which the chambers are affiliated, consists of a total of 13 professional chambers in different regions and a union to which these chambers are members. Founded in 1998 by the merger of four different tourist guiding professional organisations, the Association of Tourist Guides (TUREB) held its first ordinary general assembly after the professional law enacted in 2012 and became the highest organisation of the tourist guiding profession in Turkey. In 2022, its name was changed to Union of Chambers of Tourist Guides as a result of an official trademark application.

Finally, with the Law No. 7500 dated 27 April 2024 and numbered 7500, some amendments were made to the Professional Law No. 6326 on Tourist Guiding Profession in terms of professional ethical standards. This amendment brought about a radical transformation especially in the criteria for access to the profession, supervision mechanisms and disciplinary provisions. In addition, the Regulation on the Implementation of the Authorities and Duties Given to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism by the Tourist Guide Profession Law No. 6326 was published in the Official Gazette on 07.11.2024.

### *1.2.3. Amendment to The Law Numbered 7500 and Dated 27/04/2024*

With the 27/04/2024 amendment to the Law No. 6326 on Tourist Guide Profession, the conditions for access to the profession have been significantly revised. Some important amendments are explained below (resmigazete.gov.tr, 10.03.2025):

- While under Law No. 6326, certificate programmes were proposed by professional associations and TÜRSAB and carried out with the approval of the Ministry; with Law No. 7500, the name of these programmes was changed to training programmes and it was envisaged that they would be organised directly on the initiative of the Ministry. Another noteworthy revision in this context is that the trainings in question are no longer limited to professional associations, but also competent public institutions are included in the process. In addition, foreign language exams, which were previously organised upon the joint proposal of the professional associations and TÜRSAB and the approval of the Ministry, will be held in line with the request and under the supervision of the Ministry.
- For foreign language proficiency, it is necessary to get at least 75 points from the YDS organised by ÖSYM or to have an equivalent document, and in the languages that are not included in the exam calendar by ÖSYM in the year in which the Ministry requests the exam to be held, foreign language exams will be held by the unions or public institutions and organisations specialised in their fields under the supervision and supervision of the Ministry upon the request of the Ministry.
- Those who are successful in the admission to the profession exam conducted by public institutions and organisations specialised in their field upon the request of the Ministry and who meet the other conditions will be able to guide by obtaining a licence.
- For candidates who will work as a guide in Far Eastern languages (Chinese, etc.), the requirement for a tourist guiding programme has been abolished, and one hundred hours of training and a practice trip are deemed sufficient. In addition, it is sufficient for those who specialise in this department to have a university degree at associate degree level.
- In addition, for art history and archaeology graduates, the requirement for a tourist guiding training programme has been abolished, and only one hundred hours of training and a practical trip are required.
- Candidates who have graduated from another undergraduate programme are required to successfully complete the guidance training and admission exam in the specified foreign languages.
- Changes have also been made to the language requirements for the practice of the profession. Guiding activities will only be carried out in foreign languages written on the work card. However, if the guide is a guiding in the Turkish language or if the tour participants request services in Turkish, the guidance service may be provided in Turkish. It is obligatory to comply with the law and professional ethical principles in the use of language.
- A new regulation has also been made regarding the fee for guiding in Turkish. Accordingly, the fee to be charged for performing the profession in Turkish will be at least 70 per cent of the base fee. The fees will be determined and announced by the Ministry.
- In addition, the relevant local administrative authority will impose an administrative fine from twenty-five thousand Turkish Liras to one hundred thousand Turkish Liras on tourist guides who provide any benefit to themselves or the person they will guide in return for sending tourists to a certain business for shopping purposes without their knowledge and approval.

### *1.2.4. The Effect of Law No. 7500 Amendments on the Career Decidedness of Tourist Guidance Students*

The amendments made to the Law No. 6326 on Tourist Guiding Profession with the Law No. 7500 have the potential to have significant effects on the career decisions of tourist guiding students. The new regulations include elements that may directly affect students' professional motivation, their perceptions towards the profession and their long-term career planning.

First of all, prior to the amendment, candidates who passed the foreign language exam organised by TUREB could also obtain a work card, whereas with the new regulation, only a minimum score of 75 points from ÖSYM's Foreign Language Examination (YDS) or equivalent international exams is required. This may be perceived as an aggravation of the conditions, especially for students who rely on TUREB exams or seek alternative ways of language learning. This new language proficiency requirement carries the risk of weakening students' commitment to their careers and increasing the tendency to give up early. As a matter of fact, there are studies in the literature stating that one of the issues that tourist guiding students are hesitant to do the profession is the language problem (Şahin & Erdem, 2021) and focusing on the relatively low rate of passing the language requirement even in TUREB exams in recent years (Akgül & Aktaş, 2023).

The minimum 100 hours of training required for candidates graduating from disciplines other than tourist guiding can be considered as an insufficient qualification standard when compared to the long-term and comprehensive training processes of tourist guiding students. In the literature, as one of the problems of the fragmented structure in tourism guidance education, even the provision of education at associate degree and non-thesis master's degree levels leads to discussions on adequacy (Çokişler, 2022; Keleş et al., 2024; Kürkçü, 2018), while 100 hours of training can be questioned by students. This situation carries the risk of creating a perception of inefficiency in the use of time and resources in terms of professional preparation in students who prefer the programme in question, leading to a loss of motivation that their choice of programme is unnecessary. Comparing the 100-hour training obligation imposed on graduates other than the tourist guiding department with the comprehensive training received by tourist guiding students may lead to the perception that their efforts are not sufficiently valued. This perception may lead to indecision in students' career planning and weaken their expectations of professional satisfaction and commitment.

Law No. 7500 and the obligation of 'admission exam to the profession' directly affect the students of the department of tourist guiding and increase their concerns about their professional future. The admission exam to the profession displays an approach that does not consider the theoretical and practical competences that students have acquired during their undergraduate education as sufficient; this situation creates a risk of motivational breakdown by creating the perception that 'my academic education is insufficient for transition to the profession'. The existence of this exam may increase students' feelings of stress and uncertainty during the transition to the profession and negatively affect their career determination. Students' concern that the theoretical and practical knowledge they have acquired during their education process will not be sufficient for them to directly enter the profession may become one of the main sources of motivational breakdowns.

Another regulation, guiding in the Turkish language counselling, may also cause anxiety among students. Turkish language counselling, which was not a separate category in the past as all counsellors were fluent in Turkish, has been fixed to at least 70% of the base fee with the new regulation. This situation increases the risk of students, especially those without foreign language proficiency, being stuck in a low-fee segment. Even for students with language skills, the low pay scale of guiding in the Turkish language may erode the economic value of multilingual expertise and reduce professional attractiveness. In defence of this idea, in the study conducted by Düzgün (2021), in which the perceptions of guidance in Turkish language were examined, travel agency representatives favoured guidance in Turkish language, while tour guides agreed that this would cause serious damage to the tourist guiding profession. This result may be an indication that future guides will experience sectoral problems related to Turkish-language guidance.

Finally, according to the law, the act of providing benefit by directing tourists to commercial enterprises without their knowledge will be penalised with administrative fines. Commission-based guiding practices in tourism guidance are often found to be contrary to ethical principles and therefore criticised (Çokişler, 2023; Taşkın, 2021). However, it is known that it is seen as a method that provides additional income for tourist guides (Tetik, 2006). Rather than banning these practices completely, measures can be proposed within certain rules and in a way that does not create ethical problems. Because this situation may mean a narrowing of alternative sources of income for some guides and a more competitive entry into the sector.

Law No. 7500's regulations such as the obligation to take a language exam, admission exam to the profession, low wages for guiding in the Turkish language, and commission bans stand out as factors that directly test the career decidedness of tourist guiding students. While these changes create an environment that requires more effort, flexibility and specialisation to pursue their professional goals, they also challenge their motivational resilience.

Based on all these considerations, the following hypotheses were formed:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Students' concerns about the tourist guiding profession after the changes in Law No. 7500 differ according to their career determination.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Students' career expectations about tourist guiding after the changes in Law No. 7500 differ according to their

career determination.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Students' perceptions about the future of the tourist guiding profession after the changes in Law No. 7500 differ according to their career determination.

## 2. Method and Data

The tourist guide profession plays a critical role in terms of both the transfer of cultural heritage and the sustainability of the tourism sector. However, changes in the legal status and practice area of the profession can directly affect the attitudes of individuals studying in this field towards the profession. This study aims to provide important findings that will guide future education and employment policies by revealing the perceptual effects of the relevant law change on students.

The main purpose of this research is to determine the effect of the amendment of the law numbered 7500 and dated 27/04/2024 on the career decisions of students studying in the undergraduate programme of tourist guiding. In this context, it is examined how this legal regulation is perceived by students and how this perception shapes their attitudes and plans towards their careers.

This study makes an original contribution to the career decision-making literature by analysing the impact of legal regulations. It adds a new dimension to existing theories by showing that career decisions can be shaped not only by individual and environmental but also by legislative changes. The findings obtained in the field of tourist guiding can shed light on other professional fields that examine the effects of similar regulations. In addition, the research generates guiding data for educational institutions, professional organisations and legislators by focusing on student perceptions. In this way, it will be possible both to improve educational policies and to take into account the student perspective in future legal regulations.

### 2.1. Sampling and Data Collection

Within the scope of the study, the sample of the research consists of students studying in the Department of Tourism Guidance at Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Faculty of Tourism in the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. Since it allows collecting a large number of data in a short time, convenience sampling method was preferred (Altunışık et al., 2012) and students who agreed to fill out the questionnaire were included in the sample. The number of students enrolled in the programme within the specified period is 221 in total. However, the questionnaire form was applied to 180 students due to reasons such as limited research time, extension of the semester, and non-attendance to the courses. The questionnaires were examined and the analyses continued over 177 since there was no missing data.

### 2.2. Instrument

In the application part of the research, data collection with a questionnaire, which is one of the quantitative research techniques, was preferred to collect data. Career Stability was determined with the scale developed by Lounsbury et al. (1999) and adapted to Turkish by Akçakanat and Uzunbacak (2019) and validity and reliability study was conducted. The scale consists of six items and one dimension. Items 2, 5 and 6 in the scale were reverse scored. All measurements were made with a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree).

In addition, a section consisting of three questions was designed to measure students' perceptions towards the New Tourist Guiding Profession Law No. 7500. Participants,

- Responding 'Yes' or 'No' to the statement 'After the new Tourist Guidance Profession Law (No. 7500), I had concerns about the tourist guiding profession',
- Changes in Law No. 7500 have affected my career expectation' were asked to answer "Yes" or "No".
- To indicate their perceptions about the future of the profession with the options 'I have positive thoughts' or 'I have negative thoughts',

### 2.3. Data Analysis

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used for data analysis. Before starting the data analysis, it was examined whether the data obtained from the participants were suitable for the analysis to be applied. At this point, the steps suggested by Hair et al. (2018) were followed. Accordingly, respectively; identification of missing data, detection and elimination of extreme values and control of normal distribution assumption were made. There were no missing data in the results of the survey. In the first part of the study, the constructs or variables to be subjected to hypothetical tests were defined in detail and explained theoretically. Then, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the construct validity of the scale. AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) programme was used for

CFA. After the normal distribution test, the findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants were expressed with frequency and percentage distributions. In addition, in order to measure the perceptions of the students towards the New Tourist Guiding Profession Law No. 7500, the scales related to three questions and career decidedness were defined with frequency and percentage values. In addition, in the comparison of the career decidedness of the students according to their perceptions towards the New Tourist Guiding Profession Law, T test analysis for two groups from parametric tests was used since the data fit the normal distribution.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Since the scale used in the study is a scale that has been used before and whose factor structures are known, CFA was performed only to test the construct validity (Meydan & Şeşen, 2015). In this study, chi-square/df, RMSEA, CFI, RMR values were analysed as goodness of fit indices for construct validity. The goodness of fit value for chi-square/df should be less than 3, and the acceptable value should be less than 5. The range of CFI value is between 0.95 and 1. The acceptable range is between 0.94 and 0.95. RMR and RMSEA values should be less than 5. Acceptable values are between 0.06 and 0.08 for RMR and between 0.05 and 0.10 for RMSEA (Meydan & Şeşen, 2015; Kline, 2011). The goodness of fit values of the scale are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Confirmatory factor analysis*

Dimension	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	RMR	RMSEA
Career Decidedness	2,648	,987	,035	,076

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that  $\chi^2/df$ , CFI and RMR values of the goodness of fit values of the career decidedness scale are in the range of good fit values, and RMSEA values are between acceptable goodness of fit values. In this case, the scale consisting of 6 statements and a single dimension was validated as it is without removing any statement from the scale.

#### 3.2. Normal Distribution Test

Normality test is a test that includes skewness and kurtosis coefficients and tests whether a given data set is normally distributed. In studies, if the skewness and kurtosis indices calculated by dividing the skewness and kurtosis coefficients by their standard errors at 5% significance level are within  $\pm 2$  limits, the sample data are considered to be normally distributed (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018). The values of kurtosis and skewness coefficients are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *Kurtosis and skewness values*

Dimension	Items	Kurtosis(k)	Skewness (s)
Career Decidedness	I've made a firm decision about my career.	0,332	0,068
	I find it difficult to choose between different professions.	-1,350	0,393
	I know what I want to do for a living.	-0,253	-0,921
	I know that one day I'll have a job I want.	-1,439	-0,021
	I don't know what kind of work I want to do when I graduate.	-1,432	0,355
	I'm going back and forth about which career to pursue.	-1,037	0,659

Note: Items 2, 5 and 6 were reverse scored.

Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk analysis was also performed for normality test. The test values related to the career decidedness dimension are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** *Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk values*

Dimension	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	p	Statistic	df	p
Career Decidedness	0,068	177	0,065	0,981	177	0,078

According to Table 3, the data for the career decidedness variable are normally distributed. For these analyses, if the p-value is greater than 0.05, the data are considered normally distributed (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018).

As a result of the normality test, it was determined that univariate and multivariate normality was achieved. In this case, the measurement model is suitable for the analyses.



### 3.3. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Within the scope of the research, some descriptive statistics related to the career decidedness scale are given in Table 4. All measurements were made with 5-point Likert scale.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics for the career decidedness variable

	Items	n	Overall Average	Standard Deviation
Career Decidedness	I've made a firm decision about my career.	177	3,2655	0,97269
	I find it difficult to choose between different professions.	177	2,5424	1,51119
	I know what I want to do for a living.	177	3,9040	1,24628
	I know that one day I'll have a job I want.	177	3,3220	1,28506
	I don't know what kind of work I want to do when I graduate.	177	2,5367	1,51510
	I'm going back and forth about which career to pursue.	177	2,3559	1,47821
Total		177	2,9878	0,91546

When Table 4 is examined, the students' career determinedness is above average (2.98). This finding makes it possible to evaluate that the students have career determination.

### 3.4. Demographic Findings

Data on the demographic status of Tourist Guiding students within the scope of the research are given in Table 5 with frequency and percentage distributions.

**Table 5.** Distribution of demographic characteristics of tourist guiding students

Dimensions	Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	102	57,6
	Male	75	42,4
Classroom	1st grade	47	26,6
	2nd grade	56	31,6
	3rd grade	39	22,0
	4th grade	35	19,8
Professional experience	None	100	56,5
	1 year	41	23,2
	2-4 years	34	19,2
	7 years and above	2	1,1
Department preference order	1-4	100	56,5
	5-8	45	25,4
	9-12	19	10,7
	12 and above	13	7,3
Satisfaction with the department	I'm satisfied	152	85,9
	I am not satisfied	25	14,1
Total		177	100

When the demographic profile of tourist guide students is examined in Table 5, it is seen that the gender distribution is higher in women (57.6%). The highest participation in terms of class comes from 2nd year students (31.6%). According to the answers given to the question measuring professional experience in the field of tourism during university and high school education in the form of internship or in another way, those with no professional experience are in the majority (56.5%). The first four choices stand out in the department preference order (56.5%) and the general satisfaction rate is quite high (85.9%).

**Table 6.** Concerns about the profession and career expectations after the new Tourist Guide Profession Law

Dimensions	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
After the amendments in Law No. 7500, I had concerns about the tourist guide profession	Yes	164	94
	No	13	11,2
Changes in Law 7500 affected my career prospects	Yes	153	86,4
	No	24	13,6
Total		177	100

The situation of students' concerns about the tourist guide profession after the New Tourist Guide Profession Law and the effects of the changes in the Law on students' career expectations are given in Table 6.

When the table is examined, the majority of students (94%, n=164) stated that their concerns about the tourist guide profession increased after the new law. In contrast, only 11.2% (n=13) students stated that they did not experience any concerns. This situation shows that the legal regulation had a significant impact on the perception of the profession. When the effect of the legal changes on career expectations was examined, 86.4% (n=153) of the students stated that they were negatively affected, while only 13.6% (n=24) stated that they were not affected. This result shows that the new regulation created uncertainty and anxiety about the students' professional future.

**Table 7.** *Perceptions on the future of the profession after the new Tourist Guide Profession Law*

Dimension	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
7500 on the future of the tourist guiding profession after the amendments in Law No. 7500	I have positive thoughts	14	7,9
	I have negative thoughts	163	92,1
Total		177	100

The students' positive and negative perceptions about the future of the tourist guide profession after Law No. 7500 are given in Table 7.

According to Table 7, 92.1% (n=163) of the participants stated that they had negative thoughts about the future of the tourist guiding profession after the New Tourist Guiding Profession Law No. 7500, while only 7.9% (n=14) expressed positive thoughts.

### 3.5. Testing the Hypothesis

In order to test the hypotheses related to the research, T Test was used to compare two groups in the analysis of differences. In this context, it was examined whether the students' concerns about the tourist guiding profession after the New Tourist Guiding Profession Law, the effect of the changes in the Law on the career expectations of the students and their perceptions about the future of the tourist guiding profession after the Law differ according to their career determination. Table 8 shows the results of the analyses for this study.

**Table 8.** *T-test results on concerns about the profession and career expectations, perceptions about the future of the profession and career decidedness after the new Tourist Guiding Profession Law*

Dimension	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
After the amendments in Law No. 7500, I had concerns about the tourist guide profession	Yes	2,9217	,84610	-2,406	,032
	No	3,8205	1,32543		
Changes in Law 7500 affected my career prospects	Yes	2,8715	,87703	-4,737	,000
	No	3,7292	,81622		
7500 on the future of the tourist guiding profession after the amendments in Law No. 7500	I have positive thoughts	3,6667	,79529	3,291	,005
	I have negative thoughts	2,9294	,90360		

Firstly, it was examined whether the students' concerns about the tourist guiding profession after the changes in the Law No. 7500 differed according to their career decidedness. In this context, a significant difference was found between the students' anxiety about the tourist guiding profession after the changes in the Law and their career decidedness scores ( $t = -2,406$ ,  $p = 0,032$ ). This finding reveals that students' career decidedness levels differ according to their anxiety about the profession. Therefore,  $H_1$  was supported.

Secondly, career decidedness levels of the students were compared according to whether their career expectations were affected by the changes in the Law. This difference is statistically significant ( $t = -4,737$ ,  $p = 0,000$ ). The results show that the career decidedness levels of the students differ according to the effect of the changes in the Law on their career expectations. Therefore,  $H_2$  is supported.

Finally, the differentiation of students' perceptions about the future of the profession after the changes in the Law according to their career decidedness levels was analysed. This difference is also statistically significant ( $t = 3,291$ ,  $p = 0,005$ ). This finding shows that there is a significant difference in students' career decidedness according to their perceptions about the future of the profession after the amendment of the Law. Therefore,  $H_3$  is supported.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

Career decidedness is a fundamental factor affecting individuals' professional development and career success in the changing business world. Career determination, which is shaped by factors such as individual characteristics, occupational changes and career policies, has positive or negative consequences both professionally and psychologically. For this reason, the importance of developing strategies to support career decidedness should not be underestimated for sustainable career decidedness and success.

The main purpose of this research is to determine the differentiation between the perceptions of the students studying in the undergraduate programme of tourist guidance and their career decidedness towards the amendment of the Tourist Guidance Law No. 7500 dated 27/04/2024. In this direction, it is investigated how the legal changes are evaluated by the students and how these evaluations affect their professional determination. In particular, by examining how uncertainties about their professional future play a role in the decision-making processes of young individuals; it produces information to establish a more harmonious and sustainable structure between professional laws and educational policies.

The findings show that there has been a significant transformation in students' perceptions of the profession after the law change and that this change in perception is significantly related to their career determination. Firstly, it was determined that the career decidedness levels of the students were generally above the average. This shows that students have a basic level of professional orientation and determination. There are studies in the literature showing similar results on the career decisions of tourist guidance students (Gökdemir et al., 2021; Ilgaz & Güzel, 2019; Karacaoğlu & Cankül, 2021).

One of the other important findings of the study is that the majority of the students stated that they were concerned about the tourist guiding profession after the amendment of the law. In addition, students stated that the law amendment negatively affected their career expectations. And overwhelmingly, students stated that they had negative perceptions about the future of the profession after the law amendment. Similarly, Karanfil (2024) and Alniaçık et al. (2021) revealed in their studies that in case of occupational uncertainty, students' future anxiety increased and this negatively affected their career attitudes. These findings show that the individual is directly affected by the perception of uncertainty about the future. As a matter of fact, Lent et al. (2002) emphasise that environmental conditions shape the individual's occupational outcome expectations within the scope of Social Cognitive Career Theory. Moreover, these findings reveal that individuals consider not only their personal interests and skills but also their expectations of future job security and status in the process of career choice. Similarly, research also argues that individuals pay attention to the security provided by the profession while forming their career preferences (Batyrbekova et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2010). It is thought that these high levels of anxiety observed in students are due to the regulations introduced by Law No. 7500, such as the obligation to take a professional admission exam, policies towards students graduating from different departments, low-paid Turkish counselling practice and commission bans, making the transition to the profession more uncertain, competitive and costly. These factors negatively affect students' career decidedness by strengthening their perceptions that their professional competencies and efforts are not rewarded. Such sudden and uncertain changes in the structural conditions of the profession can interrupt career development by weakening students' perceptions of self-efficacy and outcome expectations related to the profession. Students' developing negative thoughts about the future of the profession can be considered as a factor that may also weaken the formation of professional identity.

T-test analyses revealed that students' levels of occupational anxiety, career expectations and perceptions of the future of the profession after the legislative amendments showed significant differences according to their levels of career determination. This finding is quite striking in terms of showing that the concept of career decidedness is sensitive not only to individual characteristics but also to external and structural factors, especially to legislative changes. The occupational anxieties experienced by the students after the legislative changes, the negative transformation in their career expectations and the negative perceptions they develop about the future of the profession directly affect their career decisions. With reference to this situation, Duffy and Dik (2009) emphasised the importance of other factors in the career development process rather than personal reasons. At the same time, this situation shows how coping resources discussed in Savickas' (1997) career adaptation theory can weaken in the face of external stressors such as legislation. In particular, students with low career decidedness experience higher levels of anxiety in the environment of occupational uncertainty, which may lead to a tendency to leave the profession in the long term (Bozkurt, 2023; Neumark, 2000).

The significance of this finding is multi-layered in terms of educational planning, curriculum development and vocational policies. The fact that students' career decidedness levels are strongly affected by external factors such as the law is not only an individual psychological reaction, but also a sign of institutional fragility. This situation makes it necessary for vocational education institutions, especially tourism faculties, to design an education process that raises

awareness not only about professional knowledge but also about professional laws and rights in order to strengthen students' career orientation. In addition, evaluating the changes to be made in the professional laws not only with the sector stakeholders but also with the students preparing for the profession will contribute to the protection of future professional belonging and motivation to enter the sector. For this reason, it is necessary to realise that the perceptions formed after the legislative changes should not be seen only as a temporary reaction, but on the contrary, they may have permanent consequences that may affect career processes in the long term.

In conclusion, this study shows that the legal regulation in the field of tourist guiding has significant effects on students' professional attitudes and orientations. It is clear that legislative changes affect not only the field of practice but also psychological processes such as professional motivation and career expectations.

#### 4.1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the career decidedness literature primarily due to the lack of studies analysing the relationship between legal regulations and individuals' career orientations. In the existing literature, career decision-making is addressed through education quality, academic achievement and motivation, psychological well-being, career stress and artificial intelligence. However, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature by revealing the relationship between perceptions of legal changes and individuals' career decisions.

The theoretical contributions of this study stand out by revealing how structural and environmental factors interact with individual psychological processes in the career development literature. Within the framework of basic models such as Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2002) and Career Adjustment Theory (Savickas, 1997), it offers a new perspective on these theories by concretising the relationship between legislative changes and professional stability and professional expectations. In particular, the findings showing that legal regulations may weaken career decidedness by creating occupational uncertainty deepen the environment-individual interaction in career psychology.

#### 4.2. Practical Implications

The research has critical implications for vocational education institutions and policy makers. While it is emphasised that tourism faculties should integrate professional laws, rights and skills to cope with changing sectoral dynamics into their curricula, it is suggested that taking students' perceptions and aspirations into account in law-making processes can play a protective role in professional belonging. Furthermore, it is suggested that -psychoeducational-interventions (e.g. uncertainty management trainings) and vocational counselling services should be developed to reduce students' career anxieties, while industry stakeholders should design wage policies and career opportunities that meet the expectations of graduates. This study provides an interdisciplinary perspective on the need to systematically address the human factor in policy design, proving that legal regulations are not only legal texts, but also have profound psychological effects on professional identity and social motivation.

Although this study makes an important contribution to the literature through its different findings, it should be recognised that the study has some limitations. Firstly, due to the adoption of convenience sampling method in data collection, the results of the study reflect only the attitudes of the tourist guiding students of the only faculty where the data were collected. In addition, the difficulties experienced in reaching the students due to the limited time of the research and the difficulties experienced in reaching the students due to reasons such as extension of the semester, not attending the courses or not having the obligation of attendance made it difficult to reach all the students in the sampling frame. In this direction, it is thought that determining the attitudes of tourism guidance students towards the profession with the data to be obtained from a larger sample volume through random sampling methods will contribute to the literature.

In future studies, the use of qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions is recommended to gain a deeper understanding of students' personal experiences and emotional reactions regarding the legislative changes. Such approaches can uncover nuanced insights into how students perceive legal uncertainty, how it affects their sense of professional identity, and what coping strategies they develop. Moreover, a longitudinal research design could be employed to examine the long-term effects of legal regulations on students' career planning. Tracking the same cohort of students over time would provide more detailed information about how perceptions and career intentions evolve as they approach graduation or enter the workforce.

#### Ethics Committee Permission/Etik Kurul İzni:

This study was conducted by Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Scientific Research and Ethics Board, with the approval of the ethics committee dated 23.05.2025 and Decision No. 2025.06.219

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**Conflict of Interest/ Çıkar Çatışması:**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with any individual, organization, or institution.

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