



An Evaluation of Geotourism Potential of Yatağan Geopark (Gökbel Valley-Marsyas) through SWOT Analysis

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Extensive Summary

Environmental consciousness and awareness of cultural values which increased as a result of the negative effects of mass tourism have led individuals who desire to experience different geographies and cultures to alternative tourism types. In this regard, geotourism, that is also considered as a part of tourism types such as rural tourism, ecotourism and cultural heritage tourism, which are performed with perspective of sustainable tourism approach, stand out among the current tourism trends. Geotourism is comprised of visits to areas that are not only of geological importance, but also visually attractive. Geosports, hiking, photography and similar activities in geological heritage areas, recreation activities in villages, restaurants, hotels in stone caves or structures, geo-festivals, geological information obtaining in the local atmosphere within the geo-tours, experiencing geo-products are activities amongst the tourism activities within the scope of geotourism.

Geotourism, carried out by opening geoparks and geosites to tourism in accordance with sustainability criteria, is seen as a distinctive strategy for the protection of natural and cultural heritage that is in danger of extinction. Geoparks, which are generally located in rural areas, support rural development by contributing to the revival of the regional economy as a result of the touristic demand and employment opportunities they create. Geoparks are important in terms of natural and cultural heritage because they are considered as documents proving the evolution of the world. Besides that, being convenient for scientific studies and educational activities increase the tourism potential of geoparks.

The aim of this study is to examine the geotourism potential of Yatağan Geopark in Gökbel Valley on Yatağan-Çine highway. In accordance with this purpose, field research and literature review were carried out and data were obtained to determine the geotourism potential of the region. Research data were evaluated by SWOT analysis to determine the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats that geotourism activities have for the development in the region. As a result of the research, it was revealed that strengths of Yatağan Geopark are more than its weaknesses, and its opportunities have greater advantages over possible threats.

Locating on a wider area compared to geoparks around the World, owning the oldest gneiss of Anatolia, having high potential of cultural tourism due to the fact that the presence of historical and cultural structures/monuments, and being on an easy-to-reach highway route stand out among the strengths of Yatağan Geopark. However, the lack of awareness of Geopark and inability to ensure effective local governance for the realization of the geopark project were evaluated as weaknesses. The presence of important historical, archeological and geological values near the geopark, and the development agency's support of projects for alternative tourism and ecotourism activities are some of the outstanding opportunities.

Geotourism activities aimed at protecting the natural and geological heritage, ensuring its sustainability, transferring it to future generations without deterioration, learning about the past of the world we live in scientifically as well as introducing the phenomena of "geological heritage" are also an important resource for the economies of countries. The realization of the geopark projects and giving the required importance is major to determine the geological and geomorphological structures, to protect the common heritage of the world and to pass it on to future generations, to raise awareness of local people and hence for the realization of sustainable rural development. In this context, geotourism activities to be carried out in Yatağan Geopark will contribute to raise awareness about the geopark and geosite areas in the region, the introduction of the geo-heritage values of the region and to take measures for the protection of the geosite that is in danger of extinction. Moreover, the development and implementation of sustainable tourism activities and socio-economic development of the local people will be supported through the geotourism. The study, concluded with proposals for the development of geotourism in the Gökbel Valley, which is a common heritage for the world, is also expected to contribute to promotion and visibility of geosites and increase of awareness of geotourism.