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THE EFFECTS OF ECOTOURISM AND ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESTINATION BELONGING: GIRE SUN PROVINCE CASE STUDY

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EXTENSIVE SUMMARY

Due to the negative effects of mass tourism on the environment because of regional and seasonal concentration, consumers and business managers have started to look for different types of tourism in order to minimize the negative effects of tourism. In this direction, ecotourism has become one of the tourism types which have been put forward. Ecotourism is a type of tourism that incorporates different touristic activities and enables tourism to spread to various destinations of the country in every season.

The starting point of ecotourism is to follow the sustainable principles in terms of economic (distribution of revenues to local people), socio-cultural (protection and development of social and cultural values) and environmental (minimization of the damages to the nature) issues (Sezerel, 2016: 35). Therefore, it is significant to examine and determine the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of ecotourism as well as making plans accordingly and implementing them with respect to providing sustainability in ecotourism.

Sense of belonging is defined as the emotional link that individuals develop towards physical/spatial and social environments. Physical areas include the elements such as home, workplace, neighbourhood, city and country while social environments are the relationships created by the physical environments that enable people to come together (Bezirgan, 2014: 49). The concept of belonging used in this study will be used in terms of ‘‘place belonging’’ which refers to belonging to a particular place. ‘Place belonging’ arises when an individual identifies his identity through a destination, identifies himself with the relevant destination and includes the feeling of belonging to that destination (Yılmazdođan, 2017: 43).

The main aim of the study is to determine the relationship between the local people who live in the Province of Giresun and the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of the ecotourism elements in the region as well as destination belonging and try to measure the perceptions of the local people related to the effects of ecotourism and destination belonging. The population of the research consists of the local people who are living in the city centre and districts of Giresun in 2018. According to data from Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), population of Giresun was determined to be 453 thousand 912 in 2018. As Yazıcıođlu and Erdođan (2004) stated, sample size is 385 with 5% margin of error and 95% reliability level (cited by: Karakaş and Şengün, 2017: 189). For this purpose, a total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to the local people through convenience sampling method in order to obtain the research data sufficient enough to represent population of the study and 443 of them were returned. Of the 443 surveyed questionnaires, 47 were excluded from the study due to incomplete and incorrect filling and a total of 396 questionnaires were used to evaluate the data of the study. Therefore, the target sample size which can represent the population of the research was reached.

As a result of the conducted analyses, it was concluded that the perceptions of the local people in terms of the effects of ecotourism and destination belonging were above the medium level. Besides, it was seen that men perceive the economic effects more compared to the women, married couples had more destination belonging than single people, those living in the city centre perceived the economic effects more than those living in the districts, individuals aged between 15 and 24 years have less destination belonging compared to the individuals aged 60 and older and individuals aged between 25 and 59 when the relational analysis of the demographic characteristics of the local people and their perceptions related to effects of ecotourism and destination belonging was evaluated. As a result of the correlation analysis which was conducted in order to determine the relationship between the scales, it was concluded that there was a weak and positive relationship between economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of ecotourism and destination belonging.

When the results of the study are examined, it can be seen that ecotourism has an impact on economic, socio-cultural and environmental effects on the local population. As perceptions for these effects change positively, the sense of belonging to Giresun province will also increase. In this context, work needs to be done to increase the destination belonging of the parties that have lesser destination belonging in order to enhance the sense of belonging, especially special things which make the province of Giresun attractive (environment, culture, economic etc.) should be highlighted, the city should be integrated with these attractive elements and local people should be made an important element of these attractiveness.