



REVEALING THE DARK SIDE OF A DESTINATION THROUGH WALKING TOURISM AND THE EXAMINATION OF ITS PRODUCT STRUCTURE

YÜRÜYÜŞ TURİZMİ ARACILIĞIYLA BİR DESTİNASYONUN KARANLIK YÜZÜNÜN AYDINLATILMASI VE ÜRÜN YAPISININ İNCELENMESİ

Çağrı ERDOĞAN^a

Abstract

The study aims to examine how walking tourism can illuminate the unknown and inaccessible aspects of a destination -its dark side- and the outputs of walking tourism concerning destination, local community, and tourists. It also aims to reveal the structure of the walking route as it is the main product of walking tourism. In this line, the importance of walking routes is examined through an integrative literature review. In addition, key elements for the development of walking tourism were subjected to content analysis using the LiGRE data analysis software within the framework of the tourism product model. In conclusion, the support that walking tourism provides in areas such as accessibility, sustainability, well-being, and social interaction is emphasised as a key element in realising the tourism potential for different stakeholders. Furthermore, the role of walking tourism is brought to the forefront in uncovering tourist attractions located in the inner regions, rural areas, and natural environments of the destination, positively shaping existing seasonality and image, enabling engagement with destination's unknown/dark side, and facilitating the exploration of its various dimensions. Moreover, the product structure was defined, and the condition, accessibility, visibility, and safety of the walking route, as core components integral to its structure as a tourism product, are outlined.

Keywords: Walking Tourism, Tourism Product, Destination Management, Recreation, Sustainability

Özet

Çalışmanın amacı, bir destinasyonun bilinmeyen ve erişilemeyen bölgelerinin -karanlık tarafının- yürüyüş turizmi aracılığıyla nasıl aydınlatılabileceğinin ve yürüyüş turizminin destinasyon, yerel halk ve turistler açısından ne gibi çıktılar sağlayabileceğinin incelenmesidir. Ayrıca bir yürüyüş turizmi ana ürünü olan yürüyüş rotasının/yolunun, ürün yapısının ortaya konulması da hedeflenmiştir. Bu doğrultuda yürüyüş rotalarının önemi, bütüleştirici literatür taraması kapsamında irdelenmiştir. Buna ek olarak, yürüyüş turizminin geliştirilmesi için temel kabul edilen unsurlar, turizm ürün modeli çerçevesinde LiGRE veri analiz yazılımı kullanılarak içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Sonuç olarak, yürüyüş turizminin erişilebilirlik, sürdürülebilirlik, iyi oluş ve sosyal etkileşim gibi konularda sağlayacağı desteğin, turizmin arz ettiği potansiyelin farklı paydaşlar için hayata geçirilmesindeki önemi vurgulanmıştır. Bununla birlikte yürüyüş turizminin destinasyonun iç bölgelerinde, kırsal alanlarında ve doğal çevrelerinde yer alan turistik çekim unsurlarının üstündeki örtünün kaldırılması, mevcut mevsimselliğin ve imajın olumlu bir şekilde yapılandırılması, destinasyonun bilinmeyen/karanlık tarafıyla etkileşimin mümkün kılınması ve farklı yönlerinin keşfedilmesi noktasında oynadığı rol ön plana çıkarılmıştır. Ayrıca yürüyüş rotasının bir turizm ürünü olarak yapısına entegre olan temel bileşenler içinden kondisyonun, erişilebilirliğin, görünürlüğün ve güvenliğin arz ettiği ağırlık not edilerek ürün yapısı ortaya konulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yürüyüş Turizmi, Turizm Ürünü, Destinasyon Yönetimi, Rekreasyon, Sürdürülebilirlik

Article Submission Date: 15.02.2025 Article Acceptance Date: 25.03.2025

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*This study, presented at the 22nd National Tourism Congress hosted by Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University from 27 to 29 October 2022 and published in the proceedings book, was revised, expanded significantly with enriched research process, and translated into English for publication as an article, so that it is almost entirely rewritten.

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15098615

1. Introduction

The expression “dark side of a destination” often brings to mind concepts associated with dark tourism (Tarlow, 2005; Sharpley, 2009), which encompasses tourism-related activities linked to negative actions (Moorhouse, D’Cruze & Macdonald, 2016; Mansperger, 1995), as well as non-normative and even criminal events (Biagi & Detotto, 2012) that may occur within the boundaries of a destination, whether or not they are directly related to tourism itself. Additionally, it may evoke imagery of difficult or undesirable conditions that are typically hidden from the tourist gaze (Urry, 2009), existing in the metaphorical backstage of the destination (MacCannell, 1973). However, the expression “dark side” is not necessarily meant to convey these typical associations with dark tourism or non-normativity. Instead, it is essentially inspired by the expression “dark side of the Moon”. The dark side of the Moon is often used to refer to the hemisphere of the Moon that is not facing the Earth. However, it should be clarified that this expression does not imply that this side of the Moon is perpetually dark. In reality, similar to the day-night cycle on Earth, the entire surface of the Moon experiences periods of brightness and darkness as it is exposed to sunlight at different times, so it does not have a hemisphere that is constantly in darkness. However, due to an event termed tidal locking (the time required for one full rotation of the Moon around its axis is equal to one full rotation of it around the Earth's orbit), always the same side of the Moon appears when viewed from Earth. Therefore, the other hemisphere of the Moon is described as the "dark side", since it cannot be seen from the Earth (Davis, 2019).

Consistent with the “dark side” characterization, likely, many of the destination components as products are already in the “dark” and not visible to tourism stakeholders (Mirimi et al., 2013; Remondino, 2019). These elements, often hidden from view, can be brought to light through the process of making them accessible. The walking route, which forms the core of walking tourism, not only functions as a tourism product but also takes on the role of facilitating the accessibility of these otherwise obscured aspects of the destination (Bichler & Peters, 2021). The route itself becomes an essential tool for revealing the parts of the destination that are typically overlooked or inaccessible, thus enabling greater exposure to the “dark side” of the destination. In this direction, it is aimed to reveal the outputs of walking tourism in terms of the destination, local community, and tourists in the focus of Leleg Way, and to reveal how the unknown and inaccessible places

of the destination -the dark side of it, in a sense- can be illuminated through these. Additionally, the process of developing walking tourism as a product has been analysed through the perspective of Smith's (1994) tourism product model, to provide clarity regarding the product's structure.

2. Conceptual Framework

Walking forms the basis of human mobility and has a prominent place in leisure and tourism activities (Hannam et al., 2021, p. 58), additionally, it is one of the most common actions and activities carried out both in daily life and in touristic life (Aktaş Polat & Polat, 2016), still, also one of the most invisible. When walking for transportation, to go directly from one place to another, it is described as “purposeful walking” or “utilitarian walking”. In cases where walking is a goal in itself, the steps taken can be considered as “recreational walking”. When it comes to tourist steps, it can be seen that purposeful and recreational walking can become more intertwined. It is possible for a tourist to experience the destination while walking (recreational) to arrive any tourism product (purposeful) (Ram & Hall, 2018, pp. 281-282).

Walking, which is positioned as an exercise and social activity beyond just being a physical movement, is categorized in two basic frameworks in the tourism literature (Wu & Lai, 2022, p. 88) as urban walking tourism (Farkić et al., 2015; Giddy & Hoogendoorn, 2018) and natural walking tourism (Chhetri, Arrowsmith & Jackson, 2004; Márquez-Pérez, Vallejo-Villalta & Álvarez-Francoso, 2017). As one of the two main components of natural walking tourism (Rózychki & Dryglas, 2014, p. 25); trekking taking place in challenging environments such as mountains, deserts, tropics, and glaciers allows people to recognize their mental and physical abilities through the extraordinary conditions exposed to and has an exploratory feature in this respect. The other one is hiking (Moira, Mylonopoulos & Terzoglou, 2021, pp. 13-15); although mountainous regions are generally preferred, hiking is a type of walking that is a prerequisite for many recreational activities in nature (Yamaç Erdoğan, 2023a) such as bird watching, nature photography, and backpack camping, and also includes visiting other natural and cultural places.

Since a clear limitation and categorization of the two types of natural walking tourism mentioned above has not been made yet, usage areas and related contexts of the terms could vary. Compared to each other, the points that come to the fore in general could be listed as (Bauer et al. 2012; Böhmer-Bauer, 2012; Moira, Mylonopoulos & Terzoglou,

2021); trekking is carried out at higher altitudes, in more difficult conditions, without using infrastructure facilities such as roads, and fixed accommodation, also demanding longer distances to be travelled compared to hiking.

Through walking -as a common form of travel- the destination is not only observed but also potentially experienced more deeply and directly, without mediation. Examining the walking action within the framework of tourism and leisure suggests that there are different walking types with their characteristics (Chandran, Kashyap & Golla, 2019, p. 15; Witte, 2021, p. 426). As the prominent walking types hiking and trekking are evaluated within the scope of walking tourism as a type of sports tourism in this study, as stated in the report of the United Nations World Tourism Organization/UNWTO (2019). In addition, it should be noted that the expression “walking tourism” refers to “natural walking tourism” throughout the study. Since the focused evaluations on walking tourism will be made in the context of Leleg Way. Furthermore, it is evident that concept in social sciences can be ambiguous, as numerous examples can be confronted. Nevertheless, in this study, to minimise such uncertainty, it has been emphasised that walking tourism is categorically divided in the literature as “urban walking tourism” and “natural walking tourism”, depending on whether the activity takes place within or outside of urban centres. Of course, alternative or additional categorical distinctions regarding walking tourism may exist or be developed. However, based on the aforementioned classification in the literature, this study explicitly clarifies that unless specifically stated as “urban walking tourism”, the term should be understood as referring to walking tourism in rural areas rather than urban areas. Great effort was devoted to ensuring consistency throughout the study, and no explanation was made without reference to the literature. In addition, to facilitate a broader evaluation, the analysis of the walking route as a tourism product will be carried out in accordance with Smith’s (1994) study, which is widely regarded as one of the foundational works in the field and centres on the concept of the tourism product.

3. Method

Walking emerges as a prominent activity in enhancing the depth of experience through interactions with various tourism products within the destination and in intensifying overall engagement with the destination. Walking routes, particularly those within the scope of natural walking tourism, are tourism products that play a significant role in revitalising the less structured, less accessible, and lesser-known parts of the destination,

as Rabbiosi (2021) mentions. Given its significance in this regard, the study employs an integrative literature review to shed light on walking routes as a tourism product from various perspectives, bring them to the forefront, and make them more accessible for further research. Additionally, to provide a clear depiction of the product structure, a report focusing on the development of walking tourism has been subjected to content analysis. In this regard, the research questions/RQ that direct the research process and form the basis for its execution are as follows:

RQ 1: *What is the role of walking tourism in illumination the lesser-known and hard-to-reach aspects of the destination?*

RQ 2: *What is the product structure of walking routes as tourism products?*

Due to the limited research on walking tourism and walking routes (Hall & Ram, 2018a; Ram & Hall, 2018a, as cited in Hall & Ram, 2018, p. 281) and the overlooked aspects of these topics (Rabbiosi & Meneghello, 2023, p. 1), the literature presents a fragmented picture. In line with the study's focus, an integrative literature review has been employed, as suggested by Snyder (2019), to clarify the general framework of the topic and contribute to efforts aimed at establishing a more integrated structure and combining perspectives to create new theoretical models. Accordingly, the study predominantly relies on high-reliability articles in English and Turkish, while also incorporating books, institutional reports, and official websites to ensure data triangulation (Oppermann, 2000).

Through the integrative literature review, the role of walking routes and walking tourism in facilitating access to the hidden areas of the destination has been highlighted, with a particular focus on the Leleg Way in the Bodrum destination of Muğla, Türkiye. To enhance clarity, the Leleg Way has been examined from a closer perspective; however, the study ultimately focuses on the walking route as a tourism product and the broader context of walking tourism. Expanding on the Leleg Way focus, the benefits of walking routes as tourism products for the local community, tourists, and the destination have been outlined. Following this, the section of the UNWTO's (2019) report titled "Walking Tourism: Promoting Regional Development", which focuses on the development of walking tourism, was analysed using content analysis through LiGRE, a data analysis software developed by Logiciels Ex-I-Tec Incorporation (Ex-I-Tec, 2025; LiGRE, 2025). Due to the absence of a similar report on walking tourism that encompasses the wide

range and global perspective as UNWTO’s report offers, only this report has been included in the analysis (for example; the report titled "The European market potential for walking tourism," prepared by the Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries/CBI, established in 1971 by The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (CBI, 2021), has not been included in the content analysis, both due to its use of the UNWTO (2019) report as one of the key sources and its European-centred perspective.). This analysis aims to provide an overview of walking routes as a tourism product and to concretise its structural components.

The content analysis was conducted from the perspective of Smith’s (1994) tourism product model. In this regard, a table presenting the five core dimensions of the model and their definitions has been included. The themes were developed based on the concept-driven approach, drawing from this study, which is considered one of the fundamental works in the field and subject. As the codes were data-driven, the section of the report subjected to analysis was first read multiple times, and preliminary coding was performed to draft the code hierarchy. Following this, the coding process was completed, finalising the main theme, themes, and codes. Code statistics were then presented and interpreted. The research process was conducted by following the main stages presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Main Stages of the Research Process

Stages	Actions
First stage: Preparation	Key concepts were defined, and related topics were addressed while providing the aim of the study.
Second stage: Focused examination	An examination was conducted on a specific walking route, The Leleg Way. <i>RQ-1</i>
Third stage: Broad assessment	Participation in walking tourism was examined through push and pull factors, the benefits and advantages of walking tourism products for primary stakeholders were emphasized to provide a holistic perspective. <i>RQ-1</i>
Fourth stage: Structure presentation	From a theoretical model perspective, content analysis was conducted using both concept-driven and data-driven coding approaches, and the product structure was revealed. <i>RQ-2</i>

In order to strengthen the validity and reliability of the research, the research process and findings have been clearly articulated within the word count limitations (dependability and transferability). Data triangulation was employed (credibility), and raw data quotations were included, ensuring partial transparency of the data (confirmability).

Ultimately, the research process was carried out with the possible highest level of care, with this commitment reflected throughout the study, as evidenced in the presentation of the findings in the following section.

4. Findings

The findings of the integrative literature review are presented in the first two subsections. Initially, the Leleg Way is discussed, followed by an exploration of its role in providing access to the hidden parts of the area, enriching it, and adding new dimensions. In the other subsection, walking tourism is examined from a more holistic perspective, focusing on the benefits it provides to key stakeholders. In fact, some of the findings from the integrative literature review can also be seen to permeate the content of the final section of the study. Lastly, the findings obtained from the content analysis are presented in the third subsection, thus completing this part of the study.

4.1. The Leleg Way/Walking Tourism: The Key to Accessing the Hidden Face of the Destination

As a widely performed leisure and tourism activity, walking becomes “invisible” to the extent that it is widespread. In relation to this, many natural and cultural attractions, which are located in rural and natural areas and have potential for sustainable tourism on the basis of walking tourism, can be overlooked by tourism stakeholders (Kastenholz & Rodrigues, 2007, p. 6). However, destinations step in the opposite direction, position walking tourism activities -which includes a high level of integration with the environment- as a core tourism product (Bichler & Peters, 2021).

As a walking tourism product, the Leleg Way (see Figure 1) cannot be qualified as a core product for Bodrum destination in its current form. This should not overshadow the potential of the Leleg Way playing an important role in product diversification and image enrichment of the destination. As a matter of fact, the Leleg Way strengthens its position and increases its visibility by being connected with the Carian Way (route length: ~850 km.) taking its name from the civilization lived in the region and including many natural and cultural attractions along with ancient cities such as Herakleia, Alinda, and Knidos (Özcan, 2019, p. 8; Kariayolu, 2022), and also with the Lycian Way (route length: ~600 km.) located in the place known as Lycia in the ancient geography, now called the Teke Peninsula, containing many richness in terms of landscape, archaeology, and botanic that

support nature sports (Antalya İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2014, p. 1; Likyayolu, 2022; T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2022).

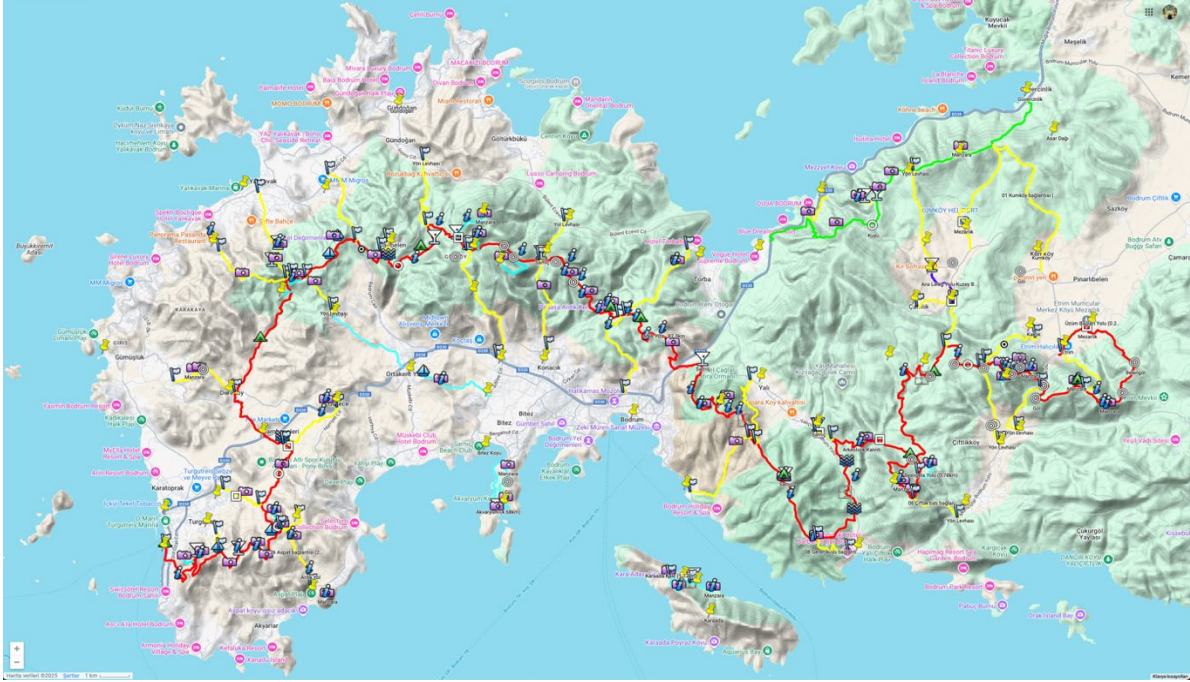


Figure 1. The Leleg Way Map (main route highlighted as red together with alternative routes)

Source: Emrahtez, 2025; Google, 2025

The Leleg Way combines with the Carian and Lycian Ways and forms a part of an important whole. On the other hand, it is in the position of being a destination component expected to contribute to the mass tourism weighted structure of Bodrum destination, concentrated in the coastal region, in an enriching way. As can be seen in Figure 1, the Leleg Way primarily covers the inland and mountainous areas of the destination rather than its coastal regions. It connects ancient cities of -one of the important people of the peninsula- the Leleges that are surrounded by walls and positioned on the summits such as Pedasa, Syangela and Termera. The Leleg Way's first phase was opened on March 26, 2016, with its 185 km long walking route, 20 km long bicycle route, camping areas, and other natural and cultural attractions; enabling various tourism activities especially under the umbrella of sports, culture, nature, and adventure tourism (Bodrum Belediyesi, 2017; Lelegyolu, 2022). With this structure, in addition to being a direct tourism product, it also has a significant share in the unearthing of unknown or inaccessible tourism products the destination already contains.

4.2. A Holistic View of Walking on the Dark Side of the Destination

Providing significant benefits in shedding light on the dark side of the destination and making it accessible, walking tourism products must be visible at first to fulfil their potential. The main issues supporting this visibility will be stated through the push and pull factors participating in walking tourism.

It is possible to show the compelling conditions of urban life, the unhealthy and inadequate aspects of daily life, the increased artificiality, crowd and pollution in environment, excessively exposed physical and social stimuli, and a highly structured stressful order are among the main push factors in connection with participation in walking tourism (Krippendorf, 1987 as cited in Kastenholtz & Rodrigues, 2007, p. 7). The attraction/pulling power created by a walking tourism product, just as the Leleg Way, reaches the highest point as a result of the combination of these push factors with pull factors as; performing a recreational activity, maintaining physical fitness, contacting with nature, getting to know different cultures, exploring new places, visiting cultural sites, contacting the region and local culture, increasing well-being (Moirá, Mylonopoulos & Terzoglou, 2021; Choi & Kim, 2021, p. 748; Witte, 2021, p. 426).

The main benefits of the Leleg Way and walking tourism products in general for the destinations, tourists and local community will be presented. Thus, it will be possible to express the values related to this tourism product and activity better, to point out the illuminating aspects for the destination, and to include a holistic view with the focus of positive aspects. Possible main benefits and advantages of walking tourism products can be sorted as (UNWTO, 2019, pp. 4-8; Kastenholtz & Rodrigues, 2007, p. 7; Chandran, Kashyap & Golla, 2019, p. 15):

For the destinations;

- Having a high market potential,
- Easy development with a relatively small investment,
- Significantly low maintenance costs,
- Playing a complementary role for the other tourism resources,
- Reducing seasonality,
- Contributing to the protection of the natural and cultural environment,
- Extends visitors' stay, increases spending, and enables less-visited places to be explored for advanced destinations,

- Can be positioned as a basic touristic attraction product for developing destinations,

For the tourists;

- Easy to participate,
- Gives the opportunity to avoid crowds of people, either in company with a small group of friends or by being alone,
- Allowing flexible routes to be created with adjustments such as distance, difficulty and attraction points designed within the walking route,
- Good for physical and mental health with clean air and unpolluted environment,
- Providing a sense of adventure by giving the feeling of physical and psychological struggle in line with the difficulty of the walking route,
- Allowing the environment, scenery and all other components to be experienced in detail and to relax in the slowed pace of life,
- Helping to develop better understanding about the natural and cultural heritage,
- Supporting the establishment of contact with natural environment and biological diversity and to perceive the sound, smell, and sensuous aspects of nature, contributing to integrate with it in this respect, and preparing and environment for a spiritual experience,
- Increasing the integrity and satisfaction of the tourism experience by enhancing the interaction between the local community and tourists,
- Bringing the interaction with natural and cultural elements to a unique point in terms of providing a basis for walking, which is a good way to explore and experience in depth,

For the local community;

- High potential for local economic benefits,
- Increases the quality of life of the society,
- Supporting the health and well-being of local community by promoting walking and physical activity, contributing to the abandonment of sedentary life, and to reduce obesity,
- Having a share in establishing a more friendly environment by strengthening

the interaction between local community and tourists,

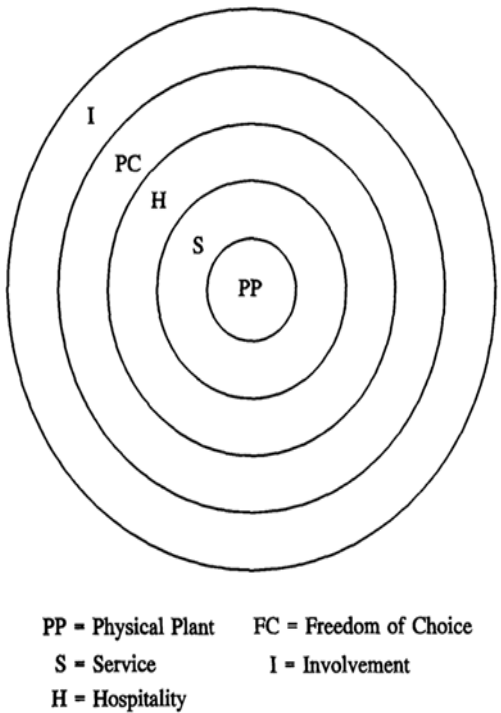
- Helping local community rediscover their natural and cultural riches, better understand and protect these values,

Following the presentation of the key benefits of walking tourism, both with its position within the destination via the Leleg Way and its broader, multidimensional aspects, the section will proceed with the presentation of findings from the content analysis, which focuses on the product structure of the walking route, thus concluding the findings section.

4.3. Content Analysis: The Product Structure of Walking Routes

Since Smith's (1994) product structure model was adopted as the primary perspective in the content analysis, Table 1 has been created to remind the reader of the key elements of the model before presenting the analysis findings. Additionally, as the five main categories of the model, which represent the product components, served as the basis for the concept-driven themes in the coding process, Table 1 also functions as a table that explains the themes.

Table 2: Smith’s (1994) Product Structure Model

The Model	Pro. Com.*	Definition
 <p data-bbox="292 1794 727 1892"> PP = Physical Plant FC = Freedom of Choice S = Service I = Involvement H = Hospitality </p> <p data-bbox="368 1906 643 1926">Figure 1. The Generic Tourism Product</p>	Physical Plant	The core of all tourism products, with its broad scope, encompasses aspects such as site, natural resources, facilities, vehicles, physical environment, wildlife, crowding, and the condition of tourism infrastructure.
	Service	The performance of specific tasks required to meet the needs of tourists.
	Hospitality	The attitude or style in which the task is performed.
	Freedom of Choice	The necessity that the traveller has come acceptable range of options in order for the experience to be satisfactory.
	Involvement	The elements set the stage for physical, intellectual, and/or emotional involvement in travel and tourism services, not simply physical participation, but a sense of engagement, of focusing on the activity.

* Product Component

Source: Smith, 1994

LiGRE data analysis software was utilised, and one of its visualisation tools, the codification tree, was applied. In this system, the main theme is represented as "root" (written in all uppercase letters), the theme is represented as "branch" (with only the initial letter capitalised), and the code is represented as "leaf" (written in all lowercase letters). To enhance the communicative clarity of Figure 2, which depicts the codification tree, and to offer insight into the raw content of the themes and codes, thereby providing greater transparency regarding the background of the coding process, Table 2 is presented. Through the code/leaf data quotation examples presented in Table 2, not only the codification tree depicted in Figure 2 but also the clarity of the other visualisation tools has been enhanced, making the concrete foundations of the codes more tangible. Indeed, data quotations will continue to be shared throughout.

Table 3: Data Quotation Examples of Codes/Leaves

MAIN THEME/ROOT: TOURISM PRODUCT: WALKING ROUTE	
Theme/Branch: 1. Physical Plant, code/leaf: 1.11. product/walking route condition	<i>“Route surface should always be well maintained.”</i>
Theme/Branch: 1. Physical Plant, code/leaf: 1.10. accessibility	<i>“a route should be easily accessible from touristic centres (for tourists) and urban/residential areas (for residents).”</i>
Theme/Branch: 2. Service, code/leaf: 2.6. information dissemination	<i>“... to raise awareness of a destination as a walking tourism destination, a promotional event (such as walking festival) can be organized.”</i>
Theme/Branch: 2. Service, code/leaf: 2.1. safety	<i>“a walking route needs to be safe in terms of minimum risk of walking accidents.”</i>
Theme/Branch: 4. Freedom of Choice, code/leaf: 4.3. supplementary facilities	<i>“craft-making classes”</i>
Theme/Branch: 4. Freedom of Choice, code/leaf: 4.2. general facilities	<i>“depending on the nature of routes, shops, accommodation (including huts and campsites), parking areas and first aid facilities need to be developed.”</i>

The first noticeable aspect when examining Figure 2 is that no coding falls within the 3. Hospitality branch. This does not imply that these walking routes have no direct relationship with hospitality in any way. This is because the analysed report text is

structured around key elements and emphasises the development of walking tourism. In this context, the dominance of the 1. Physical Plant and 2. Service branches can be regarded as a natural outcome. In Smith's (1994) model, these two components are positioned at the innermost layers of the product, forming its core. Furthermore, as the term "hospitality" in the referenced study refers to "the attitude or style in which the task is performed" (see Table 1), it is reasonable that the report prioritises identifying the tasks and outlining their fundamental aspects rather than examining the different ways they are executed.

A branch with a higher number of leaves might be assumed to contain more coded data; however, this is not necessarily the case. After all, a branch with only two leaves could include 40 coded data, while another with ten leaves might have just 20. Although such a disparity is not observed in Figure 2, this clarification has been included to prevent a potential misinterpretation that may arise at first glance. The situation observed in the figure, when considering the components that form the perspective-providing model, reveals a decrease in code frequency as one moves from the inner layers to the outer ones (PP: 28; S: 22; FC: 14; I: 8). Furthermore, regardless of the code frequency, a similar pattern is observed in the distinct types of leaves across the branches. Here, recalling the dense and comprehensive nature of the model's core (for example, the extensive scope of the Physical Plant) helps clarify the observed situation and its interrelationships. Additionally, it reflects the heterogeneity represented by both the model and the report text within the relevant theme/branch. In this regard, the report exhibits a parallel that is, to some extent, expected with the product structure model found in the literature.



Figure 2. Tourism Product: Walking Route Codification Tree

Beyond the main outlines of the report, each branch has been examined individually. The first of these is the Physical Plant, presented through Figure 3. At first glance, it is noticeable that the areas where the leaves within the branch are most densely concentrated (i.e., the codes with the highest frequency within the theme) are, in order, product/walking route condition (25%), accessibility (21.43%), and preserved environment (10.71%). It is considered that the high environmental interaction inherent in walking as an activity, along with the tendency of walking routes to be located in relatively more sensitive rural and natural areas of the destination, are among the factors influencing the coding frequency.

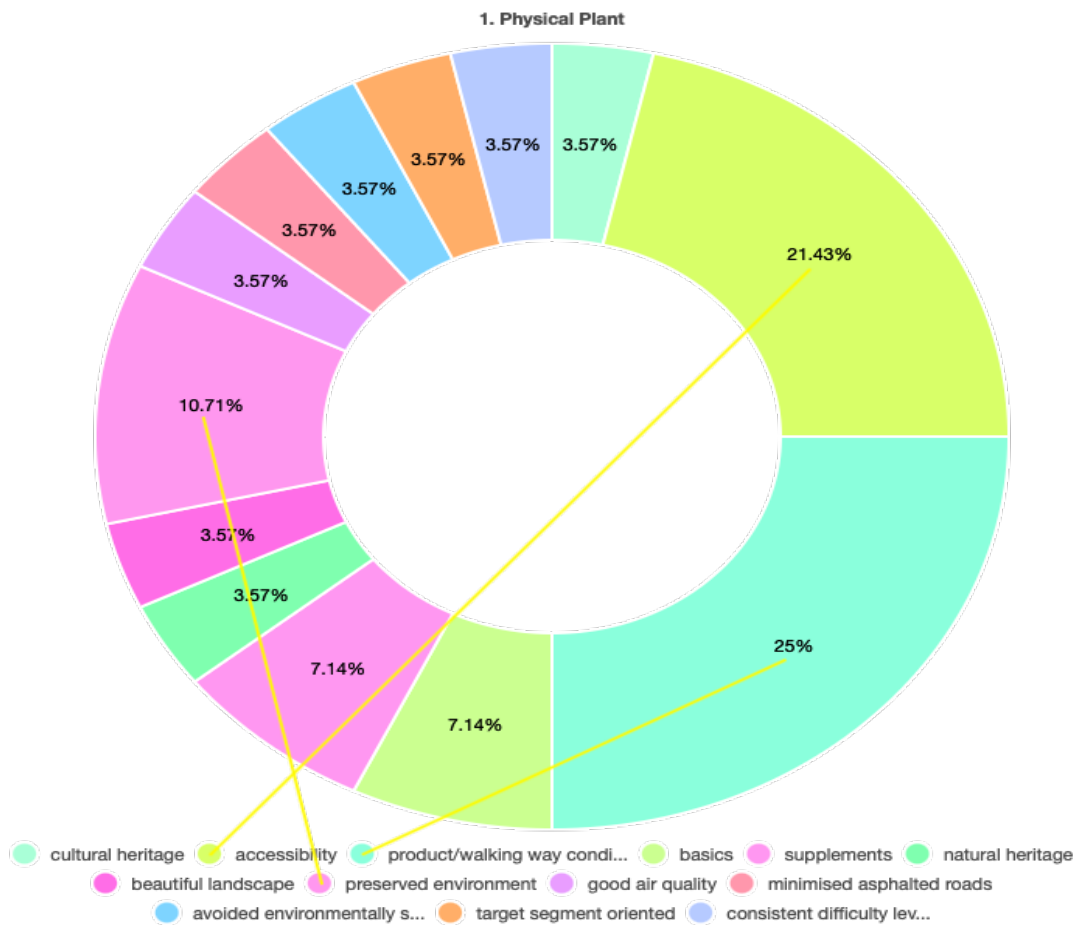


Figure 3. Physical Plant Theme/Branch Code/Leaf Statistics

In order to reflect the essence of the codes with the highest frequency in Figure 3 and to make the analysis more concrete, the relevant data quotations (DQ) are presented below.

DQ1-product/walking route condition: *“The route needs to be regularly monitored so that any problems can be remedied as soon as possible and the total environment of the route is maintained.”*

DQ2- product/walking route condition: *“Entrance fee can be considered to self-finance, at least partially, the maintenance cost of the route.”*

DQ3-accessibility: *“... tour operators, accommodation facilities or local tourism associations may need to consider providing access.”*

DQ4-accessibility: *“... accessibility can be considered for persons with disabilities by adopting universal design and other measures.”*

DQ5-preserved environment: *“... maintain the environment...”*

DQ6-preserved environment: *“... without spoiling the natural surroundings.”*

For many tourism products and experiences, as close to unspoiled environmental

conditions as possible serve as a significant enriching factor, while also embodying a tangible sign of responsibility towards nature. Given its strong relevance to the central issue of sustainability, which should be at the forefront of contemporary discussions, it is considered entirely logical for the report to highlight the preserved environment (DQ5; DQ6). It is, of course, not possible for the environment being utilized to remain entirely unaffected, nor for all the influences to be entirely positive. The fact that a walking route, as a tourism product, is somewhat structured also means that some degree of degradation is inevitable. Therefore, there is a need for maintenance, and in this regard, the report highlights that monitoring and entrance fees can be instrumental in addressing this need (DQ1, DQ2). Relatedly, although data quotations are not provided here, recommendations include optimising existing resources and improving existing paths before developing new routes from scratch, connecting them to form a cohesive route, minimising the inclusion of asphalt roads in the product component, and avoiding environmentally sensitive areas. Given the inherent structure of walking routes, which are centred around roads, they may require additional support in terms of accessibility compared to other tourism products. In this context, the role of stakeholders, such as tour operators, accommodation providers, and local tourism organisations (DQ3), is highlighted. Additionally, the importance of incorporating universal design practices (DQ4) into the product structure, particularly under the Physical Plant component, is stressed to enhance accessibility and support broader participation.

The details of the Service branch, which occupies the innermost layer of the product structure after the physical plant and directly influences the product, are highlighted in Figure 4. The key areas, in order of prominence, are information dissemination (54.53%), safety (18.18%), and informative and navigational tools (13.64%). Among these, information dissemination stands out due to its connection with accessibility within the physical plant, as it essentially involves the steps needed to ensure the visibility of the walking route product. The relevant data quotations for these codes/leaves are provided below.

DQ7-information dissemination: *“First of all, a walking route needs to be known to potential visitors. Information must be provided through the Internet.”*

DQ8- information dissemination: *“A destination can consider collaboration with tour companies to create and sell packaged tours that include the walking route in*

the itinerary and execute joint promotion.”

DQ9-safety: *“Potentially dangerous sections should be avoided.”*

DQ10-informative and navigational tools: *“It is advised that basic information should be provided free of charge either print or online.”*

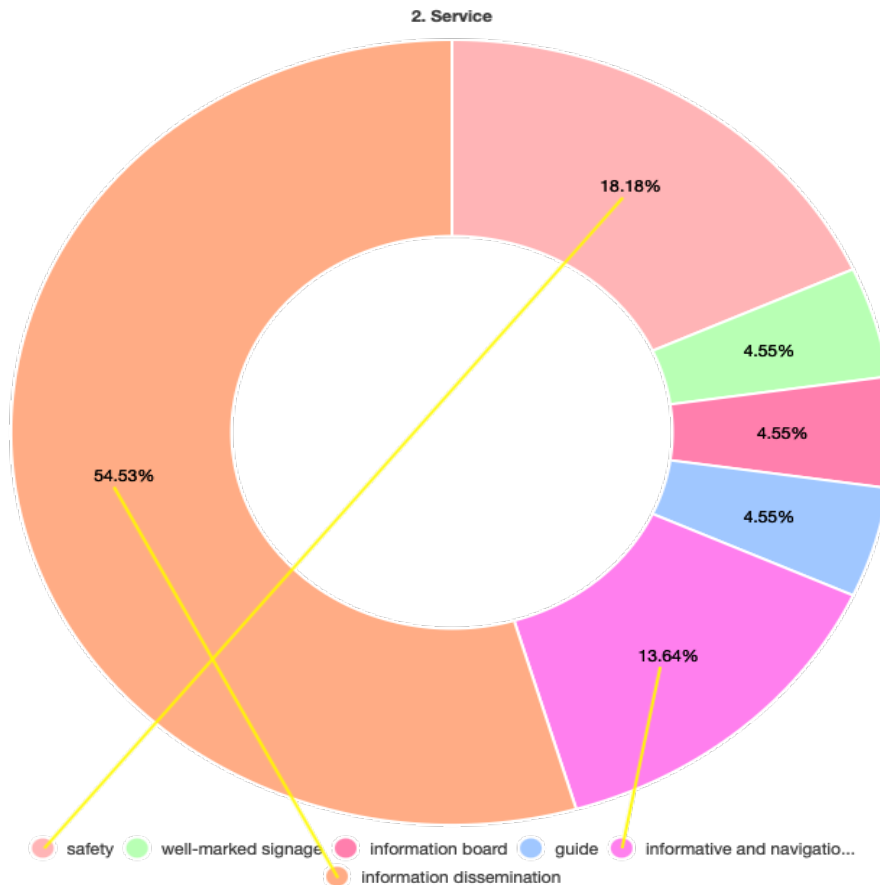


Figure 4. Service Theme/Branch Code/Leaf Statistics

In the structure of tourism products, the emphasis placed on making the product known within the scope of information dissemination is evident. After all, if there is no awareness of its existence, the likelihood of a product being demanded remains exceedingly low. To address this issue, emphasis has been placed on disseminating information via the internet to reach potential tourists (DQ7) and directing promotional activities in collaboration with stakeholders (DQ8). Additionally, although not explicitly mentioned in the data quotations, the implementation of multifaceted promotional strategies based on budget constraints, the organisation of familiarisation trips for the walking route, the hosting of events such as festivals to enhance the visibility of walking tourism within the destination, and the integration of walking tourism products into the broader tourism planning and value chain have all been highlighted as important considerations. Moreover, it is

conceivable that the coding frequency has been shaped by the value attributed to the likelihood that walking tourism products, among the various tourism offerings that constitute the destination, do not initially stand out or fail to distinguish themselves from other alternatives (with such trends varying according to the type of tourist).

Information dissemination alone will not be sufficient for a product to become widely demanded. Given that walking routes are likely to be located in the destination's interior, less densely populated, or possibly mountainous areas and require a certain level of physical and mental fitness, additional factors gain significance. In this regard, ensuring that essential information about the product is provided free of charge (DQ10) and carefully selecting its location to avoid hazardous areas (DQ9) are particularly valuable considerations. Although not explicitly mentioned among the data quotations, it is essential to structure the product with preventive measures against traffic accidents (considering the potentially challenging access conditions), crimes (given its likely location in remote areas far from security forces), and injuries or accidents related to walking (see 1. Physical Plant branch: 1.8. target segment-oriented and 1.9. consistent difficulty level leaves). Moreover, the product design must incorporate elements such as the placement of informative signage, the preparation of maps and guides, the implementation of standardised trail markings, and the provision of guided services, ensuring both safety and accessibility.

The first notable aspect of Figure 5, which presents the code/leaf statistics for the Freedom of Choice and Involvement branches, is that they contain fewer codes/leaves compared to previous branches. Additionally, as previously stated, a lower frequency of coding has been applied within these branches. Accommodation (including homestays), food and beverage, first aid, guidebooks and maps, and parking areas are listed under general facilities, whereas souvenirs, handicrafts, music and dance performances, storytelling, cooking and craft-making classes, and the provision of diversified programmes are categorised as supplementary facilities (DQ11). While these are naturally related to the physical plant, they have been evaluated within the context of the Freedom of Choice branch, particularly in terms of the alternatives and space for movement offered to the tourist. Among these, the issue of accessibility, including transportation and parking facilities, is notably emphasised, and it is encouraged that actions be taken in collaboration with relevant stakeholders on this matter (DQ12). The pivotal role of

supplementary facilities in enhancing the diversification of walking activities, increasing the sustainability of the experience through relevant tangible products, fostering socialisation, and developing skills, also clarifies their position within the product structure.

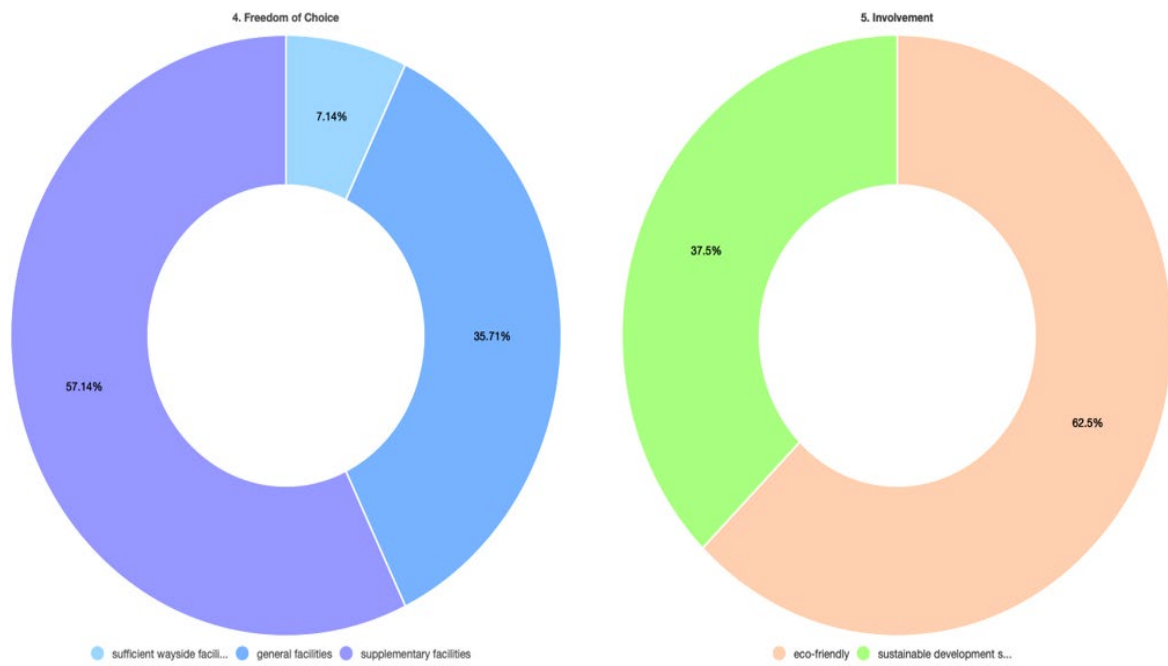


Figure 5. Freedom of Choice and Involvement Themes/Branch Code/Leaf Statistics

As the primary product is the walking route, it is expected that wayside facilities hold additional significance (DQ13). Data quotations related to this, and other facility examples centred around the Freedom of Choice branch are provided below.

DQ11-supplementary facilities: *“Provision of diversified programmes for tourists”*

DQ12-general facilities: *“If public transport is not available, tour operators, accommodation facilities or local tourism associations may need to consider providing access and parking facilities.”*

DQ13-sufficient wayside facilities: *“... such as toilets, trash bins and benches should be placed at proper places.”*

The information conveyed in the report regarding the development of walking tourism is linked to the Involvement branch in the context of supporting ecological sensitivity and sustainable development. The relevant data quotations are as follows:

DQ14-eco-friendly: *“Asphalted roads should be minimized. At the same time, environmentally sensitive areas should be avoided so that walking tourism will not harm the environment.”*

DQ15-eco-friendly: "... reduction of private car use is recommended for the sake of low carbon approach."

DQ16-sustainable development support: "... maximized use of local supplies linking various sectors needs to be encouraged."

DQ17-sustainable development support: "Creating economic opportunities, including employment, is critical for regional development. It is either economic benefit direct from walking itself or indirect ones from the increase of walking travellers."

It cannot be assumed that the aforementioned resources automatically function as components that promote involvement in the tourism product, as not every tourist engaging with a walking route product will necessarily align with the sustainability framework (DQ14-17). It is important to take into account the type of tourist, as well as various other factors that may significantly influence the tourism experience.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Through the Leleg Way focusing on Leleg settlements located mainly in the inner parts and heights of Bodrum, the unknown and inaccessible places -in a sense- the dark side of the destination gains momentum to be unearthed. Tovar & Carvalho (2011) exemplified a similar situation in Portugal and emphasized the potential to revitalize mountainous regions and natural environments through walking tourism. Choi & Kim (2021, p. 748) also explained the walking tourism that is becoming widespread by exemplifying it from South Korea. Based on the 2018 data of the Korea Tourism Organization, the authors emphasised that about 60% of South Koreans visit walking routes, most of which are located in mountainous and coastal areas, and 31% frequently participate in walking tourism. Thus, the prevalence of this type of tourism in domestic tourism activity and the interest it receives by the local community have been revealed.

In line with the examples of Portugal and South Korea; it is understood that it is possible for the local community to benefit more from the tourism products in their own region and to create a new and different attraction in tourism mobility through the walking tourism in general and Leleg Way in particular. In addition to this, for inland, rural, and natural environments; it facilitates the unveiling of various tourist attractions supporting especially sports, culture, nature, and adventure tourism, positively structuring the current seasonality and image, making easier to walk on the unknown side of the destination/to

experience its dark side, and exploring its different aspects. In this respect, the significance of the Leleg Way/walking tourism becomes evident in uncovering aspects of Bodrum/a destination that have not yet come to light, along with its unconventional tourism components. Moreover, as Yamaç Erdoğan (2023a) discusses on a similar topic, it holds the potential to be a key tourism product.

How good the potential of the walking tourism and the Leleg Way can be reflected is also related to how it appears in the eyes of tourists as well as for the product structure. Conducting a study in this direction, Bichler and Peters (2021, p. 483) emphasized that hiking is evaluated as an activity that appeals to senses rather than being a challenge and allow integration with the natural environment and social relations. Therefore, it is stated that it would be appropriate to emphasize points such as relaxation, physical and mental well-being rather than high adventure content such as risk and fear. It is also noted that it would be beneficial to make its social aspect visible as an activity shared with other people in a natural environment.

The obvious coverage of nature sports with walking, and the importance of walking activity in visiting a destination mark the place of walking in the tourist experience. In fact, including the urban context, it is emphasized that walkability could potentially be an important factor for the tourist experience (Hannam et al., 2021, p. 58). In this direction accessibility, connectivity, and continuity are emphasized as the prominent dimensions of walkability especially for tourists. Therefore, attention should be given to the integrity of routes in walking tourism products, such as the Leleg Way, as well as to the structure of walking route products in general. In addition, considering tourists' time constraints and need for guiding information, tools such as maps, signage, and social media should be utilised effectively, as highlighted by both Ram and Hall (2018, pp. 281-282) and the findings of the content analysis. Furthermore, it should be underscored that the content analysis findings highlight condition, accessibility, visibility, and safety as some of the prominent core components integral to the structure of a walking route as a tourism product.

Finally, if the relationship between walking tourism and nature is considered from a more macro perspective; tourism's share of approximately 8% in global carbon emissions (almost half of this share is transportation-related) (Lenzen et al., 2018) and the expectation of an increase [in line with the 2030 projections in the report prepared by

UNWTO & International Transport Forum/ITF (2019)] in tourism-related transportation carbon emissions comes to the mind. On the other hand, it is possible to support sustainability by protecting destination resources and reducing carbon footprint through walking tourism products that can be implemented with low investments. However, since walking routes are primarily located in environmentally sensitive areas, such as natural and rural zones (Weston & Moto, 2012, pp. 1-2; Choi & Kim, 2021, p. 748), it is essential to closely consider carrying capacity, prioritise the promotion of pro-environmental behaviour, and manage sustainability effectively, while also ensuring their integration into the broader product structure with maximum effort.

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Ethics Committee Approval

In terms of the structure and process of the research, the study does not require an ethics committee report.

Contribution Rate Statement

Single Author: 100%

Statement of Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.