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**The Role of Stakeholders in Sustainable Tourism Development in
Safranbolu, Turkey**

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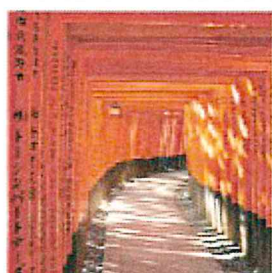
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The Role of Stakeholders in Sustainable Tourism Development in Safranbolu, Turkey

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The aim of this paper is to determine the role of stakeholders in sustainable tourism development in Safranbolu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a popular cultural tourism destination in Turkey. The study emphasizes the role of different stakeholders-local government, the tourism industry, educational institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and local communities-in sustainable tourism development. Qualitative research was conducted in this study. Specifically, face-to-face interviews were carried out with 20 stakeholders to determine their roles in developing sustainable tourism in Safranbolu. The data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings of the research show that according to stakeholders, local authorities have the most important responsibility for sustainable tourism development and should lead the other stakeholders in that development because they are the most powerful party; they have the role of preserving heritage buildings and planning sustainable tourism. Tourism enterprisers also stated that they have responsibilities in preserving heritage buildings by restoring or renovating their hotels. Local residents have the responsibility to preserve the local culture and to sustain it for the future of the community and for tourism.

Keywords: Stakeholders, Sustainable tourism development, Safranbolu, Turkey

Introduction

Sustainable tourism development (STD) is crucial for UNESCO World Heritage Sites. According to UNESCO (2016), in order to achieve long-term economic, environmental, and social sustainability, heritage values, and associated assets-tangible and intangible-should be considered by all parties as significant cultural capital that needs to be preserved and maintained through appropriate and responsible tourism. Unesco emphasizes the responsibilities of tourism stakeholders for conserving our common cultural and natural heritage and for sustainable development through appropriate tourism management. Policy makers at all levels of government, local communities, the tourism private sector, civil society groups, universities and research institutions, and intergovernmental organizations are the stakeholders that are responsible for the sustainability of the World Heritage Sites.

This paper investigates the role of stakeholders in STD in Safranbolu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Safranbolu was designated a heritage site in 1994 for its cultural heritage

inherited from the Ottoman Empire. The city is located in the north of Anatolia, in the Western Black Sea Region, and it has a permanent population of 60,000 inhabitants (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2016). Safranbolu is a unique city that represents all traditional characteristics of Turkish social life by depicting its original historical and cultural environment. There are a total of 1490 protected structures in the city including historical houses, monuments, and religious buildings.

Safranbolu has been an important cultural tourism destination for domestic and international visitors for the last 20 years. Since the establishment of the iron and steel factory in Karabuk Province (8 km away) in 1939, iron and steel manufacturing was the basic economic activity until the 1990s, when tourism became the city's second dominant source of revenue. Tourism flourished rapidly, increasing by an average of 10% in the last 20 years. In 2015, 800,000 tourists visited Safranbolu, of whom 190,000 were domestic and 54,000 were international. Tourism receipts generate approximately 50 million US dollars annually (Tourism Information Office of Safranbolu, 2016). The number of foreign arrivals increased after the city was declared a World Heritage Site, and the majority of foreign visitors were Chinese, Taiwanese, South Korean, Japanese, and German tourists in 2015. As of 2016, the town has seven highly rated hotels and 86 mansions and restored old buildings, and a bed capacity of 2092 (Tourism Information Office of Safranbolu, 2016). The majority (92%) of the accommodation stock in Safranbolu consists of old historical buildings.

Literature

Sustainable tourism entails conserving a destination's tourism resources for continuous future use while meeting the needs of present tourists. Swarbrooke (1999: 13) defines sustainable tourism as "...tourism which is economically viable but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment and the social fabric of the host community."

Because heritage sites are outstanding universal values of our shared heritage and these unique natural and cultural wonders represent our past and present and belong to all, sustainability is a critical issue for the permanency of these sites. World Heritage Sites bring a certain level of prestige and international recognition to destinations and their local communities. These sites are important travel destinations and create great opportunities for developing tourism. World Heritage properties have great potential impact for local economic development and long-term sustainability if they are managed properly.

Sustainable tourism principles, developed to operationalize the idea, identify four pillars of sustainable tourism development: economic, ecological, cultural, and community sustainability. These four pillars are vital for the long-term sustainability of destinations and tourism companies. McKercher (2003: 4-5) explains these principles as follows:

1. Economic sustainability: Development that is profitable in both the present and the long term

- Form partnerships throughout the entire supply chain from micro-sized local businesses to multinational organizations
- Use internationally approved and reviewed guidelines for training and certification
- Promote among clients ethical and environmentally conscious behavior
- Diversify the products by developing a wide range of tourist activities
- Contribute some of the income generated to assist in training, ethical marketing, and product development
- Provide financial incentives for businesses to adopt sustainability principles

2. Ecological sustainability: Development that is compatible with maintaining essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and biological resources

- Establish codes of practice for tourism at all levels
- Establish guidelines for tourism operations, impact assessment, and monitoring of cumulative impacts
- Formulate national, regional, and local tourism policies and development strategies that are consistent with the overall objectives of sustainable development
- Institute baseline environmental impact assessment studies
- Ensure that the design, planning, development, and operation of facilities incorporate sustainability principles
- Ensure that tourism in protected areas such as national parks is incorporated into and subject to sound management plans
- Monitor and conduct research on the actual impacts of tourism
- Identify acceptable behavior among tourists
- Promote responsible tourism behavior

3. Cultural sustainability: Development that increases people's control over their lives, is compatible with the culture and values of those affected, and strengthens the community identity

- Initiate tourism with the help of broad community input
- Establish education and training programs = to improve and manage heritage and natural resources
- Conserve cultural diversity
- Respect the land and property rights of traditional inhabitants
- Guarantee the protection of nature and the local indigenous cultures, especially traditional knowledge
- Work actively with indigenous leaders and minority groups to ensure that indigenous cultures and communities are depicted accurately and with respect
- Strengthen, nurture, and encourage the community's ability to maintain and use traditional skills
- Educate tourists about desirable and acceptable behavior
- Educate the tourism industry about desirable and acceptable behavior

4. Local sustainability: Development that is designed to benefit local communities and generate and retain income in those communities

- Enable the community to maintain control over tourism development
- Ensure tourism provides quality employment to community residents
- Encourage businesses to minimize negative effects on local communities and contribute positively to them
- Ensure the equitable distribution of financial benefits throughout the entire supply chain
- Provide financial incentives for local businesses to enter tourism
- Improve local human resource capacity

Gursoy et al. (2010) indicate that the sustainability of tourism development can be significantly influenced by the involvement of the local community. For the implementation of sustainable tourism principles and the success of STD, stakeholders must be involved in the entire tourism development process. STD cannot be achieved if it is imposed without considering the stakeholders' interests (Byrd, 2007).

Stakeholders are identified as groups or individuals who are associated with STD initiatives and therefore can affect or be affected by the decisions and activities concerning those initiatives (Waligo, Clarke, and Hawkins, 2013). Tourism literature refers to different stakeholder types with many typologies. According to Heitmann (2010), stakeholders can be divided into different categories depending on their levels of interest and their influence in the decision-making process of the tourism destination. Pavlovich (2003) identifies stakeholders in a tourism destination as tourists (as the demand), industries (as the supplier), and hosts (the local community and environment). According to the World Tourism Organization, stakeholders in STD are divided into three categories: the tourism industry, environmental support, and the local community/government. These three stakeholders have respective roles in shaping sustainable tourism. Both parties act to sustain physical heritage, strengthen the local culture and social viability of local residents, and provide long-term development and job opportunities for locals (Anuar et al., 2012). Swarbrooke (1999) separates stakeholders into five main categories: governments, tourists, host communities, tourism businesses, and other sectors.

The local authorities at heritage sites are responsible for determining policies and plans, setting and enforcing standards relating to facilities and services, managing the construction of infrastructure, protecting cultural and natural tourism resources according to the criteria of UNESCO, managing the tourism resources in a sustainable manner, auditing the restoration of historical buildings, encouraging the participation of all stakeholders in the planning process, and providing community integration for the sustainability of the tourism industry (Anuar et al., 2012; Gunn, 1994). Similarly, the private sector is responsible for producing and sustaining quality tourism products and services such as accommodation, food and beverages, local tours, transportation facilities, and recreational activities. The private sector also plays an important role in maintaining hotels because these buildings are historical structures.

Methodology

Because the Ottoman-style wooden houses that were inherited from the 18th and 19th centuries and the wealthy local culture based on the Ottoman Empire are the core products of Safranbolu as a tourism destination, stakeholders' roles are very important for tourism sustainability. The purpose of this paper is to identify how stakeholders in Safranbolu contribute to implementing STD.

This study used qualitative methods as the research technique. Interview is among the most popular qualitative methods used in leisure, recreation, and tourism research (Ruddell, 2011). In-depth interviews provide more detailed information and better understanding of the stakeholders' participation in STD within the destination. The authors' observations and personal experiences are also data sources in this study.

In this study, the respondents consist of five stakeholder groups: (1) tourism businesses (accommodations, restaurants, travel agencies, souvenir shops, transportation, etc.), (2) residents, (3) local authorities, (4) nongovernmental organizations, and (5) educational institutions. In-depth interviews were carried out with 20 respondents, residents, representatives of the local authorities such as the district governor and the mayor, tourism officers of the municipality, owners and managers of the tourism enterprises, nongovernmental organization (NGO) representatives, and others. These actors were selected because they are considered to play important roles in tourism development in their respective areas. The interviewees were selected based on their active roles in tourism development in Safranbolu. In-depth interviews were carried out during the period of January–March 2016. The questions were open-ended in order to obtain comprehensive information.

The first part of the interview consisted of basic questions about the interviewees' backgrounds, such as age, education, length of residency, job titles, and organizations. The second part of the interview aimed to acquire qualitative information about the interviewees' roles in the city's STD issues. The interviews ranged from 20 to 30 minutes and were recorded and then transcribed. The data were analyzed using content analysis. Analysis and interpretation were based on a general analytic framework (Yin, 2009). This comprised three stages: (1) analysis of individual interviews and transcripts, (2) identification of shared themes, and (3) analysis of shared themes.

Findings

The stakeholder groups in Safranbolu influence tourism development in many ways, such as managing tourism impacts, protecting the physical environment, conserving the historical buildings and local culture, improving the main tourism product, marketing, promotion, preserving the city's image, conducting research, formulating regulations, and policy making. Table 1 shows the interviewed stakeholders and their job titles.

Table 1: List of Interviewees

	Name of Institution/Enterprise/Interviewee	Job Title
1	District Governorship of Safranbolu	District governor
2	Municipality of Safranbolu	Mayor
3	Directorate of Culture and Tourism of Karabuk province	Director
4	Cultural and Natural Conservation Board of Karabuk	Director
5	Safranbolu Tourist Information Office	Head of the office
6	Karabuk University Safranbolu Tourism Faculty	Vice dean
7	Municipality of Safranbolu, Directorate of Culture	Director
8	Culture and Tourism Foundation of Safranbolu	Vice president of the foundation
9	Association of Safranbolu Tourism Enterprises	President
10	Safranbolu Chamber of Merchants and Craftsmen	President
11	Safranbolu Chamber of Commerce and Industry	President
12	Gülevi Hotel	Owner and manager of the hotel
13	Isen Souvenir Shop	Owner of the souvenir shop
14	Feslegen Cafe-Restaurant	Owner of the restaurant
15	Batuta Tourism and Travel Agency	Partner of the agency
16	Imren Turkish Delight	Owner of the company
17	Kamil Koc Transportation Company	Manager
18	Çelikpalas Hotel and Zeynel Restaurant	Manager of the hotel
19	Resident 1	Retiree and local travel guide
20	Resident 2	Engineer

Demographic information about the interviewees was as follows: 16 of the interviewees were male and four were female. Seventeen interviewees had university degrees, and three were high school graduates. The average age was 50, and the average length of residency was 30 years.

All stakeholders agreed that STD was the key for the sustainable heritage of Safranbolu. Eighteen respondents identified that STD should be led by the municipality. Therefore, it is evident that local authorities have a critical role in ensuring that tourism is more sustainable in the future.

This study uses four pillars to analyze and explain the stakeholders' responsibilities for sustainable tourism: economic, ecological, cultural, and local sustainability.

1. Economic sustainability

- The core tourism product in Safranbolu is cultural/heritage tourism. However, there is great nature tourism potential in the city. Therefore, product diversification was the first issue on the agenda of all stakeholders. Government and private organizations make an effort to create new tourism products and develop new tourism activities to extend tourists' overnight stays. Resident 2 said that it was important to enhance the core product by adding new attributes to extend tourists' overnight stays.
- One NGO has projects lined up to expand the tourism industry by creating new tourism activities. These projects are Tunnel 1645, a 300-meter tunnel under the city of Safranbolu that was built in 1645 between Cinci Inn and Cinci Bath; rejuvenating the Bağlar Region Water Canal; and cultivating traditional agricultural products. According to Fisher (1993) and Liburd (2004), NGOs are crucial in tourism because they are able to fill the gap between the top and bottom of society by including diverse approaches and sustainable tourism practices.
- The mayor declared that the Kilim Museum, the Akçasu Canyon trekking route, and the Documentary Film Museum are upcoming projects for enhancing tourism activities. Tourism suppliers (hotel enterprises, restaurants, and souvenir shops) make important contributions by placing more importance on the quality of services.
- The travel agency partners were searching for new markets and made efforts to create new tourism products. The travel agency partner said:

We must be careful while marketing our tourism products in the new markets. Our historical buildings are unique so we must concentrate on the European and Far Eastern markets because the visitors from these countries are environmentally sensitive. The municipality tries to promote the region in Arabic countries. I think Arabs are not as environmentally conscious as Europeans and Far Easterners. By the way, Safranbolu is in decline for Japanese tourists, so we must rejuvenate the tourism product.
- An NGO initiated producing model houses to sell to tourists as souvenirs. These model houses are small copies of the historical buildings.
- The municipality helps the sustainability of the destination through marketing and promotion, and it also participates in national and international tourism fairs in order to promote the destination.
- An NGO attempted to form a partnership among local businesses; for example, model house producers and Turkish delight producers, to produce quality products and prevent harsh competition. The organization also attached more importance to producing quality souvenirs and contributed to sustainable product development by training the craftsmen and assisting with ethical marketing.
- Some entrepreneurs perceived that the destination was in a stagnation phase, partly due to quality problems, partly to mass tourism, and partly to poor cooperation among stakeholders.

2. Ecological sustainability

- The local authority, the Municipality of Safranbolu, plays a significant role in setting tourism plans and policies and integrating sustainable tourism dimensions into the 2023 Turkish Tourism Strategy. The tourism strategy involves a planning and marketing approach that supports economic growth, is physically applicable and socially oriented, and reflects the principle of sustainable tourism. However, tourism businesses emphasized collaboration among all bodies, government and NGOs and the private sector, in formulating policies and plans that affect the tourism industry.
- The municipality also instituted the Safranbolu Tourism Master Plan, which was prepared by the Safranbolu Tourism Faculty and with the contribution of all local stakeholders. The master plan gives strategic directions for developing tourism, creating new tourism products and services, and achieving a competitive position in the cultural tourism market. It emphasizes conserving heritage and natural resources for STD. An NGO collaborated with the municipality and all stakeholders in formulating the master plan in order to fill the gap between the local authorities and the community.
- The municipality showed great effort and implemented a wide range of policies for conserving the cultural resources of Safranbolu following the UNESCO criteria. The Cultural and Natural Conservation Board of Karabuk is another government organization that is highly involved in conserving the heritage buildings. It acts according to the code of the Protection of Cultural and Natural Properties. Even though the main mission of the board is not tourism development, it helps STD by regulating the conservation act. The president of the Cultural and Natural Conservation Board of Karabuk highlighted that “Sustainable conservation and sustainable tourism should go hand in hand. Tourism and conservation develop by dragging and controlling each other.”
- The restaurant owner placed much emphasis on the quality of food, beverages, and service and the standardization of food and beverages. He stated, “For the sustainability of the restaurant sector, restaurants should serve quality food that meets the expectations of customers.”
- He also emphasized the sustainability of agriculture: “The food and beverage industry will continue as long as the agriculture is sustainable.”
- The Turkish delight producer shared the same idea as the restaurant owner. He said:

This business is inherited from my father. He established this enterprise in 1942. This business has survived because of its high-quality products, which have been the same since 1942 and comply with the ethical rules. Our employees are local people. This helps the sustainability of our business.
- An NGO has been endeavoring to solve the car parking problem in the old town with the collaboration of the municipality. Traffic and parking are big problems on weekends because of the many tourists.
- The travel agency initiated the cleanup of Akçasu Canyon with the collaboration of all stakeholders. This cleanup consisted of educating primary school students and raising awareness among all stakeholders, and it underscored the importance of the environment for quality of life.

3. Cultural sustainability

- According to local authorities, promoting conservation and sustainable tourism development helps to maintain the cultural heritage of the destination, enhancing the quality of the tourism product and improving the city's reputation.
- There was considerable agreement that local authorities, especially the Municipality of Safranbolu, should play the leading role in STD, in setting the strategic direction for developing local tourism the destination, in managing cultural heritage resources, and in planning. The findings are consistent with a previous study (Dabphet, Scott, & Ruhanen, 2012) that revealed the importance of local authorities in implementing STD on Kret Island, Thailand. Although all the stakeholders accepted the municipality's leading role, they did believe that the Municipality was weak in implementing its roles in STD. Two of the respondents (one each from the public and private sectors) believed that NGOs and residents should take the primary responsibility for STD.
- The municipality is the member of international organizations such as the Organization of World Heritage Cities, World Heritage Patrimoine Mondial, the Union of Historical Cities, and also a national organization, the Foundation for the Protection and Promotion of the Environment and Cultural Heritage. As a member of these international organizations, the municipality places much emphasis on protecting Safranbolu's cultural and natural heritage by establishing management plans, encouraging local residents' participation in cultural and natural heritage activities, and implementing public awareness-building activities. Each year since 2000, the municipality has held the Golden Saffron Documentary Film Festival, whose main theme is cultural heritage and conservation. The event attracts producers, directors, and artists as well as domestic tourists.
- An NGO whose mission is to preserve cultural heritages contributed by restoring some of the heritage buildings including some historical houses, Arasta, which was a shoe-making and selling bazaar, the Cinci Inn, a former government building, an old hospital building, the Çiçekler bath, and an apprenticeship education center. The NGO also restored the documentary film "Safranbolu: Reflections of Time," which was made in 1976 and was the first film to arouse national interest and create awareness about the heritage city of Safranbolu.
- An NGO implemented projects in order to raise awareness in local communities about preserving traditional culture.
- Educational institutions such as the Tourism Faculty have considerable influence on STD. It supports tourism development by educating not only students but also the local residents and tourists in order to raise awareness of the sustainability of cultural and natural resources as well as the importance of the tourism industry as a second local source of revenue. With its research studies, the institution draws attention to the importance of sustaining cultural and natural resources.
- The mansion-hotel owners (the old mansions that have been restored and are used as boutique hotels) help maintain the economic viability of the buildings by restoring and renovating them, and this renovation is done every year during the off-peak season (January–February). A significant part of the income is spent on the maintenance. Therefore, these entrepreneurs contribute to the sustainability of the heritage buildings. Even though the hotel owners make considerable efforts to conserve the hotel buildings, the tourism industry does endanger cultural sustainability. As one tourism entrepreneur said:

The tourism industry distorts the social fabric of the city and harms the historical buildings. Therefore, accommodation facilities that are designed to

be culturally appropriate and sensitive towards the historical fabric of the city are needed.

According to one local authority, "Tradesmen are unconscious, so they harm the sustainability of tourism."

- Although Safranbolu has a rich culture in handicrafts, such as embroidery, leather, masonry, copper, and iron work, saddle-making, and woodwork, today, these crafts are no longer productive at all. The municipality established the Culture and Education Center of Safranbolu in order to support the production of local handicrafts and local initiatives. The main aim of the center is to offer short courses to residents so they can learn the local handicrafts. There have also been efforts by primary schools to introduce, rediscover, and endear Turkish arts and handicrafts by hosting short courses for students. The Center of Research on Safranbolu was established in 2013 and has published 14 books, such as Court Records, Epitaphs of Safranbolu, Sepulchral Monuments, and Endowments in Safranbolu. In order to sustain the intangible cultural heritage, some short courses were organized for teaching the local folk dance, and a dance team was constituted to perform at certain events.
- The souvenir shop owner contributed to STD by producing and selling traditional handicraft and handwork souvenirs such as local fabric quilts and embroidery. She said, "I maintain the local culture by showing hospitable behaviors as I see from my family. When a customer comes in, I order tea or coffee for her."
- According to the travel agency partner, local handicrafts should be sold for the persistence of the impact of the holiday and for the remembrance of the travel experience. According to him, the basic condition for sustainability is the continuity of traditional life.
- Resident 1 stated, "Not only the public and nongovernmental organizations but all the people have the responsibility in STD. All the people, authorized or not authorized, should keep one end."

4. Local sustainability

- The hotel and restaurant owners supported local sustainability by providing jobs to local people; 90% of the tourism employees are residents of Safranbolu.
- One of the respondents stated that the community is the most important stakeholder in implementing STD. Tourism development should start in the community and should be managed with a bottom-up approach.
- The Safranbolu Tourism Faculty contributes to the destination's human resource capacity by educating the tourism staff. It also increases the residents' environmental awareness using research studies, publications, and education.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to identify how different stakeholders analyze and assess their roles in sustainable tourism development. In order to learn about their roles, interviews were conducted with 20 residents of Safranbolu.

All the stakeholders emphasized preserving historical buildings and sustaining local culture because it is fundamental for the sustainability of the destination and these are the core inputs of tourism. Stakeholders believed that the Municipality of Safranbolu should take the leading role in sustainable tourism development because it is believed that the municipality is the "chief executive officer" of the city. Local authorities are often the best placed for

establishing sustainable tourism, setting a strategy, and balancing the interests of tourism enterprises, tourists, and local residents.

It can be concluded from these findings that all the stakeholders were aware of the importance of the tourism industry and STD for the future of the destination. Sustainable tourism is considered the most appropriate development concept. All the stakeholders attempted to contribute to STD in order to provide high-quality experiences for tourists, and they focused on more cautious, long-term approaches to ensure that our children can enjoy a quality life.

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