

Assessment of Ecotourism Perception of Rural Youth for Rural Development: A Case Study of Yığılca

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Abstract: Rural development can be explained as increasing the production, income and welfare levels of people living in rural areas to develop socio-economic and cultural aspects, eliminating imbalances, creating physical and social infrastructure similar to those in urban areas, processes, activities and organizations for better evaluation of agricultural products and their attempts. Within the scope of rural development activities, the target audience consists of young people living in rural areas. Study area is located in the Western Black Sea region of Turkey and it is a district of Düzce. It also gives out immigration. The survey technique was used within the scope of the study. The questionnaire, which is applied to the young people (15-34 ages) living in Yığılca, is multiple choice and planned to be open and including open-ended questions for 10 minutes. During the interviews with young people, questions regarding their socio-demographic characteristics, education opportunities, transportation, movements to urban areas were asked, and then their knowledge levels about ecotourism concept and income from ecotourism activities in their region were tried to be evaluated.

Keywords: Rural development, Rural youth, Ecotourism, Education, Yığılca

Introduction

Tourism movements has improved as the initial mass tourism in Turkey. There have been changes in people's tourism demands due to reasons such as the increasing population over time, environmental damage caused by technological developments, business pace, increase in income levels and increase in education levels. As the longing for nature started to increase, the concept of ecotourism emerged. Ecotourism activities have increased gradually in the last 20 years and it is seen that this increase will continue in the future. Ecotourism can be described as the most suitable type of tourism to be developed in natural and cultural areas that take into account the development of the local people, including the elements of rural and cultural tourism (Aydın, 2010; Türksoy, 2018).

Ecotourism according to The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); It is defined as *“environmentally sensitive travel and visits to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to appreciate and enjoy nature, creating a low level of negative visitor impact that benefits the local community, providing active*

socio-economic participation, and improving conservation" (UNWTO, 2021). Another definition is adopted as "an approach or attitude that guarantees the sustainability of the natural resources of the earth, supports the economic development of local people, while protecting and observing their social and cultural integrity" (Aydın, 2010). Based on these definitions, it comes to the forefront that ecotourism is not just a curiosity but will be beneficial for the local people and the economy with a correct planning, and ecotourism can develop depending on environmental impacts and economic conditions.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) emphasizes that tourism is the largest employer industry in the world today, and it is seen that it will provide job opportunities to local people with ecotourism activities. Ecotourism is a type of tourism that is intertwined with rural settlements and based on natural resources. Due to its many positive effects, its importance as an alternative or complement to existing tourism types in developed and developing countries in tourism is better understood every day (Dilek and Şahin 2002). Most of ecotourism activities in Turkey by making forest areas and protected areas of the tourists with the local population living in rural areas are emerging interaction.

Increasing the economic contribution of ecotourism; It depends on the communication they establish between the tourism industry, public institutions, local people and ecotourists (Şahin and Aksu, 2003). Therefore, the participation of the local people, which is the focus of ecotourism, is of great importance in this context. One of the most important reasons for the emergence of ecotourism is to provide protection. Ecotourism activities are a set of studies that are generally carried out in places where people's social life takes place and that need socio-economic needs as well as ecological. For this reason, the characteristics of the social and economic life of the people living in the region, especially young people, should be analyzed and the results of this analysis should be used to ensure public support (Yalçınalp, 2005). Since ecotourism consists of travels to natural and cultural areas, the people living in the region have a very important effect on the development of ecotourism. It should not be forgotten that "forest villagers are a social entity", which is defined by the law numbered 6831 and meant people living in villages close to forest areas. Above all, a successful and purposeful ecotourism activity can only be realized if the local people want it. From this point of view, the common denominator of most of the solutions produced should be to ensure the participation of all relevant parties as much as possible in the management of forest resources.

This study will contribute to the local people living in rural areas economically by using the natural and cultural resources in rural areas more effectively, increase employment opportunities, prevent migration with on-site development and raise living standards, and aims to evaluate the ecotourism perception of rural youth by putting forth ecotourism activities that can help to minimize economic inequality. For this purpose, the perceptions of the young population living in rural areas of Düzce province Yiğilca district about the use of ecotourism activities as a tool in rural development were evaluated.

Materials and Method

The study area covers the Western Black Sea Region Düzce province Yığılca district. Yığılca District, which is between Düzce, Bolu and Zonguldak provinces, is the Alaplı district of Zonguldak province from the north; it is surrounded by the Mengen district of Bolu province from the east. It is located in the northeast of Düzce Province, in the northwest of Bolu Province, in the southwest of Zonguldak, in the northeast of Kaynaşlı district and in the southeast of Akçakoca district. It is also 35 km away from Yedigöller National Park, which is one of the important tourism centers of our country (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Location of Yığılca District in Turkey (URL-1)

The research consists of primary and secondary data sources. Within the scope of the study, primary data were obtained by using the interview and questionnaire technique as the data collection tool of the region. Within the scope of the study, the target group was selected as the young population between the ages of 15-34 living in the region. Within the scope of the study, a total of 155 young people were interviewed in 39 villages of Yığılca district. The questionnaire includes closed-ended demographic information to determine the ecotourism knowledge level of young people living in the region, their perspective on ecotourism activities and whether they want tourists to come to the region, the priority activities in the region in terms of rural development, the current problems in the region and the obstacles to ecotourism, support ecotourism activities. questions were asked to determine whether they would not support it, the degree of satisfaction among local stakeholders and incoming tourists, the migration status of the region and how these would affect ecotourism. In determining the questionnaire questions, the studies of Altanlar (2007), Berik (2018), Gültekin (2010), Hoşcan (2008) and Türker (2013) were used.

The secondary data source for the study, Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), Düzce Governorship, Yığılca District Governorship, Yığılca Municipality, Düzce Culture and Tourism Directorate, Yığılca Forest

Management Directorate, Düzce Nature Protection and National Parks Directorate database, academic dissertations on ecotourism, articles, papers, books and reports.

Results

In the study, questions were asked to determine the sociodemographic characteristics of the individuals participating in the survey. These; it can be listed as age, gender, marital status, occupation, number of household members. The gender of the participants whose age range is 18-29 was 66.6% male and 33.3% female proportionally, 86% of them were married and 13.3% were single in terms of marital status. Considering their educational status, 53.3% are high school, 40% are undergraduates, 6.3% are graduates, and 33.3% of these professions are students, 20% are engineers, 20% are graduates. worker, 13.3% farmer, 13.3% occupational safety specialist.

Table 1. Distribution of urban and rural population of Yığılca district by age groups and gender (TÜİK, 2018)

Age Groups	Urban				Rural			
	Gender		Total		Gender		Total	
	Male	Female	Person	%	Male	Female	Person	%
0-4	135	140	275	8.1	414	359	773	5.9
5-9	136	119	255	7.6	385	330	715	5.5
10-14	125	134	259	7.7	484	433	917	7.0
15-19	130	111	241	7.2	573	513	1086	8.3
20-24	103	137	240	7.1	409	375	784	6.0
25-29	125	122	247	7.3	406	309	715	5.5
30-34	153	148	301	9.0	380	304	684	5.2
35-39	143	127	270	8.0	417	356	773	6.0
40-44	120	103	223	6.6	410	426	836	6.4
45-49	127	93	220	6.5	499	455	954	7.3
50-54	93	97	190	5.6	477	467	944	7.2
55-59	106	96	202	6.0	454	518	972	7.5
60-64	65	76	141	4.2	458	457	915	7.0
65-69	63	65	128	3.8	360	375	735	5.6
70-74	39	40	79	2.3	230	268	498	3.8
75+	46	53	99	3.0	336	425	761	5.8
TOTAL	1709	1661	3370	100	6692	6370	13062	100

According to the Address Based Population Registration System (ADNKS) in 2018, Yığılca district has a population of 16.432. While 3.370 of the population expresses the number of people living in urban areas and 13.062 people living in rural areas, it reveals the difference. Yığılca District has the highest rural population

proportionally in Düzce Province. When we examine the population in terms of gender, 51.12% of the population of Yığılca, which is 16.432, is male and 48.87% is female, and these rates are almost the same in urban and rural areas (see Table 1).

According to the answers given in face-to-face interviews and questionnaire forms with young people between the ages of 15-34 in Yığılca; When it comes to Yığılca, it is seen that nature, beekeeping, agricultural products, forestry activities, caves, waterfalls and canyon come to mind. However, as a result of the interviews with the local people, it was seen that the most preferred areas in Yığılca were Sarıkaya Cave, Saklıkent Waterfall and Geyiklibel Natural Park and Canyon, respectively.

When the findings regarding the evaluation of ecotourism knowledge levels of young people in the region were examined in the survey study, the participants responded that ecotourism is 40% travels made by protecting nature, 40% do not have information, 13.3% are beneficial to rural development and 6.6% have just heard about ecotourism concept.

To the question of “which season is the most preferred season in terms of tourism in Yığılca district?”, the answer was given, it is suitable for 46.6% summer season, 33.3% summer and autumn seasons, 13.3% summer and spring seasons, 6.6% all seasons for touristic activities. In the questionnaire study, 86.6% answered the question of whether the natural beauties of Yığılca are sufficient or insufficient, sufficient and 13.3% insufficient. However, when asked whether it is sufficient or insufficient in terms of ecotourism activities, the answer was 66.6% inadequate, 20% sufficient, 13.3% partially sufficient.

To the question of “would you support ecotourism activities?” for young people, 93.3% said yes in order to protect nature, generate income, develop tourism, create new job opportunities, transport, education, health problems and prevent out-migration, while 6.6% no. However, to the question of whether the satisfaction of tourists is important to you, 93.3% answered yes and 6.6% no. However, to the question of whether young people are conscious of ecotourism, 5.3% answered no, 33.3% yes, 13.3% might be conscious.

In the interviews with the local people, it is seen that the areas where the tourists coming to the agglomerate contribute economically are the sale of agricultural products, the sale of animal products, the sale of honey, handicrafts and guidance services. To the question of whether the investments made in the region are sufficient, 93.3% answered no and 6.6% yes.

When the local people were asked what the current problems of the piles were, the answer was given the power outage in the summer, the lack of health, education and transportation infrastructure, the closure of the roads in the winter, and the lack of income. One of the problems of Yığılca district in recent years is the issue of immigration. “Would you consider immigration to young people from the region?”, the answers were 33.3% yes, 40% no, 6.6% seasonally. It is seen that the participants who say yes attribute this situation to unemployment, welfare level, social life, lack of income, getting a better education, health and transportation

reasons.

Ecotourism activities in Yıgılca; cave tourism, waterfall tourism, bicycle tourism, camping tourism, trekking, orientering, sport fishing, canoeing, sailing, nature photography, wildlife watching, agrotourism. Cave tourism can be done in Sarıkaya and Gökçeğaç Caves in Yıgılca. Sarıkaya Cave, which is the largest cave in the Western Black Sea Region, has stalactites made of limestone and sandstones. Sarıkaya is a water passage way and the branch of Aksu stream passes through it. There are Saklıkent and Yogunpelit Waterfalls in Yıgılca District, where waterfall tourism is carried out. Hasanlar Dam provides the opportunity to have a picnic around the lake in appropriate seasons. The lake and its surroundings offer photo safari opportunities with their changing tones depending on the season. In addition, activities such as canoeing, sailing, rowing sports, water biking and angling can be done. The region where the Geyikbeli Canyon Nature Park is located is in a location that can be preferred by the visitors as it is located on the road route of Yedigöller National Park. The forest area along the canyon is very attractive with fir, beech, black pine and oak trees, many small lakes and waterfalls, viewing points, natural vegetation with resting areas and clear flowing waters. Activities such as trekking, photo safari, daily picnics, angling, canyon climbing and cycling can be done in the field. This information about the study area was determined as a result of interviews with Düzce provincial cultural and tourism directorate, Yıgılca district governorship, and Yıgılca municipality, institutions and organizations (see Figure 2).

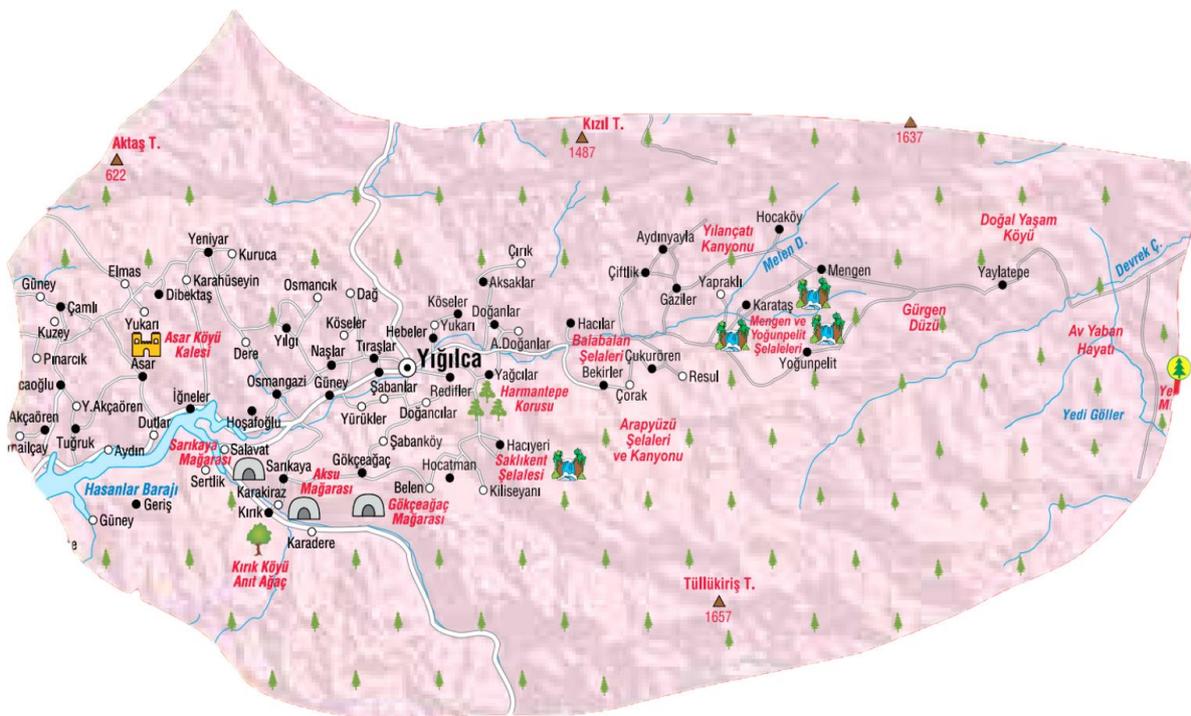


Figure 2. Ecotourism destinations of Yıgılca District (URL-2)

Discussion

It is seen that the main livelihood of the local people living in the rural areas of Yıgılca District, which is the

study area, is agriculture and forestry. The district has limited employment opportunities and it is an out-migration settlement. On the other hand, Yıgılca district has a potential suitable for ecotourism activities that have natural appeal, especially in rural areas. Implementing its potential in terms of ecotourism with investments and projects can support the development of the local people (Türksoy, 2018). Ecotourism activities in Yıgılca; cave tourism, waterfall tourism, bicycle tourism, camping tourism, trekking, orientering, sport fishing, canoeing, sailing, nature photography, wildlife watching, agrotourism. These activities should be considered as a tool to reduce the unemployment rate of local people, especially young people, and to provide young people with new job opportunities.

Planning must be made before a region or region opens up to ecotourism (Gültekin, 2010). This issue makes ecotourism planning in and around Yıgılca more important. With a healthy ecotourism planning, it is possible to prevent the migration of the young population by ensuring rural development in the Yıgılca region. It is great importance that ecotourism, which can be a response to the negativities experienced as a result of unplanned studies in mass tourism, is carried out in a planned manner.

As included in the definition of ecotourism, the protection of nature is another important element. Ecotourism activities generally take place in the living spaces of the people of that region. For this reason, these activities are ecological as well as socio-economically important studies (Aydın, 2010). The characteristics of the local people in that region should be analyzed thoroughly from this wool. Within the scope of the analysis results, it is primarily necessary to provide trainings to the local people in increasing awareness of ecotourism, gaining economic gain, fulfilling the requirements of the service sector, destination marketing and providing these activities (Türksoy, 2018). In addition, it is seen as an important requirement for young individuals in the region to receive training in order to be able to guide the field. Especially in these trainings, the employment of the young population in the region should be targeted and their emigration should be prevented. In this context, the local people should be helped by the universities in the region.

It has been determined that investments and infrastructure in Yıgılca district are insufficient. There is no valid industrial establishment other than a cement factory in the region. Turkey's Tourism Strategy 2023 has been prepared and declared by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism which the Yıgılca district is located within the Western Black Sea Region area as part of ecotourism (Türker, 2013). More successful results should be achieved by collaborating with universities, development agencies and other state levels using this opportunity. In this context, tourism incentives will be given to decision makers, local administrators or local people, and it will help both rural development and development plans. In this way, the existing infrastructure will be strengthened and it will ensure continuity in both the development of Yıgılca and tourism.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Within the scope of ecotourism marketing, all stakeholders of the tourism industry should take an active role. It

should benefit the recognition of the region by adding destination centers and routes in advertising, promotion, websites and tourism catalogs. Thus, it will contribute to both the region and the people of the region. Today, the promotion and advertising network that develops with technology should be used in all aspects. In this regard, although social media tools are effective, active social media phenomena with high recognition, the activities of the program producers to visit, see and promote various places should be used in the promotion of the region by local administrations or organizers. In addition, informative, introductory and educational brochures should be distributed about the activities carried out or to be carried out in the region.

Handicraft studies should be increased in the region. In this context, production workshops should be established by encouraging local administrations and local entrepreneurs in particular. In addition, marketing of local foods and products is of great importance. Cooperatives in this regard will strengthen the production network and help it reach the marketing channels.

In recent years, agrotourism has become popular in our country. Activities to increase the attractiveness of the public with activities ranging from organic agriculture to the cultivation of horticultural plants, even greenhouse cultivation to four-season production, afforestation works and individual sapling planting training should be carried out. If agrotourism is directed properly, it will increase the income of the people of the region. Also named after the stack of bees in the region Turkey has become a brand approved by the patent industry. Especially foods such as honey, dairy products, wild strawberries, chestnuts, walnuts and hazelnuts should be offered to visitors, brochures and booklets should be created and promoted on the products that grow naturally in the region and their production. collection activities can be carried out. In addition, the work on collecting the local mushrooms on site is another attractive activity for those concerned.

Yığılca district is a very limited settlement in terms of accommodation opportunities. Among the investments to be made, a study should be carried out to provide accommodation opportunities. These studies are considered as activities that will benefit the development and development of Yığılca district and the employment of young individuals by preserving the existing population of the region.

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