A potential offer-demand problem in ecotourism: Different perspectives from eco-tourists and indigenous people

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One of the most important components of ecotourism is the participation of the indigenous people and this is often defined as a major way in ecotourism’s main purpose. While they are often service providers for visitors, it is sometimes possible to see that they are just the main reason why the area is visited. This study examines the different approaches of eco-tourists and indigenous people to some important characteristics of the ecotourism areas and it proves how their understanding might be different from each other. To do this, five highland tourism centers in Trabzon city of Turkey were chosen as the research areas. Two different questionnaire forms were given to the eco-tourists and to the indigenous people in the areas to be able to identify their approaches regarding different characteristics of the areas. While only one person was randomly chosen from a group of visitors in the areas so that those who were in the same group might have had same or similar approaches, only one indigenous person was also chosen from a household for the same reason. Findings revealed that the eco-tourists and the indigenous people had quite different approaches and perceptions even on the same issues in the same areas, which meant that there was a potential offer-demand problem especially because the indigenous people were the only service providers in the research areas. The aim of this investigation is to contribute to the knowledge base needed to plan more efficient ecotourism areas and to address the growing gap between offer (from the indigenous people) and demand (from the eco-tourists) in ecotourism business.

Key words: Offer – demand problem, ecotourism, eco-tourist, indigenous people, highland.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has grown to be one of the world’s largest industries, second only to oil (Witt et al., 1991; Goodwin, 1996). However, although tourism industry provides economic profit, it can also cause social, cultural, economic and environmental problems (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Saarinen, 2006; Tao and Wall, 2008). As for ecotourism, the situation regarding economic growth is not that different. Globally, for years, the demand for ecotourism products has been growing rapidly.

Basically, an understanding of ecotourism and identification of the requisite natural resources can help government planners, community decision makers and tourism promoters to identify real concerns and issues as a precursor in the introduction policies and actions for its promotion and development (Baker, 2008). Ecotourism is widely perceived as a nature and culture based sustainable tourism form. In sustainable tourism concept, the balance between the development of tourism and the protection of ecosystem should be provided (Cengiz and Caliskan, 2009). That is why ecotourism is often considered to be a potential strategy to support conservation of natural ecosystems, while, at the same time, promoting sustainable local development (Ross and Wall, 1999). According to Fennell (2003), ecotourism should
be “ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented”. Some authors claim that ecotourism must involve environmental education and learning (Wight, 1993a; Alcock et al., 1994). According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2010), ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following ecotourism principles: Minimize impact, build environmental and cultural awareness and respect, provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts, provide direct financial benefits for conservation, provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people and raise sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental and social climate. Indigenous people and their position in the concept, often defined as an important part of the ecotourism. In Australia, ecotourism is seen as providing opportunities for indigenous economic development (Fuller et al., 2007). Ceballos-Lascurnia (1996) defines ecotourism as a kind of tourism which requires the implementation of environmentally responsible recreational activities within the designated natural areas, and sets forth a policy which encourages protection of the natural area with a minimal negative visitor effect and which at the same time contributes to the socio-economic development of the local population.

Nepal (2005, p. 112) defines indigenous ecotourism as “an activity and enterprise that focused on the maintenance of natural and cultural integrity of the land and people where it developed”. Zeppel (2003, p. 56) suggests that indigenous ecotourism “involves nature-based attractions or tours owned by indigenous people, and also indigenous interpretation of the natural and cultural environment”.

Highland, as a geographical term, means flat areas on high altitudes, which are broken into pieces by rivers and streams. However, in daily life, it is used to define the flat areas on high altitudes, which are rich in grassland and pasture lands so that the indigenous people can move from their villages during summer and can do some traditional livestock activities such as producing butter, cheese, yoghurt and more. Although highlands in Turkish culture have a deep history, highland tourism as an ecotourism act in the country is just a recent phenomenon.

After ecotourism became very popular all over the world because of some potential and current side effects of classic mass tourism, highlands also became important destinations especially in tourism operator’s eyes. Although these areas have already been used by the people who have been uncomfortable with the higher temperature of the Anatolian plateau in summers (Atasoy, 2010), they became internationally important owing to recent changes of demand in tourism all over the world especially because of some environmental problems such as global climate change, pollutions and unnatural environments of growing cities.

Several highlands including the research areas of this study have been declared as tourism centers to be able to promote highland tourism by the governments since 1990. However, in spite of these legitimate governing, it is still difficult to say that efficient and productive ecotourism activities are seen in the research areas. The situation is not like this for tourism centers only. In fact, the ecotourism potential of the national parks in Turkey has not been developed at the level of government policy in spite of the results of academic studies concerning designated protected areas (Açiksoz et al., 2010).

The definitions and the explanations regarding tourism centers and any kind of support that the government can provide in the areas are addressed by the tourism encouragement law (no: 2634), enacted in 1982. Tourism centers are priority places to get loans and any other supports by the government. Therefore, indigenous people living in these places to be declared as tourism centers can get some appealing funds for tourism investments.

It is estimated that Turkey has more than 26,000 highlands. However, only a few hundred of them are used seriously by eco-tourists. Their main ecotourism resources are basically vegetation, cultural values including traditional architecture and life styles, water resources, fresh air and silence. In general, indigenous people living in highlands are main service providers to the eco-tourists.

Although the term ecotourism is used to define a kind of tourism which have minimal effects to the environment and according to many definition, ecotourism activities in any area should make contribution to natural resource protection, it is possible to see some critical approaches to the term recently especially due to some changes in nature, which are seen after ecotourism activities in the areas. While some of such cases are a result of over use or inappropriate ecotourism approaches, there are also some cases that are created by the fundamental differences between eco-tourists and indigenous people as service providers.

The main purpose of this status is to establish an infrastructure with an appropriate and dynamic tourism plan for the areas which have national or international importance regarding natural and cultural values.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study areas are in the Eastern Black Sea sub-region of Turkey. The city of Trabzon lies in the Eastern Black Sea mountain range and is surrounded by the cities of Rize in the east, Bayburt and Gumushane in the south, Giresun in the west and the Black Sea in the north. Because eco-tourists is often want to be seen in several places (Boo, 1991), five highlands, which were relatively close to each other to see in an organized eco-tour and which had been declared as Tourism Centers by the governments in Trabzon city, were chosen as the research areas. These areas were thought to be extremely important as the government wanted to start an ecotourism action in the area and gave a priority to these areas by supporting the people who would want to create investment for the ecotourism sector. Moreover, several low interest loan programs
were provided and many promotional acts including advertising were officially done for the areas. Therefore, success in ecotourism activities would be considerably important for the areas as they were the first “official” ecotourism areas in the region.

These research areas are:

2. Akcaabat Karadag Tourism Center (RA-2).
3. Macka – Solma Tourism Center (RA-3).
5. Arakli – Yesilyurt – Yilantas Tourism Center (RA-5) (Figure 1).

The altitudes of the research areas vary between 1800 and 1950 m. As for the geological structures, the RA-3 is at the upper cretace, while the RA-1, RA-2 and RA-5 are at the upper cretace flysch and the RA-4 is at granite, granodiorite and quartz diorite zones.

Although Trabzon city has typical Black Sea Climate with high and evenly distributed rainfall throughout year, the research areas have cooler climates especially because of their altitudes. Most of the lands in the areas are covered with snow in almost half of the year, which makes them available only for eco-tourists between May and November.

Black Sea region has a steep, rocky coast with rivers that cascade through the gorges of the coastal ranges. Correspondingly, the areas are considerably rich in hydrological values. While Fol and Sume are two important rivers for the RA-1, Kalenema, Tasliyatak, Cataldere and Derinirmak are the rivers which give the RA-2 an important character. The RA-3 has no significant river though; there are many streams which join the Degirmendere, one of the most important rivers all over the region. The RA-4 has the longest river (56 km) in the city, the Karadere, and there are several small streams in the RA-5. The research areas take place in Colchic part of Europe-Siberia floristic region and, according to Davis (1965), this part is symbolized by some specific plant species. While only Alpine and sub-Alpine vegetation are found in the RA-5, which are located above the limit of forest, the rest of the research area has also forest areas, which are generally dominated by *Picea orientalis* (Table 1).

### Methods

Because one of the most important parts for understanding the approaches of the eco-tourists and the indigenous people is the main natural and cultural characteristics of the areas; to know them, these characteristics were defined with frequent field surveys. Two different questionnaires were developed to determine socio-economic conditions of the eco-tourists, the indigenous people and their expectations. While face-to-face interviewing was adopted in the questionnaire survey, only one person was randomly chosen from a group of eco-tourists in the areas in order to avoid possible similarities and redundancies in their answers. Moreover, one indigenous person was also chosen from a household for the same reason. Because there is hardly any permanent residential during the year and there is no official data on number of eco-tourists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trees and shrubs</th>
<th>Herbaceous</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abies nordmanniana</td>
<td>Daphne glomerata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acer cappadocicum</td>
<td>Draba hispida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alnus barbata</td>
<td>Geranium psilostemon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betula medwediewii</td>
<td>Lathyrus roseus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picea orientalis</td>
<td>Pachyphragma macrophyllum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quercus pontica</td>
<td>Papaver lateritium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osmanthus decorus</td>
<td>Lilium ponticum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diospyros lotus</td>
<td>Chamaesciadum acaule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhododendron caucasicum</td>
<td>Hypericum puleuroides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhododendron smirnovii</td>
<td>Primula cortusifolia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sorbus sublusca</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhamnus imeretinus</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Basic plant species symbolizing colchic part of Europe-Siberia floristic region.
visiting the areas, each household in the core of the research areas was visited to apply the questionnaire, and randomly one person from the each eco-tourist group having been recognized during the field studies was asked to participate in the eco-tourist questionnaires. Totally 183 eco-tourists and 180 indigenous people were seen to participate in the questionnaires. The data obtained from the questionnaire were statistically analyzed and their frequency distribution was determined using SPSS 12 software. Chi-squared and correlation analyses were also performed.

Research findings

Main characteristics of the indigenous people and eco-tourists

Although highlands used to be very important places in terms of economical activities regarding livestock for nearly all the people living in rural parts of Turkey, the situation seems to be quite different nowadays. People basically, prefer going to highlands in order for them to be healthy in natural environments and for vacation. It was only in the RA-5 that the most important reason for coming to the highland was still economical (Figure 2).

There was a significant relationship between age groups of the indigenous people and their main purposes to climb the highlands (p < 0.001). While the eldest group was in the research areas for health reason, the main reason for the younger groups to be in the highlands was basically for vacation.

The indigenous people in the research areas did not have a high education level and young people among them were comparatively rare (Figures 3 and 4).

There was a significant relationship between the purpose of going to the highlands and returning time (p < 0.001). Accordingly, those who went to the highlands for economic reasons preferred to stay until it snowed at the end of October and November, basically to benefit from the pasture lands as long as possible. People who were in the areas in order for them to be healthy, stayed until October, while the returning time for those who were for vacation was September.

One of the first steps for the eco-tourists in the areas was to define their age groups. According to this inquiry, the most common age group was 29 - 39 year-old (Figure 5).

When the eco-tourists in the research areas were asked to explain why they came to the areas, the most common answer was “natural beauties” (39.9%) that they did not experience in their hometowns, cities must provide green areas for the benefit of urban people, the climate and the ecosystems (Kurdoglu et al., 2009).

There were significant relationships between permanent residences of the eco-tourists, the main reasons for visiting the areas and length of stay (p < 0.001). Accordingly, those who came to the areas to have picnic were generally from city center and they were in the areas throughout day. Those who were in the areas in order for them to be healthy were from the other cities and foreign countries and they preferred staying in the areas for more than 7 days, while those who visited the areas in order for them to experience natural and cultural values spent only 1-7 days (Table 2).

Approaches to ecotourism components in the areas from the indigenous people and the eco-tourists

When the indigenous people were asked if they knew that the area
Figure 5. Age groups of the eco-tourists.

Table 2. The relationships between permanent residences of the eco-tourists, the main reasons for visiting the areas and length of stay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship between permanent residences (PM), the main reasons for visiting the areas (MR) and length of stay (LS)</th>
<th>PM</th>
<th>MR</th>
<th>LS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships between PM, MR, and LS</td>
<td>Spearman correlation</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>0.237</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sig. level</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Spearman correlation</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>0.442</td>
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<td>Sig. level</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>MR</td>
<td>Spearman correlation</td>
<td>0.237</td>
<td>0.442</td>
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<td>Sig. level</td>
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they were living in had been declared as a tourism center, the positive answer “yes” was more common (62.8%). However, the same answer was less common among the eco-tourists (43.2 %), which means declaring the areas as tourism centers had no significant effect on the eco-tourists (Figures 6 and 7).

When the indigenous people were asked to define the most important problem in the areas, accessibility was the most popular answer (47.8%). However, the eco-tourists clearly proved that the most important problem for them was lack of quality service (35.5 %) (Figures 8 and 9).

A total 180 households were visited during the field studies in the research areas. Although highlands in the region were famous for their local architecture and traditional structures, it was determined that 110 houses (61.1%) had been rebuilt as nontraditional residential property. When the indigenous people were asked to explain why they wanted to build nontraditional houses, the main reason was robustness (51%). However, when the eco-tourists were asked to evaluate the houses in the research areas, they referred the nontraditional houses which were not interesting to see and to stay.

Furthermore, only 10.9% of the eco-tourists wanted modern and nontraditional buildings as they would be more comfortable, while the rest (89.1%) was not interested in them. When the eco-tourists were asked to define the best place to stay at in the area, a traditional highland house was the most preferred answer (52.5%) (Figure 10).
Because one of the most important things for ecotourism is the local participation by the indigenous people, their motivation is literally considerable. In order to determine how ecotourism was ‘important in the indigenous people’s eyes, they were asked to evaluate the most important potential’, that can improve the life standards in the research areas. Although ecotourism come first in most areas, livestock activities were defined as another important potential of the area (Figure 11).

Attractiveness of an area to eco-tourists is always very important in ecotourism. Some areas having high biodiversity might be far, dangerous or uncomfortable to go or they cannot be attractive enough for some tourists. Therefore, what an eco-tourist thinks of his visit when he experiences somewhere and what indigenous people can know about the eco-tourist’s satisfaction is very

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**Figure 7.** Eco-tourists’ awareness about tourism center declaration.

**Figure 8.** The most important problems encountered by the indigenous people in the areas.
important. To be able to monitor this, the indigenous people in the research areas were asked to guess why the eco-tourists might not have wanted to visit the areas again. Then the eco-tourists were asked to explain what might have been the main reason which would prevent them from coming to the areas again so that the differences and similarities between the two sides' approaches could be presented (Figures 12 and 13).

Tourism carrying capacity is associated with the ability of tourism destination to absorb the tourism growth before the negative results become perceptible by the host community, the level of tourism growth beyond which the particular destination ceases to attract and to satisfy the tourists (Arabatzis et al., 2007). In spite of the fact that ecotourism can be defined as a kind of sustainable tourism that does not possess properties which might be harmful to the environment just like classic mass tourism often does, it is still possible to see that a number of eco-tourists is forced to be maximized in some ecotourism parts so that ecotourism companies or indigenous people can earn more. Therefore, it is important if both eco-tourists and indigenous people in an ecotourism area are aware of carrying capacity. To do this, the indigenous people and
the eco-tourists in the areas were separately asked to evaluate if the increase in eco-tourist numbers in the areas could harm natural or cultural resources of the areas. Accordingly, most of the indigenous people (80.6%) thought that the increasing numbers of eco-tourists would not be harmful to the areas. On the contrary it was dramatically perceived as harmful to the environment by the most of the eco-tourists (56.3%). Plus, there was a significant relationship between the graduation levels of the eco-tourists and their opinions on carrying capacity concern (p < 0.001) (Figure 14). When the indigenous people and the eco-tourists in the areas were asked to evaluate the situation regarding ecotourism in the research areas, none of the research areas was evaluated as "completely successful" while the indigenous people were relatively more optimistic than the eco-tourists (Figures 15 and 16).
DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Although ecotourism was created as a reaction against typical mass tourism tending to consume natural and cultural resources, it might also be harmful to the resources when it is not properly planned. Because the natural areas where the eco-tourists would want to go might be quite sensitive, the methods and the approaches
to ecotourism are extremely important in order get the main goal of the concept. Kimmel (1999) states that ecotourism provides an important opportunity to promote environmental education and that greater attention should be given to appropriate methods and materials to achieve this environmental objective. Therefore it is
essential not only to tourists but also indigenous people, management units and many other organizations to be educated before, during and after traveling (Wight, 1993b). Although several previous studies (Diamantis, 1999; Eagles and Cascagnotte, 1995; Pearce and Wilson, 1995; Wight, 1996) indicate eco-tourists as older, well educated and relatively affluent, no significant finding was detected in line with this study. However, eco-
tourists, most of whom expressed that the maximizing of
the number of eco-tourists would harm the environment
in the research areas, could be determined as sensitive
to environment while most of the indigenous people had
no idea about carrying capacity and sustainability. This
approach was important, because excessive depletion of
resources does not only damage residents’ living in the
environment but also lowers tourists’ willingness to
revisit. It is therefore, advisable for eco-travel destina-
tions, with a goal for sustainable development, to pre-
serve the natural status by minimizing artificial develop-
ment and destruction (Tsaur et al., 2006).

Because participation is essential in ecotourism,
indigenous people living in the natural environments are
always very important as they are often service provider
or cultural value of the areas. However, it might not be
interesting enough for the eco-tourists in any area or
market to have left the big tourism companies that the
indigenous people could not compete in (Yu et al., 1997).
As for the research areas, indigenous people are the only
service providers especially because of unwritten high-
land rules in Turkey. According to these rules, highlands
unofficially belong to the inhabitants of a particular village
and it is nearly impossible to come to any highland
without their permission. This situation might be a bit
uncomfortable for the eco-tourists who need to meet
more professional services in the areas. However, it is
important to show that any kind of study, regarding the
environment that humans live in, often has sociologic
parts, which might be very useful when being considered
in the right way. Plus, ecotourism activities, which are run
by indigenous people, are always more useful to improve
the economic conditions in ecotourism areas than the
others, which are performed by tourism companies
(Wunder, 2000). Cultures, religions and life styles are
often very effective in the treatments of environmental
issues. In academic and advocacy roles, anthropologists
argued strongly for the participation of local populations
in the planning and management of protected areas
(Orlove and Brush, 1996). As for tourism, it or any other
sustainable industry must maintain interaction with
natural environment and indigenous people (Ross and
Wall, 1999). No eco-tourism planning in the world can be
successful challenging local communities.

In spite of the fact that the indigenous people hardly
thought that ecotourism activities in their highland were
completely successful, most of them stressed that those
activities were at least partly successful. Moreover,
ecotourism was the most important potential of their
highland in most of the research areas and they were
already in -or at least ready to be in- the ecotourism
market. This was appropriate and important, in order to
foster positive links with conservation initiatives, local
residents must be able to feel a sense of control and
ownership over the planning process that involves
resource use and nature tourism development (Brandon,
1993). Therefore, motivation of the indigenous people is
crucial for ecotourism planning. Nevertheless, they
sometimes fail to predict what the eco-tourists want to
experience and why they are in the areas. Because eco-
tourism is generally a natural area activity and people
living in these areas often think that their life standards
are too far to meet the eco-tourists’ life standards, they
assume that the difficulties facing the areas for a very
long time also make the eco-tourists’ experience
inefficient, whereas, these difficulties are often the main
reasons that the area is visited. Therefore, difficult access
was the important problem which might have
prevented eco-tourists from visiting the areas according
to the indigenous people, while it was the most irrelevant
reason for eco-tourists. Consequently, it can be said that
convincing indigenous people to take part in eco-tourism
activities is not enough. The planners should know that
eco-tourists want to experience more natural areas and
this often means the things which would make the life
easier for indigenous people, such as road constructions
and modern-nontraditional buildings, might harm the
value of areas’ in the eco-tourists’ eyes.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that the worst
potential problem for ecotourism development is the
negative impact on the environment. The resource
utilization in ecotourism activities should therefore be
based on the considerations of sustainable development
strategies. However, the gap between the approaches of
the eco-tourists and the indigenous people to ecotourism
is one of the most important obstacles to this sustainable
purpose. Indigenous people in the areas might want to
maximize the number of eco-tourists due to lack of
knowledge on sustainability or they might just want to
earn much more money by attracting as many people as
possible. In both cases, the situation looks bad for the
eco-tourists, who often want to visit natural areas
escaping the crowd, and sustainability in the long term.
Because the crowd in an area decreases recreational
satisfaction (Muderrisoglu et al., 2006), the eco-tourists in
such areas may prefer to seek other natural and quieter
areas, which is literally a paradoxical situation regarding
ecotourism. Therefore, although indigenous people are
indispensable components of ecotourism, scientific
cooperation with them and official supervision over the
ecotourism areas are essential for sustainability.

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