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## Is there a conflict between local communities and tourism? Mardin Sample.

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# IS THERE A CONFLICT BETWEEN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND TOURISM?

## MARDİN SAMPLE

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### Abstract

The inevitable socio-cultural conflict between the tourism industry and local inhabitants in Mardin historic town challenges the tourism development process. The city of Mardin, located on the Tigris side of Southeastern Anatolia has become one of the most attractive cities of Turkey with its natural beauties, cultural heritage and socio-cultural elements and is a candidate city for the World Heritage Sites List with its stone architecture and unique religious and traditional buildings. The level of interrelation between government, residents and foreign visitors is critical in several circumstances, mainly due to the available instruments of territorial planning dealing with tourism policies, the local community benefits specifically from the social and economic point of view, the respect of natural resources and authentic culture of place.

Methodologically, comprehending the environmental context in order to connect tangible (physical and material aspects) and intangible (perceptual, tradition or living heritage) factors could contribute to set a suitable and a holistic planning policy to tackle with tourism inconveniences.

The aim of this paper is to measure the local people's attitudes towards tourism and socio-cultural relations in Mardin historical city center, which is the third habitable urban site of the world after Venice and Jerusalem, and which builds an agenda with the recent development of tourism. Questionnaire technique was used to collect data. Survey received from participants in the bilateral negotiations with 225. Factor analysis was run to determine variable groups of socio-cultural impacts of tourism. As a result, we found that positive impacts significantly influence the relationship between tourism support and socio-cultural impacts.

**Keywords:** Mardin, tourism, local people, socio-cultural impacts, planning

## **Introduction**

Tourism is an extremely effective tool to be a “world city” or a “sustainable city”, in the popular term of the day, and to enhance urban life standards. What is important is that tourism should be aiming at a structure sustaining natural and cultural roots and using the sources of the region without exhausting them. The discourse of “common heritage” (or common heritage of humanity) in the report of Our Common Future, also known as Brundtland Report issued by the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development, draws attention to the protection of historical and cultural values which are important subjects of tourism as well. By this means natural, historical, and cultural identity of the cities are protected and improved while an opportunity to create an economically, culturally, and socially strong society emerges. Today development level of societies is measured in terms of a healthy environment, cities that have protected their identities in this environment, and new development areas around these cities which are in harmony with the city.

Textures of historical cities, which have been deliberately or coincidentally protected, shelter the characteristics of old civilizations and form the purpose of travelling of many tourists. The primary goal of tourism is not vacation, as opposed to the popular belief, but cultural trips taken with the purpose of knowing the unknown, seeing the unseen, and learning (Genim, 2002). Trips that tourists go on in order to experience the art and culture of a location are referred to as “cultural tourism” by tourism professionals. Cultural tourism has been deployed as a tool by the cities to develop their economies from the beginning of the 1970s onwards in the tourism market.

Today many a society implements protection as a strategy of development. Historical-cultural frameworks, when assessed accurately, invigorate local economies, open up new employment areas, and increase tax revenues. However, mass tourism is not a phenomenon that is unique to seaside holiday resorts. It is becoming more difficult to protect the archeological sites, to provide high accessibility, and to balance the visitor experience effectively in these city textures in question. Tourist numbers in some of the historical heritage locations of the world (such as Bruges, Florence, Salzburg, and Venice) has become an issue of concern (Smith 2003). These cities lose their readability scores within the location and authentic identities, shading into a constellation of unidentifiable locations.

UNESCO, founded in 1945, perform studies on the protection of cultural and historical heritage which are deemed important for humanity. As a result of the perceived vulnerability of the world heritage, various universal measures have been taken to protect these sites and touristic attractions from the destructive effects of the “mass cultural tourism”. Mardin, incorporating unique religious and traditional structures of stone architecture which has formed as a result of the nature and human interaction, has been proposed to be included in UNESCO World Heritage List as a “cultural landscape” (URL 1). The city’s distinctive cultural and historical attraction, common and prevalent behavior patterns covering the whole life of the local people with differing belief systems, its lifestyle, and its culture which organizes, enriches, and enlivens the traditional and ritualistic life, are observed in the other regions of the country with a gradually increasing interest. Mardin is an important example for the cultural tourism of Turkey and a city worthy of research in terms the international and domestic tourism developing in the last decade. Tourism related population concentration in Mardin, an important focus point, thus an evaluation of the effects of tourism on the socio-cultural environment from the standpoint of the residents set the scope of the present study.

### **The Relationship of Tourism with The Local People and Socio-Cultural Environment**

Literature on tourism shows that economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits are important factors affecting the local people’s support of the change (Yoon et al., 1999). Due to the features of the concept of culture, “cultural tourism” defines travelling with respect to the willingness to learn about other cultures, thus, the effects of tourism related to cultural values are discussed in many research studies.

It has been put forward in several studies around the world that tourism has various social impacts. Researchers on this subject investigate into the social effects of tourism under two headings as positive and negative (Butler, 1980; Jurowski et al., 1997; Brunt and Courtney, 1999; Tosun, 2002). Research has manifested that tourism creates a demand for traditional arts, improves cultural identity, brings societies closer, generates opportunities to maintain local traditions, and rejuvenates the image of the society. Also tourism enables the exchange of ideas and enhances the level of information about the culture of a region (Besculides et al., 2002; Kuvan and Akan, 2005; Ko and Stewart, 2002). On the other hand, the concerns that the

traditional lifestyle would be disturbed and the youth of the region would be morally corrupted, which stems from the traditional perception of the local people in a touristic region that tourists are rich people who have enough leisure time to travel, and the fear that the residents would see themselves as merely servants of the tourists are among the negative perceptions of tourism as evinced by various researchers (Kousis, 1989; Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996; Brunt and Courtney, 1999; Kozak et al., 1997; Eralp, 1974; Glasson et al., 1995; Yoon et al., 2001; Teye et al., 2002).

## **Method**

### **Objective and Importance of This Study**

In this study we have tried to lay bare the relations between the socio-cultural effects of tourism in Mardin and residents' support of tourism and their awareness of tourism's effects. In addition to reflecting the perceptions and attitudes of the residents towards tourism in a region which is important for cultural tourism, we believe that this study will also significantly contribute to the literature in this field, tourism planners, and local administrations.

### **Research Field**

Mardin is an important city with its historical, cultural, and architectural richness, and is worthy of investigating with regards to its tourism profile which has been constantly developing in the last decade. The city, containing the unique religious and traditional structures of stone architecture formed as a result of the nature and human interaction, has been suggested for the World Heritage List as a "cultural landscape" due to its outlook as a medieval city. This important position of the city has attracted the attention of international and national associations, leading to projects aiming at improving and developing the region.

Therefore, in order to achieve the conception of sustainable tourism and sustainable cultural heritage, current state of the region in question needs to be manifested. In February 2001, within the scope of the Sustainable Development Program implemented via joint financing of GAP Regional Development Administration and United Nations Organization for Economic Development (\$350,000 grant), a social impact report was prepared including the remarks of

Mardin residents on tourism. In the report, it is stated that “unless there are some unprecedented occurrences, tourism is the sole sector that could be the locomotive of the development process in the short and the medium term” (Açıklan et al., 2001).

One of the oldest cities of Upper Mesopotamia, Mardin is a medium-sized city. It is located on a 1325 meter plateau, on the west end of the region historically known as Tur Abdin, and on the south slope of the hill overseeing the Diyarbakir-Nusaybin road (Alioğlu, 2005). Mardin is situated on historical trade routes in both east-west (Silk Road) and north-south directions and has a settlement overlooking the plateau of Mesopotamia. Furthermore, it is located on an important natural road connecting the plateau to Diyarbakir (Erkanal, 2005).

Mardin, whose history dates back to ten thousand years ago and which has always been a center point of commercial relations and passages due to its geographical location, possesses a multiethnic and cultural position stemming from this historical structure. Much as many of the cultures which existed in these regions do not survive today in the social arena, it is possible to come across their traces in the living cultures. This historical cultural diversity still prevails today despite many conflicts, dissidence, and war rooted in ethnic, political, and religious reasons. This diversity constitutes one of the most outstanding features of Mardin compared to Turkey in general or many of the other cities in the region. However, this ethno-cultural structure is not, unfortunately, stressed enough (Abdulgani Efendi, 1999). Although some of them are now expressed in “numbers”, settlement histories of the people living in that region are longer than thousands of years (Özmen, 2005).

Our research field not only incorporates one of the oldest urban settlements of the world but also shelters the habits and traditions of “living in diversity in the same region” required by urban life. Assyrians, Muslims, Arabs, Turks, and Kurds are neighbors to each to other. People living together within the boundaries of the historical geography of the region explain the common and prevalent behavior patterns, lifestyle, attitude, environment and worldview, and also relay to the cultural heritage of the region their culture organizing and enriching the traditional and ritualistic life and the richness and sensitivity of living in harmony with nature. These values find themselves a place in the historical ruins, as much as in the food culture of the region, an important link in the lifestyle of the local people. Food has assumed a traditional dimension

owing to the plants growing in the region and the decisive influence of weather conditions and lifestyle. Mardin cuisine might be said to own its richness to the meals prepared for the rituals of various religions, to the traditional days and rituals performed after birth and death.

Mardin has been home to many tribes, ethnic groups, and religious communities in history, and has been one of the most important centers of Eastern Christianity. It is a city where large language and ethnic groups interact with each other. Turkish-Kurdish, Arabic-Syriac are spoken and these languages are intertwined with each other. Turkish is employed in the official relations with the state whereas the dominant language of this region of this study is Arabic because of the ethnic roots of the residents in the city center and of the significant domination of the Arabs in the economic and social aspects. However, the spoken Arabic of the region has many Kurdish, Turkish, Syriac, and Turkish borrowings (Günel, 2006).

The fact that the acculturation process is slower compared to the general rates of the country enables the protection of the local values by nourishing the multicultural life. Its architectural features such as houses, mosques, madrasahs, churches, fortress, and its celebrations, local music (Reyhani), food traditions, and handicraft are the embodiment of the underlying values and belief systems in the cultural heritage.

Mardin, having a multicultural and lively social life from the past up to now, owes this lifestyle to the co-existence of various belief systems and religions. Among different religious communities are those believing in monotheistic religions like are Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, and Şemsilik (worshipping the sun and fire), Yazidism (believing that Satan is one of the Angels), although fewer in number. Sunni Arabs, Kurds, and Turks comprise the Muslim part while the majority of the Christians belong to the Orthodox sect. Chaldean, Catholic, and Protestants groups are also said to exist in the region. Today there are no longer Şemsi and Jewish populations, and apart from the Muslim majority a small group of Christians live in Mardin (Bilge, 2001).

With the influence of the cultural diversity in Anatolia, silver embroidery (techniques such as filigree, wood engraving, guverse, kazalik) has improved to the point of building a worldwide reputation, and still survives even if with difficulty. The fact that transportation is carried out by

animals in the streets which are not suitable for the motor vehicles contributes to the survival of many vocations such as saddling, and blacksmithing.

Tourism movements in Mardin are mostly based on domestic tourism. In the meeting of interreligious dialogue organized by Journalists and Writers Association in 2004, the visit of Prince Charles of England, and movies and TV series shot in the historical city highly contributed to the promotion of Mardin. City trips organized by touring agencies offer programs include Mardin and the immediate surroundings aiming at a “Culture Tour” of at least 1 night and 2 days.

The fact that Mardin is among the leading cities in Turkey in terms of socio-economic development leads to a perception of tourism having the potential of invigorating the economy, and as a savior and highlights only the positive effects of it. High percentage of young and working population (Table 1) is a strong feature of the city with regards to benefiting from the employment opportunities offered by tourism. (Gündüz and Erdem, 2010).

As for the choice of accommodation facilities and location, boutique hotels are rather common and there are a limited number of house boarding businesses in the historical city center. Because limited settlement is allowed in the urban archeological site, starred hotels are seen to have invested in the vicinity of Yenişehir and on the route to the airport (Gündüz ve Erdem, 2010).

### **Research Method and Data Collection**

The data used in this study were based on a survey conducted to assess the effects of tourism for a sustainable tourism and life on the sociocultural environment. The studies of Perez and Nadal (2005) on the Balearic Islands and Akis et al. (1986) on Cyprus were benefitted from when developing the survey used in the present study. The questions specific to the region were developed by the researcher and a pilot study was conducted. The developed survey was conducted in the first two weeks of July 2010. Participants were asked questions about their demographical information (classical assessment) and questions examining the sociocultural effects of tourism (5 point Likert Scale). Participants were asked to respond whether they agreed with each of 24 statements on a 5 point Likert Scale (Completely Agree, Agree, Neutral, Do Not Agree, Completely Do Not Agree). The questions were directed to measure the awareness/knowledge of the local people on the sociocultural effects of tourism. Surveys were



handed out to those participants who preferred to fill out the surveys on their own, whereas pollsters administered the surveys when participants preferred a face-to-face surveying experience.

Data were analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) Version 15. Descriptive and inferential analyses were carried out on the data. The frequency distribution of demographical questions was also analyzed. Factor analysis was carried out to form a variable composite which was related to the original 24 sociocultural features, to explain most of the variance between the features and the resulting factors and to define smaller dimensions and groups. Reliability of the data was measured using Cronbach's Alpha. The validity of the variables was carried out using Principal Component Analysis and data reduction was applied when necessary.

## Findings

Table 1: Information about the Local People

Category		%	Category		%
<b>Sex</b>	Male	74	<b>Religion</b>	Muslim	90
	Female	24		Christian	7
	No answer	2		Other	2
		No answer		1	
<b>Age</b>	15-18	4	<b>Ethnicity</b>	Turkish	20
	19-25	19		Kurdish	19
	26-35	27		Arab	53
	36-50	32		Other	5
	51-65	16		No answer	3
	66+	2			
	No answer	1			
<b>Education</b>	Illiterate	11	<b>Time of Residence</b>	Less than 12 months	1
	Literate	14		1-5 years	4
	Primary School	14		6-10 years	7
	Middle School	13		11-20 years	21
	High School	29		More than 21	64
				No answer	5
	Two-year degree	7	<b>Property Ownership</b>	Tenant	38
	University	10		Owner	59
	Master's-PhD	2		None	35
No answer	1	<b>Relations with the Tourists</b>	Rarely	23	
			Sometimes	25	
			Regular	14	
			No answer	3	
<b>Income</b>	0-500 TL	18	<b>Sectors of Employment related to Tourism</b>	Hotel, motel and other accommodation facilities	7
	501-1000 TL	30		Restaurant-catering services	7
	1001-1500 TL	10		Touristic activities	5
	1501-2000 TL	3			
	2001 +	1			
No answer	38				

Distribution of the demographic characteristics of the local people included in the survey is seen on Table 1. 74% of the respondents were male. When sex and education level are evaluated together, 17% of the women have received a university education. More than half of the residents are of Arab origins (53).

When the age of the participants is considered, the range of 36-50, known as middle ages, is seen to be the highest. Young, employed population is no less high than the middle age range (27%). %30 of the participants have a very low income rate, 501-1000 TL (250-500 €). 64% live in the historical city center of Mardin for more than 21 years. 51% own their houses. 58% never or rarely interact with the tourists. Percentage of the participants who are working in a sector related to tourism is quite low (Table 1). The participants were asked the question of “Do you think tourism contributes to your life?” 71% answered yes, and 27% said no.

Participants were required to evaluate the statements presented in Table 2 to assess socio-cultural effects. The results of the factor analysis are shown in Table 2. Choices related to 24 socio-cultural structure about Mardin was analyzed using the Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation. The resulting Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value associated with the factor analysis resulted to be 0. 0.89. The Bartlett test resulted in  $p < .001$ , and the chi-square test resulted in a value of 3942.175,  $df = 276$ . Eigenvalues showed that the two-factor target features explained the 55.29 % of the total variance. These values are within the minimum reliability coefficients recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

Table 2: Factor Analysis of Tourism's Effects on Socio-Cultural Structure<sup>1</sup>

	Factor 1	Factor 2
<b>Factor 1: Positive Perceptions</b>		
Interaction with the tourists educate both sides	.682	.241
Tourism has increased the cultural exchange between the foreigners and our local people	.772	.201
Tourism promotes tolerance towards different cultures	.744	.250
Tourism has augmented the number of recreation and relaxation centers in the city	.745	.302
Tourism helps protect the traditional and cultural activities	.752	.310
Local people behave the tourists with great respect	.673	.325
Socio-cultural and economic benefits of tourism outnumber the damages it causes	.719	.264
Our people benefit from touristic places as much as the tourists do	.757	.292
Tourism has positively contributed to our cultural texture	.814	.297
Tourists have adapted to our way of life	.751	.176
Tourism has positively influenced our value judgments	.814	.239
Tourism contributes to the improvement of artistic activities	.717	.264
Those who emigrated return to the city in urban tourism regions because of the employment opportunities that tourism creates	.589	.204
Tourism has not caused an increase in crime rate	.226	.210
<b>Factor 2: Negative Perceptions</b>		
Terror in the region of Mardin affects the current and future tourists	-.135	.346
Tourism has left a bad influence on the young people	-.461	.583
Tourists do not take heed of our laws and lifestyle	-.375	.622
Tourism has made it more difficult to provide for our needs	-.478	.618
Tourists behave in our living spaces without respect	-.451	.630
There are no opportunities for the tourists to have a good time in Mardin	-.457	.533
In the event that more tourists visit Mardin, local people will not like them	-.478	.594
Tourism has negative impacts on our socio-cultural and family structures	-.490	.620
Tourism has come be associated by the residents with earning money	-.463	.547
Tourism has become a factor in the increase of bad habits	-.535	.570
Eigenvalue	9.061	4.210
Variance (%)	37.756	17.540
Cumulative Variance (%)	37.756	55.296
Reliability coefficient (%)	93.2	88.3
Total number (total=24)	14	10

The first factor named Positive Perceptions explained 37.75 % of the total variance with a 93.2 % reliability coefficient. This factor included statements that the tourism interactions educate both sides; tourism increases transmission of culture; tourism helps conserving traditional and cultural activities; local people respect tourists; tourism has more socio-cultural and economic advantages

<sup>1</sup> Extraction method: Principle component analysis  
 Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization  
 KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure Sampling Adequacy)=0.89  
 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: p<0.001 (Chi-square=3942.175. df=276)

than disadvantages; local people are benefitting from tourist attractions as much as tourists do; tourism contributes to cultural fabric; tourists adapt to local life; tourism influences value judgments positively; tourism helps the improvement of art; tourism triggers the reversal of immigration by creating job opportunities, and that tourism does not lead to an increase in crime rates.

The second factor referred to as Negative Perceptions is explained through the reliability coefficient with 88,3% of the total variation (17,54%). This factor includes negative perceptions such as terror in the region of Mardin would affect the current and prospective tourists; tourism has left a bad influence on the young people; tourists do not take heed of the laws and lifestyle; tourism makes the provision of needs more difficult; tourists do not behave respectfully in the living spaces of the residents; there are no opportunities for the tourists to have a good time; and in the case of an increase in the tourist number local people might dislike them; tourism has negative effects on the socio-cultural and family structures; tourism has been associated by the local people with earning money; and tourism has become a factor in the increase of bad habits.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

As is seen in Table 2, the first 14 expressions represent the positive perceptions of tourism while the last ten refer to the negative ones. These findings point at the fact that local people are and will be content with the tourist influx and that social stress is still low depending on this influx. Local people living in the study field show a quite supportive attitude towards tourist influx due to their knowledge about the positive impacts of tourism; however, they are not much cognizant of the negative impacts of tourism. In this respect, socio-cultural impacts of tourism should be attached importance and the necessary measures should be taken to eliminate the negative socio-cultural impacts in support of tourism. Especially for tourism branches which necessitate special attention such as cultural tourism in Mardin, the target audience should be taken into consideration within the framework of sustainable tourism, local people and tourists should be ascribed equal importance, and the satisfaction levels of both parties should be carefully identified. Change in the societies via interaction with other cultures (via tourism) is an inevitable process. Thus, enrichment through mutual experiences in this cultural interaction is gaining importance. In the process from the planning of tourism until its implementation, all the actors of

tourism should aim at cultural diversity and retaining authenticity. In the maintenance of local identity, respect and tolerance of the tourists are as important as the responsibilities and functions of the local people. Also, responsibilities and activities of tour guides who are to orient and inform the tourists on the subjects of local culture and the necessity of its protection should likewise be taken into account.

As a conclusion, departing from the fact that the negative perceptions of the local people towards tourism in a touristic region might hinder the development of tourism, it is necessary to regularly measure and evaluate the perceptions and attitudes of the residents in order to achieve an environment friendly and sustainable tourism. A course of action should be identified according to these measurements. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that tourism planning studies could be sustainable only with the participation of the stakeholders (e.g. local people, local and central administrations, NGOs, vocation organizations, experts, university and private sector representatives).

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