

SUSTAINABLE MARINE TOURISM IN THE GULF OF EDREMIT

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Abstract

In the rapidly growing marine tourism sector, the concept of sustainability has come to the forefront because of inefficient use of resources, economic problems and social effects. Aegean coast, regarded as one of the major tourist areas of Turkey with its natural and cultural wealth. Especially, the Gulf of Edremit is one of the main natural gulfs in the Aegean Sea; it has been an area to be explored in recent years due to its cultural and natural characteristics. The main aim of the study is to examine development of marine tourism in Gulf of Edremit within the scope of sustainability dimensions. For this purpose, interviews with an institution and four companies were conducted. In the coding process of the responses obtained from interview, MAXQDA -Qualitative Data Analysis Software is used. As a result of these interviews, it has been determined that all institutions are aware of the negative impacts on the marine tourism environment and implement preventative measures. Also, majority of companies in sampling agree, the sustainability of marine tourism is achieved through the conservation of historical and cultural values, protection of environment and regional development. However according to interview results, the special conditions of the local people and the environment must be taken into consideration, all marine tourism stakeholders must come together and coordinate in order to better marketing techniques should be developed in the global arena for achieving successful and sustainable marine tourism in the Gulf of Edremit.

Keywords: Sustainability, marine tourism, Gulf of Edremit

1. Introduction

The concept of sustainability has become a phenomenon that must be considered in global dimensions since the 1970s, when environmental protection policies have gained national and international significance (Can, 2008: 23). The first appearance of the concept was realized with the report *"Limits of Growth 2"* published by the Club of Rome. This report focuses on the dangers of humanity in the 21st Century (Club of Rome, 2011). The Brundtland Commission report (1987) proposed a definition of sustainability for the first time. According to this report, sustainability is defined as *"to meet the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*. This definition is widely used today (WCED, 1987). Sustainability which is a multidimensional concept comprises issues as the protection of natural resources, the preservation of life quality of local people, least damage to environment and least pollution, the preservation of historical and cultural heritage and positive impact on sustainable development and transformation of economic effects to benefits (Soykan, 2003).

The concept of sustainability is examined under three main headings. These are economic, social and environmental sustainability (UN, 2005: 12). According to Carbone (2005: 560), economic sustainability refers *"to the additional income provided to locals to compensate them for the burden that the presence of tourists may cause"*. Social sustainability comprises concepts like equity, empowerment, participation, accessibility, cultural identity, sharing and stability of institutional. Social sustainability endeavor to protect the environment by way of economic growth and poverty alleviation (Basiago, 1999). Environmental sustainability defined as *"ability to maintain the qualities that are valued in the physical environment"* (Sutton, 2004).

Marine tourism includes activities for daily boat trips, long cruise ship trips, sports activities such as sailing, underwater diving, fishing, other water sports (Orams, 1999; Morena and Amelung, 2009). It is crucial that sustainable practices be implemented to ensure that the concepts of tourism and marine tourism, which combine a wide range of disciplines together, provide a long-term presence in a destination (Pınar and Sarı, 2017). Sustainable tourism defines as *"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"* (UNEP/UNWTO, 2005). It is discussed to the effects of tourism industry to sustainability at nationally and internationally.

The concept of sustainability is important with regards to the future of marine tourism as special area in tourism (Ayazlar, et al., 2016). Economic sustainability of marine tourism can be summarized the rise in earnings, incomes and employment, the foreign investments to tourism facilities in developing countries, the development of infrastructure, the increase in local support for environmental values and return to less favorable methods to exploitation (Mansuroğlu and Yıldırım, 2001). Social responsibility of marine tourism is divided into social and cultural effects. The social impacts are the consequences of changes that other users of the marine area have caused due to damage and intensive use. As marine tourism develops in a region, changes in social interactions and attitudes are increasing (Taylor and Buckenham, 2003). Environmental sustainability of marine tourism includes threats to physical values on the environment and values related to the protection of the environment (Pınar and Sarı, 2017). Coastal areas are particularly sensitive to pollution (Özhan, 2001). Issues addressing sustainability in marine tourism can be considered in the following topics: Energy management, waste management, work safety, water, air, soil and sound pollution management, pollution from oil pollution and public education (EPA, 2003; Gordon and Matuk, 2004; Görken, 2005; NSW, 2007; AtlayIşık and Cerit, 2009; AtlayIşık, 2011; Koç, 2012; Dragovic and Tselentis, 2014; Erkmen and Özkaynak, 2015; Fedai and Madran, 2015; Tuğdemir et al., 2016).

2. Aim and Methodology of the Research

Marine tourism activities are becoming more diversified and the number of people who are participating in these activities are increasing day by day. Especially in recent years, people's interest in tourism activities has been increased. When the economic, social and environmental effects taken into

consideration, sustainability and sustainable tourism concepts have gained importance in marine tourism regions. Therefore, this research aimed to examine the sustainability of marine tourism activities in the in the Gulf of Edremit of Balıkesir in terms of the perceptions of relevant institution and companies.

In order to reach the aim of the research, the interview method is used as a data collection method. Semi-structured interview technique is used in this research which is mostly used technique in qualitative researches. Interviews have been performed between the dates of 05.04.2018 and 15.04.2018 via face to face meeting, mail or telephone according to preference and availability of respondents. Some pre-determined questions related the main dimensions of sustainability are directed to interviewees and their detailed opinions are obtained. In the coding process of the responses obtained from interview, MAXQDA -Qualitative Data Analysis Software is used.

The sample of the research includes a government institution and four private marine tourism relevant companies. Sample companies are determined by convenience sampling method, which include a marina, a tour company, a diving center and a water sports center. All details related to sample of the research and interviews are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of Interviews

Institution / Company	Position of Respondent	Interview Date	Interview Method	Interview Duration
Port Authority	Harbor Master	05.04.2018	Face to face	30-45 minutes
Marina	Front Office Manager	08.04.2018	Face to face	40-50 minutes
Tour Company	Company Owner	12.04.2018	Telephone	25-30 minutes
Diving Center	Manager and Diving Instructor	15.04.2018	E-Mail	--
Water Sports Center	Manager	06.04.2018	Telephone	25-30 minutes

3. Findings

As a result of interviews with companies related to a government institutions and 4 private marine tourism companies, the MAXQDA program is used to encode sustainability approaches. In Table 2, sustainability approaches, environmental sustainability approach, social sustainability approach, economic sustainability approach are categorized as main categories and sub-codes for each approach are coded based on the answers of the respondents. The output of the coding is given in Figure 1.

In terms of sustainability approaches, answers of respondents are focused on technological adaptation, continuity of region, continuity of company, least damage to environment, people, service quality and customer expectations and sector growth. Respondent of port authority, as a representative of official institution emphasizes the importance of least damage to the people of the region and environment. Other private sector respondents emphasize the company policies, continuity of company, customer expectations, and environment protection. For example, respondent of diving center said that:

“Although sustainability in marine tourism depends primarily on climate and environmental conditions, sustainability can be created through planned tourism activities. In order to achieve this, the most important benefit will be public support”

Table 2.Coding Details in MAXQDA

Sustainability Approaches	Port Authority	Marina	Diving Center	Water Sport Center	Tour Company	Total
Least Damage to Environment	1	0	1	1	0	3
Continuity of Company	0	1	0	0	1	2
Service Quality and Customer Expectation	1	0	1	0	0	2
Technological Adaptation	0	0	0	0	1	1
Continuity of Region	0	1	0	0	0	1
Least Damage to People	1	0	0	0	0	1
Sector's Growth	1	0	0	0	0	1
Environmental Sustainability Approach						
Protection of Environment	0	1	1	1	1	4
Customer Awareness	0	1	1	1	0	3
Waste Reception	0	1	0	1	0	2
Inspections	1	0	1	0	0	2
Company Policy	0	0	1	0	1	2
Conscious Employees	0	1	0	0	0	1
Blue Flag and Blue Card System	0	1	0	0	0	1
Social Sustainability Approach						
Trainings and Education	0	0	0	1	1	2
Protection of Historical and Cultural Values	0	1	0	0	1	2
Social Responsibility Projects	0	1	1	0	0	2
Public Support	1	0	0	0	0	1
Customer Awareness	0	0	0	1	0	1
Conscious Employees	0	0	0	0	1	1
Economic Sustainability Approach						
Marketing and Campaigns	0	1	1	1	0	3
Regional Development	1	0	0	1	1	3
Government Incentives	0	0	1	0	1	2
Investments	0	0	1	0	0	1
Sensitive Brand Name	0	1	0	0	0	1

For economic sustainability, answers of respondents are focused on investments, government incentives, marketing and campaigns, sensitive brand name and regional development concepts. Respondent of port authority emphasizes the importance of economic development of the region. Other private sector respondents emphasize the brand name of the companies, development plans and government incentives, new investments and marketing campaigns. For example, respondent of Tour Company said that:

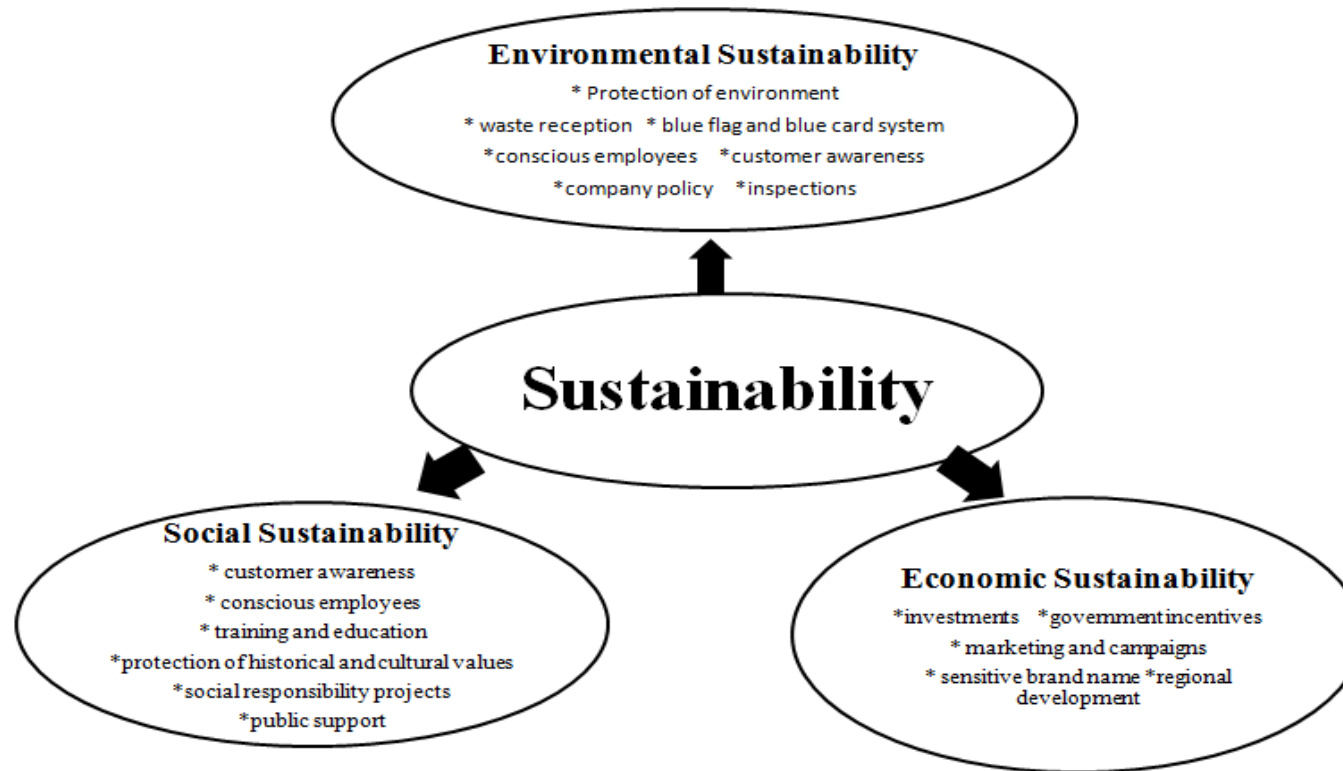


Figure 1. The Output of the Coding

“Business volume and planning are highly important for economic sustainability. For reaching economic sustainability, we are preparing development plans, investigating the government incentives and trying to fulfill the necessary conditions”

For social sustainability, answers of respondents are focused on customer awareness, conscious employees, training and education, protecting of historical and cultural values, social responsibility projects and public support. Respondent of port authority emphasizes the importance of public support for the marine tourism activities. Other private sector respondents emphasize the social responsibility projects, avoiding illegal activities, training and education for both customers and employees. For example, respondent of marina said that:

“Implementing social responsibility projects are highly important for social sustainability. We have been carried many projects related to history, culture and education with the support of headquarters such as “Ülkem için” and “Meslek Lisesi Memleket Meselesi” projects.

For environmental sustainability, answers of respondents are focused on inspections, company policies, customer awareness, conscious employees, blue flag and blue card system, protection of environment and waste reception. Respondent of port authority emphasizes the necessary inspections and trainings for the ensuring the environmental sustainability of marine tourism. Other private sector respondents emphasize the having warning signs, company policy, blue flag and blue card, waste reception, projects related to environment projections, For example, respondent of diving center said that:

“In recent times, because of water pollution demand of diving activities become shift to other destinations from the Gulf of Edremit. For this reason, The projects carried out in the name of conservation of the environment; Coastal and Marine Cleanup Activities, Hayalet Ağ Temizleme Aktiviteleri, Engelli Dalış Organizasyonları, Nature Conservation and Awareness Presentations and Red Coral Protection Projects. In addition, during the organized diving, the guide diver inspects the attitudes of the customers towards the environment. Also, “Nature Conservation and Awareness” presentations are made for the protecting special natural and cultural underwater beauties of Gulf of Edremit.

4. Conclusion

Marine tourism is rapidly developing industry all over the world. Economic, social and environmental aspects are highly important for marine tourism industry. The concept of sustainability has come to the forefront because of inefficient use of resources, economic problems and social effects. For this reason, studies related to sustainability concept in marine tourism have great importance in the literature.

The Gulf of Edremit is one of the main natural gulfs in the Aegean Sea; it has been an area to be explored in recent years due to its cultural and natural characteristics. Gulf of Edremit has marina, water sports facilities, and tour companies, coastal areas, camping sites, holiday sites, and hotels, private and public beaches.

The main aim of the study is to examine development of marine tourism in Gulf of Edremit within the scope of sustainability dimensions. In order to reach the aim of the research, semi-structured interview is used. The sample of the research includes a government institution and four private marine tourism relevant companies. Sample companies are determined by convenience sampling method, which include a marina, a tour company, a diving center and a water sports center.

According to the results, answers of respondents are focused on least damage to environment, service quality and customer expectations and continuity of the company for the sustainability approaches. In terms of environmental sustainability approaches, protection of environment, customer awareness, waste reception, inspections and company policy are the most important variables by the answers of respondents. Similarly, protection of environment, waste reception, conscious employees are variables of environmental sustainability in researches of Görken (2005), NSW (2007) Atlay Işık & Cerit (2009), Koç, (2012) Dragovic & Tselentis (2014), Erkmén & Özkaynak (2015) and Fedai &

Madran (2015). According to respondents, majority of variables are trainings and education, protection of historical and cultural values and social responsibility projects related to social sustainability approaches. Likewise, protection of historical and cultural values and public support identified as a variables in the studies of Basiago (1999) and Taylor & Buckenham (2003). Marketing and campaigns, regional development and government incentives are main variables in terms of economic sustainability. Carbone (2005) and Mansuroğlu and Yıldırım (2001) are identified regional development and investment as an economic sustainability variables.

This study can be useful for marine tourism actors for reaching more sustainable operations and necessary awareness. Further studies can be made with more marine tourism stakeholders in the region and Turkey.

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