



SWOT Analysis of Sustainable Ecotourism Potential Management in Protected Areas: A Case Study of Artvin

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ABSTRACT

In this study, it is aimed to examine the ecotourism potential in the protected areas with Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis based on expert opinions based on example of Artvin province. In this context, the situation was analyzed based on the opinions of 58 experts, consisting of local administrators and Global Environment Facility (GEF) project employees, NGOs and tour operators, the people of Camili and academics. As a result of the protection of natural resources and biodiversity, socio-economic benefits to the local people and the protection of cultural resources were listed as the most important criteria with the SWOT analysis. In addition, the main strengths of Artvin province are listed as habitat and species diversity and cultural memory, opportunities, the positive contribution of ecotourism in employment, the inadequacy of studies on the capacity to carry the weaknesses, and the deficiencies and threats in the database and inventory records, the problems experienced in the institutional framework/capacity, and the inadequacy of legislation and laws. In order to ensure sustainable ecotourism activities in protected areas, it is necessary to increase the effectiveness of the criteria and indicators, to strengthen the weaknesses, to use the opportunities in favor of the area, and to eliminate the threats and turn them into opportunities.

Keywords: SWOT analysis; Protected areas; Sustainable ecotourism

INTRODUCTION

With the effect of sustainable development, changes have become inevitable in the tourism sector, as in many sectors, and tourism policies have gained importance [1]. In particular, the concept of protected areas has become more important as a solution for the protection of forests and other natural resources used for tourism purposes and their sustainability while protecting them [2].

Following these, although many studies were conducted to monitor the sustainability of ecotourism activities around the World [3-14], with the planned development period that started in the 1960s in Türkiye, various development plans (eighth, ninth, and tenth) and their Special Specialization Commission reports, the Türkiye National Forestry Program, the 1st Environment and Forestry Council Decisions, the 2nd Forestry and Water Council Decisions, and the 3rd Agriculture and Forestry Council reported only policies and strategies for the development and dissemination of ecotourism in protected areas in these macro-level documents [15-17].

Despite these developments, the problems experienced in tourism

activities carried out in protected areas in Türkiye have not been overcome. Moreover, as a result of reasons such as globalization, rapid change in technology, newly formed markets, and the constant change in customer expectations and needs, it has become functional to think more strategically, make strategic plans and make strategic decisions all over the World [18].

Although there is a new emphasis on determining criteria and indicators for sustainable ecotourism management of a protected area in Türkiye [19-21], these studies seem to be still in the early stages. In addition, it is considered necessary to carry out SWOT analyzes that have the potential to serve the implementation of the "Strategic Management Approach" for each protected area in order to increase the efficiency and productivity of these studies in terms of quality and quantity. Therefore, in measuring the sustainability of ecotourism activities carried out in a protected area, the sustainability of a protected area will increase, its audit-monitoring activities will become more functional, and its position among other countries will increase, both with criteria and indicators, and with the determination of strengths/weaknesses, opportunities/threats for the area in question can make it stronger.

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In this study, based on the example of Artvin province of Türkiye, with the help of selected criteria and indicators related to the sustainable ecotourism management of the area and based on expert opinions, the internal and external environment analysis of the area will be carried out, and the strengths-weaknesses and opportunities-threats of these areas will be determined as items. Evaluation of internal competition and alternative options for sustainable development will be studied so that prominent strengths, opportunities-threats and weaknesses will be determined.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Introduction of the Research Area

Artvin province, located in the northeast of Türkiye and on the Georgian border, was chosen as the research area in the study. The total surface area of Artvin province is 7,359 km² and it has a ratio of 0.9% of Türkiye's surface area. The province of Artvin has mostly rugged and mountainous terrain, the Coruh River Valley divides the mountains into two, and approximately 51% of it consists of plateaus. The surface area of Artvin is 729,994 hectares, about 54% of the total area is forest and 9% is agricultural land. According to the Farmer Registration System, 13,584 households are engaged in farming [22].

Although it has not made sufficient progress in ecotourism in the province of Artvin, it also stands out with its many natural areas that local and foreign visitors approach with interest, and Türkiye's first and only biosphere reserve area. A large part of the natural touristic values found throughout the province still preserve their naturalness as areas that have not come to light and have not been promoted.

Other protected areas of Artvin province; Hatila Valley National Park, Ardanuc Hell Creek Canyon, Karagol-Sahara National Park, Altinparmak Mountains Nature Park, Balikli and Gunesli Waterfalls Nature Park, Camili-Gorgit Nature Reserve, Borcka Karagol Nature Park, Tavsan Tepesi Nature Park, Kamilat Dogu Kayin Nature Park and Melodere East Spruce Natural Monument. Ecotourism activities are carried out in Camili Biosphere Reserve, one of these protected areas.

Materials

In this study, the protected areas in the ecotourism activities carried out in the protected areas of Artvin province were used as the basic material. In this context, research, book, journal, article, paper, etc. that may be directly or indirectly related to the subject and various SWOT application examples were reached with the help of the web page on the computer, and the reports and records of Artvin Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry and Artvin Regional Directorate of Forestry were used.

Method

In this study, SWOT analysis, which is a situation analysis, was used as a method in order to achieve the purpose of the study in terms of content and scope. In addition, the questionnaires prepared according to 12 criteria and 68 indicators prepared by Bender MY [10] based on the WTO and UNWTO criteria and indicator sets constitute the other materials of the study. In this context; In order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of Artvin province, as well as the opportunities and threats that arise as a result of the activities done or to be carried out, the opinions of a total of 58 experts consisting of relevant local administrators and GEF project workers, NGOs and tour operators, the people of

Camili with direct income and academics are required. Interviews were conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SWOT analysis

The name of the SWOT analysis consists of the first letters of the terms Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. SWOT analysis considers the internal and external environment as a system, provides support in the decision-making phase and is an important stage in the formation of plan decisions [23]. Here, the strengths and weaknesses of the subject, as well as the threats and opportunities that support these situations are identified and thus basic information to be considered in planning is obtained [24,25]. SWOT analysis serves two purposes such as determining the strengths and weaknesses that determine the internal potential, the opportunities and threats encountered from the environment and the determination of strategic options that can be followed in the issues that will provide competitive advantage [26,27]. The SWOT analysis can be used in the sustainable management of ecotourism activities in protected areas, in determining the strategy and policy at both national and local level, making effective decisions and creating the necessary infrastructure. There are many studies using SWOT analysis in tourism planning strategies in literature reviews [28-30].

In this context, the SWOT analysis is an important tool in responding to the general vision for the future of the protected area and its environment, making strategic decisions and determining available options for sustainable development. Thus, according to the analysis of the current situation of protected areas, it will guide the identification and resolution of the most important strengths, deficiencies, opportunities and obstacles for the concepts of natural resources, ecotourism and carrying capacity [31]. Thus, when a SWOT analysis is performed for each protected area, targets and strategies for success will be determined in a more realistic way by comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the relevant area and environmental opportunities and threats, and it will contribute to the sustainability of ecotourism activities, making them successful, profitable, and economical.

SWOT analysis of artvin province

Artvin province has the potential to reach the place it deserves in tourism/ecotourism by eliminating its deficiencies such as infrastructure and lack of education. In Artvin, according to the tourism standards of 2020, there are 536 operating rooms with 11 operating certificates, 1.74 beds and 7 investment-certified facilities, 645 rooms and 1285 beds. In 2019, 2,292,412 people entered through the Sarp Black Border Gate. It fell to the 5th place in the ranking of tourists entering through the border gates on average in Türkiye. As of September 2019, there are 13 hotels with tourism operation certificate and 106 hotels with local certificates in Artvin. 119 accommodation facilities located throughout the province serve with a bed capacity of 4.815.

In Artvin, there is an employment distribution of 43.2% in the service sector, 41.3% in the agricultural sector and 15.5% in the industrial sector. In addition, the majority of the service sector of Artvin province is provided from the tourism sector. For example, according to 2017 data, the number of visitors to the protected areas in Artvin province was 7,600 people in Hatila Valley National Park, 26,600 people in Karagol Sahara National Park, 89,000 people in Borcka Karagol Nature Park and 629,000 people in

Kackar Mountains National Park and this rate shows an increasing trend day by day.

With the support of GEF small grant programs, beekeeping, ecotourism, fisheries project, molasses-marmalade production, dairy sheep breeding, establishment of fruit nursery etc. supported by many projects [32]. These projects are especially demanded for ecotourism purposes. 6000-6500 \$ support was given to each of the 13 village mansions for hotel pansion [33,34].

For this purpose, in the study conducted by Aydin and Öztürk [21], 12 criteria and 68 indicators, which are used as a starting set in determining the sustainable ecotourism management in Türkiye's protected areas, were utilized and the opinions of the experts were consulted for this purpose. The criteria taken into account in these

assessments are the protection of natural resources and biodiversity, the quality and quantity of environmental resources, environmental management practices, the provision of environmental learning and educational opportunities, the protection of cultural resources, the quality and quantity of cultural resources, local participation, socio-economic benefits to local people, public awareness, consumer/tourist satisfaction, management of ecotourism experience and institutional framework/capacity. In line with this information, the current situation regarding ecotourism activities carried out in protected areas in Artvin province has been tried to be revealed in line with expert opinions. Opinions on the SWOT analysis made according to the answers received in the interviews are also shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Strengths and weaknesses of Artvin province.

Strengths		Weaknesses	
S ₁	It includes many protected area status such as Nature, National Park, Nature Reserve, Biosphere Reserve Area	W ₁	Lack of accessibility to information
S ₂	Providing high quality nature services	W ₂	Deficiencies in database and inventory records
S ₃	Presence of natural old forests	W ₃	Lack of access to various historical and natural riches
S ₄	Continuity of participation and local community presence	W ₄	Distance to major cities in terms of transportation
S ₅	Presence of a polyphonic choir of elders	W ₅	Inadequacies in advertising and activities related to the promotion of the region
S ₆	Pure Caucasian Bee breed richness	W ₆	Failure to fully utilize the current ecotourism potential
S ₇	Richness of habitat and biological species diversity	W ₇	Deficiencies in in-service training
S ₈	Effectiveness of local governments and sensitive behavior of NGOs regarding ecotourism	W ₈	Lack of visitor information centers
S ₉	Characteristic of being one of the Caucasus ecoregion (one of 25 terrestrial regions) for endangered species	W ₉	Management plan still not available
S ₁₀	Presence of rich water resources	W ₁₀	Lack of adequate and trained personnel
S ₁₁	The prevalence of home pansion	W ₁₁	Not enough festivals
S ₁₂	The richness of local dishes	W ₁₂	Lack of adequate sewerage infrastructure
S ₁₃	Birds of prey are on one of their migration routes	W ₁₃	Deficiencies in direction signs
S ₁₄	Richness of geological formations	W ₁₄	Inadequacy of legislation and laws
S ₁₅	Having geopolitical importance in cross-border countries	-	-
S ₁₆	Türkiye's first and only biosphere reserve area and the increasing importance of this area	-	-
S ₁₇	Support and projects within the scope of small grant programs are active and widespread	-	-

S ₁₈	The area offers different ecotourism alternatives	-	-
S ₁₉	The high level of education of the people living in the area and their interest in ecotourism activities	-	-
S ₂₀	Being rich in historical and archaeological values	-	-

Table 2: Opportunities and threats of Artvin province.

Opportunities		Threats	
O ₁	Some very good quality products can be obtained in ecotourism areas (non-wood forest products, jam, marmalade making)	T ₁	Disruption of ecosystems
O ₂	The widespread use of organic agricultural products	T ₂	The threat of exceeding the carrying capacity in certain periods, especially in summer
O ₃	Beekeeping	T ₃	Habitat disturbances
O ₄	Existing home pansion can be further developed in terms of quality and form a basis for ecotourism services.	T ₄	The appearance of structural deterioration in local architecture
O ₅	Availability of suitable people and materials for handicrafts	T ₅	Failure to implement management plans related to zoning
O ₆	Being able to allocate sufficient time to planning as there is not yet an excessive demand for ecotourism	T ₆	Unplanned road construction works
O ₇	Respecting the complaints of visitors to the area	T ₇	Inadequacy of national protection policies
O ₈	Increasing the living standards of the local people thanks to ecotourism investments	T ₈	Increase in the amount of garbage and solid waste
O ₉	Depending on the development of ecotourism, new job opportunities are created, creating employment especially for young people	T ₉	Problems in the institutional framework, diversity of authority and multi-headedness
O ₁₀	Enabling the feasibility of many ecotourism activities	T ₁₀	Action plan deficiencies

CONCLUSION

In this case, the current situation regarding ecotourism activities in the protected dimensions of Artvin, one of Turkiye's provinces has been revealed and a SWOT analysis has been carried out for the current situation. Within the scope of the study, the opinions of the experts were used. In this way, it has been tried to determine how the existing potentials can be evaluated more efficiently, and evaluations have been made to overcome some weaknesses and threats against their strengths.

As a result of these examinations, Artvin ecotourism's rich natural resources, protected areas, history, culture and geographical location, the existence of the Pure Caucasian Bee breed, the interest of local governments and NGOs, and its geopolitical importance in the cross-border countries stand out as both its strongest aspects and advantages. Although Artvin ecotourism's weaknesses are less than its strengths, its destructive power is more. The weakest aspects are deficiencies in database and inventory records, inadequacies

in publicity, inadequacy in in-service training, deficiencies in legislation and laws, and deficiencies in management plans. In addition, the lack of a management plan in Artvin, the lack of trained personnel, transportation and infrastructure problems, and deficiencies in direction signs are the weaknesses that should be eliminated as soon as possible.

Despite all these weaknesses, there are also some opportunities. The biggest opportunity of Artvin province is that it has the most suitable areas for sustainable ecotourism and it has Turkiye's first and only biosphere reserve. In addition, considering the recent increase in interest in ecotourism in Turkiye and the benefits for the economic development of a province that has agricultural difficulties as a country, it is a great opportunity for Artvin to use this opportunity. For this purpose, the important thing is to create sensitivity in the local sense, to better evaluate the advantages in ecotourism and to minimize the negativities created by the weaknesses, and a sustainable wealth will be provided to the region.

Therefore, with the help of SWOT analysis, necessary effort and dedication should be made in order to implement the action sequences that have been put forward with a strategic approach for the sustainability of ecotourism activities in Artvin, to increase internal and external awareness, and to coordinate with institutions and organizations within and outside the forestry sector. At this point, the SWOT analysis, which is described as a due diligence, should be considered as an important tool in effectively ensuring the sustainability of ecotourism in protected areas and should be used appropriately in practice.

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