

ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF YOZGAT, TURKEY

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Abstract

This paper focuses on examining how ecotourism can help rural development. Eco-tourism is an important type of tourism that provides economic and social benefits to the local community by exhibiting rural life, culture, and nature in rural areas. The study was conducted in Yozgat province of Turkey using primary and secondary data. In this context, interviews were had with the authorities of the Culture and Tourism Provincial Directorate, Yozgat Culture, Tourism and Development Association, and local administrations, plus it was observed in the field. Published publications and scientific studies on the subject were also used as secondary sources. According to the research findings, ecotourism was considered an effective and important model for the sustainable development of local communities. In the study, the eco-tourism potential of the province, strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O), and threats (T) were revealed by SWOT analysis. Opportunities and strengths were considered significant for sustainable ecotourism potential. Focusing on local tourism and rural development as a leverage point, this paper puts forward proposals on management strategies and offers a different viewpoint on the need for rural innovation.

Key words: ecotourism, rural development, swot analysis, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

Rural development studies are extremely important in achieving national development goals. It is important to activate local dynamics in rural development. In recent years, ecotourism places, one of the local dynamics, have been rapidly brought into tourism. Thus, it is contributed to rural development without the need for large investments. At this point, ecotourism is considered a type of tourism that is based on the sustainability of natural resources on earth, helps the economic development of the local community, and protects and observes their social and cultural integrity [26]. Ecotourism is unique tourism nature-based [17].

Depending on the changing living conditions, the tourism tendencies of individuals also change. Today, instead of traditional tourism understandings, visits to calmer, natural and original places are preferred. In other words, tourists have started to prefer natural and rural areas, in short, activities where they can be intertwined with nature instead of sea-sand-

sun tourism [18]; [4]. Thus, social mobility has increased, local entrepreneurship has developed, and great cultural changes have occurred in rural areas. In this context, ecotourism provides an ideal platform for the conservation of nature and the development of rural communities [19]; [5]; [27].

Ecotourism has become a rapidly growing sector in the world tourism industry. It is seen as a potential solution for social, cultural and economic development, especially in developing countries [8]; [2]. For developing a sustainable management of ecotourism sites a public-private partnership is required [28]. For rural development and hence economic development targets, places suitable for ecotourism should be considered and brought into tourism. Thus, in this study also, the ecotourism potential in Yozgat, which has a high rural character, was investigated and its relationship with rural development was analyzed and commented on.

Yozgat province, which is one of the oldest settlements in Turkey has very suitable potential for ecotourism due to its large rural and natural fields, and rich forests. Although

there have been some scientific studies on tourism in the province, no studies on ecotourism and rural development have been met. For this reason, this study has an original feature.

The study consists of four parts, including the introduction. General information about the subject is presented in the introduction part of the study. The material and method used in the study are explained in the second part of the study. In the third chapter, which has findings and discussions, ecotourism activities and their relationship with rural development are examined in depth in Yozgat province. In the fourth and last part of the study also, a series of measures and suggestions are listed on management policies for the progress of ecotourism in Yozgat province.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, both primary data and secondary data were used. In the study, first of all, a wide literature review was conducted on the determination of suitable places for ecotourism in Yozgat province. Along with the literature review, by making use of the opinions of the Culture and Tourism Provincial Directorate and the Yozgat Culture, Tourism and Development Association, places suitable for ecotourism were determined in Yozgat. Thus, Akdağmadeni, Aydıncık, Çayıralan, Çekerek, Kadışehri, Merkez, and Sarıkaya districts were chosen as the research area. In the research, the qualitative research method was applied. In this context, interviews were had with the authorities of the Culture and Tourism Provincial Directorate, Yozgat Culture, Tourism and Development Association, and local administrations. Information aimed at the interview was carried out in the form of taking notes. In order for supporting information and findings obtained from interviews, it was observed in the field. In the study, images of ecotourism activities were also used to document in terms of promotion. This information and findings obtained constituted the primary data of the study.

The interview method, which was used as the primary data collection means in the study, is

a qualitative research method, the basis of which is based on verbal and visual communication, and is shaped by the answers of the viewed person within a conversation and dialogue [25]; [1]. The qualitative research method is considered a method in which qualitative data collection methods such as the interview, observation and focus group are used, and data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted according to the statements of individuals [3]; [22]. With this method, it became possible for creating a direct interview environment with target organizations. In interviews with target organizations, interviews were had on the issues of suitable places for ecotourism throughout the province, types of ecotourism, ecotourism investments, the importance of ecotourism and why it is needed, the contribution of ecotourism to rural development, ecotourism and environment interaction, biodiversity in ecotourism areas, future of ecotourism, policies proposed on the improvement of ecotourism, and opportunities, strengths, threats, and weaknesses, etc. aimed at ecotourism. The information obtained from the interview and observation was analyzed as content, and the ecotourism potential in the region, its relationship with rural development, and ecotourism management strategies were considered separately.

In this study, in addition to primary data, secondary data were also used. Published books, journals, papers, and institutional reports on the subject formed the secondary data of the study. With the analysis of primary and secondary data, the goal of the paper was achieved.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ecotourism activities in Yozgat province

Yozgat province hosts all types of ecotourism with its wide natural and rural areas and perfect geography. Especially in recent years, due to the changes in people's tourism preferences, the low cost of ecotourism, and the efforts to promote ecotourism, it has been observed that there has been a distinct increase in the number of ecotourists visiting

Yozgat. In 2015, a total of 56,516 ecotourists, 423 of which were foreign and 56,093 of which were local, visited Yozgat. In 2018, 1,212 foreign and 182,558 local ecotourists visited Yozgat, and the total number of tourists visiting Yozgat was 183,770 [10].

In this study, places suitable for ecotourism in Yozgat province and ecotourism-based tourism activities were determined and presented below. In the study, ecotourism activities were also supported with visuals in that for promotion.

Canoeing/Rafting (Stream Tourism)

Rafting tourism is a type of tourism that gives ecotourists extraordinary excitement and experience. Rafting is a tourism and sporting activity with a definite starting and ending point, and which is usually performed by using a boat and shovel on the river surface. Features such as flow rate, route and rocky condition of the stream are important for rafting.

Canoeing tourism, on the other hand, is a type of tourism that requires a struggle with time on streams similarly to rafting, enables reaching the goal with paddles that can be used at both ends and is also made as an olympiad sport. Canoeing is an activity that requires a high level of experimentation with natural or artificial obstacles in high-flow streams for sports or entertainment purposes. Canoeing trails generally have lengths varying between 500-1,000 meters. Canoe/rafting ecotourism can easily accord with activities such as camp/caravan, trekking/hiking, and cycling [12].

In Photo 1, the Çekerek River Rafting Area, which is a suitable place for canoe/rafting tourism, was given. A suitable flow rate can be obtained with the water released from the Çekerek Dam for rafting/canoeing.

Thus, a rafting area was built in the Çekerek district. Rafting area is 850 meters long and 10 meters wide and has social opportunities such as a rafting racing circuit, bungalow houses, sports and fitness areas, camping areas, caravan park areas, children's playgrounds, an amphitheater, and a cafeteria. There is also a lavender garden of 5,000 square meters in the racing circuit area.



Photo 1. Rafting Area (Çekerek district)
 Source: [12].

Trekking/Hiking (Nature Walk Tourism)

Trekking/hiking is a type of ecotourism based on a nature walk that is carried out in open areas and allows tourists to interact with the environment. Nature walks are a tourism activity that people usually engaged in alone or in groups in rural and natural areas. Nature walks are a type of activity most preferred by almost all age groups. In the study, the areas/places where trekking/hiking activities can be carried out in Yozgat were determined, and given in Table 1.

Table 1. Suitable areas for trekking / hiking in Yozgat province

Districts	Trekking/hiking areas
Akdağmadeni	Akdagmadeni Forests
Akdağmadeni	Yukarıçulhali Village
Akdağmadeni	Asağıçulhali Village
Akdağmadeni	Bascatak Village
Akdağmadeni	Davulbaz Village
Akdağmadeni	Çerçialanı Village
Akdağmadeni	Veziralanı Village
Akdağmadeni	Ortakoy Eğriağız Downland
Aydıncık	Aydıncık Forests
Aydıncık	Kazankaya Canyon
Aydıncık	Dereçiftlik Village
Aydıncık	Sebek Plateau
Aydıncık	Uzuncayır Downlands
Çayıralan	Çayıralan Forests
Çayıralan	Yahyasaray Dam and Village
Çayıralan	Sobeçimen Village
Çayıralan	Avşaralanı Village
Çayıralan	Guzelyayla Village
Çekerek	Pulling Forests
Çekerek	Bazlambac Town
Çekerek	Pulling Dam
Center town	Yozgat Piny National Park and Fatih Nature Park

Source: Research results; [12].

In addition to being a nature-based activity, nature walks have many advantages such as gaining an adventure experience, allowing for

cultural interaction of the local community with tourists, and educational.

In Photo 2a, trekking/hiking tourism was given in Yozgat Piny National Park.



Photo 2a. Trekking/Hiking Tourism (Yozgat Piny National Park-Center town)
Source: [20].

Kazankaya Canyon, which is one of the most beautiful places for trekking / hiking in Yozgat province, is situated 10 kilometers from the Aydıncık district. From the Aydıncık district to İncesu village of Çorum, Kazankaya Canyon has an area of 12 km. Kanyo's historical and natural beauties are tried to be kept alive without being destroyed. Thousands of tourists visit Kazankaya Canyon every year due to the fact that the region is brought into tourism. The joint efforts of Yozgat Governorship, Aydıncık Municipality, and Central Anatolian Development Agency have been effective in opening Kazankaya Canyon in tourism.

The Canyon, which has a rich content in terms of flora and fauna, has walking areas, a climbing racing circuit, an observation hill, watchtowers, and accommodation places.

The Canyon, which is also named a hidden paradise, has been the visiting point of many local and foreign tourists.

In the research, it was determined that Kazankaya Canyon provides opportunities for many ecotourism activities such as first of all camp/caravan and trekking/hiking, flora and fauna watching, and bird watching. The image of the Canyon was given in Photo 2b.



Photo 2b. Trekking/Hiking Area (Kazankaya Canyon-Aydincik district)
Source: [29].

Camping/Caravan Tourism

One of the ecotourism activities that have become popular in recent years is camping/caravan tourism. Camping/caravan tourism is also nature-based, and economic. It has been much more popular due to the changes in the holiday habits of tourists. Camping/caravan tourism is a tourism activity that ecotourists perform with caravans or tents in nature [20].

Areas where camping/caravan tourism can be conducted are; meadows and pastures, forests, heathland, sea or lake sides, and low noisy environments.

The forest areas, downlands, dams, ponds, streams, canyons, and valleys in the Center town, and Akdağmadeni, Çayıralan, Çekerek, and Aydıncık districts are quite suitable areas for camping/caravan tourism as determined in this research.

There are nearly 30 camping/caravan tourism centers throughout the province. In Photo 3, Davulbaztepe Nature Park Camping/Caravan Tourism Area was given.



Photo 3. Camp Tourism Area (Davulbaztepe Nature Park-Center town)
Source: [30].

Flora versus Fauna Watching

Flora is a concept that contains the entire plant existence in a particular region ecologically. Fauna expresses all animal species in an ecologically limited region. When wildlife observation is related to plants, it is called flora observation, and when it is related to animals, it is called fauna observation. Flora and fauna observation is currently carried out as a tourism activity in the research area.

In order for a region to be suitable for flora observation, it has to get rich with respect to plant diversity and endemic plant species have to exist. At this juncture, the research region is rich in flora, and it hosts 1,526 plant species. 244 of them are endemic and 8 of them are in the local endemic group. As for the fauna observation in the research area, it was determined that large forest areas, especially in the northern and eastern regions of the province, constitute the habitat of many wildlife species. There are 50 species of mammals in the provincial fauna. In Photo 4a and 4b, images of flora and fauna were given.



Photo 4a. Flora Whatching (Cehirlik Tulipa-Center town)

Source: Research archive.



Photo 4b. Fauna Watching (Center town).

Source: [20].

Bird Watching

Bird observation is the activity of observing the natural habitat environments of birds. Bird watching is a tourism activity that is generally preferred by ecotourists with high education and income. Bird observation is the activity of observing the natural habitat environments of birds. Bird watching is a tourism activity that is generally preferred by ecotourists with high education and income. For this reason, bird observation is important in terms of contributing to the regional economy. The fact that bird watching has a very low effect on environmental destruction shows that it is protectionism tourism. It is considered the most significant tourism based on nature.

Suitable areas for bird watching are generally watery areas, steppe lands, and open areas. Clear and flat places in forested areas are also suitable for bird observation.

Since Yozgat province is located within the Kızılırmak and Yeşilirmak basins, there are many watery areas. In the northern and eastern parts of it, the richness of forest and vegetation, and the presence of many dams and ponds have created a suitable ambiance for bird watching (Photo 5).



Photo 5. Bird Watching (Center town)

Source: Research archive.

Farm Tourism

The concept of farm tourism has emerged as a consequence of the formation of the desire to walk away from urban life and stressful environments and the longing for natural life in people. The main purpose of ecotourists performing farm tourism is to walk away from urban life city life for a while, see the farm life, and rest. As farm tourism can consist of areas assigned only for farm tourism, it can be in the form that individuals open to farm

tourism the areas where they live in villages or farms.

In this context, suitable areas for farm tourism in the research region are; Kabalı Integrated Orchard of Kadişehir and Lavender Island of Çekerek. Agricultural products such as dwarf apple, cherry, peach-nectarine, quince, strawberry, goose, sheep, and beekeeping are cultivated in Kabalı Integrated Orchard, which is one of the largest orchards in Turkey. The cherry garden in the Integrated Orchard is the third largest in Europe. In Photo 6, the image of Kabalı Integrated Orchard was given.



Photo 6. Farm Tourism (Kabalı Integrated Orchard-Kadişehir district)
 Source: [31].

Downland Tourism

Downland tourism is a type of tourism that is among the transhumance culture and traditions of Anatolia and that gives people longing for natural life the chance to league together with nature and experience different cultural experiences. Downland tourism presents people both with fun, rest, and relief opportunities in a natural environment, and high-quality landscapes.

In the study, downlands in Yozgat province were determined and given in Table 2.

Table 2. Downland tourism in Yozgat province

Districts	Downlands
Aydıncık	Şebek Downland
Aydıncık	Uzunçayır Downland
Akdağmadeni	Şirin Downland
Akdağmadeni	Nalbant Downland
Akdağmadeni	Eğriağız Downland
Çayıralan	Sııklı Downland
Çayıralan	Tahtalı Downland
Çayıralan	Konuklar Downland
Çekerek	Özükkavak Downland
Çekerek	Çayırozü Downland
Sarıkaya	Hisarbey Downland

Source: Research results; [12].

Photo 7 shows Hisarbey Downland in the Sarıkaya district.



Photo 7. Downland Tourism (Hisarbey Downland-Sarıkaya district)
 Source: Research archive.

Forest Therapy Tourism

Forest therapy tourism expresses to capitalize on forest resources to improve health and soul.

It is a tourism activity that ecotourists consider alternatively to be able to reduce the negative effects of a stressful life.

Forested areas are in Akdağmadeni, Aydıncık, Çayıralan, Çekerek, and Kadişehir districts. It was determined that forested areas in Akdağmadeni and Çayıralan districts are the most suitable places for forest therapy tourism (Photo 8a and 8b).



Photo 8a. Forest Therapy Tourism Area (Akdağmadeni Forests-Akdağmadeni district)
 Source: [32].



Photo 8b. Forest Therapy Tourism Area (Çayıralan Forests-Çayıralan district)

Source: Research archive.

Bicycling Tourism

The bicycle, which was used for transportation purposes before, started to be used as a fun, sports, and cultural activity together with the development of tourism culture. In this context, the bicycle, which is considered a combination of nature, culture, sports, and travel, has recently come into prominence in ecotourism. It is a new type of tourism [21].

Bicycling tourism has a process that can vary from daily trips to long-term holidays. Factors affecting the selection of route place for bicycling tourism are; bicycle tour route, bicycle facilities, bike lane condition, road slope, scenery, route safety, scenery diversity, ride length, and route diversity.

In the study, it was determined that Akdağmadeni, Çayıralan, Çekerek, and Aydıncık districts and Yozgat Piny National Park are quite suitable areas for bicycling tourism.

In Photo 9, bicycling tourism was given in Yozgat Piny National Park.



Photo 9. Bicycling Tourism (Yozgat Piny National Park-Central district)
Source: [20].

Hunting Tourism

Hunting tourism is one of the nature-based tourism activities. Both foreign and domestic ecotourists participate in hunting tourism. Ecotourists participating in hunting tourism are in good condition in terms of income and are considered tourist groups that spend in the region they go to. For this reason, hunting tourism contributes to the regional economy in terms of income and employment.

In this study, it was determined that Yozgat province has a rich potential in terms of hunting grounds and there are 33 hunting grounds throughout the province.

Evaluation of ecotourism with SWOT analysis

In the study, in light of information and findings obtained from interviews and the researcher's observations, the ecotourism potential of the research region was evaluated by SWOT analysis, and presented below.

Strengths:

- Existence of clean air, water and soil, and intact nature in Yozgat province.
- That Yozgat Piny National Park, which is Turkey's first National Park, is located in the city center.
- The fact that it is rich in fauna and flora.
- Favourableness of soil and climate structure for all kinds of fauna and flora.
- Presence of a large natural area in Yozgat.
- Hospitableness of Yozgat humans.
- Height of the number of the young labor force.
- Yozgat's being at close range to metropolitans such as Ankara, Kayseri, Sivas, and Samsun.
- Adequateness of the infrastructure of natural gas and electric energy in the province.
- Its having a strong railway, high-speed train, and road highway connecting the east and west of Turkey.
- The fact that Hattusha, the capital of the Hittites, who founded the first empire in Anatolia, is at close range to Yozgat.
- The fact that Sarıkaya Roman Bath is the only bath belonging to the Roman Empire whose originality has not been destroyed.
- Presence of a lot of natural, historical, and archaeological protected areas,
 - The fact that there are more historical and archaeological protected areas than 400 registered in the region.
- Existence of large forested areas, promenades, and downlands.
- Being protected naturalness in ecotourism areas.
- The fact that Yozgat is also suitable for winter, culture, faith, cave, sports, gastronomy, and health tourism together with ecotourism.
- Presence of luxury hotels and rest areas in Sorgun, Sarıkaya, Saraykent, and Yerköy districts.

- The fact that there are many dams (Süreyyabey, Musabeyli, Gelingüllü, Uzunlu, İnandık, and Yahyasaray dams) and ponds in the area.

Weaknesses:

- Population migration from Yozgat to other regions. Since population migration is effective in weakening social mobility, it is thought that it will negatively affect the improvement of ecotourism.
- Lack of awareness about ecotourism in the local community.
- Inadequateness of the relationship and communication between Yozgat Bozok University and the Yozgat community.
- Lack of rural industry.
- Weak integration between organizations related to tourism.
- Insufficient promotional efforts aimed at ecotourism.
- Insufficient attempts about marketing local products and crafts.
- Inadequateness of facilities regarding ecotourism.
- Qualified personnel shortage.
- Lack of knowledge on financing for ecotourism investments.
- Lack of travel companies throughout the province.

Opportunities:

- The richness of historical and touristic values in the region.
- Presence of high-speed train stations in ecotourism centers.
- Closeness of ecotourism areas to the town center.
- Suitability of transportation and traffic infrastructure for ecotourism.
- Suitability of the region for all nature tourism.
- Yozgat to be included the primary region for development in terms of public aid.
- The topographic and its climatic structure to be suitable for summer and winter tourism.
- Due to low population density, natural areas to remain without being destroyed.
- Its to be rich in terms of local crafts.
- Being on a good wicket of food culture.
- The height of agriculture and animal breeding potential.

- Presence of Central Anatolian Development and Agricultural Development Support Institution to encourage tourism investments.

- Yozgat Bozok University Faculty of Communication and Culture and Tourism Provincial Directorate to be able to play a part in the promotion of ecotourism.

Threats:

- Destruction risk in historical and natural areas due to the possibility of pollution and neglect.
- Insufficiency in cooperation and communication between authorized institutions and the local community on ecotourism.
- Lack of qualified and experienced personnel for this cooperation.
- Deterioration and destruction risk in ecotourism areas due to global warming, climate change, and natural disasters.
- Low income per capita in the region.
- Insufficiency of shares the province receives from public investments.
- Reduction in the young population due to population migration.
- Sufficiently undeveloped ecotourism perception in the region.
- Weakening and deterioration risk in traditional and local cultures.

The role of ecotourism in sustainable rural development

Rural development is a process in which rural efforts are activated together with the public sector, and contributed to national development in order to be able to improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions of rural communities [24]. Sustainable rural development is a total of activities, depending on the sustainable natural resource use in rural areas on the one hand, aiming to reduce development differences by increasing the income level and quality of life of the rural community, and on the other hand, considering the conservation and development of environmental, and taking into account by cultural values, social, cultural and economic needs, potentials and dynamics [11]; [5]. Sustainable rural development depends on the sustainable use of local resources in terms of ecological, economic, and sociocultural aspects [9]. In this context, mobilizing local

resources and their sustainability will be the right approach for sustainable development. With sustainable tourism also, it is understood that the current requirements of tourists and visited places are met with future opportunities. This approach is related to economic, social, and cultural needs and the continuity of ecological processes and biodiversity.

As for rural sustainability, it means that local communities stay in their traditional environments through sustainable employment and revenue growth. In order to be able to manage rural development effectively, first of all, it is necessary to define the main threats aimed at sustainable development well and to evaluate agricultural, economic, and social indicators in rural areas well [7]. Although special importance has been placed on sustainable rural development in recent years, it is still insufficient studies carried out on this subject are sufficient.

In this study, in light of the primary data, it occurred that ecotourism is an effective tool in sustainable rural development. According to the research findings, ecotourists, throughout sightseeing, not only have been going for an outing to the touristic areas but also making expenses for food, meals, cleaning, hunting, shelter, etc. Thanks to ecotourism, local community have been earning additional income by selling local food products and handicrafts on the roadside. Local food products sold in ecotourism areas have been; consisting of finger buns, fenugreek, roasted wheat, noodles, buffalo butter, churned yogurt, and butter, homemade tomato paste, local roast, grape molasses, molasses sausage, village phyllo, and dried vegetables. Local carpets and rugs, pinked hoops, hand embroidery, silver embroidery, shawl, lace, embroidered towels, and local socks are some of the local crafts. Facilities and infrastructure investments for tourism purposes in ecotourism areas have been forming elements of rural development.

In the interviews with the target organizations, it was also stated that ecotourism has been an effective tool in protecting local cultures and cultural enrichment, and that ecotourism strengthens traditional culture, hospitality, and

traditions and is effective in reducing social conflicts. In observation in the field also, it was understood that local cultures have been introduced to ecotourists, and local community have been also benefiting from ecotourists' cultures. Ergo, ecotourism has been contributing to the rural development of the region culturally.

According to information obtained from the interviews, it was determined that population migration from the region to other cities has decreased thanks to ecotourism. The researcher's observations have also been confirming this. The human mobility in the region, plant production pattern, and vitality in nature have been showing that the local community has still lived in rural areas. On considering labor, employment, and expenditure contributions of the population to the economy, it can be stated that ecotourism has contributed through expenditure and employment to development. Also in the literature studies on this subject, the relationship between ecotourism and rural development was clearly stated. Some of these studies were:

[14] stated that ecotourism turned into a strategy for creating sustainable livelihoods and played an important part in the management of local communities. Ecotourism seems an ideal means to improve socioeconomic development. Also in the study performed by [13], it was stated that when the definitions of ecotourism are examined generally, the condition of gaining benefit/welfare to the local community is in the foreground. If the local community in ecotourism regions cannot revenue any direct or indirect generation from ecotourism activities or does not provide any benefit to themselves, this type of tourism cannot be qualified as ecotourism. If rural community develops in all respects in ecotourism regions, this is expressed as sustainable rural development. In real terms, ecotourism should hold the welfare and development of the local community at its core. In the study conducted by [15], ecotourism was stated as a small-scale tourism type that aims to protect the ecological balances and to turn the interactions between nature-human-

environment and tourism activities into an advantage, meanwhile, that also supports local entrepreneurs and economic development. In the study, it was explained that ecotourists contribute to the economic welfare of the local community by creating employment and financial instruments, and they raise awareness for the protection of ecotourism areas. Ecotourism as specified is an effective process in decreasing migration from rural to urban areas and keeping local culture, arts, and crafts alive. According to [16], ecotourism is a sub-component of sustainable tourism. In the study, it was expressed that ecotourism is perceived as an effective tool for sustainable development and that developing countries now include it in their economic development strategies. As alternative tourism, ecotourism is a nature experience-based tourism that ensures the economic and social development of local communities. [23], in their study, emphasized that ecotourism-based tourism activities should be developed in ensuring the rural development of forest villages located in the Yıldız Mountains. In the study, it was stated that the economic situation of the people living in the region has been not at a sufficient level, and they need to benefit from the ecotourism potential sufficiently for their income level to be able to increase. In the region, household effects and knickknackery, and local products to be produced from forest products can create added value to rural development significantly. These products with high added value can be marketed to tourists through the sales stands to be set up on the roadside by Agricultural Development Cooperatives. In addition to these, the governorship, provincial and district municipalities, Culture and Tourism Provincial Directorate, and non-governmental organizations should also place importance on the promotion of ecotourism places in the region. In the event that these proposals can be realized at a certain level, it is thought that there will be no significant obstacle to the rural development of the region.

CONCLUSIONS

Changes in people's tourism preferences have increased the demand for ecotourism in recent years. With Increasing hobby gardening and intense interest in rural areas, ecotourism turned into an important tourism type. In this respect, Yozgat province offers a good ecotourism opportunity change with its excellent geography, biodiversity, and forest existence. Here, in this study, it was also determined that Yozgat province has a good ecotourism potential.

In the study, the ecotourism potential of Yozgat province was evaluated with a SWOT analysis. In evaluations, it was seen that SWOT analysis could be used as a useful means of tourism research. It is thought that this study can help local government managers and other organizations interested in tourism on sustainability.

Based on the information and findings obtained from the research, management strategies determined related to ecotourism were presented below:

- 1) Developing efforts aimed at understanding nature and socio-cultural values, and increasing the tendency to turn them into contributions.
- 2) Developing tendencies to minimize the negative effects of socio-cultural activities on nature and the environment.
- 3) Constructing physical facilities in accordance with the natural environment in ecotourism areas.
- 4) Attaching special importance to education and information studies on the promotion of ecotourism activities.
- 5) Being put emphasis on the quality of ecotourism, and having an impeccable natural environment.
- 6) Activating inactive ecotourism places.
- 7) Conservation of endemic plants, biological diversity, and wildlife, and integration of all these with the natural environment.
- 8) Protection of cultural heritage, keeping the traditions and customs of the local community alive.
- 9) Improving interaction between ecotourists and rural communities.
- 10) Carrying out activities in charge of both ecotourists and the local community in order

to minimize the negative nature and socio-cultural effects.

11) At the same time, implementation of long-term control programs.

12) Developing new policies and doing plans related to ecotourism.

13) Paying special attention to marketing and promotion.

14) From the local community, bringing up publicists interacting with nature and rural life, highly educated about the environment, having environmental experience, relating nature, and knowing a foreign language.

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