

EVALUATION OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL PROPERTIES OF UCMAKDERE (TEKIRDAG, TURKEY) IN TERMS OF ECOTOURISM

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Abstract

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In this study, the assessment of Ucmakdere village which has an important potential due to its natural, cultural, and historical characteristics in terms of ecotourism and the determination of the opinions of local residents and visitors regarding the region were aimed. As a result, it is found out that Ucmakdere village is suitable for ecotourism activities in terms of its natural and cultural characteristics. In the survey study, local residents and visitors reported the most important characteristic of Ucmakdere village to be its natural beauty. Visitors mostly come in order to observe traditional and natural village life and to carry out ecotourism activities.

Key words: ecotourism, recreation, sustainability, natural and cultural sources

Introduction

Eco or nature tourism has become one of the major components of tourist activity today (Ryan et al., 2000). Tourism, particularly ecotourism, is on the increase worldwide, and will continue to increase as global economies improve and leisure time increases (Burger, 2000).

Over the past 15 years, ecotourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry, growing three times faster than the industry as a whole. At the same time, ecotourism is being increasingly viewed by local and indigenous communities as an important tool for promoting sustainable livelihoods, cultural preservation, and biodiversity conservation (Honey, 2006). The In-

ternational Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2006) defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of indigenous people”. Ecotourism has, in essence, three core tenants. It holds that, done well, it can (1) protect and enhance the environment, (2) respect local cultures and provide tangible benefits to host communities, and (3) be educational as well as enjoyable for the traveler (Honey, 2006). Ecotourism has been defined in many different ways in the literature, but one of the most central dimensions, co-operation, has not been included. Ecotourism must be sustainable and four central groups of actors have to co-operate, the indigenous people, the authorities, tourists and companies involved in tourism (Bjork, 2000).

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Conventional tourism impacts the environment both physically and culturally. Tourism has increased by more than 100% between 1990 and 2000 in the world's biodiversity hotspots, regions richest in species and facing extreme threats (Christ et al., 2003). The adverse effects of tourism stem from tourists themselves, as well as from infrastructure and accommodation facilities. Although, these impacts cannot be eliminated, by establishing a framework that emphasizes proper planning and monitoring, they can be managed properly and kept to a bare minimum. To mitigate or avoid negative impacts, part of the ecotourism planning strategy often consists in restoring impacted land and affected resources, while actively publicizing such efforts (Mehta, 2006). Tourism revenues and cooperative, volunteer labor can serve to finance and carry out restoration programmes. Part of lodge owners' marketing campaign may mention reforestation, eradication of exotic species, re-introduction of native species, as well as organic gardening, etc. (Mehta et al., 2002).

Effective planning, management and control are a precondition for a sound relationship between protected areas and tourism (Boo, 1990; Hunter and Green, 1995 and Yu et al., 1997). Local communities have to participate in these processes, and to receive a share of the financial benefits (Vorlaufer,

1997). Guiding may be a key issue as well. While creating additional jobs, it maximizes the knowledge tourists can gain. Moreover, guides control visitor behavior in protected areas, and thereby increase carrying capacities (Gossling, 1999).

The demand for rural area increases recently since the urban area has not been inadequate for recreational activities (Yilmaz, 2006).

In this study, determining of the natural and cultural heritages and eco-tourism opportunities of Ucmakdere village, located 35 km far from Tekirdag city, were aimed at. The suggestions to stimulate the rural life for this village were developed.

Material and Method

Ucmakdere village, which is located within Şarköy sub-province of Tekirdag constitutes the main material of this study. Ucmakdere village is at a distance of 36 km from Sarkoy sub-province and of 35 km from Tekirdag city center. The village, which possesses a natural beauty beyond comparison, is located on the deep valley down the Ganos Mountains (Figure 1). Throughout the history, viticulture, sericulture, tobacco cultivation and fishery have been important industries in the village. The houses in the rural settlement have a different architectural characteristic and are com-

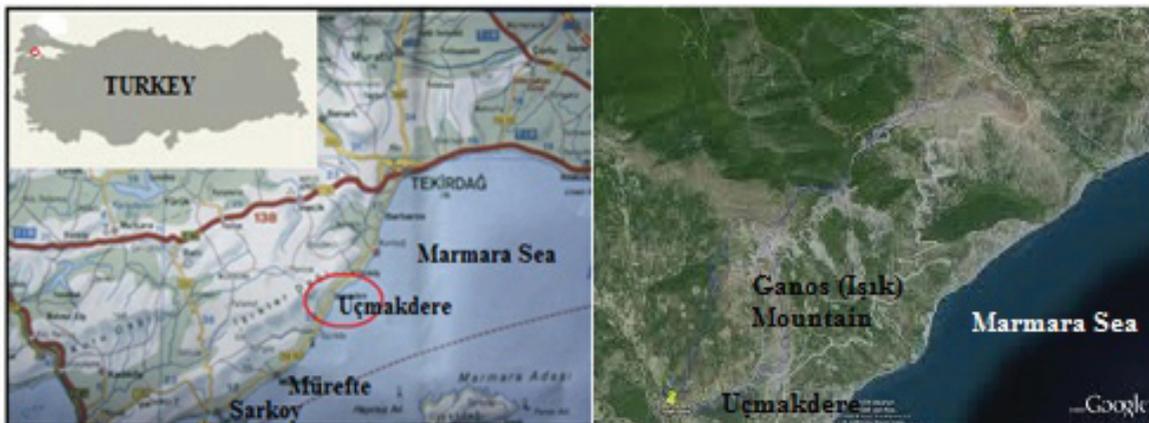


Fig. 1. Study area

patible with nature; moreover, the area is among the rare places in Tekirdag without ecological devastation (Korkut et al., 2008).

In the light of the approach which aims the evaluation of rural areas in terms of tourism and recreation activities and in order to determine the natural, cultural, and historical landscape values of the research area, this study was conducted through 5 stages, which are: determination of the border of the research area, literature review and data collection, realization of detailed survey and analysis of the area, survey study, evaluation, results, and suggestions.

Firstly, data collection, observation and analysis activities were carried out in the area. Through face-to-face interviews with local residents and visitors, 50 standard survey forms were filled. The survey study was conducted through two phases: the survey study for the demands (capacity and potential) of local residents and the survey study for the recreation demands of user groups (in order to determine the satisfaction and expectations). Besides the surveys, photos of the area were taken and data were collected about the natural and cultural resources.

Results and Discussion

Ucmakdere village is surrounded by mountains on three sides and reaches to the Sea of Marmara with the valley on the southeast. Marmara and Avsa Islands can be observed from the summits of this valley. The population of Ucmakdere Village consists of 207 residents according to the 2010 address-based population system (Anonymous, 2011). The survey study was conducted face-to-face with local residents and visitors. From the age distribution of the participants it is seen that 18-38 age group, which can be described as “young population” is very limited in the village (10%). The village contains almost no young population. Due to the insufficiency of job opportunities within the village, the young population migrates to the

city center. Thus, the average age of the residents is quite high. The population increases in summer. When the visitors are analyzed in terms of age group distributions, 18-38 age group ranks first (44%) (Figure 2).

In the conducted survey study, the education level of the local residents is found to be quite low (Figure 3). In the study conducted by Demirel et al. (1996) on the assessment of Firtina River Basin in terms of recreative and touristy activities, the need for the enlightenment of local residents on these issues and for raising their awareness were emphasized. Thus, education should come first among the activities to be conducted in Ucmakdere related with ecotourism. As to be understood through the determination of a direct proportion between education and carrying capacity awareness, ensuring the attraction of people with high levels of education and environmental awareness to the area is important.

The regional climate is sub humid. The average lowest precipitation is observed in August and

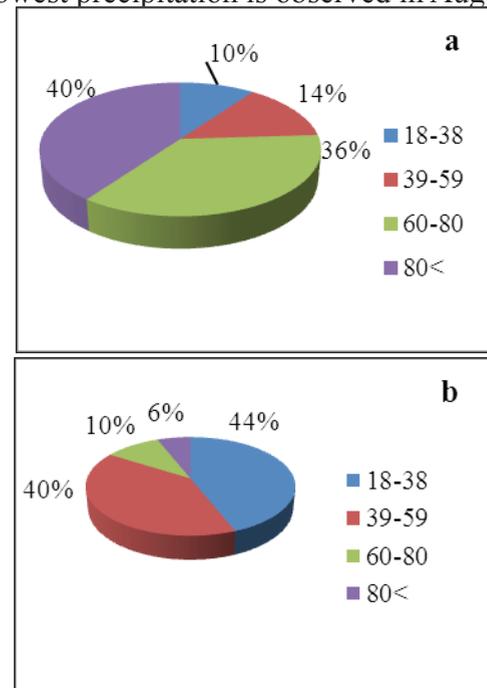


Fig. 2. Age groups
(a. indigenous people b. Visitors)

highest in December. Inner parts of the region are influenced by the continental climate (Anonymous, 1995). There are microclimate areas in Sarkoy, Murefte, and Hoskoy.

Thrace is a very rich union of ecological systems in terms of biological variety with various dominant forest areas under the influence of humid sea climate on the north and on the south, and with wide forest, pasture, and generally agricultural areas containing arid step characteristics. The natural flora variety is among the features that increase the ecotouristic potential of the area. Visitors frequently come to take photos of the area. Some natural bushes and perennial flowers are: *Rhus coriaria* L., *Spartium junceum* L., *Rosa canina* L., *Euphorbia* sp., *Trachomitum venetum* L., *Lythrum salicaria* L., *Onosma proponticum* Aznav., *Tournefortia sibirica* L., *Anchusa officinalis* L., *Cistus creticus* L., *Achillea coarctata* Poire , *Morina persica* L., *Euphorbia rigida* Bieb., *Stachys cretica* L., *Althaea officinalis* L., *Jasminum fruticans* L., *Dorycnium pentaphyllum* Scop., *Anthyllis hermanniae* L., *Lycium barbarum* L., *Thymelaea tartonraira* L. (Korkut, 1987). The vicinity of the village is covered with maquis and deciduous forests. In the Ucmakdere village, the climate and soil of which is suitable for any kind of cultivation, *Tilia argentea*, *Salvia-officinalis*, *Thymus* sp. and all kinds of fruits except citrus can be found.

The village residents and visitors answered the question “what is the most important characteristic of the village?” as the natural beauty of the area (50%) (Figure 4). The cultural assets and the traditional architectural value must be preserved for ecotourism activities (Dogan, 2006). The village, which has preserved the Greek settlement pattern, maintains its culture to some extent as well. Some plates written in Greek might be seen upon the facings of brick and wooden Greek houses. As they migrated from the region, the Greeks also left behind such an important practice as viniculture. As an indication of this fact, the indigenous people

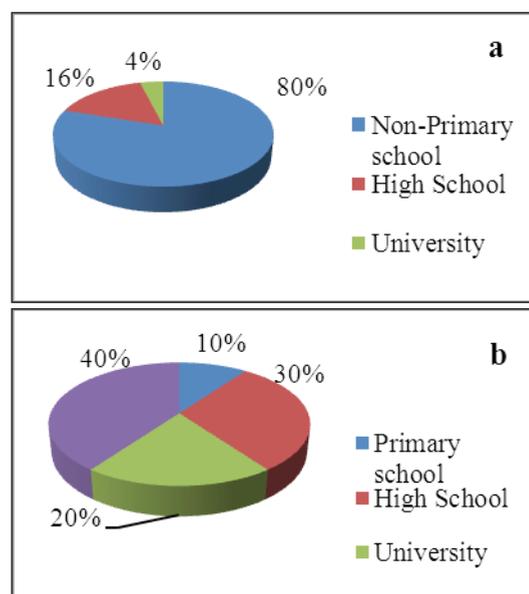


Fig. 3. Education levels (a. indigenous people b. Visitors)

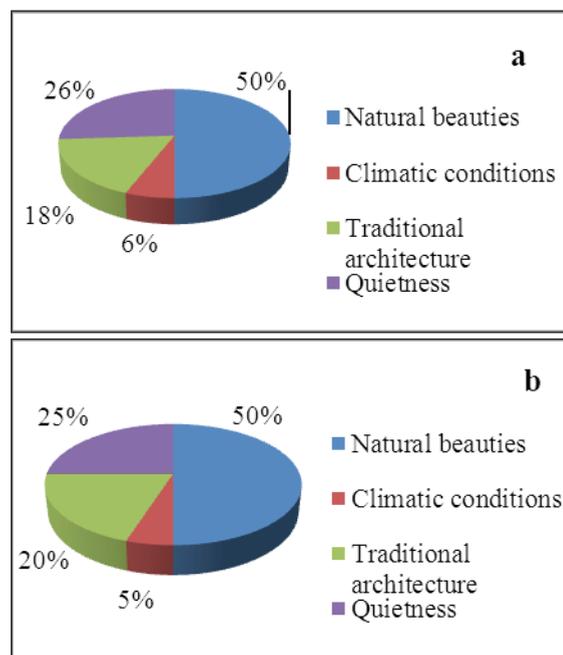


Fig. 4. The most important features of the area (a. indigenous people b. Visitors)

still produce home-made wine. Some historical artifacts known to belong to Greeks contribute to the tourism potential of the village. The houses are wooden and most of them are two- or three-stored

and with bay windows. New buildings distort the historical value of the area and create an unaesthetic appearance (Figure 5). Gurer (2003) determined that the selection of accurate application areas and planned approaches play an effective role in the preservation and sustenance of historical building value.

In Ucmakdere, there are picturesque valleys and shore formations shaped by Ganos Fault between Tekirdag and Parkoy (Figure 6). When asked about the most attractive natural assets in the area, the indigenous peoples (40%) and visitors (46%) generally answered as the land forms due to the valley formation which enable natural sports and which hide the village. Another answer following the land forms was the flora (Figure 7). Both century-old plane trees and the rich flora in the area enrich the natural characteristics of the area and increase its beauty (Figure 6). Kaska (2004) emphasizes that increasing the ecotourism potential could be achieved through preservation and particularly

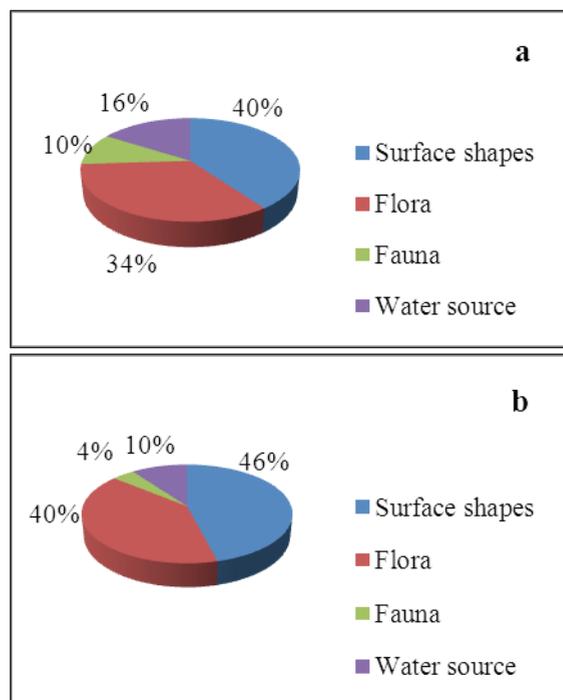


Fig. 7. The most important natural features of the area (a. indigenous people b. Visitors)



Fig. 5. The views of historical buildings

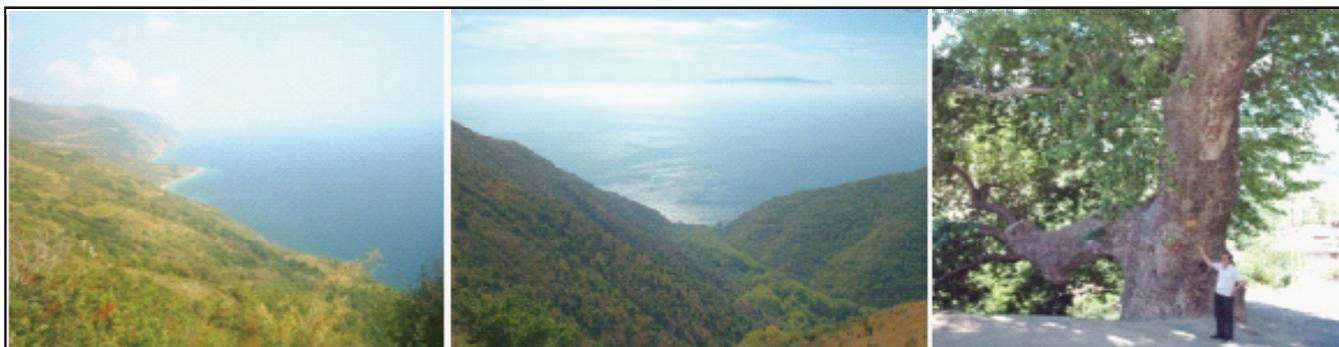


Fig. 6. Ucmakdere village landscapes

the preservation of the assets that are of first priority. Ucmakdere is distinguished with its natural beauty. However, there is no recent detailed flora research conducted in the village the flora of which is known to be quite rich. When such a research is completed and the species unique to the area are preserved, the ecotourism potential of the area will increase. Ucmakdere contains plenty of water resources. There are public fountains in many places within the village.

Many ecotourism activities such as trekking, paragliding, sailing, photography, and camping are carried out in the research area.

Trekking: Ucmakdere is a suitable track available in four seasons for in-forest trekking with ideal and medium difficulty (Figure 8). The area is at a distance of 2 hours from Istanbul with tours and the track lasts for approximately 2 and half an hour. The visitors come to the area with various tours or via their private vehicles. There are many agencies organizing trekking activities. Trekking tours might be for one-day or take more than one day.

Paragliding: Ucmakdere allows paragliding activities due to its height and the suitable characteristics of the land. Those who come to Ucmakdere for the purpose of paragliding mostly participate in the festivals organized in summer (Figure 8).

Sailing: The sailing club located in Tekirdag organizes tours to Ucmakdere. The sailing activity carried out in Ucmakdere in summer is seen in Figure 8.

Photography: Photography activities in Ucmakdere are done professionally or unprofessionally. The area attracts the attention of both professional and amateur photographers with characteristics such as its historical value, cultural heritage, maritime ecosystem, natural forms, and rich flora (Figure 8).

Camping and picnic areas: Ucmakdere beach comes first among the elements that increase the ecotourism potential of the area after the natural and historical value and natural sports activities. Picnic-camping area is attractive for its location inside century-old plane trees, its landscape beauty with surrounding high hills, as well as being close to the sea. Especially the tourists who travel from far places or ones coming with various tours prefer camping in the area containing plane trees. Camping area is seen in Figure 8. There are no touristy hotels, motels, hostels, or restaurants in the area. Visitors are only able to purchase food and beverages in the hostels and camping area. The visitors coming with tours satisfy their resting and recreational needs in this area after trekking. They have the opportunity to swim in the village beach which is among the clean shores of the Sea of Marmara. Besides, boat trips are also available.

Despite the fact that this area which is protected by its natural beauty and wilderness is very valuable in terms of tourism, it does not possess sufficient touristy facilities. The village residents report the most important problem in the area to be transportation due to the casualties in winter (40%) and



Fig. 8. Ecotourism activities in the area

visitors to be the absence or insufficiency of facilities (34%) (Figure 9). The fact that local residents consider the destruction of natural resources to be the slightest problem in the area indicates that visitors and the local residents hold quite different opinions regarding the problems of the area.

When visitors were asked what should occur to make them give up visiting the area, 44% reported that they might give up in case environmental problems begin to emerge (Figure 10). The visitors coming in order to observe the traditional and natural village life and carry out ecotourism activities constitute the majority (Figure 11). Those who come with such purposes mostly come with one-day tours.

When the visiting purposes and staying length of the visitors are compared, a significant correlation is observed (Figure 12). Whereas those who report to visit in order to observe the natural and cultural life in the area stay for one day, the ones who report medical purposes mostly prefer staying for 1 to 7 days. The staying length of those who report to stay in order to spend vacations is again between 1 and 7 days maximum.

The area generally receives visitors from the vicinity. In his study, in which he studied the rural tourism and tourist profile in Spain, Perales (2002) characterizes the visitors who visit areas in which they have no origins as modern rural tourists. The majority of the visitors besides them are those who previously inhabited the area or those who visit due to the reasons such as kinship; and he characterized those tourists as traditional rural tourists. Such a correlation is present within the visitor profile of Ucmakdere. It is observed that those who visit the area with purposes such as trekking, para-

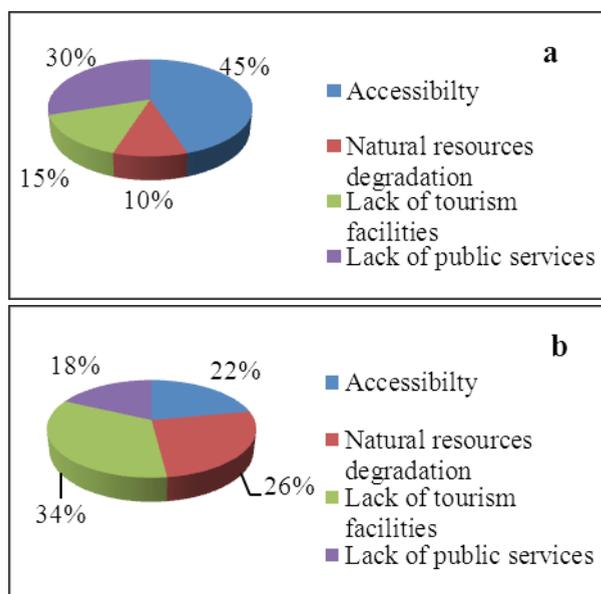


Fig. 9. The most important problems in the areas (a. indigenous people b. Visitors)

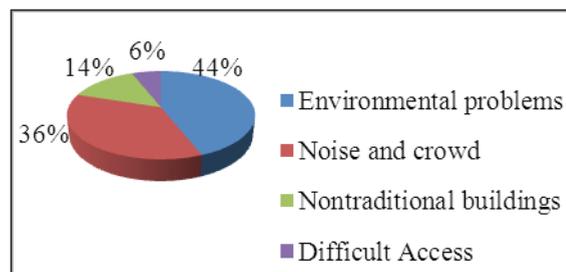


Fig. 10. The reasons why the visitors might have given up visiting the areas

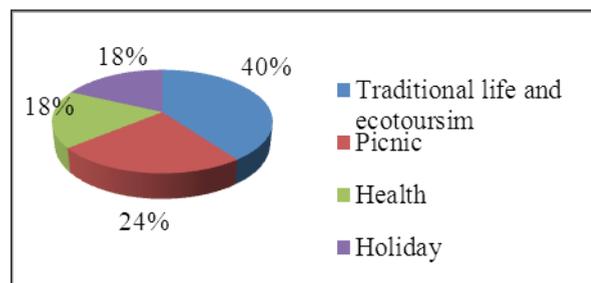


Fig. 11. The reasons for visiting the areas according to the visitors

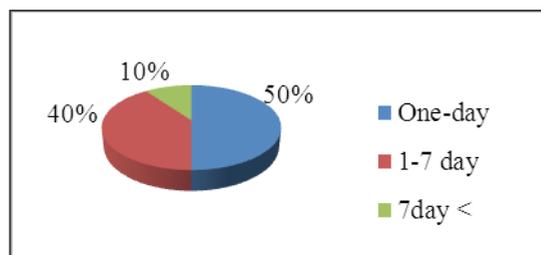


Fig. 12. Staying length of visitors

gliding, photography have no origins in Ucmakdere. On the other hand, the majority of the visitors who visit the area for picnic or spending vacations possess a kinship connection or they are former inhabitants of the area who come in summertime every year. Those who report to come with purposes such as picnic or gaining health declare that they come within or outside Tekirdag with almost equal proportions. Whereas the number of visitors who report to visit for observational purposes is majority, an important number of those who come in order to spend vacations consist of people inhabiting other cities and a little portion consists of Turks inhabiting foreign countries (Figure 13).

Those who use the area for picnic generally live in the vicinity of Tekirdag and Şarköy. Besides, there are also visitors who come from outside the city via one-day tours. This group generally consists of people with a high level of ecotourism awareness, of those who come to the area consciously for nature trips and who are interested in nature sports such as trekking or paragliding. The ones who come from outside the city usually stay for a weekend or more. They either accommodate in the tent camping area in the beach or in the hostel which is located at the entrance of the village. In addition to that, the Turks who possess summer villas and who live in foreign countries come to the area as summer house vacations. Those visitors usually pass their summer vacations here.

The participation of the local residents in tourism activities is not far beyond small grocery shops and restaurants. However, in the conducted survey

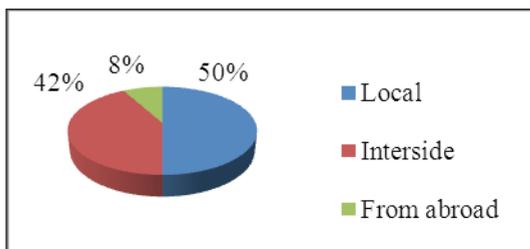


Fig. 13. Origins of visitors

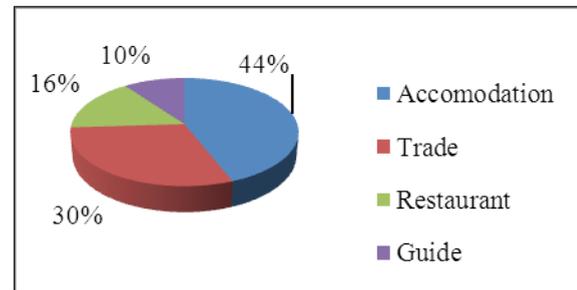


Fig. 14. Services to be given to visitors by indigenous people

studies it is found out that the most popularly desired service is accommodation (Figure 14). Besides, the fact that local residents do not consider the arrival of intense and large tourist groups to be harmful to the area indicates that they are not aware of such an important issue as carrying capacity and thus they are incapable for active participation in tourism activities. Ozturk (2005) holds that environmental protection does not only mean restrictions for local residents, that protection might create new opportunities for the benefit of the local residents and that the creation of alternative subsistence possibilities for the local residents is the most important factor for the sustainable natural resource management.

There are no units capable of satisfying basic needs such as accommodation, medical needs, and markets within the research area. Kirzioglu (1996) draws attention to the fact that the facilities in the area would operate in a dense manner when the plans in Erzurum Palandoken Mountains Winter Sports and Tourism Planning study which also took place within the scope of Eastern Anatolia Growth Project are realized and that the socioeconomic power of the region and residents would increase. However, Ucmakdere lacks such facilities. Facilities are quite important for the improving of the ecotourism activities in the area. In order to provide means of subsistence to the local residents, which is among the purposes of ecotourism, various areas might be established for local

residents in order to sell their own handicrafts and regional products.

When the visitors who participated in the survey were asked about in what kind of an environment they would prefer to receive service, it is determined that they prefer to receive service in a planned environment within which the materials are selected in accordance with the traditional architecture. The visitors quite like the natural value of the village; and regarding the accommodation, 42% preferred village houses whereas 10% preferred hotels (Figure 15).

Besides being entertaining, ecotourism activities should also carry educatory characteristics for visitors (Honey 2006). From this perspective, Ucmakdere village is also attractive for both its historical value and its flora besides providing an entertaining environment due to its natural and cultural characteristics.

Especially the increasing demand for tourism activities and the physical capacity in which the used resources reach their saturation point, the environmental capacity in which the environment begins to get harm and the psychological capacity in which the visitors lose the entertainment they receive in the area must be taken into account (Ozguc, 1998). Before putting the natural and socio-cultural assets of Ucmakdere into the service of tourism within the context of ecotourism, the carrying capacity of the area must be taken into account, analyzed, and completed fast.

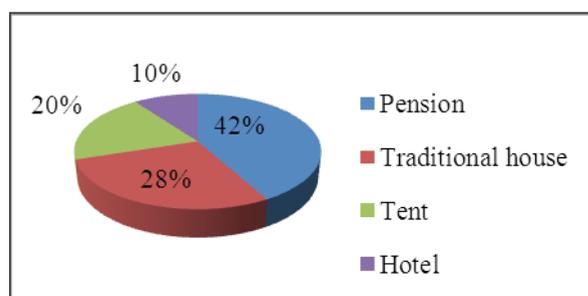


Fig. 15. Accommodation preferences of visitors

Conclusion

Rural areas provide the opportunity for getting away from the stress of the daily life and for various ecotourism activities such as nature sports. The most important advantage of rural tourism is the augmentation of local residents' prosperity through the provision of additional economical means by putting the natural, cultural, and historical assets into the service of tourism without giving up the agriculture, which is their basic subsistence. Ucmakdere village has a great potential in terms of recreation and tourism. In order to maintain the sustainability of tourism in the area, the relation between the tourism, physical and social environment must be established accurately. Through the planning studies which would not distort the natural value of the area, both the potential usage of the area will be increased and the economy of the local residents will be contributed to.

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