IMPORTANCE OF DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES AFFECTING DESTINATION CHOICE OF TURKISH BIRDWATCHERS

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ABSTRACT

Birdwatchers become a market segment for tourism industry, especially for the destination where birdwatching activity might be conducted. Destination attributes may have different weights for different market segments. In this article, Buhalis' (2000: 98) 6A's framework for destination attributes was used to determine the importance levels. Data were collected via a questionnaire and 88 birdwatchers joined in the research through internet and face to face in 2005. It was determined that they assign great importance to feel nature with clean air, especially the destinations located in national parks. Their favorite destinations are those with easy access, with food and beverage outlets, with guiding services and with accommodation facilities, supported by security and health services. Turkish birdwatchers like doing nature based activities and bird related activities while they are watching the birds.

Key words: Birdwatching, Destination attributes, Turkish birdwatchers, Turkey.

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TÜRK KUŞ GÖZLEMCİLERİNİN DESTİNASYON SEÇİMİNİ ETKİLEYEN DESTİNASYON NİTELİKLERİNİN ÖNEMİ

ÖZET

Kuş gözlemciliği, bu faaliyetin yapılabildiği destinasyonlardaki turizm endüstrisinin önemli bir pazarını oluşturmaktadır. Bir destinasyonun nitelikleri, o destinasyona dönük çeşitli pazar bölümleri için farklı önem düzeylerine sahip olabilir. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'deki kuş gözlemcilerinin çeşitli destinasyon özelliklerine verdikleri önem düzeyini belirlemek üzere Buhalis'in (2000: 98) önerdiği 6A modeli kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada veriler geliştirilen anket formu ile toplanmıştır. Anket formu, internet aracılığıyla ve yüz yüze görüşme yöntemi ile uygulanmıştır. 2005 yılında yapılan veri toplama süreci sonunda, Türkiye'deki kuş gözlemcilerinden 88'i araştırmaya katılmıştır. Elde edilen verilerden, kuş gözlemcilerinin faaliyeti yapacakları alanın milli parklara yakın olmasına, temiz havaya sahip olmasına ve bu alanlarda doğanın hissedilebilmesine oldukça önem verdikleri anlaşılmaktadır. Öte yandan, kuş gözlemcilerinin, ulaşımı kolay, yeme-içme ve konaklama tesislerine sahip olan, rehberlik, güvenlik ve sağlık hizmetlerinin sunulduğu destinasyonları daha çok tercih edecekleri belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca, kuş gözlemcilerinin bu faaliyeti yaparlarken, doğaya dayalı ve kuşlara ilgili diğer faaliyetleri de yaptıkları anlaşılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kuş gözlemciliği, destinasyon nitelikleri, Türk kuş gözlemcileri, Türkiye.

INTRODUCTION

Birdwatching became the most popular form of non-consumptive wildlife associated recreation in the Western World. The number of birdwatchers has grown very fast in the last three decades (Kerllinger and Brett 1995: 271). It is reported that 69 million American adults identify, photograph and view birds in the 2002 in the U.S (www.census.gov). Şekercioğlu (2002: 282) defines birdwatching as an act of observing and identifying birds in their native habitats.

There have been several researches on birdwatchers all of which are done in the Western world. In these researches birdwatchers have been grouped according to different variables (Hvenegaard 2002: 21; Lee and Scott 2004: 245-260; Kim, Scott and Crompton 1997: 320- 338; Scott and Thipgen 2003: 199-218). But there is no empirical research on Turkish birdwatchers and their behaviours.

In this article, it was intended to determine the importance levels of the various destination attributes sought by Turkish birdwatchers. Understanding importance levels of these attributes provide several advantages for the destination (which is suitable for birdwatching) marketers and destination management. First, findings will be useful in providing information for recreational and tourism planning. Second, recreation providers, destination managers, travel and tourism administrators could use findings as information for marketing research and marketing strategy development. Understanding preferred destinations attributes of Turkish birdwatchers may help to provide a better customer satisfaction and design effective promotional strategies.

1. IMPORTANCE OF BIRDWATCHING

Birdwatching becomes a commercial activity and a market segment for tourism industry, if birdwatchers travel enough and/or stay overnight in the

region where they visit (Smith 2001: 2). Eubanks, Kerlinger and Payne (1993: 415-420) studied the economical impacts of birdwatching in High Island in Texas. The participants of their survey were the members of Texas Ornithological Society. It was found that the respondents spent an average of $ 2000 annually on birdwatching related travel. They started to name travels related to birdwatching as ‘’*avitourism*’’.

In birdwatching activity, Important Bird Areas (IBA) has been highly visited. An IBA is a site that provide essential habitat for breeding, wintering or migrating birds (www.birdlife.org). Birdwatchers tend to focus on IBA’s and any other areas where large number of bird species can be seen (Kerlinger and Brett 2002: 271). IBA’s could attract thousands of people, birdwatchers and avitourists. Some examples are listed below:

- Hawking Day in Taiwan city of Chang-Hua attracted more then 30.000 people in the year 1999 (Army 1999: 1).

- In Patagonia’s 16 IBA’s, seabird colonies attract over 100.000 people every year (Yorio and others 2001: 231).

- In South Africa, penguin colony near Capetown, attracted 200.000 people between 1996-1997 (Kerlinger and Brett 2002: 272).

- Hawk Mountain Sancuturay in Pensilvania attracted 53.583 birdwatchers between 1990-1991 (Kerlinger and Brett 2002: 272).

- In Australia, more than 100000 avitourists visited the Philip Island Natural Park to see penguins in the year 1995 (www.birdsaustralia.org)

- Annual Hummer Bird Festival in Rock Pat in Texas, attracted 4000 birdwatchers in 1995 during four days (Scott and Thigpen 2003: 204).

In IBA’s or any other places, birdwatching has positive and negative impacts on communities which are stated near IBA’s and also impacts on environment (Kim, Scott and Crompton 1997: 320; Army 1999: 1; Scott and Thigpen 2003: 199-218; Kerlinger and Brett 2002: 271; Sekercioglu 2002: 283-

284; Lee and Scott 2004: 245-260). The impacts of birdwatching can be grouped under three main headings: economical, socio-cultural and environmental.

Economic impacts of birdwatching on travel and retail market may be listed as food, lodging, transportation, gasoline, binoculars, cameras, film and developing, guide book publishing, wild bird food, membership in wildlife organizations, camping equipment, motor homes and campers (Texas Tourism Tip Sheet 2004: 1-4). In the U.S. birdwatching created more than 1 million jobs in the year 2001 and birdwatchers spent $ 32 billion for birdwatching. Most of the birdwatchers are well-educated and have good income (over than $ 50.000) and most of birdwatchers prefer local guides (Şekercioğlu, 2002: 287). When birdwatchers prefer local guides there will be recognition and relationship between birdwatchers. If local communities have income from birdwatchers, community pride will be appeared so that social and cultural structure of the community will start to chance. Enviromental impacts of birdwatching can be grouped as positive and negative. After the visits of avitourists to the region, local control due to unique bird species will be increased. There will be more protection of unprotected areas because of desired bird species. Disturbing birds by playing tapes and approaching, cash leaks from local people and drawing attention to species which maybe desirable to illicit wildlife traders could be listed as main negative impacts of birdwatching.

2.DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES IN GENERAL

For any tourism and recreation activity i.e. holiday resort, tracking, ski, wind surf, paragliding, birdwatching etc, destination choice is a critical issue. There have been several definitions of destination. Leiper (1995) defines destination as “places towards which people travel and where they choose to stay for a while in order to experience certain features or characteristics a

perceived attraction of some sort". On the other hand, according to Coooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, Shepherd and Wanhill (1998) destination is a focus of facilities and services designed to meet the needs of the tourists (Buhalis 2000: 98). For example, a country, city, town or an area could be called as a destination but also a cruise ship is accepted as a destination.

Destination choice of the tourists has been of great interest to tourism scholars (Pikkemaat 2004: 87-102; Omerzel 2006: 167-189; Nicolau and Mas 2004: 1-34) and many other studies could be added to this list. There are so many factors affecting destination choice process of a tourist. Generally, these factors are grouped into two categories called "push" and "pull" factors (Pikkemaat 2004: 88). Push factors indicate psychological factors; e.g values, motives and personality as well as social factors; e.g. age, education, martial status. Pull factors are destination related dimensions; these can contribute formation perceived attraction among tourists; e.g. distance, type of area, infrastructure, size of area, type of vegetation and activities in the destination (Lam and Hsu 2006: 590). Also, it is accepted that pull factors (attributes) could be grouped as tangible and intangible attributes (Pikkemaat 2004: 90; Lam and Hsu 2006: 591)

From the point of destination attributes, Nicolau and Mas (2004: 1-34) summarized 17 data sets. These researches were conducted to determine factors affecting destination choice of the tourist. In the researches' data sets different operative variables were used to measure importance of destination attributes. These variables were surface area, price, natural attributes, infrastructure, accessibility, programmed activities, reputation of the destination, restrictions of navigation, population of species, time of journey, entry prices, hotel size and services, parking areas and shops.

In the issue of destination attributes, there was another research which was conducted by Nolan and Keller III in 2006. In this research they tried to

determine if there was any difference in preferred destination attributes between different visitor groups of Arkansas City USA. In this research, 183 attributes were identified by free-listing of 85 respondents. They found significant differences between visitor groups to Arkansas City. 183 destination attributes were grouped into three categories as natural resources, cultural resources and commercial resources (www.cast.uark.edu/ar_tourism/content/Lastfreelist.pdf).

On the other hand, Buhalis (2000: 98) pointed out that destinations comprised a core of some components. He categorized these components into six headings and called 6A's framework because of first letter of each heading. Attractions represent natural, hand-made, artificial buildings, special events. Accessibility refers entire transportation system, terminals and vehicles. Amenities refer accommodation, catering, retailing and other tourist services. Available packages mean pre-arranged packages by intermediaries and principals. Activities represent all the activities could be done by tourists while they are in the destination. Ancillary services refer banking, telecommunications, posts and hospitals, etc. In our study, Buhalis's 6A's framework adapted for birdwatching activity.

In the birdwatching literature, Scott and Thipgen (2003: 198-218) tried to examine relationship between skills, commitment of birdwatchers and preferred destination attributes. Their data set includes 30 variables in order to measure importance of destination attributes. The findings indicated that there are significant differences between birdwatcher groups. But most of the respondents give great deal of importance to attributes; opportunity to observe fauna and flora, clean air, crime free communities and scenic beauty along the way.

3.THE PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

3.1.The Purpose of the Research

Millions of people annually participate in avitourism (birdwatching) activity so that birdwatching became a market segment in the world tourism industry. There have been many researches on birdwatchers and avitourists in the Western world. But there is no study on Turkish birdwatchers and their behaviours, therefore importance levels of various destination attributes are not known. Hence, the purpose of this research is to determine importance levels of the destination attributes of Turkish birdwatchers. Therefore it is intended to provide useful information for destination management and contribute in designing sound marketing strategies for destination marketers.

3.2. Method of Research

Data in this research were collected via a questionnaire which involves destination attributes items besides demographics. 30 of 36 items related to destination attributes were derived from the study of Scott and Thipgen (2003) and these items were grouped according to the Buhalis' (2000) 6A's framework. For each item response categories ranged from "not at all important" to "extremely important".

The questionnaire was pre-tested for two times; the first one was conducted face to face with birdwatchers living in Çanakkale and the second was conducted through internet on the first two weeks of June 2005. Then, final questionnaire was implemented by internet and face to face.

There were found 27 bird-watching clubs and two bird-watching web sites operating in Turkey. There were 15 Turkish birdwatching e-mail groups on yahoos' website, but just two of them were active. The questionnaire was first sent to two e-mail groups which are called "Flamingoo" and "Toygar", since there was no activity in other 13 e-mail groups. The questionnaire took place at the website of the Society of Turkish Birdwatchers (www.kustr.org). They

helped in distributing the questionnaire to their members. A mailing list was first established and then the questionnaire was sent.

It was accepted that there were about 500 birdwatchers in Turkey (Çaglayan 2005: 17). "Flamingoo" e-mail group had 202 members and "Toygar" had 541 members. After cross check it was determined that some persons were subscribed to both groups. Additional confirmation was provided by the Association of Monitoring the Continental Bird Migration. At last it was decided that there were around 550 birdwatchers in Turkey. After many attempts, 88 usable questionnaires were provided, constituting the 16% of whole Turkish birdwatchers. Data were analyzed through factor and correlation analysis, besides some descriptive statistics.

4. FINDINGS OF RESEARCH

4.1.Demographics of Respondents

Majority of Turkish birdwatchers who participated to our research was male (71.6%). Half of them were under 25; average age was 29. Although they were well educated (bachelor degree 58%, graduate degree 20.5% and doctorate degree 12.5%), monthly income were reported low in many cases. They were primarily single (68.2%). Turkish bird watchers had been doing this activity for an average of 5 years. Therefore, it may be said that this is a new recreational activity among the young, well-educated and single Turkish males.

4.2. Attractions

Table 1 shows the importance means given to the some attractions items by Turkish birdwatchers. It is understood that Turkish birdwatchers give the most importance to "feeling the nature". It is followed by "clean air" and "existence of national parks". But the least important items were determined as "existence of antique dealers", "existence of crafts as the souvenirs" and "existence of local entertainment".

Table 1. Importance means of attractions

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Interesting places worth seeing	83	3.34	1.29
Specialty of small towns	82	2.80	1.17
Existence of historical sites	83	2.72	1.22
Existence of national parks	83	3.64	1.13
Existence of antique-dealers	81	1.51	.71
Existence of local entertainment	83	1.82	.98
Existence of local food and beverage outlets	83	2.58	1.29
Existence of crafts as the souvenirs	82	1.70	.81
Closeness to sea, lake or river	83	3.31	1.26
Clean air	81	3.96	1.05
Scenery quality along the road	82	2.96	1.23
Feeling the nature	84	4.36	.80
Hospitality of local people	83	3.20	1.12

Response categories range from "Not at all important: 1 to very important: 5"
Reliability coefficient of Alpha: .8536

Table 2 shows the results of factor analysis conducted for attractions. As seen in Table 2, varimax rotation yielded four dimensions, explaining 66.8% of the variance.

Table 2. Factor analysis result of attractions

Items related to Attractions	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Commu-nalities
NATURE					
Feeling the nature	.789				.657
Clean air	.724				.579
Scenery quality along the road	.717				.692
Hospitality of local people	.623				.455
INTERESTING PLACES					
Specialty of small towns		.718			.621
Closeness to sea, lake or river		.666			.788
Interesting places worth of seeing		.659			.664
Existence of national parks		.656			.485
Existence of historical sites		.580		.525	.669
SHOPPING					
Existence of antique-dealers			.919		.858
Existence of crafts as the souvenirs			.728		.819
LOCAL FOOD AND ENTERTAINMENT					
Existence of local food and beverage outlets				.788	.786
Existence of local entertainment			.517	.566	.622
Eigenvalue	2,622	2,518	1,882	1.674	
Variance explained	20.166	19.372	14.473	12.878	
Cumulative variance	20,166	39,538	54,012	66,889	
Reliability coefficient	.7338	.7686	.7999	.6064	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation: Varimax
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: .784;
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity X^2: 367.113, sig.:p<.001
Response categories range from "Not at all important: 1 to very important: 5"
Overall reliability coefficient of Alpha: .8536

As Table 2 shows, the first factor is composed of nature-based attractions. “Feeling the nature” was the important item which had the most loading. The second dimension was named as interesting places and it is worth to note that in that dimension “speciality of small towns” got the greatest loadings. The last two factors were related to shopping and food and beverage facilities.

4.3. Accessibility

Table 3 shows the importance means of items related to accessibility. While easy accessibility got the highest importance, parking facilities got the least. It wasn’t surprising that quality of roads and drive time were not highly important because of birdwatching was an activity mainly based rural destinations.

Table 3. Importance means of accessibility

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Easy accessibility	84	3.21	1.26
Quality of roads	83	2.33	1.12
Parking facilities	83	2.22	1.09
Drive time	83	2.67	1.23

Response categories range from “Not at all important: 1 to very important: 5”
Reliability coefficient of Alpha: .8685

4.4. Amenities

Table 4 demonstrates the importance means of items related to amenities. As seen in the Table, accommodation facilities get the highest importance, then it is followed by food and beverage outlets. Turkish birdwatchers give the least importance to the souvenirs sellers. Therefore it may be concluded that amenities haven’t been of great importance to Turkish birdwatchers.

Table 4. Importance means of amenities

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Existence of food and beverage outlets	83	2.47	1.13
Existence of accommodation facilities	84	2.68	1.21
Availability of shopping for birding	84	2.30	1.14
Existence of souvenirs sellers	84	1.56	.73
Availability of rent a car companies	84	1.87	1.06

Response categories range from “Not at all important: 1 to very important: 5”
Reliability coefficient of Alpha: .7709

4.5. Available Packages

Table 5 shows the importance means of items related to available packages. Turkish birdwatchers assign the greatest importance to the guiding services at the destination. It is worth to note that they do not interested in packaged tours organized by travel agents very much.

Table 5. Importance means of available packages

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Availability of bird guiding services at the destination	84	2.43	1.35
Availability of packaged tours organized by travel agents	84	1.99	1.18
Availability of travel agents organizing special interest tours	83	2.11	1.25

Response categories range from "Not at all important: 1 to very important: 5"
Reliability coefficient of Alpha: .8622

4.6. Activities

The importance means of items related to activities carried out at the destination can be found in Table 6. Turkish birdwatchers assign the highest importance to seeing natural life. Possibility of seeing different birds and hearing the voice of different birds come second and third, respectively. They give the least importance to the activity of rafting.

Table 6. Importance means of activities

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Possibility of seeing different bird species	83	4.42	.84
Possibility of hearing the voice of different bird species	82	4.40	.72
Possibility of seeing natural life	82	4.57	.67
Possibility of taking photographs of natural life	82	4.12	.96
Possibility of seeing natural flowers	82	4.23	.85
Possibility of butterfly watching	82	3.55	1.20
Possibility of fishing (with line)	81	2.14	1.25
Possibility of rafting	81	1.96	1.18

Response categories range from "Not at all important: 1 to very important: 5"
Reliability coefficient of Alpha: .6899

Table 7 shows the result of factor analysis of the items related to various activities that the birdwatchers could execute while they are watching the birds. Possibility of taking natural photos was not loaded to any dimension since it was taken .50 for factor loadings. The first dimension named as nature based

activities, explaining 26.5% of the variance. In that factor, seeing natural flowers and butterfly watching were the items which were highly loaded. Second dimension named as bird related activities, constituting 21.4% of the variance. In this dimension, the dominant item was possibility of seeing different bird species. The last factor was composed of other activities and this factor explained 20% of the total variance.

Table 7. Factor analysis results of activities

Items related to special activities	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Commu-nalities
NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES				
Possibility of seeing natural flowers	.871			.773
Possibility of butterfly watching	.861			.786
Possibility of seeing natural life	.582			.586
BIRD RELATED ACTIVITIES				
Possibility of seeing different bird species		.856		.742
Possibility of hearing the voice of different bird species		.781		.665
OTHER ACTIVITIES				
Possibility of fishing (with line)			.864	.766
Possibility of rafting			.851	.740
Eigenvalue	2.120	1.715	1.601	
Variance explained	26.505	21.436	20.009	
Cumulative variance	26.505	47.941	67.950	
Reliability coefficient	.7024	.6377	.7125	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation: Varimax
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: .645
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity X^2: 155.100, sig.:p<.001
Response categories range from "Not at all important: 1 to very important: 5"

4.7 Ancillary Services

Table 8 shows the importance means of items related to various services. Turkish birdwatchers assign the greatest importance to security and then health services. Banking services gets the least importance.

Table 8. Importance means of ancillary services

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Availability of security services at the destination	82	3.57	1.26
Availability of health services at the destination	81	3.43	1.30
Availability of bank services (24 hours) at the destination	79	2.54	1.26

Response categories range from "Not at all important: 1 to very important: 5"
Reliability coefficient of Alpha: .7846

4.8. Correlations among destination attributes according to Buhalis' 6A frame

For further investigation, in this section of the article we present the correlations of Buhalis' 6 A's frame. For this purpose each category in 6 A's framework for destination attributes was tested for additivity. It is understood that all 6 categories met the necessary conditions for additivity (no negative value on item-total correlation, a statistically meaningful of F test and Hotelling T Square, and exceeding value of .60 for reliability coefficient of Alpha). Therefore the data provided the researchers to do an evaluation by using total score. Table 9 shows the correlations among the six destination attributes assigned by Turkish birdwatchers. It is worth to note that all headings were highly correlated except activities. Activities do not show any correlations with attractions and accessibility. Since their basic motivation for travel is that they may watch or do mainly bird related activities, it may not demonstrate correlations with attractions and accessibility.

Table 9. Correlations among destination attributes

		Accessibility	**Amenities**	**Available packages**	**Activities**	**Ancillary services**
Attractions	P. Correlation	.542**	.535**	.447**	.189	.459**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.109	.000
	N	73	75	75	73	72
Accessibility	P. Correlation		.607**	.447**	.179	.403**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.115	.000
	N		81	81	79	77
Amenities	P. Correlation			.735**	.268**	.594**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.016	.000
	N			82	80	78
Available packages	P. Correlation				.379**	.501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000	.000
	N				81	79
Activities	P. Correlation					.541**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.000
	N					78

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

CONCLUSION

Turkish birdwatchers like to feel nature with clean air, especially in national parks when they are trying to choose a destination for birdwatching. Any destination with easy access, with food and beverage outlets, with guiding services and with accommodation facilities is the favor of Turkish birdwatchers. They look for the security and health services at the destination. Turkish birdwatchers like doing nature based activities and bird related activities while they are watching the birds. While activities don't show correlations with attractions and accessibility, they are correlated with amenities, available packages and ancillary services. It may be the result of these three A's being more conducive to the birdwatching activity than others.

Based on the findings of the study a number of implications on planning and marketing can be derived. For example, easy accessibility, accommodation, food and beverage outlets should be provided to the birdwatchers. In planning these facilities, identity and biodiversity of the area must be considered since birdwatchers pay great attention to feel the nature of birdwatching areas. There is another point that security, health and area guiding services must be provided to the birdwatchers. But it is a tragic fact that 80 % percent of IBA's in Turkey is unprotected and there are just a few birdwatching guides living in Turkey. Therefore most of the IBA's in Turkey must firstly be protected by regulations and then security officers must be employed for the area, educating them on the first aid. However, desirous local residents may be educated on area guiding for birdwatching through seminars and courses. Well educated and certificated area guides living in those areas should be included in an organized birdwatching tours by the travel agents.

From the point of marketing, promotional efforts should be oriented towards all level of the society who may show interest to some extend. In fact, in Turkey this activity has been mainly promoted through students' clubs in universities. Therefore, promotional messages of this activity should contain that the birdwatching was not an expensive recreation while birdwatching activity with many others i.e. watching butter-fliers, flowers, taking photos and feeling the natural beauties.

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