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The Challenges of Sustainable Development in Cappadocia Under the Impact of Tourism

Tourism is one of the biggest and fastest growing economic sectors in the global economy and has significant environmental, cultural, social and economic effects, both positive and negative.

While tourism contribute to socio-economic development and cultural exchange, it has, at the same time, the potential for degrading the natural resources, social structures and cultural heritage.

On the other hand, if handled well, tourism can provide an incentive for the conservation and environmental protection, enhancement of cultural diversity and offer unique opportunities for enhancing support for conservation. It can also be developed in more environmentally sustainable ways that can provide many alternative economic activities.

Tourism, increasingly turn to areas where nature is in a relatively undisturbed state so that a substantial number of the world's remaining natural areas are being developed for tourism activities.

Cappadocia, with its natural and historical landscape has become one of the most attractive tourism destinations in the world. Located in central Anatolia, Cappadocia is a very unique region with its whole natural and historical characteristics. Its special geological structure is shaped by human hand; namely, the early Christian communities of Anatolia who, seeking security, took refuge in the region more than one thousand years ago.

The origins of this unusual region can be traced to the Tertiary period some

50 million years ago, when craters and chimneys dominated the landscape. Since then huge quantities of volcanic material have spewed out of the many volcanoes. Forces of erosion ongoing for millions of years has left mushroom-shaped formations in the soft volcanic stone in which inhabitants centuries ago literally carved out their homes. There is a rich diversity of sites from various historic periods, from the time of the Hittites to the early Christians to the 13th century Great Silk Road. But mostly what is unique about Cappadocia is the homes and churches carved from stone and the vast underground cities. These characteristics constitute the unique identity of Cappadocia, which cannot easily be found elsewhere in the world.

The region became a popular destination for tourists especially since the last two decades and received quite intensive tourism investments. All this development took place in a rather short period of time spanning only 20 years. Such a rapid development was usually unplanned. Moreover, they were not grounded on sound feasibility studies with a concern also for sustainability.

With its unique and fascinating natural landscape, Cappadocia is facing a number of problems. In the face of these issues and problems intensified efforts has to be spend and strategies has to be developed to hand down this cultural treasure to the next generations.

In 1986, the Göreme National Park and the Rock Sites of Cappadocia have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. This boosted up international interest in the region; but not always in a positive way.

Due to this increased international interest, Cappadocia has been subject to massive tourist flows. However, there has not been sufficient planning approaches to

deal with this mass tourism that came along with the prominence of being a world heritage site.

On the other hand, although resources were allocated to Cappadocia with its inclusion in the world heritage list, they are unfortunately not enough to conserve and protect the rich cultural heritage.

Today, Cappadocia region is visited by nearly three millions of tourists in a year who flock to the region only during two months, July and August. Thus, the negative pulsar effects of this tourist flow in Cappadocia are immense and jeopardize the integrity of the natural and historical values of the region. Major problems that arise from such sudden hits of tourism can be identified as follows:

Such large numbers of tourists visit the area only for short periods of time. That is the duration of stay of tourists in Cappadocia averages to only 2 days or they come and go on a daily basis. Thus, making the economic contribution of tourism in the area insufficient. Tours that are mainly organized by large international or national agencies leave only a small sum of the actual expenses in the area and often local population is excluded from the benefits of tourism. But the destruction that is caused by tourism is enormous.

First of all, large tourist complexes which are mostly built without an overall planning framework are totally incompatible with Cappadocia's general character. They are located outside the city as complexes, in a clustered way. The only thing which is done to fit them with their surroundings is to paint them into colours like beige, reddish brown or pink as the landscape. But playing around only with colours is not enough to make these hotel complexes fit to their contexts. The incompatible architectural characteristics

and scales are the facts that alienate them to the environment.



Secondly, as a result of mass tourism, tourists are brought to these complexes and visit only monuments without experiencing the total atmosphere or the lifestyle and culture of the local people and no interruption takes place between tourists and the locals. To develop sustainable tourism the local community must be involved in the tourism sector so that the economic benefits are shared and the local culture is not undermined.

Third, during the long off-season period, the prices are lowered to such an extent that it results in a significant reduction of the quality of services provided to tourists. Regarding the population, on the other hand, tourism provides employment only for a short period of time. And those who work in tourism and related sectors are left without jobs during the rest of the year.

On the other hand, large numbers of people that come all at once to visit the area in a short period of time and they create great pressures which damage Cappadocia's rock caves, churches and underground cities. Crowded groups of tourists visiting these places causes great friction and carries the potential of damage to these areas. If the areas are continued to deliver to these demands, it will cause increasingly fast destruction of precious

historical and natural heritage and this destruction will make Cappadocia no longer attractive to tourists.

The preservation and restoration of Cappadocia's heritage is an extremely delicate and difficult task and it appears that the strategies at present are far from being sufficient. Unfortunately, up to present, change in the name of modernization in Cappadocia has become a threat to its heritage.

Cappadocia, is one of the well-protected areas in Turkey. But the concept of protection is protecting the area only as it is and doing nothing more, which makes the area an open-air museum. New concepts should be identified to emphasize an active vision for the future of the area.

For an environmentally sustainable development Cappadocia needs a comprehensive regional conservation and development plan and powerful regional management including government, private sector, international organizations, non government organizations and citizens, that looks for a balance between profitability and sustainability.

Owning a house in some of Cappadocia's popular towns is an increasing trend recently. The historical buildings and rock homes are bought mostly by outsiders, including foreign people and restored well. It seems to be a positive effect to conserve and restore the areas, but at the same time it causes speculation and gentrification. If not taken under control it may appear as a threat to the region's local values.

The tradition of digging to gain extra space still continues in Cappadocia. In touristic centers, many of the local handcraft shops are widened by digging and in local towns people are digging underground to open new spaces to use

them as warehouses. Because of the cool temperatures underground, the caves served as refrigerators for storing fruit and vegetables that Cappadocia is named as warehouse of Turkey. Most of the agricultural products are kept in these caves and distributed to the whole country. This kind of destructions must be taken under control urgently.

If undertaken sustainably and planned carefully hotels can be a positive force for the conservation of the area. Rather than being placed out of the city they can be located inside the historical city in an organic way which at the same time prevents the isolation of tourists.

First of all, the squeeze of tourism into short periods of time should be prevented and has to be spread to the whole of the year. Although number of tourists is rising, the capacity of touristic accommodation is still inadequate. In order to extend the duration of stay, development of related tourism facilities should be priority in planning studies. Beside its fascinating underground cities and cave churches other touristic activities should be developed in order to provide sustainable tourism. By the development of these activities tourism can be spreaded in a wider term so that the exposure of the heritage to the pulsar effects can be prevented.

In order to achieve this goal, beside cultural tourism, other types of tourism should also be developed in order to provide tourist demand during the off seasons. With its diversified agriculture of qualified local products Cappadocia has the potential of agritourism activities. Supported with local events, fairs and festivals, recreational ranches and sport facilities such as hiking and horse riding agritourism can provide economic viability. Rather than transnational companies, small-scale enterprises which

are in favor of local community should be developed to provide sustainability.

Cappadocia's richness is not limited with its natural and historical landscape. The colourful folklore and the art of the region which is shaped by the coexistence of people and the nature for thousands of years are the vital components of Cappadocia's culture. For a sustainable development other complementary and supportive economic activities should be developed to bolster the local communities diversity and long term viability. Traditional cultural products, crafts and folklore must be flourished, rather than causing them to degenerate and become standardized.

Wine making, specialized pottery production and handcrafting are the most significant products which are also income sources for the local people. These traditions must be expanded in a more organized way in order to serve these purposes short-term tourist courses targeted for tourists, instructing them in these traditional production may be an alternative attraction for tourists. While increasing the duration of stay, these kind of activities can provide distinctive experiences for the tourists and economical benefit for the local people.

To cope with mass tourism, alternative ways of travelling in the heritage should be developed. Horse riding which is also a tradition in Cappadocia is an original way to discover the moonscapes. Also motorbiking is another way of travelling in the region. Beside these, balloon excursions should be further developed as an extraordinary experience.

In the face of these issues Cappadocia faces a double challenge. Whether to hand over the tourist demands and continue overly consuming the environment up to a moment that tourism

will eventually end or to develop strategies to cope with these effects and manage in a sustainable way which also benefits the local population.