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## **THE EVALUATION OF TOURISM POTENTIAL OF BILECIK CITY, TURKEY**

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### **Abstract**

Historical cities are areas of material and spiritual values that convey the traditions, customs, culture, understanding of art and thought of today's society to the future generations. Bilecik city is a settlement where the Ottoman Empire was established, has important cultural heritage in which the historical remains are located, and these values are transmitted to the future. There are many archaeological and historical monuments within the borders of the province. Most of the historical and cultural assets in Bilecik consist of mosques, mausoleums, hans, baths, examples of civil architecture, almshouse and similar structures or from structural residues. Interest in the city increased because due to being the first important castle (city) to be conquered by Osman Gazi and presence of the Seyh Edebali Türbesi, It is among the cities to be visited and seen by people. In addition, Bilecik city has become a rapidly developing center of population, due to its being both a mining area and a transition zone between Thrace and Anatolia.

Bilecik city has also valuable elements in terms of natural environmental resources. Natural vegetation, urban forests, ponds and recreational areas, along with improving urban ecosystem, provide recreational opportunities for the local people and visitors. In this context, the historical, cultural and natural areas in Bilecik city have been determined and examined in terms of tourism potential by making use of on-site observation, photography, data collection from related institutions and SWOT analysis methods.

As a result, it is seen that Bilecik city is open to tourism-oriented developments in terms of both historical, cultural structure and natural elements which have in and around the city center. In addition, Bilecik city increases its tourism potential with its accessibility and transit zone while offering advantages to domestic and foreign tourists. To have this potential reach larger masses and increase the recognition of the city, it is deemed as a must by the authorized institutions to ensure protection-utilization balance, while raising the bar on the awareness of local people, conducting the urban planning approaching holistically to historical textures and urban elements.

**Key words:** Bilecik city, historical cities, historical and natural tourism elements, Turkey

## **Introduction**

Today, the economic, social and cultural effects created by tourism have important consequences in the country's economies, especially in the international economic and political relations. This situation increases the importance given to tourism in developing countries as well as in developed countries with a large share in international tourism movements (Giritlioğlu and Avcıkurt, 2010; Mamun and Mitra, 2012). While the tourism priority stands out only in terms of economic contribution, it is now in the forefront because it forms a source of tourism with its ecological, social and cultural riches. As a result of the problems caused by mass tourism and different quests, interest in tourism has turned to natural, historical and cultural riches as an alternative to sea-sand-sun (Aklanoğlu, 2010; Doğancılı and Tarakçıoğlu, 2018). In this scope; on the national and international level, Preserving existing natural, social, cultural and historical resources is more convenient to develop from the perspective of tourism potential.

Historical cities are environments that contain material and spiritual values that convey elements such as tradition, life, thought and art to a present day and communicate them to future generations. These cities are made up of works belonging to the socio-cultural structure, architectural and aesthetic character and philosophy of life of the past civilizations. For this reason, the greatest physical manifestations of civilizations are found in urban spaces (Koçan and Çorbacı, 2012). The sustainability of these physical indicators, called 'local elements', must be ensured. In historical cities that reflect the rapid change process in the most effective way, sustainability requires the preservation of cultural and historical values, as well as the maintenance of economic and social qualities. This situation is also important in terms of social continuity (Çetin, 2011; Yücel, 2005).

Bilecik province is one of the important cities with its cultural and historical qualities in Turkey. has been described as the 'City of Establishment and Liberation' due to its being host to the establishment of the Ottoman State and to the İnönü Wars. Bilecik city was founded by the Ottoman Empire and it bears the cultural heritage by the reason of the presence of important cultural assets. The Neo Ottoman movement in recent periods has positively affected in city tourism. Recently, the increase in the number of visitors to Bilecik is attributed to the use of the historical values in the scope of destination marketing (Vatan, 2017). There are many archaeological and historical monuments within the borders of the province.

Historical monuments in the city of Bilecik generally consist of mosques, tombs, inns, baths, examples of civil architecture, charitable or forms of the structural residues. Besides these, the city of Bilecik also has valuable elements in terms of natural environmental resources. Natural vegetation, urban forests, ponds and recreation areas improve the urban ecosystem, and provides a variety of recreational opportunities while local residents and visitors coming to the city.

In this context, the purpose of the study can be summarized as follows;

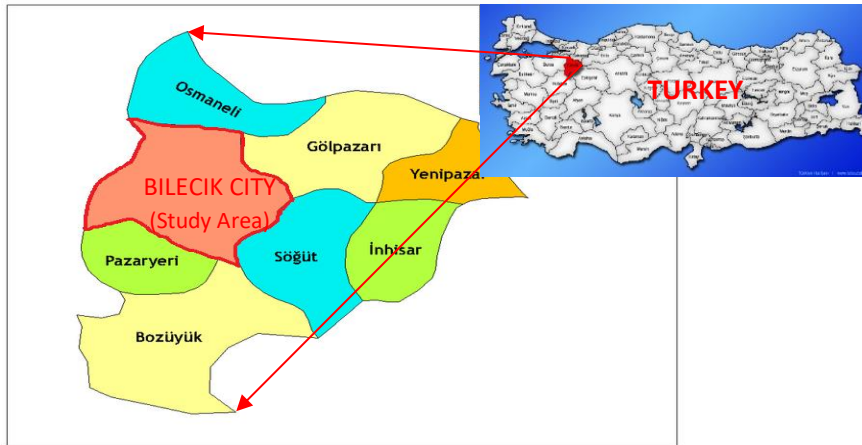
- \* To reveal the tourism potential of Bilecik city
- \* To specify the characteristics of tourism items there
- \* to evaluate in an integrated manner in the scope of historical, cultural and natural tourism elements
- \* Making people aware about tourism
- \* Create data for planning future which will be held.

## **Material and Method**

### **Material**

The main material of the study is the historical, cultural and natural tourism elements in Bilecik city. Bilecik is a small Anatolian city located at the intersection of Marmara, Black Sea, Central Anatolia and

Aegean Regions in the southeast of the Marmara Region. The city lies between 39 ° and 40 ° 31 'north latitudes and 29 ° 43' and 30 ° 41 'east longitudes. It is surrounded by Bolu and Eskişehir in the eastern part, Kütahya in the south, Bursa in the west and Sakarya in the north. Bilecik with 4.302 km<sup>2</sup> is one of the smaller provinces of Turkey. In terms of ranking The area is ranked 65 (Vatan, 2017). Because; Bilecik city is a transit point between Thrace and Anatolia has been hosted by many civilizations and has been referred to as the 'City of Establishment and Liberation' since it has hosted the Inonu wars in the foundation of the Ottoman state and in the war of liberation.



**Figure 1.** Study area

## Method

In order to evaluate the tourism potential of Bilecik city, analysis and surveys were conducted in the research area. At this stage, historical items were photographed and their properties were recorded. In addition, data from related institutions were evaluated. The data obtained by the SWOT analysis method used in tourism and planning studies are taken in a holistic manner.

The SWOT analysis is a decision support method which aims at organizing decision processes. The theory was developed in the 50's in the domain of business administration with the objective of supporting the definition of management strategies. The method has been then applied in the context of regional and local programming in order to evaluate alternative development scenarios. Nowadays, the method is widely employed in many research fields, with particular reference to spatial planning and environmental assessment (Bottero, 2015; Uçar and Doğru, 2005; Pirseliimoğlu, 2007). As a result of this evaluation; It has been determined that the city of Bilecik has the potential of tourism, at what level it is strong and weak, and at what level it presents opportunities and threats. As a result; in terms of tourism, solutions for transportation users and tourism related to the natural and socio-cultural structure of the area, which will contribute to the quality of life of the local people towards the users of the area.

## Results

Bilecik province has a city center where the historical elements are located and the surrounding area is integrated with nature. But it has lagged behind expectations in terms of tourism development in the shadow of developed cities around it. Therefore it is important for the city to have historical, cultural and natural features in the foreground and to make the necessary decisions. The tourism values of the city of Bilecik are listed below.

### **Historic items**

**-Seyh Edebalı Tomb:** It is the place where Seyh Edebalı, who is accepted as a spiritual founder in the Ottoman state, is buried. The tomb, which is located in the valley of the city of Bilecik, was built in a domed form in the previous periods. However, since it was destroyed by the Greeks, the roof was covered with tiles in later periods. The tomb consists of a hall and two rooms. The large room is designed as a mosque with a mihrab, the other room is designed as a guesthouse and a sohbethane. The dome of the room where Seyh Edebalı and his relatives are located has a rectangular dome. There are four small, seven large coffins here. (URL, 1).

**-Orhan Gazi Mosque:** Orhangazi Mosque which is one of the early Ottoman period religious architectural constructions, is located in the sources of historical foundations as 1331-1332. Orhangazi Mosque is a valuable historical monument built during the reign of Osmangazi's son Sultan Orhangazi and built in his own name. The mosque is one of the first religious architectural structures built as a single dome of the Ottoman Empire (URL 2).

**-Orhan Gazi's İmaret;** It is known that İmaret, located to the east of Bilecik, was built during the reign of Orhan Gazi. These places, which are covered with a dome, are built from rubble stone walls. Orhan Gazi is a ceremony organized to distribute food to the poor people. This building is one of the first architectural building of Ottoman so, It carries historic significance and value. This structure, destroyed by the Greeks and not restored, is inside the Old Kabristan, opposite the Orhan Gazi Mosque.

**-Bala Hatun tomb:** Bala Hatun is one of the spouses of Osman Gazi and the daughter of Seyh Edebalı, the Anatolian cleric. The tomb is located right next to the Seyh Edebalı tomb.

**-Chained rock:** There are various rumors about the chains on these rocks. According to some reports, Şeyh Edebalı was wanted to be hanged in these chains, and according to some people, these chains were tied by Ottoman soldiers to prevent the fall of the rock fragments that were there during the war.

**-Clock tower:** It was made during II: Abdülhamid period in 1907,. 16 meters high and 4 storeyed with wooden stairs, was restored in 1987. The height of the curtain is 16 meters and consists of 4 floors. This wooden staircase of tower was restored in 1987.

**-Municipality building:** Constructed by II. Sultan Abdülhamid as an Rüştüye Mektebi (secondary school) in 1905, today it is used as a municipal building. The process is characterized by being an example of formal architectural design(CURL 3, URL 4).



**Figure 2.** Historical items of Bilecik city (1a,1b,1c: Seyh Edebali Tomb; 2a,2b,2c: Orhan Gazi Mosque; 3: Bala Hatun tomb; 4a, 4b Orhan Gazi's İmaret) (Kahveci, 2018)



**Figure 3.** Historical items of Bilecik city (5: Chained rock; 6a, 6b: Clock tower, 7: Municipality building)

### Cultural Items

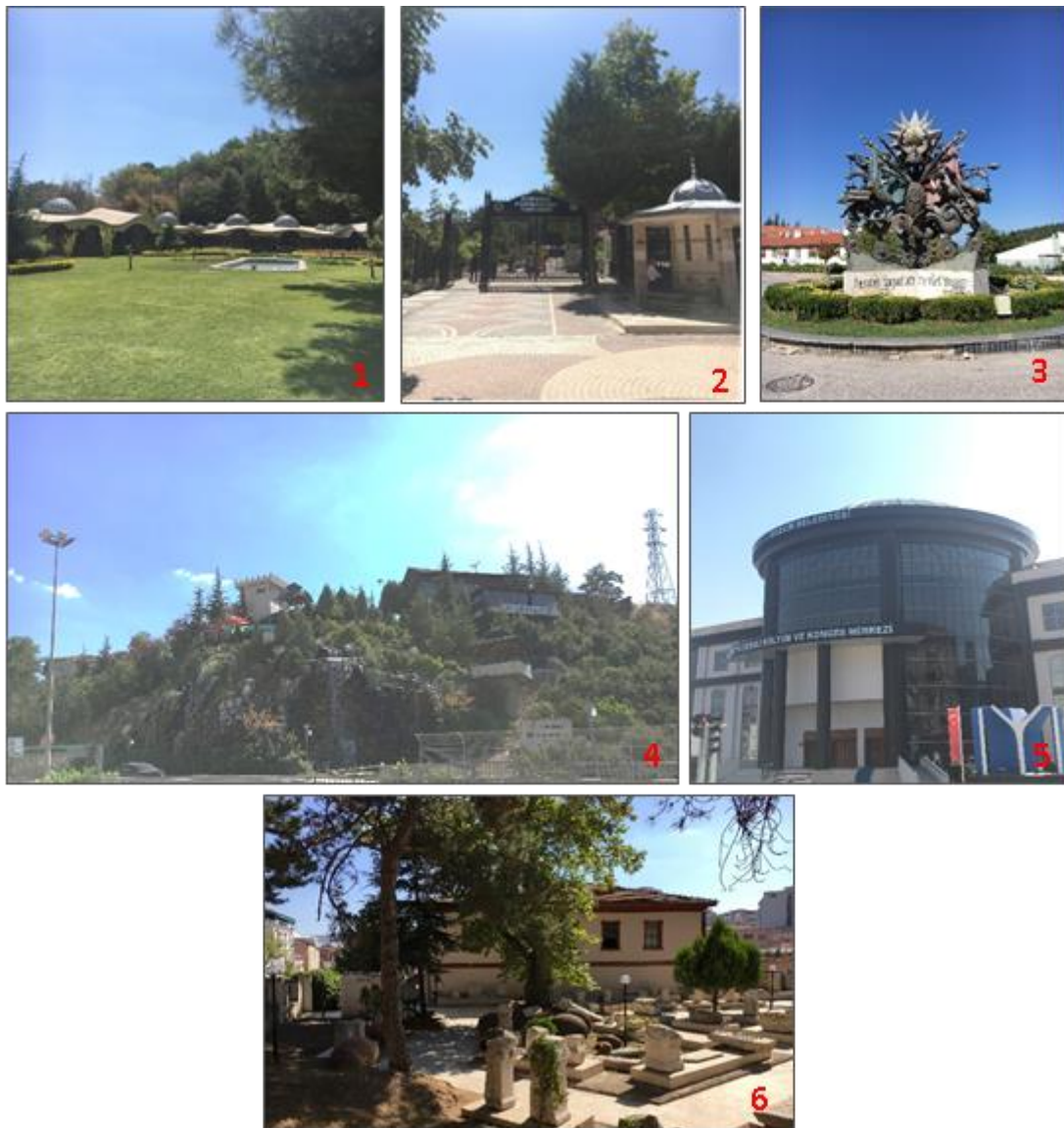
- **Culture lane of the Ottoman sultans:** The life stories of the sultans of the Ottoman Empire, which was built by the Bilecik Municipality, half-crescendo 165-meter History Strip with three-dimensional images is located in the area of Seyh Edebalı tomb and Orhangazi mosque.

-**Waterfall:** The waterfall built by the Bilecik Municipality in the city center attracts people's interest visually.

-**Culture and congress center:** It was made in cooperation with the Municipality and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2013. The conference center with a capacity of 160 people, a multi-purpose hall with a space of 500 square meters, a conference room with 650 people, 4 workshops and a 360 m<sup>2</sup> terrace, it serves as a cultural and activity center in Bilecik.

- **Ottoman army monument:** The monument depicts the Ottoman armband in three dimensions, and on three sides there is the word "Living a human being, living in a state" belonging to Seyh Edebalı.

-**Museum:** Archaeological and ethnographic artifacts belonging to Bilecik and its surroundings are exhibited in the museum. Chronological display techniques were applied in the halls and in 3 exhibition halls; Artifacts dated to the Paleolithic, Neolithic, Bronze, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Periods, mainly Roman Period, are exhibited. In the 10 exhibition halls, sections about the establishment of the Ottoman State, oba and home life are presented; weapons, daily use containers made of ceramics and metal, clothes belonging to Bilecik region, ornamental items are exhibited. (URL 3).



**Figure 4.** Cultural Items of Bilecik (1, 2: Culture lane of the Ottoman sultans; 3: Ottoman army monument, 4: Waterfall, 5: Culture and congress center; 6: Museum) (Kahveci, 2018)

#### Natural items

- **Pelitözü pond:** The pond, surrounded by *Pinus sp.* trees, is 7 km away from the city center. The pond with an area of 213.50 hectares is designed for irrigation purposes. Due to its ease of access and wide area, it is particularly popular on weekends. Around the lake there are nomad tents, tea gardens, a pancake house and barbecue areas. You can hire a bicycle with the aim of traveling around the lake and also have a chance to ride with water bicycles in the lake.

- **Bilecik city forest:** Located in the Yediler Hill area, the urban forest is a private business that serves in the 'self-catering, self-catering' area. The city forest which has started as a tea garden has children and young playgroups and continues to expand the service area. It also hosts wedding ceremonies and entertainments (URL 3).

- **Topographical features of the city and its surroundings:** The rugged topographic structure of the city of Bilecik creates visual dynamism from the entrance of the city by the east.



**Figure 5.** Natural items of Bilecik (1: Pelitözü pond; 2: Bilecik urban forest; 3: Topographical features of the city and its surroundings)



## SWOT Analysis

The Swot analysis method, which supports the planning studies that show the tourism potential of Bilecik city and respects the ecological values and reveals the current tourism usage, is used.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis factors

Internal Factors		External Factors	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Hosting the rich historical and cultural structures</li> <li>* It has a significant tourism potential in terms of proximity to large and developed cities and being a transit zone</li> <li>* Natural characteristics of urban and nearby environment</li> <li>* Incorporation of historical and natural structures</li> <li>* It is a preferable area for tourists and day-trippers because they can serve all seasons in terms of climate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* There is heavy traffic in the city</li> <li>* Inadequacy in the hospitality sector</li> <li>* Inadequate parking area</li> <li>* Inadequate promotion of local products, economic income can not be obtained</li> <li>* No facilities for disabled users to reach tourist attractions</li> <li>* narrowing of the passage area of cars after parking on the street</li> <li>* Construction works done in the city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Climate Features</li> <li>* Hospitable people</li> <li>* Tourism items close to the main transport network</li> <li>* A wide variety of tourism activities</li> <li>* Significant contributions of the local government to the tourism sector</li> <li>* A high-quality congress center for important meetings and events</li> <li>* Economic contribution of the students and staff of the university in the city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Tourism items that are hard to reach</li> <li>* Deterioration of historical items due to time</li> <li>* Interaction of people with the structure (unconscious visit)</li> <li>* Be unqualified and insufficient reinforcement element as promotion, guidance, etc. in the tourism areas.</li> <li>* The eating-drinking and souvenir places in tourist areas are inadequate and insufficient</li> </ul>

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Today, due to the fact that Osman Gazi is the first important fortress to conquer and the tomb of Seyh Edebalı tomb is also located here, the interest in Bilecik has increased and it has become one of the cities to be visited and seen by people. In this study, the necessary approaches to determine the tourism potential of Bilecik city and make it sustainable are evaluated. In this context, 7 historical elements were examined and contributed to urban tourism. These items include Seyh Edebalı Tomb, Bala Hatun Tomb, Orhan Gazi Mosque and chain rock. In order to reach this area, a different ground floor is used to go to the vehicle road which is the historical building next to the Bilecik Municipal Building. This road among people is called 'Tomb road'. In addition, the Cultural Strip of the Ottoman Sultans from cultural items was built on this area. Besides, eating and drinking places and shopping opportunities are offered for the visitors coming to this area. Therefore, this is the most important tourist center of the town of Bilecik. Other historical, cultural and natural items in the research are located in and around the city. Access to these items is provided by pedestrians and vehicles with the existing guide plates available.

Bilecik is not known for its other tourist values because it was introduced as the 'City of Establishment and Salvation' of the Ottoman Empire. Whereas it possesses forested areas, ponds, valleys and so on. They are areas for tourism mobility. In addition Bilecik Seyh Edebali University, which has 17498 students and 544 academic staff, located 6 km from the city center, is a fact that contributes to the urban economy. During the education semester, Bilecik city and the surrounding area should be developed in line with the usage of the students in the historical, cultural and natural areas, qualities should be given to spaces where they can socialize. The prestige of the university students and staff in the city should not be overlooked. The evaluation of these opportunities will further increase the tourism opportunities of the city.

Although the historical, cultural and natural structures in Bilecik increase the tourism opportunities, it is determined that the structural elements of the city are not at the level to meet the tourism opportunities. There are problems in accessing both historical and cultural areas as well as natural areas. In addition, the number and quality of accommodation and food and beverage facilities are insufficient (Vatan, 2017). SWOT analysis was used to determine the tourism potential of the city, as well as to support planning studies that respect ecological values and to reveal existing tourism uses. It is an important city with its rich natural, cultural values, location and strong tourism potential. But it is also found that infrastructure and superstructure within the scope of tourism are faced with threats due to insufficiency.

In summary, in this study, the lack of introduction of the Bilecik city which has a historical, cultural and naturally significant potential, inadequacy in the food and drink sector, disconnection between touristic items and environmental problems should be considered and resolved by the authorized units. In the direction of these results, we propose solutions for Bilecik city tourism possibilities as follows;

- Şeyh Edebali Tomb, OrhanGazi Mosque, Chain Rock, Bala Hatun Tomb and Ottoman Sultans Culture Strip are the best items in terms of accessibility. Access to other tourist attractions should be increased.
- From the entrance of the city, it is necessary to increase the number of introducer and guide board.
- lower cost car rental facilities for visitors that coming for tourist purposes should be provided from the bus station and fast train station.
- A safe pedestrian route should be arranged for the users who want to reach the areas on foot.
- Constructions and the surroundings that are under construction in the city should be visually screened and protection measures should be increased.
- Regulations should be made to serve tourism for disabled users.
- For the purpose of tourism, meetings, congresses, exhibitions etc. events should be increased, to reach a larger audience of these activities should be ensured.
- Local governments and the public should be informed about tourism

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