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## **Evaluation Of Alaçatı (İzmir, Turkey) Destination In Aspect Of Sustainable Tourism Indicators**

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### **Abstract**

Çeşme is the destination that the service capacity of tourism has developed most in İzmir. As a district of Çeşme, Alaçatı has become a rapidly growing destination in the last two decades. This popularization of Alaçatı, its natural and cultural riches, its proximity to İzmir and proximity to Çeşme played the most important roles. However, the setting up of an excessive number of operators (hotel, pension, restaurant, shopping units) in this small settlement center, which took the first steps of touristic life cycle quickly, caused some problems, especially noise.

The subject of this paper is; According to the WTO's sustainable tourism indicators, to examine Alaçatı's current situation of tourism. Proceeding; according to Alaçatı tourism and sustainable tourism indicators, Alaçatı's level of adaptation has been defined as what should be done in order to develop Alaçatı tourism according to sustainable tourism indicators. Goal is to evaluate the emerging results from a critical point of view. In the study six local actors were interviewed within the scope of twelve questions with verbal interview technique. Interviewing, one of the most frequently used data collection methods in qualitative research; has made it easy to access profound knowledge for Alaçatı. Opinions were transferred to this work with descriptive comments. If we make a generalization according to the findings, it is also true that Alaçatı has some positive developments in terms of sustainable tourism indicators, but there are also risks that can lead to various problems in the future.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, indicator, local actor, interview, Alaçatı

### **Introduction**

Tourism is a rapidly developing sector since the second half of the twentieth century. This development has taken shape mostly as mass tourism and sea-sun-sand-weighted tourism has come forward. Intensive tourist accommodation in coastal accommodation facilities during the short season has led to extreme use and has resulted in the exceeding of tourist transport capacity. The concept of alternative tourism, which has come up worldwide since the mid-1990s, refers to alternative tourism types to mass tourism. Alternative tourism aims to create a quality environment by preserving natural and cultural attractiveness and to offer economic benefits to the local community. That's why alternative tourism has a common denominator with sustainable development and sustainable tourism. The differentiation of tourist profile nowadays, paved the way for the development of alternative tourism types that are compatible with sustainable tourism, while mass tourism was being thrown into background. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as "*to preserve the future of host regions while addressing the needs of tourists and these regions, and*

*improving opportunities*” (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005). The goals of sustainable tourism can be listed as; to make tourism planning, to spread tourism to time and place, to diversify, to raise public awareness about sustainable tourism, to give priority to the local people in tourism employment, to include community in planning activities and decision-making processes, and highlighting local culture (Roney, 1999). Some principles have been determined to ensure sustainable tourism worldwide. Also, several indicators have been specified to control the impacts of tourism. In this study, only indicators were included from the master's thesis in which Bora (2018) evaluated Alaçatı tourism in terms of sustainable tourism principles and indicators. In the flow of the subject; first the tourism characteristics of Alaçatı are discussed. Then, the responses of the meetings are mentioned to find the level of alignment according to Alaçatı's sustainable tourism indicators. Finally, the recommendations are explained for developing Alaçatı tourism according to sustainable tourism indicators.

### **Purpose and Method**

The aim of this study is to decide the degree of adaptation of Alaçatı (Çeşme/İzmir) according to sustainable tourism indicators and to contribute to the transfer of it to the future with various recommendations. For this purpose, WTO's sustainability standards were based on for Alaçatı. Qualitative research method was used in the study. Qualitative data analysis is a collection of activities in which the obtained data is organized and categorized, the themes are created and the whole process is transferred to a report. Qualitative data is obtained through various techniques such as observation and interviewing for certain purposes and consists of information that includes the perception and opinion of individuals about the events (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2003). Data in qualitative research can be supplied through individual interviews, group interviews and observation (Altındağ, 2005). Six local actors were selected to conduct interviews in master's thesis (Bora, 2018) which is the basis for this study. Selections comply with the purposeful sampling method. Individual interviews were conducted as “*well-structured interview*”. Local actors have been contacted by telephone, e-mail and visit. Firstly, the scope and importance of the study and the contributions they can make to the study were explained to them. The interviews were conducted at proper time and place of the participants. Interviews were recorded as note-taking and the information obtained was reviewed and arranged. Finally, the opinions were tabulated, and the points found important were written directly. The opinions were evaluated with short comments and what to do next, was added under various headings.

### **Overview of Alaçatı Tourism**

Alaçatı is a district in the Çeşme county of İzmir (Figure 1). Alaçatı was a village connected to Çeşme in the past centuries and municipality organization was established in 1873. Alaçatı became a district of Çeşme in 2014 with the Metropolitan Law No. 6360. According to the results of Alaçatı's 2017 ADNKS (Address-based Population Registration System) population is 9745 people. Alaçatı has lived for many years introverted, because the choice of domestic and foreign tourists was Çeşme. Formerly, Çeşme had earned reputation as “*sand, sun, sea*” and later as “*entertainment, sports, thermal, transitions to Chios Island*”. Global changes in tourism (alternative tourism, new trends), has created a great opportunity for the development of tourism in Alaçatı. For example, windsurfing, boutique hotel management and local events have led to the emergence of interest to Alaçatı.

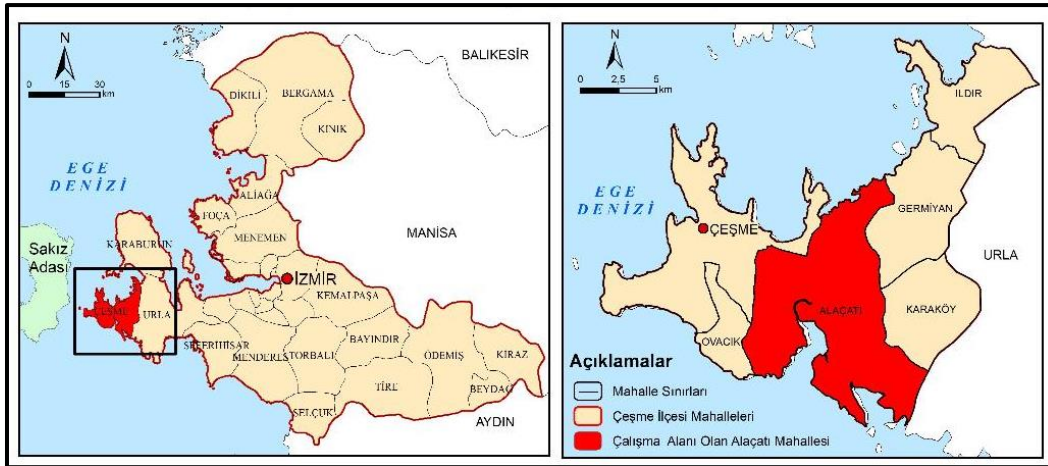


Figure 1. Geographical Location of Alaçatı (Source: Bora, 2018)

Historical center of Alaçatı is 3 km north to Ilica Bay and 3 km south to Yumru Bay (Figure: 1). The establishment place of the settlement is a depression ground consisting of alluvial plains. Alaçatı Bay, 3 km inside with a marsh. White sandy beach strips extend along the small bays of Alaçatı-Ovacık coast. Çark Beach is the largest beach on the coast and is one of the most suitable places for windsurfing (Photo 1). The continuously blowing wind allows for sailing and kite surfing as well as surfing. Two beaches in Alaçatı has won the Blue Flag in 2018. The closest geothermal sources to Alaçatı are in Ilica and Şifne.



Photo 1. Çark Beach and Surfers (By Özge Bora)

Alaçatı, has examples of civil architecture which extends to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Old Greek houses are the most important cultural heritage of Alaçatı. Alaçatı was announced an urban conversation area in 1998. With the Lausanne Exchange in the 1920s, people who come from Greece, Albania, Serbia and Macedonia constituted the local people today. People who came to work from various provinces of Turkey have been added this exchange population. Historical center of Alaçatı has a very homogeneous structure. Narrow and dead-end streets, small squares, traditional stone houses are characteristic features of the settlement structure. Old stone buildings in ancient Greek architecture are restored and used as cafe-restaurant, boutique hotel, etc. (Photo 2). The city hall serves as a center and is one of the busiest sites in Alaçatı in terms of pedestrian traffic. Pazaryeri Square is another node that is the market area of Alaçatı. Ayios Konstantinos church (1874) is called today as Pazaryeri Mosque (Photo 3). Hacimemiş Square is in the south of Alaçatı and known for its two traditional coffees. Hacimemiş Aga Mosque is one of the oldest mosques on the Urla Peninsula. Windmills are a symbol of this environment (Photo 4). Some of them have served as restaurants or cafe. In Alaçatı, there are many workshops, galleries and antique stores within the scope of art and

culture. In Çeşme, yearlong festivals, competitions, concerts, theaters, discos and bars make entertainment life alive. Alaçatı Outdoor Theatre is one of the popular event areas with a about 3000 people capacity (Kesici, 2016).



Photo 2. A Boutique Hotel / Old Alaçatı House (By Özge Bora)



Photo 3. Mosque of Pazaryeri (Source: <http://www.umart.com>)

The second houses in Alaçatı has been started to be built since 1985. Accommodation and catering facilities have been put into service since the mid-1990s. Stone houses functioned variously as second House, Boutique Hotel, Hostel, restaurant, cafe and bar. Hence social and spatial change has been experienced. One of the factors that play a role in the development of tourism is İzmir-Çeşme highway (1994). The project “*Kanal Evleri*” (Alaçatı Port), which was started in 2005 at Yumru bay, located in the south of Alaçatı, is proceeding (Photo 5). Support of local government for Alaçatı in various aspects is one of the important factors in Alaçatı's current situation. Local activities are also playing a major role in increasing Alaçatı's interest. Especially Alaçatı Herb Festival, Bicycle Festival, Pegasus Turkey Windsurf Championship League, etc. comes forward. In 2017, Alaçatı has 287 accommodation establishments with their licenses for tourism business and investment and there are 2103 beds of them.



Photo 4. Historical Windmills and Gift Shops (By Özge Bora)



Photo 5. A View from Port Alaçatı (By Özge Bora)

### Indicators of Sustainable Tourism

*Indicators of Sustainable Tourism (IST)* are information sets that are used to measure the changes caused by internal factors related to tourism, the changes caused by external factors affecting tourism, and the various impacts caused by tourism. The most comprehensive work on IST is the study of “*Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations*”, conducted by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 2004. 41 IST has been identified under 13 headings for destinations. In addition to WTO, the European Commission has developed the *European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS)* for “*Sustainable Destination Management*” in 2013 to measure sustainability-related performances of touristic destinations (European Union, 2016).

## Findings

### *Evaluation of Alaçatı According to Indicators of Sustainable Tourism*

The final situation of tourism in Alaçatı is evaluated in terms of IST in a master's thesis (Bora, 2018). In this qualitative study, Alaçatı's level of compliance with IST was determined according to the interviews made with 6 local actors (participants). Participants are decision makers and people who have a role in tourism. Thus, opinions of public, local and NGO representatives were received (Table 1).

*Table 1 Interviewees and their Institutions*

Participant	Title	Institution
P1	Çeşme Governor	Çeşme Governorship
P2	Çeşme Vice-Mayor	Çeşme Municipality
P3	Chairman of the Board	ÇEŞTOB (Çeşme Tourism Hotels Union)
P4	Member of Board	Alaçatı Tourism Association
P5	Founding Chairman	Alaçatı Art and Culture Association
P6	Chairman of Association	Alaçatı Association of Struggling with Noise

12 questions out of 16 from the thesis takes part, in this study. Questions were prepared based on 12 indicators selected from ISTs of WTO (Table 2).

*Table 2. Indicators from ISTs of WTO for Alaçatı*

Indicators
1. Local Satisfaction With Tourism
2. Public Participation
3. Sustainability of Cultural Assets
4. Tourist Satisfaction
5. Health and Security
6. Economic Benefiting from Tourism
7. Impacts of Tourism on Natural and Social Structure
8. Natural Resource Management
9. Impacts of Tourism on Infrastructure
10. Control of Touristic Activities
11. Destination Planning and Control
12. Touristic Products and Services

Source: WTO, 2004

Interview questions and answers are listed below in a concise format.

#### *1. Is the local people happy with the tourists in Alaçatı?*

The local people are pleased with tourism and thereby tourists because of the increase in earnings and the increase in business opportunities. There are no complaints from tourists at all. However, “an unhappy group that has lost its home and land” may be reactionary to those who later came to the resort. Besides, the noise problem is indirectly linked to the crowd of tourists. However, these problems can be overcome by workings of active civil organization, training and supervision.

*2. Is there any public awareness activities about tourism in Alaçatı?*

In Alaçatı, it is thought that public awareness activities about tourism have been carried out by public, local administrations and NGOs. Examples can be given as; public awareness articles in local newspapers, various courses and seminars with tourism orientated in the Public Education Center, meetings and various activities held by associations, setting up of a vocational tourism high school to train intermediate staff for tourism, etc.

*3. What are the effects of tourism on cultural heritage in Alaçatı?*

In Alaçatı, the effects of tourism on cultural heritage mostly have a positive feedback. Especially, it is considered significant for protectionism to restore traditional buildings in accordance with their original and to make stone construction compulsory for new buildings. However, it was realized that excessive structuring was a threat.

*4. What is being done in Alaçatı for the sustainability of tourist satisfaction?*

In Alaçatı, it is stated that the following services have reached a convincing level in the sustainable tourist satisfaction: transportation (highway, main road, bicycle road), tourist safety, tourist health, services for the elderly people in hotels, services for disabled tourists (a beach has been opened by Çeşme municipality), etc. There is no special health care unit for elderly tourists, but a thermal treatment center has been planned. There is a Tourism Advisory office in Alaçatı which belongs to an NGO, but it is not sufficient.

*5. What are the most important economic effects of tourism in Alaçatı?*

The most important economic effects of tourism in Alaçatı can be sorted as; revival of the economy, increase in employment opportunities, decrease in unemployment, increase in the value of the land and buildings, increase in income level, increase in the welfare level of the people, development of the service business, etc.

*6. What are the effects of tourism on society in Alaçatı?*

In Alaçatı, there is an opinion that tourism has a combination of positive and negative impacts on society. Tourists, tradesmen and operators have caused significant changes in local society. Social distortions (young people are badly affected, decrease of trust, friendships and neighborhood etc.), as well as positive influence from the high culture of the local people, exist. Therefore, tourism and tourist as well as the community's own structure is important.

*7. What about works about coastal cleaning and sea water quality?*

In Alaçatı, there is no big problem with coastal cleaning and sea water quality. The presence of Blue Flag beaches is an indicator of this. There is only concern that the Alaçatı Port project will create pollution in the future.

*8. What is the level of water and energy savings and the use of renewable energy in Alaçatı?*

In Alaçatı, it can be concluded that water and energy savings were payed attention at touristic facilities, but the use of renewable energy was very limited. The excessive number of wind power plants in the region and their very close establishment to residential areas are creating a reaction.

*9. What is being done in Alaçatı on sewage treatment, solid waste management, air pollution and noise?*

It was asserted that there was no serious problem in terms of sewage, solid waste management and air pollution in Alaçatı (except for environmental pollution and traffic problems in summer), the only important problem was noise. It was stated that preventive measures are started to be taken for noise.

*10. Is the spatial expansion of tourism in Alaçatı under control?*

The spatial development of tourism in Alaçatı is planned under the responsibility of the Çeşme Municipality, İzmir Metropolitan Municipality and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. However, contrary to this development, rapid construction and concretion is a threat especially on the coast.

*11. Is Alaçatı working to preserve the image and brand value?*

There is a view that Alaçatı has gained worldwide fame in terms of image and brand value. At this point, domestic and international expositions are introduced; festivals etc. in the town are being organized and quality, price, presentation, decoration, special regional tastes in the menus, landscaping, protection and restoration of stone houses in accordance with the original, etc .. are being maintained in a controlled way. The only concern is that the image of Alaçatı will be damaged due to changing tourist profile and overcrowding during summer.

*12. What is being done for the sustainable development of Alaçatı tourism?*

The point where Alaçatı reached today in tourism has been considered by local actors with more worrying dimensions. In this context, while the expositions are seen as the most important tool for the development of Alaçatı, it is claimed that there is no need for introductions anymore and that it is necessary to focus on protection. It is believed that protection is essential to compete. For sustainable development, setting up excessive hotels, overcrowding and noise, costly and service quality weaknesses should be prevented. If these problems have not been overcome, the opinion that Alaçatı will not see any demand, has started to dominate. In addition, diversification of activities, spreading tourism to winter, keeping hotels well-cared, balancing prices, and the efforts of restaurants to keep up the quality, will contribute to the development of sustainable tourism.

As a result, the views of local actors on sustainable tourism in Alaçatı are positive in terms of tourists, local people, and the impacts of tourism. On the other hand, there are deficiencies and omissions in terms of maintenance, control, measure and protection that will contribute to sustainability.

*What to do to Improve Alaçatı Tourism According to Indicators of Sustainable Tourism*

The satisfaction of local people should be ensured; Social peace and harmony, and satisfaction of local people in small settlements is very important regarding sustainability of tourism. Since the rise of tourism in Alaçatı in the 1990s, there have been some trouble with the relationship between local people-tourism-tourists. It has been put forward that there were some disagreements with those who settled in Alaçatı later, and there is excessive noise. The collaboration of non-governmental organizations and their actions can bring a solution. The satisfaction of local people can be increased with strong participation.

- *Tourist satisfaction should be ensured;* Tourist satisfaction is very important for sustainability of tourism operators and to get competitive advantage for them. Satisfaction of tourists about transportation and accommodation in Alaçatı has a high level. The boutique accommodation



unique to Alaçatı creates a great attraction. Tourist safety and tourist health services are very satisfactory. The most disturbing issue in Alaçatı is the overcrowding and noise problem. That's why it has been worried that the old people would move away from Alaçatı. Measures taken for 2018 are expected to be effective for this issue. Another lack of Alaçatı regarding tourist satisfaction is the lack of official Tourism Office. In Alaçatı, in order to ensure and sustain the satisfaction of tourists, each operator must detect the degree of customer satisfaction and take measures according to the results. This feedback work should be carried out after each season and for the next season, a road map should be drawn.

- *Cultural values must be protected*; one of the most powerful attractions of a destination is the values of protected cultural heritage. It is very important to balance protection and usage in the management of this heritage. Historical stone houses and cultural landscape resources in Alaçatı should be protected in a sustainable way. At this point, the national protection policy, its implementation at the local level, and the intellectual level of people are very significant. The main danger of cultural preservation is the loss of local and authentic identities. It is thought that the effects of tourism on cultural heritage in Alaçatı are positive. This is true to some extent. Because, the old buildings that were declared as urban conservation areas have been restored in accordance with their original and protectionist development plans have been implemented for many years. However, the semi-detached (adjacent) intensive constructions under the name of the stone house, setting up excessive number of accommodations, food&beverage and shopping centers, visual pollutions like large size boards and signboards in a great number, is falling opposite to the city's historical ambiance and leads to loss of the authenticity of the streets also elimination of calm and elitism. Operators should organize activities to protect cultural heritage and to raise awareness of their staff and customers. For example, personal memories that has been lived at the houses should be collected, old items, old food, old craftsmanship, old habits should be taught to tourists, and a documentary should be created by recording life stories of old people.
- *Alaçatı image and brand value should be protected*; There is a close relationship between reputation and brand. Human is subject of reputation and brand is subject of destination. The brand is strategically critical for operators, and it increases the competitive power of the operator to make more sales and profits. Most powerful touristic products of Alaçatı create its brand value. Alaçatı stone houses and their use as a hotel, windsurfing, herb festival can be listed as the first three products. According to the "*Life Cycle Model*" (Buttler, 1986), Alaçatı completed its period of exploration and penetration to the market. It is experiencing periods of development and consolidation. It is asserted that the "stagnation" process which is the final stage of the life-cycle, approaches gradually. This indicates that Alaçatı is moving towards losing its image and brand values. It is once again clear that Alaçatı should be managed with sustainable principles and indicators to avoid this ending.
- *Renewable energy should be used, water and Energy Conservation should be done*; The issue of savings and type of energy sources is at the centre of sustainable tourism. In terms of cost and environmental protection, renewable energy (green energy) sources include solar, geothermal, biomass and wind come forward. In this context, both the use of renewable energy sources and the modern architectural approaches to green hotels (bio hotels) in tourism & lodging industry are becoming increasingly widespread. There is a low-level of progress in water and energy savings in touristic facilities in Alaçatı. Also, the use of renewable energy is very limited. A local reaction has occurred to many of wind energy turbines in Alaçatı and nearby hills. Protests of local initiatives are taking place and there are many reasons for these protests. It can be suggested that solar energy is the most convenient type as a renewable energy source for Alaçatı.

- *Eco-Friendly Products and logos should be used;* Accommodation operators can only contribute to sustainable tourism through an eco-friendly management approach. In this context, the use of renewable energy, waste reduction, water efficiency and water saving, environmental education and the use of eco-friendly products are the first to come to mind. *Green stars, White stars, Blue Flag* campaigns in Turkey serve this purpose. Eco-labels, which guarantee that products and services have certain standards and quality, have entered the world agenda in the 1980s and have reached a number more than 300 today. Eco-label now represents sustainability and is a method and tool for risk management, access to markets, prestige and dignity, cost advantage and investments. In Alaçatı, operators pay attention to the use of natural materials in construction and decoration works. Usage of these very limited materials should be increased and spread to wider areas for sure.
- *Requirements for sewage treatment, Solid Waste Management and noise should be met;* Sewage treatment, waste reduction and separation are among the essential principles and indicators of sustainability. Various practices in the world about waste management (usage of fabric instead of paper, applying recycling projects, recycling oil products, usage of garbage disposal, reducing paper consumption, not using plastic materials etc.) should be come into force in Alaçatı. Even though the sewage system was built in Alaçatı, there are no serious workings in terms of solid waste management and air pollution. Noise is a current and important problem. The project “*#alacati75desibel*”, which was launched in April 2018, seeks a solution to the noise problem. With this project, 135 operators affiliated to Alaçatı Tourism Association will not be able to broadcast music over 75 decibels on the streets. Any sources of noise, other than music, should also be reduced. For instance, the noise should be minimized by changing the flow direction of heavy traffic and with the time limitation.
- *The spatial development of tourism and functional use of buildings should be controlled;* In the context of conservation, “*re-function*” is often applied today. The ÇEKÜL foundation, for example, undertook an important mission in transforming old buildings into a City Museum, a History Museum, an Art Gallery or a Culture House. Alaçatı is a whole with its historical street patterns and traditional stone houses. With the restorations in the last thirty years, both the old settlement area has expanded, and new settlement areas have emerged in the nearby areas. Tourism has created new sites over the years, as spatial expansion is directly associated with tourism. Eventually, tourism in Alaçatı has shown a multi-part spatial spread. On the other hand, the old houses, one by one, have gained a new touristic function. The critical point here is, which direction of spatial growth is towards, physical and social transport capacity is payed attention to what extent, and how much functional changes are controlled in terms of protectionism. Clearly, local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGO) have a great deal of responsibilities.
- *The marketing of Alaçatı should be sustainable;* The path to sustainable marketing of Alaçatı is very simple: how and to whom should Alaçatı serve? The answers to this question are: to set bounds to usage of traditional houses for accommodation, food and beverage, shopping and entertainment purposes (carrying capacity); to prohibit any visual materials (posters, panels, signboards, plates) that will depreciate the image of Alaçatı; to impose strict sanctions on noise sources; to simplify traffic flow in the historical center, to put into use electrical public transport vehicles, to encourage bicycle use, to increase pedestrian zones, to urge the sale of high quality souvenirs which are using Alaçatı brand values, to prevent the sale of goods that are imported, cheap and inconvenient to health; to limit tourist entries, to control reservations; to protect excessive construction of coasts which are identified with coastal tourism and sports tourism and located outside the Historical Center. Thus, sustainable marketing of Alaçatı which focuses itself on sustainable tourism development, would be so permanent.

- *Tourism strategy and action plan should be made*; Strategic and action plans are made to manage tourism in a region or destination and to carry it to the future. There is no tourism strategy and action plan for Alaçatı and its connected county Çeşme. However, both have been referred in this kind of plans which belong to İzmir. In the plan of *Sustainable Development Strategy in the Peninsula 2014-2023* (İZKA, 2014), some predictions are made for Çeşme and Alaçatı: restoration of historical buildings, inns and baths and their conversion to boutique hotels and art centers; dissemination of wave and solar energy; energy efficient building design; walkway and bike trail creation, green transportation; to render feasts and festivals national and international. Apart from all these, a tourism plan that is specific to Alaçatı should be made on the principles of integrated planning. This plan must be with a sustainable approach and participatory as well as innovative.

## Result

Alaçatı is a unique destination with high brand value for İzmir, Aegean region and Turkey. Natural environment of Alaçatı and its structure with a cultural identity are the most important sources of power in tourism. Alaçatı has risen rapidly in tourism over the last thirty years and must be carried to the future by protecting with all its values. Tourism in Alaçatı should be managed by sticking to the principles of sustainable tourism. Besides, sustainable tourism indicators must be guiding to control the impacts of tourism and to eliminate problems. According to sustainable tourism indicators Alaçatı has reached a level that can be criticized from several aspects today. This reveals that the stages in the touristic life cycle are also consumed rapidly. In order not to enter the last stage of the “*recession*” process; local people, NGOs, local and public governments, circles of university, investors and operators should monitor Alaçatı tourism with common mind and be in cooperation. If they will be able to act together in protecting Alaçatı, find solutions to problems together, control the works done, reward the achievements, then it would be enough to make Alaçatı an exemplary and model destination in Turkey. In this process, ‘protection of own spatial values in the future of Alaçatı tourism’ should be adopted as the most basic principle. Changes that will estrange the region should never be allowed. One of the most important tasks to do is preparation of a strategy and action plan for Alaçatı.

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