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## **CULTURAL HERITAGE SUSTAINABILITY WITH THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL PEOPLE: THE CASE OF HISTORICAL AYVALIK HOUSES**

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### **Abstract**

Although the origins of culture go a long way back when compared to tourism, culture and tourism are directly related with each other. All tangible and intangible cultural heritage values are the basis of tourism supply as cultural attractions. For this reason, cultural values are extremely important in the increase of tourism demand for any region. Therefore, these cultural values which are inherited from different civilizations must be protected with a sustainable perspective. In the absence of sustainability, these mysterious attractions will soon disappear. In this context, the study aimed to explore the sustainability of cultural heritage values from the public point of view. The area of the work was determined as Ayvalık houses remaining from the Greeks and considered as important cultural heritage values. The sample of the research is the people living in historical Ayvalık houses. . This study was prepared with qualitative method and interview technique was used as data collection tool. As a result, it is found that it is forbidden to make any amendments other than minor modifications in order to preserve the characteristics of the historic houses. There are serious sanctions in case of changes in houses; but the inspections are inadequate. In addition, it has been determined that people have to sell their homes despite their desire because of the cost of caring for the houses. Also it was revealed that since the summer residents who bought houses outside Ayvalık neglected to care for the whole year, the houses were severely damaged and eventually left to the fate of themselves.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Historical Ayvalık Houses, Sustainability.

## **Introduction**

Humankind has been in a struggle with the nature since its existence. The desire to survive and struggle for life made humans realize some activities. These activities sometimes transformed into devices and sometimes into languages. All the behaviors that humans realized for the sake of this struggle and that have been models for the subsequent generations are accepted as the foundations of culture (Güvenç, 2002: 48). The morals, in which humans find themselves from the very early days of their lives, start to shape humans' experiences and behaviors. When a human being starts to speak, he/she becomes a part of his/her own culture; when he/she grows up and starts to take part in activities, the habits of his/her culture becomes his/her own habits, beliefs becomes his/her own beliefs, and impossibilities becomes his/her own impossibilities (Benedict, 2003: 26).

Culture consists of the elements which humans think (attitudes, beliefs, ideas and values), do (behaviors and life styles), and create (artworks, crafts and other cultural products). Thus, culture includes the processes (humans' ideas and life styles) and the products (buildings, crafts, art and traditions) that are produced as a result of these processes. From this point of view, culture tourism is not only the visiting the sites and the monuments as it is perceived, but is learning the life style in those places. In this way they gain both information and experience. In this respect, culture tourism is founded on not only visiting the sites and monuments which belonged to previous cultures, but also on the life styles of people living in a region or a country (Richard, 2001: 7). So, while mentioning about a continuity, it is necessary to investigate local people's point of view. Therefore, local people's point of view is investigated in this current study.

Until it has been totally Turkified in 1923, Ayvalık which is a tourism center with its historical and cultural values was an Ottoman city where mostly Greek people lived and where Greek culture was dominant throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Özel, 2016). Thus, the cities host many cultural heritage values on which many researches could be carried out. In this respect, in addition to many studies on sustainability, the aim of this study is to identify the local people's perspectives regarding the sustainability of the historical Ayvalık houses which are inherited from various civilizations and which we will entrust to the future generations as cultural heritage values. First, the term cultural heritage and the sustainability of cultural heritage are investigated and several suggestions are made according to the findings derived from the collected data.

## **Theoretical Framework**

It is seen that the term "heritage" is highly important for the development of culture tourism which is one of the fundamental components of tourism supply and which is required to increase the demand for tourism. Thus, it would be appropriate to clarify the topics of cultural heritage and the sustainability of cultural heritage.

### *Cultural heritage and cultural heritage tourism*

According to the Turkish Language Institute, cultural heritage "is the thing that a generation leaves to the subsequent generations" (Turkish Language Institute Dictionary, 2018). According to another definition, cultural heritage "is a set of values that belongs to a society and any kind of artefacts which were inherited from the past and desired to be inherited to the next generations for various reasons, and which are physically exist and made by human beings" (Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2009: 3). This cultural heritage

term is recognized in various forms such as monuments, museums, palaces, national parks, geological formations or traditions (Kozak, 2014: 31).

Cultural heritage in tourism not only means telling the things, which have been passed from one generation to another, rural areas, natural or historical buildings, art works, or traditions but also protecting them while using. In this vein, heritage is an important source that attracts tourists and it is divided into two groups as natural heritage and cultural heritage (Doğaner, 2001). Indeed, there is a linear relationship between culture and tourism. The history of tourism dates back to earlier than tourism. Yet, tourism plays a catalyzer role in the development and spread of culture. And today this helps the development of culture tourism and at the same time gives acceleration to the tourism demand.

While in History Protection National Safety in The United States of America, cultural heritage tourism is defined as “humans’ discovering and experiencing the sites and activities” and it also represents humans and stories from the past and present authentically (culturalheritagetourism.org). Ruins from the ancient times, museums, traditions and morals, folkloric values, crafts and so on are accepted as heritage and have touristic product quality (Emekli, 2003). In this respect, trips made to see and know these products and artefacts are accepted as cultural heritage tourism.

It is important to know the theoretical dimensions of a topic in order to understand its importance. But, what is more important is that to be able to ensure the existence of these important things, that is, their sustainability. For this reason, the term “sustainable cultural heritage” has been formed.

#### *Sustainable cultural heritage tourism*

The focal points in the development of cultural heritage tourism is to revive local economies, to increase host society’s life standards, to be able to attract tourists to the destinations, to extend the knowledge about heritage and to enable the protection of cultural heritage against destructions (Binoy, 2011).

Tourists attending cultural heritage tourism are interested in local characteristics and traditions while visiting cultural values in a region. All cultural heritage values are tools, or even clues, that transfer knowledge about cultures of local people living in that region, civilizations, and their experiences to present. In this vein, cultural heritage tourism is both a source of attraction and an advertisement tool. From this aspect, cultural heritage tourism helps moral values turn into tangible values and contributes country’s economy. In addition, local cultures can resist culture erosion thanks to cultural heritage tourism (Emekli, 2003). Thus, to enable the sustainability of cultural heritage values, which have such important returns, is societies’ dept to history, nature and future.

To be able to mention about a sustainable culture and hence tourism mobility, the development of cultural heritage tourism is highly significant. In this context, there are particular principles that should be taken into consideration for the development of cultural heritage tourism (Richard, 2007). These principles are as in the following:

- On national and local bases its inventory should be prepared by determining the cultural heritage values.
- Cultural heritage components should be turned into touristic products and made tradable.
- Protection-survival principle should be adopted by enabling the tracing of damages and changes that can occur while using the cultural heritage products on a continuous inventory.
- The priority should be given to local culture and local people while improving protection-survival principle and local interest should be motivated to cultural heritage. Traditional characteristics

should be protected; local people's awareness should be raised; and cultural tourism should be developed with a broad participation of local administrations, non-governmental organizations, and other related institutions and organizations in government-private sector cooperation.

In addition to these;

- Cultural tourism should not be approached as an alternative but as a supplementary element.
- The advertisement of cultural values should not be exaggerated. Values should be protected in line with national identity.

By this means, the sustainability of cultural heritage tourism will be enabled by developing it and it can be transferred to the next generations.

#### *Ayvalık and Historical Ayvalık Houses*

Together with Mysians, settlement started in Ayvalık and the city hosted many civilizations ranging from Macedonians to Romans, Byzantines to Greeks. (T. C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2012). The texture of the city which was inherited as a present from these civilizations is an important tourism product today. Almost all the buildings in and around Ayvalık have common and distinct architectural characteristics. This architecture which is called as "neo-classical" survived without losing its value against time and carries the traces of old Roman and Hellenistic structures. There are approximately 2000 neo-classical civil architecture samples in the center of and around Ayvalık. Moreover, many historical mosques, churches and monasteries exist in this environment which is called as "old city". With their 100-150 years old history, Ayvalık houses are taken under the protection by Council of Monuments ([www.ayvalikturizmdanismaburosu.gov.tr](http://www.ayvalikturizmdanismaburosu.gov.tr)).

It is seen that Ayvalık, which is located in South Marmara and which is one of the important centers of Balıkesir regarding its tourism supply, is surrounded with Mount Ida, Kozak highland, Sarımsaklı Beach, Cunda and 24 Islands. Ayvalık, which has managed to carry its historical, natural and socio-cultural riches to the present day, has been under protection as a protected area since 11 September 1946. It has been detected that there are 750 types of plants 17 of which are Typical to Anatolia and 4 of which are endemic (only grows in Ayvalık in the world). Because of these and its underwater richness, the area was taken under protection in 1995 when it was declared as Natural Park ([www.ayvalikturizmdanismaburosu.gov.tr](http://www.ayvalikturizmdanismaburosu.gov.tr)).

#### **Method**

This study aims at investigating the perspectives of local people regarding the sustainability of historical Ayvalık houses as cultural heritage values inherited from various civilizations. Accordingly, data were collected from totally 12 people living in the center of Ayvalık and Cunda Island by using interview forms that include semi-structured open-ended questions. The questions which were prepared after literature scanning and expert views were taken were organized in accordance with interview method. Interviews were finished when it was seen that the answers to the questions started to be repeated. The selection of people who would be interviewed in scope of the study was done by using snowball and convenience sampling techniques.

Semi-structured interview form includes questions regarding residence time in historical Ayvalık house, views about the cultural value of the house, what people have done for the restoration of the house and

what they could do, how living in this kind of a house feels like, families' approaches to the house, their views about the protection of the house.

Interviews were carried out in interviewees' houses, which is a significant factor showing that the interviewer has gained the trust. Thus, it would not be wrong to assume that this is an indicator of the reliability of the answers and hence the reliability of the study. Because in qualitative study the reliability cannot be reduced to the standard techniques (Pratt, 2008). Interviews took 20 minutes on average, all of them were voice recorded and then transcribed by using Microsoft Word software. In addition, logs were kept by the interviewer to collect personal observation data about the house and interviewee. To ensure the familiarity to the data, transcriptions were read multiple times and throughout this process, small notes regarding important topics, concepts, thoughts and relationships were written down. Then, content analysis was carried out and the results were evaluated.

## **Findings**

### *Demographic findings*

To reach more sound findings some data about the participants should be given. In this way, readers can understand interviewees' point of views more easily. Of all 12 participants interviewed in this study, 6 were male and the other 6 were female. All of them were over 40 and they all inhabited in Ayvalık and most of them were relatives of exchanged people. Only two of them came outside Ayvalık and settled down there. On the average most of the participants had 2000 TL monthly income. Four of them inherited their houses from their families, and tenants stated that they preferred that house because of the neighborhood or because that house was suitable with their life style.

### *The sustainability perceptions of local people regarding historical Ayvalık houses*

In interviews, participants were first asked how living in a historical house felt, and then, if they had had chance, whether they would have wanted to move to an apartment. Most of the participants stated that the house made them feel true experiences and they would never feel like that in an apartment. As a matter of the characteristics of that district, since attached houses and structure of street enabled warm relationships, most of the participants indicated that they voluntarily and intentionally were living in that kind of house. Only two tenants stated that they were living in that house due to their economic situation and they would have lived in an apartment if they had had better income. One participant who was content with his/her situation said that "...You would be afraid if somebody came and taken the photos of the house, wouldn't you? You would ask what's going on? Things are not like that for us. They say sister your house is so beautiful; can we take a photo? I take pride in. I say yes, but if you take my photo with it as well..." (8<sup>th</sup> interviewee). Another participant who had counter views stated that "...I am here to save the day. You see the house! Totally worn out. When I win the lottery, my first job will be to buy a new house in Çamlık..." (3<sup>th</sup> interviewee).

In the light of questions asked to the interviewees, it was revealed that they knew their houses are in the protected area and controls were carried out by the Council of Monuments. But, another finding was that these controls were not carried out frequently enough. The participants whose houses were in a rather central parts stated that there had been controls and at the slightest thing they were reported whereas the ones whose houses were in inner parts stated they rarely came up with an inspector. Concerning to this matter, one participant told his/her experience: "...Once I had a small change in the house without

*damaging the original. My opposite neighbor who heard the sound and was jealous about me immediately reported me. I was tried in Criminal Court. Fortunately, I had taken the pre-, while and post- photos so the judge returned the acquittal..."* (1<sup>st</sup> interviewee). Another one expressed his/her opinion like this: *"...I had bought my house years ago, I moved from Istanbul. During purchase and sale process, documents were sent to the Council of Monuments because of the house being in protected area. They came for inspection and that was my only encounter with them in ten years..."* (4<sup>th</sup> interviewee).

Regarding the question what cultural characteristics of the house meant, it was found out that most of the participants had no idea. They stated that they knew their houses had high ceilings, there were bay windows, there were shutters both inside and outside in some of them, there were engravings in houses which had cellars. However, they said they did not know the reasons. They stated that there were cultural artefacts exemplars of historical artefacts as houses left by the Greeks. In this respect, they were asked whether there had been anybody who knew the past of the house called at to see the house. Participants told that it had been a long time since the exchange and the generation gap had grown. So there had not been any visitors. Only once a participant stated that he/she could remember such an occasion: *"...My house cannot be forgotten easily due to its location. One day a couple came by while I was sitting in front of the door. In fact, I thought that they were going to take photos again. The male one said this had been our house in the past, I knew this place. Even he told about the pictures by saying that I could tell that this house has a cellar, I knew this house. He had learned from his grandfather..."* (10<sup>th</sup> interviewee).

When the participants were asked whether living in a historical house has negative sides. They unanimously answered that it was quite costly. Since the buildings are too old and there are some structural features, regular maintenance should be carried out and the buildings should be aired. However, this can be trouble for the ones with low income. Concerning this, a participant stated that *"...What makes a fisherman happy? He catches his fish, he buys a bottle of wine on his way back to home, oooh, and there cannot be a happier man. He airs his house, from time to time gets it painted. But when it is the time to roof maintenance, it requires 10 thousand liras. How can this man give all of a sudden? These houses are very cozy, but there should be money. You get it fixed once, twice; but when you cannot afford one more, you have to sell the house..."* (2<sup>nd</sup> interviewee). Again, another participant said in a supportive manner *"...It is easy to buy these houses, or rather was easy. But maintenance is very difficult. Your financial situation needs to be very strong. The government says here is a protected area, but it does not support. Now that you direct, then at least support..."* (5<sup>th</sup> interviewee). Participants who stated that there was no support from the government and who complained about this answered to the question whether they would do a restoration in the house if they could get support from the government as they would do only in some specific places. And this included strengthening places such as inside stairs, bay windows and so on.

Children living in the house were not aware of the fact that they were in a cultural place. According to the participants' statements, that place is only their house and for this reason it was only "old" for them. 4<sup>th</sup> interviewee mentioned about his/her child who from time to time abstained from the shabbiness of the house and did not invite his/her friends to their house like this: *"...When I say, son why always you go there, let them come here. I got the response that their house is more beautiful. I asked why do you think so? He said our house is too old. Indeed, he is right. We have never told the historical side of the house to the child..."*. Another interviewee told these: *"...I am 95 years old. I was born, grew up, married, and had children in this house. But, their children were born in other houses. The ones who got married left the house. They visit me once in a week. Sometimes I kid around with my grandchildren and say that this house*

*we be yours. They say grandpa, what are we going to do in this house. Apartment is more beautiful...*" (6<sup>th</sup> interviewee).

There was desperation when the participants were asked the question about the sustainability of the houses. They stated they there were more abandoned houses when compared to 10 years ago and the houses were turning into ruins day by day. In addition, they said that after another decade, if directionlessness kept going on, these houses would be totally left to their fates. Regarding this a participant used these statements "*...Recently, the number of people who are coming from outside Ayvalık and says I am purchasing a Greek house has been increased. As a matter of fact, these houses were quite cheap before, but the prices raised a lot. They kept raising the prices. Anyway, they come, and immediately a restoration to the house, and for a whole year there is nobody. Look, these houses are living. They get a history live. If you do not come and chat with this house, air it, revive it, the house is offended, when you come the next year, you cannot find it sturdy. Then, during the 10 days of your 15 days holiday, you strive to get it fixed. You lose your interest. You either sell it or lock it. You do not look it back again, it collapses and remains...*" (2<sup>nd</sup> interviewee).

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The sustainability of cultural heritage which, especially, was inherited from various civilizations is a topic which should be taken into consideration significantly. In addition, what could be done to protect the cultural heritage and to transfer it to the next generations must be investigated meticulously. In this study local people's views about the sustainability of historical Ayvalık houses which are some of the best examples of the aforementioned issue are investigated.

As a result of the interviews carried out in scope of this study, it is found out that living in a historical Ayvalık house is quite enjoyable, exciting and admired, but at the same time costly. Moreover, it is figured out that restoration jobs are under the control of concerned authority but insufficient. Essentially, enforcements are very strict but it is understood that what prevent people from doing restorations is not the strict enforcements but their financial incapability. Unfortunately, local people do not have enough awareness although they are living in a historical house. In addition, since they are unable to tell their children what it is like to live with these values, children admire standard apartments. The trend of purchasing the houses which are promoted and advertised in various ways results in an increase in the number of people who put their house on the market. Since the maintenance jobs cannot be carried out in time by vacationists, unfortunately big damages occur in houses. It would not be wrong to say that this course of events will not be positive regarding the sustainability of the houses.

To protect the sustainability of the historical houses in Ayvalık in a way and to ensure that they will be left to next generations, following suggestions derived from study results should be taken into consideration:

- By using the results from this study either individually or with municipal collaboration, Council of Monuments must be informed so that the number of controls and enforcements will be increased.
- By using the fact that Ayvalık was included into the UNESCO temporary list in "Industrial Landscape" field as an important advertisement tool, senior management must be included in this process.
- Because of local people's not knowing the historical and cultural characteristics of the places they live in, information meetings must be carried out within municipality and university cooperation. By using various encouragements, participation of local people must be ensured.

- With the help of schools, history awareness must be given to family members and several activities need to be planned to increase the awareness especially among children. Composition, painting or photograph competitions can be organized in primary or secondary level schools and participation of children can be enabled in this way.
- Projects by which the maintenance of the houses can be supported should be carried out together with South Marmara Development Agency.
- Proposal can be done to the businessmen, who have done restorations in various places in the city and who have opened new businesses, to be sponsors for maintenance jobs.
- Many Ayvalık houses which are not taken care because of financial incapability of the tenants or which are purchased by outsiders and left untouched for a whole year can be integrated into tourism by restoring them by means of various initiatives. In this way, both the sustainability of the houses and authenticity of the city are enabled and bed capacity can be increased.

It should be indicated that this study has some limitations. In that, the data were collected within a certain period which is an important limitation. It is suggested that future studies need to be carried out at different times. In this way, whether the suggestions are put into practice and whether the criteria are met could be found out. In which way the sustainability is going can only be figured out in this way.

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